

Aesthetic Knowledge
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What is the source of aesthetic knowledge? Empirical knowledge, it is generally held, bottoms out in perception. Such knowledge can be transmitted to others through testimony, preserved by memory, and amplified via inference. But there would be no such knowledge in the first place without perception; it is where the rubber hits the road. What about aesthetic knowledge? Does it too bottom out in perception? Is it those very perceptual states that ultimately justify our empirical beliefs that also ground aesthetic knowledge? Most say “yes”; we will call them *Perceptualists*.¹ But Perceptualism is wrong. When it comes to aesthetic knowledge, it is *appreciation*, not perception, where the rubber hits the road. Aesthetic knowledge, we argue, derives ultimately from *feeling*; it is a kind of *affective knowledge*.² This is Affectivism. In what follows, we articulate and defend a conception of affective knowledge and reveal aesthetic knowledge to be a species of the genus.

¹ This view is so ubiquitous that it is often regarded as a “truism” (Livingston 2003) or as “the ‘Perceptual Requirement’ in aesthetic epistemology” (Schellekens 2019:22).

Among the many Perceptualists, see Walton (1970) and (1993), Tormey (1973), Stokes (2014) and (2018), as well as Hopkins (2006) and Lord (2019), both of whom we discuss below.

² Goffin (2018) also argues for a version of Affectivism but is blocked from the proper account of aesthetic knowledge by his failure to identify the rational structure of the emotions.

The virtues of Affectivism will be demonstrated in its solution to a thorny problem that has bedeviled aesthetic epistemologists: how to reconcile the seemingly direct character of aesthetic knowledge with the way we acquire knowledge from criticism. One learns from criticism, we argue, when it guides one's engagement with an object so that one can appreciate it in virtue of those of its features that render it worthy of appreciation; that is, when this affective guidance happens in virtue of criticism's rational character. There is, nonetheless, an important analogy between the fundamental roles that perception and appreciation play in knowledge-acquisition in their respective domains, a fact that helps to explain the appeal of Perceptualism. Using (what we call) the Paradox of Aesthetic Criticism as our lodestar, we will show that aesthetic knowledge bottoms out in appreciation.

Before we begin, a terminological clarification: our target in this essay is a contemporary aesthetic doctrine that we label Perceptualism. But we do not challenge the long tradition—dating back to at least the 18th century—of thinking about aesthetic knowledge as perceptual in a broader sense.³ Those 18th-century thinkers who held that aesthetic knowledge is a matter of *feeling* called this knowledge *aesthetic* because they regarded knowledge acquired from feeling as experiential and direct. This is precisely our view. Perceptualism, by contrast, conceives of such knowledge as perceptual in a

³ More recently, James Shelley describes himself as a 'Perceptualist', but unlike those we call Perceptualists in this paper, he also uses the term in the broader sense (see his 2003, 2004). Similarly, though in a different context, when McDowell (1978) argues that one can *perceive* moral requirements, he too employs a broad sense of 'perceptual', one on which a perceptual state can be (indivisibly) both receptive and conative.

narrow sense, and so as excluding the conative and the affective. We use the term ‘perception’ and its cognates to refer to these non-affective and non-conative receptive states. On the view we will defend, primary aesthetically knowledge (as we will call it) is constituted by a distinctive sort of feeling, by (aesthetic) appreciation. This is not to deny that one can possess aesthetic knowledge in virtue of a justified belief. But such doxastic knowledge of the aesthetic is parasitic on primary aesthetic knowledge. Perceptualists take themselves to be heirs to the 18th-century tradition, but we claim this honorific for ourselves.

I. The Paradox of Aesthetic Criticism

The Paradox of Aesthetic Criticism (as we call it) involves a tension between the (seemingly) first-handed, immediate character of aesthetic knowledge on the one hand, and the (apparent) epistemic function of criticism on the other.⁴ Aesthetic knowledge is widely held to be *direct*: it arises from an experience of the object, but not by way of any rational transition from such experience.⁵ But knowledge that arises from critical instruction would seem to be derived via reflection from a critical text. Thus, it cannot be a matter of one’s immediate response to the aesthetic object. To resolve the Paradox,

⁴ See Hopkins (2006) and Lord (2019) for extensive discussion.

⁵ See Livingston (2003), Schellekens and Goldie (2008), and Schellekens (2019). For disagreement, see Dorsch (2013). The underlying intuition has been defended under a variety of headings, e.g., in terms of principles such as Autonomy (e.g., Hopkins (2001) and Nguyen (2020)) and Acquaintance (e.g., Wollheim (1980:3) and Tormey (1973)).

one must articulate the immediacy of the knowledge afforded by aesthetic experience in a manner consistent with the power of good criticism to instruct. We formulate the Paradox as follows:

Directness: Direct experience is the only source of aesthetic knowledge.

Criticism: Aesthetic criticism is, in virtue of its rational character, a source of aesthetic knowledge.

In this section, we will diagnose the failure of two prominent approaches to the Paradox as an inevitable byproduct of their shared Perceptualist assumption about aesthetic knowledge. To see the basic difficulty, we'll discuss the tension between Directness and Criticism in a little more detail.

Directness raises a serious challenge for any account of criticism for two closely related reasons. First, critics do not pronounce mere verdicts about the excellence of the relevant works, but explain how these works are excellent (or not) and why they are excellent (or not) in the ways that they are. They point to those aspects of the works that not only *explain* what led them (the critics) to respond to these works a certain way but also *justify* these responses as *correct*. Critical discussions, in other words, invoke what Joseph Raz calls the explanatory-normative nexus characteristic of rationality. In the paradigm case, the critics, in giving the reasons that support their responses, articulate their aesthetic knowledge of the works. This is what leads virtually everyone writing on criticism in recent years to agree that criticism is a “rational activity” (Hopkins 2003:

137) or a “rational enterprise” (Lord, 2019:810). At the very least, the idea that criticism embodies a form of rationality is “a very appealing thought” (Hopkins 2003:137), worthy of preservation and explanation. Yet according to Directness, one does not acquire aesthetic knowledge via deduction from premises. And so the reasoning one finds in aesthetic criticism cannot be inferential reasoning, in which one arrives at the relevant knowledge by deducing a conclusion from independently held premises.

Furthermore, Criticism is in tension with Directness not only insofar as the reasoning appears to be the source of the *critic’s* aesthetic knowledge, but also insofar as it seems to be the source of the *reader’s* aesthetic knowledge. Criticism is, after all, not primarily self-expression or self-explanation, but a communicative practice directed at the audience. Critics do not simply express aesthetic reasons but *communicate* these reasons as reasons for their audience to respond in similar ways. Furthermore, critical instruction is not exhausted merely by prompting the reader to adopt a (thereby) justified belief that the aesthetic object has certain properties. A critic shows her audience how and why to respond *directly* to the relevant works in the way that she does. But wait: how can taking in the critic’s remarks be the source of direct knowledge of the absent artwork? The very idea would seem to be incoherent. If audiences arrive at knowledge via criticism, they must arrive at it indirectly, mediated by the argument and testimony of the critic. Hence the conflict between Directness and Criticism.

Philosophers who defend Directness from apparent conflict with Criticism often try to point to a special mode of rationality, one that *shapes* direct experience. They hope to explain thereby the reasoning that underlies critics’ aesthetic knowledge and guides their readers’ aesthetic knowledge. And this is the right impulse. But those taking this route have heretofore assumed that the relevant direct experience is

perception (Hopkins 2006: 137 ff., Lord 2019: 810ff). The resulting conception of aesthetic experience, as we shall now argue, is hopeless.

Errol Lord and Robert Hopkins have each defended a version of Perceptualism. An examination of the weaknesses of their respective approaches reveals Perceptualists as caught in a dilemma: Perceptualists must, to accommodate aesthetic rationality, either deny that aesthetic reasons operate via the subject's responsiveness to them or locate rational responsiveness inside the act of perception itself. Lord is impaled on the first horn, which misrepresents rationality, while Hopkins is impaled on the second, which misrepresents perception. In the rest of this section, we explain their errors, and in section four, after putting on the table the Affective View, demonstrate that the dilemma is false.

According to Lord's "Enrichment View," the justificatory structure of inference, the paradigmatic rational act, is mirrored by the justificatory relation between low-level contents of perception—what can be *simply seen*, as one might put it—and high-level aesthetic contents of perception. Specifically, the aesthetic content of a perceptual experience is rationally justified by the justificatory status of its lower-level content. As he puts it: "the justification one gets from an aesthetic perception is dependent on one's justification to believe that the object has various features that indicate or ground the aesthetic features" (Lord, 2019: 830). What distinguishes this form of rationality from inference is partly that a subject, who, to use Lord's example, believes that *Olympia* is intense on the basis of seeing the painting, need have no inkling of the justificatory connection between the perception of the lower-level properties and the perception of intensity:

...[the] justificatory power of his perception of the intensity is dependent on his *ex-ante* justification for believing certain claims about *Olympia's* corresponding features (in my analysis this has to do with the facial expressions and their relations). To be clear, the Enrichment View does not predict that Alexander *infers* that the painting is intense from the claims about the corresponding features. It doesn't even require that Alexander believe the claims about the corresponding features. It does maintain, though, that Alexander be *ex-ante* justified to believe those claims. This justification is provided by his perceptual experience of the features. (Lord, 2019:831)

The job of the critic, on Lord's view, is then to point out precisely those lower-level features on which our aesthetic perceptions depend:

When all goes well, one ends up with justified judgments that are epistemically dependent on *ex-ante* justification to believe the corresponding feature contents. By pointing out the corresponding features in just the right way, the critic both elucidates the structure of her justification and points the consumer towards the features one needs to process in order to see the aesthetic features for oneself. This, I contend, is exactly the sort of 'perceptual proof' that criticism seems to wear on its sleeve. (Lord 2019: 831)

To see the difficulty with this approach—analogueous to the central difficulty in formulating an adequate view of inference in the theoretical realm—we need to return to the normative-explanatory nexus. A rational explanation of belief operates by showing

the normative order grasp of which culminates in the relevant belief. It is, for example, precisely my grasp of the fact that the butler has an alibi together with the inferential significance of this fact that leads me to believe that the butler is innocent. If I do not grasp the rational connection between his having an alibi and his innocence, and do not believe that he is innocent because I grasp this connection, then I do not believe that he is innocent for the reason that he has an alibi. Paul Boghossian calls this

The Taking Condition: Inferring necessarily involves the thinker taking his premises to support his conclusion and drawing his conclusion because of that fact.⁶

Lord would reject an analogous condition on aesthetic rationality for, on his view, one appreciates aesthetically even if one does not grasp the rational connection between one's appreciation and the ground of it—in his terms, between the higher-level and the lower-level features:

I am not claiming that one needs to have *ex-post* justified beliefs about the facial expressions in order to be *ex-ante* justified in believing the painting is intense. That requires too much. (829)

The experiencing subject, he argues, need not even “*believe* the claims about” (ibid.) the justifying features, let alone be conscious about the justificatory relation between these and the relevant aesthetic judgment. As such, the perception of the higher-level content

⁶ Boghossian (2014), 5. This condition is first discussed in Longino (1978).

does not manifest the sort of rational sensitivity to justification that is the hallmark of genuine rationality: it fails to meet the Taking Condition. This is not by itself an objection to Lord's theory of the relation between lower-level perception and aesthetic perception. It is rather an objection to Lord's claim that this relation is *rational*, and to his subsequent claim that critics, in virtue of making this relation explicit, are making rational connections explicit.⁷

Lord might respond by pointing out that nothing precludes him from adopting the thesis that the *aesthetic judgment* that the painting is intense is based on the perception of the relevant lower-level features in the fulsome sense suggested by the Taking Condition. His claim is just that the *perception* that the painting is intense is not based on perception of those features (although it is epistemically dependent on them). But part of his stated aim is to elucidate the nature of aesthetic justification, the sort of thing that critics make explicit. If Lord were to concede that critical *judgments* incorporate a kind of basing, he would thereby have admitted that the Enrichment account does not do the job that it is supposed to do. Perceptualism itself would have no hand in resolving the Paradox of Aesthetic Criticism—unless he were to argue that perception itself *does* contain something like an inference, in which case he would impale himself on the Hopkins horn of the dilemma. Barring horn-switching, the burden of resolving the Paradox would have been shifted to the theory that elucidates the nature of our non-perceptual, Taking-like responsiveness to aesthetic reasons in judgment (and does so in a manner that is consistent with Directness).

⁷ Lord seems to think Taking leads to regress (see Lord forthcoming, 5), but that's not so. See Marcus 2021, ch. 5.

Lord is more naturally positioned simply to reject the idea that aesthetic justification requires this more demanding sort of rational responsiveness. After all, he holds that the Enrichment view is correct about other domains of higher-level perception and would argue that this provides a good reason to extend it to the aesthetic realm. Why think that aesthetic judgment requires anything like *basing*, rather than a less demanding form of epistemic dependence? This suggestion might be bolstered by the observation that there are plenty of kinds of epistemic dependence that do not require any such thing. For example, my justification for believing that I have lived my entire life on Earth is dependent on my not being a brain in a vat on Venus, but this belief is not *based on* my not being a brain in a vat on Venus.

However, this rejoinder will not work. To see why, note first that the more demanding requirement holds not only of the relation between premises and conclusions of inference but also of the relation between the objects of the emotions and the emotions themselves. Consider, e.g., Kaito, who is angry at his mother. We ask why he is angry. Among those answers we would accept, some satisfy by giving an ordinary causal explanation, e.g., he's angry at his mother because he only slept for two hours last night. This answer gives an explanation that does not depend on his knowledge of the explanandum, i.e., of his recognizing that his sleep deficit contributes to his anger. The relation between Kaito's insomnia and his anger figures nowhere in Kaito's experience, and so, per (the affective analogue to) Taking, it cannot be part of the rational explanation of his anger. Now consider the following explanation: Kaito is angry at her because she singed his toast. This answer is *not* compatible with his being oblivious to its being singed. Insofar as the toast being singed rationally explains his anger, this fact is what he is angry *about*. And to have singed toast as the object of one's anger is to view

the toast's being singed as a reason to be angry at the one responsible. Kaito's anger is rationally explained by the toast being singed only insofar as he experiences his anger as warranted by that very fact. It is not enough that the toast's being singed confers upon him *ex-ante* justification for being angry at his mother. Were he oblivious to its being singed, if this did not figure in his experience, it could not be what he is *actually* angry about, but only what he would be justified in being angry about in the event that he learns of it.

The relation between aesthetic judgment and its grounds has the same structure: to say that someone finds a work beautiful because R, where this is a rational explanation, is to say that R is something that this person likes *about the work*. It is not enough that the work's being R confers upon her *ex-ante* justification for finding it beautiful. For that by itself does not secure that R is what she *actually* likes about it. Nor is it enough that she was led to find it beautiful by having R pointed out to her. So long as she does not experience the beauty of the work as based on R, it is not what she likes about it and so cannot rationally explain her appreciation. To secure that, she must experience R as contributing to the beauty of the relevant work. For that reason, Alexander (in Lord's example) can't judge the painting to be intense because (in the rational sense) of the facial expressions if he's oblivious to those expressions or if he does not experience the facial expression as contributing to the painting's intensity.

It might be objected that, even if it's not precisely like rationality in other domains, it is close enough. And indeed, if this were the closest we could come to genuine rationality in the aesthetic realm, we could console ourselves with the ersatz rationality that Lord offers us. But the genuine article is, as we shall see, very much a live option. There is no need to settle.

Importantly, neither Taking nor its analogues require that the subject be able to *articulate* either the reason for her judgment or its rational significance. We suspect that a confusion about this is behind Lord's thought that it would "require too much" for seeing the painting as intense because of the facial expressions that one has "*ex-post* justification about the facial expressions" (829). He means to respect the fact that we are often incapable of articulating why we love the works we do. This is true and important. But there is much that figures in one's experience and which is thus eligible to be part of a rational-causal explanation of feeling that one cannot quite articulate. In fact, it is, we would argue, crucial to a proper account of aesthetic criticism that it allow for precisely this possibility. It is a common phenomenon that one goes to see a film and is troubled by something but can't say exactly what it is. One may then read various reviews that specify something troubling about the film. About some, one says "nope, that's not it." Finally, one reads the piece that illuminates what troubles one. "That's it!" No one else is in a position to say this, since what troubles one is not part of *anyone else's* experience. This is what we mean by saying that the rational significance of one's aesthetic reasons must be part of one's experience. Otherwise, one would not be in a position to say "That's it!". Rational sensitivity to theoretical, practical, and affective/aesthetic considerations does not require that a subject be fully ready to articulate the rational connection between her belief, action, or emotion/appreciation and what lends support to it. But still, the connection must have an inchoate presence in her mental life. Otherwise, she does not believe, act, or feel/appreciate for that reason.

There is nonetheless something importantly right in Lord's conception of criticism. Criticism, according to Lord, points to what makes an artwork beautiful (or

intense or...) and makes explicit the critic's justification for making the aesthetic judgments she does. But this insight is distorted by Lord's commitment to Perceptualism. We will make good on the insight below.

What about Hopkins? The nub of Hopkins' proposal is that aesthetic perception incorporates [an] argument....[T]he overall perception will include the relation between those premise-perceptions and the conclusion. That is, seeing the daintiness moves one to see the prissiness, and not just as a factor external to the perception. The prissiness one sees is presented in perception, as a consequence in part of the daintiness.⁸

Hopkins's inclusion of the "argument" inside perception shows that, unlike Lord, he recognizes the centrality of something analogous to Taking as central to genuine rationality.⁹ And so he worries—and is right to worry—about whether the transition between the perception of daintiness and the perception of prissiness is genuinely *rational*, rather than a matter of "mere causal connections" (Hopkins 2003:152). But he isn't worried enough.

The core difficulty is connected to the mismatch between perception and the rational basing relation, one that we will explore more fully below. Hopkins models the shift that takes place upon reading criticism on aspect-perception:

⁸ Hopkins (2006): 150

⁹ Grant (2013) also seems to recognize this requirement, at least in the context of criticism and appreciation. But this insight is spoiled by his non-affective picture of appreciation. For more on his view, see Gorodeisky (2021b).

By getting you to see these things, and to see them as organized in these ways, I bring you, if I'm successful, to see the deer. But the subsidiary perceptions do not merely serve as causes of your seeing the deer.

Rather, they form elements in the deer-perception itself. Seeing the deer involves, and does not merely require as a causal condition, seeing the two patches near the flower as part of the flank, or seeing the variegated patch higher on the left as an ear. (2003:149)

Seeing the deer as a whole, we agree, depends on seeing the patches as ears. But whatever else must be said to distinguish it from a mere causal condition—and we have no alternative to offer here—it is not sort of connection that is distinctive of rational responsiveness. Why not? Because you do not see the deer in virtue of taking *seeing its ears* to be showing that one *should* see the whole as the deer, that is, as *warranting* or *meriting* the latter. Rather, you cause yourself to see the deer by trying to see its ears near the flower, etc. Perhaps you also believe you should see the deer, in the sense that you believe a properly functioning visual system serves up a deer in these circumstances. And perhaps it is because you believe this that you try so hard and eventually succeed in seeing the deer. But this still does not amount to seeing the deer precisely insofar as one views seeing it as what one should see in seeing the ears; one does not take seeing the ears as *warranting* seeing the deer. Yet this is how it is with rational responsiveness in general and aesthetic responsiveness in particular. One appreciates the excellence of the *Souvenir* precisely insofar as one appreciates its being moving, where the relation of the latter appreciation to the former appreciation is constituted by one's recognition that its being moving makes the film (or helps to make it) excellent. In this case, one takes the

film's being moving as *warranting* and *meriting* the appreciation of the film as excellent. Aspect-perception does not exhibit rational responsiveness of this sort.

To summarize: the rationality of aesthetic experience and criticism exemplifies a normative-explanatory nexus. Perception does not comprise such a nexus and thus does not reflect the rationality of aesthetic experience and criticism. Accordingly, Lords' and Hopkins' positions reflect the Perceptualist's dilemma: in order to accommodate the rationality of criticism, they must *either* misrepresent the nature of aesthetic rationality by rendering the relevant rational connections as separable from the experiencing subject's point of view *or* misrepresent the nature of perception by including within it a genuine act of reasoning.

In contrast, Affectivism, as we will show, can do justice to both the direct character of aesthetic knowledge and the rationality of criticism. It's time to introduce this view of aesthetic knowledge and defend it. We will do so in two steps: first, in the next section, we distinguish feeling from perception and characterize the distinctive character of affective knowledge. In section III, we then show that, given the character of aesthetic experience and judgment, aesthetic knowledge is a kind of affective knowledge, not empirical knowledge. This analysis yields an account of aesthetic appreciation that shows how it incorporates the sort of rational responsiveness that Lord eschews and Hopkins mislocates. Equipped with this understanding of aesthetic knowledge, we will return, in section IV, to the Paradox of Criticism, proving Affectivism to be better positioned than Perceptualism to dissolve the Paradox, and better positioned precisely because it yields a satisfactory account of aesthetic knowledge.

II. Perception and Feeling

Aesthetic knowledge is typically considered a species of ordinary empirical knowledge, differing from other sorts of knowledge only in its topic: the aesthetic properties of objects, rather than, say, their color properties or their atomic properties. There are many ways of construing this thesis, some of which would no doubt be perfectly congenial to our aims here. But we will begin this section by laying out, in rough terms, an uncongenial construal: we will call it *the empirical model of knowledge*.

According to this model, the mark of empirical knowledge is its causal and justificatory dependence on perception. If someone knows that p, where p is an empirical fact, then someone must have perceived that p or have learned it from someone who perceived that p, or inferred it from what was perceived, or from what was itself inferred, etc. And it is in virtue of the very perceptual states from which our empirical beliefs derive that those beliefs constitute empirical knowledge. We will call knowledge that is derived from perception *empirical knowledge*. Our claim is that aesthetic knowledge is derived from affective rather than perceptual states and so is not empirical (in that sense). It will thus be crucial to say what the differences between affective and perceptual states are.

We discuss two broad contrasts between affective and perceptual states, the first concerns the rational structure (or lack thereof) of the relevant state, and the second, its motivational power (or lack thereof). The rough idea is this: feelings¹⁰ (e.g., fear) present

¹⁰ In this paper, we use the terms “feeling” and “emotion” interchangeably. We do not mean to imply that these terms as they are ordinarily used have precisely the same

the facts on which they are based (e.g., the approaching man is a violent criminal) as having a certain normative significance (e.g., the man is to-be-feared), and present them in a manner that engages the will. Unlike affective states, sensory perceptions neither have rational bases nor *as such* motivate actions. These two contrasts will be explored in the abstract here and developed in more detail in relation to aesthetic feeling in the next section. In elucidating these differences and the intimate connection between them, we will begin to see how feelings can constitute a distinctive source of our knowledge of the world. In paradigmatic cases, the feeling itself is knowledge of the normative fact (e.g., knowledge that the man is to-be-feared). Such facts are the objects of affective knowledge. The aim of this section is to put us in a position to recognize aesthetic knowledge as a species of affective knowledge.

a. Feelings have a Rational Structure

We will focus on three interrelated elements of the rational structure of feeling: (a) feelings are based on their objects, which (b) warrant them in the paradigmatic case. Regardless of whether they are in fact warranted, however, (c) they are *experienced* as warranted by their object.

Start with basing. Perceptions are not based on the facts they present, whereas feelings are. To see this, consider two kinds of defects to which an emotion is susceptible. Suppose one finds oneself grieving over the loss of one's favorite team, the

extension; however, everything we say here is (we take it) true of what they both paradigmatically denote.

Tigers. One's grief can be (a) grounded in falsehood (if the Tigers didn't lose) or (b) misplaced (if the Tigers' loss does not warrant grief). Suppose, by contrast, that one looks out onto the field and announces "the Tigers are taller than their opponents." The perceptual state one thereby gives voice to is not *rationally* based on the corresponding fact or putative fact. Whatever else is true of the rational basing relation, it requires that the subject have a separate grasp of ground and grounded. One cannot base a belief, emotion, action, or anything else on *p*, unless the relevant belief (or emotion or...) is, from the point of view of the subject, notionally separable from *p*. When a belief (or ...) is rationally based on *p*, the subject understands the belief (or...) as her own response to something else, where the something else is itself or by proxy an element of her mental life. But when I perceive that *p*, there is no distinct element of my mental life to which I understand my perception as a response.¹¹

It might be doubted whether basing must always relate distinct elements of one's mental life. The point (of course) is not that one necessarily makes an error in using the technical term 'basing' to characterize the relation between someone's perceiving something and the object of that perception. But, all other things being equal, it is best not to use technical terms to corral items that are (in the relevant respects) fundamentally unlike one another. Paradigmatically, when one's belief (or action or emotion) is based on something, one can explain why one holds the belief (or...) by

¹¹ Although we will not explore the connection in detail here, we would argue that the underlying point is closely connected with G.E. Moore's famous observation concerning perception: "when we try to introspect the sensation of blue, all we can see is the blue: the other element is as if it were diaphanous" (1922; p.25).

pointing to (what one conceives of as) something else. The relation between ground and grounded thus yields a rational explanation of the belief (or..), one which posits an asymmetric dependence of the latter on the former. It would make no sense for the subject to explain why she holds the relevant belief (or...) by citing the relevant ground unless there were (at least from the subject's point of view) some such separation. Nothing rationally explains itself. But when I perceive that p, p is precisely what is given to me in perception. Its presence in my mind is simply the perception itself: there is not enough space, so to speak, for the transition essential to basing. Thus, one cannot point to the fact that p as one's 'reason for perceiving' p. (Hence also the difficulty of making sense of the phrase 'reason for perceiving'.) In this respect, affective states are more like beliefs than perceptions.¹²

Because emotions are based on rational grounds, the notion of warrant gets a distinctive sort of grip on the connection between an emotion and its object (e.g., grieving and the Tiger's loss). When we feel grief (or another emotion) about something, we are open to assessment, criticism, praise, or blame much as if we simply

¹² Susanna Siegel has recently (2017) argued that perception itself is rationally assessable. But the disagreement between us and Seigel does not so much concern perception as it does the nature of rationality. Unlike Hopkins, Siegel would reject including 'the argument' inside perception; her point is partly that rationality does not require Taking. Although we cannot adjudicate this dispute here, if the view of aesthetic knowledge on offer in this essay is an illuminating one, then the general conception of rationality should to that extent be credited.

asserted that the relevant something was worthy of grief. How warranted the grounded is in specific cases reflects on the rationality of the person who feels the emotion. Someone is *silly* to grieve the loss of their favorite team, as this overvalues the place of sports in human life. Unlike, say, the death of a loved one, the Tigers' loss does not warrant grieving.

This notion of warrant does not apply to perception in part for the reason just discussed: where there is warrant there is space in the mind between what warrants and what is warranted. But it is also because perceptual success is simply a matter of our sensory apparatus presenting what is indeed the case: of accuracy. There is no question of whether *I* have reacted inappropriately.¹³ This helps to explain the fact that where it is perception itself that is deficient, it is a failure of biological equipment and not a failure of the perceiver. By contrast, the question of this sort of warrant is always at stake when it comes to feelings and emotions. Even if one's grief is based on a truth (as when the Tigers indeed lost), there is a question of whether *I* have responded to it correctly by grieving (rather than by, say, being disappointed).

Furthermore, this susceptibility to rational assessment is part of the experience of the emotion, whereas nothing of the sort is true of perception. The sense of a feeling's appropriateness is internal to the feeling itself. To grieve about the loss of a loved one is to experience this loss as *meriting* grief. The emotion presents its object as warranting itself—that very emotion—as a response. We are crying about what is sad, laughing about what is funny, frightened at what is dangerous, etc. (or so it seems from the point of view of the emotion). This is the internal perspective of the emotion. A perception,

¹³ Cf., Gregory (2018: 1066).

on the contrary, simply presents what is there (or so it seems from the point of view of the perception). This helps to explain the fact that we do not consider a defect in my vision—blurriness, say—as *my* error. It is easy to distance oneself from a faulty perception. And although we can distance ourselves from a feeling, it's hard. It's hard because it requires us to disengage from an evaluative perspective that we ourselves find compelling, called for, or even obligatory—precisely because we feel the emotion and so feel it as merited. If I am persuaded (to believe) that an emotion I am experiencing is unwarranted—say, that a joke that I find funny is in fact deeply offensive—I am at odds with myself. By contrast, if my vision is blurry, my body has betrayed me. The fact that feelings are affective judgments and so such as to include an evaluative assessment of themselves helps us to locate the source of the charge of inappropriateness for grieving over the Tiger's loss: to have the emotion is therein for the *subject* to take their loss as possessing existential profundity. This is an error of the person. Chris curses his luck for his poor eyesight but feels shame that he grieves the loss of his team more than the loss of his mother. Rather than mere tools for measuring the world, our emotions measure us.¹⁴

b. Feelings are Intrinsically Motivating

We now turn to the second difference between affective and perceptual states. It is widely held that to be in an affective state is already to be in what is, as such, a

¹⁴ In this we are particularly inspired by Hamawaki (2006), Moran (2012) and Friedlander (2015).

motivating state.¹⁵ But this is not so with perception, that is, with the sort of receptive state that is thought to ground empirical knowledge.

Feelings have what is sometimes called *valence*: they exist on a spectrum of pleasurable and painfulness. The fact that feelings are pleasurable or painful as *such*—their valence—constitutes a link to motivation, one that has no analogue in

¹⁵ A few have raised doubts about the idea that feelings are motivating, e.g., Robinson et al (2015), Corns (2014), and Corns and Cowan (2021)). But their arguments establish only that the so-called “affective” and “motivating” sub-personal processing systems are two separate systems, though often working in tandem. Even if true, it does not follow that the emotions, which are *person-level* states, do not on their own motivate and rationalize behaviors. What we say in this section is meant to intuitively support the motivating power of feelings by means of examples. We would also argue that alleged counterexamples to the motivational power of feelings on the personal level introduced by Corns and Cowan (2021) misfire insofar as (a) they target only the view that affect is constituted by desire, a view we reject below; (b) assume that sensory perceptions and feelings have analogous rational structures, a view that we refute; and (c) address mainly *moral internalism*, to which we are not committed here. Furthermore, the fact that even Perceptualists about emotions accept the challenge of reconciling their view with the truism that emotions are intrinsically motivating (e.g., Tappolet 2016) speaks to its intuitiveness. The connection is so tight that some suggest that it is part of the etymology of the term, going back to the “Old French ‘emouvoir,’ which means to stir up, itself going back to the Latin *emovere*, meaning to move out, remove, agitate” (Tappolet 2016: 47, n.1).

perception. It is tricky to characterize this connection, however. We will do so here by distinguishing motivation both from the mere having of reasons and from having conative pro-attitudes.

To feel is not simply a matter of having and knowing oneself to have a reason to act, although it includes it. To experience grief over the loss of one's friend is to take his death to be grief-worthy. The pain of his loss gives one has reason to do various things, for example, to take time out to reflect on his life. Yet it's possible to have all of the reasons and to know that I have these reasons, but nonetheless to lack the motivation to act on them. If, for example, I simply *believe* that I have reasons to spend time reflecting on Morgan's life, I may not act on these reasons—I may simply not feel like it. Nor is motivation simply a matter of possessing the desire to do it, at least insofar as one conceives of a desire as simply a 'pro-attitude' towards performing a certain action.¹⁶ A desire (so understood) might be a matter of holding the aforementioned belief that I have certain reasons to perform the action.¹⁷ Such a desire may even be associated with a feeling of dread about performing the relevant action. But to grieve is not merely to *have* and know that one has the reason, and so not simply to desire (in the 'pro-attitude'

¹⁶ This conception of motivation is developed and defended at length in Marcus (forthcoming).

¹⁷ The distinction between desiring to do something and believing it would be good to do is emphasized in, e.g., Stampe (1987). We do not, in any case, commit ourselves to a 'pro-attitude' theory of desire. For a conception of desire according to which it is presentational and internally evaluative, see, for example, Tenenbaum (2007) and Brewer (2009).

sense) to perform the action. Prompted by the pain of someone's loss, one feels like doing the things that the reasons are reasons to do; that is, one is motivated to do those things.¹⁸ Perception, by contrast, does not as such supply motivation. Typically, we know various facts on the basis of perception, facts that, once grasped, can figure in our practical deliberations in various ways. But to perceive that things are thus-and-so is not by itself to be motivated to respond in any particular way.

Though emotions are unlike perceptions in their motivational power, the particular manner in which they motivate is inextricable from a feature they share with perception: they are *presentational*, i.e., they present the world as being a certain way. Mark Johnston has argued along these lines that if affective experiences were not presentational, we could not account for their power either to motivate or to rationalize behaviors and to do so *directly*. Johnston observes that “many of our affective responses have authority, in the sense of requiring or at least making immediately intelligible what we then go on to desire and do.”¹⁹ This authoritativeness is due to the presentational purport of feelings. He argues that the analogy between perception and *feeling* is something like this: whereas perception, precisely insofar as it discloses the environment, makes our own beliefs about the world intelligible to ourselves (and so they are sustained by our viewing them as true), feeling, precisely insofar as it discloses the good, makes those feelings and consequent behaviors intelligible to ourselves: they

¹⁸ The wide tendency to understand affective motivation in terms of desire is thus misguided. See Prinz 2004, Tappolet 2016, though with qualifications, and Corns & Cowans (2021). On its confusion, cf. Goldie (2000), Helm (2001).

¹⁹ Johnston (2001): 187.

are sustained by the continuing sensuous apprehension of the worthwhile. It is precisely because emotions present the world as having certain goods that they have the power to both motivate and rationalize their own (dis)continuation, their pursuit/avoidance, etc. I need nothing other than to be in touch with my grief to spend time reflecting on Morgan's life, to visit his parents, to keep playing James Brown, etc. Note too that we need *only* cite a past or current feeling in order to rationally explain such behaviors. Saying: "I am so taken back by Morgan's death" suffices on its own both to articulate my motivation and to *justify* the time I spend listening to *Star Time*. I need not say, and standardly don't say in response to the question "why do you spend so much time in quiet reflection?" "I *believe* that I am grieving" or "I *desire* to reflect on Morgan's life." In fact, standardly such answers would be weird. To answer this question aptly, I need only to cite my emotion.

c. Feelings are Direct Ways of Knowing

When our emotions present the world as it really is, we acquire knowledge of the world directly.²⁰ We can learn from grief that a specific person's life was important, that they mattered, that they were a special and irreplaceable being. Furthermore, we do not

²⁰ Our view of the emotions thus differs both from the standard cognitivist's view, according to which emotions are beliefs or judgments about values (e.g., Solomon 1993, Nussbaum 2001) *and* from perceptual theories of emotions, according to which emotions just are perceptions—in *the narrow sense*—of value (e.g., Tappolet 2016, Milona 2016).

learn this by inferential reasoning: “I feel terrible that Morgan died, so he must have been a special person.” Rather, it is simply *by experiencing grief* that one can come to know that he is a special person. Emotions are responses to facts (and events and objects) that present those very facts (and events and objects) as having a certain significance. They present those facts (and events and objects) as warranting and motivating actions and mental states of various types, in addition to warranting the very emotion being experienced. In the paradigm case, we know that those facts possess the relevant significance by experiencing the relevant emotions. To feel grief about what merits grief because it merits grief is to have knowledge of, in the broad sense, *value*. This is not to say that one can’t know the significance of this person in some other way. One can know it from testimony or inference. But *the feeling of grief* is itself a way of coming to know this instance of value.

Our point is not that one feels grief and is thereby caused to *believe* that, e.g., Morgan’s death merits sadness and reflection on his life. Rather, the feeling itself, which like perceptions comes upon the griever unbidden, simply presents Morgan’s death as worthy of grief. Unlike the case of belief, there is no proposition, mediating between the emotion and the world. Affective knowledge is in this sense non-propositional. But unlike knowing how to do something or knowing a person (other plausible candidates for non-propositional knowledge), the object of affective knowledge is a (normative) fact. In this respect, it is more like practical knowledge: practical knowledge is factual knowledge we have not by virtue of being justified in believing a proposition, but rather simply by virtue of performing an intentional action: for example, I know that I am walking to the zoo not because I have adequate doxastic justification (e.g., I can smell the animals), but simply because I am intentionally

walking to the zoo.²¹ Analogously, affective knowledge is factual knowledge we have not by virtue of being justified in believing a proposition, but rather simply by experiencing a feeling. I know that Morgan was a special person not because I have doxastic justification (e.g., having read the obituaries), but simply through grief.

Is there a tension between arguing that emotions are motivating and that they are direct ways of knowing? No. To regard the emotions as motivating is *not* to regard them as non-cognitive states (as the Humean typically has it). The emotions are not motivating states *as opposed to* being ways of knowing the world. To assume otherwise is to wrongly assume an affective-cognitive divide, which we reject along with the affective-conative divide, and the conative-cognitive divide. A state or experience can be *both* a way of knowing the world *and* motivation to act a certain way—a knowing feeling.²² Feelings provide excellent ground for challenging these alleged divisions, given that, as argued above, their motivational and cognitive powers are interdependent.

Because feeling *is*, in the ideal case, an awareness of a normative fact, we describe it as a type of *judgment*. Our point in doing so is to emphasize that affective knowledge is not *based on* feeling in the way doxastic knowledge might be based on feeling—as when I infer that Morgan meant a lot to me from the fact that I can't stop crying. The latter is a theoretical judgment, consisting of a true belief based on good evidence. The former, affective knowledge, is an affective judgment consisting simply of the feeling

²¹ This thesis is defended at length in Marcus (2018) and Marcus (2019).

²² Cf. Zagzebski (2003), Döring (2007), Brewer (2009): 32-34 and Helm (2001), mainly chapter 2.

itself. As we will use the term, then, a judgment is a possible knowledge-state. Not all affective judgments are knowledge, of course. One who grieves over their team's loss does not, in so doing, know that it was grief-worthy. But when an affective judgment is what it should be—a feeling that presents itself as merited by its object and is felt because it is (actually) so merited—it constitutes affective knowledge in virtue of putting us in (affective) touch with a normative fact.

d. Objections and Queries

Given the ultimate objectives of this paper, a full defense of the general approach to the emotions and to affective knowledge is not possible here.²³ But consideration of some objections and queries will clarify and support the central idea.

First, we ordinarily don't speak of emotions as true or accurate, but rather as appropriate or inappropriate. This might be taken as evidence that we don't ordinarily conceive of emotions as tracking reality. But in fact, part of what confers appropriateness on an emotion is precisely its fidelity to reality. Its rationality is measured by accuracy, just not *exhausted* by that measure.²⁴ If a grown man cries when

²³ For a fuller defense, see Gorodeisky (MS).

²⁴ See Gorodeisky (2021b). This is why some of those working on emotions agree that emotions cannot be desires if the latter are characterized by what is often known as a world-to-mind direction of fit (e.g., Helm (2001), Döring (2003), Raz (2011)). The point is that, like beliefs and doxastic judgments, the emotions are measured partly by their

the Tigers lose, we would (ordinarily) view him *in his grief* as wrongly valuing the outcome of football games. His emotional response falls short of the relevant standard of success since it is not warranted by their loss. Similarly, someone who flies into a rage at being asked by a waiter whether they want a lemon in their water finds offense where there was none. We view someone who grieves at the loss of a friend, on the contrary, as properly registering *in their grief* the value of a human being. The appropriateness of an emotion is a matter of its affectively presenting its object as possessing a significance that it really does have, and of being responsive to it. Accuracy is part but not all of this.

Second, do emotions reveal value-facts *simpliciter* (a man's death is to-be-grieved) or just value-facts *for* the experiencing subject (a man's death is to be grieved by *me*)? A complete answer to this question would require more work on the ontology of value than we can do here. But we would argue that the character of disagreements fueled by conflicting emotions strongly suggests that emotions, on their face, present value facts *simpliciter*. Someone who feels sympathy for a migrant child being separated from their parents will take someone who feels none to be both *missing* something (the tragedy) and *lacking* something (appropriate responsiveness to such a tragedy). Even when it comes to less weighty matters, there is something slightly disturbing and alienating in realizing that someone else—particularly someone close—doesn't share one's emotional response (“you didn't find it funny??” “you dislike Hitchcock??”). And emotions are always subject to a “why” question, one that asks not

answerability to the facts: their success depends (partially) on correct reflection of the world.

only for what led you to feel that way (or to lack the feeling) but at the same time what *justifies* this feeling (or lack thereof). The best explanation of this and related phenomena is that, when our emotions present something as having a certain value, we do not understand the relevant value as merely of the ‘for me’ variety.

As our topic is not the ontology of value, we will not consider here arguments that there are no values ‘out there’ as part of the fabric of reality.²⁵ It is worth emphasizing, however, that our opponent in this paper, the Perceptualist, is also a realist about aesthetic value. And their theory attempts to show how the aesthetic has a real foothold in the world. We contend that our view accomplishes this aim without distorting the character of what it is supposed to explain, namely, aesthetic knowledge. We will return to this point below.

Still, it might then be wondered, thirdly, why in presenting this view of feelings a specific stance on the question of value realism is required and, relatedly, why the theory of the emotions on offer is committed to any particular story about affective *knowledge*? Why not, it might be asked, simply introduce the notion of affective (and aesthetic) cognition without weighing in on any extra-mental questions?

The short answer is that emotions are normative kinds, in the sense that part of what it is to be a state of, say, grief is to be measurable according to a standard. And the relevant standard is to feel grief about what merits grief because it merits grief. So grief is inappropriate when it is about something that does not merit grief. But a suitable

²⁵ For arguments supporting the view that affective values, including aesthetic properties are not merely projected on to the world, but part of the fabric of the world, see, e.g., McDowell 1983, Johnston 2001.

match is not sufficient for an exemplary instance. It must also be felt *because* its object is grief-worthy. And the relevant sense of ‘because’ is that of rational explanation. To revert to our earlier example, Kaito is not angry at his mother because she singed the toast unless he takes it that she singed the toast. For this reason, the same strange possibilities that threaten our perceptual judgments (defeaters of various sorts) also make vulnerable our emotional responses to what is (or seems to be) learned through experience. If Kaito merely speculates (but does not *know*) that she singed the toast then his anger is to that extent unjustified. More interestingly, if (as seems fair) singed toast is a bad reason for anger, then his anger does not embody knowledge of the singing’s meriting anger. Because grief is a normative kind, governed by the above standard, one cannot say what grief is without invoking the extra-mental. It just is the feeling that is what it should be under specific, apprehended worldly conditions.

Fourth, the former query and our repeated discussion of merit may raise a further question: what role does the appeal to *meriting* play in distinguishing affect from perception? We answer as follows. The rational ‘because’ means roughly ‘in light of the fact that...’.²⁶ To say that a man grieves the death of his friend because it merits grief is to say that he reacts in light of the death’s grief-worthiness; the point of view of his grief includes a view of Morgan’s death as worthy of grieving. We do not emphasize this merely because it accounts for a central feature of the phenomenology of feeling, but because a crucial element of the sort of knowledge that a feeling provides is a consciousness of the feeling’s own appropriateness, i.e., its being a suitable response to a loss. And the emotion constitutes knowledge of grief-worthiness only if it includes a

²⁶ For extensive discussion of rational explanation, see Marcus (2012).

grasp (often inchoate) of the justification that the relevant circumstance actually provides for grieving. Emotions are, in this sense, occupants of the space of reasons. Part of what it is to feel grief is to recognize the appropriateness of such questions as ‘why grieve about *him*?’. To which one might respond, as the Ghost of Christmas Future does to Scrooge: “It may be that, in the sight of Heaven, you are more worthless and less fit to live than millions like this poor man's child”. In the exemplary case, the subject understands her grief (again perhaps inchoately) as justified by a state of affairs that in reality does justify her grief. The internal perspective of the emotion is thus itself evaluative, and it is partly in virtue of the correctness of the evaluation that the emotion is at the same time knowledge of a value-fact. Meriting is thus at the core of affective knowledge.

But, fifth, what about when an emotion is not based on a fact at all, but only on what the person took to be a fact? Since the ground cannot be the fact, what is it? And doesn't the difficulty of answering this question favor a story on which emotions are never based on external facts? Here we run into a constellation of philosophical pressures familiar from the philosophy of perception. There too an account that posits its topic-state as a mode of access to what is ‘out there’ runs up against the fact that sometimes its putative object is absent. But few nowadays would insist on the basis of this argument that one only ever *really* perceives *internal* items.²⁷ There is a plethora of strategies for avoiding this conclusion, as the explosion of disjunctivist responses to the

²⁷ Contemporary skepticism about this style of argument traces back to Austin 1962.

argument from illusion shows.²⁸ We will not commit ourselves to any detailed reply to the analogous argument here. But we see no reason why the correct solution to the former case could not be extended to the latter.

Emotions are especially plausible sources of knowledge of value in light of the way they challenge the false division between the cognitive and the conative. And it is precisely in this regard that a theory of the aesthetic that identifies aesthetic judgment with emotion—Affectivism—proves itself. Affectivism illuminates, as we show in the next section, the structure of aesthetic experience, its motivating character, and its epistemic profile.

III. Aesthetic Judgment as Feeling

In what follows, we will take for granted that emotions and perceptions differ along the lines just sketched. Now we will show that aesthetic knowledge bottoms out in affective states rather than perceptual states. We will argue that the three characteristics of feeling highlighted in section II—rational structure, motivational immediacy, and epistemic directness—are precisely what makes the feeling of aesthetic appreciation the most plausible source of aesthetic knowledge. In making this argument, we will rely on a distinction between *primary* and *derivative* knowledge. According to the empirical model of knowledge, any instance of such knowledge traces back to perception. We will describe those who know that p in virtue of perceiving or having perceived that p as

²⁸ Influential versions of disjunctivism include Hinton (1973) Snowdon (1979), McDowell (1987) and. Martin (2002)

possessing *primary* empirical knowledge that p. Those who have never perceived that p have at best *derivative* empirical knowledge that p. To have derivative empirical knowledge is to have acquired beliefs about the relevant objects without having perceived them.²⁹

In what, then, does primary *aesthetic* knowledge consist? Not in perception, we argue in this section. More precisely, we do not possess *primary aesthetic knowledge* in virtue of being in (or having been in) an affectless state.³⁰ This is not to deny that we can form aesthetic *beliefs* without affect, nor to deny that such beliefs can constitute

²⁹ To say that a piece of aesthetic knowledge is primary is to say that its justification has not been transmitted by testimony or inference. But aesthetic justification does not operate independently of our being justified in holding other attitudes and so is not *foundational* in Lord's sense. Without perceptual knowledge, we would not be in a position to respond to the world emotionally. Our argument here is thus consistent with the idea that perception, unlike affect, is a source of foundational knowledge.

³⁰ We thus explain why Beardsley, like many after him, is wrong to argue that aesthetic qualities are "perceptual" in the sense of being "open to direct sensory awareness" (Beardsley 1958: 31), or more generally, what's wrong with "aesthetic empiricism," the view that (in the words of Gregory Curry, who rejects it), "the boundaries of the aesthetic are set by the boundaries of vision, hearing or verbal understanding" (*An Ontology of Art*, p. 18). One can also think of the argument in this section as the argument that Carroll demands for "demonstrating" that aesthetic experiences (at least insofar as they amount to primary aesthetic knowledge) must be affective (Carroll 2012: 169).

knowledge. One could acquire this sort of *derivative* knowledge on the basis of testimony. For example, one could come to believe that a movie is good on the basis of reading a favorite critic's review of the film and one could act on the basis of this belief by streaming the film. But aesthetic knowledge does not originate in a belief, perceptually grounded or otherwise. Such knowledge derives from feeling. While we can know the aesthetic features of objects independently of feeling anything for them, aesthetic knowledge derives ultimately from feeling.

To frame the issue differently: the Perceptualist does not dispute that aesthetic knowledge stems ultimately from a direct experience. Our disagreement concerns the nature of this experience. We use the term 'aesthetic judgment' for the cognitive state that, in the paradigm case, constitutes primary aesthetic knowledge. The Perceptualist holds that this aesthetic judgment is a species of perceptually-grounded belief (distinguished from other beliefs by its content); we contend that it is a species of affective judgment (distinguished from every belief by its being a kind of feeling).

Our defense of Affectivism will revisit the comparison of the previous section, using it to show that aesthetic judgments fall into the category of feeling. Aesthetic judgments have rational bases that warrant or fail to warrant and they engage the will *as such*. Nonetheless, like perceptual judgments, they are a source of primary knowledge.

a. Aesthetic Experiences have a Rational Structure

Aesthetic experience yields knowledge of value facts; specifically, the facts that certain objects are to-be-appreciated. We articulate aesthetic experience by ascribing

merit or demerit, voicing approval or disapproval of what we have experienced. When we say “*The Souvenir* is moving”, we are putting into words an experience through which we seem to be in touch with a property of the film in virtue of which it is worthy of being appreciated, that is, with a value property. And we experience the film as being moving in light of, e.g., the *candid* yet *expressive* acting, the *complicated* and *powerful* plot, etc., which are themselves value-facts: aspects of the film to-be-appreciated.

Because an aesthetic judgment is a stance on whether something is to be appreciated, the aesthetic experiences that constitute such judgments, unlike perceptions, raise a rational “why” question. This question asks for one’s reasons for finding it worthy of appreciation, reasons that in the good case both justify *and* explain one’s aesthetic judgment. If Mary judges the *Souvenir* to be an excellent film and is asked why she does so, she might appeal to its being moving. The judgment of excellence (in the form of feeling) is justified by appeal to a feature or features of the film in virtue of which it merits such a judgment, that is, such a feeling. Mary might cite the fact that the film is moving as rationally explaining her liking for the film; in so doing, she portrays this fact as a cause of her liking, one that operates through her recognition that this same fact justifies this liking. The film is to-be-appreciated—as Mary knows *through* her appreciation of it—because its being moving confers this status upon it. In giving the explanation, Mary represents her aesthetic judgment as explained by a certain aspect of the film, and this explanation operates through her recognition of its justifying function: she recognizes it as showing the film to be worthy of appreciation.

Now consider an ordinary emotion: If Sal is scared of the approaching man, their fear is a presentation of that man’s approach as *to-be-feared*. To be afraid is itself an evaluative judgment, but one that, unlike belief, takes the form of feeling. If they are

asked *why* they fear the man's approach, Sal might reply that it is because he is a violent criminal. This is an explanation of why they are scared, one that also justifies their fear. It is precisely because the emotion itself is a presentation (or a would-be presentation) of something as to-be-feared that Sal's answer—like anyone's answer to a similar 'why' question—must cite something that shows (or purports to show) that the object of their fear in fact warrants that very feeling. Sal cites the fact that the approaching man is a violent criminal as a way of rationally explaining her fear; in so doing she portrays this fact as a rational cause of their fear, one that operates through their recognition of this fact as justifying this fear.³¹ The common rational structure (alien to perceptual states) of aesthetic and affective judgment is due to the former being an instance of the latter.

b. Aesthetic Experiences are Intrinsically Motivating

Let us return to valence. Aesthetic experience, like the emotions, has valence: it is experientially charged positively or negatively.³² Some doubt whether aesthetic experience must be valenced,³³ but we would argue that this is chiefly based on a confusion about what valence is. To be positively (or negatively) valenced, an experience need not be a fluffy, warm experience (or its opposite). A valenced experience is an experience with a specific presentational profile;³⁴ it presents one kind

³¹ For more on rational causes, see Marcus (2012).

³² E.g., Prinz (2011), Dokic (2016), Nanay (2016), Goffin (2018), Robinson (2020).

³³ E.g., Carroll (1999) and (2004).

³⁴ E.g., Scheller (1973) and Poellner (2016).

of value property and also has a specific motivational structure.³⁵ Positive (or negative) valence is not to be understood as a hedonic tone, i.e., in terms of ‘feeling good’ (or ‘feeling bad’) as that expression is typically used. This would wrongly exclude the possibility that an experience of a work *both* presents it as excellent *and* as, in a familiar sense, *painful* to read or watch or listen to (and as painful precisely in the experience of the works’ aesthetic virtues). And it would wrongly suggest that experiences with the same valence feel the same. An aesthetic experience that has a positive valence is felt as to-be-sustained insofar as it presents the object as meriting the very feeling one is experiencing. This is sometimes so even when we would describe the work as unpleasant or difficult. Even then, one is conscious not just of one’s pleasure in taking in the work, but of the correctness of one’s own pleasurable response to it.

The valence and presentational character of aesthetic experience are connected in the characteristically affective manner: it is *through* valence that we make contact with value. This is not to say that we infer value from our feeling pleasure, but rather that the pleasure (or displeasure) of an aesthetic experience *is* a presentation of its object’s value, and therein a way of coming to know its value. To see this, consider the corresponding claim about perception. One does not infer from the qualitative character of one’s visual experience that the world is laid out a certain way. Rather, this qualitative character constitutes one’s grasp of what characteristics one’s visual experience presents objects as possessing.³⁶ Similarly, the affective character of one’s aesthetic experience

³⁵ E.g., Prinz (2011).

³⁶ Dispositionalist accounts of color go wrong precisely by denying this intuitive idea. See Johnston 1992.

constitutes one's grasp of what aesthetic properties such experience presents the objects as possessing. Specifically, it presents an object as worthy of the pleasure (or displeasure) that is exemplified by the very experience one is having, and as possessing the value that consists partly in meriting such an experience.

The valenced character of aesthetic experience is a presentation of value that possesses an immediate motivational direction in virtue of the specific value presented. Mere belief, even belief about value, is not like this. If one, for example, merely believes knowledgeably that the *Souvenir* is excellent one might nonetheless lack the motivation to finish watching it, let alone to re-watch it with commentary and recommend it to others. But feeling as such motivates. We saw above how emotions such as grief standardly motivate by themselves; we can now extend this point to the aesthetic realm. To find something beautiful—to make a positive aesthetic judgment—is therein to be motivated to continue the relevant experience. This is another way of putting Kant's characterization of aesthetic judgment as future-directed and self-sustaining.³⁷ To appreciate the beauty of the *Souvenir* means that no additional motivation is needed to keep watching it. This is not to say that one will necessarily act on this motivation—other sources of motivation may interfere. But nothing further in the way of motivation is needed to continue.

This is one of the least controversial aspects of Kant's aesthetics, an aspect of aesthetic experience that aestheticians today widely agree upon. We explain this feature. Aesthetic judgment is immediately motivating in part because to make such a

³⁷ Kant 2000 [1790]: 107. Cf. Dokic on what he calls the “characteristic motivational profile” of aesthetic experience (Dokic 2016), Matthen (2017), and Hopkins (ms.).

judgment—i.e., to experience the relevant feeling—is to take the object at stake to *merit* this feeling indefinitely (and often further mental states and actions). And it is to take in the object as valuable by *feeling* its value. The same cannot be said of any merely perceptual judgment or, more generally, any judgment that is not at the same time an affective judgment. To see that the table is red is not thereby to be motivated to continue gazing at. If aesthetic judgment were perceptual, it could not as such motivate. But it does, and this fact helps to establish that aesthetic judgment is affective rather than perceptual.

c. Aesthetic Experience is a Direct Way of Knowing

What we say and do on the basis of our affective experiences support the view that they give us cognitive purchase on value properties. We take it that someone undergoing these experiences can discover and learn new things about the objects of these experiences through the experiences themselves. It is often *through grieving* that the significance of a loved one manifests itself to us, and it is the disclosure of this significance that explains why we reflect upon the loved one's life. It is often by feeling angry and morally indignant that we make cognitive contact with the corruption of someone's act, and this discovery then explains why we choose to stay away from the person or try to explain to him or to others the wrongness of his act. Similarly, it is through our enjoyment of *The Souvenir* that we discover the film's aesthetic excellence, and it is this experience that explains why we watch the film again with full commentary by the director, recommend it to others, and so on. As we mentioned above, we do not deny that we can come to learn about those (dis)values in non-affective ways. But feeling

these emotions is a paradigmatic way of coming to know these (dis)values, a way of knowing to which we often appeal when we are asked: “why do you think the act was morally outrageous?” or “why do you take the film to be so good?” Our ways of thinking and acting indicate that we take our feelings, aesthetic and otherwise, to reveal values to us.³⁸

Our claim, then, is that aesthetic knowledge bottoms out in affective experiences. Aesthetic pleasure reveals objects as beautiful, which is to say, as meriting the very pleasure we experience when, in paradigmatic instances, we take in a beautiful object. In the paradigmatic case, appreciation puts one in touch with the object’s beauty.³⁹ This is aesthetic knowledge, understood as the perfection of the capacity for appreciation. Someone who understands the medium of film and possesses the relevant knowledge

³⁸ Clearly, this is not meant as a complete defense of the presentational power of feelings, but along with the responses to the queries above, it suffices for our purposes in this paper. For a more detailed defense, see Gorodeisky (MS).

³⁹ Notice that while Jesse Prinz (2011) also views appreciation as affective, he wrongly regards it as non-cognitive (and not as pleasure but as the emotion of wonder). Furthermore, our view significantly differs from aesthetic empiricist views of appreciation such as Iseminger’s (2004): on our view, appreciation is directed at and presents not *itself* as finally valuable (as Iseminger has it) but the appreciated object as meriting appreciation. Our view is thus not empiricist: it is not committed to the claim that aesthetic value is the value of its appreciation. Furthermore, since Carroll (2012) understands both what he calls the affective approach and the valuing approach as empiricist, his criticisms of both views miss ours.

can exercise her understanding (and other relevant cognitive powers) in an enjoyment of the film, one that is derived in part from an enjoyment of the features of the film that make it—a film of this sort—worth enjoying. Her knowledge of its excellence consists in this pleasure. She has primary aesthetic knowledge, knowledge whose *form* is aesthetic. But since beauty is part of the fabric of reality, it is also among possible objects of belief, an affectless state. Someone with primary aesthetic knowledge of a film can communicate her own aesthetic appreciation of the film to another, who might then have derivative aesthetic knowledge. This knowledge is a species of belief and is aesthetic in virtue of its *content*.

Before we move on, a note on the role of pleasure in our argument. Our goal in this paper is to argue that primary aesthetic knowledge is constituted by feeling rather than perception. Throughout our discussion in this section, we have focused on pleasure. More would have to be said to locate pleasure definitively in a taxonomy of aesthetic feeling (for that, see Gorodeisky 2021(a), Gorodeisky MS). But here is the basic idea: pleasure, we would argue, is not so much a state as it is a class of states. A pleasure is a felt endorsement. The pleasure of sipping a hot toddy on this chilly December day is a felt approving apprehension of the drink as meriting such a felt approval; the pleasure of dancing to “Stupid Horse” is an approving apprehension of the song’s groove, the pleasure of reading a good book to one’s child is an approving apprehension of the value of this engagement, one’s enjoyment of *The Souvenir* is an approving apprehension of the film as excellent, etc. These are all instances of pleasure, though they are not the same feeling.

It is quite uncontroversial (throughout the history of philosophy and up to the present day) that pleasure has a particular motivational structure: it is self-maintaining.

And so, given that it is a self-maintaining and (as we have now argued) direct presentation of normative fact, it satisfies the criteria for the fundamental aesthetic knowledge-state: it has the same rational structure, epistemic profile, and motivating power that we have shown aesthetic experience and judgment to have.

We now turn to the Paradox of Aesthetic Criticism.⁴⁰

IV. The Paradox of Aesthetic Criticism Redux

The point of this paper is to argue for Affectivism, the view that aesthetic knowledge bottoms out in feeling. Our strategy has been to demonstrate its superiority in this regard over Perceptualism, the view that the source of aesthetic knowledge is perception. To this end, we employ an argument from explanatory fruits. Affectivism, unlike Perceptualism, yields an explanation of how to reconcile Directness with Criticism. In so doing, it illuminates a wide swath of core aesthetic phenomena—the structure of aesthetic experience, its motivating character, and its epistemic profile—and the connections between them. In this final section, we show exactly how Affectivism resolves the Paradox of Aesthetic Criticism.

Recall first that the Paradox arises from the seeming conflict between

⁴⁰ We have shown elsewhere (Gorodeisky and Marcus 2018) that this distinction is also crucial for solving another puzzle that has bedeviled aestheticians since at least Kant: how to reconcile the (at least seemingly) first-personal nature of aesthetic judgment (its independence of the judgments of others) with our rationally doubting such judgments they conflict with that of qualified judges.

Directness: Direct experience is the only source of aesthetic knowledge,
and

Criticism: Aesthetic criticism is, in virtue of its rational character, a source of aesthetic knowledge.

How, then, does Affectivism resolve the Paradox? Like so: Affectivism is the view that aesthetic knowledge is (affective) appreciation. Feeling, in contrast to perception, has a rational structure. The rationality of aesthetic criticism thus helps to *confirm* our approach. Since aesthetic knowledge is a feeling with a rational structure, it is natural that writings about the aesthetic take the form of making that structure explicit. The reasoning of the critic is of a perfectly familiar sort, the sort we engage every day, for example, when we dispute that the loss of the Tigers is worthy of grief; when we explain why we are disappointed by a student, angry at a colleague, or moved by *The Souvenir*. Criticism is the articulation of one subspecies of emotional rationality. That criticism articulates the critic's aesthetic knowledge is puzzling only if one has somehow fallen out of touch with this familiar phenomenon and so with the affective nature of aesthetic knowledge. Our view predicts and explains the nature of criticism straightforwardly and elegantly without forcing it where it doesn't fit: in perception.

This takes care of **Criticism**, but what about **Directness**? We are still left with the puzzle of how criticism could be the source of its audience's aesthetic knowledge given that, per Directness, the source of aesthetic knowledge is direct experience. The affective account of aesthetic knowledge does not seem to help here, since one cannot feel what is to be felt merely by taking the word of someone else that such a feeling is

merited. The core of our solution is a distinction between the nature of the relation that the critic stands in to her own reasons and the relation that the audience stands in to those same reasons. A critic's aesthetic judgment that *The Souvenir* is excellent is derived, say, from her being moved by its perceptive portrait of a talented and ambitious student falling under the sway of a manipulative, sophisticated, penurious, and mysteriously charismatic older man. But simply imbibing the critic's words does not justify any aesthetic judgment on the part of a reader who has yet to see the film, for she is not yet in a position to *make* an aesthetic judgment about the film. So what does criticism do for the reader?

Two things. First, as Sibley held, and both Lord and Hopkins emphasize, critics *guide* their readers' aesthetic experience. But only Affectivism can account for how critics do this *by virtue of the rational character of criticism*. For example, suppose upon first viewing the film, we failed to notice just how blind the *Souvenir's* heroine is to her lover's manipulations. We might then come to appreciate the film better after reading Anthony Lane's invocation of Henry James: "we pay more for some kinds of knowledge than those particular kinds are worth" (Lane, 2014). This remark might alert us to what Julie, the heroine, does not know, and in some sense chooses not to know. We might then become concerned about her willful blindness. We might also come to recognize our own anxiety on her behalf as crucial to the film's aesthetic achievement. In other words, if we watch the film with these critical remarks in mind, then the critic's reason, which initially served merely as a guide to appreciation, *becomes* a reason for our own aesthetic judgment: we can now *appreciate* the film for the reasons that it is appreciation-worthy. We come to appreciate the power of the film *by* being concerned about Julie and moved by her innocence, her ambition, and the way the former

undermines the latter. In the ideal case, a critic's reason becomes a reader's reason: not by testimony, but by leading the reader to a more attuned engagement with the work, thereby allowing her to experience this reason for herself as supporting appreciation.

Second, even apart from any such engagement, the critic's reasoning can also function as testimony in support of an ordinary belief that the film has the qualities that the critic describes. Criticism could thus also be the source of the audience's merely *derivative* aesthetic knowledge, the source of their justified *belief* that the relevant work is excellent or poor in the manner specified by the critic. Such derivative knowledge is often what leads us to go to the movies following a favorable review.

Putting these two points together: Criticism is a source of its audience's derivative aesthetic knowledge. But, more importantly, it also helps audiences acquire *primary* aesthetic knowledge by rationally guiding their own appreciative responses. Critics *model* primary aesthetic knowledge; they are our appreciative mirrors, showing us how to take in a work so as appreciate its beauty. Criticism is thus, via testimony, the epistemic source of derivative aesthetic knowledge. It is, via guidance, the causal or guiding source of primary aesthetic knowledge.⁴¹ But Directness concerns the epistemic source of primary aesthetic knowledge. Thus, we arrive at a satisfactory reconciliation of Criticism and Directness, one that neither obliterates the rationality of aesthetic experience nor makes a mystery of its intrinsically motivating character.

Here are our two principles again, now refined so as to reveal their consistency:

⁴¹ By 'causal', we do not mean 'mechanistic'. The point is simply that criticism *leads one*, in the ordinary sense, to experiences that constitute aesthetic knowledge.

Directness*: Direct experience is the only source of primary aesthetic knowledge.

Criticism*: Aesthetic criticism is, in virtue of its rational character, a guide to obtaining primary aesthetic knowledge. It is also a testimonial source of derivative aesthetic knowledge.

It might be objected that Affectivism is not as well-positioned as Perceptualism to account for the truth of Directness* given that a perception of *p* is necessarily the product of direct contact with *p*, whereas we are capable of emotionally responding to an object without any direct contact. But to account for Directness* we do not need to show that feelings typically arise from direct contact or even that affective knowledge generally bottoms out in direct contact, as empirical knowledge does with perception. We just need to show that aesthetic experience is *a* direct way of acquiring knowledge. Given that aesthetic experience is affective experience, there is no mystery about how direct aesthetic knowledge is possible. This result fits into the large aims of the paper like so: If not for the introduction of Affectivism, only Perceptualism would be able to account for Directness. But since Perceptualism cannot account for Criticism, there would then be no way to resolve The Paradox of Aesthetic Criticism.

Finally, another dimension of the rationality of criticism bears mention. Above, we noted that it is common to find oneself stymied in attempting to articulate one's aesthetic reactions. Sometimes, this is simply because our judgment has no rational

ground. I just, e.g., find a certain shade of blue beautiful.⁴² Often, however, there is a reason for one's response but one cannot put one's finger on it. Its presence is inchoate in one's experience. Good criticism can help us articulate our experience of the work. In this way, a good critic contributes to our own self-understanding. This too is an aspect of the rational character of criticism. The best art touches us deeply, and the best criticism enables us to bring the way it moves us more fully to consciousness.

V. Conclusion

Some hold that our approach cherry-picks the data, emphasizing those acts and activities to which feeling is essential while ignoring everything else.⁴³ The judgments

⁴² Someone might think that this shows aesthetic judgments need not be rational after all, but that is not so. To make this judgment is to experience the color as to-be-appreciated. As such, the question: "Why do you find it beautiful?" has application. But one way of showing it to have application is to say: "No reason, I just like it; that's all." Our view thus does not require that, in every case, one's feelings have a rational cause. Cf., Anscombe on the distinctive 'Why?' question that marks intentional action: "Now of course a possible answer to the question 'Why?' is one like 'I just thought I would' or 'It was an impulse' or 'For no particular reason'....The question is not refused application because the answer to it says that there is no reason, any more than the question how much money I have in my pocket is refused application by the answer 'None'" (Anscombe 2000: 25).

⁴³ Robbie Kubala in a review of our Gorodeisky and Marcus (2018).

and activities of curators, art historians, preservationists, art educators, after all, often do not involve feeling (of pleasure) in any direct way. We contend, nonetheless, that the view defended here is the only one that can make sense of the full range of the practices that are built up around the aesthetic dimensions of human life. Independently of the appreciation that aesthetic value merits, and through which it is revealed, none of these practices would be intelligible as *aesthetic* practices, nor, for that matter would they make sense as human activities more generally. There would be no reasons to exhibit a painting or preserve a building on account of its aesthetic value if there were no reasons to appreciate the painting or the building. The distinctive sort of pleasure that we take in beautiful things thus grounds the activities of the curator, historian, and others. This is not to suggest that the point of these practices is to feel pleasure, as if we go to see *The Souvenir* again for the same sort of reason that a raver takes another hit of ecstasy. No: we engage in these practices because of the excellence of aesthetically valuable things, excellence that merits and is fundamentally known through a certain kind of pleasure. Appreciation, then, is the key to the aesthetic. It is through appreciation that aesthetic value is, in the first instance, known. And it is in virtue of this pleasurable engagement with value that it occupies a vital role in our lives.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ This article evolved from our response to comments on Gorodeisky and Marcus (2018) by Robbie Kubala and Aaron Meskin at the 2020 Eastern Division Meeting of the APA. We thank Kubala and Meskin for those comments, and are grateful to Arata Hamawaki for conversations that helped to inspire this article. We also extend our thanks to Ram Neta and James Shelley, to anonymous reviewers of this journal, and to audiences at an

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