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# PRACTICAL BEAUTY

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*For Dad.*

# PRACTICAL BEAUTY

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

# PRACTICAL BEAUTY

The title, *Practical Beauty*, will suggest a tension to most philosophers today. One of the few thoughts we tend to share is that our enjoyment of beauty is of a disinterested nature; i.e., whatever else it is, it is not practical. While I wholeheartedly agree, I nonetheless want to defend the claim that aesthetic activity is of enormous practical value in our pursuit of living a moral life. Such is the thesis of this dissertation. While judgments realizing moral value are essentially practical and judgments articulating appreciation of aesthetic value are essentially disinterested, these distinct forms of judgment nonetheless enjoy a unity in virtue of their common reliance on a logically prior moment of thought. This moment is our ongoing struggle to make sense of our shared human nature and to feel at home in it, one struggle severally manifested in moral and aesthetic judgment.

## §1. A LOST TRADITION

Truth, goodness, and beauty have enjoyed traditional associations of varying strength throughout millennia of Western thought. For contemporary philosophy, that association has mostly atrophied to little more than an occasionally useful metaphor. I think it was a mistake to deviate from this tradition. Accordingly, this dissertation takes a step toward recovering a version of the traditional thought palatable to contemporary philosophy by offering an account of a formal unity between two of these cardinal values—goodness and beauty. While this dissertation is in no way a work of historical scholarship, beginning with a whirlwind history of this tradition might nonetheless benefit us. Let us mention four highlights along the way, then, each of which teach us truths some version of which any adequate account will need to preserve.

We begin with one of the great foundational texts in the Western tradition, Plato's *Symposium*. There, in Socrates' recital of Diotima's speech, one wrung near the top of the ladder of ascent to beholding beauty itself is the beholding of 'beauty in human behavior'.[1] And once one's eyes have been opened to beauty itself, a life organized around 'contemplating it as it should be contemplated' and 'spending time in its company' becomes conducive to 'real goodness', earning the friendship of the gods.[2] When it comes to the ancient Greeks generally, we find encoded in their language one remarkable manifestation that goodness and beauty were understood to bear some great degree of unity. The Greek's '*kalon*' gives translators significant heartburn because it seems to straddle moral and aesthetic senses in ways that our contemporary separation of ethics and aesthetics into autonomous inquiries seems compelled to regard as confused. (We will shortly see that this autonomy is less observed outside the walls of the academy.) For example, Aristotle tells us virtue aims at the *kalon*.[3] But if his '*kalon*' is synonymous with our 'beautiful', it becomes quite difficult to make sense of Aristotle's claim in a way that does not either place virtue's aim at the *kalon* in competition with its aim at the good or, alternatively, in a way that reduces beauty to some merely instrumental role. One legitimate philosophical question that might be prompted by this is, as Elizabeth Asmis asks it, "did the Greek philosophers recognize something about the conjunction of beauty and moral goodness that deserves to be widely recognized even now?"[4] I suspect they did, and I hope to help us come to recognize it for ourselves in this dissertation.

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1 Plato, *Symposium and Phaedrus*, trans. Thomas Griffith (New York: Everyman's Library, 2001) 211c.
2 Plato, *Symposium*, 212a.
3 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin, 2nd edition (Indianapolis, Ind: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1999) 1115b12-13.
4 Elizabeth Asmis, "Beauty, Harmony, and the Good," *Classical Philology* 105, no. 4 (October 2010): i. This is a special edition of the journal dedicated in large part to the aforementioned heartburn.

In Scholastic thought, goodness and beauty were both transcendental properties of being.[5] The latter are properties some degree of which everything has simply in virtue of existing; they are not 'properties' in the sense of descriptive predicates, but instead characterize some manner in which an object has the properties it has. Everything that exists ultimately owes its being to the perfect being and imperfectly manifests these perfections of being to the extent that it participates in the nature of the divine. Though the transcendentals are coextensive with being, each has a distinct sense, a discreet, discernable sort of perfection. Aquinas distinguishes the senses of the two of interest to us in this way:

> [T]he beautiful and the good are the same in any subject. For they are grounded in the same thing, namely form, and this is why the good is esteemed as beautiful. They are different notions nonetheless. For the good, which is what all things desire, properly has to do with appetite. So, too, it has to do with the idea of an end; for appetite is a kind of movement toward an end. Beauty, however, has to do with knowledge, for we call those things beautiful which please us when they are seen.[6]

In a related passage, he tells us that "'good' and 'beautiful' have the same reference but differ in meaning." This difference is clearly recognized insofar as one must acquire or achieve the object of desire to bring appetite for the good to rest. Beauty, however, "refers to something the mere apprehension of which gives pleasure," and so refers to "that in which appetite comes to rest through contemplation or knowledge".[7] This characterization of judgments of the good as fundamentally practical in nature while judgments of beauty are fundamentally spectatorial, contemplative, and, in Kant's sense, disinterested is one we will hold on to. But there is a more interesting feature of transcendental properties of being that we will try to retain in a way that is far less metaphysically burdensome.[8] We, too, will say that neither 'good' nor 'beautiful' in their strict

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[5] The beautiful was a late-comer to explicit discussion of the transcendentals in Scholastic thought. See the second chapter of Umberto Eco's *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas* for an account of its tardiness to Scholastic thought as well as an argument that it had already been implicitly present as a transcendental before it came to receive direct attention.

[6] *Summa Theologica*, I-II, 5, 4. Eco's translation, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas,* 35.

[7] *ST*, I-II, 27, 1 ad 3. Eco's translation, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas,* 36.

[8] "Less burdensome" when it comes to what is *required.* Our account by no means rules theism out.

senses are descriptive predicates; we, too, will say that they are rather grounded in form, a manner in which the properties of an object hold together in a way making it intelligible as the kind of thing it is. Rather than meditation on a divine nature, however, we will discover these formal properties through an extension of Fregean approaches to thought and language.

By the time of Hume, these values maintain a unity, but it is a worldly unity rather than a divine unity. Goodness and beauty are nowhere to be found but in our own breasts. Both are new creations raised by the productive power of taste gilding and staining nature instead of participations in the Creator's nature.[9]

> Morals and criticism are not so properly objects of the understanding as of taste and sentiment. Beauty, whether moral or natural, is felt, more properly than perceived. Or if we reason concerning it, and endeavour to fix its standard, we regard a new fact, to wit, the general taste of mankind, or some such fact, which may be the object of reasoning and enquiry.[10]

Hume does speak of the divine as well. Just a few lines after this passage he tells us the general taste of mankind is what it is because of the "Supreme Will, which bestowed on each being its peculiar nature." It is easy enough to recognize this as lip-service to the tradition under the pressures of his day. Regardless, the latter remark contains an indication of a quite deep alteration in the tradition by Hume's time. While goodness and beauty are unified in human sentiment, it could have been otherwise. Nothing intrinsic to the nature of each unifies them, let alone their both being participations in a single divine nature. It is only a matter of fact, whether one designed by a creator or otherwise established. As for what we will preserve some variation of in our account, we find little help from Hume when it comes to making sense of goodness and beauty as formal concepts. On the other hand, we will find he provides great guidance when turning our attention in the final

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[9] I here borrow some familiar language from Hume. David Hume, *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch, 3rd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975) 294/SBN 246.

[10] Hume, *Enquiries*, 165/SBN 132.

chapter to the particular descriptive moral and aesthetic predicates we use in articulating our judgments of goodness and beauty, especially the latter. It is by the development of language through critical discourse—whether of a professional or everyday sort—that certain properties are "naturally fitted" to evoke certain responses.[11]

The tradition comes to an end with Kant. While the two things that fill him with may be are the starry heavens above and the moral law within, his accounts of aesthetic and moral judgment lay the poison for maintaining a unity of goodness and beauty. For all the wonderful richness of his accounts, what the tradition moved forward with was simply this: moral judgment is objective while judgments of beauty are subjective; the study of each should be diligently separated. Kant himself can be recognized to make efforts to preserve some sort of significant relation nonetheless. We see this in, for example, his claims that practicing aesthetic judgment can help us become more sensitive to the pleasures generated by reason. While the pleasure in beauty is a disinterested pleasure of reflective judgment, Kant thinks we can hope that increased sensitivity to *it* can help us increase sensitivity to pleasures generated by reason *generally* such that we might become more easily motivated by the interested pleasure in the good.[12] Perhaps the most remarkable example, though, is Kant's claim that beauty is the symbol of morality, a claim we will return to multiple times in the dissertation. But even here, the reason beauty can only be a *symbol* of morality for Kant ultimately comes down to the subjectivity of the former versus the objectivity of the latter.[13] In this dissertation, we will rely on Kant a fair deal to help us analyze moral and aesthetic judgment. But by abandoning his metaphysics for a form of neo-Aristotelian naturalism, we will be able to recover a

[11] The expression "naturally fitted" comes from "Of the Standard of Taste."
[12] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. Paul Guyer, The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000) §60.
[13] Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, §59.

way to understand these forms of judgment to both allow for some measure of objectivity while indicating an important unity among the values they judge.

## §2. Wisdom of Ordinary Life & Language

Interestingly, what the tradition has abandoned, ordinary language not only appears to maintain, it further appears to embed hints toward how we might recover that lost tradition in present times. The account I will develop in this dissertation is an attempt to take the hints. There are two main observations to make on this point.

The first observation regards just how naturally moral and aesthetic language cross-pollinate. We readily use language whose main sense lies in one domain to communicate judgments concerning the other. We praise an artwork for its honesty or courage; we demean it for its pretentiousness or decadence or sentimentality. We speak of the beauty of a particular action or of a life well lived. 'Ugly' is a paradigmatic term of aesthetic demerit, but less than a moment's reflection recalls its moral sense. One will find this ordering reflected in the numbering of its definitions in dictionaries. More specific aesthetic language doubles as moral language as well. On occasion we might appraise an action as graceful on straightforwardly aesthetic grounds, such as when the appearance of its movements flow smoothly. But in other circumstances we borrow the term to give adequate voice to a genuinely moral sentiment, say, to describe another's response to a slight that unostentatiously and at once acknowledges hurt while extending forgiveness.

The second observation—an even more telling one, I believe—discovers a feature shared between moral and aesthetic discourse of the ordinary, mundane sort: that explicit talk about the human—'what it means to be human', 'human nature', 'the human condition', &c.—naturally and commonly permeates these discourses. It is in talk about art and talk about morality where one

most finds public engagement on matters of human nature and what it means for such a nature to be our own. I wish to emphasize that I am not presently referring to 'high' art and moral philosophy, though of course such talk is ubiquitous there, too. I am rather thinking of the kinds of conversations among friends you might overhear as they chat over drinks about the movie they just saw. Explicit talk of the human even makes frequent appearance in the promotional materials one finds for the latest drama "in theaters near you", the blurbs on the back of the latest novels, and even the content of some of the day's most popular songs. Recommendations based on a work's tendency to provoke reflection on our shared nature are common.

Take some examples. The details are not important. I anticipate the reader will find the sorts of claims within them to be quite familiar, and *that* is the point. Consider this article in *The Atlantic* commemorating Nora Ephron, writer and producer of some of the most popular romantic comedies of the last generation, upon her passing: "We admired especially her dialogue, particularly in her movies, which we grew up on: her humor, the essential truths she revealed about human nature, her characterizations, warm at the same time sharp and incisive."[14] Martha Lavey, artistic director of Chicago's Steppenwolf Theater, wrote in her letter regarding her 2007-2008 production of Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*: "The narrative that Miller provides in his asides in the text illuminates not only 17th century Salem but provides a wonderfully keen insight into human nature. [...] The enduring value of Miller's play is its deep wisdom about human nature."[15] Speaking of Alice Munro upon her 2013 award of the Nobel Prize in Literature, Lynn Neary remarked, "In a really short

[14] Esther Zuckerman and Jen Doll, "Words as Truth: The Eminently Quotable Nora Ephron," *The Atlantic*, June 27, 2012, https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2012/06/words-truth-eminently-quotable-nora-ephron/326501/.

[15] Martha Lavey, "Letter from the Artistic Director on *The Crucible*," accessed June 15, 2018, https://www.steppenwolf.org/articles/letter-from-the-artistic-director-on-the-crucible/.

space of time, she can provide a fully realized story that provides remarkable insight into human beings, their shortcomings, their complexities, their loves, their lives."[16]

On the moral side of our second observation, also think of conversations among friends trying to work out how one should act given some undesirable circumstances she finds herself in or perhaps trying to resolve how she feels about how she actually did act in the past. Explicit talk of the human not uncommonly arises here, too. For good and for ill, a reminder that tendency toward some behavior 'is only human' can often ameliorate our discomfort with acting accordingly. When an evil challenges our capacity to make sense of its perpetrator, we feel compelled to castigate the act as 'inhuman'.

Quite naturally, or so it seems, we sense that beauty and morality are somehow reflective of each other such that our concepts for one are apt to help us understand the other; quite naturally, or so it seems, we sense that both aesthetic and moral value have some inescapable connection to human nature, that those values are what they are because we are what we are. John Gardner once wrote, "Art rediscovers, generation by generation, what is necessary to humanness."[17] If we can make sense of this in a way bearing some literal truth, as I think we can, and we take our fundamental moral concept to be that of the human, as I think we should, the insight and importance of this claim cannot be overstated. One could reasonably understand this dissertation as an attempt to capture this insight and account for it.

## §3. Natural Beauty

[16] Lynn Neary, "Canadian Alice Munro Wins Nobel's Literature Prize," interview by David Greene, *Morning Edition*, NPR, October 10, 2013, https://www.npr.org/2013/10/10/231352197/canadian-alice-munro-wins-nobel-s-literature-prize.

[17] John Gardner, *On Moral Fiction*, (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2009) 6.

I take it that our responsiveness to natural beauty is a given. Evolutionary biology rather than philosophy is likely the best place to look for explanation on this point. If we were not in fact naturally responsive to various features in nature as we are, then we would not have the capacities that can get trained up into the sort of refined responsiveness that we enjoy in our engagement with the liberal arts. As the latter is one of the privileges of the rational animal, one can see in it at least a small analogy to language. Without some physical features we possess and certain achievements of intelligence, we never would have come to infuse our noise-making with such rich varieties of meaning. We will say a little about how our natural responsiveness to cheerful sounds and autumn leaves grows into what later draws us to concert halls and art galleries in Chapter Five, but that is all. The beauty of concern to us is the beauty rational animals infuse with rich varieties of meaning and create to have such meaning.

## §4. Art & Beauty

In this dissertation on beauty, I will talk quite a lot about art. This could be taken to suggest that I think beauty is somehow constitutive of what art is. I do not. Modernism proved otherwise. It is important, however, to further clarify, as a lot changes depending on whether we are thinking of beauty as an ordinary descriptive concept—even a 'thin' one—or a formal concept.

Sarah Thornton reports an amusing scene from her interviews with art students at the California Institute of the Arts, which could be taken to illustrate a prevailing attitude toward beauty in art among those who are anything more than the most casual observers:

> After [the instructor] took his leave, I explored another word: *creativity*. The students wrinkled their noses in disgust. "Creative is definitely a dirty word," sneered one of them. "You would *not* want to say it in Post-Studio. People would Gag! It's almost as embarrassing as *beautiful*..."[18]

[18] Sarah. Thornton, *Seven Days in the Art World*, 1st ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008) 63.

I certainly have no desire to make anyone wrinkle their nose, let alone gag. But such a response only makes sense if we are taking 'beautiful' to be a thin aesthetic predicate, one whose synonyms would be 'pretty' and 'lovely' and the like. To be sure, I have no objection to using the word this way; that would be bizarre given that we unproblematically use it this way with great frequency in everyday life. I take it this is the sense the students had in mind, and the enthusiasm with which they react against the idea that art should be beautiful likely gains some energy in their affirmation of the new possibilities opened to them by the revolutions in modernism. We have other legitimate uses of 'beautiful' as well. While emotive theories of beauty are false, we do sometimes use 'beautiful' purely emotively. I find no fault in this either.

Neither of these senses is the one that is the focus of the dissertation. The sense we will develop is one that characterizes a relation of appreciation between subject and object and, implicitly, other subjects to whom I might communicate my judgment. To say that something is beautiful is to indicate that we find it worthy of such contemplation for its own sake, regardless of any appeal it may also have to what interests and idiosyncrasies any one of us has. The term 'beauty' alone is descriptively void. Description enters when we characterize or try to capture our response to the object. This use of 'beautiful' often gets conflated with the first, descriptive sense above. While an object may be beautiful in virtue of its prettiness and loveliness, objects can also be beautiful in virtue of being somber or haunting or powerful or aggressive. In this sense that we will develop over the course of the dissertation, I do not think there is anything to make anyone wrinkle their nose.[19]

## §5. Overview

[19] The students said that art should have 'criticality' rather than 'beauty'. When saying what they mean by 'criticality', their explanations gesture in the direction of beauty as a formal concept.

So how shall we proceed?

The first and necessary step toward recovery of the tradition is to abandon the assumption that the important analogy between our relations to these values will be symmetrical. The most common comparison focuses on the judgmental activity of the spectator of a good action on one side and that of the spectator of a beautiful object on the other. Less commonly, we also find value theorists comparing the agent of moral action on one side with the agent, i.e., the artist, on the other. While it is natural to reach for things of a similar form when looking for unity, we find a better account by looking to the asymmetrical alignment of the analogy, to the agent of moral action and the spectator of beauty. Chapter One advocates this realignment. We will consider Sentimentalism as the example of a tendency toward treating a spectator-spectator alignment as of primary interest and Nietzsche as the example of a tendency toward treating an agent-agent alignment as primary. Criticism of each will unearth advantages of looking to the agent-spectator alignment instead.

How can there be a substantial unity to moral and aesthetic value when the judgments of each are different in kind: productive of its object in one and receptive to its object in the other? The answer requires making sense of an 'earlier moment' in thought logically prior to the approbation internal to either form of judgment. This moment must share substantial elements of both matter and form. The shared matter is the human entity, and as self-consciousness' initial apprehension of this takes a form requiring interpretation for its completion, it can enter into both interested and disinterested activities furthering self-understanding. Developing an account of shared sense-making activity prior to articulation in either form has the further benefit of giving insight into another tendency common throughout our tradition, that of taking the experience of beauty as giving some glimpse of what true happiness is even though happiness is understood practically, as something achieved through living well.

Chapter Two demonstrates how Neo-Aristotelian naturalism provides an appropriate metaphysics for the account I develop. A metaphysics of this kind has several advantages. First, it locates the specifically human as the foundational normative concept upon which moral value is upheld. To understand the manner in which this occurs, we must consider both the form of moral thought as a whole—how we get from self-understanding to choosing to act in a way that counts as praiseworthy—and the form of species concepts, insofar as self-understanding is in part understanding the human, itself a species concept. Each inquiry constitutes a further advantage. As we try to figure out what manner of living best contributes to the flourishing of ourselves as one human among others, we must bear in mind that some of the knowledge of the human we have to work with is given through our self-consciousness of ourselves as such a being. This is not a concept standing entirely independent of ourselves awaiting discovery, but one where self-understanding and the public discourse pertaining to it partially constitutes what values are potentially realizable. By explaining Goodness and Beauty via forms of judgmental activity taking them as their object, we can recast ancient ideas of 'transcendental properties' with formal concepts. 'Good' and 'Beautiful' are not descriptive properties on a par with 'fast' and 'red'. They instead characterize the way the subject relates herself to the world, a relation uptake of which has approbation internal to it.

Chapter Three explicates how locating thought about the human as the basis of moral value through this Neo-Aristotelian approach at once gives us an account where much of the same activity in which we struggle to make sense of ourselves as human can also be articulated through a different form of judgment that upholds aesthetic value. Anscombe argues that nothing in the content of thought distinguishes it as practical or theoretical. I adopt her argument and consider how we might say the same about practical and aesthetic thought. Insofar as aesthetic experience does not involve neatly bounded contents in a form apt to be a premise in a practical syllogism, we must look for a

different kind of interaction. We find it in narrative. The narrative understanding we give to our lives is a crucial element in practical reason. In focusing attention on selected details concerning how we reached our present moment of decision and in interpreting those details in a way that makes sense, such understanding determines what we take our potential next move to mean and so what reason there might be in favor of taking that course of action. While narrativizing need not be an aesthetic activity in itself, it remains that happiness requires we are able to find our way to affirming this particular instance of a human life we cannot help but realize. Happiness, we could say, requires that our practical lives be productive of something in some sense beautiful.

Chapter Four takes up the task of domesticating the theoretical work of previous chapters, revealing how it is at play throughout the quite mundane goings on of everyday life. The struggles for self-understanding as one human among others situated in a particular moment in time is essential to adequately answering the grandest questions of life, but they are no less pertinent to how we behave ourselves shopping at the grocery store. We are always interpreting ourselves and our circumstances as we go about our business and our interpretations alter our perceptions. The latter claim is apt to invite worries of relativism. To allay any such concern, we turn to lessons we learn from attending to the various phenomena of seeing aspects. These lessons reveal both the potential for interpretation-sensitive perceptions to maintain their capacity for objective apprehension of the world, but also remind us of the necessity to be mindful of our vulnerability to self-deception.

Chapter Five argues that an advantage of the foregoing neo-Aristotelian approach to moral and aesthetic value generally is that it provides the basis for a defense of realism regarding a range of particular moral and aesthetic property ascriptions. Human nature and the interests we characteristically have are sufficiently stable over time that critical discourse seeking agreement on appropriate descriptions of instances of moral and aesthetic value will hone a settled sense whose referent is immediately perceptible in the manner of other material properties. A full account of the

meaning of any property term in this range will require a genealogical story of its development dependent upon the forms of judgmental activity appropriate to its domain of value, though a justified use of the term no longer need take that form on a particular occasion. The naturalism of our account combined with the linguistic practices educating the innate responsiveness we find ourselves with—i.e., being struck by autumn leaves, the songs of birds, &c.—explains why there need be no worry of 'queerness' in Mackie's sense about such properties. Indeed, given the practices and discourse we must engage in as we endeavor to make sense of ourselves as one human among others, we should expect discoveries of such values to occur.

Chapter One

# ETHICS & AESTHETICS; AGENTS & SPECTATORS

Contemporary philosophy has for a couple centuries now increasingly distanced itself from the once traditional association of the Beautiful and the Good, resulting in aesthetics and ethics being treated as mostly autonomous fields. One major stumbling block that now impedes philosophers from productively thinking of aesthetic and moral judgment together is our tendency to misalign the primary analogy in the judging subject's relation to her object across each of these normative domains. When one comes across an aesthetician or moral philosopher commenting on some analogy between judgments in each area of life, the comparison is nearly always—for apparent if misleading reasons—between judgments made as a spectator in each: I express my critical view of a beautiful object with which I am confronted; I express my moral evaluation of an action I happen to witness or the idea of a possible action I contemplate. The less considered comparison, equally deceptive at first glance, would align the aesthetic and moral activity of an agent: I paint or perform or write something beautiful; I do something praiseworthy.

In this chapter, I aim to demonstrate that this alignment misconstrues our relation to the world as judging subjects when we engage in aesthetic and morally significant activity. The proper alignment is that of the spectator of manifestations of beauty with the agent of moral action.[1] Making this correction enables us to better see a continuity and even a unity to these domains of life. To begin, I will seek to establish an initial plausibility for the proposed realignment with a quick

[1] There is no interesting unity between the derivative forms on this view.

argument regarding which kind of judgment is primary and which derivative in each domain. We will then proceed to examine the misleading appearances that make a spectator-spectator alignment seem so natural. One familiar school of thought that mostly accepted this structure was Sentimentalism. While concern with the agent-agent has been less common, Nietzsche, in some moods, provides an example. For expository rather than historical purposes, I will frame these sections of the paper by putting each party in conversation with Kant, who I think provides some valuable insights for correcting the misalignment. I should emphasize that I will always use Kant as a means, and never as an end in himself.

In the second half of the paper, §§5-9, I provide what we might call a philosophical cartography. It is a landscape drawn with both commonplace and controversial claims. For the purposes of this chapter, I will pass over many of the latter without earning the right to them. Later chapters, I hope, will provide the called for justification, while the present chapter orients the reader in such a way that she can more readily locate the importance of those arguments for the bigger picture when we reach them. At the same time, I also hope to reveal both an attractiveness and at last a perhaps unsuspected familiarity to the landscape, offering these features as themselves contributing a supporting argument.

## §1. Where We Begin

Whether we are considering aesthetic or moral judgment, it seems clear that its agent and spectator modes are not isolated from each other. Nonetheless, for each case there does also seem to be a primary and a derivative mode.

Let's examine aesthetic judgment first, as it provides the easier case. For aesthetic judgment, the spectator mode is primary. There are at least three simple points that suggest this. First, in the production of a work of art, artists rely on taking a step back to observe and submit their progress to

aesthetic assessment, searching for any false shades or notes or connotations in need of correction.[2] Second, our developmental experience attests to the primacy of the spectatorial in aesthetic experience. A refined aesthetic vocabulary and sensitivity could never develop without our natural responsiveness to sunsets and flowers, cheery or comforting sounds, &c.[3] Understanding that one has control over objects that one might respond to aesthetically and skill over that control develops later. And it is okay if it does not develop much at all. This is the third point. We are not inclined to treat someone as defective or objectionably lacking if they have no particular talent for producing beautiful objects. Contrariwise, if that same person were always left unmoved by sunsets and starry nights, the rustle of leaves in the breeze and the songs of birds, we would think something amiss.

Corresponding points suggest that it is the practical mode that is primary in moral judgment. Before considering these points, it seems noteworthy in itself that the practical and the spectatorial are far less easily isolated in moral than in aesthetic judgment. One result of this is our need to juggle the first and second points here. There certainly is a sense in which we learn what to do morally speaking by standing back and observing and evaluating the actions of others; its importance for moral education could hardly be greater. It is the correspondent of the second point above—our developmental experience—that reveals why this remains secondary to the practical. Intentional actions are formally distinct events in the world. Before an action can be evaluated as such, we must learn what an action is. We only fully understand that some movement in the world is goal directed self-movement once we realize our own self-conscious capacity to exert our causal efficacy in pursuit of an end. So, as important as moral evaluation from the place of a spectator is, it is a perspective that cannot be taken up without having already judged practically; the

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[2] This way of putting the point too easily invites caricature, so let me add a word of clarification. For the mature artist, the spectatorial guidance is taken up into the production process in interesting ways worthy of extensive examination itself. A Hegelian might easiest begin by speaking of its being *aufgehoben* or sublated. There is one moment, however, when the spectatorial primacy plays out more noticeably: the artist's determination of whether to consider it finished or to carry on revising.

[3] Discussed at greater length in Chapter 5 Section 2.

spectator's moral judgment is guided by the agent's moral judgment in inverse manner to which the agent is guided by the spectator in artistic production. Likewise, any refinement our evaluations of perceived intentional actions may undergo must follow on, not precede, maturation of our ability to act.

The correspondent of the third point similarly points to the primacy of the practical in moral judgment, but also requires a little extra care. There will be little controversy regarding the claim that the primary normative requirement in ethics is that we behave ourselves. But we cannot be so lax regarding the secondary mode; an inability to accurately appraise the moral value of actions we perceive belies a substantial problem. The reason why this is so, though, again refers us back to the primacy of action: unlike with the familiar artistically incompetent but critically keen art connoisseur, it strikes me as difficult to so much as imagine—*really* imagine, not in the philosopher's sense of 'imagine,' which cheats—someone incompetent in evaluating others' actions and yet consistently skilled at setting moral ends for herself. But if we go ahead and philosopher-imagine such a case anyway, I think the common intuition would be that we could tolerate poor evaluative skill in aesthetics in a way that we could not tolerate immoral actions.

All I have offered in this section are a few quick reasons why one might think the spectator mode is primary for aesthetics and the agent mode is primary for ethics. My purpose in doing so is to give the reader some basis upon which to grant my proposal of realignment an initial plausibility. By way of beginning a substantive defense of it, I will argue that both the spectator-spectator and the agent-agent alignment face difficulties that stem from their failure to align the primary modes across each form of judgment.

## §2. The Spectator-Spectator Misalignment

Myriad moral and aesthetic theories hold some version of the spectator-spectator alignment. Sentimentalism provides one prominent example. However Kant himself might have thought of such matters, his criticism of Sentimentalism provides helpful insights that aide in recognizing the alignment of moral agent with aesthetic spectator to instead be primary. One feature that accounts for this helpfulness is Kant's sensitivity to just how attractive are the appearances to which Sentimentalists are responding and to how deep the illusion runs. He came to call this illusion a 'subreptive illusion' and found it worthy of analysis. We can most quickly reach the insights I want to gleam from Kant by considering some of his remarks on the etiology of pleasure in aesthetic and moral judgment.

Pleasure, equally essential to Kant and to sentimentalists, plays a very different role in the etiology of moral action for them. Front and center in any Philosophy 101 description of sentimentalist thought will be the pleasure found in sentiments of approbation, whether of a beautiful object or of a praiseworthy action. We call that good which elicits a feeling of approbation in us, especially in moments of cool reflection; likewise, we call that beautiful which elicits a feeling of approbation in us, so long as it does not do so through some bias or idiosyncrasy of our own. For sentimentalists, if we take the matter of fact given by our feeling of approbation as our starting point and can proceed to discern what it is about that object or action that gains our approval, we have thereby determined what accounts for its beauty or goodness. Kant finds this method ill-conceived, its flaw being revealed in concept of morality itself. We take morality to depend upon our being free as rational agents. Anything determined by some material effect such as pleasure will be subject to natural law. But *moral* law, as a law of freedom, cannot be constrained by the laws of the empirical realm. To maintain morality's purity from empirical contamination, Kant urges we must recognize reason to be practical of itself, to be causally efficacious.

For Kant, Sentimentalists erred in thinking that the prospect of pleasure in moral action moved us to determine ourselves to act accordingly rather than recognizing that pleasure is instead the subjective effect of pure reason determining our will to act morally. Their mistake, he writes, is an understandable sort of "optical illusion in the self-consciousness of what one *does*,"—referring by "what one does" to producing a pleasure through reason determining the will, i.e., not an intentional sense of 'does'—mistaking it for a passion, a feeling experienced in response to objects external to reason.[4] Pleasure is inescapably empirical and inescapably subjective; if it at all contributes to the grounding of our causal efficacy, that efficacy will then be in accordance with natural law, not moral law. For Kant, whether we act from inclination or from duty, there will always be both an impulse to action (i.e., causal efficacy) and a pleasure, but in the former, pleasure impels the action while in the latter, reason itself impels the action which determination at once grounds pleasure.[5] The practical element of sentimentalism's moral philosophy, by contrast, is found in the account it gives of how a spectator's pleasure comes to be harnessed as causally efficacious in producing action. One example of this sort of move would be to argue that we desire to be approved of in the manner in which we approve of those whose actions we take pleasure in witnessing and act according to that desire.

In a less friendly moment, Kant characterizes the sentimentalist's mistake as a "sophistical trifling" in which they "[make] the effect its own cause."[6] Elsewhere, he displays the same impatience while noting there are certainly worse mistakes to be made:

> On the other hand, moral feeling – this supposed special sense, (however superficial the appeal to it is, inasmuch as those who cannot *think* believe they can help themselves out by feeling in what has to do merely with universal law, and however little feelings which by nature differ infinitely from one another in degree, can furnish a uniform standard of good and evil, and one cannot judge validly for others by means of one's feeling) – nevertheless

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[4] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, in *Practical Philosophy*, ed. and trans. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 5:116. All quotations from Kant's practical works from this edition.
[5] *Ibid.*
[6] Kant, "On the Common Saying: That May be Correct in Theory, but It is of No Use in Practice," 8:284.

> remains closer to morality and its dignity inasmuch as it shows virtue the honor of ascribing to her *immediately* the delight and esteem we have for her and does not, as it were, tell her to her face that it is not her beauty but only our advantage that attaches us to her.[7]

He joins Hutcheson here in heaping scorn on egoism and any other moral theory requiring an awareness of advantage to mediate pleasurable experience of the moral. Sentimentalism does well, he thinks, in recognizing that virtue's effect must be immediate, but they err by regarding its immediate relation to be to our *delight* and not to our *will*.

Kant's resort to speaking of the 'beauty of virtue' in this passage is staggering. His discussion of beauty as the symbol of morality has deservedly received a great amount of attention; but this simpler claim offered in a moment of simultaneous rebuke and praise of sentimentalism itself deserves more attention. That virtue itself—whatever that is—is beautiful is of course an ancient thought. Why is it so staggering, then, when it comes from the pen of Kant?

Virtue is ultimately a practical concept. Judgments of beauty, for Kant, are *disinterested*. And there's the rub: an 'interest' for Kant is "that by which reason becomes practical."[8] Whatever recognizing the beauty of virtue amounts to for Kant, it certainly cannot be acting virtuously. The prospect of pleasure, for Kant, is always an interest of ours given the animal part of us rational animals; by its very nature it pertains to the sensible in a way that its efficacy poses no unique mystery. Morality, in contrast, issues from reason. Kant does agree with the sentimentalists that pleasure always accompanies moral action; but this is where they go wrong and make the effect its own cause. We experience pleasure because reason has determined our will directly—this is a peculiar feature of combining rationality and animal finitude—we do not determine our will *in response* to a pleasure. The causality of reason produces action and pleasure at once. But causality is everywhere governed by law.[9] Whenever we act, insofar as we are having an effect in the world, our

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[7] Kant, "Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals," 4:443.
[8] Kant, "Groundwork," 4:460 fn.
[9] Kant, 2nd *Critique*, 5:55.

actions, then, must be law governed. Anywhere pleasure is a causal antecedent in our action, as we have seen, we act according to natural law. If our action is to accord with moral law—as any virtuous action must—reason itself rather than pleasure must be the cause. To translate an earlier point regarding action into this terminology, we can say that non-moral action of any sort is causally efficacious through the interest given to practical reason by inclination, by our animal drives toward pleasure; moral action differs insofar as reason directly generates an interest for the subject, which activity is at once the cause of her pleasure.

This is not the only causality of reason for Kant. Our disinterested pleasure taken in the beautiful is also an immediate effect of the activity of reason. In fact, one way of characterizing what it means to say our pleasure in beauty is 'disinterested' would be to say that the causality of reason is put to no effect other than the pleasure itself. There is no further determination of the will. All that reason bids us do is continue in the very judging activity that is pleasing in the first place, i.e., to carry on in our contemplation of beauty. When Kant compliments the sentimentalists, it is because they attribute our pleasure in the good to thought of virtue herself. They do not make the mistake of requiring a utilitarian or hedonist or egoist calculation to occasion the pleasure. But insofar as the immediate relation the activity of reason has is to our delight and not to our will, they still unacceptably characterize our response to virtue as though it were to the starry heavens above rather than to the moral law within.

The presence of pleasure in each form of judgment gives an appearance that quite naturally leads us down the path of sentimentalism—our paradigm case of treating the analogous cases for moral and aesthetic judgment being the spectator in each. But this is a mistake that fails to recognize the *primary* activity of reason in each case, that of sending us forth to realize value in the moral case, versus in the aesthetic case, stilling us before value we have encountered.

## §3. The Agent-Agent Misalignment

Nietzsche—oddly—understands this aspect of Kant's thought *after* Schopenhauer translates it to him, yet thinks Schopenhauer is mistaken to think he is following Kant. Whomever's idea Nietzsche takes it to be, he finds it an occasion for ridicule. That very ridicule strikes me as a rather compelling portrayal of precisely what is so attractive in Kant's thought. We will use it to identify the problem with the complementary analogy to sentimentalism, that of agent with agent.

Nietzsche took the source of Kant's mistake to be that he considered beauty from the spectator's perspective rather than from that of the artist. Note that this is equally a manifestation of the common misalignment, only now motivated from the practical side. Kant was quite right here, as to consider beauty from the practical side is not to consider art, but to consider virtue, but that is a claim that still lies far ahead of us. For now, let's start on a sympathetic note: at least part of what motivated Nietzsche's reluctance to take Kant entirely seriously regarding matters of beauty is Kant's well known lack of aesthetic sensitivity in the arts. This is reasonable occasion for pause, I think. With Schopenhauer however, no such worry arises, and so Nietzsche accordingly does not dismiss him so quickly. In his greater willingness to extend charity, he was aghast at Schopenhauer's uptake of Kant's notion that our pleasure in beauty is disinterested. Ironically, Schopenhauer gives strikingly lovely expression to this uptake in the very passage Nietzsche quotes during his polemic. The result, it seems to me, is embarrassing.

Beauty, Schopenhauer writes, gives us occasion to "celebrate the Sabbath of the penal servitude of willing."[10] If we are willing to trade poetry for clarity, Francis Golffing's rendering of this line (via Nietzsche's quotation) uses an image that, if clunky, provides a wonderful first step toward understanding Schopenhauer's valuable description of the disinterestedness of our pleasure

[10] Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation, Volume I*, ed. and trans. Judith Norman, Alistair Welchman, and Christopher Janaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 220.

in beauty: namely, it finds rest in the 'treadmill of volition.'[11] Resting in a treadmill? It is precisely the apparent contradiction in this expression that accounts for its aptness. Our capacity for pleasure is practical in nature; it indicates what to pursue, as pain indicates what to avoid. Pleasure taken in beauty gives us nothing to pursue, sets no further end for us, and yet this practical capacity is active. There is activity, endless activity, activity of a kind the very point of which is to get us somewhere. But we are going nowhere. Of course, one might say we *are* going somewhere in *some* sense. That *that* sense could only be poetic or metaphorical is instructive. And so it also remains that we are at rest.

Purposiveness without purpose, or, in the less common rendering, an 'endless end'; an activation of practical capacities which gives us nothing to do; all these amount to characterizations of our response to beauty as a being compelled that does not terminate with the obtaining of some prescribed end. Goodness compels; we act accordingly and we have answered its call. Beauty compels; but when have we answered its call? The call only ceases when we exhaust our attention span or when the demands of everyday life interrupt our Sabbath. These are external terminations, though, rather than the fulfillment of internally set conditions achieved when we succeed in doing as goodness bids.

Nietzsche thought he could give a *reductio* of the disinterestedness of our pleasure in beauty with the mere mention of female nudes. Here we reach the embarrassing part. If I may be allowed to illustrate this by treating Nietzsche in a Nietzschean spirit—if not with Nietzschean skill—his objection makes it difficult not to imagine him walking around the statuary in the manner of the bar-room boor, leering at the women, and in the slang of his day, declaring, "I'd tap that." The point of his attempted *reductio* is that surely this pleasure *does* give us an end. I have no doubt many a thirteen

[11] Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy; And, the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Francis Golffing (New York: Anchor Books, 1990) 240.

year old boy would agree. But Schopenhauer is pointing to a formal difference in the way the admiring subject is on to its object. However unwilling the boor's desired object is to do her part, he is nonetheless expressing a desire that clearly has its natural termination (or consummation) in a particular action, and so is interested in Kant's sense. In contrast, while erotic passions need not be absent in the admiration of, e.g., a Bouguereau canvass, what was the natural termination of the boor's interest would be a rather significant reorientation on the world in the other. Retiring to the bedroom is a continuation in one case, the beginning of a new enterprise in the other.

Nietzsche insists that the very passage in which Schopenhauer describes our disinterested pleasure in beauty as a "treadmill of volition" can be seen to express the interest Schopenhauer acts upon in enjoying beauty. His unacknowledged interest is in fact the "strongest, most personal interest, that of the tortured man seeking release from his torment."[12] To make this assertion, however, is to ignore what Schopenhauer attributes the suffering to: namely, *interest*. Insofar as desire constantly sets ends for us—so many of which we can never realize—it must be a torment to us. Relief from this torment in the practical domain comes through acting on the interest given by desire so that we fulfill its indicated lack. This is a small comfort, Schopenhauer thinks, since the torment is always soon to return. Beauty's deliverance from torment is different in kind. The pleasure we experience when we enjoy beauty is not a pleasure of fulfilling a lack, a pleasure that would presuppose torment. Rather, the peculiar deliverance from torment beauty provides us with is precisely that we reap the reward of having a lack fulfilled without ever suffering a particular lack to begin with. Or, more simply, the pleasure is disinterested.

Despite my ridicule of Nietzsche, his sharp allusion to Pygmalion amid his ridicule of Schopenhauer is not without force. And while his complaint that Schopenhauer was insufficiently prurient is perhaps an historical oddity, its reverse—the often misplaced condemnation of an artist

[12] *Ibid.*

for appealing to prurient desires so common throughout the past[13]—cautions us not to overcorrect. If the formal difference in the pleasure revealed by its disinterestedness were to deny that great art can involve our erotic passions in *some* manner, we may well be better off siding with Nietzsche after all. A similar caution can be made in response to the possibility of propaganda. If the disinterestedness of pleasure in beauty required us to deny or simplistically explain away hard cases among propagandistic art, experience and history would again be against us. We will address such appearances in later chapters. For now, let the point be noted. The quick response I offer for the time being is to say that the significant reorientation on the world spoken of above surely does occur, as it must if the nature of our response goes from disinterested to interested. It is the continuity of content from one orientation to the other that confounds this move.[14]

Nietzsche's agent-agent alignment, then, faces difficulties that are the complement to those facing the Sentimentalists. By trying to maintain symmetry to the analogy, the spectator-spectator alignment hobbles the practicality of moral judgment while the agent-agent alignment denies aesthetic judgment its rest

## §4. Admiration

Our quibble with Nietzsche began in responding to his protest to the disinterestedness of our pleasure in beauty. Now I would like to turn to a worry Kant himself had surrounding this disinterestedness. To put the worry in terms of a phrase we encountered earlier, it could be summarized as the worry that the beauty of virtue could be an *obstacle* to our acting virtuously. We will speak in terms of admiration. Doing so is, I think, true to Kant's thought, even if he did not frequently use such language himself. Admiration is one among a number of concepts that span

[13] F. H. Bradley's "On Attention to Sexual Detail in Literature" is interesting on this matter.
[14] Chapter Three elaborates how content can be continuous through different formal applications.

moral and aesthetic contexts in a way that can provide insight into both realms.[15] Part of that insight serves to reinforce the realignment of primary forms of judgment I am recommending.

Demanding reason's immediate causal efficacy in moral action drives Kant to a particularly hard line when it comes to moral education. Admiration, he thinks, can all too easily become a threat to character. If stories of heroic action are presented for the sake of moral education, we are naturally moved to admire the protagonist. Kant doesn't doubt that this can influence our behavior; but he worries that what will truly be moving us will be our desire to receive the admiration appropriate to the hero of the story. An action so motivated, for Kant, is not truly moral action. His method for avoiding such mistakes is extreme. Kant contests that moral education should only employ stories of action done for the sake of duty *and* where there is no possible motive to action visible other than the demands of morality itself. To be sure, it isn't even enough just to kill the protagonist off. Say we describe someone who gives her life while rescuing others in a shipwreck. This certainly could portray a virtuous action; but it leaves open the possibility that the pupil takes away from the story a desire for acclaim, a desire to act in a way that will leave her memory crowned with glory in the manner of the hero. Kant, in other words, worries this sort of story could encourage action from a 'flattering thought of merit' as easily as it could action from duty alone. What we need instead is to kill the agent off *and* deny even any posthumous recognition of merit. Kant offers as an example a man refusing to falsely accuse an innocent man, defying the command of his king to do so even in the face of a tortuous death by Phalaris' bull, and where public perceptions are such that it remains unknown what truly happened. Perhaps—to fill in—it is generally taken that he died trying to protect a scoundrel. Only examples with incentive structures

[15] **Pretentious**: Arnold Isenberg, "'Pretentious' as an Aesthetic Predicate" in *Aesthetics and the Theory of Criticism; Selected Essays of Arnold Isenberg.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 172-183. **Decadent**: José Luis Bermúdez. "The Concept of Decadence" in *Art and Morality*, (London: Routledge, 2003), 111-130. **Sentimental**: Michael Tanner. "Sentimentality" in *Art and Morality*. (London: Routledge, 2003), 95-110.

along these lines, where there is no possible incentive at all other than that given by reason enabling fidelity to the moral law, is permissible in moral education.[16]

We needn't buy into Kant's system to appreciate a tempered version of what he is worrying about here. An ideal moral action is one performed for its own sake, not for the sake of enjoying praise. That said, among other indicators, Kant's hard line on moral education suggests that metaphysics is getting in the way of common sense here. General experience attests that admiration can be one of most beneficial attitudes in our moral development. It can go wrong, of course, and we will not consider here the most obvious way in which it can go wrong, namely, admiring what is not worthy of admiration. (An extreme classic fictional example would be Dorian Grey's admiration for Lord Henry Wotton.) But admiration can go awry in more subtle ways, some of which vaguely resemble Kant's worry discussed above, but that hold regardless of one's metaphysics. Let's take a step back and think of some of the features present in our everyday understanding of admiration. This will enable us to identify an insidious threat it can pose to moral development.

The main feature that makes admiration an interesting concept in the present context is that it is an attitude that spans aesthetic and moral spheres. We speak equally naturally of admiring goodness and admiring beauty. Importantly, though, it also extends beyond the normative in both spheres. We can admire someone for her virtue. But we might also admire her for her ability to juggle chainsaws. We speak of admiration as an attitude always appropriate where beauty is found. But we also allow for speaking of admiring things that are only agreeable.[17] We will see shortly that this feature of admiration—that it has both normative and non-normative application—accounts in part for its threatening aspect.

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[16] Kant briefly discusses these matters in a number of places, but gives extended consideration to it in the "Doctrine of Method" of his *Critique of Practical Reason*, from which the quotation and examples are taken.

[17] Perhaps noteworthy here—though I'm not sure about this—it does seem that we must find *something* about our object potentially recommendable to others' admiration. Put another way, I think we tend to shy away from saying we admire something we think we find appealing only on some highly idiosyncratic basis.

Admiration, where well-placed, can be uniquely valuable in moral development. One way character develops is through habituation by repeated action. We often think of this as acting by self-consciously applying a principle—mommy said I should always tell the truth—until we develop the disposition to tell the truth without such deliberate exertions. Now consider: one natural expression of admiration is *imitation*. This surely *can* be done self-consciously as well, but it need not be. When I admire someone of high moral character, especially where my admiration has the knowledge of personal intimacy, I might simply *find* myself acting in imitation of her, acting out my admiration, and so acting in a manner that lends itself to developing such a character myself.

When our object is another person's character, we often reach for the metaphor of 'looking up' to them. This expression nicely highlights that there is a sort of humility internal to admiration; it reveals a recognition of room for growth in myself.[18] Contrast admiring the chainsaw juggler. Such a person would be an acceptable object of admiration for someone given this achievement of skill that sets her apart. But it is also fine if I don't care. Talk of 'looking up' and experiences of humility would simply be bizarre for most people and would only begin to leave the comic behind when we imagine the admirer to herself be a passionately aspiring circus performer. Admiration in such cases is conditional.[19] And that is what admiration of moral worth cannot be. Surely when we admire someone for her virtue, there will be incidental qualities of her character that marks her out to us as distinct among those we know. But insofar as her life manifests an answer to that question so fundamental to ethics, 'how shall I live?' the possibilities for virtue revealed in the actuality of her life lived *calls* to me; what is possible in ethical life makes a claim on me. Chainsaw juggling, happily, does not.

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[18] This is not to say, however, that admiration induces humility. One might rather say that humility is a necessary condition for admiration, that without humility I am incapable of admiration. If there is truth to either claim, I think it is likely to be found in a dynamic interplay of the two.

[19] Or 'hypothetical' in Kantian terms.

Though the derivation of possibility from actuality is obvious enough, the human capacity for rationalization is cunning and strong. One rather insidious form of rationalization will reward our attention in the present context. Kierkegaard describes it perfectly as "a certain disingenuousness of spirit, which seeks to protect itself against the ethical impression precisely by means of admiration."[20] We can construe 'the ethical impression' here as the recognition of the claim made on us by the virtue we see realized in the lives of others. But if admiration can be such a powerful force for lifting us up in our ethical lives, how can it also be a means by which we rob the object's ethical claim on us of its force? We exploit this possibility by admiring the object for her virtue, but only in the way in which we admire the chainsaw juggler. To adapt further remarks of Kierkegaard, we focus so intently on the lived reality, on the actuality of our object's praiseworthy life that we at best distract ourselves from appreciating the derivation of the possibility for ourselves that it reveals. At worst, we excuse ourselves by declaring them exceptional, thereby denying that we fall within the scope of any such derived claim; we treat its claim on us as conditional rather than categorical.

This rationalization can harness the aesthetic to further entrench itself. Admiration, we noted, is always an appropriate response to beauty. Now, note in addition that there is a praiseworthiness due to those who possess a sensitive appreciation of what is truly beautiful; more praiseworthy still is a capacity to understand and communicate to others what it is about the object that makes it valuable, what makes it worthy of our attention for its own sake, what gives it its power to reward our clear perception of it and contemplation of its meaning. Spectatorial virtue *of this kind*, the virtue of the critic, is limited to aesthetics. The disingenuousness of spirit we are considering exploits admiration's dual citizenship in moral and aesthetic normative domains. After

[20] Søren Kierkegaard, *Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, ed. Walter Lowrie, trans. David F. Swenson (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1941) 321.

excusing ourselves by declaring our object exceptional in the moral domain, thereby side-stepping the claim made upon us, we then arrogate to ourselves the praiseworthiness due to the critic in the aesthetic domain for properly evaluating the object as admirable. With this, we not only excuse ourselves, we find a way to praise ourselves amidst our shortcoming.

Recall, at last, Kant's concern that drove him to recommend staying as far away as possible from employing tales of moral action that might encourage admiration in one whom we seek to instill virtue. Kant certainly believes the simple claim that apparently virtuous actions motivated for the sake of winning admiration are inferior to truly virtuous actions performed for their own sake. It may well be that he was wrong to believe this and that some account can be given that preserves the integrity of an action motivated in the former manner. But there is a deeper worry here that I think Kant was on to; it is formally of a kind with the rationalization we have just described. The form is this: we specify the distinct normative relation appropriate for a subject to stand in regarding her object in the aesthetic realm and in the moral realm. We then relate ourselves to an object of moral import in the manner appropriate to beauty rather than in the manner appropriate to goodness. Rationalization in this way exploits one sense in which we *are* responding appropriately—we are recognizing the beauty of virtue. But there is another, more important sense, in which we are drowning out the command of virtue, refusing to recognize her in her own normative domain. She demands not just our aesthetic admiration, but also our ethical admiration, our imitation, and ultimately that we beautify our own souls through this admiration and the imitation it inspires. Kant recognized that there is a unique power to this rationalization because it equivocates between the normative relations themselves.

Compare my claim here to Aristotle's example of a patient who listens to the doctor's prescription, but does not implement it. She acquires theoretical knowledge of her condition and its cure, but never puts it to practical use. Now Aristotle's example, I think, tends to strike us as

something approaching a joke. Unless we think of someone who chooses to suffer the illness because she takes it to be less painful than the effort to recover, the idea that someone could mistake the doctor as only giving her information is a bit silly. But the 'equivocation between the normative domains' that admiration can lend itself to—far from being such a blatant mistake that description of it can have the ring of a joke—is dangerously insidious. Praising someone for her virtue, even in all sincerity, without recognizing that she, as it were, has given us a prescription—that is all too common. Any plausible moral theory will be able to give some account of such rationalization; common among them will be a picture of a two-step process, the second step of which we excuse ourselves from taking. We admire a moral object and take pleasure in it just as we would a beautiful object. The problem on such an account is that this pleasure does not then cause us to act. On the Kantian understanding of moral and aesthetic judgment we discussed in contrast to sentimentalism, we can see the mistake lies deeper. It isn't that there is some second step I fail to take; rather, I don't relate myself to the object in the appropriate manner to begin with.

## §5. Relations in Normativity

I began by claiming that the common comparisons between moral and aesthetic judgment that align spectator with spectator and agent with agent are mistaken notwithstanding the tempting superficial similarities that invite this picture. I argue instead that the appropriate alignment orients the agent of moral action with the spectator of beauty, the need for which is revealed by attending to the form each kind of judgmental activity takes. I ended the previous section with the claim that Kant recognizes a way in which the beauty of virtue enables an equivocation between appropriate normative relations of subject and object. Our focus in the remainder of the chapter will further explore this relational, mind to world aspect of normativity and the different forms of the judgmental activity relating them. We begin the 'philosophical cartography' promised in the

introduction here, as the proposed realignment requires a substantial alteration to the lay of the land for philosophical approaches to ethics and aesthetics. At the same time, however, we will also discover along the way features in everyday life that evince an awareness of just this alignment.

When it comes to how we relate ourselves to the world as subjects, we could say that this takes three distinct forms when speaking of normativity. These three forms, of course, are the theoretical, the practical, and the aesthetic. By way of a heuristic device and nothing more, I think we can map the role these forms play in our life onto the modalities Kant attributes to theoretical judgment in the *Critique of Pure Reason*: apodictic, assertoric, and problematic, respectively.[21] In this bit of philosophical cartography, it is important to remember that we are speaking of the forms these kinds of judgment take, not yet the values they concern themselves with.

Theoretical judgment and the normative domain of truth is not a focus of this dissertation, save for occasionally providing a useful point of comparison or contrast. What matters to us here is recognizing that theoretical judgment pertains mainly to what is entirely independent of our existence.[22] The only relation the objects of theoretical judgment have to our subjective activity is as a standard such that we either get our claims about them right or not. The language we use for doing so depends on us, but not in a way that intrudes on the world's independence at all.[23]

The practical is assertoric in the familiar sense that we cause things to be the case. The object in a practical judgment is the event realized by the judgment, at least if it is successful. (And if not, it is instead the mess realized by the misfire.) Theoretically, when we make an assertion, we either get what we assert right or not, we either accurately capture what is antecedently the case or fail to do so. To 'assert' in the practical realm is to act; we make some antecedently conceived outcome the case (if we succeed). Prior to making the judgment, prior to venturing the action, an

[21] Kant distributes these modalities into all forms of judgment.
[22] Excluding the facts realized by the other two domains.
[23] For a bit more on this matter, see Chapter 5 Section 6.

awful lot of subjective activity in the form of deliberation, calculation, &c., can be involved in reaching the 'antecedently conceived' characterization of an object we are willing to set ourselves to realize. It is the latter contingency of the object upon the subject's exercise of causal efficacy that makes the form of practical judgment assertoric rather than apodictic; it is assertoric rather than problematic because of the *post hoc* independence of the object.

In aesthetic judgment, there is no final characterization of the object one feels entirely confident to assert. Or at least there is no characterization one feels confident to entirely assert; there is always the suspicion that one's understanding could go deeper still.[24] In contrast to the practical, there's no sense in realizing the object of value in aesthetic judgment: it is already there; it is what I am responding to in the first place. The aesthetic is problematic, then, precisely in its ongoingness, its endlessness as we put it earlier. To use another Kantian phrase, aesthetic judgment neither 'terminates in a concept' by reaching the end of an adequate characterization as aspired to in theoretical judgment, nor does it 'terminate in a concept' by conceiving of some end to realize as aspired to in practical judgment.[25]

It is noteworthy that wherever this picture locates moral *deliberation*, insofar as it lies before the 'assertion' of the act, it seems it must at least be in the neighborhood of the aesthetic. Both relate in some way to practical capacities, and both are problematic. Importantly, while aesthetic judgment is problematic by its nature, moral deliberation is so only by its stage in practical judgment. Where there is overlap, where not, and what significance the overlap has are questions the answers to which we will be working out through the remainder of the chapter and throughout the dissertation as a whole. That they share much of the same space in our judgmental economy will of course prove important in demonstrating how thought about beauty can be advantageous to living

[24] This statement applies mainly to great art.
[25] This receives fuller treatment in Chapter Three. Cf. Eli Friedlander, "Meaning and Aesthetic Judgment," *Philosophical Topics* 34, no. 1&2 (2006): 21-34.

virtuously. For now, note that moral deliberation is part of the subjective activity that terminates with the practical judgment that realizes its object. This subjective activity is sense-making and evaluative; the same is true of the subjective activity present in aesthetic judgment. As the problematic modality is characterized in the 1st *Critique*, the content of the cognitive activity must be something that makes sense. In its original theoretical context, this means that while the content has yet to be judged so or not so, it is in a form fit for such judgment. Once we shift the context to the practical, this condition of sheer coherence remains, but there also arises the need for an additional sort of sense-making, a justificatory sense-making, one that specifies a point for the course of action.[26] For aesthetic judgment, there remains a justificatory element internal to its sense-making, but it takes on the endlessness characteristic of this form of judgment. The justification does not situate the judgment as a reasonable means to or part of realizing its end, as it has no end to realize. To justify my response to a beautiful object is to express that response in terms that give voice to adequate and apt characterizations of this very subjective activity and that does so with the conviction that the pleasure this activity affords is attributable to the object rather than to myself. To give this articulation is to seek to justify my response to you. The response and its justificatory activity are inseparable, so if I can bring you to accept my justification and to thereby see the object as I do, it will enrich your life as well.[27]

Two more notes should be registered here. By shifting the focus to *moral* deliberation in the previous paragraph, I introduced the cardinal value toward which practical judgment can be directed, the good. Likewise, the aesthetic judgment I will now carry on to consider is that directed toward objects embodying its cardinal value, beauty. This is where the focus must be, else we quickly find

[26] For more on what justificatory sense-making in practical contexts, see Chapter 2 Section 5. Also, it should be noted that justification is of course important for theoretical judgment, but it isn't internal to the sense-makingness of the judgment like it is for practical and aesthetic judgments.

[27] Fleshed out in Chapter 5 Section 5.

prima facie absurdities; the further we move from the 'top,' the more disanalogies we will find. Wondering if my shoes really match my outfit is hardly comparable to figuring out whether I have chosen the best course of action morally speaking, and there is no sense in comparing trying to figure out how to finally get that stubborn jar of pickles to open and enjoying a great symphony. (…though moments in the first movement of Mahler's 5th would make a wonderful farce of the scene.) And even here, attention must be specifically on judgments directed toward moral value in a certain way, as a judgment of the fitting rather than straightforward application of principle.[28] Second, the language of contemporary philosophy allows us to mark moves between the 'practical' generally and the 'moral' specifically rather clearly. There's no equally helpful common usage to mark comparable moves within the aesthetic. We are quite promiscuous with our use of 'beautiful'; a well-done manicure invites the language of the aesthetic no less than a well-composed symphony. From here on in this chapter, unless otherwise indicated we will be speaking of aesthetic judgment as directed toward the beautiful rather than the more domesticated everyday aesthetic concern of simply 'looking right' or mere liking. The latter must entertain us at another time.

## §6. Beauty's Seeming Interpersonality

In order to allow further exploration of unitary moments in aesthetic and moral judgmental activity, it will benefit us to attend to one phenomenological aspect of the experience of beauty: its felt interpersonality.

"*Beauty* is an apparently meaningless word which we continue to use because we understand it." The line is John Gardner's,[29] but I will impose my own meaning on it here. When we take note of what we call beautiful, we find a tremendous array of rather disparate things—and this claim is

[28] On how the fitting contrasts with the useful and the pleasant, see Candace A. Vogler, *Reasonably Vicious* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002) Chapter 3.
[29] John Gardner, *On Moral Fiction*, (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2009) 144.

only accurate so long as we speak of 'things' in its broadest sense, so as to potentially include *every* sort of thing. Whenever the occasion is one where we already have a particular object in view, say, some artwork, if after describing it to you I add the claim that it is beautiful, then whatever I have added, it is not something that adds to the *content* in any clear way. The apparent meaninglessness of 'beauty' is in large part due to this 'everything and nothing' dynamic, that it seems capable of describing every sort of thing but adds nothing concretely descriptive. Still, we understand it; still, we use it; indeed, our ability to communicate some aspects of what we care about most would suffer tremendously without it. These considerations—among many others—indicate that 'beauty' is a term with formal properties quite different from an ordinary descriptive predicate.

Wendy Steiner reaches in this direction when she argues that our experience of beauty is that of a relation rather than of a property.[30] Consider the lovely explanation she offers for why we so naturally mistake the former for the latter:

> [A] beautiful object is something we value, and we value it because it touches our dearest concerns. In our gratitude toward what moves us so, we attribute to it the *property* of beauty, but what we are actually experiencing is a special *relation* between it and ourselves. […] Thus, the judgment of beauty is not a one-way street. One discovers a valuable Other, and rises to recognize oneself in it. In doing so, one "participates" in beauty. This gratifying self-expansion produces profound generosity toward the beautiful Other in the form of compliment, infatuation, love, critical rave. The person or artwork claims nothing, but receives all; the lover or critic is validated, but credits the Other. This is a win-win situation if ever there was one, and occasions great pleasure. It also occasions utter confusion as to the direction of agency involved, for the object or person who can elicit the perceiver's pleasure through its passivity does not seem passive at all. The "power of beauty" is a mystification of the perceiver's magnanimity, but how grateful we are to a force that can show us ourselves so great in spirit.[31]

Steiner is of course far from alone in reaching in the direction of friendship and love for help understanding beauty. And in so reaching, Steiner indicates that the sort of relation our experience

[30] It is important to emphasize that the claim is that the experience of beauty is the experience of a relation, not that beauty is a relation.

[31] Wendy Steiner, *Venus in Exile: The Rejection of Beauty in Twentieth-Century Art.* (New York: Free Press, 2001) Proem.

of beauty most resembles in our lives is that of *interpersonal* relationship; it is of a sort that Martin Buber would represent as <*I, thou*> rather than <*I, it*>.[32]

The felt interpersonality of our encounters with beauty begins with the feeling that the object *greets* us. Emerson, when words failed him in his old age, literally embodied this sense when he removed his hat in an admiring tribute to a rose. It is doubtful even he could find words more fitting.[33] If I respond to this greeting with the desire to come to know its subject better, the felt interpersonality characteristically continues. In finding words adequate to characterize our deepening response to a beautiful object, the experience is less that of simply figuring something out, and more that found in receiving an affirmation of this response from the object; we seem to be reaching a sort of concord. The pleasure of learning frequently occurs here, but rather than passing as the novelty wears off, it continues as with the comfort of company. Further, when responding to a beautiful object, as with responding to another human being, we sense we are answerable to it. Unlike with the merely agreeable, where the object might fail to live up to my expectations or might be inadequate for my satisfaction, I might be inadequate to the artwork such that the failure of satisfaction is owing to my failure to appreciate what is there, what is anyway available to me.[34]

One contrast between the nature of our relation to a friend and to a beautiful object is equally important as it brings us to a partial characterization of the universality of aesthetic judgment. If we are continuing to think of our appreciation of great artworks, the kind of relationship with another person that is appropriate for comparison is one possessing at least a moderate degree of intimacy. Though others certainly may cultivate intimate friendships with the

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[32] While many would reject that any such distinction runs much deeper than the level of appearances, for present purposes, I will trust that appearances are such that the reader will grant an initial plausibility to some such distinction and proceed relying on just that.

[33] From Michael West's *Transcendental Wordplay: America's Romantic Punsters and the Search for the Language of Nature*. (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000). Also: Elaine Scarry sketches a short history of the idea of the sense of receiving a greeting from beauty in *On Beauty and Being Just*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999) 25-26, ff.

[34] See Coleridge's "Dejection: An Ode".

same person with whom I am a friend, each of the relationships are autonomous, and there is only a rather restricted sense in which it can be said that each has the 'same' relationship with the other. We saw the contrast in passing earlier, that my relation to an artwork is such that I expect the very same pleasures I experience are available to you, and indeed, that if only I can communicate my own pleasure in it in a way understandable to you, then I might assist you in coming to enjoy these pleasures yourself. This expectation that the pleasure in beauty is grounded not in what is peculiar to me, but in the relation between what is common to us as human beings and an object valuable for contemplation by such beings, amounts to the 'universality' of aesthetic judgments. This sense could be called Kantian, though only in some broad methodological sense: we reach the universal by having a remainder common among us once all the features that please me individually in some idiosyncratic manner are stripped away.[35]

## §7. Freedom, Necessaries, and the Matter of Judgment

All our forms of judgment—to state the obvious—must operate using the matter we embody as human animals. Recall that practical capacities are in some manner engaged in aesthetic judgment given pleasure's internal role, the latter indicating to living beings what to pursue, pain to avoid. I have also characterized aesthetic judgment as problematic in form by its nature and moral deliberation as problematic by its stage in moral judgment. These features together can, I think, begin to show there to be an important unity to aesthetic and practical judgment beyond mere analogies of form; they are rather an intimately cooperating working out of our human matter. Think here of the traditional concepts of work and leisure. Josef Pieper has tracked an historical shift in which of these concepts is primary; consistent throughout that history, they are inter-

[35] 'Idiosyncratic' here serves to pick out features that please me through appeal to anything from some innocent fondness developed through association in my past to the sort of association neuroses are made of.

defined.[36] Whatever else work is and does, at its most fundamental, it is a means by which we secure the necessaries for human existence.[37] Even this vaguely expressed, we have already said enough to lead us rather directly to our need for morality and political order. Individuals' pursuits to get what they need will inevitably lead to conflict. Wherever that fact fits in one's theory of moral value, the need to negotiate relations with others will have to play a major part. Though the concept of work alone will not lead us to an exhaustive study of the moral realm, it is one way of approaching that is particularly helpful for us, as it is obviously and necessarily practical. Without being productive, without realizing its object—without, that is, being assertoric—we simply will not live long enough to ever worry ourselves with questions of happiness or living well.

Leisure, on the other hand, is the free expression and enjoyment of various human capacities for their own sake, apart from any demand of necessity. It is the restorative Sabbath from the penal servitude of willing of which Schopenhauer speaks. With leisure, the instrumentality of work necessitated by our need to secure the means for our existence falls away; instead, in Pieper's phrase, we are free to enjoy "existential realization itself."[38]

The contrasting inter-definition of the concepts of work and leisure—whether my own here or many another such characterization—points to a common source of moral and aesthetic values while simultaneously highlighting the difference in kind of judgment called for to enjoy them. The common source is the human, and with the interested and disinterested modalities of maintaining and comprehending that nature, we have the human as end and the human as endless end. In moral judgment, we mobilize our practical capacities in recognition of some value we have opportunity to realize; in aesthetic judgment, we are stilled before an object valuable for contemplation and seek

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[36] *Leisure: The Basis of Culture* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2009). See also Josef Pieper, *Happiness and Contemplation*, 1 edition (South Bend, Ind: St. Augustines Press, 1998); Josef Pieper, *In Tune With The World*, 1 edition (South Bend, Ind: St. Augustines Press, 1999).

[37] I use Thoreau's word from *Walden* here—*necessaries*—as that work provides very fertile ground on which to pursue the present point.

[38] Josef Pieper, *Only the Lover Sings: Art and Contemplation* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990) 21-22.

only to adequately articulate the experience of this object. And moral deliberation? We have characterized it as problematic by its stage in judgment rather than by its nature and as a sense-making and evaluative activity. These are formal features it shares with aesthetic judgment along with its matter, what we have characterized minimally as 'working out our human nature.'

What, then, makes these different activities? The problematic character of deliberation is that it is considering possible sense-making options that it might pursue, but has yet to set an end to be realized in judgment. It is articulating desire into something 'assertable', where for us, the action is the assertion. Deliberation, then, doesn't itself tend toward realizing its object, but only toward determining what object practical judgment will take up. Since it is only a stage in practical judgment rather than any *sui generis* form of thought, it too must be guided in some manner by the pursuit of happiness internal to the order of practical reason. For present purposes, we needn't plunk for any particular conception of happiness; hedonic, eudaimoniac, stoic, any will do. The point at hand is simply this: the problematic activity in aesthetic judgment, by contrast, is free from any such constraint.

And yet, while aesthetic judgment is not in service to happiness, it is uniquely suggestive of what happiness experienced as an enduring state might be. Early on, we made passing reference to Kant's claim that beauty is the symbol of morality. A less ambitious, less theoretically loaded version of this claim would be that the experience of beauty is a symbol or reflection or hint of the experience of happiness. Let us return to Schopenhauer's treadmill of volition. Recall his characterization of beauty as delivering us from our torment, torment inflicted upon us by our ever-demanding desire.[39] It is perfectly sensible to claim that where the experience of fulfilling a desire is especially satisfying, this is an experience that attests to what achievement of happiness might

[39] I will continue to use Schopenhauer's dramatic language here for the fun of it. In these terms, when I eyeball my lunch-mate's remaining French fries and ask, "you gonna eat those?" I have expressed my torment, disburdened myself with a low-level cry of my suffering. After all, we're just talking about desire, regardless of how demanding it is.

be. But as Schopenhauer laments, our suffering will inevitably return soon after. Of course, our experience of beauty is short lived, too, but we must be mindful of why it is so. First, in its being disinterested, pleasure in beauty is not of a sort that presupposes torment. Secondly, in its having no end given internally by the judgment (judgmental activity), it is of a kind that could thereby conceivably carry on endlessly. Wretched folks that we are, we just get distracted or tired. These two features together better suit beauty for a representation of happiness as an enduring state than any interested pleasure could offer. What we should see in these observations is a recognition of the agent-spectator alignment implicit in common understanding of the role of work and leisure in human life. What action aims at—in part through acquiring practical necessities through work—beauty, in leisure, provides.

Beauty, then, is a symbol of happiness. But it is not merely a symbol of happiness; our enjoyment of it is conducive to happiness, even conducive to happiness achieved through virtue. Again, whatever one's conception of happiness, it seems uncontroversial to say it will be more easily achieved where the individual does not act from a general sense of opposition or bitterness or anger or any generally baddish sort of attitude toward the world; attitudes of acceptance and affirmation of the world prove far more conducive to happiness. Tragedy provides a convenient example here. Tragedy, after all, presents us with events of a sort that would make it all too easy to become bitter should they actually happen to us; and yet we know it somehow proves rather to be a guard against bitterness.

## §8. Tragedy and Acceptance

I want to consider tragedy further here, though we need to register two notes to avoid a couple misunderstandings it would be easy to fall into. The first is that what I say here does *not* speak directly to what is usually meant by 'the problem of tragedy.' It involves many of its

explicanda, but looks from there to different concerns. It will benefit us to delay further caution until the moment of potential of confusion. Secondly, I am not offering tragedy as an exemplar from which we should expect accounts of the capacity of other genres and media of art to facilitate our achievement of happiness to follow *mutatis mutandis* or even nearly so. We should expect such accounts to be as diverse as are the arts and the genres within them. I do not even want to suggest that every genre has some such account. My claim is only that we can discover some such account for many of the genres, accounts which will in their own way draw attention to shared formal and material elements in our judgmental activity concerning goodness and beauty, and that they are discoverable frequently enough to support the notion that it is no mere accidental correspondence between the normative domains.

In order to accept something difficult or to reach an attitude of affirmation toward it we must have gone some way toward making sense of it, some way toward understanding it. In the context of tragedy, I of course mean 'accept' and 'affirm' in an ethical-affective sense, but it is no less true epistemically. I can memorize, "and the slithy toves / Did gyre and gimble in the wabe," and can even use these lines to tell someone she is speaking nonsense. But there is nothing in them to understand, and so nothing to affirm. Further, what understanding we reach can only much benefit us so long as we are able to hold on to it, able to retain it. Epistemically, we know too well that the light bulb of a 'eureka!' moment has an unfortunate tendency to blow after some time has passed for us to forget the explanation that brought us to it. What, we should now ask, is the relevant sense of 'holding on' in the ethical-affective sense?

The answer, I think, is in a kind of incorporation, the sense and importance of which we must specify before proceeding. When speaking of practical capacities being operative in aesthetic experience, we spoke of pleasure and pain. Alternatively, we could speak of desire to incorporate and desire to reject. Developmentally or psychologically speaking, these terms could mean several

things. Perhaps what I mean here does not even cleanly fit an established technical use, but it does fall within the range of meanings they tend to span. The concept of incorporation of course is founded on its literal sense in nutrition where matter alien to oneself is transformed into a part of one's own physical being. Upon this foundation is built a long tradition of making sense of knowledge as a rational analogue of this. The thing known is taken up and made part of the knower; the alien world is incorporated into oneself.[40] A further extension of the concept arises in psychoanalytic contexts in concepts such as introjection and incorporative phantasy.[41] More familiarly, we can also include admiration. Where properly held—i.e., where not used to excuse oneself—and where imitation results without requiring deliberate effort, admiration, too, is a form of incorporation, of making characteristics of another a part of myself. What we must look for now is a way of making sense of the world—and of coming to *have* a sense of it, a feel for it and feelings toward it—that facilitates our incorporation of it where our natural inclination might instead be one of resistance or denial, the avoidance pain inclines us toward.

Recall now the differentia between history and tragedy Aristotle offers in his *Poetics*: history describes the thing that has been; tragedy describes the kinds of things that might be.[42] Attending to what is actual versus what is only generally possible will unsurprisingly prove key to understanding differences in how we can and do relate to tragic reality versus tragic art; the challenge is to take care not to rely on this distinction in some facile manner that only gives us the appearance of an account. By way of shortcut, rather than history as a genre, think of an individual's personal history, our own stories as each of us are now authoring them (in a telling metaphor of not-terribly-uncommon parlance). In those terms, we all experience events in life that we colloquially call tragedies. And—call it the wisdom of common sense—the standard counsel of friends no less than of

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[40] See, e.g., Pieper, *Happiness and Contemplation*, 65-66.
[41] See, e.g., Richard Wollheim, *The Thread of Life*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984) Ch. IV §§11-14.
[42] From Book IX.

psychotherapists will encourage an acceptance that will enable one to move on. This is perhaps among those things we all know but need to be reminded of at the right times. Great art can aide the acceptance we must achieve, though, when speaking generally, it does not do so immediately.

Let's take an example to help us understand the difference in 'acceptance' when speaking of tragic literature versus tragic reality and to see its role in how we incorporate a sense of the world. Say I face the untimely death of a sibling. On such an occasion, there quite obviously will be no question of the sheer emotional impact in the way we might ask how it can be that we are moved by the fate of Anna Karenina.[43] One indicator of my success or failure at acceptance will be of a purely functional sort: does grief incapacitate me? A significant part of the understanding I will need to reach that will enable me to reach an attitude of acceptance will be suggested by the particular relationships of my life. For example, I must surely seek to understand whether I am faced with any new obligations or opportunities in my role as son now that I am my parents' only surviving child. Perhaps—for a contrasting example—it is not clear whether I should or should wish to continue some relationships. Say my sibling was the mutual tie that frequently brought me into friendly company with another. Has that relationship taken on enough life of its own such that I should invest in continuing it? or has the basis of our relationship become part of the loss we have suffered? How should I handle the situation if it appears we feel differently about this? What I wish to highlight with these examples is that in the face of personal tragedy the questions pressed upon me by my new reality, the understanding I must reach in order to figure out what moving on even amounts to, requires answering a lot of practical questions regarding currently ongoing projects in which I am already active.

[43] As Colin Radford did, framing much discussion to follow. (In "How Can We Be Moved by the Fate of Anna Karenina?," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes* 49 (1975): 67–93.) Like with the problem of tragedy, we're in the middle of much of the phenomena this literature worries about. Only we're not worrying about it, but accepting things at face value to ask different questions.

When one's search for understanding of tragic events drifts away from the practical questions related to 'moving on' from where one finds oneself, we unfortunately know that it can become a dangerous pitfall. This occurs when we start looking for understanding in some justificatory sense, demanding an answer to *why?* as though God or fate or nature was an intentional agent of the event. There is no *why* of this kind, and so the search for one will inevitably become frustrated. I must justify myself in the world, but the demand that the world justify itself to me is ill placed. Making this demand risks leading to bitterness regarding the particular circumstance one is responding to, and persisting in that risks leading to general bitterness.

No such risks characterize our engagement with literature. Its non-actuality of course explains much of the psychology of the differences, even if it raises interesting questions for aestheticians. Setting those philosophical concerns aside and accepting that we are as a matter of fact moved by literary tragedy, puzzling though that may be, we can discover an interesting possibility tragedy opens for moral psychology.

Literature does not resist enquiry into a justificatory *why*, though this is not to say it admits of answers. Much tragedy does not. Sometimes it presents us with stories where the reader can see a *why*, but can also see that the hero cannot see that *why*, as justification lies in divine realms off the worldly stage. Sometimes tragedy presents us with stories where justification even in a divine realm is wanting. Enquiry into the never-to-be-found *why* is nonetheless rewarded, as it facilitates a deeper engagement with the artwork, and so does move us toward *one* sort of justification: an increased ability to articulate our aesthetic responses to the work. So the *why* that would risk bitterness when demanded of reality rewards experience regarding literary tragedy, enriching our appreciation of it. Meanwhile, as a self-contained whole, the tragedy represents the world to us. Not, of course, in the sense of representing the depicted events being true. That is history's business. Tragedy's representation is not that of a portrait to its sitter, but as an ambassador attesting to the character of

the world: "these are the kinds of things that might be." Coming to better understand the possibilities of the world I inhabit is coming to better understand the world *simpliciter*. In tragedy, these possibilities are presented beautifully. The pleasure we find in this beauty provides the element we need in order to incorporate the possibilities represented, and does so without needing to deceive us as to the painfulness of what it presents. Here is where it is especially important that we not think in terms of 'the problem of tragedy'. My claim is that the beauty of tragedy allows us to incorporate it in a way that we cannot the actual tragedies of life. This assumes we do find it beautiful, but makes no claim to explain why.[44]

The beauty of tragedy renders painful possibilities incorporable. It is important, though, to pay extra attention to what is being incorporated, to what new understandings of the world achieved. In giving us a comprehensible whole that affords no answer to *why* regarding the events depicted, but meanwhile presenting itself as representing the world, it allows us to understand that the world is such as to confront us with the unjustifiable. We see there is no *why*, but we see characters that must understand where they are in order to move on—this is a reflection of the practical acceptance we know reality requires of us when we face our own tragic realities. What I think it is that tragedy helps us to understand and, through its beauty, to incorporate, is this: that the world is such as to require me to sacrifice my demand for a *why*, no matter how difficult it is not to feel I am owed one, in order to better justify my own life moving on. Coming to understand 'the world is such as to require this of you' is not itself to fulfill the requirement—that is necessarily an ethico-practical deed—but the latter acceptance must be easier where former has taken place. (I hazard this claim as a bit of armchair moral psychology.) Life sometimes demands that we accept the unacceptable. Tragedy represents this to us without understating the cost involved.

[44] The reason what I say here can at best speak to the problem of tragedy at a remove is that if we attribute the value of tragedy directly to the advantages of this incorporability, we have reduced its value to a crude instrumentality.

Perhaps prior to knowing a comparable tragedy by acquaintance one could understand that we must at times accept the unacceptable given as a theoretical proposition, being taught it as a truism. This seems rather like describing redness to one who is colorblind, though. The comparison is an imperfect one, as the contrast is not that of *restoring color-sightedness*: it isn't as though the appreciator of a tragedy becomes *acquainted* with what it is to suffer the loss depicted. But we are left less ignorant about what it is like to inhabit the world than is the colorblind man, even if less experienced than the sufferer. I suppose this is when we reach for "through a glass darkly", but that is just to call the phenomenon's name.

I have allowed the discussion to take on a bit of free flow. My hoped-for aim in doing so is to bring the reader along with greater ease. The cost could easily be losing sight of the point of the section. Recall that I do not mean to offer tragedy as an exemplar from which we should expect accounts of the capacity of other genres and media of art to facilitate our achievement of happiness to follow *mutatis mutandis*. Accounts explaining how beauty might keep its 'promise of happiness' can be discovered for other genres, but each must be discovered on its own terms. Should such accounts prove so elusive as to call into question their existence, this would provide reason for suspicion of my characterization of the shared matter and shared elements in the forms of aesthetic and moral judgment.

## §9. A Mundane Picture After All

I have spoken of the question 'how shall I live?' as fundamental to ethics. This is not a claim that no one can live ethically without having put deliberate thought into the question in these terms, nor in any terms manifestly translatable. All of us, I imagine, have run from the question at certain points in life. But insofar as one must, after all, *live*, we will be able to read off some 'how' from her life as matter of fact lived. This 'how' is the characterization we would give of an individual that

enables us to understand and get along with her. Some amount of understanding or pretense to understanding of this sort seems no less vital to being able to live with oneself. Everyday character-talk answers to this need. The 'how' may be rather incoherent—shortsighted, in the moment, reactionary, flaky, whatever—but it remains a 'how', nonetheless. Explicit reflection on the question of how we should live in those terms, then, is a contentful tool to think over a structure our lives anyway have.[45]

At least one element of what must be involved in coming to any sense of how to proceed in light of this 'how shall I live?' is to make sense of what sort of thing this 'I' is, and at least in part in general terms, since the question became urgent when it bumped up against others like it.[46] Perhaps no question or slogan can capture as much of aesthetics as well as the former does for ethics, but one worthy suggestion would be Terence's line, 'nothing human is alien to me.'[47] This situates aesthetics as the exploration of the matter we have to set into motion in order to realize the particular human life that is our own and with which we must gain familiarity in order to better understand the lives and characters of others.

We turned to a passage from Wendy Steiner earlier to help us along our way. If what we are confronting now is the human as it is (as we are), then she is overly eulogistic in the quotation above. We needn't find in ourselves some greatness of spirit in our response to *Lolita*. Baudelaire's confidence voiced in *Le fleurs du mal*'s 'Note to the Reader' is justified, namely his confidence that the soil of his readers' souls contain all that is needed to cultivate flowers of evil no less than his own, even if they have succeeded in producing sweeter fruits so far. His confidence is justified precisely for the reason he gives: "that we are of the same sad kind."[48] Our human matter has no small

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[45] I flesh this claim out in Chapter 3.
[46] I flesh this claim out in Chapter 2.
[47] This is a line that Ted Cohen frequently quoted in classes and in conversation. I am not sure how sympathetic he would be to my use of it here, but I nonetheless owe the idea to him.
[48] The quotation is from Brian Stableford's superb translation. The basis for the line is simply '*mon semblable, — mon frère!*' but Stableford's insertion of 'sad'—aside from getting him the needed extra syllable—is justified by and quite

amount of tawdry elements. Gratitude toward an object that touches on our dearest concerns and that mystifies our magnanimity doesn't seem a fitting characterization of our appreciation of beauty in such contexts. Perhaps our experience here is something more comparable to the sublime; we are afraid of what we have discovered in ourselves, in our human matter, but this fear is experienced while we take refuge within the safety of the problematic. We are shown ourselves in a fearful light, but acceptance of this revelation of our nature while the demands of practical life are in suspension can help us know the burden we carry as we try to reach that great light and to inhabit it permanently rather than only in the fleeting transposition provided by the experience of beauty.

It is common in ethics to worry about over-intellectualization, and I imagine that worry may arise for some regarding the account I am developing. It is common to respond—and I do so respond—that much of what is described in the theory is not a description of what must be thought through occurrently by individual agents but rather the depth logic that explains the manner of our common sense goings on with the moral aspects of life. Presently, however, I think it is more important to emphasize the point's complement, that common sense goings on with the moral aspects of life very frequently *does* engage in explicit consideration of what is human and how one's own life appreciates and expresses that understanding. Talk of the human is quite quotidian: we express moral outrage by condemning actions and characters as 'inhuman'; we rationalize actions with 'it's only human'; examples range from these to the nearly caricature line in any given movie trailer for a romantic comedy selling itself as an exploration of 'what it means to be human'. The latter line is not trying lure in professional philosophers; it is pitched to the general public and is indeed generally appealing. Though it may not be in abstract terms of the academic humanities, we can easily recognize a familiar sort of conversation between friends about such films that takes up

consonant with the spirit/sense of the poem as a whole. Brian M. Stableford, *The Dedalus Book of Decadence: Moral Ruins*, 2nd ed. (Sawtry: Dedalus with the support of the Eastern Arts Association, 1993) 84-85.

that exploration through the characters and circumstances it features. Mindful of this, Arthur Miller once wrote a friend, "I regard the theater as a serious business, one that makes or should make man more human, which is to say, less alone."

Less alone? This brings us to one final as yet unexplored consequence (and advantage) of the 'shared space' of moral and aesthetic judgement. Adding his own voice to Miller's, Ted Cohen writes, "being human requires knowing what it is to be human, and that requires the intimate recognition of other human beings."[49] We saw that art facilitates understanding of the world and that better understanding of the world facilitates acceptance of it. Neither need be achieved alone. Perhaps neither *can* be. We spoke earlier of a feeling of affirmation we might feel we receive from a beautiful object as we appreciate it. That felt affirmation can be confirmed by the actual affirmation of another person with whom we reach a community of feeling.[50] Through the success, the failure, and the process that either led to success or was given up in failure to communicate one's own experience of the object, we at once enter into a sort of inquiry into the extent to which we inhabit the same world, and thereby also into how we can better live together in it.

The point of contact of a perhaps otherwise tangential observation can be telling here. We recognize a sentiment expressed in the lament, "you don't know my pain." It is rarely a healthy sentiment, as it often manifests either a rejection of comfort or an incomprehension at how to accept the comfort being offered. But it is nonetheless a response we can make sense of when it comes from someone in a trying time of her life. Imagine, though, that someone expressed this sentiment in response to the fate of Anna Karenina. Rather than a blameless difference in aesthetic sensibility such as might be expressed in an argument about which is Tolstoy's greatest novel, it seems what we would have here is a failure to properly engage in aesthetic activity. The possibility

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[49] Ted Cohen, *Thinking of Others: On the Talent for Metaphor*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008) 85.
[50] To borrow Isenberg's phrase from "Critical Communication," in *Aesthetics and the Theory of Criticism; Selected Essays of Arnold Isenberg.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973) 163.

of achieving 'community of feeling' is internal to the experience; where we seek to speak about the novel rather than ourselves and our idiosyncratic associations, we speak in a 'universal voice'.[51]

Along with the worry of over-intellectualization, it is also easy to imagine the worry that my talk above of affirmation presents some grandiose or mystical picture. No doubt things can be so. But we also regularly see manifestations of this affirmation in more common circumstances. We hear, for example, another's resolute proclamation of determination to carry on despite a cruel turn of fate against her in this tragic world. Translated into everyday parlance, it is likely to be phrased more tersely: 'shit happens!' While this is sometimes only a pretense to acceptance, it sometimes genuinely expresses resolution on one's part to take this reality as the new starting point from which from which the question of how best to carry on must be asked. Sighed profanities; chats about a novel or movie: quite quotidian stuff. And yet sometimes it reveals the only visible trace of some of the most challenging operations crucial to living life well.

## §10. Conclusion

Reaching an understanding of goodness and beauty that might enable a productive contemporary uptake of the traditional attribution of an important unity to these values requires clarifying the primary form of judgment oriented toward each. The Sentimentalists, we saw, err in favor of a spectator-spectator analogy, thereby undermining moral judgment's practical nature. Nietzsche, we saw, errs in favor of an agent-agent analogy, thereby undermining the disinterested nature of aesthetic judgment. Each are representatives of the inevitable traps we fall into if we fail to recognize that the proper analogy is between the agent of moral value and the spectator of beauty.

[51] See Stanley Cavell, "Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy" in *Must We Mean What We Say?: A Book of Essays*, Updated ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 88, ff.

The correct perspective has its own traps, of course; Kant worried that the beauty of virtue could become an impediment to acting virtuously, and so, in his own way, he, too, exiles poets from the Republic. This is needlessly drastic. So long as we heed Kierkegaard's warning to be vigilant against the temptation to admire aesthetically where ethical admiration is called for, there is no need to deny what common understanding makes so clear: that stories of admirable characters and deeds are among the most valuable tools we have in moral education.

Discovering the apparently contradictory natures of moral and aesthetic judgment—practical and disinterested, respectively—to instead complement each other reveals the possibility for a robust account of our thought about goodness and beauty as in a shared enterprise of making sense of ourselves as human beings in a shared world, all striving for happiness. In spite of its uncommon way of theorizing the forms of judgment by which we orient ourselves on value in the world, we saw that the cooperative, asymmetrical alignment I propose is resonant with common understanding and manifests itself in everyday life.

This chapter has defended the asymmetrical analogy of agent and spectator as essential for reaching a sound philosophical understanding of the unity of goodness and beauty and has provided an essayistic survey of what it is about our natures that supports this understanding. In the following chapter, I argue that a neo-Aristotelian account of life in general and human life in particular captures these points and provides the most fertile ground for further cultivating such an account.

Chapter Two

# KNOWING THE HUMAN

In the previous chapter, I introduced the claim that there is some overlap in the cognitive activity that comprises aesthetic judgment and moral judgment. Both involve to some extent wrestling with what it is to be human. Upon reading the latter statement, one or both of the following observations likely spring to mind: one, that it is so commonplace as to flirt with the cliché; and two, that it is so vague as to flirt with meaningless sentimentality. In this chapter, I would like to consider a theoretically robust way of understanding human nature that can preserve what wisps of wisdom seem to be flitting about somewhere in all those phrases of common parlance while escaping the vagueness that might render them useless or empty.

The kind of account best suited to provide a theoretical accommodation for commonplace expressions appealing to human nature is, I think, a sort of neo-Aristotelian naturalism. The primary purpose of the present chapter is to substantiate this claim. I will follow the work of Michael Thompson very closely, though will also introduce the considerations we broached in the previous chapter concerning the problematic moment in practical judgment into my accounting of his account. After beginning with some introductory terminological and methodological remarks, I will consider why one might worry about taking the human to be the foundational concept in moral philosophy. From there, I proceed to the task of locating an understanding of the nature of the concept *human* that eschews those worries and on to determining what evaluative form of thought is adequate to a concept of such a kind. A secondary purpose is to engage in a bit of stage setting for a later chapter. This is to demonstrate that the understanding of our thought about human nature

advanced here does not simply work well with, but even invites a kind of neo-Sentimentalism about value properties.[1]

## §1. Formal Concepts

I would like to advance the claim that the *good* is a practical formal concept. The natural starting place for delineating the nature of this claim is to expound the distinction I want to work with between formal and material concepts. As the word 'good' has plenty of legitimate uses other than as a practical formal concept, I will mark when I intend to use it as such by italicizing it. This chapter only begins the account of the formal peculiarities of this sense of 'good'. It will be continued in the next as we compare it with the *beautiful* understood as a formal concept.

What distinguishes formal concepts can most effectively be communicated in the case of logic by recounting Benno Kerry's misplaced objection to Frege's *The Foundation of Arithmetic*, though I shall borrow Wittgenstein's language from the *Tractatus* to do so.[2] Frege had put forth the claim that the distinction between *concept* and *object* in language is absolute, picking out unique logical properties of constituents of a complete declarative sentence; a concept can never play the role of an object, nor vice versa. Take Frege's example sentence, "Silver is a horse." We isolate the logical constituents of this sentence by 'segmenting' it into its concept and object phrases. The concept phrase in the example would be represented as, '( ) is a horse'. This use of vacant parenthesis makes plain that the concept expression is unsaturated; it has an empty space that must be filled, must be saturated, with an object. The object expression is 'Silver'. It stands alone in a way a concept phrase

[1] This points to a form/content distinction, one better suited to deal with moral and aesthetic value than a thick/thin distinction. The content side of this distinction is explored in Chapter Five. This chapter explores the form side, only showing why neo-Sentimentalism is the natural—even necessary—complement to the formal characteristics of moral thought developed in the first three chapters.

[2] Gottlob Frege, *Foundations of Arithmetic*, trans. Austin, J.L. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980). Gottlob Frege, "On Concept and Object", in *Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege,* eds. Peter Geach and Max Black (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Press, 1977), pp. 42–55. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. Ogden, C.K. (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 1999).

cannot, as it does not await saturation. But it does not on its own give us anything truth valuable. When it saturates the concept expression, it functions to yield a truth value.

Benno Kerry famously thought he could present a counterexample to the absoluteness of the distinction, offering for this purpose, "The concept 'horse' is a concept easily attained." The segmentation of Kerry's sentence gives us, in the object position, "the concept 'horse'". *There we have it*, Kerry thought, *a concept in the object position. It couldn't be clearer that it is a concept; it even announces itself as one*. This, Frege replied, misses the point. Sure, the object phrase in Kerry's example may be—and doubtlessly is—a concept in a *psychological* sense; perhaps it refers to some image of a paradigmatic horse that one can hold before one's mind's eye. Fill in whatever description of a psychological concept you like. Logically, however, it is an object; logically, it saturates the concept "( ) is a concept easily attained" to form a complete thought. One demonstrates one has become competent with the formal concept *concept* by properly segmenting out the *concept* expression in one's symbolism; one demonstrates one has become competent with the formal concept *object* by properly segmenting out the *object* expression in one's symbolism. *Per impossible*, had Benno Kerry's counterexample succeeded, the 'proper' 'segmentation' of the sentence would have been as follows: "(( ) is a horse) is a concept easily attained." The impossibility exemplified in the fact that this does not even represent a complete thought, and the nonsense that Frege's response was condemned to when he met Kerry in his own confusion to retort that "the concept 'horse' is not a concept" are so many manifestations in logic of treating formal concepts as on a par with material concepts.[3] The aesthetician falls into similar confusion when she treats the delicate and the dynamic as on a par with the *beautiful*; the moral philosopher, likewise, when she treats moral terms in the description of an

[3] Frege, of course, was quite aware of his own nonsense, thus his plea for a pinch of salt.

action as on a par with the *good*.[4]

In logic, we demonstrate mastery of a formal concept by everywhere representing constituents of a proposition with the appropriate symbol type in our symbolism. The *good* is a formal concept employed in practical judgment. Given that practical judgment concerns our causal efficacy as rational agents capable of intentional action, the *good* is a practical formal concept; its application is an exercise of our causal efficacy.[5] The virtuous agent manifests mastery of this concept by choosing actions realizing moral value everywhere it is possible and wise to do so, choosing them specifically for this reason.

Recognizing the proper role of the *good* reveals that the surface grammar of statements such as "she acted for the sake of the *good*" can easily mislead. This is not to say she chose to act in a way that she conceived of as possessing a particular property, namely, the *good*. Nor is the concept of the *good* here a placeholder awaiting specification into the concept of an individual virtue, such as courage. It would be no threat to the courageousness of her action should the material concept 'courageous' enter into her description of his action as it would be if we were considering an example where the material concept 'modest' entered an agent's description of her modest action. We needn't say in the case of courage—as many do—and cannot say in the case of modesty that what it means for the virtuous agent to choose an action because it is courageous or modest is for her to choose in accordance with a recognition of an action as possessing qualities describable by these particular property terms. Rather, this requirement of virtuous action will be met where, in response to the question 'why?' regarding her action, the virtuous agent gives reasons consonant with the answer to the question of what it is that makes the action brave or modest or in whatever

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[4] Cp. Sebastian Rödl: "Thinking that ['good,' 'true,' and 'beautiful'] signify properties, one will find these to be very special properties—a sign that one is on a path to nonsense." "The Form of the Will" in *Desire, Practical Reason, and the Good*, ed. Sergio Tenenbaum (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010) 140.

[5] It will be important to note here or elsewhere that 'application' is not univocal between uses with formal or material concepts in view.

way virtuous.[6]

If the virtuous agent manifests mastery of the *good* as a formal concept by choosing actions realizing moral value everywhere it is possible and wise to do so, choosing them specifically for this reason, one important question becomes: how does one develop facility with this concept? Note that when it comes to Frege's *concept* and *object*, mastery of these concepts does not require any tutorials in logic; rather, we simply learn to speak a language, to attach predicates to objects in the most basic ways: 'the ball is red,' 'the cat is soft,' &c. Later, if we ever have occasion to bother, we can discover these logically distinct operations of mind by attending to how such ordinary thoughts hold together. Discovery follows mastery. Likewise, facility with the *good* is not acquired through studying moral philosophy. Our question, then, must be this: what is the analogue to competently knowing a language when it comes to the *good* in moral life? Our claim will ultimately be that it is knowledge of the human form of life and facility with judgments of natural goodness.[7]

## §2. The Concept *Human* and Moral Thought

Introducing any concept of the human invites worries about a problematic intrusion of the empirical into moral philosophy. Kant, of course, is well known for rather emphatic worries on this point. According to Kant, the concept of morality is itself sufficient for us to see that nothing empirical can ground morally good action. Moral law, given by reason, must ground any such action. Our human embodiment introduces animal desire and inclination, the causality of which operates by natural law rather than moral law. Kant made much of the observation that we must admit that we *could* act according to the moral law—whether we expect we *would* or not—even where

[6] I simply hazard this claim here; I offer some defense of it in Chapter 4.

[7] Though, as later sections will show, insofar as the human form is not an entirely independent object standing over against our knowledge of it, perhaps some such phrase as *participation in* knowledge of human form is to be preferred, awkward though it is.

all inclination opposes doing so. The lesson to be learned in response is that whatever our account of morality is, it must be one where the conception of an action as moral can be sufficient to insure its efficacy, enabling us thereby to act contrary to self-interest. The idea of the *good* as a practical formal concept as we will be developing it can accomplish this without needing any of Kant's extravagant metaphysical commitments, though this requires relying instead on various anathemas to Kant such as the concept *human* and moral action as responding to value apprehended by more than pure reason alone.

Worry that placing the concept *human* in a foundational role in moral philosophy opens it up to a crude sort of empirical determination needn't rely on full-blooded Kantianism for its force. The simplest interpretation of how the concept human might enter moral philosophy exhibits two kinds of mistake we should take care to avoid. On this interpretation, knowledge of the human form is known empirically and its importance for morality is reached deductively. John McDowell demonstrates the problems with such an interpretation well in 'Two Sorts of Naturalism'. We will consider his argument presently. Then, considering the corrections Michael Thompson offers will help us see our way to embracing the concept of the human while resisting any pernicious intrusion of the empirical.

Let us begin with McDowell's argument that knowledge of the human form cannot be a ground from which any conclusion possessing moral force can be reached deductively. To this end, McDowell imagines a wolf that has achieved rationality. Unfortunately, this wolf's new power of reason allows him to work out the concept of a free-rider, a concept he finds rather appealing. From then on, he takes to only feigning effort during the hunt, being as lazy as he thinks he can get away with, and yet helping himself to no less of the meat of his pack-mates' labor. Wolf nature, we know, is such that their flourishing requires the joint effort of the pack in the hunt. Can this fact in any way be used to effectively rebuke the free-riding wolf? The idea that McDowell's rational wolf

would find himself guilty of an injustice in acting contrary to what he knows wolves as such need requires that the error of his ways become manifest to him in a derivation of what he ought to do from the conjunction of his awareness that wolves must pool their energies in the hunt if they are to be successful with his awareness that he is himself a wolf.

McDowell observes that without even approaching traditional worries about deriving an 'ought' from an 'is', the wolf can know nothing need follow about himself from this fact about wolf nature, even if he is a wolf. The problem is that the logic of propositions characterizing species of living thing—being generic rather than universal—are such that truths about an individual member of a species cannot be deduced from facts about that species. We will attend to the logic of such propositions in detail shortly; presently, it will suffice to consider the example of Anscombe's that McDowell borrows, one that steps away from any moral concerns: Humans have thirty-two teeth. We cannot conclude from this that any given individual human has thirty-two teeth. Hockey players are people, too. Gretzky may have left many a tooth on the ice, but he hasn't thereby left his humanity there. Our rational wolf takes comfort in this bit of logic, realizing also that the inferential integrity of facts characterizing a life form is not restored simply by pertaining to characteristic activities rather than characteristic features. There is no valid path from truths about wolf nature to what he ought to do. And so, as long as his pack-mates are sufficiently skillful and the prey sufficiently plentiful, he knows he neither acts contrary to reason nor need worry of going hungry should he choose not to chip in. Mutatis mutandis, our knowledge of the human form cannot have direct moral import for us.

Thompson finds McDowell to be guilty of what he calls the 'empiricist fallacy'. I think it would be better to charge him with a sort of psychologism.[8] We turn now to what significance either charge has and how correcting whichever mistake helps us move forward. The first step

[8] The import of this claim needn't be addressed here; it will be explained below when its importance arises.

toward seeing how attributing foundational moral salience to knowledge of the human form need not amount to investing empirically discovered facts with normative force—and so to 'taking direction from outside'—is to realize that the concept *species* or *life-form* is not a concept empirically attained. We will shortly see that it, too, is a formal concept. By itself, this point doesn't get us very far. But when we introduce considerations of what non-observational knowledge we may acquire of the *human* form through first-person awareness, we can see that the possibility opens that not all knowledge of the human form need be rejected as coming 'from outside'. Accordingly, in the next section we will consider what it means to say that our *life-form* concept is not empirically attained, what the formal peculiarities of this are, and find the proper place for the obviously indispensable empirical observation in knowledge about particular species. In §5, we introduce the idea of judgments of natural goodness, and how our knowledge characterizing a given life-form allows for such judgments. §6 begins to consider the proper manner in which knowledge of the human form enters moral philosophy in light of the fact that some content of that knowledge is not acquired empirically, and §7 considers further what transformative effect this might have for judgments of natural goodness when the life-form concerned is the human self-consciously considering her own life.

## §3. The Concept of a Life-Form

We introduced the idea of a formal concept by discussing Frege on *concept* and *object*. Proper application of these formal concepts arrange constituents of a thought into one complete thought. The logical implications of some formal concepts extend further as well, determining the relation of other concepts to themselves beyond what is internal to the particular proposition in which they are used. The concept of a life-form is of the latter kind. Stanley Cavell provides a useful characterization:

> Here the test of your possession of a concept… would be your ability to use the concept in conjunction with other concepts, your knowledge of which concepts are relevant to the one in question and which are not; your knowledge of how various relevant concepts, used in conjunction with the concepts of different kinds of objects, require different kinds of contexts for their competent employment.[9]

Take, for example, the concept *process*, a frequent object of comparison for Thompson. To speak of something as a process rather than a mere event introduces the possibility of considering progressive aspect rather than only simple past, present, future; the concepts of completion and interruption gain purchase; and we imply a unity between what might be apparently unrelated events. To speak of something as alive has implications for what concepts relate to such a thing and in what manner, in what contexts. This section considers what is distinctive of the concept *life-form* and why it should be recognized to be a formal concept in this extended sense.

One peculiarity of *life-form* concepts is the 'inferential impotence' discussed above; nothing can be inferred about a particular individual of a species from our knowledge of the species itself. We express our knowledge of a kind of living thing in propositions exemplifying the form, 'The S is/has/does F,' 'S's are/have/do F,' or some variant.[10] Such propositions tolerate exceptions and so cannot be universally quantified. But neither can they be accurately be formalized with 'most' or even 'some'. In contrast with statements quantified in the latter manner, we *can* infer a conjunction from independent propositions characterizing the same species. If we know that humans have thirty-two teeth and also that humans have opposing thumbs, we know that humans have thirty-two teeth *and* opposing thumbs. Operating with this unique inferential potency, we could even construct a conjunctive property that can truly be said to belong to the life-form, though cannot truly be attributed to any individual instance of that life-form. This may on first thought seem strange, but

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[9] Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) 73.

[10] Here and below, I use the variables and sentence forms given by Thompson in 'Apprehending Human Form' in *Modern Moral Philosophy*, ed. Anthony O'Hear, vol. 54, The Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 47-74.

as Thompson jests, nobody's perfect.

The feature perhaps most striking about judgments that employ life-form concepts is what Thompson calls their implicit reference to a 'wider context'. In considering an individual living thing, the recognition of what kind of thing it is—its species—will take the simple form, 'X is an S'. Competent employment of a specific life-form concept presupposes a body of knowledge about the particular kind at issue. This will be comprised of the system of propositions taking the previous form that we know or surmise to hold true of 'the S.' When we make a statement about an individual member of some species, a statement taking a variation of the form '*this* S is/has/does G', the employment of a specific life-form concept (i.e., the term that will fill the variable S) brings with it that entire body of knowledge in a 'mediating' role. By way of beginning to clarify what this means, Thompson usefully compares this 'mediation' to Rawls' contrast between, e.g., running and sliding on one hand and *stealing a base* on the other; the latter presupposes the game of baseball.[11] Even a claim as simple as 'the dog is eating' invokes what we know the vital process of nutrition amounts to in the kind of thing that is a dog. Thompson's most vivid example of the import of the 'look to a wider context' concerns cell division:

> the division of an amoeba and the division of a human cell have a *lot* in common; the essentials are described in some detail on the same pages of the average introductory text. But while amoeba division is reproduction of amoeba-kind, human cell division is not the reproduction of humankind.[12]

Whether what is going on is reproduction or self-maintenance is told not by closer inspection of the chemical processes going on here and now in this cell, but by situating the process within its contribution to the life cycle of the organism of which it is a part.[13]

Thompson very helpfully situates what is formal and what empirical in our knowledge of

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[11] Thompson discusses the comparison at *Life and Action: Elementary Structures of Practice and Practical Thought* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008) 58. The relevant Rawls is "Two Concepts of Rules"

[12] "Apprehending Human Form," 64.

[13] *Life and Action*, 55. See also "Apprehending Human Form," 52.

particular life-forms in his essay, 'Apprehending Human Form'. There, he tells a story of how the discovery of a new species of jellyfish might go. A naturalist encounters a specimen of a species of jellyfish previously unknown to him. At first, he takes himself to have come upon a deformed specimen of a familiar species. The bell appears misshapen and it appears to have lost a few tentacles. Not long after, he spots another jellyfish bearing strikingly similar deformities; he later spots another one, then another. The naturalist soon realizes he has come across mostly healthy instances of a previously unknown species of jellyfish rather than deformed instances of the other species. They are not missing tentacles; this species simply has fewer than the other. The shift in realizing that this one here must be said to be missing a few tentacles while that one there must not despite their having the same number of tentacles is the realization that instances of two distinct life-forms are before him and so are judgments mediated by differing wider contexts. Sure, that a new species has been discovered is an empirical fact; but the structuring of the data in our thought about this species is something deeper. The formal structure our thought takes in virtue of being about a living thing is something, in Thompson's phrase, 'somehow *carried into the scene;*'[14] that is, carried into the scene in the way that the logical roles of *concept* and *object* are carried into the scene as we learn to say that the ball is blue or the sky is blue or the song is blue; in the way that the logical role of *relation* is carried into the scene as we learn to say that something is on something else or that someone is the daughter of someone else; in the way that the logic of a *process* unites this movement here and now with that movement there and then into parts of a whole.

I do not claim to have offered a full defense of this conception of the concept of a life-form. For such a defense, I simply refer the reader to Thompson's work. I do, however, hope to have begun to communicate what it means to claim that *life-form* is a formal concept, as doing so is a necessary beginning to rejecting McDowell's characterization of the importance of the concept

[14] "Apprehending Human Form," 63, my emphasis.

human for moral philosophy. This first step is not complete, however, until we see the role of this formal concept in judgments of natural goodness.

## §4. Judgments of Natural Goodness

We can already see judgments of natural goodness at work in the preceding section. The naturalist's judgments as to whether a particular jellyfish is sound or defective insofar as it has the number of tentacles that it has are of this kind. A judgment that represents something as living will take on the formal properties outlined in the previous section. A judgment that identifies a particular individual as a member of a particular species introduces the relevant 'wider context' to which it makes implicit reference. This wider context is the system of natural historical judgments that characterize the life-cycle of the species, that comprise our body of knowledge regarding the survival of an individual of that kind through self-maintenance and survival of the species through reproduction. This body of knowledge acts as a sort of standard. Judgments of natural goodness, then, will take variations of the form "An S is defective/sound in a certain respect if it is/has/does G" where expressed generally, or variations of the form "this S is defective/sound, as an S, in that it is/has/does H" where it concerns a particular individual.

Thompson's story of the naturalist discovering an unfamiliar species of jellyfish helps us see that *life-form* is a formal concept by considering how someone fully competent with judgments of natural goodness comes to apply them when met with new data. What we are aiming ultimately to understand is how, when it comes to developing facility with the formal concept *good,* facility with judgments of natural goodness in conjunction with knowledge of the human form plays a role analogous to that of knowing language in developing competence with *concept* and *object*. We can move toward that goal by adding a story of our own. What it depicts is a case of moral education gone awry in the course of a child learning to live life in an environment shared with other living

things. While we have so far been talking about things that ultimately allow for moral knowledge, we have not yet been considering specifically moral matters. In introducing moral education here, I do not think I am leaping ahead in any problematic way. The moral concept primarily involved in our story will be that of *harm*. Harm can be glossed in terms of natural goodness: it can only occur to kinds of thing admitting of standards of natural goodness and occurs where what goodness a thing possesses is adversely affected.

Little Jimothy was playing outdoors one day with his father when he spotted a garden lizard. He excitedly brought it to his father's attention. To little Jimothy's delight, his father responded, "let's catch it!" He watched with giddy excitement as his father stalked nearer and nearer to the unsuspecting lizard. His father paused, gathering his bearings now that their new playmate was within reach. He lunged, grabbed, and, yes! caught him! Little Jimothy cheered. But his father had caught the lizard by the tail, which, after a second's struggle, broke off as it scurried away. Little Jimothy screamed in horror and began to cry. His father rushed to console him, comfort quickly taking the form of a biology lesson in regeneration. Their lost playmate will be just fine, he assured Jimothy. Its tail will grow back. He explained that it was an escape mechanism so that lizards could get away from those seeking to make a dinner of them and that this one just didn't understand that they were only friends looking to play. Little Jimothy's horror gave way to wonder, so his father wiped away the lingering tears and off they went to try to find another reptilian playmate.

The following day, Little Jimothy's father is startled by a terrible din in the next room. At first, he thinks he has heard someone step on an accordion and trip. But no one in the house owns an accordion. He panics and storms into the room to discover what has happened. This time, to *his* horror, he discovers that the apparent accordion was actually the wail of Tibbles, the family cat, in pain. On one side of the room, Tibbles writhes, flails and screeches; on the other, Little Jimothy, in frightened and confused tears, holds Tibbles' tail—and a pair of scissors. Cursing and using

Descartes' name in vain, Little Jimothy's father demands he explain himself. The hysterical explanation is hardly impressive at first; yes, Tibbles' tail is pretty and fluffy and soft, but how could Little Jimothy find these reasons sufficient justification for his cruel act? It dawns on his father what has happened, though, when he begins to ramble about the previous day's experience with the lizard along with various protests of "but you said..." Little Jimothy had attached the concept of regeneration to tails in general, not to lizards' tails specifically.

I think what we find in this tale—if the reader is willing to indulge a bit of twisted humor—is a recognizable hiccup in moral education. If our concern were the substantial moral claims about human relations with animals, there would be too much to quibble over in this example for it be very helpful.[15] We can save those quibbles for another day, though, as our concern has to do with learning the application of judgments of natural goodness. Determining that Tibbles was harmed in a way that the garden lizard was not requires reference to the sound state of an individual of the species each bears. The garden lizard will grow a new tail; Tibbles will not. And Jimothy still has much of this sort to learn to avoid further domestic mishaps. A chocolate treat for him is poison for Fido as 'food', too, must be mediated by knowledge of the life-form. What counts as harming individual living things will be determined in part by the natural history of its kind. This is no less true of harming rational animals than non-rational animals. The human form of life, though, opens up new possibilities for the kinds of thing that can count as harm. Let us begin exploring what this means.

[15] Nexus of considerations along these lines in dealing with animals does arise in non-contrived, real life cases. For example, at least in America, the snow crab is a protected species while at the same time snow crab claws are a popular delicacy in restaurants. The conflict here is circumvented by taking advantage of the snow crab's capacity for regeneration. After catch, they are released alive. But if both of their claws are fully grown, release comes only after one of their claws has been harvested. From the perspective of American law as it presently stands, then, on one claw, preservation of the species is a valued end, on the other, the degree of harm inflicted upon the crabs is permissible given the demand for and benefit to the economy in the food industry's meeting that demand, coupled with the consideration of the snow crab's capacity for regeneration.

## §5. KNOWLEDGE OF THE SPECIFICALLY HUMAN

> The human entity is not the answer to any philosophical problem,
> but philosophy is answerable to it (to us)…
> Kelly Dean Jolley[16]

If our knowledge of the human form entirely paralleled our knowledge of other species of life form, McDowell's objection would still highlight potential problems with introducing the concept *human* into moral philosophy. I claimed earlier that Thompson's charge that McDowell commits what he calls an 'empiricist fallacy' points up a sort of psychologism. In McDowell's case, the psychologism comes about through the mistake of thinking that the only knowledge of the human form we could have must be acquired empirically. In this section we consider the second step of Thompson's response which reveals this to be mistaken. In short, the response is simply to remind us that some of what we know about the human form comes from our non-observational, first-personal awareness of ourselves. Before spelling that out, though, notice that even so, even if every trace of the empirical can be removed, the inferential impotence McDowell highlights remains; it isn't the fact that the premise is acquired empirically that accounts for its impotence, but the form it takes in virtue of applying a vital concept, of representing a thing as living.[17] The real mistake—the underlying psychologism—is the attempt to use knowledge of the human form as a premise in a deductive argument concerning what ought to be done, to grant the concept *human* the 'unconvincing speaking part' of whispering imperatives into our ear, or at least the facts from which those imperatives are to be derived. Two points, then, must be addressed: one, what is the relevant content of our knowledge of human nature, and two, if not deductive, what *is* its logical role in the overall account?

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[16] "Wittgenstein and Thoreau (and Cavell): The Ordinary Weltanschauung," *Reason Papers* 19 (Fall 1994): 9.
[17] "Grammar tells what kind of object anything is." Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, English text reprinted. (New York: Macmillan, 1963) §373. See also §371.

To help us maintain our bearings, let's recall the sort of account we are progressing toward. We have taken up matters surrounding the nature of our knowledge of the human form of life as well as the logical character of judgments of natural goodness. The purpose in doing so is not that understanding these matters will in any way provide the basis from which we will then see how we might proceed deductively or procedurally to answers regarding what actions are virtuous. Rather, the importance of these matters for us lies in the pertinence of each to our developing competence with the *good* understood as a practical formal concept. I must note one other matter before proceeding to the points identified above: in pursuing the first point, space demands I help myself to the assumption that immediate first personal self-awareness is something we do have. Though accounts concerning the nature of such knowledge and how it is possible are myriad, the claim that we have *some* such knowledge is, I think, not so controversial as to render the assumption irresponsible. Among the things generally thought to be known first-personally are our beliefs, our desires, and our intentional actions.[18] Along with this assumption, we should add the observation that believing and doing are vital operations in the life of a human being no less than digesting and sleeping; a claim to the effect that "Jimothy believes the cat's tail is pretty" makes implicit reference to the wider context relevant to the human no less than a claim that "the rose is blooming" makes implicit reference to the wider context relevant to roses. While many differences obtain, what differences there are come through the difference in the nature of the concept *human* as opposed to concepts of non-rational living things.

With this assumption in place, we can begin addressing the above two points together via recourse to a familiar observation. One of the questions of fundamental importance for moral philosophy is what, if anything, stands as its primary or central concept. Two candidates frequently

[18] Including intentional actions here is more controversial than beliefs and desires. For those who insist we can only know what we *intend* or what we are *trying* to do in this way, I note that such an account of intentional action would, I think, require only minimal alterations to the argument of the dissertation as a whole.

considered are the concept of a rational agent and the concept of the human. Given the recent dominance of broadly neo-Kantian views, emphasizing what role the concept *human* does *not* play in moral philosophy provides a useful beginning for locating what is its proper role. When the neo-Aristotelian responds to the neo-Kantian that *human* rather than *rational agent* is the fundamental concept of moral philosophy, she is not, or at least should not be, recommending we simply replace *rational agent* with *human* and carry on more or less procedurally the same, deriving moral principles from that new starting point. This would give us what McDowell calls a 'blueprint' model: once we determine what the final end of human being is, we can then procedurally derive verdicts concerning the goodness or badness of any given action so long as we can find sufficient instrumental premises linking this action to that ultimate good.[19]

I have said that recognizing ourselves to have non-empirical knowledge of the human form removes the cause of McDowell's psychologism, though doing so is not alone sufficient to escape psychologism entirely. The only relevance something discovered empirically *could* have for thought is as content; to seek to endow such a content with normative force is surely a form of 'taking direction from outside.' We do little to escape this in allowing for our first-person access, and so recognizing that the content of our knowledge is not empirically discovered, if we do not also see our way to thinking of this content as something other than mere facts about a specific kind of living thing, even if I know myself to be that kind of living thing. (Kant avoids any problem here by having what is given in the 'fact of reason' already be practical, i.e., the moral *law*.) It is not how the knowledge is acquired, but the form the knowledge takes that results in the logical breakdown McDowell rightly exploits.

Rather than mere facts about human nature, what I think is given in first personal

[19] Wiggins discusses an instance of Railton doing just this in his "A Neglected Position?" in *Reality, Representation, and Projection*, eds. John Haldane and Crispin Wright (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) 329-336.

awareness—and what requires an alternative logic—is *problematic* knowledge of the human form. I want to use 'problematic' here in way that straddles two senses. One is the sense given to the term by Kant to characterize a modality of judgments in the first *Critique*. 'Problematic' in this sense indicates nothing about the content but locates that content—whatever it is—in its proper moment of thought. Where problematic, the content is taken up by the understanding in a manner that makes sense, that makes it a proper object for judgment, though, preceding judgment, is silent as to its truth or falsity. The second sense in which the content should be thought to be 'problematic' is in the colloquial sense: what is given to understanding is given as a problem, as something to-be-solved. Setting ourselves to solving the puzzle isn't something we need *do*; doing *anything* ensures we engage in that project whether we much like it or not.[20] Intentional action, requiring as it does practical *judgment*, presupposes a move from the problematic to the assertoric.

We must proceed with care, here. We can speak of the 'role of our knowledge of human nature' for practical judgment and mean to refer to two different though robustly interdependent things: (1) the knowledge each of us possesses distributively and the manner in which an individual's knowledge of the human form is present wherever she makes a practical judgment, and (2) what we might call the public concept of the human, our collective understanding of ourselves contained (and disputed) in common cultural awareness. These two are necessarily in ongoing dynamic interplay, and are so *because* of the problematic nature of the knowledge involved. The wolf-nature analogue for both can be seen to be at work in McDowell's example. On that point, returning to it can be helpful. What further help it offers, however, comes through seeing its shortcomings. The example's expository benefit, by assuming the psychologism we must rid ourselves of, will be overcome by its costs.

The way McDowell presents his argument, we are in conversation with the wolf. We are

[20] It is characteristic of the virtuous agent, of course, that she does care to 'solve the puzzle,' and to do so well.

made privy to how a public concept of wolf nature enters into his individual consciousness as he recounts his practical deliberations to us. In seeking to influence his decision, we appeal to the public concept of wolf nature. Attending to substantive matters would be a distraction here, but our formal concerns quickly return if we note that, contrary to appearances, our moral concept of 'free riding'—the concept McDowell has us appeal to when we try to persuade him he ought to fully contribute to the hunt—*does not apply here*. For all they share, the rational wolves and the non-rational wolves have an essential difference in their natures, that described by Aristotle in *De Anima*. The nature McDowell has us appeal to as content in arguing with the wolf is not the nature of the wolf with whom we argue.[21] The logical breakdown that the wolf alerts us to as he defends his rationality eschews the logical breakdown that is responsible for the failure of 'blueprint' models. What prevents the possibility of a self-conscious being discovering a 'blueprint' leading from thought about her own nature to judgments about what is good for her to do is not the form taken by any of the premises such an argument would contain, even though it is correct to point out that a generic statement frustrates simple deduction; it is rather that since self-consciousness brings with it the capacity to 'step back' from any information prior to judgment, as McDowell rightly stresses, it thereby imposes limits on what force mere information can have on her practical deliberation, no matter what form the information itself takes. In other words, it is the form of moral thought as a whole, not that of any of its contents, that matters.

At this point, we have seen what the shape of the account we must reject is as well as why it must be rejected. As for the account we are moving toward, I have made the following claims along the way which await development: (1) the knowledge of the human form of life to which we have a priori access in first-personal awareness is given problematically; (2) in manifesting a practical

[21] I think it is a common observation that when slave holders try to rationalize their evil by insisting their slaves are "just animals," this is a motivated denial of (full-blooded) rationality in order to change the moral logic of the situation.

judgment, our actions require a move to the assertoric.

The reader has likely recognized that we have introduced a tension in speaking of 'information' and especially of 'knowledge' when referring to the not-yet-judged-true-or-false. If anything in this vicinity can be called 'knowledge' in the traditional sense, it is, as we said, knowledge of some problem, knowledge of our plight as human beings; the knowledge that would be expressed in the description we would give of our needs and of our capacity to meet those needs. To begin developing the positive account, we do need *some* idea of what this means content-wise. Let us borrow from Cavell:

> In being asked to accept this [the human form of life], or suffer it, as given for ourselves, we are not asked to accept, let us say, private property, but separateness; not a particular fact of power but the fact that I am a man, therefore of *this* (range or scale of) capacity for work, for pleasure, for endurance, for appeal, for command, for understanding, for wish, for will, for teaching, for suffering. The precise range or scale is not knowable a priori, any more than the precise range or scale of a word is to be known a priori.[22]

So our separateness is given, as is—save for the beasts and gods among us—our need to overcome or at least negotiate it. The fact of our separateness alone, of course, gives no indication as to how it might be overcome. And any idea we come up with won't contain within its concept any indication as to whether it will go any real distance in actually overcoming it, let alone whether it could do so without outstripping our capacity for endurance or understanding or will, &c.

Reflections such as these only address the much easier sense in which our knowledge of human nature is problematic, that to describe our place in the world and our unavoidable confrontations with others invariably describes puzzles of various kinds. What of the more difficult notion, that of the problematic nature of this knowledge? This will be our focus in the following section.

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[22] Stanley Cavell, "Declining Decline" in *This New yet Unapproachable America: Lectures after Emerson after Wittgenstein*, 1987 Frederick Ives Carpenter Lectures (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013) 44.

## §6. Asserting Ourselves

As human beings, we are 'condemned' to act, as Korsgaard has put it.[23] It is familiar enough that when we act intentionally, the 'I' of self-consciousness is present in the thought relative to the action. One lesson we have learned from Thompson is that insofar as the 'I' is a representation of an individual human being, it will take the form any other proposition representing a life-form takes and so will be mediated by our knowledge of the human species, by a look to its wider context. But for the human species, understanding what this 'do *x*' means often requires the look to the wider context to involve a look to convention. A range of familiar examples can be quickly called up by name dropping J. L. Austin here.[24] Some of the things humans characteristically do can only be the sorts of things they are in the context of conventions defining their felicitous execution. As we will see below, that there are such conventions is no accident, but is one consequence of the problematic nature of our knowledge of the human. Insofar as an intentional action exhibits a practical *judgment*, it must contain a movement from the problematic to the assertoric. In this move, we must inescapably stake our claim in response to the problem of human being. The action declares: *this* is how the human lives. We may in the very next breath regret or in the very next act renounce the claim staked in the previous, but in being condemned to act we are condemned to stake our claim. We could eternally shrug our shoulders in the face of this problem were it not essentially practical, i.e., if a self-conscious human being could somehow act inhumanly.[25]

Peter Winch offers a helpful characterization of part of what is involved in coming to know human nature once we have this dynamic in view:

> …what we can ascribe to human nature does not determine what we can and what we

[23] See the opening pages of her *Self-Constitution: Agency, Identity, and Integrity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
[24] J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 2d ed., The William James Lectures Delivered at Harvard University in 1955 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975).
[25] To be sure, this sentence is tautological. I do not mean 'inhumanly' in the evaluative sense that one may use to say some very evil person acts inhumanly. (That would be to confuse the psychological and the logical.) Rather, I mean the redundancy that a human being cannot act in a way that that action exhibits any form other than the form human action necessarily takes given our specific embodied rationality.

> cannot make sense of; rather, what we can and what we cannot make sense of determine what we can ascribe to human nature. It is indeed precisely for this reason that the concept of human nature is not the concept of something fixed and given; i.e. the reason for this is a philosophical, not a sociological, one.[26]

The idea of 'what we can and what we cannot make sense of' here is best thought of practically. We may ask someone for her reasons for doing something with Anscombe's sense of 'why?' and may need to repeat the question any number of times if the answer returned offers a proximate end that leaves us uncertain as to the point of some greater project. 'Getting the point' here is the 'making sense' in Winch's remark; when we can see the action as something that contributes to the pursuit of some interest any human can be thought to reasonably have, then we have made sense of it. Philip Clark expounds this idea very nicely in a recent paper[27] one important strength of which is how clearly it demonstrates that nothing in such a thought requires us come near any heavy metaphysics. Common sense will do. The intuition-priming example he begins his argument with contrasts two cases of a guy explaining why he is spray-painting his left shoe. In the first case, there is no further end or purpose—not a peculiar sense of fashion; not to participate in some strange new game—only, he claims, for its own sake. In the second case, he claims the additional weight added to the shoe on that side will help him maintain his balance. Of course, it remains baffling as to why on earth he thinks such a miniscule addition of weight will in any way help him keep his balance, but we needn't have immersed ourselves in treatises on human nature to get the point of keeping one's balance.

Clark's fun example can also be used to reveal how everyday interactions are indirectly a sort of ongoing meditation on the human form of life. If what we can and what we cannot make sense of determines what we can ascribe to human nature, then insofar as we have some basic

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[26] "Human Nature" in *Ethics and Action* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972) 84.

[27] See Philip Clark, "Aspects, Guises, Species, and Knowing Something to Be Good" in *Desire, Practical Reason, and the Good*, ed. Sergio Tenenbaum (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010) 234-243.

understanding of what others around us are up to, we manifest an understanding of human nature such that we can see what they are doing to broadly address a characteristically human interest. Where we fail to understand, one common reason will be that we don't see how this is a means to addressing such an interest; more instructively, sometimes our incomprehension manifests a blind spot or misconception as to what goods are available to us. When we ask the shoe-painter "why?," our move from incomprehension to comprehension—or at least our trading incomprehension about an end for incomprehension about means—is itself an insight into how it is that a human life is here and now realizing itself. Of course, my understanding needn't appear in any such fancy terms. As far as occurrent thought goes, I'm just curious about what he's up to.

This 'getting the point,' this 'making sense of,' then, is an instance of situating the action in the wider context of a human life. The uniqueness of 'the look to the wider context' where the object of thought is a human being becomes important here. We mentioned that Thompson helps his reader get in view the sort of idea he is going for with the 'look to the wider context' by analogy to Rawls' contrast between running and sliding in one case and stealing a base on the other. It is only in the context of an established practice of the game of baseball that the former actions could even possibly count as such a thing as stealing a base. Thompson's analogy is that when speaking of living things as living, knowledge of the object's form of life must mediate in a similar way for us to be able to so much as say, e.g., that what is going on here amounts to eating or self-medicating or reproducing. The uniqueness of the human form of life, in short, is that it is the sort of thing whose life cycle can include such things as *literally stealing bases*.

Thompson's analogy takes us from thought about complex rule-governed convention to thought about the biological. The present point is that in the human form of life, the two often cannot be clearly separated. Human life exists in the realm of meanings; in another phrase of

Winch's, what is at issue is not just life but a conception of life.[28] In the life of the human, simple biological questions around reproduction *can* arise, but in most everyday circumstances our concerns in that part of life are typically a bit more exciting. We quoted Cavell earlier citing separateness as an example of the given in human life. He gestured there that struggling with that separateness leads to institutions of private property; we can note here that struggling with that same separateness in much different contexts can lead to the development courtship rituals. Courtship rituals are—among other things—conventions enshrined in common cultural understanding rather than law that provide a structured way to begin pursuing romantic love's demand for absolute eradication of this separateness.[29]

Our needs and interests are given problematically to us in our shared humanity. When first quoting Cavell on separateness, we noted that reflection on the concept of some action will be of little help in determining what counts as appropriate responses to those interests. Rather, we must put ourselves to the test; we need experience to give us our eye.[30] This point explains why I reached for the phrase '*participation in* knowledge of the human form' in an earlier footnote.[31] 'Participation in knowledge' has an odd ring to contemporary ears, but 'participation in practices' does not. We can see the latter to simply be a mode of the former. Of course, much of the time we are not at a complete loss as to how to address our needs. We have already mentioned a couple of examples as to why we are not; settled conventions such as private property and courtship rituals contain an answer most take up without much further deliberation. In having a sense of what a practice is for—however vague or unreflective—the individual's going along with it in order to meet some need or interest is a practical affirmation of it. This is the assertoric of doing.

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[28] "Understanding a Primitive Society" in *Ethics and Action*, 44.
[29] Is this biological? It is certainly human.
[30] To borrow phrases from pertinent discussions by Thoreau and Aristotle respectively.
[31] It is also an idea wonderfully explored by Cora Diamond in her "Eating Meat and Eating People." As she puts it here, the concept human is for contemplation, not discovery. In *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy, and the Mind* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995) 319-334.

The problematic nature of the knowledge of the human form of life we possess in virtue of being self-conscious human animals renders any hope for a blueprint to reach an accurate conception of the good untenable. Nevertheless, this knowledge is what we must go by as we figure out what we should do. The assertoric nature of action requires that we bring the meaning making activity of understanding the circumstances in which we find ourselves to an end in practical judgment; we must assert ourselves, so to speak, and, in that act, stake our claim as to how human life realizes itself. If we note in addition to this that no single act done in particular circumstances will end the problematic nature of our knowledge of the human form in general, we can see that our moral lives involve a constant, ongoing interplay between the problematic and the assertoric, between making sense of ourselves and realizing our lives in the light of what sense we have made.

This dynamic character that our knowledge of the human form of life takes necessitates that we continually wrestle with it; our participation is not optional. And while much of this struggle is one we each must engage in privately, it is crucial to attend to just how much of it is either public or dependent upon the public. Some of this is as casual as the conversation we have when someone curiously inquires what we're up to, assuming the question was not inappropriate and we are in the mood to chat. Where our actions have consequences for others, we likely *owe* the other explanations or justifications for our actions whether we care to share them or not. In cases of this sort, our actions are open to the criticism of others. There is a small-scale sort of public discourse in these direct person-to-person exchanges of reasons and disputes over their adequacy that, writ large, is the public discourse of our politics as well as of our upholding or refining or abandoning of practices in civil society.

We have reached a point where we can introduce the claim that enables moral philosophy to rely upon a logic other than the deductive: one consequence of our knowledge of the human form of life—that which informs our judgments of natural goodness—being knowledge not possessed

but participated in is that this participation, our wrestling with human nature in its private and public individual as well as collective manifestations, *plays a constitutive role in moral value*. Our relation to ourselves and to each other *naturally compels* us into the kind of activity that can support neo-sentimentalist realism about value. The presence of moral values—objective and real—in an account of moral life is what changes the logical space such an account can inhabit, allowing something drastically different from a blueprint model. To be sure, nothing in this chapter vindicates moral values as objective and real; that is the argument of Chapter Five. What we must note here is that a necessary condition for that account has been secured. We are not just stitching accounts together willy-nilly. The present account of the form of our practical and moral thought and the forthcoming account of the content of that thought do not simply work well together. They require each other. This value-constituting public discourse and its attendant practices are natural consequences of the dynamic character of acting in light of our problematic knowledge of the human form of life.

Assume for present purposes the vindication of moral value succeeds; we could then take Thompson's remark with regards to acting virtuously—that where we do so act, "the reasons that we 'have' are the ones we take account of when we are *reasoning well,*"[32]—and understand 'reasoning well' in terms other than soundness and validity alone. Given the actual presence of moral value (or the actual possibility for it to be realized), we doubtless have reason to judge that it is so. And where anyone judges something to be so because it is, in fact, so, i.e. if she judges as there is reason to judge, she is in a broad sense surely 'reasoning well.' A gloss of this broad sense of 'reasoning well' echoes the sense in which reason functions well in perception: it only endorses claims warranted by the circumstances as perceived, all things considered, with, e.g., self-interest being the equivalent of bad lighting.[33] Straightforward deductive reasoning can be, though very often is not, among what

[32] "Apprehending Human Form," 60.

[33] I address the epistemic questions raised here and the sense of 'reasoning' in Chapters Four and Five.

brings one to properly register the presence of (or opportunity to realize) moral value. But here, just as it is in critical discourse regarding aesthetic value, it is one tool among many to bring one to see things as they are.[34]

## §7. Conclusion

I began the inquiry of this chapter by claiming that the *good* should be understood as a formal concept. Our discussion of Frege on the *concept/object* distinction served to give us our bearings on both what a formal concept is, and, through Kerry's confusion, how deceptive surface grammar can be when we use the name of a formal concept. Competence with *concept* and *object* is not found in an ability to give a definition of each; rather, it is found in the skill acquired in learning language. In our competent use of language, formal concepts inform the contents of thought such that these otherwise manifold materials operate together to yield a single understandable whole—a sentence. And, as such, this new whole becomes evaluable in terms of truth and falsity.

Formal concepts, we then saw, can hold more than just a single thought together in a way that makes something understandable as the kind of thing it is. What might otherwise be apparently manifold events, for example, hold together in a newly understandable way as phases of one thing when discovered to be—and brought under the formal concept of—a *process*. Another such formal concept is that of a *species* or *form of life*. Like a thought united in a well-formed sentence employing

[34] The resulting account here will be, I believe, very close to what John McDowell gestures at as a promising possibility in his "Might There Be External Reasons?" One prerequisite he emphasizes for the success of such an account is that one must further develop an account along the lines of that presented by David Wiggins in "A Sensible Subjectivism?" i.e., to provide the vindication of moral value we are now only assuming. One thing worth adding for those familiar with McDowell's paper and subsequent discussions concerning it—and this will be further developed in Chapter Four as well—is that his use of the word 'conversion' need not insinuate anything dramatic. Surely it would have to be dramatic if we are thinking of an agent changing at once from vicious to virtuous, but the transition to recognizing the importance of reasons from failing to do so is very common on a perfectly mundane level. McDowell himself reaches here for an aesthetic analogy: reasons are there to appreciate atonal music, but it may be difficult to bring some to see that. True enough. But it is also the case that nearly any novice can be brought to a richer appreciation for Rembrandt's *Prodigal Son* with great ease by highlighting the contrast in the father's hands.

*concept* and *object* terms—but unlike a mere *process*—a form of evaluation is internal to life-form concepts. For declarative sentences, it is truth and falsity. Once we comprehend a form of life, we can then make judgments of natural goodness.

The human, of course, is a form of life. As such, judgments of natural goodness are warranted. But the human is not just any form of life since it is a form of life that intentionally pursues well-being according to its understanding of its own form. We captured this earlier by saying that knowledge of the human is not something simply possessed, but participated in. This, we saw, rather complicates matters. The first-personality of practical judgment introduces the species concept *human* insofar as 'I' picks out a human being. For this reason, mediation by the 'wider context' is internal to practical judgment. Much in the mediating body of knowledge of this wider context, though, is only problematic knowledge. And yet to act is to judge, to render the knowledge assertoric in the practical sense, to assert ourselves.

Now, nothing necessitates we act according to what we know to be good for the human, and for two quite different reasons. First, as self-conscious agents, we are entirely free to flout this knowledge at any cost to others for our own pleasure and even at some cost to ourselves where we prefer a benefit also incurred by the same action. McDowell's free-riding wolf demonstrated this. Second, what knowledge we have of the human is not a settled matter anyway. Whatever we choose to do now just might lead to acquisition of the knowledge that it was exactly the wrong thing to do, and not because of some of the peculiarities at hand, but because it is discovered to be deleterious to the human as such. Whatever choice we make, its implicit assertion of how human life should realize itself does not reach beyond the singular judgement it is internal to. Asserting ourselves never completes our knowledge; the very next act will be ventured from the same problematic, sense-making-but-not-yet-judged state. This dynamic is internal to action itself. Making sense of ourselves, of others, and of ourselves in relation to others, then, is an ongoing

conversation of sorts. This conversation is not one we need ever recognize as such, nor is it one that is front in center in our everyday individual actions. We simply concern ourselves with meeting our needs, with pursuing our interests. And happily, as we noted, the struggles of the many that have lived before us have sometimes resulted in establishing practices that can bring us unreflectively along with the solutions they hit upon. Some amount to upholding of values.

In the application of a life-form concept to an object of thought, we represent that object as evaluable in terms of natural goodness. In this form of thought alone, the *good* as a practical formal concept has no place. This only enters with the attribution of value realized by that living thing's intentional action. We have not yet said anything about these values on a substantive level, only indicated where they are part of the story. Knowledge of the human form and facility with judgments of natural goodness are for the *good* what knowing language is for *concept* and *object*. A summary statement of the positive claim here could now be expressed thus: the *good* would be blind without facility with judgments of natural goodness—as we would otherwise have no evaluative form of thought adequate to the living as living—and would be empty without knowledge of the human form of life—as we would otherwise have no idea of the interests that make sense of our actions as the realization of a human life.

This chapter's task will ultimately serve the purpose of attributing unity to goodness and beauty. We momentarily let the aesthetic dimension fall by the wayside, but we can see that it was always near in the offing by reintroducing some of what we established in Chapter One.

We there discovered a 'shared space' between moral and aesthetic judgment. Part of what is shared is our human matter; it is, after all, we humans who are in a judging relation. One formal feature shared is the problematic, sense-making moment in practical judgment which terminates in action, but which is essential to aesthetic judgment. This chapter was a fuller exploration of the dynamic nature of our thought about the human consequent upon this problematic moment in

practical judgment.

In the following chapter we will explore another shared formal feature only gestured at in Chapter One (§1.5). For both kinds of judgment, a proper understanding will not just attend to the subject and her object, but also to the subject's articulation of her relation to that object. 'Articulation' is not univocal across cases; the shift in sense tracks the fundamental difference in forms, the practical versus the disinterested. What that means is next chapter's topic. Here, let's recall materials from Chapter One that should make us *expect* such an intimate relation between these forms of judgment.

The enjoyment of beauty is a disinterested pleasure. But pleasure's etiology reveals it to be a fundamentally practical capacity. Pleasure indicates what to pursue, pain what to avoid, though of course this does not mean we pursue every potential pleasure or that every pursuit is pleasurable. Sometimes it is rather work to acquire necessaries, raising a need for some endurance of pain. Acquiring the necessaries for happiness often requires work. But work is only instrumental, incapable in itself of securing all such necessaries. Human happiness also calls for enjoyment of intrinsic goods, for some amount of 'existential realization itself,' pointing to our need to be not-at-leisure so that we may be at leisure. Work and leisure cooperate in the pursuit of happiness.

The enjoyment of beauty is the paradigm of leisure and its experience is uniquely indicative of what enduring happiness might be. It presupposes no lack but nonetheless rewards us with contentment akin to that in lack fulfilled (§§1.3, 1.7). Next chapter addresses how thought about beauty can be beneficial—note: *can* be—for pursuit of virtue, and so how it informs the virtuous person's life. Beauty, this reveals, is not just a symbol of happiness. It is a constituent of happiness.

Chapter Three

# WHAT IS IT LIKE TO BE HUMAN?

> Between the thought-action and the actual action, between possibility and actuality, there perhaps is no difference at all in content; the difference in form is always essential. Actuality is interestedness by existing in it.
> Johannes Climacus[1]

We are seeking a way that contemporary philosophy might be able to recover an understanding of goodness and beauty that attributes a unity to these values. It's a thought some version of which has only recently been lost relative to its millennia long adherence. The direction in which we have been looking has been to the nature of the judgmental activity we engage in directed toward each value. Perhaps the unity of goodness and beauty needn't be grounded in a divine nature or taken to be transcendental properties of being, but instead can be grounded in human nature. Not that we understand what human nature is any better than we do what goodness or beauty are. But coming to better understand any one will better our understanding of the others.

Chapter one clarified which sorts of judgments we should be considering when dealing with each value. This has focused us upon the agent of moral action—the production of moral value rather than the spectator's evaluation of it—and the spectator of beauty—its admiration rather than the artist's production of it. This is to take the primary form of each judgment, noting that the

[1] Søren Kierkegaard, *Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, for American Scandinavian foundation, 1941), 340.

forms we set aside are derivative. This, however, points to a challenge for grounding the unity of goodness and beauty in forms of judgment. The judgments are not just different, but in some sense opposed: practical versus disinterested. How is it, then, anything as substantive as our struggle to make sense of human nature could be meaningfully common to them?

Chapter two began answering this question and we will continue answering it presently. Last chapter we saw that thought about the human is thought about a kind of living thing; and since thought about the living hangs together in ways distinct from thought about the non-living, thought about the human takes on the form characteristic of thought about the living. Thought about the human has its distinctive moment, though, insofar as we live according to a conception of how we should live; our interpretation of the human affects how we go about realizing the instance of human being that we are. To speak in this manner is to speak practically and to highlight the central ethical question, how shall we live? But what we discovered was that while this sense-making, interpretive activity happens in a logical moment that can be articulated practically, it is not itself distinctively practical. This makes it possible for the same activity to find articulation in judgments of the beautiful. We complete the account of how in the present chapter.

Narrative and the multiple ways we use it to make sense of ourselves will be key. We will take one of Kierkegaard's more famous remarks to guide us in seeing how narrative brings our ethical and aesthetic lives together, namely his observation that we must understand life backward, but live it forward. One tool by which we make sense of our pasts, of course, is narrative. While relying on narrativizing our pasts is not necessarily an aesthetic activity itself, aesthetic features of what we can make of our stories certainly impacts how we feel about our lives, and so impacts our happiness. I will be taking it for granted that we all strive for happiness in life and try to organize our lives in a manner that we hope will get us there. For present purposes, I don't think we need to think of this as a substantial philosophical thesis and so nothing as rigorous as would require us to

consider, e.g., if we can save the opening lines of the Nicomachean Ethics from fallacy. Think instead of the mundane statement, 'we all want to be happy.' How we understand our stories, I hope to show, is an important constituent of this pursuit. We will also see that living forward is dependent upon understanding backward in ways meriting serious attention. The understanding of where I am and how I got here is as important for practical reason as anything; the full understanding of what my next move might mean rests squarely upon it.

## §1. What Judgments Share

Let us begin by further elaborating what it means to say that different forms of judgment share something in common in the first place. We need to reach an understanding of what the practical and the aesthetic might have in common, but it will help to begin by considering the case of the practical and the theoretical. For this we can turn to Anscombe's work on practical inference.[2] Whatever it is that distinguishes theoretical inference from practical inference, it simply is not anything we can find in the *content* of the reasoning. The logical relations that hold between the contents given in the premises are the same whether we are making an assertion on the grounds given in the premises or we are seeking to realize an end for the considerations cited in the premises. Knowing both 'if *p*, then *q*' and 'if *q*, then *r*' to be true, I can exercise that knowledge either by justifying my assertion of *r* on the grounds of these premises or by making *p* true in order to realize *r*.

Anscombe begins demonstrating this with an example of two basic uses to which one might put knowledge of Euclidian geometry. Candace Vogler tidies the example up into the following summation:

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[2] G. E. M. Anscombe, "Practical Inference" in *Human Life, Action and Ethics: Essays*, ed. Mary Geach and Luke Gormally (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2005), 109-148.

The objective is: to construct the center of a circle. Here is the practical inference and its justification:

| Justification | Practical Consideration |
|---|---|
| The center of a circle is the midpoint of a diameter. | If I construct the perpendicular bisector of a diameter, that will give me the center of a circle. |
| The perpendicular bisector of a chord, produced to the circumference, is a diameter. | If I produce a chord to the circumference and construct a perpendicular bisector of the chord, that will give me a diameter. |

Whereupon I construct a chord to the circumference.[3]

It could be tempting to say that there is a difference in content between the two columns, a difference that makes apparent which is appropriate to theoretical knowledge and which to practical reasoning. The latter includes explicit mention of what I am to do if I am to accomplish my objective; the former includes only mathematical truth. But, even in the very act of constructing the proof, one might find nothing more on my mind than the justifications given in the first column. Equally, if for whatever reason I need to recall the facts about circles and their midpoints, I could do so by reminding myself of a geometry lesson given in the practical-sounding terms of the second column. It is the use to which to the knowledge is put. Am I reporting a bit of mathematical knowledge? or am I actually constructing a proof?[4]

Constructing a proof is a peculiar example in that what I am doing in the practical case is actually demonstrating the truth of the theoretical case. Take another set of propositions bearing logical connections. (1) Strong alkaloids are poison for humans. (2) Nicotine is a strong alkaloid. (3) This liquid here is nicotine. –So, what? Theoretically, we thereby know this liquid here is poison for humans. What about practically? We cannot yet answer. We need an end. Presumably there was some purpose for consulting this bit of knowledge. Am I observing workplace safety

[3] "Anscombe on Practical Inference" in *Varieties of Practical Reasoning,* ed. Elijah Millgram (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001), 13-14.

[4] As expressed here, the argument speaks to occurrent thought only and so is incomplete. More is needed to demonstrate that it reaches, so to speak, all the way down. For this, I commend the cited Anscombe and Vogler works to the reader. I here assume this further argumentation succeeds and move on for the sake of extending it to moral and aesthetic judgment.

guidelines? or am I ending it all? I ensure I use proper care in the former instance, guzzle it down in the latter.

Defending the picture would take more, and the view I'm recommending depends on a successful defense.[5] I hope this is sufficient to get a basic sense of what the picture is in view: whether we are giving a theoretical justification for a belief or figuring out what we can do to bring about an end, the inferential relations among what we know just are what they are. What direction the considerations run simply depends on what we are up to.

Clearly there will have to be substantial differences when we are relating practical and aesthetic judgment. Aesthetic judgment does not give us something we can then easily plug in to a set of conditionals indicating possible means to ends. Beyond that, aesthetic judgment is not the conclusion of a syllogistic inference. So, work needs to be done on both form and content grounds to locate how practical and aesthetic judgment share a moment making sense of the human.

Let's take the formal element first. How are we to understand practical and aesthetic judgment such that their forms allow one activity of thought to find articulation in judgments of two distinct values?

For Aristotle, setting ends and figuring out how to accomplish them are different moments of practical judgment. We set our ends according to our character; the person of virtuous character will set the right ends. Practical reason, cleverness, or, for the virtuous person, practical wisdom, will then figure out the things we need to do in order to accomplish the end set by character. I find Aristotle's language marking this clunky, but helpful, so I'll adopt it in spite of its clunkiness: the distinction is between the end and the 'things toward the end.' Things toward the end are articulations of our power of causal efficacy. Through character, I am on to my object in an affirming way, judging it to be worth pursuing. Through practical reason, I determine what things

[5] See Anscombe's "Practical Inference" and Vogler's "Anscombe on Practical Inference."

toward the end will get me there. That I act accordingly, that I exercise my power of causal efficacy in this manner, is the expression of my having deemed the end worth pursuing.[6]

Now, isn't this picture of practical judgment just wildly different from the structure of aesthetic judgment? No. The definitive difference that remains is that practical judgment is essentially productive while aesthetic judgment is essentially disinterested. But there is much more analogous in the forms of these judgments than is commonly recognized. To begin bringing this out, consider Kant's characterization of 'disinterested'. Since Kant defines an interest as 'that by which reason becomes practical,'[7] we can flatly gloss 'disinterested' as 'not-practical'. But he also speaks of a disinterested judgment as one that does not terminate in a concept. This really means two things. The first is simply another way of saying the same thing: where the concept concerned is a practical concept, 'applying a practical concept' simply means to act. Upon completion of the intended act, the judgment reaches its internally set stopping point; the judgment terminates in the realization of its concept.

In the second sense, it also means that the judgment doesn't terminate in the application of a theoretical concept. Take an example. My companion asks me, "Do you mind grabbing my jacket for me?" / "No problem; which one is yours?" / "The red one." I look. *Ah, there it is.* In identifying it, the theoretical judgment, "the jacket is red," has served its purpose; it has reached its termination in the application of a concept.

Aesthetic judgment is not like this. There is always more to say, or new and perhaps better ways to say it; enjoyment remains and perhaps even grows richer as we say it again. We are not done with our judgment once we have offered a couple descriptions. This is part of the explanation

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6 Jessica Moss, "Virtue Makes the Goal Right," *Phronesis* 56 (2011): 204-261.

7 See, e.g., Immanuel Kant, "Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals," in *Practical Philosophy*, ed. and trans. Mary J. Gregor, The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 4:413n.

for the problem we identified earlier when asking what content might be common to practical and aesthetic judgment. The latter doesn't lend itself to neat formulations of clearly defined content, and so it isn't as though it give us something that could obviously become a premise in a practical syllogism.

Consider further the importance of the claim that aesthetic judgment does not terminate in a concept. It means that what is crucial to aesthetic judgment is the whole relation in which the subject stands to the object. What is properly called aesthetic judgment, then, is the ongoing judgmental activity. This observation helps us state more directly the formal similarity and the formal difference aesthetic judgment has in comparison with practical judgment. The similarity can be brought out by saying that in both cases the subject is in an affirming relation to her object; we can say that there is a kind of approbation internal to the judgment so long as we do not let the echoes of sentimentalism ring too loud. Also in both cases, this affirmation or approbation is articulated into the things toward the object. As we just saw in the practical case, the object is the end given by character and which is taken to be worth pursuing. Once we complete the things toward the end, thereby achieving the good we were shooting for, this judgmental activity is complete; it has terminated in a concept, in the realization of its object.

Now, in aesthetic judgment, this much is analogous: the subject stands in an affirming relation to an object in some sense given for her. In this case, what is given is a real-world object, say, an artwork. Since there is no question of realizing this object—it is already there; that is what I am responding to—the 'things toward the end' are those things I say and do to communicate my approbation of the object in a way understandable and hopefully consonant with the responses of my peers.

We have to take care to spell out what 'communicate' must mean here. If I communicate a theoretical judgment to you, the sense of that term indicating a transfer of information suffices,

assuming a transfer of warrant. But since aesthetic judgment is strictly speaking the judgmental activity itself,[8] mere transfer of information is inadequate. I must also communicate my judgment in the sense of communicating a disease, to bring it about that you are in the same condition as me, so to speak, which in this case means to seek to bring you into relation with the object in the same way I am in relation to it. This is what Isenberg calls critical communication—seeking to bring about 'sameness of vision' and hopefully 'community of feeling'.[9] Some of this activity will involve simple descriptive statements, but will also include metaphor, interpretation, allusion, gestures—all the tools of the critic. All are acceptable things toward the end so long as they are in service of articulating the approving relation I stand in to the object, i.e., to communicating my aesthetic judgment.

Another comparison between practical and aesthetic judgment will become important for us later, namely what the point of unity is in each form of judgment. What holds *doing A* and *doing B* and *doing C* together as a single intentional action is that each is an articulation of a means toward achieving one end. Querying the agent as to why she did each thing will reveal this structure to be internal to her doings. As for the end pursuit which unifies all this activity, she will justify herself to us by characterizing it as something we can understand as reasonably desired by a fellow human being.

For aesthetic judgment, what unifies the judgmental activity is the object itself. A space of meanings and associative play is opened by the object; the play, the associative activity can go quite deep or far, but it is always tethered to the object. There is some sense in comparing the aesthetic object to the copula in theoretical judgment—it organizes various constituents together into a new understandable whole, e.g., a color and a garment in 'the jacket is red.' The big contrast, though, is

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[8] 'Strictly', as it is perfectly natural and acceptable to use 'aesthetic judgment' more loosely, e.g., to indicate each individual descriptive statement employed in the service of communicating one's (now strictly speaking) aesthetic judgment.

[9] Arnold Isenberg, "Critical Communication" in *Aesthetics and the Theory of Criticism; Selected Essays of Arnold Isenberg.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 163.

that copulas are simple logical functions, everywhere the same. Each artwork is a unique function, inseparable from the matter it unites. Cavell suggests that the best way to see how far the associative activity united by the artwork can go is by taking it too far, to the point where the ground becomes too shaky. We often find that point by seeing how far we can travel the path together.[10]

What we have so far is a better understanding of the analogies in the form of aesthetic and practical judgment—that both consist in a subject's affirming relation to an object that finds articulation into 'things toward that object'—and we have a better understanding of the consequences of one form terminating in a concept while the other does not. What remains is to see how this allows one activity by which we struggle with human nature to enter equally into practical judgments of moral value and disinterested judgments of the beautiful.

## §2. Narrative Structure

Now, if our natures are such as that we concern ourselves greatly with the true, the good, and the beautiful, and these concerns are concerns not with objects, but with the ways in which we comport ourselves to the world, then it is reasonable to expect that the activity whereby we make sense of *ourselves* to have, accordingly, theoretical, practical, and aesthetic dimensions.

How are we to think of the aesthetic dimension?

There are of course multiple elements to the answer. We will take up just one: our natural tendency to give narrative structure to our lives. And this is only to begin the answer. Giving something narrative structure does not automatically mean we are doing anything distinctively aesthetic.

[10] Stanley Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), Introduction.

I assume that the claim that we tend to narrativize our thought about ourselves and others will not be met with much resistance, so I shall move along after noting one manifestation of this chosen simply because I like it. One occasionally finds passages in Freud that could be crudely paraphrased as expressing something like this: "I'm doing science here! Why do my case studies always seem like short stories?"[11] They turn out that way—as he certainly knew—because the subject matter of his science dealt with how human lives hang together and fall apart. One indication of the severity of the illness he was treating is the difficulty of making narrative sense out of the life details shared by the analysand.

By way of illustration, contrast a couple examples. Recently, my grandmother shared with me the story of the passing of her parents. They had been married quite young and their marriage had been a strong one throughout. Her mother was the first to die, passing a few years earlier than her father. They were poor country folk, so her father's 'Sunday best' consisted in his least tattered work clothes. I don't recall if he said something that tipped my grandmother and her siblings off or if they simply knew him well enough to intuit it, but it really mattered to him to look his best at the funeral. One of the children had an idea: they pooled their money and bought him a new suit to wear to the ceremony. After the funeral, he stored the suit for safe keeping. He never wore it again. He did, however, ask his children to assist him in one final act of celebratory remembrance of their sacred union. He asked that they have him buried wearing the suit.

It's a beautiful story and I'm glad my grandmother shared it with me. They of course honored their father's last wish as I trust you will agree it was good for them to do.

Now let's consider another example of someone's last wish. His name is John Johnson. He

[11] E.g. Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud, *Studies on Hysteria*, ed. Anna Freud Bernays, trans. James. Strachey (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 160-161. Stephen Marcus provides an excellent discussion of this in his "Freud and Dora: Story, History, Case History," in *In Dora's Case: Freud--Hysteria--Feminism*, 2nd ed., eds. Charles Bernheimer and Claire Kahane (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990) 56-91.

knows that he is in the autumn of his life, and so mortality is increasingly on his mind. One day, as he concluded a pleasant lunch together with a friend of his, David Davidson, he shares his last wish with him. Upon his parting, he asks his friend to buy a turtle and name it William Williamson.

It's a bizarre story, at least as it stands. I am skeptical that David has been given any reason to do as asked, or at least no reason that isn't highly defeasible. The senselessness of the story itself would suffice to forgo complying.

Now, given my target audience, I would be willing to bet a decent number of readers respond to the turtle example by thinking, 'oh, I can make sense of that!' The important thing to note if this was you is *how* you went about doing so. You likely began to fill out the story. If we imagine John to be an esteemed zoologist who dedicated his life to the study of turtles and who truly loved his work; if we imagine further that David was his long-time research assistant who had become a dear friend, the absurdity of the request at least wanes. Tell the story this way, and we might be more inclined to allow that maybe David does have reason to honor John's request. Our greater sympathy to the idea that maybe now there is a reason worth considering rests in the story we tell to render the act at least intelligible.

The first story, the story of the funeral suit, is intelligible on its own. We understand how symbolic gestures can take on such deep significance under certain circumstances—honoring the union of lifelong lovers being one such circumstance—and we understand this from living our own lives in the presence of others. In the first telling of the second story, there is no fit between life and last wish. It appears entirely arbitrary. Only with the addition of the supplemental details to the story does it even become intelligible, and only then are we inclined to entertain the idea that there might be a reason with any force given by the request. The intelligibility alone, however, does not seem to account for our inclination to grant such different weights to the reasons in favor of honoring the deceased's last wish across the cases. More work remains to be done to rule out

alternatives, but an obvious candidate for what accounts for the strength of the reasons just is the beauty of the gesture in the first case.

We have to guard against taking two steps back here. The claim cannot be flatly that finding the gesture to be beautiful grounds the efficacy of performing it, else in effect we have claimed this aesthetic judgment was causally efficacious—more explicitly, that this disinterested judgment was interested (i.e., practical). So next section builds on this idea of aesthetic properties giving weight to practical reasons in a way that helps us see how practical and aesthetic judgments remain distinct.

A methodological word of warning: §3 indulges in a false assumption, namely, it speaks in a way far too kind to a crude subjectivism. As I think the correction is made sufficiently clearly afterward, the expository advantage renders the temporary oversight worthwhile. And since the false assumption mirrors a mistake we are actually liable to make in life, perhaps our indulgence will allow us to correct both.

## §3. Narrative and Practical Reasons

Lewis White Beck once wrote something we could appropriate as an apt summary statement of the matter we should consider now:

> Explanation by reasons is just as empirical as explanation by causes, but the connection is not between two independently recognizable events or features of the events. "What a situation means" and "what reasons the [agent] had" are not independent variables, but must be jointly ascertained by interpreting the transaction as an episode in the history of the situation and the life-history of the [agent].[12]

Another way of saying this might be that we must take care not to take the sense of *understanding* too simply in the practical philosophical slogan defining intentional action as the cause of what it understands. We can learn a lot about action by taking the object understood to be something

[12] Lewis White Beck, *The Actor and the Spectator* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), 78. Emphasis mine. Substituted 'agent' for 'actor'.

simple, like a cake or the process of making one. In such a case, we can then see that we have reason to, e.g., go purchase the necessary ingredients. Beck is pointing out that there are considerations of a much different sort that we concern ourselves with which call for philosophical attention no less. Treat 'baking a cake' in the following example as a variable that could be filled by any token gesture of kindness and I would dare say most of us have been in or near comparable situations in our own lives.

I am planning to bake a cake for a friend this weekend. As the weekend approaches, a conversation about some sensitive topic somehow gets out of hand—*how* hardly makes sense to me now as I reflect upon it—and ends with our angrily parting ways after harsh words are exchanged in a moment of frustration. Now, after this, the question of *what it would mean* were I to go ahead and bake the cake anyway becomes pressing. As for myself, would my anger allow it to be an entirely genuine gesture of kindness? If not, am I sufficiently in control of myself to resolve my anger to a point where I could make it be so? Could I even make my action a means to resolving my anger? On my best understanding of you, would you be able to accept it as genuine? If not, how does this restrict what significance I can reasonably expect the gesture to take on? On a bad extreme, it could be seen as a self-righteous slap in the face, an act only superficially kind, deeply intended as a provocation, an attempt to force you into pleasantries at a time I know would be difficult for you. Even if such an interpretation on your end would be entirely false, it remains that I could be guilty of insensitivity if I do not so much as take the possibility for such misunderstanding into account.

One could here set oneself to casting around for some sophisticated set of premises for a practical syllogism or some maxim sufficiently qualified with detail to test for universalizability. Reasonable accounts along such lines have been proposed. But stepping away from philosophy and instead considering, for example, how my worried conversation with a mutual friend about the matter might go, these accounts seem to be looking in the wrong place. The most pressing question

is often simply seeking to reach an understanding of the situation sufficient to answer what feels at the moment of our vexation to be a simple, even silly little question: what would my act mean?[13]

It is most often the meaning of an action that inclines us to find it beautiful. And if an action is found to be beautiful, on the present picture, should it not then be available to us to articulate our affirmation practically? This would oversimplify to the point of being false. We can further develop the picture by saying why.

Consider an action that is the cliché stuff of the narrative arts thanks to the ease with which it can be portrayed beautifully (though it is far easier to end up with only maudlin tripe), the suicide of an unrequited lover. Great works of art have treated of this topic; there are hopefully many more to come. Imagine now someone in such a situation, his heart set on one object, hers set on a third or just cold or opposed to him. We know too well this can bring some people to their breaking point. Suppose our subject is there, contemplating now whether to despair of life along with her love and end it all. He might repeatedly pour over the story of how he got here, perhaps hoping to recall some details of the story that might lend hope to where he now is. Suppose he discovers no such hope. But suppose he does find his way into a telling of the story that makes the thought of suicide quite beautiful to him.[14] Perhaps it seems to him that this act is likely to posthumously and paradoxically win her love, making his life a tragicomedy of sorts. Or perhaps he feels sure it will effectively exact revenge. (Aesthetically, we can rather delight in a good act of revenge, though ethically I am sure you find it unthinkable.) It is possible he finds one such portrayal quite moving. Does it follow he has found reason to kill himself?

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[13] Cf. "The question is again the fit of a decision to present circumstances. And reflection which begins with the decision or intention rather than with the construal of the situation to which the intention is a response begins too far down the line." Nancy Sherman, *The Fabric of Character: Aristotle's Theory of Virtue* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 28.

[14] The "to him" indicates an illicit subjectivism I indulge here for expository reason. We will set this straight below.

We are dealing only with an imagined example here, so unburdened by the need for sensitivity to his survivors, I will flatly say he is a bad logician if he thinks so. That he should act accordingly no more follows from a beautiful representation of his suicide than any prescribed action follows from the truth of a syllogism, even if the contents of the latter could be used in action.

Recall our example above. Given that nicotine is deadly and that this liquid here is nicotine, I know it follows that this liquid is deadly. But nothing follows practically without an end. Motivated by health, I will avoid it; motivated by a death wish, our unrequited lover will guzzle it down. Suicide being his end, and practical reason judging it to be an efficacious means to his end, the above theoretical knowledge could be put to practical use if our unhappy lover has enough liquid nicotine handy. The content of the syllogism is equally available for theoretical or practical use.

It would be easy to oversimplify the relation between the practical and aesthetic judgment in the following manner. Sure, no practical judgment follows from a true syllogism alone; but as aesthetic judgment draws no conclusion, the nature of drawing a conclusion is not at issue between aesthetic and moral judgment. Both are instead articulations of the affirmation of an object. Why not say that judging a conception of an action to be beautiful, insofar as this indicates the presence of affirmation, just is setting it as an end? We have said that in practical judgment, our ends are set by character. So, to return to the example, if our unhappy lover's character is such that he finds the prospects of his suicide beautiful in his circumstances, then why is this not at once the setting of his end? What he would offer as justification for finding the action beautiful would be aesthetic articulations of his approbation; drinking the nicotine would be the practical articulation of that same approbation.

This equivocates on the object of judgment. There is no object that practical and aesthetic judgment could share at once without qualification. The metaphor of living one's life as writing

one's own story is a common one for good reasons. It possesses some appealing aspects, some of which we can ultimately hold on to some version of. But presently, exploring its *inaptness* will most benefit us. Intentional action, deciding what to do as we go about our lives, is a very different enterprise than writing a novel.[15] That one could use true details from her own history as best she honestly understands them up to that very instant to tell a story leading to suicide that all would agree is beautiful does not entail that anyone would find her real-world act of suicide beautiful. In addition to formal differences between aesthetic and moral judgment, ontological differences between artworks and actions matter here.

If I were writing a novel, I would have the power over everything that could be said to be 'there', at least as far as the information relevant to moral and aesthetic judgment is concerned.[16] In contrast, when deciding what to do and what doing so might mean in real life, to put the point in a somewhat corny manner, I am forced to work with a cowriter: the actual world. Hard cases certainly happen where two people can be considerate of all relevant features of a situation but still disagree about the meaning or value of a course of action. Sometimes circumstances are such that we can with patience find our way to a better interpretation of the situation that we agree is apt and which makes determining how to move forward more tractable. But it is not open to us to simply alter the story. (Even though we do just that all the time. More on self-deception momentarily.) In writing a novel, I might realize that I have, e.g., established a dependency relation between the protagonist and a minor character sensitivity to which would make the former's ultimate suicide too selfish to find the story beautiful. Such a concern would be one I may well be able to address by

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[15] There is the arguable exception of certain kinds of artist who broaden their conception of writing out to absorb all of life. I like to think such lives have been lived by some of our greatest artists, but this dissertation sets aside entirely questions of art production--of the agent producing beautiful objects. See Chapter One Section One.

[16] I.e., data/information as opposed to aesthetic properties. If I wrote a fictional story about a boy who owned a three-legged dog, it would make no sense for you to criticize my work on the grounds that the boy didn't really own a three-legged dog. But if I write a story of an unrequited lover's suicide with every intent of making it powerful, you can of course contend that it is only maudlin instead. 'Putting' such aesthetic force 'there' depends on much more than my intent to do so.

writing that character out of the story in the next draft or by at least reducing the level of dependency in order to achieve my desired effect. But rewriting the past is a luxury we only have in aesthetic production. The world affords us no such possibility. It remains stubbornly independent of us. The unhappy lover can reimagine his story and cling to it in a manner that renders himself inconsiderate of those he is accountable to. But no reimagining of his story can absolve him of that accountability.

One general remark fits as well here as anywhere: we should underscore that our interpretive, narrativizing activity when we reflect on our lives is perhaps the most potent tool self-deception has at its disposal. According to Hume's conception of a qualified judge of beauty, if I am a friend of the artist, the likelihood that my warm feelings for her exaggerate my estimation of her work is quite high, and so the credibility of my judgment suffers. This can only be much worse when the author of the narrative one is judging is the dear self.[17] To avoid such biases, Hume thought we should look to the joint verdict of what he called 'true judges.' There is a lot to say about what makes the true judges true, all of which can be learned from; but the lesson most relevant for us is in the call for the joint verdict. Anything beautiful rather than idiosyncratically appealing affords an experience which is communicable in the sense elaborated above; it is an experience we speak of in the universal voice.[18] The description the unhappy lover would give of his suicide that strikes him as beautiful would be rebuffed by his peers. His self-deception does not blind *them* to the relevant considerations he ignores.[19] I think we can see in this another species of the problem Kierkegaard criticized in the case of admiration; it is a way of protecting oneself from

[17] Kant, "Groundwork," 4:407.
[18] See Stanley Cavell, "Aesthetic Problems of Moral Philosophy," *Must We Mean What We Say?: A Book of Essays* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 88ff.
[19] Hume calls this particular kind of attention "good sense;" it is the aesthetic version of the 'salience' of McDowell and Herman discussed next chapter.

the ethical by means of the aesthetic.[20] The ethical forbids his suicide; the confusion of aesthetic production with living demands it, and this demand he heeds by his own lights.[21]

So now we must again ask, what, if not some characterization of a shared object which elicits approbation, could the content shared be between the formally distinct judgments? It appears that we have located *something* that is shared between our partly aesthetic personal-historical evaluation and practical thought.[22] But what? Aesthetically, there is no object as yet to which the subject could respond, no object to which she could seek to articulate her relation through communicating her approbation to others. Perhaps she has a great story to tell, one whose beauty we would readily appreciate. But that would be aesthetic production, the derivative form of aesthetic judgment we have set aside. If, instead, she describes the same story while sharing a plan of action, her hearers would see—or at least would have access to—the unrevisable contributions from her cowriter which spoil its beauty. Practical thought must be responsive to meaning determinants not put there by oneself. And for this reason, the shared content cannot simply be practical reasons, as the sense-making thought one is engaged in alters what reasons one finds are or are not there.

The content shared between moral and aesthetic judgment simply cannot be propositional knowledge. What is shared, I propose, are more schematic elements constituting our understanding of the human, such as narrative and lore.

## §4. Narrative, Lore, & Human Understanding

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[20] Chapter One Section Four. In the present context, it might be worthwhile to note that we are in the ballpark of what propaganda exploits; it tries to support a partial vision through aesthetic means. Note also that if the unhappy lover is charismatic, he could perhaps persuade other judges away from reality to his distorted vision.

[21] It should now be clear why the subjectivism granted in the example is illicit. Many things we take to be beautiful turn out to be merely agreeable to us. Any many a thing that wouldn't even be agreeable to us might still strike us so if we willfully ignore its ugly aspects. See final paragraph for more.

[22] Why "partly aesthetic?" Recall our observation from the introduction and from chapter one that the aesthetic properties of what narrative sense we have made of our lives cannot but affect out happiness. More on this in the final section.

Kierkegaard once wrote in his journals, "It is perfectly true, as the philosophers say, that life must be understood backwards. But they forget the other proposition, that it must be lived forwards." What we were just considering is that seeing the meaning of a situation is inseparably bound with seeing what reasons an agent has, and these, to recall Beck's words, are "jointly ascertained by interpreting the transaction as an episode in the history of the situation and the life-history of the agent." Taken together we see that our narrative understanding informing the present is an important constituent in deciding what to do next. There is more still to say about narrative and its contribution, but it is not the only contributor. We must also consider lore.[23] Human lore informs practical reasoning on a different level. It defines for us the range of possible human meaning.

Last chapter we saw that as intentional action is self-conscious, and our self-consciousness includes consciousness of ourselves as human, our intentional actions involve the application of a life-form concept, with all its formal peculiarities. The prime peculiarity, of course, is that the wider context that mediates application of the concept *human* is not the sort of body of knowledge other life-form concepts involve, but one that demands ever ongoing interpretation. No doubt some straightforward natural historical knowledge fills in the wider context, but it is here that lore thrives.

So how are we to understand the role of narrative and lore together shaping our understanding of the human? The analogy does not bear much weight and so should only be taken as a surface level heuristic device, but we could say that narrative and myth are to our perceptions of the human what time and space are to external perception for Kant. As they are forms of intuition, anything externally perceived is necessarily located in time and space, else it would escape empirical experience altogether. Whenever we encounter other humans and recognize them as such, narrative and lore will inform our experience of them no less.

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[23] See below for the sense and purpose of using this term.

We have already begun above to emphasize the importance of narrative structure to making sense of oneself and the behavior of others. Narrative's capacity to aid understanding comes from its power to organize and unify. The most obvious feature of narrative that places it as time in the Kantian metaphor is simply that it is ordering: this *then* that *then* that *then*… Ordering alone, however, does not go very far in aiding understanding. It is not entirely unhelpful to know that, e.g., this act of aggression preceded that act of aggression. But when narrative indicates some relation between the two, it becomes possible to see the second as an act of retaliation and so to see the two together as an unfolding of something understandable as a single event in time.

There are countless *this then that*s during any duration of experience. We only attribute causality to such time determinations where some sort of law-likeness is suspected. Before we subsume experience under the concept of causality, we must first recognize the potential that a ground-consequent relation has been instantiated in experience before us. We can clearly perceive, e.g., that the yodeling began and then the avalanche, but we would only perceive the former as a cause for the latter if the avalanche is within decent proximity to the yodeling; we are more likely to suspect coincidence if the avalanche is barely within sight on the far horizon.

It would be too strong to say that narrative posits causality and therefore necessity. Narrative does, however, provide at least an imitation of necessity.[24] This is captured in our less strict usage of 'because'. The causal chain leading from act of aggression to act of retaliation passes through the passions of the second agent, rendering talk of necessity inappropriate. There is something in experience that fits the ground-consequent relation, but the path from ground to consequent cannot justify positing a law according to which it is instantiated; he may well have turned the other cheek instead.

[24] Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction: With a New Epilogue*, [New ed.]. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), Chapter 5.

There is, however, a *felt sense* of necessity that we sometimes experience that merits attention here. Think of Aristotle on tragic form and the necessity he speaks of there. If the tragedy is good, it will be complex, involving a reversal. It hardly works as a definition, but for the sake of highlighting a point of interest, we could say that the reversal is a key moment we didn't see coming. At the same time, another feature of good tragedy is that it is not episodic. The latter flaw is avoided when one event seems to lead to the next with necessity, a property of the work we can only see after taking in the entire work.[25] So, while reading for the first time, this great event takes us by surprise. While reflecting once the reading is complete, we feel things simply *had* to happen that way. Now returning to the real world, as we go about living our lives forward but understanding them backward, we never reach that complete vantage point from which to reflect on a whole. But we are not unfamiliar with the feeling that things *had* to happen as they have, otherwise we wouldn't be where we are. A strange feeling of necessity creeps in.

Another organizing feature of narrative is that it is selective, including and excluding from the minutia of detail available to it, highlighting only what is useful for making the best sense of things. We are familiar with something similar from literary narrative. The mere mention of any detail enables its relevance to a proper interpretation. If what we are considering is truly great art, critical scrutiny will reveal the contribution of every included detail to the meaning of the whole. Here, as above, when going about living life rather than writing a novel, we do not have complete control. Simply not including a detail in the story of our lives doesn't make the detail cease to exist. Our co-author, the world, still has its say.

In making sense of life, knowing what to include and exclude is itself a practical skill. It is no matter of arbitrary choice. It might help us say why our selections cannot be arbitrary to

[25] Aristotle, *Poetics*, Books VIII-XI. Aristotle actually speaks of *probability or* necessity. I take omitting the former for present purposes is unproblematic but note it in case the omission is distorting in a way I fail to see.

consider a case that *does* allow for some amount of arbitrariness: the sentimental selection by lovers of a song as 'their song' or their treating some other sort of ordinary object as bearing a secret celebration of their love. Were we to ask how this came about—ignore for the present that it is probably none of our business—we would expect a story of one of few familiar types, whatever its details. One goes something like this: some accidental convergence of events featured the to-be-sentimental object at a moment of poignance; its accidental appearance at later times seemed to coincide with other moments of poignance or even to usher them in. The object becomes thematic in the story of their love. The arbitrariness lies in the fact that though the coincidence made the object inviting for sentimental use, nothing requires them to use it so. They could have valued the occasion but forgotten about the incidental object and been none the worse for it. We let sentimentally inviting circumstances pass all the time, whether noticed but unseized or simply unnoticed.

One part of respecting others is respecting those objects they find sentimentally valuable for that person's sake when interacting with them, regardless of the arbitrariness. This does have limits, though. "How did this become your song?" / "It was during that song that this thing momentous for the flourishing of our relationship happened." / "But wasn't it during that song on that very occasion that the mass shooter opened fire?" It would be little comfort if the shooting only began at the final note. Though this is an aspect of life where we respect a high amount of arbitrariness, something is simply wrong with omitting this detail from their story. And its inclusion renders sentimentally elevating this object in light of the story inappropriate. We might even find the omission so shocking as to call it 'inhuman.'[26]

[26] Cf. the joke sometimes used to point out the impropriety of a certain sort of inquiry that would be perfectly appropriate under different circumstances, "Other than that, Ms. Lincoln, how was the play?"

Another sort of breakdown in communication is possible, though one we are more likely to simply play along with out of politeness. This is where the story leading to the choice of object is one we simply cannot make sense of. "This is our song because it started skipping that time we had it playing in the background while fixing the leaky faucet." I'm sure some further set of circumstances could begin to make this intelligible. We saw something similar above with the request for one's colleague to buy a pet turtle. But until we get those additional details of the story, we are likely to assume they are kidding us or suggesting we bugger off or some such. These cases return us to Winch's claim considered in the previous chapter that what we can and what we cannot make sense of informs our sense of human nature. Last wishes, what lovers claim as 'their song', these are things we make sense of by ourselves engaging in the practices or indirectly through our support.

Standing as time in the Kantian metaphor, narrative determines the form of our perception of the human through its selectivity, ordering, and contribution to meaning through an imitation of causality; what details have been included affects what sense I make of my present circumstances, and what sense I make of my present circumstances affects what I take my next action to mean. Putting the claim in these terms might suggest there is only one potential action in view. Typically, though, I will have a range of possibilities in view. It is here that our human lore informs what possibilities I take to be available.[27] Lore, in the Kantian metaphor, correspondingly stands as space, contributing to what meaning an action might have by indicating the realm of human possibility.

Before explaining how lore corresponds to space, let me speak to the choice of this term. One definition the *Oxford English Dictionary* offers for 'lore' is "the body of traditional facts, anecdotes, or beliefs relating to some particular subject; chiefly with attributive [noun], as animal

[27] The phrase 'what possibilities I *take*…' is not supposed to humor subjectivism again, but to signal that bad lore can render 'perceptions' of possibilities false.

lore, bird lore, fairy lore, plant lore." This surviving sense, it tells us, descends from a now archaic use meaning "that which is learned; learning, scholarship, erudition." The lore of interest to us, of course, is human lore. And the reason for this word rather than another is we need something generous enough to span interpretations of the human as communicated through everything from traditions to anecdotes, received wisdom of many kinds.

So how does human lore enter into our everyday decision making? It hardly ever seems to enter into the flow of our occurrent thought. Nor need it do so. Recall our discussion of lifeform concepts in Chapter Two; we there saw how the 'wider context'—our body of knowledge about the relevant species—mediates application of that lifeform concept. We then noted that the *human*, unlike other lifeform concepts, calls out for interpretation. Human lore is a reservoir of interpretive tools. While the sorts of biological fact that tells us, e.g., that the cell-spitting in an amoeba is reproduction while the cell-splitting in the dog is self-maintenance, do inhabit the wider context of the *human*, it is our lore that matters most in this sense making mediation.

With this logical point in place, why say that human lore stands as *space* in the Kantian metaphor? Lore shapes what possibilities we take to be available to us in deciding our next move. Consider chess for a moment, as it bears enough similarity to provide a helpful analogy, though a drastically simplified one. In chess, what moves are possible are determined by the rules of the game and the situation on the board. (This point alone accounts for no small part of the simplification in analogizing chess to ordinary life and action.) Which rule I apply, which possibility I will actualize in making a move, is of course left up to me as a player. It is also up to me in some ways how to apply my chosen rule. Which direction do I move the piece? How many spaces? And even though the game is rigidly constrained, there is enough freedom within those constraints for us to recognize something as creativity in ones play.

Part of what constitutes our human lore are the proverbs maintained in received wisdom. Such proverbs are not in any obvious way *about* the human— "a stitch in time saves nine," "nothing ventured, nothing gained"—but their whole point is to provide rules of thumb to help us with some of the basics as we answer the question of how to go about realizing the instance of human life that we are. 'Rules of thumb,' we should note, are the best we can do here. In chess, the rules determine possible moves in the sense that if I move a piece in a way in violation of the rules, one could strictly speaking say that whatever I'm doing, I'm not playing chess. But flout proverbs as egregiously as you like in living your life, you are still realizing an instance of the human. Lore generally does not rule moves out so much as identify them as unwise, as indicating that if one wants to live one's life *well*, this or that is or is not a good way to go. As in chess, it takes judgment to know which rule is best applied in a given situation to move one toward one's goal. But another complication the analogy simplifies out is that the 'rules' contained in our human lore themselves testify to the need for interpretation. "Nothing ventured, nothing gained" we say; but we also say "better safe than sorry." "Don't sweat the small stuff;" and yet "God is in the details." I take it this is a pretty blatant manifestation of the human as problematic in the straightforward sense. The practical use of these proverbs is clear enough. Though it is rather didactic itself, the last finds aesthetic articulation in lines of Longfellow, "In the elder days of Art, / Builders wrought with greatest care / Each minute and unseen part; / For the Gods see everywhere."[28]

Some proverbs more directly characterize the human in something apparently closer to the natural historical statements comprising the in wider context considered last chapter: "the s is/has/does X." "Absence makes the heart grow fonder" could be an example. Shorn of all attractiveness, the claim is "the human grows fonder of love objects when away from them." To take another saying, and again one pointing to our need for interpretation when paired with the first,

[28] "The Builders"

we could say that "out of sight, out of mind," becomes, when stripped down, "the human is forgetful of things not at hand." Remember from our discussion of tragedy in Chapter One, tragedy represents the world to us, not as history does claiming that the events described are true, but again as testifying to possibility: "these are the kinds of things that might be." In this sense—though it is only the most superficial of readings—we can see the latter proverb represented in Bruegel's *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus.*

On the far end from proverbs, human lore contains stories of all-encompassing import. Two such stories that philosophers have told are Rousseau's noble savage and Hobbes' state of nature. Long before encountering these stories, anyone with similar upbringing similar to my own will know that of the creation of man in the image of God and of the subsequent fall. These stories represent respectively the fundamental sense that people are basically good or that people are basically bad. Whatever theoretical commitments one might consistently avow, culture has a way of instilling in us a sense of what it is to live in each world along with any others our lore contains. And however consistent one's theoretical commitments, my sense is it is characteristic of the human to waver between the felt sense of which world is ours. This wavering, in turn, rearranges what moves we are apt to make. If nothing else, what it means to ask for or offer help alters greatly, and so will our sense of the appropriateness of doing so.

Our focus in most this section has concerned the relatively particular: what do I take this or that potential action to mean in light of what sense I have made of where I am and how I got here? We should lastly consider the general: how does what sense I have made of the human and how well I take myself to be realizing an instance of it affect my happiness?

## §5. Narrative, Deliberation, & Happiness

Recall that we have adopted an Aristotelian picture where character sets ends while practical

reason determines things toward the end. In the relevant literature, one important question—both as a matter of Aristotle exegesis and as a question of what is true—is whether deliberation ever concerns itself with our ends themselves, not just the things toward them. The sorts of end in question here are the big picture, entire life organizing ends; this regards the very first articulation of what a happy life could possibly consist in for oneself, for example, whether I might be able to better pursue happiness in life as a statesman or as an artist. Set aside the exegetical question entirely. And regarding the philosophical question alone, for the moment, set aside technical considerations *pro* and *contra* and consider instead just some surface phenomenological points on the matter.

Do we deliberate about such things? Taking 'deliberation' here in an everyday sense of the term, meaning something like do we ever entertain ourselves with episodes of conscious thought about such matters with at least a pretext that it will influence what we do? Yes; of course we do. But enter a second observation: very often, often enough to even flirt with 'always', these episodes of deliberation are utterly worthless. We might enjoy the process, inspired by our own daydreams; the process might be an expression of anxiety, one we think should scare us straight; but, soon afterward, we find ourselves carrying on about our lives in the exact manner as before. The pretext really was just a pretext. Kierkegaard describes this kind of thing as reflection that momentarily bursts into enthusiasm only to relapse into repose.[29]

Be that as it may, we don't *always* just relapse into repose. Once in a blue moon, these episodes at least *seem* to have lasting effect. It sometimes seems we have reasonable claim that they constitute genuine deliberation rather than mere daydreaming.

What's the difference between such cases? I don't know. And there is likely more than one

[29] First lines of *The Present Age*. Søren Kierkegaard, *The Present Age: And Of the Difference between a Genius and an Apostle*, trans. Alexander Dru, (New York: Harper & Row, 1962).

answer. But I think I can suggest one possibility, or part of one possibility, one that involves responsiveness to the aesthetic properties of the interpretive narrative we give to our lives.

Throughout the history of philosophy, one occasionally finds the suggestion that the experience of beauty offers us a passing glimpse of what it would be to achieve happiness as an enduring state.[30] What leads to this sentiment is again the dynamic between practical and disinterested affirming relations to the world. When we experience any sort of lack, when we have a desire, we often experience some degree of pleasure or at least comfort upon fulfilling that desire. Given that in our finitude another desire is soon to again leave us wanting, this satisfaction is short lived. In contrast, as we have seen, the pleasure in beauty has no internal point of termination. The pleasure only ends when externally interrupted—we get tired or have to get back to work.

But what are we to say when the object of our judgment of beauty is the narrative of our own life as we have come to understand it? In one expression of the thought just considered, Stendhal once wrote that "Beauty is nothing other than the promise of happiness." In our present finite embodiments, this promise is most promising when beauty can be found in the thought of what we could make ourselves. If I stand transfixed in admiration of a sculpture when suddenly the fire alarms start blaring, I am separated from the source of my pleasure when I evacuate. But the matter of my life escapes with me. If I can make sense of *it* in a way that strikes me as beautiful, then whenever I can find time for reflection, I can be reminded of its promise.

In a similar vein, Rilke, as he contemplates the torso of Apollo, registers beauty's address to him: "you must change your life." If I understand him, he wants us to see that this is always beauty's address to us. It's a thought I like, but it's quite difficult to make plausible as a meaningful philosophical thesis. It becomes less difficult, however, to conceive of this as beauty's address where one's object is an interpretation of one's own life.

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[30] See Chapter One

We must take care not to think of this claim in such a way that makes pursuit of virtue too much like masturbation. Something is definitely going wrong if one constantly sits back in self-admiration. If nothing else—and there is much else—if one is always focused on admiring one's own life to the present, one cannot at the same time be acting admirably in productive continuation of that story. This would likely be another case of disingenuousness of spirit, of protecting oneself from the ethical impression by means of the aesthetic.[31] Rather than such navel gazing, the beauty in one's self-understanding has its effect on the level of our 'sense of self'—whatever exactly that is—as we carry on with outward focus. We have said not just that we must make sense of one's life as an instance of human being, but also that one must feel at home in this nature. Happiness surely requires the latter.

Focus must remain outward if we are to see the unity of goodness and beauty. How is this unity manifested? Consider the virtuous agent, or at least someone who his doing pretty well. Whatever course of action she takes, acting—as the virtuous agent will—on her affirmation of her end for its own sake, her history is sure to be one she will be able to understand to be beautiful (as will we, if we are doing okay ourselves). This does not mean that she has reached a point of setting her ends according to what might produce a beautiful story. Each form of judgment retains its distinctness, each retains its immediate relation to its object, and the latter would be to mediate the good through the beautiful. The claim beauty has on us is nothing more than that we should rest in admiration of it. "That, beautiful beyond being, is said to be Beauty… it calls all to itself, when it is called beauty," Pseudo-Dionysius said. We can say that since the aesthetic properties of our understanding of our own lives affects our happiness, beauty *does* have a secondary imperative:

[31] Chapter 1 Section 4 and Section 3 of this chapter.

"That one thing that you cannot help but produce: make it beautiful."[32] But *this* production must itself answer to the imperatives of its own domain. The medium is the human entity, the matter a human life, the story one's history as half-told by an unforgiving coauthor. To set ends according to what might make a beautiful story is intrude a mediating step that simply takes one more risk of tripping. Think again of our unhappy lover self-deceived into the beauty of his suicide. That the story of a virtuous life will always be tellable in beautiful manner without distorting reality does not require living life guided by such an end; it is rather owing to the convergence of goodness and beauty themselves. And if these first three chapters are right, we don't need an appeal to a divine nature to unify these values. Rather, what the values are are worked out together in the joint project of living—of realizing this instance of human being—brought out in the complementary slogans, the ethical 'How shall I live?' and the aesthetic 'Nothing human is foreign to me.'

[32] We shouldn't think of thrillers or tragedies here. Montaigne's thought, in his essay "Of Experience," is perfectly appropriate here: "The most beautiful lives, in my opinion, are those which conform to the common and human model, with order, but without miracle and without extravagant behavior."

Chapter Four

# OBJECTIVE INTERPRETATION, SENSITIVE PERCEPTION

While our struggle for self-understanding as one human among others situated in a particular moment in time is essential to adequately answering the grandest questions of life, it is no less pertinent to how we behave ourselves as we go about mundane tasks, such as shopping at the grocery store. In the previous chapter, we argued that the narrative element of our self-understanding reveals important interdependencies in aesthetic and practical judgment. We are always interpreting ourselves and our circumstances as we go about our business and our interpretations alter our perceptions. Such claims are apt to invite worries of relativism. To allay any such concern, we turn to lessons we learn from attending to the various phenomena of seeing aspects. These lessons reveal both the potential for interpretation-sensitive perceptions to maintain their capacity for objective apprehension of the world, but also remind us of the necessity to be mindful of our vulnerability to self-deception.

At the beginning, we set aside questions pertaining to the spectator of moral value in order to focus on the agent as the primary form of moral judgment is practical. In this chapter, we will nonetheless say a little about the moral spectator as it can help us see our way to rejecting relativism. If we accept the Thomistic description brought to the fore of contemporary practical philosophy by Anscombe that practical knowledge is the cause of what it understands on the part of the agent, then the agent's understanding of her action must somehow be vitally important to the spectator's judgment. For this reason, we will begin by thinking about what role description plays in intentional

action and what that reveals about moral judgment. Given that not only do both perception and reason contribute to our ability to get descriptions right, but additionally that reason alters our perceptions themselves, we will then turn our attention to this interaction and its implications for objectivity. In the final, admittedly ill-fitting section, we add a quick word tying the aesthetic case of interpretation sensitive perception to our prior considerations of how a wider context mediates judgments using life-form concepts. So long as we are speaking formally, it turns out that there is a sense in which we can say that art imitates life after all.

## §1. Moral Judgment: Practical and Perceptual

It is not uncommon to see conflation of agent and spectator forms of "moral judgment" as this one expression sometimes picks out the practical, sometimes the perceptual. An agent's moral judgment results in good action; a spectator observing this action judges it to be moral. As we will soon discuss an instance where I think such a slip causes problems, it will benefit us to make a terminological stipulation to help us avoid the same mistake. Continuing to speak of agents and spectators will of course provide one useful means for avoiding ambiguity in the sense of "moral judgment." Additionally, I will always use "moral sentiment" to refer only to the spectator's sense.

Since action bears a particular form, if we attribute an action to an other, we must understand it to bear that form. Perhaps the most neutral way to put it is that action as such is directed at an end. At present, it needn't be specified if that end is the good, the pleasant, or if it even has a uniform object rather than multifarious objects of no discernible unity. Assume simply that where there is action, the agent has an answer to the question "why?" As spectator, then, to attribute an action to another is to attribute some "going for" to the agent.

Consideration of moral sentiment directed at an individual action must be mindful that description enters its matter twice, though once is implicit. The obvious element of description is

the judge's description of the action she is evaluating, which will include her description of the context in which it takes place. Whether she is right in the action she attributes to the agent will depend on how the agent describes her situation. "How rude!" I think when I see someone take a gulp of another person's drink. Should I realize the guilty drinker had grabbed her companion's beverage by mistake, I would reduce the charges from rudeness to carelessness. Alteration in what I understand to accurately describe the action alters my judgment. What the action I am judging *is*, as a matter of fact, largely depends upon the agent's understanding of what she is doing, what description she acts under. Perhaps she knowingly stole a gulp while her victim was looking aside. Perhaps she took herself to be picking up her own drink, not her companion's. Understanding this to make all the difference, I, as spectator, alter my judgment from rude to careless as I alter the description under which I take the other to be acting. Attributing an action to an other involves, at least on some minimal level, attributing to the agent a certain descriptive understanding of the circumstances in which she acts.

Failing to keep track of what sense of "moral judgment" is at issue along with the distinct roles description plays in the judgments of agent and spectator can easily lead one into confusion. An example of this surfaces in Onora O'Neill's "Modern Moral Philosophy and the Problem of Relevant Descriptions."[1] Her aim in that paper is to demonstrate that a problem Anscombe raises for Kant and Mill is either equally a problem for all ethical theories or is a problem for no one. She concludes the latter. Before considering her conclusion, we should ask what the problem is—the problem of relevant descriptions—as O'Neill presents it? She summarizes an example of Anscombe's: "a man is moving his arm up and down, thereby pumping water into a cistern, thereby poisoning a water supply, thereby poisoning inhabitants of a villa, thereby despatching a group of

[1] "Modern Moral Philosophy and the Problem of Relevant Descriptions," in *Modern Moral Philosophy*, vol. 54, The Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement, ed. Anthony O'Hear (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 301-316.

war criminals."[2] O'Neill proceeds to remind us that "multiplicity of true descriptions is ubiquitous," asking then on behalf of those who might find it a problem, "how are we to judge the action?" As replenishing the water supply? As polishing off the criminals? This will be a problem for "any adequate account of ethical judgment." (Note the ambiguity.) Before we can judge, we must decide how to describe the object of our judgment.

O'Neill avers there really is no problem. "Ethical judgment," as practical judgment, is not concerned with how to describe an object given to it, but with how to produce its object. She continues with familiar characterizations of the contrast between species of theoretical judgment, which "aim to *fit the world* or *some possible world*," with practical judgment, which "aims in some measure to *shape the world*, or to *specify how it should be shaped*."[3] If there is nothing yet to describe, there can be no problem concerning how to describe it.

O'Neill faces two problems here: she fails to see how questions regarding description remain in practical judgment, and she fails to see the proper role description is playing in the accounts of those she criticizes. Addressing the former, we can fill in her own example to reveal her oversight. Consider, as she does, deciding to stop by a grocery store to buy enough groceries to last the weekend. I have yet to make the stop, so she is right there is nothing yet to describe. But O'Neill recognizes here a "near relative" of the problem of relevant descriptions, namely that there are myriad ways I could choose to achieve my goal of buying enough groceries for my purposes. Why, she asks, does this not leave me frozen like Buridan's ass? Returning the example to a context truer to real life, she replies, removes much of the indeterminacy. We rarely have only one constraint to take into consideration, such as the quantity of food we buy. A moment's thought brings to mind many others: "I not only try to get enough food to last until Monday, but also to do so quickly,

[2] O'Neill, "Relevant Descriptions," 308-309.
[3] O'Neill, "Relevant Descriptions," 313.

without overspending, and without buying food that is unhealthy, or monotonous, disliked by those who will eat it, or produced by methods of which I disapprove. And I will also have regard to legal rules such as refraining from shoplifting, or to ethical requirements such [as] treating the staff with courtesy or refraining from queue jumping." Also accounting for these constraints certainly does narrow our options down. But O'Neill seems not to notice that the problem of relevant descriptions has returned. Consider her final constraint. I cannot refrain from queue jumping if I am unsure precisely where the line ends. It isn't terribly uncommon to need to ask someone whether or not they are in line. Though we cannot be concerned to describe actions yet to be performed, we must everywhere be concerned with an accurate understanding of the material the world gives us to work with as we set out to shape it.

Secondly, in neglecting to insure that she and her interlocutors are considering ethical judgment in the same sense, O'Neill misunderstands precisely what the concern regarding description is that each is addressing. O'Neill motivates the problem of relevant descriptions entirely in terms of "moral" and "ethical" judgment, which are, after all, terms used by those whom she criticizes. She reads their remarks as making sense only on a view of moral assessment that must be "directed at individuable act-tokens"[4] already "there to hand,"[5] and so as assuming "a spectator view of the moral life."[6] They assume no such thing. The authors are aware that the matter they address is practical and would agree with O'Neill that this means there is no action yet to describe. What they are concerning themselves with are the peculiarities practical judgment takes on when it is to lead to an action that will be properly subject to moral evaluation.

Consider first the passage O'Neill takes as her point of departure in which Anscombe quickly brushes Kant aside. When Anscombe complains that "[Kant's] rule about universalizable

[4] O'Neill, "Relevant Descriptions," 313.
[5] O'Neill, "Relevant Descriptions," 312.
[6] O'Neill, "Relevant Descriptions," 314.

maxims is useless without stipulations as to what shall count as a relevant description of an action with a view to constructing a maxim about it," she does so immediately after contrasting lying with lying in such-and-such circumstances[7]—think of the familiar example of the bare notion of lying versus that of lying as to the whereabouts of an innocent man in order to spare his life from his evil pursuers. Her point seems to be that if we can make sense of universalizing maxims at all, if the latter description passes universalizable muster while the former, less specific one does not, that would reveal Kant's theory "has no content" until we are told how to construct our maxims.

Barbara Herman, in the passages O'Neill quotes, is offering a Kantian remedy to just this problem. The "rules of moral salience" Herman describes are rules for constructing maxims prior to testing them with some version of a Categorical Imperative procedure, rules providing the content Anscombe finds lacking in Kantian moral philosophy. Presumably, if Herman's topic were broader she could offer us "rules of *practical* salience," rules that, e.g., if we wish to go for a walk, will reveal considerations of the local weather to be relevant and the GDP of Japan to be irrelevant; the questions about description that arise here do not assume we have already taken the walk. Such rules in this case serve the purpose of alerting the agent to what considerations might reasonably affect her decision to take a walk. Rules of moral salience do the same where action is likely to have a moral valence, alerting the agent now to considerations that bear on that action's valence. Similarly for John McDowell—who has no use for the notion of universalizing maxims—the "capacity to read the details of situations" he speaks of is not a capacity to determine which description should be the object of my self-evaluation once I have already gotten in line—to return to our earlier example—but a capacity to recognize that I better figure out whether that awkwardly positioned, shifty-eyed fellow is in line before I step in front of him if I want to avoid being rude.

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[7] "Modern Moral Philosophy" in *Human Life, Action and Ethics,* eds. Mary Geach and Luke Gormally (Charlottesville VA: Imprint Academic, 2005) 171.

When it comes to moral judgment, O'Neill is right that there will be many true descriptions that will hold of the action once performed, some of which will and some of which will not be proper objects of moral evaluation. Her mistake is to fail to see that the agent aspiring for virtue must be just as concerned with aptly describing the world in which she must act in order that she might act well as the spectator must be in observing details relevant to reaching an accurate evaluation of that act.

Prior to mistakenly dismissing the problem of relevant descriptions, O'Neill argued that if it poses a problem for any ethical theory, it does so equally for all ethical theories. Here, she is surely right. It poses a problem for all ethical theories insofar as the problem of relevant descriptions is a problem of living ethically. Not every case where an agent chooses to act will be one where moral value is realized. Some recognition of when the question of what to do given the circumstances we find ourselves in must take a moral inflection, of when we must be sensitive to the potential for moral value to be realized, is a fundamental requirement ethical living. Herman and McDowell offer two options for understanding the overall role such sensitivity might play in an ethical theory.

## §2. Interpretation and Perception

Our consideration of the problem of relevant descriptions has emphasized different roles for description in the agent's moral action and the spectator's moral sentiment. We must take care, however, not to overstate the separation. Indeed, it is distinctive of moral life that improving descriptive sensitivity as an agent and as a spectator is one activity. For aesthetic judgment, let us adopt Hume's characterization of the true judge of beauty, someone with "strong sense, united to delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by comparison, and cleared of all prejudice."[8] Notice that nothing required in order for the true judge of beauty to better her sensibilities

[8] David Hume, "Of the Standard of Taste," in *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1985) 241.

necessarily contributes to her ability to *produce* beauty. A fine critic may be an incompetent artist; great artists often show poor critical judgment. Moral sentiment and virtue do not display an equivalent separation. The practice required to improve moral judgment cannot lie entirely in the spectatorial realm of moral life.

Iris Murdoch captures the need for activity to sharpen perception and the manner in which accurate perception enables virtuous activity in the following lovely statement: "Of course virtue is good habit and dutiful action. But the background condition of such habit and such action, in human beings, is a just mode of vision and a good quality of consciousness. It is a *task* to come to see the world as it is."[9] It would be easy to read such a line in a way that portrays the task as too like the task of the true judge of beauty, as a sort of study honing recognitional capacities only, to the neglect of practical capacities. But the recognitional capacities required for virtue can only be developed through the exercise of practical capacities. This is the basis of Aristotle's recommendation—which is no doubt also common wisdom—that we heed our elders; "these people see correctly because experience has given them their eye."[10] Aristotle adds that we are not merely to listen, else as he says we would be "like a sick person who listens attentively to the doctor, but acts on none of his instructions."[11] Another moral teacher, after a parable telling of one man's great kindness, bade us go and do likewise. He shared Aristotle's notion that as the sick person has no prospect of becoming well by failing to enact his doctor's instructions, no one has the least prospect of becoming kind apart from performing acts of kindness. Sometimes when we err, the world punishes us: my attempted act of kindness earns the other's scorn; I assisted him where I thought I saw need, but I missed that what he really needed was to struggle through on his own.

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[9] Iris Murdoch, *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature*, ed. Peter J. Conradi (New York: Allen Lane/Penguin Press, 1998) 375.
[10] *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1143b14.
[11] *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1105b16.

Sometimes when we err, the wiser correct us: my elder's experienced eye sees where I intruded on the other's independence and she alerts me to my own blindness. Sometimes when we err, it is up to us to recognize our own folly in reflection, and we may well instead remain blind. One essential part of what experience needs in order to give us the eye with which to see correctly can come only from within performance of the kinds of actions we hope someday to perfect.

So it is a task to come to see the world as it is. How might we work on this task? Well, many ways, and no doubt each is of interest to moral philosophy in its turn. Presently, I would like to highlight one perhaps less obvious manner in which we can affect—and so hopefully improve—our perceptions of the world. When we speak of seeing the world as it is, we mean something more than if we were to speak of, say, seeing the color of something as it is. Attentive open eyes and good lighting there suffice. Seeing the world as it is, though, involves understanding what is seen. Perception and interpretation go hand in hand. This of course means that we must interpret the details we perceive. But there is another and important sense in which for us as moral agents, to borrow a line from Daniel Brudney, our perceptions are already interpretations.[12] Let us focus, then, not primarily on concerns involving how to interpret what we perceive, but on what it might mean for perceptions to already be interpretations as well as how we might insure those interpretations are accurate.

There will be a common impulse amongst philosophers to insist that the account that begins to take shape transgresses certain restrictions. I'd like to acknowledge up front two potential places of concern, hopefully in order to begin the process of allaying those worries. Anscombe protests that "Hume defines 'truth' in such a way as to exclude ethical judgments from it, and professes that

[12] "The Breadth of Moral Character," in *Fictional Characters, Real Problems: The Search for Ethical Content in Literature*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016) 254-281. I should note that I am taking his line and running with it, perhaps running places he would rather it not go.

he has proved that they are so excluded."[13] Wittgenstein protests a similar restriction philosophers are wont to make to the concept of seeing: "'But this isn't *seeing!*' ——'But this is seeing!' —It must be possible to give both remarks a conceptual justification."[14] The point of contention in the latter remark is seeing aspects; Wittgenstein peppers similar reassurances throughout his discussion of aspect-seeing. Putting Brudney's remark to good use requires the more capacious understandings both of truth in ethical judgment and of what counts as seeing that Anscombe and Wittgenstein respectively press us toward.

If Anscombe were to seek a proof-text for her claim in Hume, she perhaps could do no better than to cite the following:

> Thus the distinct boundaries and offices of *reason* and of *taste* are easily ascertained. The former conveys the knowledge of truth and falsehood: the latter gives the sentiment of beauty and deformity, vice and virtue. The one discovers objects as they really stand in nature, without addition or diminution: the other has a productive faculty, and gilding or staining all natural objects with the colours, borrowed from internal sentiment, raises in a manner a new creation.[15]

Certainly, distinct *paradigmatic* functions are easily ascertained for reason and for taste. Sentiment is, if anything, a distraction as I work out a logical proof, and logic is of little aide to my decision between chocolate or vanilla—unless, perhaps, I could convince the vendor that the disjunction should be inclusive at no extra charge. To speak of *boundaries*, though, is to needlessly confine each to their paradigmatic functions. To so confine each is to blind oneself to the only "new creation" to be discovered in this area of human life and experience: the rational animal's capacity for perception that is at once sentimental and veridical.

However just the accusation that Hume too starkly divides sentiment and reason, his defense should no doubt begin by pointing to the robust interaction he assigns to the offices:

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[13] Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," 170-71.
[14] *Philosophical Investigations,* PII 173.
[15] David Hume, *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch, 3rd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975) 294/SBN 246, Appendix I.

> But in order to pave the way for such a sentiment, and give a proper discernment of its object, it is often necessary, we find, that much reasoning should precede, that nice distinctions be made, just conclusions drawn, distant comparisons formed, complicated relations examined, and general facts fixed and ascertained.[16]

The operations of reason Hume here cites serve to bring into view the object as it really stands. Any response sentiment might afford prior to reason's work would be an inadequate response insofar as it is a response to an incomplete or defective grasp of the object. As far as this goes, I doubt many philosophers would find anything more mysterious here than in the need to bring an object into proper lighting conditions in order to accurately judge of its color. Regarding moral perception, however, if interpretation is the work of reason, how are we to understand the claim that certain moral perceptions are *already* interpretations? It is in response to this question that we can learn from consideration of seeing aspects.

Before turning attention there, I first offer a word on methodology and a word of caution. My initial aim in the following few paragraphs is merely to bring to our attention experiences of sorts we are all familiar with, not yet to argue for a particular understanding of these experiences. Philosophers of different stripes can respond, "yes, yes, but this can all be reduced to…" or "yes, yes, but all is illusion…". I first seek only that initial "yes, yes." The next step from there is to notice a clear contrast within these familiar experiences concerning what can be said about the various species' relation to facts. In showing that there are species of aspect-seeing for which the idea of responsiveness to facts is quite natural, we also show the tendency many philosophers may have to dismiss out of hand the possibility of objectivity for any account of moral perception that relies on any notion of aspect-seeing to be unwarranted. We will still be a long way from securing objectivity, but the possibility that perceptual deliverances of such a kind can admit of objectivity and so can be a legitimate power of knowledge will be secured.

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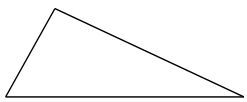
[16] Hume, *Enquiries*, 173/SBN 137.

The word of caution also initiates our consideration of the matter of aspect seeing, and it is this: though attention to aspect seeing may teach us about possibilities for perception, it would be a terrible mistake to assume the grammar of one kind of case applies equally to that of another. We must let each kind of case teach us its own grammar. The first example most think of when the idea of seeing an aspect is brought up is the duck-rabbit. If we were to take this case as a sort of paradigm to which other cases of aspect-seeing must conform, we would claim that switching from seeing one aspect to seeing another is subject to our will. But contrast the duck-rabbit with the case with which Wittgenstein introduces the idea of the dawning of an aspect in Part II of *Philosophical Investigations*, namely that of noticing one person's resemblance to another. Once the resemblance strikes us, we cannot then swap back and forth between familiar and unfamiliar aspects; the grammar of the duck-rabbit differs from that of personal resemblance.

Contrasting yet another example of Wittgenstein's with that of the duck-rabbit reveals a wide variance in the extent to which one can or cannot intelligibly speak of seeing an aspect being responsive to facts. If anything is a representation of a duck, this figure is one; if anything is a representation of a rabbit, this figure is one. Pointing out the truth of both claims is just a long-winded way of saying it is an ambiguous figure. On any reasonable account of representation, one could defend the objectivity of each claim in its turn via application of this account to the figure and the respective animals. Now consider the following figure:



Wittgenstein writes here, "This triangle can be seen as a triangular hole,… as standing on its base, as hanging from its apex; as a mountain,… as an overturned object which is meant to stand on the

shorter side of the right angle… and as various other things."[17] A distinguishing mark of this kind of aspect-seeing is the necessity of imagination: "It is possible to take the duck-rabbit simply for the picture of a rabbit… but not to take the bare triangular figure for the picture of an object that has fallen over. To see this aspect of the triangle demands *imagination*."[18] Wittgenstein puts the point nicely speaking of a similar example when he writes, "I can see it in various aspects according to the fiction I surround it with."[19] We must surround the triangle with some sort of fiction in order to see it as an object that has fallen over, or even to see it as an object in the ordinary sense at all. Call it imagining an interpretive context. We introduced the triangle as fallen object example to contrast it with the typical duck-rabbit case. About either, we may say with Wittgenstein that we interpret the illustration, and "*see* it as we *interpret* it."[20] The important contrast for our purposes is that no imagination is necessary for one conversant with the shape of ducks to simply take the duck-rabbit as a duck. And should the rabbit aspect dawn upon this person, his ability to shift from aspect to aspect will not demand surrounding the figure with any fiction; the activity is purely interpretive.[21]

Recognizing the latter contrast, the traditional question regarding the objectivity or subjectivity of moral judgment can be phrased in its terms. Should the concept of aspect-seeing prove to have some bearing on moral judgment, practical and sentimental, an account is needed to show that not all of our moral judgments are made in accordance with whatever fiction we have surrounded the judgment with rather than in any way manifesting an interpretation properly responsive to the facts. Hume says reason paves the way for sentiment, but might it not be imagination paving the way instead? Few would deny, I think, that sometimes our sentiments do

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[17] Wittgenstein, *PI*, 171.
[18] Wittgenstein, *PI*, 177.
[19] Wittgenstein, *PI*, 179.
[20] Wittgenstein, *PI*, 165.
[21] To be sure, this is not to say that imagination *cannot* play a role in duck-rabbit aspect changes. It could be a psychological fact about someone that the best way she can swap between seeing the different aspects is to imagine the picture surrounded now by a pond, now by a meadow.

reflect more an interpretive context we've imagined than an accurate appraisal of reality. One could even effectively characterize the damning power of rationalization in these terms. In rationalization, we surround our justification for action with a fiction more attractive than the truth, and—compelling as fiction often is and particularly fond of the author of this one, namely, the dear self—we come to see the world according to our own fictitious interpretation. This is one reason O'Neil says we flirt with forms of relativism if we try to "cast the weight of moral judgment" anywhere heavily dependent upon capacities for description.[22] Our account must demonstrate how our interpretive context might somehow be moored to reality.

The examples of aspect-seeing we have used bring to mind cases of interpretations here-and-now affecting perceptions here-and-now. Such cases would translate most simply into cases of moral perception of the kind we considered earlier: my judgment of rudeness or carelessness altering along with my beliefs about which drink is whose and whether that fellow is knowingly drinking from his companion's or not. Such a case, however, is not a case of perception *already* being interpretation so much as coming to an interpretation while confronted with the situation. An instance of what is presently of interest to us would be an example where an interpretive context is set in advance and does important work in enabling us to live the moral life. David Wiggins provides a good example we will consider at length.

## §3. Interpretation and Moral Perception

"The general in command is a blundering fool," our retelling of the example begins.[23] The terrible reality of the battle as it stands calls on Antiochus to act courageously. He answers the call

[22] O'Neill, "Relevant Descriptions," 310.

[23] The manner in which I engage with Wiggins' example here could be misleading. Its original home is in a response to a paper by John McDowell where one thing at issue between them is a finer point of Aristotle exegesis. I worry stripping the example from its original context of exegesis is alone distorting enough, let alone also using it as I do. Though I write as though in opposition to Wiggins, in the end I am actually defending an account Wiggins himself gestures at as promising. For the sake of convenience, I have named Wiggins' characters. "Eudaimonism and Realism

and indeed acts with great bravery. But he does so in great anger as well, as he recognizes that had his buffoon of a commander not issued a series of short-sighted commands, the present treacherous circumstances never would have arisen. Still, he would never be able to live with himself if he did not do all he could to protect the polis, and winning the battle to provide that protection requires a courageous performance in his present circumstances. A second warrior, Ajax, also acts bravely but without anger, instead "simply and cheerfully accept[ing] this as his chance to act courageously;" he "rather likes to be put on his mettle." Wiggins begins to communicate the point of his example by asking whether the angry Antiochus is any less brave, any less virtuous, or any less practically wise than the cheerful Ajax?

These questions, as asked, following on this example, as told, invite a confusion we should take care to avoid. Intuitions muddle if we are not clear in what precisely the object of evaluation is at each moment. Wiggins asks about the bravery of each warrior, but we are to answer the question after consideration of each's singular act in this one ill-begotten battle. Meanwhile, Wiggins' question as to the virtue of each warrior either falls away or is treated as equivalent to the question of each warrior's bravery.

We can better secure clarity for present purposes if we amend the first of Wiggins' questions. Allow the intermediate question of the individual virtue of courage to fall away and let us ask instead whether on the particular occasion described Antiochus acts any less bravely than Ajax? Allow his second question to remain as asked: is Antiochus any less virtuous than Ajax? With this emendation, the first question takes as its object a particular act while the second takes as its object the character of each warrior. The question of practical wisdom is presently for us only tangential.

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in Aristotle's Ethics: A Reply to John McDowell," in *Aristotle and Moral Realism*, ed. Robert Heinaman (London: University College London, 1995) 219-232.

Wiggins argues we must accept that Antiochus is no less courageous than Ajax. While this addresses the question we have set aside, in support of his claim he speaks of our interest, the bravery of the particular acts described in the example. In the latter terms, I think nearly all would agree: each act is doubtlessly courageous.[24] Agreement is likely to be unhesitating if all we imagine is a perception of danger, Antiochus and Ajax rushing in at great risk to themselves, each rising to the occasion and skillfully overcoming the opposition, turning the tide of battle in their favor. What Wiggins believes might give one pause enters if we add to the basis of our judgment a recognition of the attitude with which each warrior acts. Proper attention to the latter, he thinks, causes problems for those wishing to adhere to certain readings of Aristotle, if not on the level of judging particular acts, then certainly on the level of judging character.

A sound judgment regarding the courageousness of each warrior—let alone their overall virtue—cannot be reached given only a single instance. To attribute the virtue of courage is to attribute a *pattern* of behavior; to attribute virtue overall involves consideration of an even larger pattern of behavior understood in a wider context. Fortunately, the need for a wider context enables us to say more rather than less about the warriors' virtue given Wiggins' portrayal of the example. Here, Antiochus' anger versus Ajax's cheerfulness comes to the fore.

Wiggins believes Antiochus' anger about his predicament should make it difficult for a certain kind of Aristotelian to avoid tempering her attribution of virtue to him. Whether or not Wiggins is right in his characterization of his opponents, an Aristotelian view needn't bear any such burden. Wiggins' sense that some might be reluctant to place Antiochus' courage on par with that of Ajax seems to come from an errant restriction of his opponent's view, as though all they can see in the example is an action done angrily compared to a similar action done cheerfully. But when a

[24] Wiggins does not claim anyone says otherwise; rather, he suggests that McDowell's reading of Aristotle commits him unwittingly to the contrary claim.

wider view of Wiggins' example is allowed, the question of Antiochus' virtue can register that he is likely justified in his anger. Suppose—as Aristotle might say—he is angry in the right way and to the right degree. If his estimation of the foolishness of his commander's orders is accurate, then though inferior according to military rank, Antiochus shows himself superior in practical wisdom. Not only this, if Ajax's cheerfulness comes only from his enjoyment of being tested, as Wiggins' description suggests, his heedless rush into danger for no good reason—meaning by this that he neither recognizes nor cares, as does Antiochus, that good reason on the part of his commander would have avoided this occasion for his bravery—reveals him to be inferior to Antiochus from the perspective of virtue. Antiochus' anger is sensible, responding as it does to the reality of his situation; Ajax's cheerfulness is foolhardy.

The point Wiggins' example is meant ultimately to serve surfaces when we further ask whether Antiochus chose his brave action for its own sake. If we could say he chose the action for the sake of *to kalon*—i.e. if we can say he chose to act as he saw noble or fine or beautiful—we could thereby say he chose the action for its own sake. Wiggins believes Aristotle would indeed claim that the action was chosen as noble, but believes that such a claim fits ill with our intuitions on the case. "[S]urely," Wiggins writes, "what [Antiochus] is doing the act *for* is to fend off the disaster that will otherwise overwhelm the city;" we can say nothing stronger than that he acts "not for the wrong sort of reason."[25] If we can lay claim to nothing stronger, an account that holds the value of virtuous actions to be intrinsic to those actions because virtuous seems to move out of reach; an inferential step has otherwise ineliminably intruded.

We have already developed sufficient resources to explain how, *pace* Wiggins, we *are* entitled to make the stronger claim and hold on to the idea that the virtuous agent chooses virtuous actions because she recognizes them to be virtuous. We needn't shy away from the Aristotelian idea that

[25] Wiggins, "Reply to McDowell," 223.

moral actions are chosen as *kalon*, even in tricky situations like that presented in Wiggins' example. Defending our right to the stronger claim happily takes the form of tying together all the loose threads left free to this point.

Antiochus could have been bitter. A lesser warrior would have been. Instead, we have imagined him to be angry, but angry "in the right way." Unpacking all that virtue would require this qualification to mean for his anger would likely be a lengthy task. One clear requirement among the many would surely be that his anger not prevent him—as it easily could—from seeing the fineness of acting courageously in the context he is actually in. Call it acceptance; an ability for such acceptance will be as characteristic of the virtuous agent as anything. We could describe it like this: reason must pave the way for us to adequately perceive the world we must seek to shape as it presently stands and can do so through establishing an interpretive context in practical deliberation. Presumably, Antiochus has thought about the cause for which the war is being waged, about the consequences for the polis of losing the present battle, about aspirations for honor or whether honor is worth striving for, &c. These are not *passing* thoughts; they are thoughts constituting what it means for him to be where he is, faced with what he is faced with, and so what it would mean to respond in this way or that. There is no need for Antiochus to infer the nobility of acting in a courageous manner from his true motive of fending off disaster, no need for us to say his pursuit of the *kalon* is at best indirect. His perceptions are *already* interpretations; the nobility of acting bravely is manifest to him, and he chooses accordingly.

Were Antiochus to go wrong in the practical deliberation in which he develops his interpretive context—perhaps, for example, incorrectly estimating the justness of the war—then we should instead say that he sees the circumstances according to the fiction he has surrounded it with, i.e., that his claim as to the noble thing to do is false, his action misguided. If his reasoning is sound, his claims, objectively, are true, his action noble.

## §4. Art Imitates Life

By way of transitioning to a discussion focused mostly on the *content* of aesthetic judgment, I close this chapter with an observation that has no obvious better home elsewhere. Our investigations to present has considered primarily aesthetic judgment of artworks, taking the manner in which we are struck by the beauty of, e.g., sunsets and autumn leaves to simply be given, a natural human responsiveness without which our conventional aesthetic practices--the arts, rituals and ceremony, &c.--never would have arisen. We have been concerned with analogies in form of aesthetic and practical judgment to move us in the direction to discover a sort of unity between the corresponding values. The dependence of practical judgment on the application of the concept *human*, and the moment demanding interpretation internal to the concept of the human was a fundamental unifying element. There is yet one more formal analogy worth attending to, one that illuminates our engagement with artworks specifically. It amounts to a formal reading of "art imitates life" that has remained true through all modernism and post-'s revolutions.

In chapter two we saw that the meaning of any claim that employs a life-form concept will be mediated by reference to the 'wider context' of that life-form. So, by way of a reminder example, I could see two animals side by side doing the same thing, say, eating grass, but know that one is feeding itself while the other is self-medicating since the first is a horse and the second is a dog. This wider context is given in our natural historical knowledge of each species. I want to claim that art imitates life in that this exact structure is present in our aesthetic judgments about particular artworks.

To tackle what is most likely to jump out as an apparent disanalogy first, what could possibly be an analogue to a natural history that mediates the meaning, and so potential truth, of property ascriptions to particular artworks? What, to put it with examples, would be the 'wider context' of

Manet's Olympia or Mahler's 5th symphony or Mann's The Magic Mountain? The place of the 'wider context' for artworks is the place of criticism.

When we are thinking about judgments applying a life-form concept, the natural history that spells out the wider context is a body of knowledge acquired through empirical observation, or at least testimony tracing back to such. That 'the horse is eating' but 'the dog is self-medicating' when to all appearances the cow and the dog is doing the exact same thing is determined by the mediation of the body of knowledge developed through these observations. The job of the critic is not—if you will pardon the absurdity—to go on safari to observe artworks feeding in their natural habitat. And no matter how central and explicit an artist inartfully makes his own sex life central to a work, the mating habits of the artist don't matter. (Comment on human sexuality as such that survives the purging of self-indulgence, however, can of course be of great value.)

Take a rather unsubtle illustration, though one that is not far from reality if we imagine the critic is dealing with someone very early in her aesthetic education. The student claims Rembrandt's Prodigal Son is dull. The critic claims, to the contrary, that it is quite profound. In seeking to communicate this to us, he draws our attention to the contrast in the father's hands and elucidates their symbolism of the simultaneous grace and reproach of God. This kind of discourse is by far the part of criticism we most care about, what is most instructive and exciting in it—instructive, in part, of what we are, and certainly exciting for that—not simple property attribution. Now, there is no mystery how the latter relates to the artwork and counts as aesthetic judgment. But one might ask how the critical activity of the sort in the example just offered is taken up into the aesthetic judgment rather than only being an externally related side activity. We can put the answer here by saying that it takes the role of offering a speculative natural history for the work. The only point of calling it a 'natural history' here is to clearly indicate how it fits into the judgmental activity on the

life-form analogy, i.e., that the critical interpretation mediates property ascription to an artwork in the way natural history does to living things.

I have at least indicated realist sympathies at points earlier in the dissertation. An objection from that side would protest, can't we just *see*, e.g., the vibrancy of the Kandinsky? And if your criticism fails to register *that*, something is plainly going wrong in it? Yes to both. And this highlights a difference, but one that complements rather than contradicts the life-form analogy.

Singular attributions of aesthetic properties to artworks are of two distinct kinds. First are what we might call 'manifest' aesthetic properties. These are the properties where the realist can correctly be somewhat flat-footed in her account. Only 'somewhat', as these property terms have genealogies where they come to a settled sense through first being properties of the second type. This story, the genealogy of manifest aesthetic properties, is the story of Chapter 5. Secondly, there are singular attributions of aesthetic properties that we could call 'context sensitive.' These are properties that we will only see these when judging in accordance with whatever critical interpretation—the wider context—we are working with; in the language from earlier in the present chapter, we see it according to the fiction we surround it with. This is not unrestrained. If a critical interpretation seems to make the ascription of clearly manifest properties problematic, this is a substantial red flag that something is likely going wrong with the interpretation. A realist can still argue that these properties are 'there,' she only needs to further defend one interpretation as right or closer to right, one indication of which will be its consonance with the work's manifest properties.

Our approach to reestablishing how goodness and beauty are unified values depends on moral and aesthetic judgment sharing a prior moment of thought in which we struggle and seek to make sense of our human natures. But when it comes to something like attributing manifest aesthetic properties to, say, an abstract expressionist painting, it is far from obvious that any such thing is going on. As indicated, to discover how it nevertheless is an important element in such

moments of aesthetic judging, we must look to the history of our aesthetic vocabulary. Such is the task of next chapter.

Chapter Five

# OBJECTIVITY, ANTHROPOCENTRICITY, & AESTHETIC PROPERTIES

> The imagination is the power of the mind over the possibilities of things; but if this constitutes a certain single characteristic, it is the source not of a certain single value but of as many values as reside in the possibilities of things.[1]

Part of the great appeal of Hume's "Of the Standard of Taste" is his juxtaposition of two "species of common sense", one having aesthetic value as obviously subjective—sentiment has reference to nothing beyond itself—while the other has it no less obviously objective—it would be mad to praise Ogilby over Milton. I take it most can find both compelling, depending on where our focus is at the time. One might hope, then, for a philosophical account of aesthetic value that, whatever the final verdict, provides insight into how or why both views can seem so compelling. One might then suspect that there must be ways to accept virtues of both views without falling into incoherence. I hope to develop such an account here drawing heavily on the work of Frank Sibley, David Wiggins, and Ludwig Wittgenstein, though without any pretense to exegesis.

Some preliminaries are in order. While we shall be developing a form of objectivism, we must be clear that it is not an objectivism scientistically conceived. 'Objective' has a perfectly happy use designating only what is of direct interest to the natural sciences; this will not be our use of the term. The sense of 'objective' that we are claiming for aesthetic properties will be worked out in more detail below. As a basic, initial characterization, we can say that 'objective' for us is a

[1] Wallace Stevens, *The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and the Imagination* (New York: Vintage Books, 1965) 136.

responsiveness to facts. Our concern, then, is whether when we offer aesthetic descriptions and evaluations, our predications attribute properties about which we should be realists, whether they attribute real properties of objects. I will speak sometimes of aesthetic value, sometimes of aesthetic properties. In this paper, I simply take 'aesthetic value' to be a broader term. Aesthetic properties are specific aesthetic values; 'aesthetic value' contains the aesthetic properties one might ascribe. And as a final preliminary, I choose to focus on how this plays out in art-critical discourse as we more readily employ a wider vocabulary and more often dispute such employments than in descriptions of natural beauty, although I intend the account to apply equally to natural beauty.

We shall begin by motivating worry about the most popular form of subjectivism. In section two, we specify how we should understand 'aesthetic property' and highlight a couple details that will be important throughout. Finally, sections three through six work out the notions of objectivity and anthropocentricity, arguing that and demonstrating how aesthetic properties are both.

## §1. Against Response Dependence in Aesthetics

If one holds that aesthetic value is instrumental, that an object is aesthetically valuable because of its disposition to afford us pleasurable experiences, then one is committed to a response-dependence account of aesthetic value. Some instrumentalists about aesthetic value understand that they must sophisticate their view in order to avoid what Malcolm Budd calls the "heresy of the separable experience." The worry is that on an instrumentalist view, anything affording the same experience as a particular artwork would have the same value as that artwork, reducing the value of artworks to something like the value of a drug. The artwork would be irrelevant so long as the experience could otherwise be had. Instrumentalists have avoided such heresy by pointing out that the experience of an artwork simply cannot be characterized without reference to the artwork, and

so is an experience nothing other than it could afford.[2] Surely it is true that a proper characterization of the experience of an artwork demands reference to that artwork, but this leaves the question as to the value of the experience unanswered: why is the experience of an artwork valuable? One option is to say that the experience is valuable because it is of a valuable object. This response is unavailable to an instrumentalist for whom it is circular; it would require that the artwork derive its value from the experience it affords while the experience derives its value from the artwork. The instrumentalist may alternatively respond by stating the obvious: the experience is valuable because of what it is like to have it, i.e., its phenomenal character. It is, after all, taken to be a *pleasure*. But this reintroduces the possibility that something other than the artwork could have the same value. While nothing other than the artwork could afford the same experience, it is still possible that some other experience—say, one caused by a drug—could have the same phenomenal character, and so the same value. Instrumentalism, then, faces the dilemma of circularity or 'heresy'.[3]

To deny instrumentalism is not to deny our responses play any role at all; the concept of aesthetic value has no purchase in a story omitting sensibilities like ours. I have just said that an instrumentalist cannot explain the value of aesthetic experience in terms of experiencing a valuable object on pain of circularity. This particular circularity is no threat when we say the value of an experience derives from the object's antecedent, final value. The discomfort for many here is, I think, the feeling that such finalism is inconsistent with the seemingly obvious anthropocentric nature of aesthetic value. But the incompatibility is only apparent. The compatibility of an

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[2] See, e.g., Jerrold Levinson, *The Pleasures of Aesthetics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996) 22-24. He there also quotes in a footnote Stephen Davies making a similar move.

[3] James Shelley, "Against Value Empiricism in Aesthetics," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 88, no 4 (2009) 707-720. The preceding argument is Shelley's, or my abbreviation of it. All I hope for here is to motivate a substantial suspicion of response-dependence about aesthetic value. For a thorough presentation of the argument as well as consideration and refutation of possible responses, see Shelley's (2009). He proceeds from there to defend an object-theory of aesthetic value in a very different manner than I do here.

objectivity admitting such finalism and a strong anthropocentricity is the concern of the paper as a whole; first, however, we should specify what range aesthetic value, captured in certain of our aesthetic property ascriptions, will be our focus.

## §2. Sibley and Aesthetic Properties

Frank Sibley is the first philosopher to give us a sustained discussion focused on the nature of aesthetic properties.[4] His project is not one of developing or discovering a definition of 'aesthetic property', taking it that "one must recognize examples of one's subject matter" in order to even get started.[5] It might be helpful to first say what Sibley's idea of an aesthetic property is *not*. One might use 'aesthetic property' to mean any property of an object that contributes to one's aesthetic evaluation of it. This definition seems to me a perfectly fine, very natural definition, one that would even be preferable in some contexts. But it is not the use I, following Sibley, shall employ here. The former use can call 'red' an aesthetic property no less than 'vibrant' speaking of a painting, 'slow' no less than 'somber' in music, 'in iambic pentameter' no less than 'tightly-knit' in poetry.

For Sibley, the latter, but not the former, in each pairing is an aesthetic property. His idea is that it requires some amount of *taste* to see the latter properties. One can see a painting's redness without seeing that it is vibrant, note the slow tempo and minor key without noting its somberness, &c. Sibley takes it that all that is needed for someone to grasp the distinction he intends is to provide a few examples. We speak of non-aesthetic properties when we say a painting uses pale colors or that it is a portrait, when we say a novel has five characters and is set in the 1930s, as well as when we speak of crescendos and ostinatos in music. These property ascriptions are not

[4] Sibley preferred 'concepts' to 'properties'. His preference was based on a worry about possible misunderstandings the use of the term 'property' might bring with it that I do not share.

[5] Frank Sibley, "Aesthetic and Non-Aesthetic," in *Approach to Aesthetics*, eds. John Benson, Betty Redfern, and Jeremy Roxbee Cox (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 33.

themselves suggestive of any evaluation and seem to admit unproblematically of unqualified second-hand testimony. We speak of aesthetic properties when we cite a painting's gracefulness or garishness, a novel's unity or serenity, a concerto's sprightliness or a fugue's majesty. These property ascriptions are tinged with evaluation and would be misleadingly used in describing an object based on testimony without qualification.[6] Within the category of aesthetic terms, Sibley also distinguishes those mentioned so far in this section from what he calls *verdicts*, evaluative judgments as to something's overall aesthetic character, such as it's being beautiful or ugly, good or bad. I shall maintain this useful distinction.

Ted Cohen challenges the idea that taste is required to discriminate aesthetic properties. Rather than considering the challenge itself, I'd like to consider what seems to be one of its motivations. Sibley often contrasts taste with "normal senses and intelligence." This, Cohen exploits. He presents images of three lines, one perfectly straight, one angularly scribbled, one slightly arched, and asks us which we would call 'graceful'. He further asks if we take our judgment to have required anything beyond normal senses and intelligence. In another example, Cohen quotes Sibley's claim that 'lovely' is a term with no non-aesthetic use, and then asks us the same question about the commonplace statement, "It's a lovely day today.".[7] I take it—as Cohen intends—most would be squeamish about claiming these judgments require more than normality.

Considering Cohen's concern, what might make one suggest that aesthetic judgments require more than normal senses and intelligence to begin with? The main reason is simply that one can see an object full well and yet not notice its aesthetic qualities.[8] Wittgenstein provides a rather fun expression of this idea: "If you feel the seriousness of a tune, what are you perceiving?—Nothing

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[6] 'According to her, it is graceful.' 'I hear it is (or it is supposed to be) quite delicate.'

[7] Ted Cohen, "Aesthetic/Non-aesthetic and the Concept of Taste: A Critique of Sibley's Position," *Theoria* 39 (1973): 130-131.

[8] Sibley, *Approach*, 14, 38.

that could be conveyed by reproducing what you heard."[9] It seems there can be no better way of showing someone something than reproducing it for them. But with aesthetic properties, this may not suffice. We might sit together attentive to the very same performance, and yet as we leave I may be surprised to hear you speaking of its seriousness or solemnity or melancholy. I enjoyed the piece, but noticed no such things.

The problem with contrasting taste with normal senses and intelligence is that taste just is part of such normality. Taste is doubtless a skill that can be developed; borrowing Hume's vocabulary, delicacy of taste can be developed through practice and comparisons. And one possessing delicacy of taste can doubtless discriminate properties the unpracticed cannot. But taste should itself be thought of as part of normal senses and intelligence. Sibley acknowledges this. The closing line of his celebrated "Aesthetic Concepts" claims that if we could not be brought to see aesthetic qualities by critical methods, "this would prove us lacking in one characteristically human kind of awareness".[10] A necessary condition for acquiring an aesthetic vocabulary is our natural tendency to be drawn to certain phenomena, to react with delight or repulsion, admiration or aversion. Children exhibit this tendency in their reactions to spectacular sunsets or autumn leaves or by skipping or laughing or clapping along with music. We take advantage of these situations by simply applying to them the most fundamental aesthetic terms such as beautiful, pretty, or lively. "[W]ithout this natural tendency," Sibley notes, "our training would get nowhere."[11]

Uncharitably, in light of the foregoing we could accuse Sibley of inconsistency. I recommend, however, accommodating him by taking his remarks about taste requiring more than

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[9] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 3rd edition., trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 1953): Part II, 179.
[10] Sibley, *Approach*, 23.
[11] Sibley, *Approach*, 21.

"normal senses and intelligence" to have an implicit "strictly speaking."[12] Such remarks, we saw, are occasioned by observation of how we can miss aesthetic properties despite irreproachable functioning of our five senses. We may then emphasize along with him that taste is a natural human capacity. The latter along with the idea that taste needs to be developed will be important points for us throughout.

## §3. Wiggins and Sensible Subjectivism

We turn now to the work of David Wiggins. In "A Sensible Subjectivism?," Wiggins develops his 'subjectivism' by following as far as possible Hume's immensely valuable "Of the Standard of Taste" while working out what he thinks to be a tension it contains. Hume's essay is largely driven by a now familiar analogy:

> If, in the sound state of the organ, there be an entire or a considerable uniformity of sentiment among men, we may thence derive an idea of the perfect beauty; in like manner as the appearance of objects in day-light, to the eye of a man in health, is denominated their true and real colour, even while colour is allowed to be merely a phantasm of the senses.[13]

For Hume, the equivalent of a man with healthy eyesight for perceiving beauty is the "true judge," one with "strong sense, united to delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by comparison, and cleared of all prejudice." The "joint verdict" of judges characterizable in this way "is the true standard of taste and of beauty."[14] A circularity here threatens that we shall soon address, but we should first identify the tension. Hume insists that "it must be allowed, that there are certain qualities in objects, which are fitted by nature to produce those particular feelings," i.e., feelings of delight in beauty.[15] This could be considered the most important thought to sensible subjectivism;

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[12] Too strictly. If not to the senses and intelligence (and affect—holistically), to what would we attribute taste? I do not think one could spell out the "strictly speaking" without rendering violence to human nature. Many do, though, and so various "faculty objections" stubbornly persist.

[13] David Wiggins, *Needs, Values, Truth,* (London: Basil Blackwell – Oxford, 1987) 234.

[14] Wiggins, *Needs*, 241.

[15] Wiggins, *Needs*, 235.

but Wiggins thinks this statement, along with Hume's analogy to healthy perceptual organs, has "no clear place in his official theory."[16] The claim is too strong for one who thinks beauty is only in the breast, is gilding or staining of objects with sentiment, a phantasm of the senses, &c. Wiggins' account is one that preserves Hume's estranged thought.

Wiggins' strategy for dealing with the circularity in what can be called the Humean idea of aesthetic properties—that an object has a particular aesthetic quality iff true judges agree that it does—is to, in some sense, accept it. "Circularity as such," he tells us, "is no objection to it, provided that the offending formulation is also *true*."[17] The thought is that it is unacceptable as an *analysis* or *definition*, but useful, even demanded, for *elucidation*. His example is instructive. Compare the following circular statement of 'sameness': "If *x* is the same as *y*, and if *y* is the same as *z*, then *x* is the same as *z*." True enough; but as an analysis or definition it won't do. 'Same' cannot appear in this manner in a definition of 'sameness'. But neither is it worthless. It is useful in helping someone grasp the concept, useful in explanation, in elucidation. As we develop Wiggins' proposed 'subjectivism', we will need to see how the Humean circle is not only unproblematically true, but even *demanded* for a proper understanding of aesthetic judgment.

Understanding aesthetic properties as Wiggins does begins with a speculative genealogy of aesthetic predicates. In it, we begin grouping together objects that we regularly respond to in similar ways. As these groupings are formed because of the reactions the objects cause, the names we attach to the groupings are "avowedly anthropocentric." The names begin to operate as property terms, the property being what is common to the group, a commonality not specifiable otherwise than in terms of our responses. "Amusement for instance is a reaction we have to characterize by reference to its proper object, via something perceived as funny… And equally there is no saying

[16] Wiggins, *Needs*, 187.
[17] Wiggins, *Needs*, 189.

what exactly the funny is without reference to laughter or amusement or kindred reactions."[18] We should stress with Wiggins that if this is correct, purely introspective accounts of amusement or any of the other responses are unavailable. As the property terms' roots grow deeper and more securely into the language, it will become possible to dispute whether something genuinely belongs in the grouping, whether it genuinely has the property. E.g. Is this *funny*, or just silly? This feature, their contestability, will be essential in enabling them to take root and flourish in the language. The questions here are normative; they are questions of appropriateness, of whether the object *merits* the response as well as whether the response is appropriate for the sort of thing it is directed upon. We'll have more to say about this when we discuss the vindication of aesthetic judgments.

The structure of what is beginning to emerge can be seen as a sort of synthesis of the opposing sides of a Euthyphro dilemma. In an aesthetic context, then, rather than taking a side we say it is true both that (1) we value *x* because we find *x* beautiful,[19] and also that (2) *x* is beautiful because it is such that we value it. 'Because,' here, is not univocal. (1) can be taken at face value: our finding x to be beautiful is the reason we value it. (2) taken at face value would be a crude subjectivism or response-dependence theory and cannot obviously be combined in any coherent, non-viciously circular way with (1). Wiggins' gloss on (2) tailored to the aesthetic case is this: Such valuing by human beings directed in this way is one part of what is required for there to be such a thing as the perspective from which the beauty of *x* is there to be perceived (1987: 106). With care, the latter can be spelled out in a way consistent with (1). Consider the phrase, "part of what is required for there to be such a thing as the perspective from which…" Human interest here is constitutive of a particular perspective, a perspective without which there is no beauty to speak of.

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[18] Wiggins, Needs, 195.

[19] I intend 'find' factively here. We could equally say, "we value *x* because *x is* beautiful." I prefer the personal verb as an object may be beautiful and yet we do not value it due to our failure to see that it is. When we come to see its beauty, when we, so to speak, find its beauty, we will then value it because it is beautiful.

How can this thought possibly be accepted while denying subjectivism? By demonstrating how this perspective provides a genuine mode of access to the world. Thomas Nagel put the suggestion nicely when recommending that we might need to resist the "voracity of the objective appetite," scientistically conceived, as "perhaps the best or truest view is not obtained by transcending oneself as far as possible."[20] Seeing how such a perspective can earn a right to claims of truth about the world coincides with seeing how aesthetic judgments are to be vindicated. To that we now turn. The following three sections are in service of working out the details introduced in this paragraph.

## §4. Vindication and Vindicatory Explanation

Proceeding, it is important to recognize that there will be two parts to what we are discussing: vindication and vindicatory explanation, the senses of both will be detailed below. The importance of highlighting the difference lies in the fact that much of what will be said of vindication—our practices in justifying our aesthetic claims—can be held by realists and anti-realists alike. Vindicatory explanation is the further step from a vindicated aesthetic claim to realism.[21] The discussions interweave, though, as vindication is not only a prerequisite for vindicatory explanation in this way, but also as our practices of vindication ensure that our aesthetic claims are of a kind that can admit of vindicatory explanation. In the terms just used, while vindication deals with the 'invention' and regulation of the perspective from which we make aesthetic claims, vindicatory explanation defends it as a genuine mode of access to the world.

Wiggins explicates his notion of vindicatory explanation with reference to how we secure objectivity for arithmetical judgments, the latter being similar to aesthetic judgments in that they are

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[20] Thomas Nagel, "Subjective and Objective," in *Mortal Questions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979) 211-212.

[21] Wiggins prefers to avoid the term 'realism' because of possible confusions the term might bring with it (see, e.g., 1990-91: §III). I prefer to trust the reader not to make needless associations with uses of the term elsewhere in philosophy.

not empirical judgments, dissimilar in that they are uncontroversial.[22] We explain the consensus in belief that 7+5=12, for example, by showing that for these reasons—fill in the blank with relevant proofs or calculations—"there is really nothing else to think." Generally, the belief that p is vindicated if our best explanation for how one comes to believe that p is precisely *because* p, i.e., if the best explanation for the belief makes the positing of p explanatorily indispensible.[23] The vindication aims to show that given the *reasons* it sees fit to cite, there is really nothing else to think other than p. As Wiggins most concisely puts it, "vindicatory explanations at once justify a belief, as the only belief that is open to one who understands what is at issue, and also, by reference to that, explain the belief's coming into being."[24]

In the arithmetical case, vindicatory explanation is easy enough since we have a demonstrative proof to offer as our reason. When an aesthetic judgment is at issue, what shape must the explanation take? Nothing comparable to an arithmetical proof is available, and it isn't obvious how reasons come in to play here given the immediacy of aesthetic perception.[25] There is only one notion of proof in aesthetics—what Sibley conveniently calls a 'perceptual proof'—which is serviceable here; it also brings with it a serviceable notion of the role of reasons.

Sibley's idea of a perceptual proof is as simple as it sounds. Should one doubt my claim that an object is blue, the best I can do to prove my claim to her is to ask her to look for herself, perhaps bringing it into better light. When one doubts my claim that a painting is delicate, typically there is much more to do than to bring it into better light; but if I can get her to see the delicacy for herself, then "I have vindicated my claim in the best possible way."[26] Indeed, bringing others to see for

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[22] Disagreement in aesthetic judgment, of course, is an important threat to accounts of aesthetic value as objective. Alas, life is full of tragedy and word-limits, and so that issue must be left aside in this paper.
[23] David Wiggins, "Moral Cognitivism, Moral Relativism and Motivating Moral Beliefs," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 91 (1990-91): §V.
[24] David Wiggins, "Replies," in *Essays for David Wiggins,* eds. Savina Lovibond and S. G. Williams (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1996) 283 n.52.
[25] On 'immediacy', see note 26 below.
[26] Notice that we have here shifted away from vindicatory explanation to vindication. Sibley, *Approach*, 39.

themselves is a goal of critical discourse—whether professionally or amongst friends—and having a talent for finding ways to bring others to see is a cardinal virtue for critics.

One important part of the activity leading to perceptual proof is that of giving reasons, reasons citing what it is about an object that gives it its aesthetic character. These reasons do not, however, support the aesthetic judgment discursively. They are explanatory reasons, comparable with saying that the reason two stones do not fit snugly together is that one is slightly convex. One can similarly say that the reason a painting is graceful is its gently curving lines. This does not, however, mean descriptions of the curving lines can play the role of premises in an argument leading to the conclusion that the object is graceful.[27] Another's citation of reasons for something's aesthetic character often acts as what brings us to see it for ourselves; but, to echo Sibley's caution, "an activity the successful outcome of which is seeing or hearing cannot, I think, be called *reasoning*" (2001: 40). Explanatory reasons are typically *contrasted* with justificatory reasons. Here, explanatory reasons serve as justification—not by any alien logic, but by their ability to inform and so improve one's perception. Agreement remains the ultimate arbiter.

Giving the reasons for an object's aesthetic character, it should be noted, is only one of many things a critic might do to bring another to see. We might also employ metaphors, similes, comparisons, give background information, make apt gestures, and much else.[28] Remember, though, battle-tested subjectivists can embrace most everything we have said about perceptual proof. Getting people to see objects in a certain way is no less a part of their story. Realism or objectivism requires the further claim that the way of seeing things brought about is seeing things as they really

[27] This largely exhausts the content of how I intend 'immediacy'—that aesthetic judgments are not mediated by logical steps. This, I take it, is what motivates Sibley's talk of aesthetic judgments not being condition-governed, a point made well by Cohen in the final section of his (1973).

[28] Sibley adumbrates such activities well in *Approach*, 17-19.

are. Part of what enables this further claim is that the critical practices that bring others to see serve another purpose: refining aesthetic claims into something that can admit of vindicatory explanation.

## §5. Appropriateness and Criticism

Recall now our speculative genealogy in which we group objects according to our responses to them, also naming the grouping with reference to the response, the name coming to operate as a property term. One might worry that claiming objectivity for such anthropocentric properties cannot guard against counting any actual response as a true representation of reality. There is, after all, no perspective outside that from which the judgment is made by which it could be verified. But what it is for an object to have the proposed property is not for it simply to occasion some response, but to *merit* it. The sense of appropriateness that is at issue allows criticism to get purchase. Does the object to which we respond thusly really merit the response? And what does such a response suggest about what an object must be like to merit it? Critical scrutiny allows us to sharpen our abilities to distinguish the Φ from near misses, etc. But as the property is being such as to merit a certain response, refining our responses alters what property ascriptions are available to us. Actual responses not admitting of reasons withstanding criticism of their appropriateness—whose appropriateness cannot be sufficiently established to allow for an adequate amount of convergence in scrutinized judgments—cannot develop a public sense, and so cannot come to admit of truth. The latter two points will be discussed below, after first developing the relevant notion of appropriateness of response to property in aesthetics.

One might worry that it is not obvious how criticism takes hold with many aesthetic terms. From where could criticism find its idea of appropriateness? I think we can answer this question by combining an observation about the nature of aesthetic terms with the following familiar picture of aesthetic discourse described by Wittgenstein:

> It is possible—and this is important—to say a *great deal* about a fine aesthetic difference.—The first thing you say may, of course, just be: "*This* word fits, *that* doesn't"—or something of the kind. But then you can discuss all the extensive ramifications of the tie-up effected by each of the words. That first judgment is *not* the end of the matter, for it is the field of force of the word that is decisive.[29]

The relevant observation is Sibley's suggestion that "the qualities… that can be admired aesthetically for themselves must be the ones which somehow, putting aesthetic questions aside, are vitally involved in human experience."[30] Most terms we use in aesthetic discourse have uses connected to non-aesthetic aspects of life, aspects we care about. Some aesthetic predicates are themselves metaphorical, some 'quasi-metaphorical', some have taken on an independent life of their own, yet etymologically have metaphorical uses in their history. These connections cannot be severed without rendering violence to the sense of the terms. Sibley cites Stuart Hampshire as having described a "colony of aesthetes, disengaged from practical needs." Hampshire imagines that these aesthetes would have a purely direct, non-metaphorical critical vocabulary. But Sibley's claim is that if their terms "were more completely 'disengaged from practical needs' and other non-aesthetic awarenesses and interests, they would perforce be blind to many aesthetic qualities we can appreciate."[31] Take 'dynamic' as an example.[32] Competence with the term's use in non-aesthetic discourse is necessary for our eyes or ears to be opened to the dynamic in aesthetic contexts; "the very point is that we are noticing aesthetic qualities related to their literal or common meanings." We come to 'see the same face,' so to speak, in the dynamic things of art as we see in the dynamic things of life. This is one reason that sometimes all a critic has to do to bring us to see a particular aesthetic quality is simply use the word; we already have some idea of what we are looking for.[33]

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[29] Wittgenstein, *PI* II, 186.
[30] Sibley, *Approach*, 31.
[31] Sibley, *Approach*, 17.
[32] As applied to, say, painting. Thinking of dynamic as applied to music is fine, too, so long as we note I am not speaking of the technical term referring to crescendos, diminuendos, &c.
[33] Sibley, Approach, 20.

To keep things in perspective, it might be valuable to observe that much of what is involved in the metaphorical extension of terms just described is far from unique to the aesthetic sphere; it is commonplace throughout language. Let's borrow an example Stanley Cavell uses in a different context.[34] Our introduction to the use of 'feed' typically comes from "feed the cat," "feed the dog," "feed the baby," &c. Yet when we later hear, say when parking downtown, "feed the meter," or after hearing someone praised, "feed his pride," we are hardly mystified. We needn't use the word 'feed' in either case, but we lose something if we don't. We could say, "'put money into the meter;" but the sense of this expression doesn't by itself distinguish between, say, 'putting' something into the meter in the sense of replacing a malfunctioning gear on the one hand, and on the other 'putting' something into the meter which keeps it running only for a while, which must be continually repeated to delay expiration. And speaking of 'feeding pride' indicates that it is something that can grow, that has a healthy state which suffers unique consequences upon being under or over fed. There is an appropriateness of the term 'feed' to these new uses; Cavell describes this as the circumstances "inviting" or at least "allowing" the extending of the term. The circumstances, of course, must be taken as a whole: stuffing peanuts into the meter's coin slot is no more feeding the meter than is giving a child a quarter. What counts as 'food' depends on what is being 'fed', &c. The caution is perhaps best put, "the similarity in 'face' is not a *straightforward* similarity in 'features'."[35]

Linguistically, then, there is nothing out of the ordinary when non-aesthetic terms are extended metaphorically into aesthetic contexts. What is unique, and what raises some eyebrows, is the idea that the extended terms refer to real properties of objects and that the metaphoricality of

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[34] Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979) 181–83.
[35] The phrase is Kelly Dean Jolley's (2007: 103, emphasis added). The discussion from which I take this phrase is important for us below. Kelly Dean Jolley, *The Concept 'Horse' Paradox and Wittgensteinian Conceptual Investigations* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007) 103.

the term's use is essential to perceiving the property. Regarding the latter, Roger Scruton asks us to imagine someone who classifies a group of artworks exactly as we do when picking out the works that are sad, who displays full competence with the concept 'sadness' with regard to people, and yet denies that the set of works he groups together that we call sad are sad. Whatever *je ne sais quoi* by which he classifies them, he deems it foolish to call it sadness—artworks have no mental states—and claims to see no connection between sadness and the quality common to these works. I think we should agree with Scruton that it would be odd for us to say that this man has classified the artworks by seeing their sadness—as we *would* say of someone who consistently picks out all red objects that he classifies them according to their redness despite his calling them 'hot'—because seeing the connection between the artworks and the emotional state is somehow part of seeing their sadness.[36]

Scruton uses this example as part of an argument against any flat-footed objectivist view that holds aesthetic properties to be simple perceptual properties in any way that severs (or allows for severance) any connection with the sense of the words when used to speak of non-aesthetic properties. We may ask on behalf of such a view—our purposes not being to defend it, but only to reinforce an earlier point—for more detail as to what we are to imagine. Would this man also insist that it is foolish to say that we 'feed' meters given that meters do not eat? If so, it seems we have bigger problems regarding his use of language generally that must be answered before we could even begin to get a grasp of what might be going on in Scruton's example. And if he has no problem speaking of 'feeding' meters simply because they don't eat, how is it that an artwork not having states of mind still counts for him as a reason to think it nonsense to call them 'sad'? It can be no objection against realism in aesthetics that there are irrational people. Scruton's example can be

[36] Roger Scruton, *Art and Imagination* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd., 1974) 39.

altered to serve his purposes. As presented it seems to miss the ubiquity of metaphorical extensions throughout language.

Scruton's objection does not strike against a realist view like the one we are developing; and this he acknowledges.[37] Saying *why* it doesn't provides a useful expository tool. Any view against which Scruton's objection would have any force would be one where a quality is picked out and classified prior to any affective or valuational response then attached to it as a member of that class.[38] Such separability of classification and response is not possible on our view. Our responses are themselves the awareness of the qualities, are themselves classificatory. One might worry here that saying this would require that there is a unique and identifiable phenomenology for 'graceful', for 'dynamic', for 'delicate' and so on. I think this only seems problematic if one is thinking about aesthetic responses as something that could be given purely introspective descriptions. If we keep in mind that our responses can only be characterized with reference to the objects to which they are responses, there is nothing more surprising in the claim that aesthetic responses have unique phenomenologies than in the claim that encounters with different objects have unique phenomenologies. In aesthetic experience, coming to a satisfactory characterization of the object is at once coming to a satisfactory characterization of our response.[39] Refining our understanding of, and responsive competence with, aesthetic values through critical discourse is in an important sense refining *ourselves*. An observation that might bring clarity here is that the concept of 'stepping back' gets no purchase in aesthetic judgment. We can reconsider a visual experience of redness, note bad lighting, and come think that it only *looks* red though it isn't, all while the visual experience remains constant. In contrast, questioning and adjusting our aesthetic judgments must happen, so to speak,

[37] Scruton, *Art and Imagination*, 42.
[38] The 'priority' is logical priority; the response could be simultaneous and the view would still fall prey Scruton's objection. It is the *separability* of classification and response that is important.
[39] Herein lies a reason why a proper understanding of aesthetic judgment will demand we accept a kind of circularity.

*within* the response. If during contemplation of the object we move from characterizing it as powerful to characterizing it instead as maudlin, we do so only as our response shifts. The logic of 'looks' loses its grip here.[40]

We are pressing toward understanding how insisting on one word rather than another can amount to saying a great deal about a fine aesthetic difference. The unity of characterizing an object and characterizing our aesthetic responses is an important element. There is a range of aesthetic predicates, however, for which it is far from obvious what precisely it would mean to say that employing them characterizes our response. What is it to have a 'dynamic' or 'graceful' or 'delicate' response? To understand this, we must consider the 'forms' of anthropocentricity found in aesthetic judgment. Wiggins develops the view I am drawing on with reference to the funny, the shocking, the delightful, &c., properties whose anthropocentricity is clearly marked, being distinguished by amusement and shock and delight, &c. When we move to aesthetic judgments using emotion terms such as 'sad' or 'angry', the anthropocentricity is obvious in one sense, but there must be a difference as we do not distinguish sad artworks by being sad. Further, when we think of predicates like 'dynamic', even the initial anthropocentricity possessed by 'sad' is lost.

The anthropocentricity we seek is to be found in human *interest* motivating a metaphorical extension of terms. Recall Sibley's suggestion that the qualities we value aesthetically are those suggestive of non-aesthetic qualities that are "vitally involved in human experience." He carries on to say "awareness of and concern with warmth, light, brilliance, clarity, purity, regularity,… and simplicity go deep into human life and interests… [W]e cannot survive without warmth, peace, energy; we cannot avoid anger, violence, fear; and we concern ourselves deeply over purity, clarity,

[40] To borrow Wilfrid Sellars' terms in *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind,* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997) §§III, IV. It is this idea, I think, that is behind Wiggins' difficult remarks that our responses are themselves "nothing less than an act of judging a content" and "[are] not that *by which we tell.* It is part of the telling itself." *Needs*, 208.

and simplicity."[41] Making the same point from the opposite direction, he notes that "if someone professed aesthetic admiration for equiangular or elliptical appearances as such, this would not mark an unusual, seldom met with sensitivity on his part; we should not understand him."[42] It is because of the importance of and our interest in the dynamic things of non-aesthetic life that we can come to see the dynamic in art and other aesthetic contexts. Now, a Kandinsky canvass, for example, is clearly immobile; herein lies the importance of metaphorical extension, and here is where we earlier spoke of 'seeing the same face'. We see in Kandinsky a quality that we respond to in a way bearing a family resemblance to our responses to the dynamic in non-aesthetic life. Naturally, we dub that quality 'dynamic'. The question is unanswerable, but it is perhaps not without all instruction to ask ourselves how we might respond to the work of Kandinsky in a world permeated by sloth. I should state, laying bare an assumption, that I take it that being struck by and taking interest in similarities is simply something we in fact do. One could perhaps demand of a *complete* account an explanation for this. So our account is incomplete. Also, one could deny the assumption. But then one has work to do in explaining much more than our use of aesthetic terms, such as why we so naturally speak of 'feeding' meters and pride.

We may here contrast the anthropocentricity we have been developing with regard to aesthetic properties with the anthropocentricity of color. The latter is due to the dependency of color perception on our need for certain properly functioning 'machinery', and normativity goes no further than basic perceptual normativity. There is no sense in saying that the properties of objects responsible for their colors "make appropriate" or "merit" our perceptual responses; it is only a matter of health and causality. The normative notion of merit, however, is essential to an understanding of aesthetic engagement. Some have objected to Wiggins' account for providing no

[41] Sibley, *Approach*, 31.
[42] Sibley, *Approach*, 32.

way for these terms to get any traction, have objected he has left the account at too abstract of a level.[43] The claim here is that the sense of appropriateness of response to property is grounded in the concept of its non-aesthetic relative.

One might be impatient with all this talk of connection to non-aesthetic aspects of life given glaring counterexamples such as the paradigmatic aesthetic term, 'beautiful'. Rather than providing counterexamples, though, these values inhabit an importantly unique role in the present account. Recall now Sibley's discussion of the need for certain natural tendencies without which the formation of an aesthetic vocabulary could never get started. Beauty compels us; ugliness repels.[44] The pleasantness and discomfort of some of our responses that I take as a fundamental datum of human being is expressed in our more generic, broadly evaluative aesthetic terms—verdict terms. Our more specific aesthetic terms are expressions of these (dis)pleasures articulated with reference to the object, articulations of the particular way in which the object is beautiful or otherwise aesthetically valuable. The latter terms are those wrought from metaphorical extension, the former are terms directly related to the natural responses that are the foundations necessary for cultivating aesthetic sensibility.

## §6. The Role of Agreement

Our final task is to understand the relation of verdict terms to specific aesthetic property terms. Agreement and practices aspiring for agreement prove to be crucial. We have been speaking of vindication for aesthetic judgments, the roles criticism plays in that, and how the refining of our responses is the refining of ourselves. The last point, of course, is part of what is important in

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[43] See, for example, Justin D'Arms and Daniel Jacobson, "Sentiment and Value," *Ethics* 110 (2000): 722-48.

[44] In general, anyway. Arguably, morally repugnant actions presented beautifully can be very repulsive, and ugliness in the right context is quite compelling, even beautiful. Also, we do have experiences—again, how to understand what is going on in such cases is arguable—such as that described by Coleridge in "Ode to Dejection": "I see them all so excellently fair, I see, not feel, how beautiful they are!" But we need not entertain those arguments here.

Hume's description of true judges we long ago mentioned. There, we noted that a circularity threatens the Humean idea of aesthetic properties—that an object has a particular aesthetic quality iff true judges agree that it does. The latter is often offered as a definition for aesthetic properties on response-dependent accounts. Agreement is then constitutive. Such a view falls prey to the circularity. Our view is one that accepts the circularity, but offers it for elucidation rather than definition. The Humean appeal to agreement is for us merely epistemic. If we know what the true judges jointly deem beautiful, we know what is beautiful just as if we know what things the gods love, we know what things are pious.[45] The latter is *not* a claim that the gods' love *makes* those things pious. Our Humean claim is analogous.

When Wiggins imagines an objector persisting in her demand for an account of how agreement in responses can "decide what *really* is Φ or not Φ," he resorts to a passage in *Philosophical Investigations* to explain that the only sort of agreement that is in question in the discussion of what is really Φ is "agreement in *susceptibility* to respond thus and so to Φ things."[46] We shall do the same:

> "So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false?"—It is what human beings *say* that is true and false; and they agree in the *language* that they use. That is not agreement in opinions, but in form of life. (§241)

If language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but also (queer as this may sound) in judgments… It is one thing to describe methods of measurement, and another to obtain and state results of measurement. But what we call "measuring" is partly determined by a certain constancy in results of measurements. (§242)

In §240, Wittgenstein remarks that lack of dispute enables mathematicians to get on with their business, say, in making calculations or giving descriptions using mathematical concepts. When his interlocutor asks if he is saying human agreement decides what is true, Wittgenstein offers a way

[45] Shelley (2009)
[46] Wiggins, *Needs*, 205.

of understanding the suggestion that renders it true to his claim. It is not agreement in opinion—agreement over what propositions to assent to—that decides truth. The agreement somehow determinative of truth is agreement in judgments, in language, in form of life. How this agreement is determinative is that it enables claims to be made such that they can even be so much as true or false. Agreement that particular claims are true or false does not directly determine truth or falsity; rather, agreement in language is the basis for any claim to be possibly true or false, i.e., to have objective purport. Importantly, though, the latter sort of agreement could not come about if no one ever agreed in opinion, if a certain constancy were never attained.[47]

It is worth noting, returning to aesthetics, that the interpretation of the interlocutor's suggestion that Wittgenstein rejects would be the response-dependence about aesthetic value that we long ago found reason to reject. The move from agreement in actual responses to agreement in susceptibility to respond in a particular way parallels the move from agreement of opinions to agreement in language. And just as "what we call 'measuring' is partly determined by a certain constancy in results of measurements," our aesthetic terms could never acquire a stable sense if there were not sufficient agreement in aesthetic judgment. Critical discourse, then, in aiming at establishing such agreement, makes it a practice that invests our aesthetic terms with the senses they have, in turn "fixing what truths we shall be able to give expression to."[48]

Further comparison to Wittgenstein's discussion of measurement can domesticate what might begin to feel lofty here. Consider truth in light of Wittgenstein's remark on the standard meter in Paris.[49] The standard meter is a tool of our language determining the sense of our word "meter". Our selection of that particular object to play the role of the standard meter was arbitrary. Let's say

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[47] My understanding of this passage is largely shaped by Jolley's *Concept 'Horse'*, 99-104, whom I am following very closely here.

[48] Wiggins, *Needs*, 350. Such sense-giving, of course, is not an explicit aim of critical discourse; it is rather something of a byproduct. Also, the senses of our aesthetic vocabulary today are largely set, though doubtless remain open to evolution.

[49] Wittgenstein, *PI*, §50.

that the desk I am sitting at is one meter wide. In an imaginary world where we picked an object one-third the length of the one we did pick, I would then say the desk is three meters wide. In both cases I'm truly representing the width of the desk. The difference in expression has nothing to do with a change in what is true, but a change in the sense of the word "meter" that requires us to express this truth differently.

On the aesthetic theory presently being developed, the non-aesthetic relative of the aesthetic term plays the role of the standard meter. Aesthetic value, of course, is much trickier than measurement. Any reasonably intelligent person—and many a dolt, no less—can be taught the concept of a meter sufficiently well to accurately measure something in a jiffy; a mass-produced proxy for the standard is right there in her hand to lay across the object to determine how many could fit into that space. Things aren't so simple when we are arguing whether or not an artwork is sad. We know sadness from our emotional, non-aesthetic lives. We are now trying to determine whether sadness is an accurate articulation of the artwork's value. In the measurement case, one meter proved to be the proper determination of the truth concerning the width of my desk, but only with reference to the object we picked out to be the standard meter. In the aesthetic case, we have no measuring device with which to determine the sadness of the object. We *are* the measuring devices in the aesthetic case; the only thing external to ourselves as individuals to which we have recourse in order to determine that we are, so to speak, properly calibrated to measure sadness as an aesthetic value is each other. Agreement in criticism selects the standard; practice in critical discourse hones our use of it. It is no more threat to the objectivity of aesthetic value that we articulate our experiences of it in the manner described than it is a threat to the truth of something's being *x* meters long that our selection of the standard meter was arbitrary.

## §7. Conclusion

We needed to develop an account that allows us to say both that (1) we value *x* because we find *x* beautiful, and also that (2) *x* is beautiful because it is such that we value it. We saw that in order to do so we needed to be able to say how human interest could be constitutive of a perspective apart from which beauty is not there to be perceived, a perspective which is nonetheless a genuine mode of access to the world. The perspective is that found in our shared form of life, no small part of which is the shared senses of our language. We must remember that our aesthetic vocabulary is formed via our responses; criticism that alters the senses of our aesthetic terms then involves alteration in our responses, alteration in ourselves. Further, our responses are such that they cannot be properly characterized apart from reference to what they are a response to, which is part of how critical regulation of our aesthetic claims ensures that they acquire senses admitting of vindicatory explanation. When we consider what best explains the successes of criticism, best explains convergence[50] in our aesthetic judgments, we find that denial of the values attributed in those judgments is inconsistent with that explanation. An adequate self-understanding in this area of our lives demands, borrowing McDowell's words, that we "attribute, to at least some possible objects of the responses, properties that would validate the responses."[51] This self-understanding, that is, requires us to recognize that the reason we come to believe p is precisely because p. Aesthetic judgment, then, is anthropocentric in that the properties posited depend for their sense upon human sensibility trained by critical regulation in reference to the world, and whose sense is only intelligible through such sensibility, and yet aesthetic judgment is objective in that responsiveness to the fact that p will be what secures its truth.[52]

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[50] Wiggins provides valuable discussion of the need for convergence at (1987: 147-152, 339-350).
[51] John McDowell, *Mind, Value, and Reality,* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998) 144.
[52] Consider Wiggins' overly simple but nonetheless helpful analogy: "the size and mesh of a fisherman's net determine what fish he will catch, if he catches any; not what fish are in the sea." *Needs*, 350.

The chief virtue of the account developed here that it is one that allows us to restore beauty to its traditionally venerated association with truth and goodness as final values, a worthy desideratum, I think. Also, the phenomenology of aesthetic experience is that of a confrontation with value. Some antirealists have offered convincing reinterpretations of this experience worth taking seriously, but I do think it is preferable to take such experience at face value if possible, and we can. A realist account, as we mentioned above, seems true to our most natural self-understanding: we inhabit a world in which beauty—and gracefulness, vibrancy, delicacy, &c.—is there to be found. Yet with the present form of realism, we need not give up the thought that such things make no sense without reference to sensibilities like ours. And with this, we hold on to important aspects of both species of common sense.