

# **The Nature of Aesthetic Experiences**

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## *Abstract*

This dissertation provides a theory of the nature of aesthetic experiences on the basis of a theory of aesthetic values. It results in the formulation of the following necessary conditions for an experience to be aesthetic: (i) it must consist of a (complex) representation of an object and an accompanying feeling; (ii) the representation must instantiate an intrinsic value; and (iii) the feeling must be the recognition of that value and bestow it on the object. Since representations are of intrinsic value for different reasons, there are different kinds of aesthetic experiences (such as sensual or meta-cognitive ones).

By means of certain conceptual links, it is possible to extend this account to other aesthetic entities thus enabling the formulation of a general theory of the aesthetic in non-aesthetic terms. In particular, aesthetic values are identical with subjective dispositions to elicit aesthetic experiences under normal conditions. Accordingly, I endorse anti-realism about aesthetic values: their existence, nature and exemplification are mind-dependent, while their ascriptions to objects have genuine truth-values. I back up this account by arguing against the alternative positions that either take aesthetic values to be objective or deny the truth-aptness of their attributions.

Furthermore, I put forward a relativist variant of anti-realism according to which ascriptions of different (and seemingly incompatible) aesthetic values to a particular object are all correct, given that the aesthetic experiences involved are made under normal conditions and concern the same aesthetically non-evaluative features of that object. For there is no specifically aesthetic norm (e.g., a specification of “ideal critics”) by means of which one of the faultless aesthetic experiences can be picked out as the only appropriate one. That aesthetic values nevertheless show a normative dimension is ensured by their conformity to a general account of values as capacities to satisfy, or dissatisfy, rational desires.

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# 1. Introduction

The main objective of this dissertation is to provide a theory of the nature of aesthetic experiences (or responses). Any account of *aesthetic experiences* has to address at least the following two questions: what it means for an entity to be an experience; and what it means for an experience to be aesthetic. While the answer to the first question does not require an extensive discussion, the answer to the second will in fact occupy the whole extent of this dissertation.

## *The nature of experiences*

Experiences are of such importance for us, since it is mainly by means of them that we can become aware of more comprehensive aspects of the nature of objects (e.g., the whole pattern of colours and shapes of a large painting). For *experiences* are identical with complexes of representational mental episodes, each of which must have the same referent and that fall into the same “temporal span of attention”. *Episodes* are those mental phenomena that are phenomenally conscious over a certain duration of time: they are constitutive parts of our stream of phenomenal consciousness, show a specific phenomenal character (i.e., what it is like to be in them) and are possible subjects for our attention and introspection. Examples of episodes are judgements, perceptions, imaginations, feelings or sensations. They are contrasted with the only other kind of mental states: namely *mental dispositions*. These become phenomenally conscious only if they are manifested by means of a corresponding episode. Mental dispositions are such states as beliefs, desires, emotions and states of knowledge.

That episodes are *representational* (i.e., intentional) means: they have a content, by means of which they represent the world as being in a certain way; they may have a referent; and they are susceptible to error. The corresponding notion of representational episodes is broad enough to cover all object-directed episodes as well as all episodes with propositional contents. It is also sufficiently wide to include not only judgements and perceptions, but also feelings (except, perhaps, non-representational moods), sensations and imaginings.

That the requirement of sameness of reference alone does not suffice to guarantee the unity of an experience as a distinctive part of the stream of consciousness can be illustrated by means of the following example. Consider someone who reads a couple of pages of a novel, then puts the book aside to do something else, only to return later to continue his reading; or someone who takes up a book every now and then over the whole period of his life. He surely undergoes several distinct experiences of reading that do not literally constitute one single experience, even though they are all about the same object. Hence, to constitute a distinctive unit within the stream of consciousness, the relevant episodes have to be connected to each other in a further way: they have to fall into the same “temporal span of attention”.

Accordingly, our mind is able to link several momentary acts of attention together in a specific way: while it shifts its attention from one feature of an object to another, the previous act of attending does not always immediately cease to exist (apart from being transformed into a state of memory), but often remains for some time in the “temporal background” of our attention. If, for example, we listen to a simple

piece of music consisting of a row of tones, we attend in each moment only to one of the tones. But we are nevertheless able to perceive intervals or melodies, even if all of the tones, except the last, cannot actually be heard anymore. This is possible only if the just previously heard tones are still, in one way or other, represented and attended-to within the phenomenal consciousness<sup>1</sup>. A similar thing happens when we move from two premises to a conclusion or imagine how the world would be like on the basis of the assumption that we live on the inside of a sphere rather than its outside. Hence it must be possible for our attention to be directed towards features that are represented at different moments in time: it has to be able to link representations that occur in succession within the stream of consciousness, and so capable of “spanning“ certain periods of time.

There are two restrictions on what a particular “span of attention“ can cover to constitute an experience. First, the number of episodes involved is limited. For example, while it is possible for us to be aware of several consecutive intervals or even a simple, short melody in one act of attention, we cannot experience the continuous melodic line of a whole movement of a symphony in one go. Second, the linked episodes have to follow each other more or less immediately. There is, however, a way in which it is possible to cover within one “span of attention“ features of an object that are not (or even cannot be) experienced immediately one after the other: namely by means of including episodes of memory in one’s experience. Thus one can, for instance, compare the beginning of the last movement of a symphony with the previously heard beginning of the first. And if a character reappears in a later chapter of a book, one typically connects the actual reading with a recollection of the earlier described characterisations and actions of that character. In fact, many experiences show such more or less considerable temporal gaps. Note, however, that even in these cases the unified episodes follow each other immediately within the stream of consciousness; only the moments in which their representational contents have been first generated are temporally distant.

### ***The aesthetic nature of experiences and values***

What it means for an experience - or, for that matter, any other kind of entity (properties, values, judgements, sensitivities, and so forth) - to be aesthetic cannot be answered in such a straightforward (even if only broad) way as the first question. After all, it has been one of the major issues of debate in aesthetics how, in general, the notion of the aesthetic can be satisfactorily defined. However, what can be offered at the outset is an illumination of the conceptual links between the notions of different kinds of entities that are specifically aesthetic in nature. Most importantly, the concepts of aesthetic experiences and aesthetic values are linked to each other by means of the following logical necessity:

(AES) An experience of an object is aesthetic if and only if it ascribes a value to the object, and that value is aesthetic.

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<sup>1</sup> Such temporal fore- and background attention is paralleled by the opposition of central and peripheral, or spatial fore- and background, attention in the case of visual experience. Cf. also the role of “retention” in explaining consciousness of time (cf. Husserl (1905); Frank (1990)), and of “comprehension” in Kant’s account of how we perceive extensive magnitudes (cf. Kant (1790)).

Undergoing an aesthetic experiences is thereby stipulated to be the *canonical way* in which we find out whether an object is of aesthetic value: that is, any other kind of recognition of aesthetic values must ultimately be based on aesthetic experiences, without being itself a part of these experiences. An account of aesthetic experiences must make this stipulation substantial by specifying which kind of experience fulfils the role of ultimate recognition of aesthetic merits.

If follows from (AES) that it is possible to define each of the notions in terms of the other; and if an account of what it means for one of the kinds of entities to be aesthetic is provided, this will automatically capture the aesthetic nature of the other kind as well. Although either of the concepts can enjoy logical priority over the other, I aim to show that it is reasonable to take the notion of aesthetic experiences as theoretically more fundamental than the notion of aesthetic values. To achieve this aim, I will proceed as follows.

First of all, I will present a *descriptive theory of the nature of aesthetic values*: that is, the listing and descriptive elucidation of certain features, which are essential to aesthetic values and by means of which these values can be distinguished from other kinds of values. These will establish certain desiderata for an account of aesthetic experiences. For according to the necessary link between aesthetic experiences and aesthetic values, any theory of the former has to be able to account for the facts: that experiences of this kind can really count as experiential recognitions of instantiations of the latter; and that aesthetic experiences differ from other kinds of experiences - and especially from other kinds of evaluative experiences (e.g., moral, sentimental or emotional experiences) - in that they are concerned with aesthetic values as the experienced qualities. And both these tasks are obviously dependent on how aesthetic values are described in the first place.

The description of the nature of aesthetic values will in this way ground a *descriptive theory of the nature of aesthetic experiences*. It will turn out that the nature of aesthetic experiences can be fully described in non-aesthetic terms: that is, in terms that are borrowed solely from such general philosophical disciplines as ontology, epistemology or philosophy of mind. Given the conceptual link (AES), this non-aesthetic description of the nature of aesthetic experiences also makes possible a non-aesthetic description of the nature of aesthetic values. Moreover, it allows for a *non-aesthetic explanation of what it means for an entity to be aesthetic*, because it is capable of differentiating aesthetic experiences and values from their non-aesthetic counterparts without reference to notions, the meaning and significance of which is essentially due to their role within debates about aesthetic issues (irrespective of whether these debates are of a theoretical or philosophical nature, or instead located within our daily, more practical and commonsensical interaction with objects of aesthetic relevance). As a consequence, it is perhaps more appropriate to conceive of aesthetics only as occupying specific sections of the general systematic disciplines of philosophy than to conceive of it as constituting a systematic discipline in its own right. The reduction of the notion of the aesthetic might thus result in a “reduction of aesthetics“.

That an explanation of why certain experiences and values are aesthetic can be extended to other kinds of aesthetic entities is due to further conceptual links. In particular, it is possible to define: *aesthetic sensitivities* (such as taste) as those capacities that are essentially involved in the experiential recognition of instantiations of these values; *aesthetic objects* as the intentional objects of aesthetic experiences (including natural objects as well as art and other artefacts); and *aesthetic judgements* as those judgements that ascribe aesthetic values to objects. Since aesthetic experiences are assumed to be the canonical means for

the recognition of aesthetic values, all aesthetic judgements have ultimately to be grounded on such experiences, while not being part of them. But they need not be directly based on actual aesthetic responses. Aesthetic judgements can also be indirectly grounded through *deferment*. Accordingly, they can rely on remembered or imagined experiences, considerations about what kind of experience an object might offer that take past experiences of comparable objects into account, or (ultimately experienced-based) aesthetic judgements of others.

### ***Aesthetic values and aesthetic properties***

That certain objects have aesthetic values means, first of all, that each of them has an *overall aesthetic value*. The overall aesthetic merit of an object is the extent to which it is - in general and as a whole - aesthetically good. It allows us to compare and order objects (and especially artworks) with respect to their general aesthetic appeal. Thus a novel by Saul Bellow can be, and is typically, valued higher than one by Ken Follet, and the works of Leonardo higher than the works of Fra Angelico. All experienceable features of a particular object that are responsible for, or contribute to, its overall aesthetic value, are *aesthetically relevant*. For instance, the aesthetically relevant qualities of a painting may be: the colours and shapes on its canvas; its material nature; its relations to other paintings; its pictorial content; its stylistic features; its cognitive value; and so forth. In principle, any kind of quality can be aesthetically relevant with respect to a particular object, as long as it is experienceable.

Since the “span of attention“ of human beings is very limited, in most cases it takes many distinct experiences to recognise all aesthetically relevant features of an object. It is nevertheless possible for us actually to recognise the overall aesthetic value of such an object, because its overall merit does not depend in the same “direct“ way on all aesthetically relevant features. For the relations of constitutional dependence form the shape of a pyramid. At the top is, of course, the overall aesthetic value. On the next lower level can be partial aesthetic values as well as other qualities; and this is true of all the following levels, until those levels are reached that consist solely of qualities that are not aesthetically evaluative. Accordingly, most objects possess many different *partial aesthetic values* in addition to their overall aesthetic merit (given that they possess any). And the overall aesthetic value is only the highest-level and most comprehensive of these values and depends on the pyramid hierarchy of lower-level values (as well as other qualities). As a consequence, the class of aesthetically relevant features also includes, with respect to many objects, partial aesthetic values.

The recognition of higher-level values - including overall merit - occurs by means of higher-order aesthetic experiences on the basis of representing the object as possessing both certain lower-level values, that have been previously experienced, and certain other aesthetically relevant qualities, that are not aesthetically evaluative themselves<sup>2</sup>. This is possible because the evaluative conclusions of previously made aesthetic experiences can enter new experiences in the form of episodes of memory. It requires only that, for each aesthetic value, there must be a corresponding kind of aesthetic response.

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<sup>2</sup> It seems impossible to infer a higher-level aesthetic value directly from lower-level aesthetic values. Even if each line of a poem is great, it is an overall aesthetically appealing work only if the lines are related to each other in a suitable right way (which itself need not be captured by an aesthetic value).



As the topic of this dissertation has been laid out so far, the discussion of the nature of aesthetic experiences will focus almost exclusively on aesthetic values; while aesthetic properties will play only a very minor role. To see why this is so, it is necessary to be clear about the distinction between the two kinds of qualities. *Aesthetic qualities* can be values or properties: they are aesthetic *values* if their recognition requires an evaluative response; and they are aesthetic *properties* if their recognition has to occur by means of a descriptive (or non-evaluative) representation. An evaluative response has some kind of approval or some kind of disapproval essential to it, while all non-evaluative representations (such as perceptions) lack such an aspect.

The class of aesthetic properties thus contains all *inherent aesthetic merit- or defect-constituting properties*<sup>3</sup>. These properties are characterised by the fact that - when instantiated by objects of certain appropriate kinds - they necessarily contribute to the aesthetic values of these objects (in either a positive or negative way, respectively). But they do not count as aesthetic values themselves, because their ascription does not presuppose an evaluative response, nor does the ascribing subject have to be aware of the fact that they constitute a merit or defect of the kind of object in question. This is also apparent in the fact that they do not necessarily contribute to aesthetic values in the same way - or even at all - with respect to all kinds of objects. Consider, for example, the properties of being elegant and being gaudy. To recognise that a painting is gaudy, or a drawing elegant, does not presuppose that one evaluates the item, say, by means of a feeling. And while gaudiness may, in some cases, be partly responsible for the positive aesthetic value of its bearer (e.g., in an Almodovar movie), elegance may sometimes be an aesthetic defect (e.g., in an allegorical depiction of disquiet).

That aesthetic properties will not play a very prominent role in the following discussion is due to two closely related reasons. First, the significance of these properties for aesthetic responses consists solely in the fact that aesthetic experiences (often) involve representations of them and, in such cases, ascribe aesthetic values to the experienced objects on the basis of these representations. But this is true of many other qualities that are not aesthetic: notably, representational and structural properties. The suggestion that aesthetic properties nevertheless differ from other qualities contributing to aesthetic values, because only the former, in all cases in which they are instantiated, have a constitutive impact on aesthetic value, is simply false. For the possession of an aesthetic property as such never ensures the possession of an aesthetic value, since aesthetic properties can be at most merit- or defect-constituting: there can be objects with aesthetic properties that do not elicit any aesthetic evaluation (e.g., a piece of music that is heard as sad, but leaves us aesthetically indifferent). Hence, aesthetic properties should not be accorded a more eminent position within a theory of aesthetic experiences than other qualities that are responsible for aesthetic values.

Second, it is questionable whether properties are aesthetic in the same sense as experiences and values. For this would require there to be some kind of conceptual link between the already coupled notions and the notion of aesthetic properties. But this seems to be highly implausible, since there does not appear

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Sibley ((1974): 6). I prefer the expression “merit-constituting property” over Sibley’s “merit-qualities” to avoid confusion regarding the expression “merit” that I will use to refer to values exclusively. Besides, whether there are aesthetic properties that are not merit- or defect-constituting is a matter of debate.

to be any satisfactory way in which their class can be intensionally defined<sup>4</sup>. In particular, the often favoured criterion of contribution to the aesthetic value of objects is not an option, since (as has just been argued) non-aesthetic qualities also satisfy this criterion. And to say that one needs a special capacity (such as “taste”) to detect them does not distinguish them from other (not easily) discernible qualities like intelligence or hidden anger. But if the class of aesthetic properties cannot be delineated by means of an intensional definition, it is difficult to see how one could establish a conceptual link between the concept of these properties and the concept of aesthetic experiences or values.

It might appear plausible to say that aesthetic properties are those properties that are *directly* responsible for aesthetic values, while non-aesthetic qualities have only an impact that is mediated by aesthetic properties. But one difficulty with this proposal is that it is not clear what “directness” might mean in the context of the ontological constitution of qualities. For example, is the contribution of macro-physical surface reflectance properties to the colours of their bearers in fact more “direct” than the contribution of those micro-physical properties that constitute the reflectances? But even if one can make sense of such a notion of “directness”, it is not clear whether it can really be used to distinguish aesthetic from non-aesthetic properties. It is imaginable that if we come empirically to know better how aesthetic values are realised by other qualities of their bearers, additional levels of constitution will sometimes have to be introduced between aesthetic values and those aesthetic properties that will have been understood as their “direct” ground until then. Another problem is that it seems conceivable that some non-aesthetic features can figure as aesthetic merit-constituting properties without any help from aesthetic properties. The most serious objection would be that there can be cases of aesthetic properties that do not “directly” contribute to an aesthetic value, but only via another aesthetic property. For instance, the sadness of a piece of music might have an impact on the aesthetic appeal of that piece only by partly constituting its serenity.

In any case, one who wants to hold that there are distinctively aesthetic properties has to find a satisfactory way of delineating the class of these properties, as well as of explaining in which sense they are aesthetic. But for a theory of aesthetic experiences, as envisaged in this dissertation, these issues are only of minor relevance. This remains true even if it turns out that there are aesthetic qualities that are values and properties at the same time (as proposed by Goldman (1994)). Even then, there is no need to extend the discussion about aesthetic experiences and evaluations to cover aesthetic properties in the form of these hypothetical mixed qualities, because it is sufficient to deal only with their evaluative, but not with their descriptive aspect. Besides, whether there really are aesthetic qualities, the recognition of which requires a response that is at the same time, evaluative and descriptive, is controversial, to say the least (cf. Levinson (1994); Sibley (1974)).

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Goldman ((1992); (1995): 17ff.). He elucidates aesthetic properties in terms of their contribution to aesthetic values. Sibley defines them in terms of taste, without, however, clarifying how taste can be specified independently of the notion of aesthetic properties (cf. Sibley (1959)).

## 2. Realism and Irrealism

In this and the following section, I will discuss the merits of various ontological interpretations of judgements that ascribe aesthetic values to objects. In particular, I will deal with the questions: whether these judgements refer to states of affairs and, if they do, to what kind of states of affairs; and whether they are susceptible of truth and falsehood. There are three mutually exclusive positions about the ontological status of aesthetic values that exhaust the possibilities: realism, irrealism and anti-realism. In what follows, I will argue in favour of anti-realism by showing that realism and irrealism do not provide tenable accounts of what aesthetic values are.

### *Realism*

As I understand it, *realism* about aesthetic values consists of three connected theses. First, it maintains that there are aesthetic values in the world. Second, it claims that these qualities, as well as their instantiations (if there are any), are objective: an entity is *objective* if and only if its existence and nature is mind-independent. Third, it states that the experiences and judgements that ascribe aesthetic values to objects are made true by the existence of the relevant objective facts. Ascriptions of aesthetic values thus have a genuine truth-value: they are either true or false; and both alternatives are possible.

Realism concerning aesthetic merit is typically combined with the epistemological thesis that we can actually have access to instantiations of aesthetic values. Accordingly, we recognise the aesthetic appeal of objects by means of aesthetic experiences, on which our aesthetic judgements are based. And as in the case of perceptions, there are experiential normal conditions, which guarantee that any aesthetic experience made while they obtain is indeed appropriate; and any aesthetic judgement, that is based on an appropriate experience in the correct way, is true.

### *Contra realism*

Although realism with respect to aesthetic values appears to be an attractive position because of its simple and straightforward approach to ascriptions of aesthetic values, it is not very often endorsed because of a set of serious problems. I will discuss two decisive objections to realism.

The first maintains that a realist position cannot account for the fact that our aesthetic evaluations are often highly diverse and contradictory - even among those people whom we consider to be experienced and reliable judges. Of course, such disagreement occurs in all kinds of discourse: we may dispute which size or colour a given object has, whether a certain action is morally justified, which traits a person possesses or what a certain combination of words means. But in the case of most observable objective properties (such as size or mass), and even in the case of many response-dependent ones (colours or sounds, for example), disagreement usually happens far less frequently than with aesthetic values. Furthermore, it can

usually be dissolved easily by reference to objective evidence (with colours, say, by means of the findings of colour science). By contrast, it often seems impossible to distinguish correct from incorrect aesthetic opinions on the basis of independent objective facts. If nevertheless aesthetic values are taken to be objective, a satisfactory explanation of this stark difference between aesthetic and many other objective qualities must be provided, and an account must be given of how disagreement can be objectively dissolved. That realism is incapable of providing such an explanation will become clear when I return to the problem stemming from disagreement in the context of anti-realism.

The second objection argues directly against the claim that aesthetic values are objective. Qualities can be objective only in two different ways: either by being constitutionally dependent solely on other objective qualities of their bearers; or by being primitive (or simple) qualities<sup>5</sup>. Primitive qualities are objective qualities which do not constitutionally depend on other qualities, in particular not on micro- or macro-physical properties. Perhaps some micro-physical properties are primitive in this sense. But it is highly implausible to take aesthetic values to be completely independent of the physical constitution of their bearers: just consider the example of a painter who is able to change the aesthetic appeal of her picture by applying colour to the canvas in different shapes or changing its texture. Furthermore, primitivism has difficulties in explaining the causal relevance and observability of the respective qualities and is also likely to lead to some kind of quality dualism<sup>6</sup>. Hence, it is better to discard the idea of primitive aesthetic values.

It is more plausible to adopt a realism that traces the objectivity of aesthetic values back to their (supposed) complete constitutional dependence on more basic, objective qualities. Such metaphysical dependence is usually expressed in terms of supervenience. According to a common conception of supervenience, one set of qualities is supervenient on another set if any two objects that are indiscernible with respect to their qualities of the latter, more basic set are also necessarily indiscernible with respect to their qualities of the former set (cf. Kim (1994): 577). In other words, for aesthetic values of objects completely to supervene on other objective qualities of their bearers means that any change in aesthetic merit necessitates a change in those other qualities. Moreover, since the dependence is said to be complete or exclusive, no subjective qualities of the objects can have any determinatory power over aesthetic appeal. In other words, no subjective property of the object can be part of the supervenience base, if realism is to be true.

The main issue is thus whether there really are no subjective qualities in the supervenience bases of aesthetic values. The aesthetic merits of external entities usually depend on many diverse human-ascribed qualities: shapes and size; colours, texture and sounds; Gestalt qualities; meanings; so-called aesthetic properties (grace, harmony or funniness, for instance); or properties like intelligence and serenity (if they are not taken to be aesthetic as well). However, most of these qualities (probably only with the exception of the first two) are subjective. In support of this claim, I will consider only colours and aesthetic properties. This should suffice to render it plausible that most of the qualities that ground aesthetic values are

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<sup>5</sup> The issue is not whether aesthetic values can be specified in purely objective terms. For any mind-dependent quality will be, if naturalism turns out to be true of mental entities.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. the discussion of primitivism about colours (as it is held by John Campbell (1993) and suggested by Broackes (1992)) in: Armstrong (1997), Keith Campbell (1993), Hardin (1988) and Smith (1993).

subjective, and to show that realism about these values is not viable.

As a matter of fact, colours are not completely determined by the physical constitution and the objective relational properties of their bearers. For instance, it is essential to colours that they show certain resemblance relations and can be divided into colours with pure or unique hues (namely: red, green, blue and yellow) and colours with binary hues (that is, hues mixed out of two unique hues). But the physical properties of objects responsible for our colour experiences do not display similar and physically interesting resemblances and classifications<sup>7</sup>. Instead, these phenomenal features of colours can be explained only by reference to the nature of our colour perceptions: it is their introspectible phenomenal characters (or qualia) that actually show these phenomenal features<sup>8</sup>. Hence, while it is certainly true that there are certain objective properties (surface spectral reflectances, for example) that are discerned and represented by our colour perceptions, these experiences also possess certain phenomenal properties (namely colour qualia) that determine the phenomenal aspect of colours and cannot be reduced to the objective, representational aspect<sup>9</sup>.

Accordingly, colours are best analysed as subjective dispositional properties, which are defined by reference to the relevant types of colour experience (as individuated by their colour qualia), and which the objects instantiate over and above (and also partly because of) their objective reflectances<sup>10</sup>. For our discussion, it is important that aesthetic values are often constitutionally dependent on the subjective phenomenal colours (and only indirectly, via these phenomenal colours, on the objective reflectance properties). The garishness of a painting that contributes to its aesthetic appeal is due to the phenomenal brightness of its colours; and features like harmony or balance often owe their occurrence to contrasts holding between phenomenal colours (consider, for example, Delaunay's or Itten's explorations of contrast phenomena). Moreover, similar considerations apply to all secondary qualities, as well as to most of the other kinds of qualities mentioned above. Hence, most aesthetic values are in fact partly supervenient on subjective qualities.

That aesthetic properties are subjective can be shown on the basis of the following two premises. First, it is possible to provide a complete and objective description of an object in purely non-aesthetic terms, that is, without referring to any aesthetic qualities. Second, no set of non-aesthetic properties of an object can

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<sup>7</sup> It is of course possible to group the relevant physical properties in correspondence to the experienced colour properties. But this grouping would remain completely arbitrary from a physical point of view and cannot thus provide a physicalistic explanation of the respective features of colours - which would be required, if the nature of colours could be said to be entirely determined by the respective physical properties of objects (cf. Hilbert (1987): 100).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Johnston (1992) and Boghossian & Velleman (1989). Cf. the introduction of Byrne & Hilbert (1997a) for a good general discussion of theories of colours.

<sup>9</sup> Although Byrne & Hilbert (1997b) try to defend such a reduction, there are decisive objections in, among others, Hardin (1988), K. Campbell (1993)), and also the proponents of the theory of colour endorsed here (cf. footnote 10). Cf. also opponents of the reduction of qualia to representational features (e.g., Block (1995)).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Armstrong (1997), K. Campbell (1993) and Smart (1975). Since our conception of colours covers both the objective and the phenomenal side, it can be a matter of debate whether the objective reflectances or rather the subjective phenomenal dispositions should be called "colours", or whether the concept of colours refers to two distinct kinds of qualities.

ensure the instantiation of any aesthetic property. The argument for the subjectivity of aesthetic properties runs now as follows. If these properties are indeed objective in a non-primitive way, they supervene solely on certain objective qualities of their bearers. Since the first premise demands that there be a non-aesthetic description of objects on some objective (presumably purely physical) level of constitution, there must be a set of non-aesthetic qualities on this level to which aesthetic values can be fully reduced. This requires that it is possible to formulate general reduction principles linking aesthetic properties with non-aesthetic qualities: that is, principles that provide at least sufficient conditions for the instantiations of the former on the basis of instantiations of the latter. However, this requirement stands in direct contradiction with the second premise. Hence, if one accepts the two premises, aesthetic properties are subjective. But a realist might, of course, want to deny either of the premises.

The second premise is a reformulation of Sibley's claim that there are no aesthetic principles by reference to which ascriptions of aesthetic properties can be positively inferred or proved on the basis of ascriptions of non-aesthetic qualities. His main consideration in support of this claim can be construed as an argument from context<sup>11</sup>. A line that is graceful in one painting does not necessarily possess this gracefulness in another painting: say, if having many similarly shaped parallels very close to it, or if being contrasted with a line that is, in comparison, much more elegant and fragile. Which aesthetic property the shape and colour of that line helps to constitute is dependent on the context: one can always imagine distinct contexts, in which it contributes to different aesthetic effects. Even if one can identify all those non-aesthetic qualities of an object that are responsible for one of its aesthetic properties, the set of the former is not sufficient for the instantiation of the latter. For one can always imagine changes of the other non-aesthetic qualities of the object, or additions to them, that leave the set unchanged, but cause a change of the aesthetic property in question. A small painting that is balanced and harmonious can lose these qualities completely, if it is integrated into a chaotic larger painting. That aesthetic properties show such context-dependence, and that they arise only on the basis of the interaction of the non-aesthetic qualities of their bearers, frustrates any attempt to identify a set of non-aesthetic qualities sufficient for an aesthetic property.

It has been suggested that the conclusion may not be valid for all aesthetic properties, since a few of them (symmetry, say) do not seem to be context-dependent in the specified sense and thus can perhaps be governed by positive conditions involving non-aesthetic qualities (cf. Sibley (1959); Cohen (1973)). But this does not radically affect the argumentation, since it remains true that most aesthetic properties are dependent on the context in which they are instantiated and therefore cannot be ascribed solely on the basis of attributions of non-aesthetic qualities of their bearers. Any doubts that the distinction between aesthetic and non-aesthetic properties cannot (easily) be drawn likewise do not constitute a serious threat to Sibley's thesis. For even if properties like gracefulness, elegance or harmony cannot, or should not, be classified as "aesthetic properties", they are nevertheless context-dependent and subjective and help to constitute aesthetic values. And the consideration that a line taken "on its own" is graceful, while the context can at best mask this fact, lacks force, since it is unclear under which circumstances it is possible to consider a line "on its own" (e.g., which colour or material the background has to be made of in order not to

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. the context-dependence of colour hues. Cf. also Sibley (1959) and Goldman ((1995): 134). Sibley states the issue in terms of concepts and logical sufficiency rather than in terms of qualities and metaphysical sufficiency. Note that Goldman can extend the argument from context directly to evaluative aesthetic qualities only because he assumes that most aesthetic properties are essentially evaluative.

influence the line at all). Hence, it is difficult to see how a realist could avoid accepting the second premise.

But he might try to evade the first premise by maintaining that aesthetic qualities can be constitutionally dependent on non-aesthetic, objective qualities without necessarily being reducible to them: for instance, if the dependence relation holding between the two kinds of qualities is that of emergence. However, emergence does not seem to provide the right account of how aesthetic properties are related to non-aesthetic qualities. On the one hand, aesthetic properties are typically instantiated on the same ontological level as the qualities on which they depend: the latter are possessed either by the bearer of the former, or by certain of its compositional parts. By contrast, emergent qualities are usually exemplified on a different ontological level than their realisation base. For instance, the transparency of a certain volume of water is emergent not on properties of macro-physical, compositional parts of that volume, but on properties of the micro-physical molecules that constitute that volume. On the other hand, our daily practice suggests that there can be complete and objective description of an aesthetically appealing object without reference to its aesthetic qualities - which would be impossible if aesthetic properties were objective due to emergence. But there is an even more serious worry concerning the introduction of emergence (or any other form of non-reductive dependence relation, for that matter): it cannot really solve the problem that it is supposed to solve. For since the dependence would still hold between two objective sets of qualities, there would have to be objective principles governing it. After all, presumably no dependence is arbitrary, but can be subsumed under some kind of laws. Thus, for example, it is no pure accident that water - but not, say, oil - is transparent because of its chemical micro-structure.

The conclusion is that most aesthetic values cannot be objective, since they are at least partly dependent on secondary qualities, aesthetic properties or other subjective qualities. Consequently, realism is false with respect to most aesthetic values. Of course, there may be aesthetic values that are solely dependent on objective qualities: for example, aesthetic values that are constituted solely by those aesthetic properties, which are positively governed by principles linking them to objective properties of their bearers (symmetry, say). And this leaves open the possibility that these specific aesthetic values are objective after all. However, this possibility is implausible: it entails that the class of aesthetic values is divided into objective and subjective qualities. If there were such a heterogeneity, it would be more appropriate to speak of two distinct categories or kinds of values, rather than one - which evidently would not match our daily practice. Hence, it is more reasonable to avoid such a conceptual fission and to discard realism altogether. If there are aesthetic values at all, they are subjective.

### ***Pro realism***

Before looking at the two alternative proposals, it is advisable to consider a promising, though unsuccessful argument in favour of realism, as it has been presented by Eddy Zemach, one of the few proponents of a realist position in recent years (cf. Zemach (1997): ch. 3). The general strategy of his argument is to show that anyone who adopts some form of global realism by maintaining that there are some real entities in the world, is forced to accept the “reality” of aesthetic values (and aesthetic qualities in general) as

well. I will not be concerned with his two lines of argument leading to the thesis that both scientific and ontological realism entail the “reality” of aesthetic values<sup>12</sup>. Instead, I will focus on the fact that the conclusions Zemach draws (and can maximally draw) fall short of the thesis that aesthetic values are objective.

According to Zemach, an aesthetic quality is “real“ if it really characterises things in the world and thus partly constitutes facts, and if ascriptions of it can be made true by such facts and therefore have genuine truth-values (cf. Zemach (1997): x). Hence, what his argument at best shows is that a global realist might have to assume that there are aesthetic qualities in the world, by means of which theories about the reality of the world can be correctly evaluated. But that aesthetic qualities really, or as a matter of fact, exist and are instantiated does not automatically entail that they are real in the sense of being objective. Similarly, that many of our aesthetic judgements are true is compatible with the claim that they are made true by mind-dependent aesthetic facts. And Zemach provides no argument why aesthetic facts (whether about theories or about other objects) cannot be subjective in the same way as, say, facts about colours are.

That he does not see the need for such a further argument is clear in the first pages of his book. After his definition of what he means by “realism“ with respect to aesthetic qualities, he attempts to ensure that “real“ in fact means “objective“, by claiming (or at least assuming) that this definition of “realism“ requires a robust or substantial notion of truth (e.g., that of correspondence with a mind-independent world), because theories of truth that define this notion either disquotationally or in terms of epistemic assertibility cannot allow that aesthetic judgements have genuine truth-values (cf. Zemach (1997): xf.). But this last claim (or assumption) is simply unwarranted (although Zemach does not feel the need to further elucidate or support it). For any theory of truth that wants to be taken seriously has to guarantee that judgements or sentences have genuine truth-values in the sense (accepted by Zemach) that there is a matter of fact with respect to which they are true or false (cf. Horwich (1990)). And in fact, since neither his definition of “realism“, nor his later use of that notion, indicates that “real“ entities have to be mind-independent (or to conform to any other criteria according to which entities are objective: like those proposed by scientific realism), both the objectivity and the subjectivity of the “real“ qualities and facts is compatible with his position (cf. Budd (1999a)).

### ***Irrealism***

What Zemach in fact argues against is the irrealist alternative to realism. *Irrealism* concerning aesthetic values is characterised by the claim that ascriptions of these qualities do not have genuine truth-values: that is, they either have no truth-values at all, or are all said to possess the same truth-value (presumably: falsehood) for systematic reasons. According to different variants of irrealism, attributions of aesthetic

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Goldman ((1995): 34-36) and Budd (1999a) for criticism of his argument concerning scientific realism. His argument concerning ontological realism is based on two completely unwarranted premises: that it is inconceivable that there could be an objective world with a certain structure constituted by certain facts, unless at least some of these facts were aesthetic; and that there is no reason for an ontological realist to believe that aesthetic judgements cannot present the world as it objectively is. His third premise - that aesthetic evaluations can be true, and that quite a few of them have in fact to be true - is more promising and might figure as an objection against irrealism (cf. Zemach (1997): 70).



values do not have genuine truth-values, either because they do not possess the propositional and assertive nature of judgements that allows for the possibility of error, or because aesthetic concepts do not refer to any existing qualities (whether these are objective or subjective). However, irrealism not only rejects the third thesis of realism, but also the first two. For it also denies that there are such qualities (either objective or subjective ones) and states of affairs including them<sup>13</sup>.

### ***Contra irrealism***

Now irrealism is unnecessarily extreme in its claims. First of all, it is highly implausible in the light of our common practices: after all, we do speak of aesthetic values of objects, can successfully communicate and argue about our opinions of them and do allow for the possibility of error with respect to aesthetic evaluations. Then, as has already been mentioned, the considerations that Zemach puts forward in favour of his “realism“ can be interpreted as objections against irrealism (in particular, cf. footnote 12). Finally, irrealism figures only as a second choice. Taken for itself, it does not have any advantage in comparison with the other two ontological positions, but only disadvantages. Apart from the possibility that both alternatives of irrealism might to be refuted, there does not seem to be any positive reason for adopting this extreme position. Hence, if the third ontological option - namely anti-realism - turns out to be tenable, there is no need to consider irrealism further.

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<sup>13</sup> Non-factualism, the more radical form of irrealism, denies that aesthetic judgements have any truth-values (say, because there are no qualities that are denoted by evaluative aesthetic concepts or predicates); the less radical form of irrealism adopts an error theory that allows, and tries to account for the fact, that all aesthetic judgements are systematically false (cf. Boghossian (1989)). A third variant of irrealism does not deny the existence of aesthetic values and state of affairs, but insists that we do not have the conceptual means to represent them.

### 3. Anti-realism

Realism and *anti-realism* concerning aesthetic values have many characteristics in common. They both assume: there are state of affairs involving aesthetic values; the obtaining of these state of affairs can make aesthetic judgements true; these judgements have genuine truth-values and correctness conditions; and we can have epistemic access to instantiations of aesthetic values by means of aesthetic experiences under normal conditions and the resulting judgements. Hence, anti-realism agrees with the first and third theses that characterise realism. The two positions differ, however, with respect to the second thesis that concerns the ontological status of (the instantiations of) aesthetic values: while realism claims that aesthetic values are instantiated objectively, anti-realism assumes that these facts (and the respective qualities) are subjective. In what follows, I will give a more detailed account of the anti-realist option to establish it as the most promising ontological position about aesthetic values.

#### *Response-dependence*

The best way to interpret the ontological subjectivity, or mind-dependence, of aesthetic values is to understand it as response-dependence (cf. Wright (1988); (1992)). Aesthetic values are accordingly analysed as subjective dispositions to cause certain (complex) mental episodes. Since we recognise instantiations of aesthetic values by means of these episodes, there are essentially aesthetic experiences. As a result, the anti-realist can accept the following biconditional<sup>14</sup>:

(BC) Under normal conditions: an object has a certain aesthetic value iff it has the disposition to cause, in all subjects of the relevant kind, an aesthetic experience which ascribes that specific value to the object.

The class of the relevant subjects comprises solely human beings capable of having aesthetic experiences of the respective kind. Whether animals can have aesthetic experiences is irrelevant here, since the conception of aesthetic value is essentially anthropocentric. Similarly, human beings that lack capacities required for aesthetically experiencing certain kinds of objects (e.g., visual perception, comprehension of a specific language or the ability to respond affectively in certain ways) need not be considered with respect to the aesthetic values of those objects (cf. Budd (1995): 39). Whether the class of relevant subjects must be further restricted remains to be seen.

The biconditional (BC) alone is not sufficient to render the anti-realistic position. The anti-realist advances two additional claims. First, there are qualities to which the biconditional is applicable, there are aesthetic values. And second, the right side of the biconditional enjoys priority over the left side: it is because of its capacity to cause a specific aesthetic experiences that an object possesses the respective aes-

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<sup>14</sup> Experiences or representations are not necessarily incorrect if not made under non-trivially specified normal conditions (cf. Wright (1992)). Hence, normal conditions can only be sufficient for faultlessness (contra Zemach (1997): 54).

thetic value (and not the other way round)<sup>15</sup>.

The response-dependence of aesthetic values is best understood as a dependence on values of a certain kind that are instantiated by the relevant responses (cf. the quality-dependence of colours on the colour qualia). The reasoning leading to this conclusion is simple. Different kinds of aesthetic value are dependent on different kinds of aesthetic experiences: to find something exciting requires a different response than to find something calming. Any difference between mental episodes will be a difference in certain of their qualities. If differences in aesthetic values are dependent on differences in qualities of the respective responses, the unity of the class of aesthetic values can be guaranteed only if the qualities on which they depend are all of the same kind. Moreover, since the dependent qualities are values, the kind of qualities on which they are dependent have to be values as well. For the determination of values necessarily involves the determination of those aspects that are distinctive for values (in contrast to properties): namely their positive or negative aspect and their normativity. But it is very difficult to imagine how any set of non-evaluative properties - which, after all, do not show any evaluative degree or normative dimension - could achieve this specific determination task, at least with respect to values of external objects.

Consider an exciting thriller. Could there be any set of non-evaluative properties of the text (e.g., the meaning of the words) that on its own constitutes the degree to which the book is exciting? Or could there be any quality of a response that completely determines that degree without being a value itself? It seems that the degree to which the book is exciting is solely dependent on the degree to which our appropriate response to it is exciting; and for an experience to be exciting is for it to exemplify a specific value. And since it is not necessary that the aesthetically relevant qualities, on which aesthetic values also depend, include values, this determination has to be provided by the response-dependence.

Accordingly, it is true that: any aesthetic experience essentially instantiates a certain value; this value is bestowed on the experienced object; and the object is, as a result, experienced as possessing a specific aesthetic value. In other words, the response-dependence of aesthetic values is nothing else than a specific value-dependence. If a book is exciting, because it delivers an exciting reading experience; a joke funny, because it makes us laugh; or a hot shower pleasant, because it provides us with a pleasurable experience: then the qualities of being exciting, funny or pleasant count as merits of their bearers, only because the qualities of being exciting, laughter-inducing or pleasurable are valuable features of experiences.

### ***Base-dependence and the principle of direct acquaintance***

The realist about aesthetic values has to assume - if he wants to avoid primitivism - that these values supervene, or are constitutionally dependent, on certain other qualities of their bearers. These latter qualities thus count as aesthetically relevant and constitute the *base* for that value and the respective object<sup>16</sup>. Some of these more basic qualities are subjective, so that aesthetic values turn out to be response-depend-

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. Wright (1988) and (1992). According to him, the right side enjoys priority if and only if (BC) is a priori. Note that all three positions about aesthetic values are consistent with the truth of the biconditional (BC). While realism maintains the priority of the left side (that it is because of its possessing a specific aesthetic value that an object typically causes the appropriate aesthetic experiences), irrealism denies that there are any qualities to which the biconditional is applicable.

<sup>16</sup> Of course, most aesthetic values can be multiply realised and thus are constituted by different bases with respect to different objects.

ent as well. This leaves a realist with the dilemma of either endorsing primitivism or of giving up his position entirely - and has motivated our taking a closer look at the anti-realist alternative. Given the response-dependence of aesthetic values, one important question is, however, whether an anti-realist should underwrite the supervenience claim, initially brought up by the realist; or whether aesthetic values are entirely constituted by the relevant aesthetic responses.

It seems impossible to deny that there is some kind of metaphysical dependence of aesthetic values on other qualities of their bearers. For, first, the most straightforward way to bring about or change the aesthetic appeal of an object is to influence its aesthetic properties as well as its more basic, non-aesthetic nature. Thus poets rewrite their poems or painters apply more colour to their canvasses to try to improve their works. Second, critics point at such base qualities to justify their aesthetic evaluations. And this practice can be vindicated only if the latter are partly responsible for aesthetic values. Third, aesthetic values play an important role in our folk-psychological explanations of behaviour. Which movies we see or which pieces of music we listen to is often influenced by our beliefs about their aesthetic merit. But aesthetic values can have such explanatory power only if they are linked to the causality of their bearers, namely by being metaphysically dependent on some of their more basic, causally efficacious properties (leaving aside the possibility of some kind of primitivism or dualism). In particular, they must depend on those qualities that cause the aesthetic experiences in us.

The most straightforward account of the required metaphysical dependence asserts that aesthetic values are *base-dependent*, that is, supervene on certain base qualities. However, this option faces a considerable difficulty. Since aesthetic values are also response-dependent, their supervenience bases are not exhausted by the relevant base qualities. But it is not clear which entities enter the overall supervenience base on behalf of response-dependence. To say that aesthetic values depend on a potential response is just a reformulation of their dispositional character, but not an elucidation of it.

Although the same issue arises for objective dispositions, it does not seem to be as pressing as in the case of subjective dispositions. Whether, say, salt is soluble in water depends on two factors: its chemical structure, and a causal law linking that structure and the structure of water to the structure of a salty solution (i.e.,  $NaCl + H_2O \rightarrow NaOH + HCl$ ). If one of the factors is changed, salt is not soluble any more. Hence, the supervenience base of its solubility appears to consist of intrinsic qualities and a causal law (i.e., a special relation between universals). But this not only casts some doubt on the status of solubility as a genuine *quality*, it also seems to be incompatible with the plausible idea that supervenience requires ontological reduction. The obvious answer is to rigidify ascriptions of solubility to worlds in which the mentioned law obtains, and thus to exclude this law from the supervenience base. As a consequence, there is no disposition over and above the chemical base properties: the former can be reduced to the latter<sup>17</sup>.

The application of the same strategy to subjective dispositions is far less promising, since these dispositions cannot be reduced to other qualities of their bearers in virtue of their response-dependence. Consider the case of aesthetic values. The argument from context mentioned earlier has led to the conclusion

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<sup>17</sup> Kim (1998) and Armstrong (1997) provide convincing arguments in favour of the idea that supervenience requires reduction (given that dualism and emergentism are excluded). Armstrong also mentions the fact that the truth-conditions of ascriptions of dispositions include both bases and laws and favours the account of dispositions outlined here. Jackson, Pargetter and Prior (1982) oppose the reduction to bases, however, without providing a satisfactory account of the nature of the supervenience bases. Besides, multiple realisation and the problem of defeaters makes the whole discussion more complicated (cf. Goldman (1995): 39ff.).

that there are no principles enabling us to infer the instantiation of an aesthetic property from an instantiation of a set of non-aesthetic qualities. This consideration can now be extended to cover the irreducibility of aesthetic merits to other qualities of their bearers<sup>18</sup>. Which aesthetic value an object possesses in virtue of a set of certain qualities depends on the context: one can always imagine changes in other qualities of the object, or additions to them, that leave the set unchanged, but cause an alteration of the aesthetic value in question. For instance, a thriller that is full of suspense on its own because one cannot guess until its very end who the murderer is, might become rather dull if it is embedded within a frame that gives away the identity of the murderer right at the beginning<sup>19</sup>. So it is impossible to decide *a priori* on the basis of an aesthetically non-evaluative description of an object to what extent it is aesthetically appealing. Instead, the *principle of direct acquaintance* is true: to judge its aesthetic merit, one must be directly acquainted with an object (apart from cases of deferment), where direct acquaintance means that the representation of the object is based on some form of perceptual access to the object. This also explains why aesthetic experiences are the canonical method for recognising aesthetic merits, and why aesthetic judgements must ultimately be derived from such experiences<sup>20</sup>.

Now the strategy of excluding the causal laws (linking the bases with the relevant values of aesthetic experiences) from the supervenience bases of aesthetic values results in a denial of the existence of these values. For there are accordingly only base qualities of objects and certain values of experiences, but no additional aesthetic values; and since aesthetic values are irreducible to the aesthetically non-evaluative base qualities, there are no aesthetic values at all. Although this position still deserves to be called anti-realist, since it upholds the claim that ascriptions of aesthetic values have genuine truth-values, it is still problematic. On the one hand, it is not clear how the justificatory role of bases and the explanatory role of (supposed) aesthetic merits can be accounted for in terms of the causal dependence of aesthetic responses on base qualities. In particular, aesthetic values (though possibly causally epiphenomenal) fulfil an explanatory role which is likely to differ from the causal role of their particular bases in virtue of the irreducibility of the former to the latter. For instance, that a minimalist piece of music consists of layers of loops slightly out of phase cannot alone account for the fact that it enjoys widespread popularity because of the appeasing nature of the experience it offers. On the other hand, the seeming fact of a bestowal of values of experiences onto objects remains unexplained. In the case of colours, this problem can be avoided by interpreting colour qualia as phenomenal modes of presentation of reflectances. Values of experiences, however, do not seem to figure as modes of presentation of the base qualities (or, at least, it remains unclear what it might mean to say that aesthetic feelings “colour” the world). And since, according to the proposal under consideration, the values of experiences do not constitute values of the objects, the seeming bestowal cannot be accounted for.

Another strategy for solving the problem of specifying the supervenience base of aesthetic values also denies base-dependence, but accepts the existence of aesthetic merits over and above base qualities and

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<sup>18</sup> That values cannot be reduced to non-evaluative properties because of their evaluative aspect and their normativity is as such not an argument in favour of irreducibility, since it still leaves open the option that aesthetic values can be reduced to other kinds of values.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. also the cases of seeming disagreement below.

<sup>20</sup> For another argument in favour of the principle of acquaintance compare Budd ((1995): 11ff.). Note that Zemach ((1997): 99) can allow inferences from non-aesthetic qualities to aesthetic values only because of the possibility of deferment.

values of experiences by claiming that aesthetic values depend solely on the corresponding values of aesthetic responses (which are themselves causally dependent on qualities of the object)<sup>21</sup>. But this strategy faces even more serious objections. First of all, it threatens the homogeneity of the class of dispositions: there no longer appears to be a reason why solubility and aesthetic values belong to the same ontological category. It is especially difficult to maintain that aesthetic values are instantiated by their bearers, even if they are not actually experienced. Then, there has to be some kind of irreducible supervenience, since aesthetic values cannot be identified with the respective values of experiences on which they depend. And finally, if aesthetic values are not constitutionally linked to any other qualities of the experienced objects, it seems impossible to explain their being instantiated by these objects without reference to some kind of primitivism.

Therefore, even if there is no answer immediately at hand to the question which entities enter the overall supervenience base on behalf of response-dependence, it is best for anti-realism to embrace base-dependence.

### *The representational element*

Aesthetic values, understood as subjective dispositions, have the further characteristic that their recognition involves the recognition of their bases: if we experience the aesthetic value of an object, our experience contains episodes that represent the object as having those aesthetically relevant qualities on which the value depends<sup>22</sup>. For example, if a thriller is exciting because of the unusualness of the crime and the tension built up within the narrative, then our response of excitement will involve the representation of the unusualness and the tension. If we did not represent the thriller as being unusual and full of tension, but instead as, say, having a common plot with an obvious solution, we would not experience it as exciting. Of course, we might find it exciting for other reasons (e.g., its being written in a fantasy language that one first must learn to decipher); but we would then have to recognise these other features responsible for its aesthetic appeal.

But reference to examples is not the only possible support for the thesis that aesthetic experiences necessarily involve the representation of the base of the aesthetic values they recognise<sup>23</sup>. For this thesis is a direct consequence of the response-dependence of aesthetic values and their corresponding identification with subjective dispositions in accordance with the biconditional (BC). The biconditional entails that, if an aesthetic experience occurs under normal conditions, it is caused by the object to which it ascribes the aesthetic value; and that if an object causes an aesthetic experience under normal conditions, the aesthetic experience figures as a recognition of the aesthetic merit of that object. In virtue of the base-dependence, the causally efficacious properties can be identified as those base qualities on which the value depends. Hence, there are nomological correlations of the following form between occurrences of kinds of aes-

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21 Goldman, who denies base-dependence, seems to adopt this second strategy (cf. Goldman (1995): 43f.).

22 If there are several levels of dependence relations between an aesthetic value and the most basic aesthetically relevant qualities, the value has a base for each level of dependence. Accordingly, it can be experienced on the basis of different representations, each concerning a different base

23 Cf. also Sibley (1974) for two suggestive examples.

thetic experiences and instantiations of kinds of base qualities: given that an object is aesthetically experienced under normal conditions, an aesthetic experience ascribes a specific aesthetic value if and only if it is caused by the fact that the object possesses a base for that value. However, according to a simple, but powerful proposal, the relation of representation can be understood in terms of nomological correlations: under normal conditions, a mental state of a certain kind represents a certain object as having a specific quality if and only if the object's having that quality causes a mental state of that kind<sup>24</sup>. Therefore, it follows immediately that aesthetic experiences always represent the bases of those aesthetic values that they ascribe.

This thesis is of further importance for the question of what determines that value of an aesthetic experience, that determines the experienced aesthetic value. Since aesthetic values are response-dependent, one important factor will surely be the nature of the relevant subject at the time of the experience (e.g., her aesthetic responsiveness). But the other important factor, owing to base-dependence, is the representational content of the experience. That is, the relevant value of an aesthetic experience is partly determined both by those aesthetically relevant qualities that the experience represents, and by the way in which it represents them (e.g., by means of which modality, from which perspective, or in what kind of relation to other represented qualities; cf. Levinson (1992a); (1992b)). And no other aspect of the aesthetic experience has an impact on the value in question. Let me call the representational - and thus also value-exemplifying - part of an aesthetic response its *representational element*, or simply, the *representation* of the object<sup>25</sup>.

This representation can include any kind of episode (judgements, perceptions, evaluations, and so on) by means of which we can be aware of the object in question. Which episodes can constitute a specific representation of a given object thus depends on the nature of that object. A poem can be read, but (typically) not smelled; a piece of music can be performed or listened to, but not touched; a pint of beer can be drunk and tasted, but not pictorially deciphered. Often, certain forms of awareness can only be brought about by a more active interaction with the object. Thus sometimes one has to move around in a room to trigger certain visual or sound effects, or actually to use a surf-board to discover the aesthetic merit that lies in the smooth- and easiness with which it glides over the waves.

Any object can be represented in many different ways, of which not all must be able to ground aesthetic feelings. Only those that concern at least some aesthetically relevant qualities can become part of aesthetic experiences. Most poems need only to be read, pieces of music to be listened to or pints of beer to be drunk in order to be appreciated aesthetically. But there are some poems, or scores of pieces of music, that can also be evaluated because of their visual design; and similarly, it is possible to praise a fresh pint of Guinness merely because of the beautiful look of its white top above its black body. Henceforth, I will confine the discussion solely to those representations of a given object that capture at least some aesthetically relevant qualities and thus can figure as the representational element of an aesthetic response.

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24 Cf. Tye ((1995): 100ff.) Lewis also construes visual perception (in contrast to veridical hallucination) in terms of counterfactual dependence of the experience on the experienced scene (cf. Lewis (1980): especially 281).

25 The representational content of an experience may, or may not, contain aesthetically irrelevant qualities also: that is, qualities that do not contribute to the experienced aesthetic value. The aesthetic value (although, in a sense, represented by the response) is certainly not included in the content possessed by that part of the aesthetic experience, that exemplifies the value on which the aesthetic value depends.

A representation can, from an aesthetic point of view, be either complete or partial, depending on whether it covers all or only some of the aesthetically relevant qualities of the object under consideration. If I read only the first half of a book or, while reading the whole, focus my attention on certain aspects (e.g., the overall narrative structure, or changes in tense and style), my representation remains incomplete. Many objects are too complex for us to be able to represent all their aesthetically relevant features by means of single, or even few, representations. Instead, they require a long and intricate series of experiential interactions with them. For instance, although it may be fairly easy to grasp the fact that Joyce's *Ulyssess* is one of the aesthetically most interesting texts ever written, its length, variety, density and complexity render it very unlikely that its overall aesthetic value will ever be recognised correctly and in full extent. With a short poem, however, it is much easier to approximate a full understanding of its aesthetic merit, and of how it is constituted by lower-level aesthetic values and other aesthetically relevant qualities.

### ***The evaluative element***

Aesthetic experiences possess a *two-fold structure*: they are not exhausted by their representational element, but also include an evaluative element. And this extra element consists in the recognition of the value that is instantiated by the representational element. The argument for these two claims runs as follows.

If not deferred, aesthetic judgements are directly grounded on aesthetic experiences, without being part of them. The aesthetic values they ascribe to external objects are determined by the values of the representational elements involved in aesthetic responses. The recognition of an aesthetic value thus occurs via the recognition of the corresponding value of a representation. The representational element is automatically ruled out as the evaluation of its own value, since the relation of evaluative recognition is not a self-reflexive relation of mental states. And equally, the aesthetic judgement cannot be directly based on the representational element (which would render the proposed additional element superfluous). For, first, aesthetic judgements attribute values not to mental representations, but only to the represented objects. Second, there is no possible candidate for the required relation of direct access between the representational element and the aesthetic judgement. An aesthetic judgement surely does not constitute a case of introspective self-knowledge. And it could not be a non-introspective recognition of the value of the representational element, because the only direct internal access we have to qualities of our own mental episodes is via introspection (in a broad sense): that is, via higher-order states that are non-inferentially directed towards lower-level episodes. Inference, as one particular non-introspective candidate for the required access relation, is additionally barred by the principle of direct acquaintance. Hence, there must be an additional element involved in aesthetic experiences that is epistemically located between the representation and the aesthetic judgement. This part of an aesthetic response is best named its *evaluative element*, since it consists in the recognition of the value of the representational element<sup>26</sup>.

The evaluative element of aesthetic experiences always consists of a feeling, since there is no other

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26 Cf. Levinson's (1992b) acknowledgement that aesthetic feelings can be indirect, reflective second-order responses.



kind of mental episode by means of which we could have direct introspective access to the value of the representational element<sup>27</sup>. The only other candidates for such a higher-order state are introspective judgements (or beliefs). But they do not provide us with the required form of direct higher-order access for the same reason that aesthetic judgements are not directly based in the representational element by means of introspection: the evaluation of the representation does not happen via judgements that constitute introspective self-knowledge. For instance, that I become aware of the fact that my experience of a book excites or pleases me usually does not involve the higher-order judgement that I am currently in such a state of mind. Of course, it is possible to infer the value of a representation on the basis of both an introspective judgement about its mental type and the belief that this mental type constitutes a value. But in such cases the latter belief must ultimately be derived from a non-judgemental recognition of that link between mental type and value.

Hence, introspective judgements cannot help to explicate the relation between the two elements of aesthetic experiences. Instead, the direct, internal recognition of the values of the relevant mental episodes occurs exclusively by means of feelings. All judgemental evaluations of mental episodes are necessarily indirect: either they are based directly on an actual instance of a relevant feeling or they are deferred. Those feelings that can constitute the evaluative element of aesthetic experience can be named *aesthetic feelings*. As such, they figure as the evaluations of the representational elements; and they can ground both the respective aesthetic judgements and the respective judgement about the value of the experience. The thesis of the two-fold structure of aesthetic responses thus amounts to the claim that aesthetic experiences consist of a representation of an object and an aesthetic feeling.

The notion of a feeling is to be understood in a very broad sense. In fact, it covers episodes as various as certain bodily sensations (e.g., feelings of pain or hunger) or the phenomenal manifestations of emotions, sentiments, moods and passions. There are three main characteristics that qualify a mental state as a *feeling*: (i) they are episodes; (ii) their phenomenal characters show either a positive or a negative aspect; and (iii) they have at least the tendency to draw one's attention towards themselves and what they are about<sup>28</sup>. According to the last feature, feelings of love, surprise, pain, fear, hunger, jealousy, invigoration or anxiety have the (not always exercised) power to distract us from other things that we are phenomenally aware of. In this sense, feelings fulfil some kind of selective function: they highlight certain aspects of the world (and our awareness of them) at the expense of other aspects.

If we undergo an experience that is pleasant, exciting or frightening, it is typically (but not necessarily) accompanied by the corresponding feeling of pleasure, excitement or fear. This relation of accompaniment shows several features that together qualify feelings for the task of figuring in the introspective and direct recognition of the values of those representational elements that figure in aesthetic responses. Firstly, we do actually become aware of the value of a representation by means of the accompanying feeling. That we feel bored, amused or invigorated, if we watch a play, is a reliable indicator of our act of watching it being of the corresponding value. Secondly, this form of awareness is introspective, since the

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<sup>27</sup> Budd seems to claim that it is the intrinsic nature of the value of the experiences that is responsible for the response necessarily being affective (cf. Budd (1995): 38f.). But a direct introspective access to an instrumental value could not be provided by a single judgement, since it would also require a belief linking the ascribed quality of the experience to the valuable effect.

<sup>28</sup> The list of criteria is incomplete, since it cannot be used to distinguish feelings from perceptions of certain op-art phenomena.

feeling is primarily directed towards the experience we undergo. It is our experience of watching the play that is, in the first place, unchallenging, gratifying or stimulating. It is important to note that introspection does not have to take the form of an active and intentional access (as it does in most cases of self-knowledge): that a feeling arises is usually beyond our control, and that it is directed towards other mental states does not imply that it has to be about them in the intentional sense. Thirdly, a feeling is, nevertheless, also directed at the represented object, mediated, however, by the corresponding representation. As a consequence, the value of the experience is bestowed on the object. Thus we also find the play itself to be boring.

Perhaps the last two features might be explained by the fact that feelings tend to capture our attention. According to a promising conception, attention can be understood as a form of awareness of mental states that is both introspective and non-intentional<sup>29</sup>. And it also seems that attending to a mental episode happens simultaneously with - and perhaps only via - attending to the object that one is aware of by means of that episode<sup>30</sup>. Therefore, it might be possible to construe feelings as a special, passive form of attention, which could also provide a plausible account of how feelings can fulfil their selective function and, furthermore, might help to distinguish the experiences they accompany from the rest of the stream of consciousness.

### ***Intrinsic nature and disinterestedness***

One important issue about aesthetic values is whether they belong to the class of intrinsic or of instrumental values. A value of a certain kind is *intrinsic* if and only if its instantiation does not depend on its bearer having the power to cause the exemplification of some value by another object<sup>31</sup>. Otherwise, it is *instrumental*: its instantiation is due to the fact that at least one of its bearer's causal effects possesses a certain value (often, but not necessarily, of a different kind). Accordingly, instrumental values are only means to bring about other values, while intrinsic values are values in themselves, or for their own sake<sup>32</sup>. It follows directly from these definitions that aesthetic values must - owing to their response-dependence - be instrumental. For no response-dependent value could be intrinsic, because the relevant responses must be counted among the possible effects of the bearers of the value in question. However, aesthetic values are quasi-intrinsic. A value of a certain kind is *quasi-intrinsic* if and only if it is intrinsic apart from the fact that it is dependent on the value (of an element) of a certain kind of response<sup>33</sup>.

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29 Cf. Brentano (1894) and other opponents of higher-order theories of consciousness.

30 That aesthetic feelings are both about the representation and the object is perhaps analogous to the fact that introspection of visual perceptions is transparent (cf. Tye (1995)).

31 Beardsley argues that there cannot be any intrinsic values because the normativity of values requires that they are justified, and such justification is possible only in the context of, or by reference to, other things, in particular other values; thus nothing can be a (normative) value "in itself" (cf. Beardsley ((1982): 58ff.)). However, as long as the other values involved are not instantiated by possible effects of the bearer of the value to be justified, it is still possible that the latter counts as intrinsic. That is, the epistemological normativity of values need not have an impact on the metaphysical dependence relations they stand in.

32 This notion of intrinsic values is different from Moore's that understands them as non-extrinsic, that is, not dependent on any relations of their bearers to other objects (cf. Budd (1995): 5).

33 Cf. Beardsley on "inherent" values (cf. Beardsley (1982): 48).

That aesthetic values are quasi-intrinsic is entailed by the *disinterestedness* of aesthetic experiences, which can be defined as follows<sup>34</sup>:

For your pleasure in experiencing the object to be disinterested is, principally, for it not to be the result of the satisfaction of a desire that there should be such an object or the thought that it is a good thing that the object exists. (cf. Budd (1995): 27)

For aesthetic responses to be disinterested thus means that the constituent aesthetic feelings are not about the existence or nature of the experienced objects (apart, of course, from their aesthetic appeal). In particular, they do not have a propositional content consisting of these objects and aesthetically non-evaluative qualities. If someone feels pleased, disgusted or excited about the fact that a certain object exists, or about how it is like, then he does not have a specifically aesthetic feeling. For example, whether we own Manet's *Breakfast* or just see it in a gallery, whether we share the excitement of the first encounter with it with a person we like very much or look at it for ourselves, or whether in general we take delight in depictions of nudity: all these factors are irrelevant for the aesthetic appeal of the painting; but they might signify non-aesthetic kinds of merit. We value objects for many diverse reasons: because we possess them, and their possession is of economic or social value for us; because they remind us of happy times or people dear to us; because they teach us something important about life; and so forth. Accordingly, when we are aware of these objects, we often feel pleasure about the respective facts: that we possess them; that they are reminiscent of nice things; or that they are informative. And to take delight in these facts involves taking delight in the - supposed or anticipated - existence of the experienced objects. But our evaluative feelings are, in these cases, not aesthetic. Instead, they ascribe economical, social, sentimental or cognitive values, and they concern and reflect our economical, social, sentimental or cognitive interests<sup>35</sup>.

That the quasi-intrinsic nature of aesthetic values is a direct consequence of the disinterestedness of aesthetic experiences can be shown by the following *reductio ad absurdum*. Assume that the positive aesthetic value of an object is not quasi-intrinsic, since it depends on a certain positive value of one of the object's possible effects. Assume also that a person correctly recognises this aesthetic value by means of a feeling of pleasure. Then her feeling can only be due to the fact that she represents the object as being capable of bringing about the specific effect. This representation of the object is ultimately pleasant for her because she desires the existence of the valuable effect. However, her pleasure cannot be directly due to the satisfaction of that desire, since then her feeling - and her whole experience - would be directed towards the effect instead of towards the object under consideration. Hence, what she takes pleasure in must be the fact that the experienced object can bring about that valuable effect (and her feeling has to result from a corresponding desire, which is induced by her other desire concerning the effect and her representation of the possible causal link between the object and the effect). But this pleasure is not disin-

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<sup>34</sup> Budd uses "pleasure" as a generic term for positive aesthetic feelings. According to him, this notion of disinterestedness is identical with the one Kant had in mind. Other commentators, however, read Kant more - and unnecessarily (cf. footnote 37) - strongly, interpreting disinterestedness as the requirement that aesthetic evaluations do not presuppose the existence of the experienced object (cf. Gardner (1998)).

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Walton (1993) on the distinctness of aesthetic values

terested, since it (like the corresponding desire) concerns the existence and nature of the experienced object. For the object has its causal powers only if it exists and possesses the right kind of causal properties. Hence, the *reductio* is successful, and the disinterestedness of aesthetic experiences entails the quasi-intrinsic nature of aesthetic values.

It might be thought that the *reductio* undermines the response-dependence of aesthetic values. For suppose that the effect in the *reductio* is the feeling of pleasure itself, on which the aesthetic value of the object is dependent. Then, it seems, the pleasure one takes in the object's aesthetic value - in the capacity to bring about this effect - cannot be disinterested either, since such a pleasure about the causal powers of an object is automatically pleasure about the existence and nature of that object. But this reasoning is flawed. Unlike the case above, the pleasure one feels toward the experienced object is identical with the pleasure one feels towards the representation of it (this is just the claim of direct response-dependence)<sup>36</sup>, and it is due solely to a desire that concerns the existence and nature of that representation. No additional desire about the existence and nature of the represented object is needed. Of course, the bestowal of the value of the representation onto the object presupposes that the experiencing subject commits herself to the existence of that item. But this commitment does not take the shape of a desire: it is rather an attitude presuming or positing the existence of the object<sup>37</sup>.

Not only aesthetic values, but also the corresponding values of the representational elements of aesthetic experiences are quasi-intrinsic. In other words, the latter depend at most on certain values of the aesthetic feelings (i.e., the evaluative responses towards them). Of course, representations of objects can have effects that are beneficial for one's behaviour, character or mind, and also for society in general. For instance, to watch a documentary about genocide or famine may cause one to actively support organisations that try to prevent their occurrence. Or to listen to a piece of music may put one in a good mood, causing one to treat one's fellow humans well. But the values of these effects do not have any impact on the aesthetic merit of the documentary or the piece of music.

Three further considerations support this claim (cf. Budd (1995): 5ff.). First, our opinions about the values of experiences that determine aesthetic values differ from our opinions about other values of these responses. For it is difficult to see what beneficial or harmful effects experiences have on people; while it is much easier to recognise whether an experience is exciting, stimulating or disquieting, for example. Second, which beneficial or harmful effects an experience has on people is highly dependent on the subjects' individual characters, moods and attitudes. By contrast, many aesthetic values seem to be more intersubjective. For instance, many readers may agree that Bataille's *The Story of the Eye* is an ironic and erotic masterpiece; but only a few, presumably, will use it as an instruction to enhance their own sexual pleasures. And third, many benefits of representations that might be taken to be effects of experiencing an object are actually part of that experience. As Budd maintains (while focusing on artistic values, that is, aesthetic values of works of art):

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The experience a work of art offers can involve the invigoration of one's consciousness, or a re-

<sup>36</sup> It is not harmful in this case that the feeling is also a pleasure about the actual existence of a valuable effect of the object (given that the representation has been caused by the object). For, given the claim of direct response-dependence, the evaluation is primarily about the representation.

<sup>37</sup> That aesthetic experiences are compatible with such a commitment explains why disinterestedness does not require that the existence of the object must not be presupposed (cf. footnote 34).

fined awareness of human psychology or political or social structures, or moral insight, or an imaginative identification with a sympathetic form of life or point of view that is not one's own; it can be beneficial in these and countless other ways. But since such benefits are aspects, not consequences, of the experience the work offers, the irrelevance of the actual effects of the experience to the work's artistic value does not imply the irrelevance of these kinds of benefits. On the contrary, such benefits contribute to making the experience intrinsically valuable and partly constitute the ways in which it is so. (Budd (1995): 7)

The values of the representational elements of aesthetic experiences that determine aesthetic values are therefore quasi-intrinsic. But they are also intrinsic (cf. Levinson (1992a))<sup>38</sup>. This requires that they do not depend on certain values of the aesthetic feelings directed towards their bearers. In other words, they must be objective. This is the case because a representation of an object can be beneficial for someone who lacks the capacity to recognise the value of that representation by means of a feeling. For capacities of this kind typically need to be acquired or developed; and this happens usually on the basis of an unnoticedly beneficial representation. Thus a person's mind might get stimulated while reading a book or looking at a painting, although she is not able, at least at the time of her experience, to notice this fact. Compare the analogous case of a paralysed person who cannot feel that her legs are bodily harmed. By contrast, an object is aesthetically beneficial only if it can be experienced by means of an intrinsically rewarding representation. The response-dependence of aesthetic values allows them only to be quasi-intrinsic.

Walton presents a different account of aesthetic experiences (cf. Walton (1993): especially 504ff.). According to him, aesthetic feelings are exactly those feelings (components of) which are directed towards evaluations of objects. Thus a feeling about an evaluation of an object is both necessary and sufficient for an aesthetic experience of that object. The evaluation can be aesthetic or non-aesthetic, although it has to be non-aesthetic on the lowest level to avoid a regress or circularity in the definition of aesthetic values<sup>39</sup>.

However, this account is too narrow and too broad at the same time. It is too narrow because it cannot capture certain aesthetic responses that do not involve an evaluation of the object (other than the resulting aesthetic one). A vase may be beautiful because it is elegantly shaped. But the recognition of its elegant shape does not necessarily require any prior evaluation of the vase (e.g., of its function to hold flowers)<sup>40</sup>. Not all representational elements with an intrinsic value that determines an aesthetic value must therefore include evaluations. And the account is too broad because not all feelings directed towards evaluations are aesthetic: such as pleasure taken in the good performance of a car, or in the insightfulness of a poem.

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38 Interestingly, Levinson (1996b) does not accept Budd's argumentation in favour of their intrinsic nature.

39 Walton's original discussion focuses on artefacts and on positive aesthetic feelings only, but is susceptible to the same objections. He also has "some temptation to define aesthetic value as necessarily involving an element of bootstrapping" (Walton (1993): 507): that is, all aesthetic feelings are (partly) directed towards aesthetic evaluations. But this leads to a regress in his definition of aesthetic value as the capacity to elicit an aesthetic feeling (with a certain propriety and under suitable circumstances). For an aesthetic value would accordingly be the capacity to elicit a feeling directed towards the object's capacity to elicit a feeling directed towards..., and so forth.

40 One might insist that the vase is beautiful because it well fulfils the function of being decorative. But the decorativeness of the vase seems to depend on its beauty (and on the context), rather than the other way round.

Moreover, aesthetic values can be completely independent of the kind and degree of the instrumental values of their bearers: the ride in a loud and slow car with bad springs and a high consumption of petrol might be more aesthetic (though not necessarily more pleasurable) than a ride in a perfect one. Hence, only values that are exemplified in an aesthetically interesting way can justify aesthetic experiences<sup>41</sup>. In other words: not all pleasurable evaluations constitute a representational element with an intrinsic value that determines an aesthetic value. What Walton's account thus lacks is a specification of what it means for an experience of an object to be aesthetic.

### ***Taste and aesthetic sensitivity***

Having aesthetic experiences involves the employment of many diverse abilities by critics (i.e., people making aesthetic evaluations). I want to highlight four different kinds: (i) the capacities to represent specific aesthetically relevant qualities of objects; (ii) the capacities to discern specific aesthetic properties; (iii) the capacities to recognise specific intrinsic values of representational elements by means of aesthetic feelings; and (iv) the sensitivities to discern which qualities of a given object are aesthetically relevant, and to what extent.

The first three kinds of capacity are examples of our general ability to discern qualities of objects. They concern whether we have in principle the discriminatory ability to represent, say, redness, elegance or pleasantness. Without either instances of the first or the third, it would be simply impossible to have any aesthetic experience. For the first are identical with the capacities to have specific experiences that can figure as the representational element of aesthetic responses; while the third consist in the capacities to have specific aesthetic feelings on the basis of these representations. The second kind of capacity is in fact a special case of the first, since aesthetic properties are one kind of aesthetically relevant (or base) qualities. Note that the three capacities are here interpreted in a weak sense: in each case, to possess the capacity does not require the ability to represent all qualities of the respective kind, and of all possible objects.

The fourth type of ability is of a completely different kind. It is not a specification of the general capacity to discern qualities of objects, but of the general sensitivity towards the aesthetic relevance of these qualities. It is one thing to be able to discern, with regard to a certain piece of music, its formal structure, the different variations of one of its motifs, or its instrumentation. But it is quite another to realise whether, and to what extent, each of these features is important for the overall aesthetic merit of the work.

I will concentrate on the last two kinds of abilities and their significance for concrete cases of aesthetic experiences. For the sake of simplicity, I will label the third capacities *tastes* and the fourth *aesthetic sensitivities*. It is very important to distinguish these two kinds of capacity, since they serve very different functions within aesthetic appreciation.

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<sup>41</sup> Walton's choice of words ("marvellously suited", "in a way that does elicit admiration" or "vivid and convincing manner" (Walton (1993): 505)) suggests that he is somehow aware of this. But he never explicitly mentions the need for an additional element, and none of his examples concerns pleasure taken in low values (whether positive or negative ones). Some of the confusion arises because he seems to use the term "admiration" ambiguously: as denoting either the pleasurable evaluation, or the pleasure taken in the evaluation.

The main role of tastes is to ensure that certain aesthetic experiences actually occur. It is a particular taste of a reader of Paul Celan's poem *Todesfuge* that is responsible for her feeling captured and unsettled when she reads and interprets the poem on the basis of its simple, but rich and paradoxical metaphoric, its elegiac, almost song- or fairy tale-like character and its bleak content. Furthermore, tastes are passive and receptive capacities (like the capacities to discern colours or Gestalt properties), because the arousal of the accompanying feelings is usually beyond our control (at least to a large extent). Tastes are also very specific: each of them is defined via a particular kind of representation and a particular kind of aesthetic feeling. Different ways of representing objects require the application of different tastes; and two subjects who react with different feelings to one and the same representation of an object possess different tastes regarding that representation.

By contrast, aesthetic sensitivities are relativised with respect to certain kinds of objects. An expert in Russian poetry may be particularly sensitive to, say, a series of certain poems by Ossip Mandelstam, and he is probably bound to have an eye for the aesthetically relevant features of poems in general; but he does not have to show a similar aesthetic sensitivity with regard to other kinds of objects, pieces of music, paintings or textiles, say. For the aesthetic sensitivities of critics are constituted by, among other things, their background knowledge concerning the experienced object, their past aesthetic experiences and their general training as critics, because their main function is to support a decision, on the basis of their degree of aesthetic relevance, as to which qualities of a given object are to be represented. Although the possession of an aesthetic sensitivity is not necessary for having aesthetic experiences, the more one exposes oneself to aesthetically interesting objects, the more one develops one's aesthetic sensitivities and lets one's responses be influenced by them in a non-arbitrary way. And because of this influence, the mental representation of an object involved in an aesthetic experience is often far more active than a mere receptive confrontation with that object (cf. Levinson (1992b)).

Since critics often differ with respect to their knowledge and past experiences concerning particular aesthetic objects, aesthetic sensitivities come in degrees. Highly experienced critics (or experts) distinguish themselves from other people (such as aesthetic laymen) by their ability to discern and pay attention to a larger number of aesthetically relevant features of objects, and especially to those having a higher share in the contribution to overall aesthetic merit. The better a reader's aesthetic sensitivity with respect to Celan's poem is, the better she can identify the most significant of its features and concentrate her experience on them, so as to get the most out of her encounter with the text. Moreover, the richness of one's aesthetic experience of a certain object is partly dependent on the standard of the applied aesthetic sensitivity: the better developed the latter, the more interesting the former. Whether a reader of Celan's poem comes up with a representation that is worth having (e.g., because it shows her that it is possible, after all, to capture aspects of the unspeakable), is partially due to whether she pays attention to those qualities of the poem that are of particular relevance for the poem's overall aesthetic merit (e.g., to its metre and alliterations rather than its rhymes).

### ***Normal conditions and manifestation conditions***

It is now time to say something about the normal and the manifestation conditions of aesthetic experi-

ences. The conditions under which an aesthetic experience of a certain kind occurs count as *normal conditions* with respect to that kind of experience if their obtaining guarantees that the experience is faultless. That is, the notion of normal conditions covers all those conditions that are sufficient (though not necessary) for the flawlessness of aesthetic responses. If a joke is experienced as funny, and the normal conditions for experiencing a joke (whatever they might be) obtain, the experience is a trustworthy indicator of the joke's really being funny. Owing to the two-fold structure of aesthetic experiences, there are two kinds of normal conditions: the first concern the representation of the experienced object, and the second the aesthetic feeling accompanying that understanding.

The function of the second type of normal conditions is solely to ensure the faultlessness of the application of a taste to a representation of a given object. To spell out these normal conditions in detail requires a well-developed theory of how aesthetic feelings (or feelings in general) arise as accompaniments of other episodes. But it is to be expected that only certain mental or cerebral processes are concerned, and that the conditions for their proper function will not differ very much among different cases of aesthetic response. Whether the faultless application of taste also suffices for the resulting aesthetic feeling to constitute a correct or appropriate response to the object in question will depend on the specific stance the anti-realist adopts towards the normativity of aesthetic values. While some anti-realists maintain that the applied taste has additionally to be of the right kind in order to render the evaluation justified, others do not. I will return to this issue when I discuss the various anti-realist options for accounting for cases of disagreement.

Since the generation of a representation of a given object happens by means of a certain kind of interaction between a subject and that object, normal conditions of the first type must cover both the experiential circumstances and the subject. Normal conditions of this kind can differ greatly from one aesthetic experience to another, because the representational elements involved often derive from very different forms of awareness. Whereas the faultless perception of a painting, for example, requires the obtaining of sufficiently bright and continuous lighting and a functioning visual apparatus of the subject, an impeccable understanding of a poem demands that the external circumstances allow the flawless perception of its words, and that those mechanisms of the brain and mind, which are involved in the comprehension of the words' meanings and the subsequent critical analysis of the poem, are working properly. The more complex the way of representing an object is, the more external and internal aspects have to be covered by the normal conditions. Moreover, a faultless representation will always be a true representation. This is particularly easy to see in simple cases, in which the awareness of the object is already exhausted by perceiving it or by grasping its linguistic meaning. But it will not be different for more complex ways of representing objects that involve discernments of Gestalt qualities and aesthetic properties, for instance, or ascriptions of aesthetic or non-aesthetic values.

Although the manifestation conditions for aesthetic responses share the two-fold structure with normal conditions, the two categories of condition fulfil completely different functions. The obtaining of normal conditions is needed to guarantee that aesthetic experiences are faultless. By contrast, the role of manifestation conditions is to bring about the employment of those abilities of a person that lead to her undergoing an aesthetic experience. To have an aesthetic experience of a particular kind presupposes, first, the capacity to represent the object in question respectively and, second, the relevant taste that links that representation to the specific aesthetic feeling. And since both these abilities have a dispositional character,



their manifestation needs to be triggered by the obtaining of certain conditions: namely their *manifestation conditions*. Without the obtaining of these conditions, there could not be any aesthetic experiences. As a block of salt will not dissolve unless it is put into water, we will not be able to recognise the aesthetic worth of an object unless we experience the object and experience it in the right way.

The first part of the manifestation conditions simply ensures that one applies one's capacities to become aware of some or other (though not necessarily aesthetically relevant) qualities of the object in question. Without such a state of awareness, one could not have an aesthetic experience of that particular object, because one would not represent it. The second part of the manifestation conditions secures that, if one represents an object in a certain way, one's particular taste with respect to that kind of representation gets (rather passively) employed, so that one responds with a certain aesthetic feeling. As with normal conditions, this part of the manifestation conditions is in principle the same for all kinds of aesthetic experiences. The main thing that has to be guaranteed is that the feeling accompanying the representation is in fact aesthetic, which will be so only if the subject is not too distracted by non-aesthetic interests in the object. For these interests are manifested in non-aesthetic feelings that often forestall one's aesthetic responses or at least influence them in such a way that they cannot truly be said to be aesthetic anymore. An important function of the manifestation conditions is thus to ensure the disinterestedness of aesthetic experiences<sup>42</sup>.

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42 But they do not require the adoption of a specifically "aesthetic attitude" (cf. Dickie (1964)).

## 4. A theory of values

We benefit from many very different entities: objects, events, facts or activities, for examples. Cakes and other kinds of food still our hunger and provide our body with the nutrition and energy it needs; we use means of transport to cover distances between two places; talking with a good friend makes us happy, as does watching a game of football; or we look into a history book in order to learn more about the crusades. And we value the relevant entities – cakes, means of transport, talks, games or books – since we recognise that they have the capacity or disposition to be beneficial for us under suitable circumstances – for example, when eaten, used, experienced, watched or read. These circumstances are in fact those that allow the manifestation of the dispositional capacity in question. Benefits are thus nothing other than manifested values; or values nothing other than dispositional benefits. Moreover, that an object actually benefits us is, it seems, connected to the fact that it satisfies one of our desires. It is because we want to satiate our hunger, travel around, be content or learn something, that we can benefit from the entities and value them accordingly. The core idea of the general theory of values which I want to propose here is thus to link values - and therefore also benefits - to desires in the following way:

(VAL) Values are identical with dispositional capacities to (partially) satisfy, or dissatisfy, sufficiently rational desires<sup>43</sup>.

Any theory of values has to capture the following distinctive features that are inherent in our notion of values: (i) they come in evaluative (i.e., either positive or negative) degrees; (ii) they are grouped into broad kinds (e.g., into the classes of moral, aesthetic or economical values); (iii) they show a normative dimension; and (iv) they are not completely arbitrary. The last feature is already guaranteed by the reference to desires. It is not enough to simply stipulate that a certain quality of an object constitutes a value; instead, objects have to be desired because of their possession of that quality. This explains why money or rare stamps are of a certain value for people, but the weight of the pebbles in a river or the colour of the underside of carpets are usually not. To see how an account of values in terms of desires can account for the other three features, it is necessary to take a closer look at desires.

### *Desires*

By *desires*, I mean all mental dispositions that display the following three characteristics. First, they are capable of giving direction to our behaviour: they provide us with aims for which we typically act. Second, they have a satisfaction aspect to them: they are satisfied, if the aim they set is achieved. And third, they constitute specific determinations of our will: what we desire is not completely imposed on us, but at least partially willed by us. Desires thus indicate what a person “really“ wants: our will determines what we desire and (external influences aside) whether we decide to act accordingly. The class of desires

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<sup>43</sup> Henceforth, I will ignore the possibility of dissatisfaction.

includes all kinds of mental pro-attitudes: wishes, wants, longings, cravings, willings, certain kinds of dreams, concerns, interests, and so forth. But for the sake of simplicity, I will just talk of desires.

Desires come in degrees: we desire different things with different strength or intensity. Furthermore, desires are either satisfied or dissatisfied. A desire is satisfied if and only if the entity that it is about exists, or comes into existence; otherwise, it is dissatisfied. In short: satisfaction is an optional property of desires, and desires aim at it<sup>44</sup>. That desires aim at their satisfaction reveals itself in the fact that they have the power to influence our actions. If we desire an entity, we usually do something to call it into being; and the more we desire something (and the more we are aware of that fact), the more impact does our desire tend to have on our decision making (e.g., the more energy is needed to suppress it). The satisfaction aspect of desires thus contributes to their motivational aspect.

Desires can manifest themselves in our behaviour and in our phenomenal consciousness. In the latter case, the manifesting episode always contains a feeling by means of which we are aware of the status of satisfaction of the desire. That is, any phenomenal manifestation of a desire is at the same time a form of affective awareness of its status of satisfaction. If I want my lover to be close to me, I may come to feel a strong and desperate longing, if she is in another city; but I also may come to feel highly content, if I see her opposite me and know that I just have to stretch my arms to touch her. Positive feelings (such as feelings of pleasure or satisfaction) are thereby linked to satisfied desires, while negative feelings are linked to dissatisfied ones. And the intensity of the feeling is determined by the degree of the desire and the permanence of its (potential) satisfaction: the more we desire the existence of a certain entity, and the longer this entity can satisfy that desire, the stronger we feel the satisfaction of that desire, if the entity comes into existence.

### ***Evaluative degree and broad kind***

On the basis of the considerations developed so far, it is possible to account for the first two distinctive features of values: their evaluative degree and their broad kind. The degree of a value is determined by the degree of the desire it can potentially satisfy (or by the extent to which it can contribute to such a satisfaction). And whether the value is negative or positive depends on whether it satisfies or dissatisfies the respective desire. A cream-cake is thus more valuable with respect to stilling hunger than an olive; and one may strongly disvalue going to a park on a sunny Sunday, because seeing all the happy couples enjoying themselves may induce a powerful feeling of loneliness. The broad kind of a value is mirrored by the broad kind of the desire to which it is connected. That is, values and desires can be grouped in accordance with each other. Such values as those of being nutritious, economically valuable or socially acceptable are as distinctive with respect to each other as the relevant desires are among themselves.

That an object has a certain value consequently means not only that it has the capacity to satisfy a certain desire, but also that it has the disposition to elicit certain feelings in subjects who have that desire. These feelings are *evaluations*: it is ultimately by means of them that we find out whether an object is be-

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<sup>44</sup> In this respect, the satisfaction of desires is analogous to the truth of beliefs (cf. Stampe (1994): 247). Note that satisfaction does not come in degrees and is independent of both the manifestation and the existence of desires.

beneficial for us and thus has a certain value. The biconditional (BC) - according to which, roughly, an object has a specific aesthetic value if and only if it typically elicits a certain aesthetic feeling - constitutes only a special instance of this thesis: we evaluate objects aesthetically by means of such feelings. And the degree of a value thus matches not only the degree of the satisfied desire, but also the degree of the feeling of satisfaction.

Of course, affective evaluations are not the only kind of evaluation. There are also judgements that ascribe values to objects. But these evaluative judgements ultimately derive from affective evaluations. There are three basic ways in which a judgemental evaluation can be derived: directly from an actual feeling (presumably via a process similar to that leading from perceptions to perceptual beliefs); via deferment; or via inference from other evaluative judgements (which is presumably excluded in the aesthetic case).

It is important to note that desires are not direct responses to instantiations of values and do not count as evaluations. For evaluations and desires fulfil distinct, but complementary functions within our interaction with the world: the former are recognitions of the specific values of external objects and, as responses, often also constitute these values; while the latter tell us which features of objects should count as values and what we should pursue by means of our actions.

There are indeed many cases in which something is valued by a person without being desired by her at the same time. That she believes that studying archaeology is a very worthwhile vocation need not lead to the arousal of the respective desire in her. And knowing that smoking cigarettes is bad for his health does not have to cause a smoker to develop even the slightest motivation to stop. But these cases are fully compatible with the proposed identity. For the thesis (VAL) does not require that the evaluator herself desires the evaluated entity at the moment of her evaluation. Instead, evaluations need involve only the recognition of an object's potential to satisfy some desire - irrespective of who might actually or possibly have it. It is thus possible that one is not always aware that something is beneficial and thus of a certain value for oneself.

Moreover, our feeling of being satisfied or dissatisfied is susceptible to error. On the one hand, it is possible that the felt degree of satisfaction does not accurately indicate the degree of the desire. Thus our general mood or state of mind can have the effect that our affective reactions are exaggerated. For instance, the suddenness and unexpectedness of a satisfaction may inappropriately heighten the intensity with which it is felt; and a manic-depressive person may not have a realistic grasp of how or when her desires are satisfied. On the other hand, it is possible for us to misrepresent the fact that our desire is satisfied altogether. Given that I desperately want to drink a Coca-Cola, it is sufficient for me to believe that what I actually drink is Coca-Cola in order to feel pleased; and I remain pleased even if my desire is actually not satisfied, because the fluid in my glass is Pepsi Cola (and I am surprisingly not capable of tasting the difference).

### ***Rational normativity***

The restriction of the relevant desires to those that are sufficiently rational ensures that all values are *normative* in the sense that their ascriptions have to be rationally justified to a sufficient extent in order to

be valid<sup>45</sup>. That an evaluation is rationally justified to a sufficient extent means that it is possible to give an explanation of why it is sufficiently rational for a person to make or endorse it. According to the proposed account, any evaluation is ultimately derived from and thus to be explained in terms of a particular desire. It is therefore rational for a person to evaluate an entity in a certain way if and only if the relevant desire is sufficiently rational.

A mental state is sufficiently rational if and only if it conforms to a certain extent to the constraints of rationality. Rationality governs all epistemic states of a person (her beliefs, desires and decisions to act, for examples) and requires that there is coherence among these mental states. Hence, a state is *rational* just in case it coheres with the person's other epistemic states<sup>46</sup>. In the ideal case, the mind of a rational subject would show complete coherence: each of her epistemic states would cohere with all the others. However, human beings could never show a fully coherent epistemic system, because of the occurrence of bodily needs and instincts that can contradict their other desires. Hence, to ensure that rationality is actually applicable to mental states of human beings, it cannot be defined in terms of full coherence. Rationality of epistemic states thus comes in degrees: mental states are rational to the extent to which they cohere with all the other states of that kind. And some people may show more rationality than others in the sense that their states are overall more coherent than those of others.

That it is a distinctive feature of all values that they are normative, in the sense that they have to be linked to sufficiently rational desires, is part of our conception of values: if one has no good reason for wanting something, one has no good reason for valuing it (cf. Beardsley (1982): p. 49; and Budd (1995): 40). Correspondingly, there are states with a motivational and a satisfaction aspect that are not capable of grounding values, because they are not sufficiently rational. Desires that arise mainly because of impulses, as well as these impulses themselves, are examples.

*Impulses* are mental phenomena that, in one way or another, have a directing impact on our behaviour and aim at satisfaction, but that can be distinguished from desires by the fact that they do not share the third feature of being determinations of the will<sup>47</sup>. Instead, impulses are such that it is beyond our control when they arise and which entities they are directed towards (and often also whether they actually influence our behaviour). Both urges owing to physical addiction or mental compulsion and the awareness of instinctive bodily needs are kinds of impulse. They cannot easily be integrated into our rational net of epistemic states if they stand in conflict with too many of our desires and convictions (as well as with our decisions about what kind of action we should perform). The same is often true for those desires the occurrence of which is primarily due to the occurrence of impulses (e.g., the desire to get rid of a specific withdrawal symptom as soon as possible).

Here are three illustrations of the difference between sufficiently rational desires, that can ground values, and others, that cannot because of the difficulty of integrating those impulses on which they are based into one's rational system of desires and values (cf. Smith (1994): 133ff.). First, the genuine wish and the resulting efforts of a heroin addict to get rid of her addiction are frustrated because the urge to take the drug overwhelms her again and again. Second, a woman bathing her baby that she really loves may be so irritated by the cries of her child that, though only for a moment, she feels the urge to drown it.

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45 Walton ((1993): n. 4) and Lewis (1989) seem to have similar ideas.

46 Rationality might require more than coherence (cf. Cherniak (1994)).

47 Presumably, impulses are also not mental dispositions.

Third, a kleptomaniac continues to steal, even though she has decided to do otherwise, simply because her impulse to steal becomes too strong from time to time to be suppressed lastingly. In each case, there is a conflict between what the involved person really wants (a life without drugs; a well child; breaking the habit of having to steal) and what she feels compelled to do (to take drugs; to drown her child; to steal); and it is plausible to say that she values only the former, not the latter. For although both her genuine wishes and her instinctive or addictive impulses may influence and thus explain her behaviour, only the former can be sufficiently justified in the light of her other epistemic states and thus ground values.

The theory of values, as developed so far, seems to be true of a wide range of different kinds of value: those values linked to emotions and bodily sensations (e.g., sentimentality, danger, or nutritional value); those related to recreational events (e.g., winning a competitive game, or having a comprehensive collection of something); those connected with fashion and social or celebrity status; cultural values (e.g., of heritage, traditions or certain national symbols); economical values; or practical values of actions<sup>48</sup>. For all these values, it is true that: they are normative solely in the sense of being rationally grounded; the possession of the capacity to satisfy certain rational desires is sufficient for the possession of these values; and their degrees are matched by the degrees of the corresponding rational desires. Consider the following example of a sentimental value. That it is reasonable for someone to desire to own a certain painting, that reminds him strongly of a dead person who was very close to him, is already enough for him to value that painting in a sentimental way. And the more he desires the possession of the painting, the more valuable it is for him. The story is a bit more complex in the case of many of those values and corresponding desires which are determined collectively (and by external factors like rareness) rather than individually. But still, if it is rational for a considerable number of members of the British public to desire, say, that the tradition of using non-metric systems for measurements is kept, it follows that this tradition has some cultural value, and that it has that value to the extent to which its being kept is desired by the public.

### ***Moral normativity***

There is, however, at least one kind of value that does not yet seem to be captured by the proposed account of values: namely moral values. For, it seems, our conception of moral values does not only contain rational normativity, but also another, specifically moral normativity that cannot be reduced to mere rationality: that an action is rational does not seem sufficient for its being morally obligatory<sup>49</sup>. If this is correct, the general theory of values has to be amended, or at least extended, to accommodate moral values. This raises the question whether the same might be true of aesthetic values: perhaps there is a specifically aesthetic normativity inherent in our notion of aesthetic values. But first it is necessary to understand what it means for moral values to be normative in a sense different from merely being rationally grounded.

I will simply assume here that there is a moral normativity inherent in the concept of moral values, that goes beyond mere rationality and cannot be purely analysed by reference to conventions or stipula-

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<sup>48</sup> Some values - such as economic value and values of fashion - might only be parasitic on other values and desires, and not linked to "their own" desires.

<sup>49</sup> It might even not be necessary, although I will ignore here the possibility of accounting for moral values independently of rationality.

tions. Whether this is really true (as it is at least plausible to believe), has no influence whatsoever on the discussion of aesthetic values - apart from the point that the existence of a distinctive moral normativity might suggest a similar aesthetic normativity (since both seem to enjoy a special status among values). But even if it turns out that there is no such normativity in the moral case, there may still be good reasons to acknowledge the existence of one in the realm of the aesthetic. So the discussion of moral normativity will at least help in understanding how aesthetic normativity might be best conceived of.

The class of moral values of actions constitutes a sub-set of the class of practical values. A *practical value* of an action is identical with its capacity to satisfy a certain, sufficiently rational desire, the satisfaction of which is likely to contribute to the satisfaction of another desire concerned with the meeting of a particular objective. If I desire with sufficient reason to see a movie in the city centre of London, it is reasonable for me to desire to take the tube to get there, and the corresponding action is of practical value for me. An action can possess a practical value for many different reasons, since we desire to achieve certain aims because of very diverse motives. Accordingly, there are often cases in which conflicts arise because of two practically valuable actions, only one can be performed. In particular, this includes cases of moral dilemmas, in which at least one of the involved practical values is a moral value. A *moral value* can be defined as a practical value that is morally induced: that is, either due to a desire that is concerned with a moral end (e.g., keeping one's promises, or not killing anyone), or due to a desire that otherwise conforms with some kind of accepted moral standard or principle (e.g., Kant's categorical imperative).

Now consider the following case of someone who has two conflicting desires: he wants to spend a particular evening both at a certain party and at the house of a colleague, with whom he is working on an important business project. Furthermore, he has good reasons for both his desires. The party is given by the person he has secretly loved for years, but never believed he would get close to; however, that person has now, for the first time, indicated that she likes him and that she would really appreciate it if he were to come to her party. On the other hand, his colleague has invited a prospective sponsor for their project to dine with them that very evening: a social event from which both his colleague and he himself are likely to benefit exceptionally. Furthermore, he neither wants to disadvantage nor to embarrass his colleague by staying away from the dinner and feels some moral responsibility towards his colleague.

Both options are therefore of considerable practical value for him. But they are so for entirely different reasons: going to the party is worthwhile for his love interest; going to the dinner is more advisable for his business interests as well as for general moral considerations. It is thus possible that his desire to see the woman he loves is stronger than his desire to spend the evening with his colleague and the business man (for instance, he might have good reasons for believing that love is more important in life than professional success and loyalty). Hence, the overall practical value of the former action is for him higher than the overall practical value of the latter. And solely from practical considerations, he would therefore decide to go to the party.

But this is exactly, where morality becomes significant. For the man may, after all, decide to stay loyal to his colleague and join him at the dinner, mainly because he has good reasons for believing that this is the morally more appropriate behaviour. In other words, the moral value of going to the dinner appears to be able to "outweigh" the practical value of going to the party - despite the fact that the love-induced desire to go to the party is stronger than the morally induced desire to go to the dinner.

There are two possible interpretations of this case. According to the first, the degrees of the values of

the two actions in fact correspond to the degrees of the relevant, sufficiently rational desires. Hence, the practical value grounded on the love interest is higher than the practical value linked to moral loyalty; and the “outweighing“ of the former by the latter has to be accounted for: either in terms of further interests, that shift the balance in degrees of values towards the action of going to the dinner (e.g., he might fear that his colleague would take revenge by disparaging him behind his back); or in terms of weakness of will, that is, the phenomenon that we do not always act in conformity with what we practically value most. But neither explanation seems able to capture our moral commitments adequately, for neither can make sense of the idea that, after all, the man morally ought to decide to go the dinner rather than the party.

The second interpretation does a better job. It maintains that the degree of moral values is not determined by the intensity of certain desires. Thus it is possible that the morally induced practical value of going to the dinner is higher than the practical value of going to the party. One way of accounting for the degree of moral values is to derive it from some kind of normative value system (such as the ten commandments, or a bill of rights). But assuming that morality is not purely a matter of convention, such a value system has to originate in some non-stipulated moral values: which leads directly back to the problem of determining what counts as a moral value and, especially, its weight.

One can, however, give an illuminating answer to the question where moral values get their degrees from. The main idea is to identify the degree of the moral value of an action with the degree of rationality (not the intensity) of the morally induced desire that is directed towards that action. Take again the example of the man with his practical conflict. His sufficiently rational desire to go to the party is stronger than his sufficiently rational desire to go the dinner: which means nothing else than that he has good reason to desire the first action more than the second. But nevertheless it is possible that it is more rational for him to desire (with less intensity) to go to his colleague’s house than to desire (with more intensity) to go his lover’s house<sup>50</sup>. And this can explain why the morally induced practical value of the former action is higher than the love-induced practical value of the latter: and thus why the man chooses to visit his colleague rather than to see his lover.

That the degree of rationality and the intensity of desires do not have to match is due to the fact that the influence of the latter on the former is only indirect. The extent to which a desire is rational is directly dependent solely on the extent to which it coheres with other epistemic states. But how much desires cohere with other states depends on their nature: which is again partly determined by their intensities. Hence, a desire could be more (or less) rational than it actually is, if its strength were to alter. However, because of the indirectness of the influence, there are no nomological connections between the intensities and the degrees of rationality: a strong desire can be more or less irrational than a weak desire. The degree of rationality and the intensity of desires can therefore come apart.

This account of the degree of moral values of actions suggests furthermore an account of the moral nature of desires and objectives. For from the claim that actions are of moral value to the extent to which they are rationally desired, it is only a small step to the following two theses: that desires are moral to the extent to which they are rational; and that ends are moral to the extent to which they are rationally desired. Consequently, moral values can perhaps be defined as those values that are linked to highly rational

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<sup>50</sup> That it is rational for a certain subject to have a specific desire simply means that it is rational for her to have that desire-with-a-particular-intensity, since desires are partly individuated by means of their degrees.



desires concerning actions (or concerning aims that can be achieved by means of these actions)<sup>51</sup>. It thus becomes possible not only to account for the degree of moral values, but also to delineate the class of moral values and distinguish them from other kinds of value. Moreover, this account of moral values is - except for the amendment regarding the degree of these values - in absolute conformity with the general theory of values based on the identification of values with capacities to satisfy certain rational desires.

What is most important, however, is that the amendment mentioned introduces a kind of normativity into the account that is distinct from mere rationality. This specifically moral normativity can capture the normative dimension that is often associated with the issue of how one ought to act. For according to the account of moral values of actions, what a person morally ought to desire practically can be analysed in terms of what is most rational for her to desire practically. The two kinds of normativity thus fulfil two completely different functions: sufficient rationality ensures that desires constitute values in the first place; while moral normativity turns the desires and values into moral ones.

### *Aesthetic normativity*

The claim that there is an aesthetic normativity - in analogy to moral normativity - can be understood as the thesis that there is a norm for the appropriateness of aesthetic evaluations. Aesthetic normativity thus tells us which aesthetic experiences we should have from an aesthetic point of view: that is, which aesthetic experience of an object it is more (or most) appropriate to have, given that one responds aesthetically to that item<sup>52</sup>.

Moral appropriateness of actions can be analysed in terms of high rationality. But how it is possible, against the background of the account of values introduced, to conceive of a specifically aesthetic normativity? Reference to the degree of rationality of the involved desires and responses does not help to elucidate the notion of such a normativity. For this degree is irrelevant to the issue whether - and if so to what extent - a given, intrinsically rewarding response constitutes an aesthetic value. It may well be highly reasonable for a particular person to be aesthetically overwhelmed by a minor piece of music consisting mainly of noises, if his conception of music up to now has not included such works, because he has never before encountered one (believing it to be music). But a slightly less rational opinion of an expert in contemporary music, according to which the aesthetic merit of this piece is not very high, might be more appropriate from an aesthetic point of view. For aesthetic (unlike moral) cases concern experiential, not practical, issues.

It is therefore advisable to look instead for an experiential capacity in terms of which aesthetic normativity can be defined. Taste seems to be immediately ruled out, because it does not come in degrees: either one possesses a particular taste, or one does not. If some tastes are aesthetically more appropriate than others, the relevant appropriateness has to be due to an aesthetic norm external to the tastes. However, such a norm can be defined in terms of the degree of the aesthetic sensitivity involved. Accordingly,

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<sup>51</sup> Both Kant (1788) and Smith (1994) analyse morality in terms of full rationality. But while Kant accepts that thus perhaps no empirical being can be moral, Smith is happy with (sufficient) approximation to the ideal.

<sup>52</sup> This aesthetic ought is distinct from the moral ought to have (particular) aesthetic experiences (cf. Kant (1790)).

an aesthetic experience is *aesthetically appropriate* in proportion to the degree of the aesthetic sensitivity employed in generating the experience. Since aesthetic sensitivity is the capacity to discern the aesthetic relevance of all the qualities of a particular object, the more aesthetically relevant qualities one is able to detect, and the more accurate one's assessment of their share in contributing to the overall aesthetic merit of the object, the more appropriate is one's aesthetic experience. Hence, the most appropriate aesthetic experiences we can undergo (i.e., the experiences that, from an aesthetic point of view, it is best to have) are those that capture the overall aesthetic value of the experienced object.

This account of aesthetic normativity does not require any amendments to the proposed general theory of values. It is still to be expected that there are specific rational desires that ground aesthetic values. And the degree of aesthetic values is still completely determined by the degree of the corresponding aesthetic feelings and rational desires<sup>53</sup>. Aesthetic normativity thus shares only one function with moral normativity: as the latter determines which actions are morally appropriate, so the former specifies which experiences are aesthetically appropriate. But while moral normativity also fixes the degree of the moral values, aesthetic normativity sets the quality of aesthetic responses (and hence the quality of aesthetic evaluators): the higher one's aesthetic sensitivity with respect to a particular object, the more appropriate (and nearer to an overall evaluation) is one's aesthetic experience of that item. This introduces a new kind of value into the debate about aesthetic matters, that is distinct from the aesthetic values of objects, and also from the faultlessness of aesthetic evaluations.

Whether there is a specifically aesthetic norm that, in addition to faultlessness, governs the correctness of aesthetic evaluations, and, if so, whether the aesthetic normativity introduced is identical with such a norm will be discussed in the context of the problem from disagreement.

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<sup>53</sup> That the degree of aesthetic values could match the extent to which aesthetic experiences are appropriate is obviously false; as is the idea that the degree of aesthetic values attributed to a particular object is always the same as the degree of the overall aesthetic merit of that object.

## 5. Anti-realism and disagreement

The remaining task for an anti-realist is to ensure the truth of the biconditional (BC) as it applies to existing, subjective aesthetic values. According to the anti-realist interpretation, the biconditional claims that - under normal conditions - an object has a specific aesthetic value because it causes the same aesthetic feeling in all relevant subjects undergoing the same experience of the object. Since all other parameters are already set, the question is how the scope of the relevant subjects has to be specified, so that it turns out to be true of each possible object that it elicits the same aesthetic experiences in all these subjects (given that normal and manifestation conditions obtain). For only then will the right-hand side of the biconditional be true and applicable to existing aesthetic values defined as certain subjective dispositions. If anti-realism cannot fulfil this task, irrealism is the only alternative. For if the right-hand side cannot be made true, the left-hand side will not be true, implying the denial of the existence of aesthetic values<sup>54</sup>.

Whether the right-hand side of the biconditional is true or false for different specifications of the scope of relevant subjects is an empirical matter. And the conditions under which sameness of response is guaranteed can be specified only by reference to the actual practice of aesthetic criticism. There is one frequently occurring phenomenon in particular that appears to threaten the possibility of ensuring the sameness of aesthetic responses: namely the fact that people often seem to disagree widely about the aesthetic merits of objects. Hence, the anti-realist has to show that and how she is able to accommodate this phenomenon in her account of aesthetic values and experiences. There are two possible interpretations of such cases that she can pursue: she can treat them either as cases of seeming disagreement, or as cases of genuine disagreement.

### *Seeming disagreement and genuine disagreement*

Two subjects *seemingly disagree* about (the degree of) the aesthetic value of a given object if and only if they have different aesthetic experiences of that object despite the representational elements of their aesthetic experiences being the same and normal conditions holding. Seeming disagreement becomes most apparent in expressions of aesthetic judgements and is due to a difference in tastes with respect to the particular representation in question. For a taste has been defined as the capacity to respond with a certain aesthetic feeling to a specific representation of an object. What renders cases of seeming disagreement so interesting (and, as we will see, problematic for the anti-realist) is that the dispute cannot be dissolved by reference to any fault or lack of ability of one of the subjects. This is why cases of seeming disagreement are in stark contrast with two other classes of phenomena.

On the one hand, the obtaining of the normal conditions guarantees that the two elements of aesthetic experiences are flawless. In particular, there is no fault in the application of tastes. Consequently, any dispute about aesthetic matters that can be dissolved by reference to some epistemic error involved in the generation of the representation or the aesthetic feeling is not an instance of seeming disagreement. If a

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<sup>54</sup> If anti-realism cannot render the right-hand side of the biconditional true, realism cannot either: for a realist specification of the relevant subjects will have to be the same as an anti-realist.

person views a painting under completely inadequate lighting and thus misperceives it; if she falls victim to some kind of hallucination; if she mistakes the portrayed queen with her son as the Virgin Mary with child; or if her evaluative response is not appropriately caused by her representation, but by some other kind of neural stimulation: then she is not in seeming disagreement with another person who has a different aesthetic experience.

On the other hand, that seeming disagreement requires the sameness of the representational elements excludes cases in which the experiences of the two subjects concern different aesthetically relevant aspects or parts of the object in question. For instance, if one person says that the first part of a book is highly appealing, while another person insists that its latter part is boring, they simply talk at cross purposes. And if they are concerned with the same passage of the book, but highlight different aesthetically relevant features of it, it is no surprise that their aesthetic responses differ. Only if the two aesthetic responses acknowledge the same characteristics of the same parts of the experienced object can they be said to stand in the relation of seeming disagreement. In particular, this rules out all disputes between more and less aesthetically sensitive critics: an aesthetic expert is simply aware of more aesthetically relevant qualities (e.g., of subtle details, or the broad context of the work), or is better equipped to identify those features that are particularly important for the constitution of the overall aesthetic merit, than the inexperienced spectator.

There are unlikely to be many cases of seeming disagreement, since there are probably not many situations in which critics experience exactly the same aesthetically relevant qualities of an object. But it seems to be impossible to deny their existence<sup>55</sup>. First of all, it is difficult to see why people who do not show any general fault in their affective reactions to objects should not be able to have different tastes (irrespective of whether these tastes are perhaps more, or less, appropriate than others). There is at least no obvious reason that might compel one to deny the possibility that two art critics, who consider exactly the same features of a painting, can come up with different opinions - without there being any errors that might explain the difference in their response (cf. Goldman (1995): 32f.).

But there is a further argument in support of the existence of cases of seeming disagreement. It is based on certain findings about seeming disagreement regarding colour experiences, as they are reported by Hardin in his book *Color for Philosophers* (cf. Hardin (1988)). As a matter of fact, people with impeccable vision locate the unique colours (i.e., the pure hues of red, green, yellow and blue) and the borders between two distinct hues at different locations within the spectrum of colour hues: that is, they point to different objects, if asked to identify bearers of a pure red; and in the transition from green to blue, while some perceive an object as already being blue, others count it as still being green. These are obviously cases of seeming disagreement: the differences in response occur even under normal conditions; and the colour experiences are based on the representation of the same surface reflectance properties of the objects. However, if there is seeming disagreement among viewers of colours, then one should expect that there also to be seeming disagreement among aesthetic critics. There are two reasons for this. First, aesthetic values are often dependent on colours (and other secondary qualities) and will thus inherit any seeming disagreement concerning them. Second, it is the response-dependence of colours that is responsible for the existence of cases of seeming disagreement: so it would be surprising if the (more apparent)

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<sup>55</sup> After all, it is an empirical question. Kant can deny cases of seeming disagreement only because he assumes a single taste common to all subjects.

response-dependent aesthetic values did not show similar disparities. Consequently, it is better to accept that there are cases of seeming disagreement in aesthetic matters<sup>56</sup>.

The cases discussed so far are only cases of *seeming* disagreement, because it is not necessary that the difference in response amounts to an incompatibility. By contrast, genuine disagreement requires incompatibility: two subjects *disagree* with each other about the aesthetic value of a given object if and only if they seemingly disagree about that value and their two aesthetic experiences are incompatible. The additional requirement of incompatibility between the differing evaluations is due to the fact that, according to our conception of genuine disagreement, there must be some kind of tension between opinions in order to constitute a real dispute. The only promising account of how differing opinions can stand in real conflict construes the tension involved as a tension between truth-values. Accordingly, two aesthetic responses are incompatible if and only if they cannot be correct at the same time. The notion of disagreement, defined as an incompatibility holding between faultless aesthetic experiences that contain the same representational, but different evaluative elements, therefore exactly covers all cases of faultless evaluations of which only one can at most be correct.

One might wonder, however, whether there is really a difference between cases of disagreement and cases of seeming disagreement. For it appears to be intuitively plausible to assume that a difference in aesthetic evaluation is already sufficient for the responses involved to be incompatible. That an object can be highly capturing as well as just about interesting because of the same base qualities appears to be as unlikely as that an object can be both dark and light because of the same reflectance properties. But this intuition is not enough to force one to accept the thesis that two faultless aesthetic responses to one and the same experience cannot be both correct. Hence, the notions of seeming disagreement and of disagreement are not the same. The only conceptual connection they show is that being in disagreement entails being in seeming disagreement.

While it appears to be undeniable that there are cases of seeming disagreement, it is a matter of debate whether there is also genuine aesthetic disagreement. What is at issue is whether the cases covered by seeming disagreement can also be interpreted as cases of disagreement: that is, whether a faultless difference in response already entails an incompatibility. Accordingly, there are two options. Either one adopts the stronger reading that maintains that any difference amounts to an incompatibility and thus accepts the existence of aesthetic disagreement; or one does not. Within the context of anti-realism, the monist version goes for the first option, while the pluralist and relativist alternatives opt for the second. Whether cases are interpreted as aesthetic disagreement, or only as seeming disagreement, thus depends on which form of anti-realism one favours. If one chooses the latter of the two options, one has to provide a satisfactory explanation of why there is no incompatibility between faultless aesthetic responses made under the same manifestation conditions, and thus no aesthetic disagreement. Proponents of the former option face a completely different challenge, as the next section will show.

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<sup>56</sup> Note that seeming (and genuine) disagreement is completely independent of the incommensurability of aesthetic values (cf. Budd (1995): 42f.) and cannot be explained away by reference to that vagueness.

## ***The problems from seeming disagreement and genuine disagreement***

For the anti-realist, there is a problem related to each of the two kinds of difference between aesthetic experiences. Seeming disagreement prevents the right-hand side of the biconditional from being true, if the class of relevant subjects comprises all human subjects capable of having the respective aesthetic experiences. For that such human beings can seemingly disagree simply means that, under normal conditions, they do not aesthetically respond in the same way to the same represented aspects of a given object. So in order to render the biconditional true of aesthetic values, the anti-realist has to modify it by restricting the class of relevant subjects in such a way that seeming disagreement is not possible among the limited class of subjects.

If the anti-realist also accepts that there are really cases of aesthetic disagreement, she faces the problem that, if interpreted in a certain way, disagreement embodies an antinomy. Aesthetic experiences that are faultless - that is, made under normal conditions - are presumably true. After all, normal conditions are meant to guarantee that the experiences and responses they cover are correct. However, two aesthetic experiences are incompatible with one another if at most only one can be correct; or in other words: if the correctness of the one aesthetic experience excludes the correctness of the other. But if disagreement really entails both that the aesthetic responses involved are true and that they mutually exclude each other from being true, it turns out to be an incoherent notion that has no application to any possible cases. To avoid this antinomy, the anti-realist has either to interpret disagreement in a less strong way (without thereby deviating from the understanding of disagreement as faultless incompatibility), or to deny altogether the existence of disagreement in aesthetic matters by assuming that a difference in faultless response does not amount to an incompatibility.

It is important to remember that irrealism does not face either of these problems and might therefore still be an attractive alternative. The antinomy of disagreement does not arise, because irrealism does not claim that aesthetic evaluations are truth-apt. And the biconditional does not have to be modified in order to accommodate the cases of seeming disagreement, since the irrealist accepts from the start that the right hand side - and thus also the left hand side - is always false. However, in order to assess whether anti-realism can meet the challenge set by seeming disagreement and, perhaps, by disagreement, I will discuss each of the three anti-realist alternatives - monism, pluralism and relativism - in turn.

### ***Monism***

According to *monism*, only one of those tastes that lead to aesthetic feelings on the basis of a given representation results in a true aesthetic response; while experiences based on all other tastes are erroneous. Consequently, only the responses of those subjects who possess the right or appropriate taste play a role in the determination of the aesthetic value of the experienced object. The result is the following modification of the scope of the class of relevant subjects within the biconditional:

(BC<sub>M</sub>) Under normal conditions: an object has a certain aesthetic value if it has the disposition to cause, in all subjects *with the right taste*, an aesthetic experience which ascribes that specific value to

the object.

Since subjects who share a taste will have the same aesthetic responses, differences in response will not occur among those subjects who share the appropriate taste. Thus the right-hand side of the biconditional (and hence also the left-hand side) turns out to be true, and the problem from seeming disagreement is solved.

Monism must also allow for the occurrence of disagreement. For, with respect to a particular representation, only that aesthetic feeling that is the result of the application of the right taste is appropriate. Hence, at most one of the aesthetic responses involved in the case of seeming disagreement is correct. It follows automatically that they are incompatible with each other. If two subjects with faultless aesthetic experiences thus seemingly disagree, they automatically also disagree. But monism can also offer an easy solution to the problem from disagreement: cases of disagreement are unproblematic, because at most one of the responses can be true, even though they are both faultless.

It is a consequence of this strong reading of cases of seeming disagreement as being also cases of disagreement, that monism cannot consider faultlessness as being sufficient for the correctness of aesthetic experiences. While the obtaining of the normal conditions still ensures the correctness of the representational element, it figures only as a necessary condition for the correctness of the evaluative element. What is also required is that the aesthetic feeling is of the right kind: namely due to the right taste. Only then will the aesthetic response be true.

### ***Contra monism***

However, monism faces a serious problem. It is essential to the monist conception that it is possible to single out a feature of tastes by means of which the right taste can be distinguished from all others. But there does not seem to be a feature that can fulfil that task.

Tastes are defined as abilities by means of which we can link a specific experience to a specific aesthetic feeling. If some tastes have in common that they concern the same kind of representation, they can differ only in the aesthetic feelings that are the results of their application to that kind of representation. It is, however, not possible to exploit this difference and explain the appropriateness of a taste in terms of the appropriateness of the resulting aesthetic feeling. For the latter kind of correctness is defined by means of the former: aesthetic feelings are correct because they are due to the right taste (and not vice versa).

Another strategy is to define the right taste in terms of its contribution to the correct recognition of the relevant intrinsic value of the representational element. But this proposal does not do justice to the problem from disagreement. The existence of cases of disagreement can be put down to the fact that the respective intrinsic values of representations are not the same for all relevant subjects. For the disagreement in aesthetic feelings is disagreement in direct recognitions of these values of representations. It might thus be possible to illuminate why disagreement occurs by explaining why a certain representation is of different intrinsic value for different subjects. But this would not result in the identification of the right taste.

It would be just as hopeless to look for certain characteristics of the experienced object that are re-

sponsible for the fact that at most one particular aesthetic response can be merited. The only plausible candidates for these characteristics are the represented base qualities, on which the ascribed aesthetic values depend. Now if it were true that only the application of the right taste would be justified by reference to these base qualities, then one could draw the required distinction<sup>57</sup>. But again, the problem of disagreement is simply ignored instead of addressed. For it is the point of cases of disagreement that there are different and incompatible responses, which are nevertheless equally justified by the same represented nature of the object. Here, it is significant that the possibility of disagreement is due to the response-dependence of aesthetic values. Since their instantiations depend not only on certain base qualities, but also on the value of the respective representations, aesthetic experiences can be completely justified only in terms of both the base qualities and the value of their representational elements (or whatever justifies them). And it is thus still a real possibility that each of the representations can have different, equally warranted values for different subjects.

Perhaps the most promising idea is to specify the right taste by making reference to certain features that characterise exclusively its bearers. The right taste is accordingly that taste which is shown by the right kind of critics; and the class of relevant subjects mentioned on the right-hand side of the biconditional consists simply of critics of this kind. Apart from tastes, the only plausible candidates for those features in which good critics might differ from poor ones are their aesthetic sensitivities. To possess the right taste might thus mean to possess a taste and to show an appropriate standard of aesthetic sensitivity, that is, an appropriate standard of (at least) background knowledge and past training; while appropriateness of standard requires either sufficiently good or optimal knowledge and training (relative to the object in question)<sup>58</sup>.

However, neither of the options can exclude the possibility of disagreement among critics of the right kind. For one's particular tastes are not (completely) determined by one's aesthetic sensitivities. Sameness of aesthetic sensitivity cannot therefore ensure sameness of taste. And critics of the right kind - whether they possess a sufficiently high or an optimal standard of knowledge and training - can differ in their aesthetic responses. For example, there is no reason why two lovers of classical music who are appropriately knowledgeable and trained and who represent all, or most of, the aesthetically relevant qualities of a piece of music (say, a symphony by Mahler, or a waltz of Chopin) cannot disagree about the aesthetic appeal of that piece (cf. Goldman (1995): 31f.).

Hence, aesthetic normativity - specified in terms of aesthetic sensitivity and governing the quality and richness of aesthetic experiences - cannot also function as a norm for tastes and the correctness of the corresponding aesthetic responses. That one critic perceives more aesthetically relevant qualities of an object, and more with a high degree of aesthetic relevance, than another does not imply that the former's response is more likely to be correct than the latter's. It is thus not possible for the monist to define the right taste in terms of the right kind of critics. And since there is no other plausible alternative, monism is not a

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<sup>57</sup> Budd suggests such a solution (cf. Budd (1995): 40; and Budd (1999b)).

<sup>58</sup> It should not simply be a matter of stipulation whether a critic shows the right taste; and likewise not a matter of statistical considerations (cf. Wright (1992)). Both options would result in distributions of truth-values among aesthetic evaluations that are too arbitrary to be able to justify the commitment to monism, instead of to the relativist anti-realist alternative (or perhaps even irrealism). Besides, anti-realists cannot interpret optimal as ideal in the sense that subjects - because of their physical and mental limitations - can never actually reach, but only approximate the optimal standard. For then no one could ever be in the position to evaluate objects aesthetically; and irrealism would be the only available option.



tenable option for an anti-realist<sup>59</sup>.

## ***Pluralism***

A plausible alternative to monism is pluralism. It can be derived from the former position by a simple modification: instead of only one, there can be more than one right taste with respect to a specific representation; but not every taste is right. The last constraint mirrors the fact that pluralism still assumes that there is a distinction between appropriate and inappropriate tastes. The pluralist thus favours the following formulation of the biconditional:

(BC<sub>p</sub>) Under normal conditions: an object has a certain aesthetic value *iff* it has the disposition to cause, in all subjects *with one particular right taste*, an aesthetic experience of the kind that can ground the aesthetic judgement ascribing that specific value to the object.

The appropriateness of taste is best elucidated in terms of aesthetic normativity. Accordingly, a taste is right if and only if it is combined with an aesthetic sensitivity of sufficiently high, or optimal, standard. Now, pluralism can provide a solution to the problem from seeming disagreement. As has just been argued, critics that are of an appropriate standard do not have to have the same tastes with respect to a given representation. Hence, there may occur different faultless evaluations among them. But this does not prevent the right-hand side of the biconditional (BC<sub>p</sub>) from being true, since it does not state that an object must, under normal conditions, elicit the same response in all subjects having any of the right tastes. All that is needed for the right-hand side to be true is that sameness of response is guaranteed with respect to each right taste considered on its own. And this is so because of the definition of tastes: all who possess the same taste respond in the same way to the same representation.

The concession that pluralism has to make is that an object can have different aesthetic values in virtue of the same base qualities. This is possible because aesthetic values are not only base-dependent, but also response-dependent. If the base is fixed, there can still be different correct responses from the perspective of different sets of subjects. In fact, the number of correct aesthetic evaluations based on one particular representation corresponds to the number of right tastes among the ones that are concerned with that representation. Faultlessness is thus, after all, identified with correctness. The opinions of the two music lovers with a high standard of musical knowledge and training are both true, even if they do not match. So pluralism must find a different way of avoiding the seeming antinomy of disagreement than monism's, which distinguishes between faultlessness and correctness.

But the accomplishment of this task is already entirely anticipated in the specification of the relevant subjects that has rendered the right-hand side true. For it is a direct consequence of that specification that

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<sup>59</sup> According to Budd (1999b), who seems to be inclined to embrace monism, it might be compatible with general monism that, in cases of disagreement, none of the aesthetic responses involved is correct. Consequently, some aesthetic values (the number of which is presumably very high) are not anti-real, but irreal. However, this proposal is highly implausible because it renders the class of aesthetic values heterogeneous. Furthermore, there is an anti-realist alternative available: relativism. - Note that Budd favours a pluralist (or relativist) alternative elsewhere ((1995): 42).

there cannot be any disputes concerning aesthetic evaluations that are made under normal conditions and include the same representational element. Following pluralism, it does not make any sense for the two music lovers to debate which of their judgements is more appropriate, or to try to convince each other of the falsehood of the other's opinion. For both of their evaluations are true because of their faultlessness. What pluralism thus simply denies is that there can be any incompatibility between different faultless aesthetic evaluations based on the same representation of an object. Consequently, there cannot be any disagreement in aesthetic matters.

A recent proponent of pluralism is Goldman. He offers an analysis of aesthetic values in terms of a biconditional that describes the dispositional ("Humean") structure of these values and that conforms, in its main aspects, to the biconditional (BC<sub>p</sub>)<sup>60</sup>. And he allows for the existence of several right tastes and thus relativises aesthetic values, as subjective dispositions, to critics sharing an appropriate taste (cf. Goldman (1995): 37).

### ***Contra pluralism***

Apart from the issue of how the notion of a sufficiently good standard can be non-circularly elucidated, pluralism does not inherit any difficulties from monism. In fact, the main purpose of the distinctive move away from a single right taste to a plurality of such tastes is to pay tribute to the fact that monism is not tenable. Pluralism is accordingly the result of an amendment of the monist position in such a way that the latter's difficulties disappear. But the pluralist alternative faces its own objections.

The first concerns the question whether real dispute in aesthetic matters is still possible if the existence of cases of disagreement is denied. Actually, we often engage in debates about our aesthetic judgements; and it would seem implausible to deny that none of these is in the end a real dispute that can be settled by reference to some matter of fact. But pluralists can allow for many different kinds of genuine disputes: namely if the differing aesthetic experiences are not all undergone under normal conditions; or if they are not due to the same manifestation conditions. In the first case, mis-representations (notably of aesthetic properties) or errors in the bringing about of aesthetic feelings may occur and thus render evaluations false. In the second case, the subjects may be distracted by non-aesthetic interests, or may simply attend to different qualities of the object. The very last situation is especially apt to lead to disputes, particularly about whether oneself or the other is really sufficiently concerned with those qualities that are most important in contributing to the overall aesthetic merit of an object. That is, many debates actually arise because of different aesthetic sensitivities.

These different kinds of disputes presumably cover most of the actual cases in which we quarrel about aesthetic matters. After all, there are probably not too many cases of seeming disagreement, since there

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<sup>60</sup> According to the "Humean structure", an object has a certain aesthetic value if and only if it is disposed to elicit a corresponding evaluative response in "ideal" critics (i.e., presumably critics of a sufficiently high standard). The main differences between Goldman's and my version of anti-realism are: he allows for mixed aesthetic qualities and extends the "Humean structure" to cover all aesthetic qualities; he does not distinguish between taste, aesthetic sensitivity and disinterestedness, especially in his specification of "ideal" critics; and he does not acknowledge the two-fold structure of aesthetic experiences (cf. Goldman (1995): 21ff.).

are not many cases in which subjects represent exactly the same aesthetically relevant qualities of an object. That pluralism denies these few cases of seeming disagreement the status of genuine disputes - in which at least one of the involved experiences is either not correct, or not fully sensitive to all, or the more significant, aesthetically relevant features of the object - suggests that we should shift the focus within our aesthetic debates from instantiations of aesthetic values as such to the whole process of evaluation, including the manner in which objects are represented as a consequence of the application of one's aesthetic sensitivity. For while pluralism does not permit the possibility of aesthetic disagreement, it allows for disputes about the aesthetic relevance of qualities of objects.

The second objection claims that pluralism entails a certain relativisation of the content of aesthetic evaluations, and that this is problematic. The first part of the statement is true, but not the second. Pluralism entails that the contents of aesthetic evaluations are relativised to subjects in the sense that their truth-conditions are relativised; and their truth-conditions are relativised, because the existence of the ascribed aesthetic values is relativised. According to anti-realism, the biconditional provides a definitional identity claim: aesthetic values are identical with subjective dispositions to cause certain aesthetic feelings in the relevant subjects (here: those sharing a particular right taste). And these dispositions would not exist, if the respective subjects were not (actually) possible. Hence, a specific aesthetic value exists only relative to the possible existence of a subject with a right taste, the application of which results in an aesthetic feeling ascribing that value. My experientially based statement that Fitzgerald's *Tender is the Night* is marvellous is thus elliptic in the sense that, more exactly, it states that Fitzgerald's book is marvellous-for-all-the-people-who-share-the-respective-right-taste-with-me (cf. Goldman (1995): 37).

But that is all there is to the relativisation claim. As a matter of fact, any anti-realist position must - because of the existence of cases of seeming disagreement - relativise the existence of aesthetic values in some such way. The anti-realist alternatives differ only with respect to which class of human beings aesthetic values are relativised to. However, pluralism differs from monism in that it relativises aesthetic values in such a way, that aesthetic evaluations made under normal conditions cannot be disputed. According to the pluralist conception, if people with different tastes are engaged in debates concerning a case of seeming disagreement, in fact, they talk at cross purpose. For they are inevitably concerned with different aesthetic values because the subjective dispositions involved are defined in terms of distinct tastes and can be experienced only by those having the respective tastes. This explains why, according to pluralism, cases of aesthetic disagreement are actually impossible. To compare the differing opinions is similar to comparing the tactile judgement of a blind person that a given object is square and the visual judgement of a person without touch that the object is red. Even if the seemingly disagreeing subjects continue to attempt to convince each other of the falsehood of the other's opinion, they do not have any justification to fall back on.

The relativisation of the existence of aesthetic values and of the truth-conditions of their ascriptions would be problematic only if it were to entail the relativisation of the truth-values of aesthetic experiences and judgements. The denial of the non-relativised (or universal) validity of aesthetic evaluations is problematic because it does not match our intuitive conception of truth. After all, our judgements - whether aesthetic or not - do seem to make a claim to universal validity: they involve a commitment about the intersubjective nature of the real world. In particular, aesthetic judgements, as judgements, aim at universal

truth. My statement that Fitzgerald's *Tender is the Night* is marvellous is thus not an elliptic version of the statement that it is true-for-me that Fitzgerald's book is marvellous. Instead, that Fitzgerald's book is marvellous is simply true - even if its being true is due to there being some subjects with a particular right taste, and even if not all subjects can directly experience the marvellousness of the book.

A third objection to pluralism is that actually it cannot accommodate cases of agreement, and especially cases of almost universal agreement, that is, of aesthetic evaluations (in particular ones concerning overall aesthetic merit) that are so obviously true that any attempt to deny them is bound to look rather ridiculous. Examples of such opinions are that Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is a highly appealing play; that Rembrandt's *Self-portrait with a white hat* is a better painting than any of mine; or that the technical manual of my camera is not of much aesthetic interest. However, pluralism can provide two accounts of cases of agreement. Less often, the agreeing critics will have the same representations and tastes with respect to the object in question. Far more often, they will have rather different representations and tastes, which together nevertheless result in the same aesthetic response. And very great agreement can be explained by the fact that certain objects simply provide far more aesthetic experiences with either a very positive or a very negative value than most other objects do. For instance, it is difficult to imagine a faultless experience of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* that does not give rise to a very positive evaluation.

There is however one successful and very simple objection against pluralism: it is unnecessarily strong. For in addition to the claim that there can be more than one taste that lead to correct aesthetic responses, it draws an unneeded distinction between right and wrong tastes. There are two main reasons by means of which the introduction of such a distinction might be motivated. Firstly, it might be required to account for the difference between aesthetic experts and aesthetic laymen. However, nothing more than aesthetic normativity is needed for this task: reference to differences in aesthetic sensitivities is already sufficient to explain differences in quality of aesthetic evaluations. Secondly, the introduction of the distinction between right and wrong tastes might be needed to solve the problems that arise from the existence of cases of seeming disagreement and, perhaps, of disagreement. This is definitely true for monism; but not for pluralism. The pluralist can fulfil the task of rendering the right-hand side of the biconditional true by the introduction of a taste, which is characterised simply by the fact that it is shared by all relevant subjects. And he can likewise expose the alleged antinomy as only apparent by restricting the scope of incompatibility to subjects sharing a taste. In both cases, that the taste might also be a right one is completely irrelevant. Hence, the distinction between right and wrong tastes has no real work to do any more, after monism has been given up. Accordingly, it is plausible to rid the anti-realist position of it and adopt relativism instead of pluralism.

### ***Relativism***

The core claim of relativism is that all tastes lead under normal conditions to correct aesthetic experiences. The biconditional therefore amounts to:

(BC<sub>R</sub>) Under normal conditions: an object has a certain aesthetic value it has the disposition to cause, in all subjects *with the same particular taste*, an aesthetic experience of the kind that can ground the aesthetic judgement ascribing that specific value to the object.

Apart from the (now dropped) distinction between right and wrong tastes, monism shares all characteristics and advantages with pluralism. But just because of this small difference, relativism is the only tenable anti-realist position. Furthermore, it is to be preferred to irrealism, since it can meet all objections brought against anti-realism.

Only that there is no specifically aesthetic norm concerning the appropriateness of tastes and aesthetic feelings might become problematic for relativism. For if the notion of an aesthetic value contains such a normative dimension that goes beyond faultlessness, rationality and aesthetic normativity, one must conclude that our concept of aesthetic values is either incoherent or without any application. And consequently, irrealism turns out to be true after all. However, the claim, that there must be, by definition, a difference between appropriate and inappropriate members of the class of faultless, rational aesthetic evaluations, that are due to the application of appropriate aesthetic sensitivities, is neither straightforwardly plausible, nor easy to assess. And even if there is such a normativity inherent in the notion of aesthetic values, this does not prevent relativism from being true of those existing values that have been discussed and labelled “aesthetic values“ so far: namely the quasi-intrinsic values of objects determined by the intrinsic values of certain representations.

In other words, depending on which stance is adopted towards whether the concept of aesthetic values is normative in the special sense described, the proposed theory captures: either the nature of aesthetic values and experiences; or the nature of a unique kind of values and experiences, that are like aesthetic values and experiences apart from the fact that they are not conceived of as being governed by that special aesthetic norm. But in both cases the captured values are normative in exactly the same sense, namely with respect to the faultlessness and rationality of their ascriptions; and in both cases the quality (though not the correctness) of evaluation is governed by aesthetic normativity<sup>61</sup>.

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<sup>61</sup> It is still possible that values cannot be completely specified in non-normative terms (as McDowell (1983), (1985) and Wiggins (1987) maintain): namely if rationality cannot be analysed in such a way.

## 6. Conclusion

It is time to return to the question left open at the very beginning: what it means for an experience to be aesthetic. For the considerations unfolded so far allow the formulation of certain necessary conditions. Accordingly, an *experience* is *aesthetic* only if: (i) it consists of a (complex) representation of an object and an accompanying feeling; (ii) the representation instantiates a value linked to a certain desire; (iii) the feeling is the recognition of that value, or the satisfaction of that desire, and bestows it onto the object; (iv) the value of the representation, like the corresponding desire, is intrinsic. Experiences fulfilling all these criteria are automatically disinterested because an intrinsic value of a representation cannot be due to a desire concerning the existence or nature of the experienced object, but only to a desire concerning the existence or nature of that representation.

That non-aesthetic kinds of experiences also satisfy these criteria means that the latter do not constitute sufficient conditions for experiences to be aesthetic, and that further criteria have to be identified. But it is to be expected that any additional criteria for aesthetic experiences can also be specified in non-aesthetic terms. The resulting account of the aesthetic nature of experiences can be easily extended, by means of the conceptual links mentioned at the beginning, to cover the aesthetic nature of values, judgments and other entities as well. The outcome is a general theory of the aesthetic: a theory that reduces aesthetic notions to non-aesthetic ones.

### *Intrinsic desires*

Aesthetic experiences can be grouped into different kinds by differences in the values they ascribe, and thus ultimately by differences in the rational desires they are linked to. To see this, it is helpful to introduce the notion of intrinsic desires.

A certain value is instrumental if and only if it depends on some value of a possible effect of its bearer. But since values are identical with capacities to satisfy certain rational desires, the instrumentality of a value can be characterised also in terms of desires. Accordingly, a certain value is instrumental if and only if it is linked to a rational desire, the existence of which depends on the existence of some rational desire about a possible effect of the value's bearer<sup>62</sup>. For convenience, I will call a rational desire, that concerns a specific object and is explained by some rational desire concerning one of the possible effects of this object, instrumental as well. That is, a value is instrumental if and only if it is linked to an instrumental desire. For example, if my wish to know more about Werner Herzog's movies is the sole reason why I want to read a book about his work, the book has an instrumental value for me. By contrast, a value is intrinsic if and only if it is linked to an intrinsic desire; while a rational desire is intrinsic just in case it is not instrumental. However, since one desire can account for another only if the object of the former is a possible effect of the object of the latter, *intrinsic desires* are exactly those that are not dependent on any other desires: and intrinsic values those that are defined by means of desires that are independent of all

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<sup>62</sup> This includes more specific desires (e.g., for a Guinness) that depend on less specific desires (e.g., for a drink) and specifying mental states (e.g., the preference for Guinness to other drinks).

other desires.

Intrinsic desires can be acquired in different ways. First, the existence of certain desires might be entirely due to the occurrence of relevant feelings (or other kinds of evaluations). That I once have taken pleasure in drinking Guinness might be the sole reason for me to desire to drink a pint of it from time to time; or my enjoyment of my first holiday in *Puglia* might make me want to return there every summer<sup>63</sup>. Second, there might be innate desires, in particular those that are based on innate impulses. To be healthy, or not to be in pain, are perhaps examples of intrinsic values based on such innate desires. And curiosity might be a more cognitive case of an innate desire. Third, it seems to be possible that instrumental desires might get transformed into intrinsic ones, if the explanatory role of the grounding desires finally becomes unimportant. Consider the case of a boy whose father has taken him to all the games of the local football team since his early youth. Initially, the visits were perhaps only of instrumental value for the boy: because he didn't want to fail his father's enthusiasm; or because it meant for him an afternoon free of homework and with lots of ice-cream and entertainment. But later, the boy might have developed an interest in watching the games and supporting the local team that is strong and self-sufficient enough to survive the waning of all previously explanatory desires. That is, the initially instrumental desire got "internalised" as an intrinsic desire.

### ***Kinds of aesthetic experience***

Because of their intrinsic nature, the values of representations determining aesthetic values are necessarily linked to intrinsic desires. In what follows, I will concentrate on two important kinds of intrinsic desire by means of which two fundamental kinds of aesthetic value and experience can be individuated.

The first class of intrinsic desires comprises all those rational desires involved in aesthetic experiences that concern a particular kind of representation, specified by what and how it represents. Examples are the intrinsic desire to taste Guinness, to watch a sun-set, to read crime fiction, to see a nice wallpaper, to experience Tango, to daydream about living in Manhattan, to learn something, or to avoid the awareness of pain. While the last two desires might be innate, the others are definitely either feeling-based or due to "internalisation". Since most of these desires are rather egocentric and concern personal likings, the corresponding *aesthetic experiences* are best labelled *preferential*. Within the tradition, they have not always been taken to be aesthetic, mainly because of their high degree of subjectivity (cf. Levinson (1992a)). But as the discussion of disagreement has shown, no kind of aesthetic evaluation can claim full intersubjectivity. Thus it seems plausible to adopt a more comprehensive interpretation of the notion of aesthetic experiences.

The second class of intrinsic desires contains all those rational desires grounding aesthetic values that are quasi-indexical in nature. Quasi-indexical desires are desires that concern specific kinds of representa-

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<sup>63</sup> One might object that one starts to desire a particular entity that one has experienced as pleasurable only because one has the desire to experience pleasure; and hence, the new desire concerning that entity is instrumental, since it is dependent on the more general desire for pleasurable things. But the postulation of that latter desire is neither required, nor possible. For desires are desires for something pleasant by definition: what is desired necessarily pleases, if it comes into existence; otherwise, it would not be desired (cf. Stampe (1994): 247)).

tion in virtue of not only what and how they represent, but also their mental contexts. In particular, a large class of aesthetic experiences can be accounted for by reference to the intrinsic desire to be able to understand what one is aware of and cannot yet understand.

Each person has a certain subjective *view of the world*: her own overall conception of what the world is like. As a kind of theory (even if in a rather loose sense), it postulates the existence of certain entities: particulars, qualities, and facts that are composed of the former two. And it posits certain laws, conventions and rules that govern the interaction among these entities. In accordance with her world view, a person interprets, classifies and explains what she encounters, makes predictions, develops aims and aligns her decisions and actions. In other words, she applies her theory of the world to what she experiences and how she interacts with the world.

*Understanding* (in a very broad sense) covers one important class of cases of applying one's world view. To understand something that one is aware of is to make sense of it in the light of one's (not necessarily correct) world view. Understanding can take the form of a successful application of a certain classificatory scheme, the subsumption of a concrete case under a specific law, the gathering of new knowledge about facts that are in conformity with one's theory of the world, the recognition of already familiar facts, and so forth. It does not have to be restricted to the level of belief or knowledge: there are also cases of what one might call recognitional understanding (e.g., the recognition of facial expression, or the perceptual discernment of something as a table). As with any application of one's conception of the world, understanding does not presuppose or involve any revision of that subjective theory. It happens in a habitual - and often also (though not necessarily) immediate - way: comprehension requires a theory of the world as a means of explanation that one is used to applying.

As a consequence, only what matches or fits into one's view of the world can be completely understood. However, it happens often enough that one encounters something which reaches beyond the limits of applicability of one's theory of the world and which one thus cannot fully grasp. In such cases, a successful integration of the represented into one's world view requires a revision of that view. Such a *revision* consists in the alteration of the class of entities that are postulated as existing in the real world, or of the class of laws and conventions by which these are governed. For instance, a revision can involve the alteration of a particular law, the refinement of a classificatory scheme, the introduction of a new kind of entity, the opening up of a new epistemic perspective on the world (e.g., to learn to put oneself in the specific position of someone else may make it easier to understand him), or even the establishment of a completely new area of theorising. Since revision alters the modes in which we understand the world, it is a *meta-cognitive* process: it does not in itself concern facts in the world, but only facts about how to view the world.

The intrinsic desire mentioned is quasi-indexical because there are inter- and intrasubjective differences in mental contexts (i.e., world views and objects of awareness), and thus in what kinds of representation one is aware of without being able to fully include them in one's theory of the world. But it is to be expected that almost all human beings capable of aesthetic experiences possess this (or a very similar) desire. Furthermore, the desire is meta-cognitive, since it is linked to representations demanding revision. Hence, the corresponding *aesthetic experiences* are *meta-cognitive* as well<sup>64</sup>.

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64 According to Levinson (1992a), aesthetic experiences thus take into account how a representational content is conveyed.



The desire is dissatisfied by the occurrence of representations that reveal a lack of understanding and a need for revision, which is simply the case if one represents something that one cannot comprehend straight away. The results are negative aesthetic feelings. For instance, a person may feel frustration or disdain if she cannot make sense of a hermetic poem; or a student may despair because he is not able to grasp the fundamental ideas of the theory of relativity or quantum physics. Similar reactions are the result if we become aware of our limits of understanding (as in the case of the sublime)<sup>65</sup>.

By contrast, positive aesthetic feelings accompany representations that satisfy the meta-cognitive desire to be able to understand something previously incomprehensible. Since one might be able to understand something in two different ways, there are two different kinds of positive meta-cognitive aesthetic experience.

First, one is able to understand something if one possesses the ability to fit it into one's view of the world. Since the desire is relevant only with respect to cases in which one does not already have this capacity, it concerns the acquisition of that ability. The only way to acquire it is by undergoing representations that lead to the required revision of one's world view (e.g., to an alteration of the set of mental dispositions that embodies that view). My excitement in getting a grasp of a hermetic poem may thus be due to the fact that my representation of it involves the recognition of the closed system of metaphors employed by the poem as well as its inclusion in my view of the world. And many scientific discoveries presumably started off with the pleasurable recognition of a revisionary idea as the solution to a previously unsolved problem.

But being able to understand something does not require the actual acquisition of the corresponding ability. For, second, it is sufficient that there is the actual (or real) possibility that one can revise one's world view and comprehend the respective subject matter. Typically, aesthetic experiences of this kind involve the awareness of how to bring about the necessary revision. Thus to get an idea of the possibilities of a new medium or style of expression is sufficient to feel excited and stimulated. And to realise that discrete energy levels will provide a solution for many problems related to the mechanics of particles can offer deep satisfaction, even if one does not actually think the idea through.

The class of experiences linked to the meta-cognitive desire covers a wide range of aesthetic experiences, in particular all those opening up new perspectives on objects. It can also explain why indifference towards objects is linked to the fact that they are aesthetically not very appealing. Great works of art, or amazing natural phenomena or landscapes, hardly ever become boring, because they have the capacity to open up new perspectives (on themselves or on the world in general) even after being experienced for the hundredth time. By contrast, many objects (eventually) leave us indifferent (even if they initially capture our attention because of some kind of unusualness) because they do not pose a (constant) challenge to our world views.

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<sup>65</sup> Other examples are feelings of disturbance, dizziness or disorientation. Levinson (1992b) suggests that they nevertheless constitute positive aesthetic values. In fact, there might be a case for the claim that - in the case of meta-cognitive aesthetic experiences - both positive and negative feelings indicate worthwhile experiences and positive aesthetic merits, while only the lack of aesthetic feeling (i.e., indifference, boredom or lack of challenge) implies an unrewarding experience and a negative aesthetic value. Note that this is compatible with the existence of aesthetic defects (i.e., qualities that are responsible for an object's being unchallenging).

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