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# A Volitional Theory of Aesthetic Value

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**A VOLITIONAL THEORY OF AESTHETIC VALUE**

by

**JOHN DYCK**

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Philosophy in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2019

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A VOLITIONAL THEORY OF AESTHETIC VALUE

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John Dyck

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Philosophy in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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# ABSTRACT

## A Volitional Theory of Aesthetic Value

by

John Dyck

Advisor: Noël Carroll

In this dissertation, I defend a volitionalist theory of aesthetic value. The volitionalist theory is a species of response-based models of aesthetic value: It holds that aesthetic value is based in a kind of human response. Traditional response-based theories of aesthetic value hold that value is based in responses of cognition, perception, desire, or pleasure. The volitionalist theory offers a new response as the home of aesthetic value. The home of aesthetic value is the will. We find things beautiful, I argue, because we orient our selves towards them; we find things ugly, I argue, because we orient our selves against them. The volitionalist theory I offer here is what I call, following Ruth Chang, a form of *hierarchical voluntarism*. On the first stage of the theory, there are objective aesthetic reasons in the world. Objects have features that give reasons for their aesthetic value or disvalue. But these reasons are not sufficient for value. Value, I argue, requires actual valuers. At this second stage, aesthetic value arises when human agents engaging in valuing particular objects and practices. This valuing is an act of the will; we orient ourselves alongside certain reasons.

The volitionalist theory is meant to respond to a crisis in contemporary aesthetic theories of value. The standard Humean theory of aesthetic value holds that aesthetic value is based in hedonic responses of pleasure (Levinson 2002). Some hedonic theories hold that aesthetic value is a kind of pleasure for its own sake (Iseminger 2006). Increasingly, however, it is becoming

clear that pleasure is an inadequate basis for aesthetic value (Lopes 2018). If hedonic theories were right, good aesthetic agents trade up in their pursuit of aesthetic goods, optimizing the amount of pleasure that we get from art and the natural world. But this is not the way that aesthetic agency tends to work; we tend to stick to our own aesthetic projects, seeking beauty from our own distinctive sources. One response, holding fast to hedonic theories, might be to hold that we are bad aesthetic agents. I argue here that, to the contrary, our distinctive aesthetic styles are crucial parts of a good aesthetic life.

In light of this crisis, it is surprising that aestheticians have not drawn from one of the most influential trends in the past thirty years in value theory: The emergence of normative volitionalism, or voluntarism (Korsgaard 1996). My goal here is to draw from this rich strain of normative thinking to offer a new picture of aesthetic value—a picture that fits better with the aesthetic lives we actually live. In these chapters, I aim to show that aesthetic agency exists, and that the aesthetic reasons we encounter in the world do not force any response upon us. Instead, I argue, we construct aesthetic values by aligning ourselves to reasons—by committing, avowing, or endorsing them.

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## Introduction

In this dissertation, I propose an original model of aesthetic value, *the volitional model of aesthetic value*. According to the volitional model, aesthetic value—or *beauty*, for short—is essentially based upon alignments of the will. This is because, I claim, aesthetic value is based upon aesthetic experiences, and aesthetic experiences essentially involve volitional movements. Or, to put things another way: What’s central to our experiences of beauty and ugliness is not pleasure, desire, perception, or knowledge. What’s central to our experiences of beauty and ugliness is a certain alignment of our wills, a situating of our practical identities for or against things. A strong way to put this is in terms of commitment—a weaker way of putting this, as Cheshire Calhoun suggests, is in terms of prizing.

The volitional model is an unorthodox model. It stands in stark contrast to traditional theories of aesthetic values, which are standardly response-based theories of aesthetic value. According to response-based theories of aesthetic value, for an object to have aesthetic value is for it to tend to produce some sort of response in viewers. I agree, of course, that aesthetic value is rooted in responses—this is a central aspect of the volitional model. However, I disagree about the way that these responses are traditionally cashed out. Traditional *hedonic* theories of aesthetic value hold that aesthetic value is rooted in desire or pleasure. Central to the volitional model is the view, first, that we have agency over our aesthetic evaluations, and secondly, that our experiences of beauty are necessarily rooted in alignments of our wills.

I begin by arguing in the first chapter that we have agency over our aesthetic evaluations. I argue that our evaluations can be wrapped up in decisions we make about interpretation and evaluation. We can have direct agential control over some aspects of interpretation and

evaluation—our experience of art and aesthetic objects can involve perspectival slides which we can consciously put off and take on. So, we can have some agential control over our aesthetic evaluations. We can sometimes decide, I claim, what we like and what we don't like. Of course, this is not the core component of the claim that an experience of beauty is rooted in the will; it only shows that our experiences of beauty can sometimes be agentially effected.

The claim that we have some agential control over our aesthetic evaluations may be necessary for the volitional model of aesthetic value that I propose here. However, it is not sufficient—or at least, not obviously sufficient. After all, I think that advocates of traditional theories of aesthetic value may want to allow that we can have control, say, over our desires, such that the control over our desires may sometimes be direct, and it may sometimes exist in the aesthetic domain. At the very least, I would not want my argument for volitionalism to depend upon this claim. I make this claim only to advocate for an important connection between agency—which, I think, is best understood in a volitional sense—and aesthetic evaluation. This chapter is meant to provide an overlooked perspective on aesthetic evaluation, one which I think helps someone get in the frame of mind that is more receptive to the volitional model, although it does not imply the volitional model.

In the second chapter, I present a framework for aesthetic value through thinking about aesthetic reasons. The volitional account of aesthetic value is part of a two-level story about aesthetic value. On a basic level, objects, events, styles, and movements have features which count for or against their being beautiful, ugly, etc. These features are objective parts of the world. In some ways, this account is fairly standard, and presents a straightforward and standard account of aesthetic reasons—an account that is even silent on several questions. This chapter focuses in particular on the *force* of aesthetic reasons. I argue that aesthetic reasons are not

enough to compel anyone to act. Aesthetic reasons are not like moral reasons. I argue that aesthetic reasons are a kind of reason that Jonathan Dancy calls ‘enticing reasons’. This helps to lay the groundwork for a practical role in the will in our aesthetic lives. If aesthetic reasons are not enough to compel us to act, this explains why we think of the aesthetic realm as an area of freedom—we express our own styles, figure out our own preferences, and decide what suits us.

The first two chapters, then, do not defend the volitional model of aesthetic value directly; they merely make conceptual room for it. In the first chapter makes room for volitionalism *from the inside*. By arguing that we have agency in our evaluation, we can see aesthetic evaluational experience in a way that is more favorable to the volitional model. The second chapter makes room for volitionalism *from the outside*. It argues that there are no obligations in our aesthetic lives; our aesthetic appreciation and attention are not compelled. This allows in another way for us to have aesthetic agency.

In the third chapter, I argue for what a picture of aesthetic value should explain. I present two constraints on any good theory of aesthetic value. First of all, I will argue that a theory of aesthetic value should not merely provide justification for attributing value to objects. Justifications of aesthetic value come cheap: The world is ablaze with beauty. And traditional views of aesthetic value were provided as justificatory models of aesthetic value. Instead, I will argue, theories of aesthetic value should explain aesthetic *motivation*. Secondly, I will argue, an adequate theory of aesthetic value is response-based; it is based in the responses of agents. But, I argue, these responses are real, not ideal. Traditional hedonic theories of aesthetic value, by contrast, derive their force from ideal responses. I will argue that a proper theory of aesthetic value must explain the role that beauty plays in our actual lives. I call this approach The Personal Approach. I argue that traditional theories of aesthetic value fail to meet these conditions.

In the fourth chapter, I present the volitional model of aesthetic value. Philosophers in value theory more generally have made space for robust theories of volitional accounts of normativity and value in the past forty years. I explain how the previous work helps provide an argument for the volitional theory of aesthetic value, modeled on Ruth Chang's work on hard choices. I argue that, given the picture of aesthetic reasons I endorse above, our aesthetic choices are hard choices in Chang's sense—choices about aesthetic value are ones through which we construct our identities. I also show how the will can operate in ways that are not as strong as paradigmatic instances of commitment—volition is apparent in lower-stakes volitional actions such as *prizing* and *endorsement*. I argue that these are also species of commitment.

## Chapter One: Choosing Beauty

“The man in the street, finding no worth in himself which corresponds to the force which built a tower or sculptured a marble god, feels poor when he looks on these. To him a palace, a statue, or a costly book have an alien and forbidding air, much like a gay equipage, and seem to say like that, ‘Who are you, sir?’ Yet they are all his, suitors for his notice, petitioners to his faculties that they will come out and take possession. The picture waits for my verdict: it is not to commend me, but I am to settle its claims to praise.”

*Ralph Waldo Emerson, Self-Reliance (1841)*

“I don’t have a strong opinion either way on dubstep but since I saw that photo of Skrillex I’ve decided I hate it.”

*user complex\_reduction, on an internet forum (2011)*

### 1. Introduction

On the way into work, you decide where to stop for coffee. Do you get the cheap coffee from the coffee cart? Or do you walk a couple of extra blocks—and shell out a couple of extra bucks—to get a fancy pour-over from the artisanal coffee place? Coffee from the cart tastes muddy and strong; artisanal coffee tastes bright and floral. Your choice between them is aesthetic, at least partly. It involves more than aesthetics—finances, social status, practical considerations. But it is partly a choice about what kind of taste you prefer, and what you’re willing to put up with. Choices like this are practical choices about aesthetic actions.

For the most part, we have agency over our actions; and this includes our aesthetic actions. Maybe one day you decide to stop going to the fancy coffee place—the place with artisanal small-batch pour-over coffee—and start going to the coffee cart instead. You decide that you’re done with fancy coffee; it’s too thin, too precious. The decision—this control over

your aesthetic action—seems to reflect a kind of control you have over your evaluation: you no longer value artisanal coffee. Your decision here isn't based in a difference in your response, in how the coffee tastes; you still taste the same floral brightness. The difference lies in how you evaluate the taste; you no longer care for it. Your practical agency—your decision to start going to the coffee cart—reflects *evaluative agency*: You had control over how you evaluated the coffee flavor. It seems that you freely chose a new evaluation of the coffee's flavor. Or so I will argue here.

To put it in terms of evaluation in general, we could put this as a thesis about *evaluative agency*.

EA: We can have direct agential control over our evaluations.

In this paper, I argue for EA. Specifically, I argue that we have direct control over our *aesthetic* evaluations. I do not claim that we have agency in other domains of evaluation, such as epistemic and moral evaluation—but I am right, this shows something about the structure of evaluation in general: We sometimes have direct control over it.

I call this thesis *aesthetic evaluative agency*.

AEA: We can have direct agential control over our aesthetic evaluations.

If aesthetic evaluative agency is true, it follows that evaluative agency is true—if we have agency over some aesthetic evaluations, then we have agency over some evaluations. Either view has received little discussion. This is significant and surprising, especially regarding the more general view about evaluation. Perhaps this is because theories of normativity and evaluation mostly focus on moral evaluation, where EA seems less plausible. Some epistemologists have argued for doxastic voluntarism, the view that we have some control over which beliefs we

adopt. If evaluation is cognitive, then it may be true that doxastic voluntarism implies EA. But it may be false; doxastic voluntarism usually concerns descriptive rather than evaluative beliefs.

This line of argument isn't obvious.

To some, it seems that we *never* have direct agential control over our evaluations. According to a common response-based model of evaluation, popular from early modern philosophers, our judgments are delivered up to us by internal processes—perceptual, emotional, or social. While we may have some control over these processes, any such control is indirect at best. Indeed, philosophers rarely ask whether we could have evaluational agency, simply assuming that we do not. If this is correct, our evaluations are at the mercy of subagential processes. This same view seems to be common sense. If you smell a stinky sock, you don't seem to have any control over the stinkiness of the sock.

In this chapter, I shall argue to the contrary: We have evaluative agency. We can sometimes freely settle something's claim to praise; we can be direct authors of our aesthetic values. Specifically, I will argue for AEA. I will not argue that we always have control over our aesthetic evaluations; I could not decide to find a sunset ugly or a bag of trash beautiful.<sup>1</sup> AEA says just that sometimes, we do have such control.

The ultimate goal of my dissertation is to argue for a particular view of aesthetic value: volitionalism. According to the volitionalist account of aesthetic value, aesthetic value essentially involves certain alignment of the will. The thesis I defend here, aesthetic evaluative agency, is not a claim about aesthetic *value*; it is a claim about aesthetic *evaluation*. If I want to defend the volitional model of aesthetic value, it's not enough to defend AEA, since AEA does

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<sup>1</sup> I use 'beauty' and 'aesthetic value' interchangeably here, for ease of terminology. Of course, not all aesthetic value is beauty, and perhaps some things we think of as *beautiful* really have no aesthetic value.

not imply the volitional model. Even if we have some direct control over our evaluations, it does not follow that this direct control is volitional. And furthermore, I need to show how a thesis about aesthetic evaluation could imply a thesis about aesthetic value. But it may not even be necessary, either. For AEA to imply volitionalism, I need to argue that evaluative agency involves acts of the will; and that is not my task in this chapter. So, I do not assume that this chapter is sufficient or even necessary for my ultimate goal of proposing and defending volitionalism about aesthetic value. For all I say here, there may be some other way of defending aesthetic agency besides through volition.

Yet I still think that this chapter is a crucial step in defending a view of aesthetic evaluation—and, indeed, aesthetic value—which foregrounds the importance of agency. I take it to be common sense that we are passive with respect to our aesthetic experience. A stinky sock smells stinky, for example, in a way that seems completely out of my control. Examples like this suggest a picture of phenomenal aesthetic experience as passive; and indeed, this passive view of phenomenal aesthetic experience is pervasive and common, not just in academic philosophy but in our everyday lives more generally. In order to show that aesthetic agency exists, I want to begin by chipping away at this view, drawing attention to aspects of our aesthetic experience that are not passive—aspects that are active. Part of the conceit of this chapter, then, is to convince my readers that our experiences of aesthetic evaluation are at least sometimes active and not just passive.

This identifies one reason for my argument in this chapter about aesthetic agency to be as catholic as possible: My motivation here is to make room for the view I will ultimately endorse in this dissertation. If I can show that we do have control over our aesthetic judgements, then a volitional view of aesthetic judgment starts to become more plausible. Or, at least, it is no longer

out of the picture. Defending evaluative agency helps to highlight the importance of aesthetic agency; and highlighting the importance of aesthetic agency will help to show the importance of volitionalism. But I want the thesis in this chapter to be plausible independently of the view of aesthetic value that I will eventually endorse. If my readers cannot follow me to as radical an idea as aesthetic volitionalism, I hope they will at least accept that we have much more aesthetic agency than we have often realized. Even this notion, I believe, is underappreciated.

I start by explaining and motivating the view in the next section, §2; I explain what it means more carefully, and I consider five reasons why it is worthy of consideration. In §3, I explain some historical resistance to the view that we have evaluative agency, especially from Hutcheson and Hume. I show why standard aesthetic theories have allowed only for indirect agency. I then consider arguments for AEA. In §3, I begin with an argument based upon artistic agency. It is widely accepted that artists have creative control over the content of their artworks. If that is so, perhaps they have control over aspects of evaluation as well. I find this argument unsuccessful in the end; artists might have agency, but it does not support AEA. Finally, in §5, I present two arguments for direct agency in aesthetic evaluation. I argue that we have direct control over certain processes that are directly related to evaluation. Through such control, we have direct agency over our evaluations.

## **2. Aesthetic evaluative agency**

AEA is a claim about our aesthetic evaluations, not about aesthetic value itself. It says that some of our aesthetic evaluations are up to us; we can make decisions about what we hold to be beautiful or not. It does not say that we decide what is beautiful. And yet, nearly all accounts of

aesthetic value are based on (real or ideal) aesthetic evaluation. While I will restrict my focus here to aesthetic evaluation, and while it is theoretically distinct from aesthetic value, it is worth noting that, in traditional theorizing about aesthetic value, evaluation and value often play roles that inform each other.

Nor does AEA say that we can just decide to evaluate just anything as beautiful. Again, I could not decide to find a sunset ugly. But then, no one ever thought that agency requires doing whatever you want.<sup>2</sup> Keep in mind the parallel case about free agency in ordinary action. Many people accept that you have direct control over your actions, but that doesn't mean you can do anything you want. You can't grow wings and fly just because you want to.

Although I believe that the main idea is clear enough, I will clarify some aspects of the thesis here.

What do I mean by 'evaluation'? There are various accounts of evaluation. Some are hedonic: they hold that evaluation is a kind of desire (Lewis 1989). Other accounts of evaluation are cognitive: they hold that evaluation is a kind of belief (Smith 1989, Carroll 2008).<sup>3</sup> Samuel Scheffler (2012) argues that evaluation involves both beliefs and desires. Our evaluations are neither fully considered (as beliefs are) nor fully automatic (as desires are). The hybrid aspect of Scheffler's view is reflected, for instance, in contemporary hedonic views of aesthetic value, such as Levinson (2010), Mothersill (1984), and Nehamas (2007).

I will remain relatively agnostic here on what exactly evaluation is. I endorse only three conditions. The first condition is that evaluation, whatever it is, can involve both beliefs and

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<sup>2</sup> For discussion on this point, see Ryan 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Smith's view is reflected in Carroll's (2015) content approach to aesthetic experience, which holds that aesthetic experience is attending with understanding to the content of an artwork. See also Carroll (2008).

desires. This allows that there are other important aspects to evaluation, and it is agnostic on whether belief or desire is more fundamental. (Later in this dissertation, I will argue that volition is fundamental in evaluation. I do not want to commit myself to that strong thesis in this chapter.) The second condition on evaluation is that it is not limited to one's immediate reactions; evaluation can also involve considered reactions. In the longstanding tradition of aesthetic discourse, it may help to think of 'evaluation' in the sense I mean here as something equivalent to (or relevantly similar to) *judgment*, an important notion in aesthetic theory. The final condition pertains to aesthetic evaluations in particular: Aesthetic evaluations regard particular things, rather than *kinds* of things. In aesthetics, evaluation is particular rather than general.

My claim is that we have some agency or agential control over our evaluations. What do I mean by 'agency' and 'agential control'? Obviously the issue of agency is hotly contested by philosophers (see Schlosser 2015 for an overview). Many philosophers hold that agency involves intentions, so that it involves action guided by one's intentions. One is an agent, in this sense, when one's attributions of aesthetic value can be at least partly attributed to one's intentions.<sup>4</sup> Many hold, in addition, that agential action is action that is initiated by the self, whether in virtue of belief-desire pairs or in virtue of some other kind of initiation. One is an agent, in this sense, when one initiates one's action in one way or another. Fortunately, both of these conditions are consonant with my account of evaluational agency. By 'agency' I mean the ability to decide for oneself in one or both of these ways. If one has agency over one's evaluations, one's evaluations are self-guided, either by one's own intentions or by one's own initiation or by both.

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<sup>4</sup> See for example Davidson 1963, 1971; Bratman 1987; Dretske 1988; Mele 1992, 2003

The claim I make here is relevantly similar to a view discussed in epistemology, doxastic voluntarism. According to doxastic voluntarism, we have control over our beliefs in the sense that we can decide to believe or disbelieve some propositions. Discussions of doxastic voluntarism often do not involve the exercise of defining agency in a broad sense. I am claiming that we have control over our evaluations in the same sense as it is discussed by doxastic voluntarists. This claim, as I have said, is not common sense; the usual thought is that our evaluations are subject to conditioning, learning, or biology. It is this aspect that I reject. All of these aspects may be at play, but, I argue, our evaluations can come from our selves—we can *make up our* minds about what we like or not. It is this claim that, to my knowledge, has never been defended regarding aesthetic evaluation. Once we can see how controversial the claim is on any standard conception of agency, it should be clear that I do not need to be picky about agency.

So, then, what is direct agential control?

Direct agential control is characterized by *immediacy in virtue of intentions or self-initiation*. It occurs when one's evaluation—say, that lattes are tasty—is an immediate result of one's decision to evaluate lattes as tasty. Indirect control, on the other hand, is not immediate; it is a diachronic process that extends over time, since it necessarily involves a re-orienting of one's perception or evaluation, and this re-orientation takes time. Suppose, having hated jazz music all your life, you want to come to positively appreciate jazz. While this change certainly seems possible, it may not be immediate. You can take steps to expose yourself to jazz, learn about jazz, and thereby, over a process of education or enculturation, come to prize jazz eventually. This is an example of *indirect* evaluative agency. It is clear—and, I take it, uncontroversial—that we have indirect evaluative agency sometimes. Such indirect agency is involved in Agnes Callard's (2018) theory of aspirants—people who set out to develop different

values than they already have. Aspirants, in Callard's sense, aim to develop certain values through a process, even when they do not fully grasp those values. Such development takes time. Direct evaluative agency, on the other hand, is a controversial thesis.

The distinction between direct and indirect agency in this sense is similar to Mele's (2009) distinction between acting and trying to act—in Mele's words, there is a difference between “trying to  $\psi$ ” and “trying to bring it about that one  $\psi$ s”. One has direct control in the former case (trying to  $\psi$ ) but not the latter (trying to bring it about that one  $\psi$ s).

There are two characteristics that distinguish the immediacy of direct control. First, direct control is *temporally immediate*. If one has direct control over O, one's action immediately influences O. Indirect control is not temporally immediate; it takes time. Second, direct control is *causally immediate*; there is direct causal interaction rather than indirect causal interaction. I allow for some leniency in causal immediacy; X can be causally immediate to Y even if X is not causally next-door to Y. I can immediately scratch my back by using a backscratcher; I kick a fence even if my shoe and not my foot hits the fence. X can directly cause Y even if X is not a next-door causal neighbor of Y. But X and Y cannot be more than a few houses apart. So then, the claim that aesthetic evaluations can be under our direct control amounts to the idea that they are both temporally immediate and causally immediate. The main idea here, of course, is that one's own evaluation can come across directly by one's own decision—by intending, initiating, or committing to have some evaluation.

So much for my explanation of direct evaluative aesthetic agency. As I keep mentioning, the thesis has rarely (if ever) seen the light of day. So why should we consider it? Briefly, here are five motivations for discussing evaluative agency in the first place.

First, as mentioned earlier, some epistemologists have argued for *doxastic voluntarism*: we have some direct control over our beliefs.<sup>5</sup> It is worth asking whether something a similar claim is true in the aesthetic realm. We may not be able to transpose the arguments, given a hybrid view of evaluation; but it is worth asking whether such a view is plausible. Can we control our evaluations? Of course, if it is true, doxastic voluntarism may support evaluational agency, especially if a cognitive account of evaluation is correct.

Second, there is some *prima facie* evidence for control over our aesthetic evaluations. Our aesthetic judgments—and our claims about the aesthetic judgements of others—seem to track agency since they are things we hold people responsible for: We hold people’s evaluations to be attributable to their selves in a way that allows for change—the kind of change that people can make themselves.<sup>6</sup> We try to convince people to change their minds, or to adopt views—if you liked *this*, you ought to really love *that*! More generally, our aesthetic practices involve reasons over which we can have some control—we *make up our minds* about whether we like something.<sup>7</sup> In fact, the aesthetic realm might seem especially individualistic in our world: We each try to find and cultivate our own individual aesthetic sensibility—everybody wants a unique style.<sup>8</sup> In our searches for our own styles, it seems plausible that we will sometimes make decisions about what we value.

Third, consider artistic intentions. The importance of creative intentions in art has long been acknowledged by philosophers: it is generally agreed that the existence and content of some works of art partly depends upon—or is even determined by—the right kinds of creative

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<sup>5</sup> Ryan (2003) and Weatherston (2008) argue for DV. Alston (1988) and Williams (1976) argue against it.

<sup>6</sup> See especially Wolf (2016). Some have argued for responsibility without control, notably Smith (2005) and Hieronymi (2006, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> Moran 2001 and Boyle 2011 argue that we have some (indirect) agency over beliefs.

<sup>8</sup> Riggle 2015 argues that personal style is an expression of one’s personal ideals.

intentions.<sup>9</sup> If artists can determine the contents of artworks through intentions, then it is at least worth asking whether artists and audiences have control over their evaluations. (I will consider this argument in more detail in section 3.)

Fourth, many philosophers have recently emphasized robust agency in aesthetic engagement.<sup>10</sup> Noël Carroll (1984: 185) has argued for the importance of our own interaction with art—as a reasoned process that requires our own reasoned engagement. Alex King (2017) argues that subtlety in art is valuable because it allows active engagement with artworks. Anthony Cross (2017) argues that art criticism can be a kind of practical reasoning, because it gives us strategies for engaging artworks. Paul Crowther (2009) has argued that listening involve agency in the sense that it involves maintaining awareness with some goal; such perceptual agency seems necessary for any artistic engagement. Dominic McIver Lopes (2018) has defended the view that a theory of aesthetic value must explain aesthetic agency. Perhaps, in addition to having agency over engagement, we can also have agency over evaluation. If we have agency over our aesthetic engagement, does it suddenly stop as soon as we start evaluating the work? That would be curious. So maybe our evaluations involve agency, too.

Finally, consider *autonomy*, a crucial notion in contemporary and historical aesthetics.<sup>11</sup> As emphasized by Kant<sup>12</sup> and in the literature on aesthetic testimony,<sup>13</sup> aesthetic judgments ought to be (or are constitutively) autonomous inasmuch as they ought to (or do) arise from one's

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<sup>9</sup> See Irvin (2005, 2006) and Mag Uidhir 2013.

<sup>10</sup> O'Shaughnessy (2000) presents some arguments that agential perception is impossible. One of these arguments is that agency requires acting from reasons, but perception does not admit of reasons.

<sup>11</sup> More recently, 'autonomy' is taken to mean a judgment's independence from extra-aesthetic (practical or moral) considerations. See Carroll 1996.

<sup>12</sup> Consider Kant's claim that, when one makes a judgment of beauty, one insists upon it even if the whole world would claim otherwise.

<sup>13</sup> See for example Ransom 2017 and Nguyen 2017.

own experience. It would be curious if one's judgements ought to be autonomous yet one had only indirect control over them.

A vague but common resistance to evaluative agency comes from a common idea that our aesthetic preferences are static. We like what we like; we can't change our preferences. If this is true, aesthetic agency is impossible: If our preferences can't change, we cannot control them. The conditional is true. But the initial idea—that our aesthetic preferences are static—is false. Our aesthetic preferences are more dynamic than we often realize. Surely you, or at least some of your friends, have undergone radical aesthetic changes in preferences. Some folks grow out of their earlier punk or grunge phases; others stay metalheads. Whether we stay faithful punks or not, there seems to be at least some agency at play. Further, recent work in neuroaesthetics suggests that our aesthetic preferences are surprisingly plastic (Pugach et al 2017). Of course, this plasticity is not necessarily due to agency. But aesthetic plasticity exists, so agency is at least possible.

In the next section, I will consider why philosophers have been reluctant to allow for evaluative agency. I will explain why philosophical theories of aesthetic value and aesthetic experience have tended not to allow for direct agency.

### **3. Opposition to direct aesthetic evaluative agency**

Many accounts of aesthetic value do not take an explicit stance on whether aesthetic evaluation is under one's control. When it is explicitly addressed, philosophers argue that we do not have agential control over our evaluations. Call this view *the received view*. Like AEA, we can distinguish two versions: A strong version says we have no control at all, even indirect control. A

weak version says we have only indirect control but no direct control over our evaluations. My goal in this section is modest; I explain why philosophers have endorsed the received view, in either version, and why they do not endorse that we have direct evaluative agency. I will then consider whether a form of subjectivism can allow for such agency.

Why is the received view so popular? At least in aesthetics, one reason is that it is implied by an orthodox thesis about aesthetic judgments: the *immediacy thesis*. There are various versions of the immediacy thesis. Sometimes it amounts to the claim that aesthetic judgements are experientially direct; they seem to flow immediately from one's perceptual experience. Usually it amounts to the claim that aesthetic judgments are non-inferential. The immediacy thesis has been endorsed by Addison, Hutcheson, and Kant;<sup>14</sup> and it lives on today in discussions of aesthetic testimony.<sup>15</sup> It is easy to see how the immediacy thesis implies the received view: If aesthetic judgments are immediate, they cannot be under our direct control.

There are also top-down theoretical reasons why philosophers accept the received view. Many theories of aesthetic value come fully loaded with an account of aesthetic experience which imply, or at least strongly suggest, the received view. Consider realism about aesthetic value. On this view, when things go right, our evaluations are caused by real features of the world. These features are not subject to our agency.<sup>16</sup> A similar picture is also adopted by rational accounts of aesthetic evaluation, according to which evaluation is grounded in reasons.

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<sup>14</sup> “The colours paint themselves on the fancy, with very little attention of thought or application of mind in the beholder. We are struck, we know not how, with the symmetry of anything we see, and immediately assent to the beauty of an object, without inquiring into the particular causes and occasions of it.” Addison 1711. See also Hutcheson 1726, Kant 1797.

<sup>15</sup> See Dorsch (2013). Dorsch cites Walton (1970), McDowell (1983), Budd (1999), Zemach (2001), and Schellekens (2006) as endorsing the view that aesthetic judgments are non-inferential.

<sup>16</sup> See for example Zemach (1997).

Evaluating an artwork means evaluating its different features, but the evaluative valence of these reasons strikes us as a fabric of the world.

Prominent forms of subjectivism or quasi-realism also imply a strong version of the received view. The main forms of subjectivism or quasi-realism are *response-based theories*. These theories are committed to this core claim: “to have aesthetic value is to be disposed to bring about a particular response for a particular audience under suitable conditions” (Watkins and Shelley 2012: 338). This response is assumed to be automatic and immediate, which suggests that there can be no agency. Many response-based theorists hold that our evaluations are caused by processes—social or innate—over which we have no control. Consider Hutcheson’s view, according to which our aesthetic judgments are immediate responses to objective features in nature, produced by a special aesthetic faculty. On this view, our aesthetic evaluations are psychologically innate, formed by “the very Frame of our Nature” (1726: 8):

In reflecting upon our external Senses, we plainly see, that our Perceptions of Pleasure, or Pain, do not depend directly on our Will. Objects do not please us, according as we incline they should. The presence of some Objects necessarily pleases us, and the presence of others as necessarily displeases us. Nor can we by our Will, any otherwise procure Pleasure, or avoid Pain, than by procuring the former kind of Objects, and avoiding the latter. (1726: 8)

There is some debate about whether Hutcheson’s account of aesthetic value is a response-based theory or an objective realist theory; but either way, it is clear that we do not have direct control over our evaluations. Hutcheson says here that aesthetic perception doesn’t depend upon our evaluation. But, for Hutcheson, proper aesthetic perception is where evaluation lies; for Hutcheson, our aesthetic sense is immediate. We do not have control over our responses, and we certainly do not have control over the features of reality to which they are responding.

It is not just response-based or realist theorists who accept the received view. According to one version of Bourdieu's (1984) subjectivism, our aesthetic evaluations are, often unconsciously, determined by a social superstructure. We, individual humans, could have no control over the superstructure (or at least, if we ever could, it would be very rare and difficult).

If we look a little closer at some response-based theories, there is room to allow for some form of evaluative control. Here I want to pause and take a closer look at the Humean response-based theory of aesthetic value. For one thing, Humeanism about aesthetic value is a popular account of aesthetic value. For another thing, there has been contemporary discussion about how much agency Hume's account allows for.<sup>17</sup> I'll focus especially on the basics of Hume's account of aesthetic experience—a view which is common to many response-based theories.<sup>18</sup>

The standard Humean view of aesthetic experience involves a perceptual stage and an affective stage; here I follow James Shelley's (1998) interpretation of Hume. First, one perceives an object; then, one has an affective response.<sup>19</sup> According to Hume, this elicitation of the affective from the perceptual is automatic.<sup>20</sup> Against Hume, one might think that we have no agency in either stage, the perceptual or the affective. This is Noël Carroll's objection to Hume's view. Carroll alleges that, in 'Of the Standard of Taste', "the notion that the aesthetic response is

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<sup>17</sup> Hume gives accounts of both (1) evaluation and (2) *correct* evaluation. I focus on the first.

<sup>18</sup> **The first stage involves evaluation. But it is not yet an account of aesthetic value, since it doesn't say which responses are correct and which are incorrect. The second stage of Hume's theory is designed to answer this problem. Aesthetic value is fixed or identified by ideal critics; good artworks—beautiful artworks—are whatever the ideal critics prefer. Hume famously lists five features of the good taste of ideal critics: "strong sense, united to delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by comparison, and cleared of all prejudice". According to contemporary orthodoxy, ideal critics are ideal on hedonic grounds (Mothersill 1984; Railton 1998; Levinson 2010). Given Mill's test for pleasure, ideal critics are ideal in virtue of their ability to identify the most pleasurable items (Lopes 2016).**

<sup>19</sup> More specifically, approbation in the case of beauty and disapprobation in the case of ugliness.

<sup>20</sup> **There is some disagreement about whether approbation is this emotional response itself, or whether it is a further reaction to this emotional response.**

a simple causal effect—a sentiment consequent to a stimulus—predominates” (Carroll 1984: 185).<sup>21</sup>

Theodore Gracyk and Dabney Townsend have argued that the Humean view allows for some indirect control over our responses. The idea is that we can have indirect control not only over our initial perceptions, but also over our subsequent affective reactions. We can learn to see things in new ways, and we can forge new affective associations.<sup>22</sup> This allows for at least some agency—indirect and diachronic—even if our responses are automatic and immediate. I can’t directly have control over my response to whiskey; I can’t like it just by a decision. But I can learn things about whiskey, make different associations, and increase the amount of my engagement with whiskey. Hopefully, over time, I come to like whiskey. In this way, we can have some indirect agency over our aesthetic evaluations. If we think that taking steps of increased or decreased exposure will help us to like something or dislike it, we can take those steps. Indeed, Hume wants to help his readers develop their evaluative and perceptual abilities. To paint this picture in more detail, one might try to draw from more general Humean accounts. Neil Sinhababu’s recent account of Humeanism (2017) argues that, although our actions are guided by desire, we can shape our desires by intentions. Perhaps the Humean could appeal to intentions.

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<sup>21</sup> There are various other arguments that Hume’s account is overly causal, and cannot allow for real normativity (Budd 1994, Shiner 1996).

<sup>22</sup> “Hume regards this ‘immediacy’ of taste as entirely compatible with the influence of intellectual and imaginative faculties.” Gracyk 2016.

While an appeal to intentions may be able to allow for some agency in the Humean picture, it still cannot allow for direct agency. There is no reason to think that intentions about responses will directly result in evaluative changes for the Humean.<sup>23</sup>

Of course, there are other theoretical accounts of evaluation. I don't think they are any more promising in allowing for direct agency. Consider, for example, an aesthetic version of Frankfurt's view. On this view, aesthetic evaluations are rooted in second-order desires; our evaluations are rooted in what we desire to desire (Frankfurt 2006). One may think that we have more control over second-order desires, but it is not clear how we can have authority over our second-order desires any more than first-order desires (Wallace 1999). Further, this view is implausible about aesthetic evaluation. We do not often identify positive aesthetic evaluations with what we desire to desire.<sup>24</sup>

My fundamental claim here is not that the Humean view is unable to allow for direct evaluative agency—although it seems to me that Humean views of aesthetic experience connect naturally to Humean views of practical reason, and it is unclear this combination could allow for direct evaluative agency. My point instead is that Humeanism, the view which seems to come closest in allowing for aesthetic evaluative agency, has traditionally allowed for only indirect agency; and there are several principled reasons why it has done so. This is not an objection to Hume; the point is just that no one has made room for direct evaluative agency in the aesthetic realm.

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<sup>23</sup> Wallace (1999) argues that we still lack agency on this view. According to Humean accounts of practical reason, we simply do not have control over our desires—and only desires can change intentions.

<sup>24</sup> This objection is also raised (in a way not specific to aesthetic evaluation) by Samuel Scheffler (2012).

My goal here is to make room for such agency. In the next section, I consider an argument that starts from a natural place: artistic creation. Scholars in various disciplines have emphasized that aesthetic agency is possible in artistic creation or aesthetic movements. I will consider whether this could involve a kind of direct evaluative agency.

#### 4. Evaluative agency in creation

The argument here begins with two commonly-accepted claims. First, artists are creators.<sup>25</sup> As a minimum, this means that artists have agency over their creations, even if they are subject to constraints. Second, artworks embody a point of view, which means that they avow certain valences or values, or are intended to perform certain functions (Carroll 2008; Gilmore 2011). Chopin ballads aim at a certain kind of gracefulness, taking for granted that gracefulness is valuable; many of Nam June Paik's works assume that irony is aesthetically valuable. This evaluative embodiment occurs not only in individual artworks, but also in genres. Action films like *The Italian Job* (dir. Gray, 2003) put a value on fast-paced, action-based storytelling.

If artists have agency with respect to their works, and if works embody evaluative perspectives, then it is plausible artists have agency over certain evaluative perspectives in their works. Artists decide what kinds of values they want their works to have. This is clearest in the case of inventive, creative, artworks. Sometimes artists invent new genres or make new moves in an artistic game. David Lynch's films embody a kind of kitsch absurdity that didn't exist before. Often this occurs when artists realize certain values that were not positively evaluated before.

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<sup>25</sup> See for example Levinson 1980, Lamarque 2006.

Musicologist Ingrid Monson (2007) has argued that the innovation of modal postbop jazz, such as Miles Davis' 1959 album *Kind of Blue*, expressed an aesthetic kind of self-determination for some African-American musicians. Rigorously developed by George Russell, modal jazz involved a new system of scales and chord changes. In adopting this new practice of modal jazz, musicians were free to express a new system, and to build a musical practice that was both original and intellectually rigorous.<sup>26</sup> Monson explains:

As musicians explored various ways of thinking about harmony, rhythm, melody, and sound (timbre), they both applied ideas acquired through the study of Western music to improvisational practice and developed their own distinctive harmonic conceptions and practice devised to fit the demands of an improvising musician. (2007: 286)

Monson points out that the new values expressed a kind of agency in expressing a distinctively black musical voice. Notably for my purposes, the adoption of this new practice of modal jazz involves the adoption of certain values. In particular, modal jazz places a positive value on certain kinds of sounds—i.e. a system of chord changes—that were not valuable in jazz music before. Through innovating this system, musicians *decided* to place special value on certain kinds of sounds and certain kinds of modulation. And this new practice asks for uptake in the listeners. Listeners had to make decisions about whether they shared the values of modal jazz. Part of the innovation of artists, and of ordinary people, is to positively evaluate what was thought to be bad.

Similarly, Paul C. Taylor (1999, 2016) argues that the ownership of certain groups over certain aesthetic values can be crucial for self-determination in aesthetic life more generally.

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<sup>26</sup> Monson especially focuses on innovations based in George Russell's *Lydian Chromatic Concept of Tonal Organization*, an important text for modal jazz. She writes: "a self-actuated quest for knowledge and understanding was very much respected in jazz circles of the 1950s and 1960s."

Often groups change the valence of a certain feature; Taylor describes how some traditions of African-American culture reclaimed a value in straightening hair. These practices have the vitality they do at least partly *just because* groups employ them by deciding that they have certain meanings; and, in virtue of certain meanings, they have certain valences. This is crucial for the self-determination here.

Artistic movements often involve this sort of value agency. Consider feminist art movements like *Womanhouse* (1971-72), a feminist art collective based in CalArts and directed by Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro. This movement focused on reclaiming ‘women’s work’ as art, reorienting how we see ordinary objects and actions so that they were seen as art.

One might object at this point that, in such movements, aesthetic values are anchored in political values; the beauty just piggybacks on the politics. So if you buy into these political projects, it’s only natural to buy into the aesthetic value as well. But this undersells again the amount of aesthetic agency and presents these movements as monolithic expressions of a political fever. That’s not how things work. Not every person who advocated for freedom in black life could get behind the sound of modal jazz. Not every feminist thought that feminism needed any such relationship to art. People still needed a degree of aesthetic agency in choosing whether or not they would go in—or not—for these movements and their associated values. And, indeed, the decision not to go in for a movement is an expression of one’s aesthetic agency, too.

Unfortunately, however, there is still a problem with this argument as an argument for direct evaluative agency. While this allows for evaluative agency in the aesthetic realm, it is not clear that the evaluative agency is direct in the sense specified above. Consider the changes in group meaning that Taylor points to (indeed, these changes are similar in structure to the kind discussed by Monson). Since they are social, such a phenomenon seems to necessarily be

extended over time, and cannot be direct because it is not temporally immediate. Consider also individual decisions by composers to place value on, say, the Lydian scale applied in the way it was. Such a decision could be direct, but it need not be. These arguments are suggestive, but they are not decisive.

In the next section, I consider two more arguments for direct evaluative agency. I believe these arguments are more successful.

## **5. Two arguments for evaluative aesthetic agency**

Recently, aestheticians have been arguing that agency is important to aesthetics. As Dominic McIver Lopes (2016) notes, aesthetic value figures not just in appreciation, but also in *actions*—of collection, curation, donation, and so forth. Lopes defines an aesthetic reason as a reason to perform an aesthetic action. But this does not yet suggest that we have agency over our aesthetic evaluations. Presumably what Lopes points to here is true in the moral realm, too. Moral value plays a role in our action—perhaps even constitutively so. But it does not follow that we have agency regarding our moral evaluations.

In what follows, I will give two arguments that we have evaluative agency regarding our aesthetic evaluations. These arguments will rely upon the idea that the aesthetic features of the world are objective; but further assessment requires our own agency.

### **5.1 The Multiple Interpretations Argument**

The first of these starts is based upon the idea that we have agency over our engagement with artworks. Earlier I cited contemporary philosophers (Carroll, King, Crowther and Cross) suggesting that we have agency over our engagement with artworks. There is more precedent for this view. C. Thi Nguyen (forthcoming) takes games to be an artform of agency; if this is right, then part of the benefit of such games must be that they allow agency. Bence Nanay (2016) claims that aesthetic attention is focused upon a particular object and distributed across the properties of that object; presumably, we have agency over how we direct our attention inasmuch as we have agency over how we distribute our attention. All of these accounts try to show that we sometimes have agential control over our engagement with art.

Some artworks involve multiple interpretations, each of which are legitimate.<sup>27</sup> I mean ‘interpretation’ in a broad and inclusive sense, so that it includes modes of attention and larger-scale interpretation. The point here is that our agency over our own engagement with art can amount to agency over our interpretation. We can ‘put on’ various interpretations; we might also think of this as an ‘interpretive slide’. These are modeled off of perceptual slides, as in, for example, the duck-rabbit illusion; we interpret what the lines represent, and we can freely switch back and forth between seeing the lines as a duck or seeing the lines as a rabbit.

Consider the ending of the *Sopranos*, which admits of multiple interpretations. We can ‘put on’ either interpretation and evaluate the *Sopranos* using that interpretation; ‘putting on’ various interpretations is easily under our control. In these cases, we choose what we attend to,

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<sup>27</sup> Sometimes these multiple interpretations contradict each other. There is some discussion about whether contradictory interpretations can ultimately be assigned correctly to the same work. See Davies (1995), Margolis (1995), and Stecker (1992). The argument could be applied with regard to attention or perception.

and we thereby have agency over different, equally warranted, perceptual experiences. This is especially plausible given the importance of artistic categories in a Waltonian sense.

But one's interpretation directly affects one's evaluation. At least sometimes, there is a direct connection between our attention, our interpretation, and our evaluation. So, the ways that we choose to attend and interpret directly determine our evaluations. In the *Sopranos*, one's interpretation will greatly affect how one interprets and evaluates the scenes before, and the show as a whole. This is also true of olfaction and gustation; our associations decide how we evaluate something, and we have robust control over our associations. Since we can easily modulate between different associations, we can easily modulate between different evaluations.

The documentary *Ants on a Shrimp* (dir. Dekkers, 2016) follows the avant-garde Scandinavian restaurant Noma and its head chef Rene Redzepi. In an early scene, a sous chef creates a dish of deep-fried fish sperm with a sperm emulsion. Together, the restaurant crew try the dish hesitantly. Redzepi is hesitant at first, but triumphantly proclaims that they should think of it as fish and chips: "If you look at it like that, then it was fucking amazing." By modulating our attention and interpretation, we can immediately modulate our evaluation.

And we can modulate our engagement in very direct and quick ways. In some cases I might not be able to grasp the fish-and-chips nature of the fish sperm; it might be faint if it is not fried properly. But when it is apparent, I can switch back and forth between *sperm and sperm emulsion* and *fish and chips*. And, by modulating my attention, I can immediately modulate my evaluation; the interpretation and the evaluation are bound up together. If I see the dish as fish and chips, I might immediately begin to like it. Indeed, fine dining often involves these kinds of experiences: perspectival slides that are based upon different interpretations. We try out various 'interpretive slides', see which one we like the best, and go with that one.

Consider Walton's (1970) claim that perceiving a work in its category, first, can be correct or incorrect, and second, makes a difference to how we perceive the work. Take the film *Apocalypse Now*. Certain interpretations of this film are simply not warranted. It would be wrong to watch the film as a romantic comedy, for example. But there are multiple permissible categories in which we might see the film; we might see it as a horror film, or as a war film, or as a political film. There are various admissible interpretations of the film. And, of course, which interpretation we employ will make a difference to our evaluation.

Importantly, we don't just keep on sliding between perspectives or interpretations. We can stick to an interpretation, deciding to go with it on the basis of the evaluation we want to make. We sometimes modulate our interpretation with an evaluation in mind. You try the eggplant dish hesitantly, thinking of it as mush, but then someone suggests you taste it as hummus, and it starts to taste much better. You adopt a hummus interpretation of the dish because you want to like it. In this case, your interpretation is made with your ultimate evaluation in mind. It is because it tastes better as hummus that you can choose to interpret it as hummus.

To be clear, the idea here is not that we can always switch between different evaluations. Our range of possible interpretations is often bounded. And it depends on the artform. Intuitively, there are more ways to interpret food than there are to interpret films.

Here is the argument, formalized:

#### The Multiple Interpretations Argument

P1. Some artworks admit of multiple interpretations, each of which are equally warranted.

- P2. We have direct control over our interpretations; we can intentionally switch between multiple interpretations.
- P3. Interpretations directly determine our evaluations of artworks.
- C. So, we can directly control our evaluations of artworks.

This evaluative control is not direct in the strictest sense; but it counts as direct under my definition above, since it satisfies both conditions. It is temporally immediate. And it is causally immediate, since it's causally close enough.

An objection: Are we modulating our attention with regard to what will give us the most pleasure? If so, one might wonder whether we genuinely have agency here. After all, one might say, being guided by pleasure is a hedonic matter, not subject to our own authority or agency.

I have two points in reply. First of all, even if it is pleasure, there is no reason in principle why this should not be subject to some intentional or initiational choice on our end. (Later in this dissertation I will take issue with hedonism and take up this issue in more detail, but I wish to grant it for the time being.) Second of all, as philosophers have discussed regarding interpretation, it is clearly not true that we are interpreting purely with an eye to what will give us the most pleasure. Stephen Davies (e.g. 2006) has argued for just such a picture of interpretation, according to which the best interpretation is the maximally fruitful interpretation. But consider an argument from Noel Carroll (1991): If we interpreted films with a view only to what gives us the most pleasure, we would take bad films and try to interpret them in better lights than how they are intended. But this isn't how things work. If a film seems bad, we don't try to re-interpret it in a way that would make it seem better. Carroll's point, of course, is to argue that interpretations are constrained by, and occur in light of, artist's intentions. But, when artist's intentions leave multiple interpretations open, we have latitude to interpret on our own.

## 5.2 The Weight-of-Significance Argument

The second argument starts with a straightforward picture of aesthetic evaluative properties. Assume that artworks have objective and determinate features, and that each feature has an objective value—features are good-making or bad-making. We sometimes evaluate artworks by weighing its good-making features against its bad-making features: The script is good and the acting is bad. To evaluate the movie as a whole, we have to weigh these features against each other. Sometimes this is easy; in a drama, bad make-up usually doesn't matter if everything else good. Genre can be a good guide to what's important. But sometimes this is difficult. How do we evaluate a movie as a whole when the acting was good but the script was bad? It is sometimes not clear how to weigh the importance of different features.

An example: Childish Gambino's music video *This Is America*. This music video is visually very bold; but unfortunately, the music is not very original. Let's suppose that the visuals are a triumph and the music is a failure. To evaluate the work, it is not enough to identify the triumphs and failures; we must also weigh triumphs against failures; we must decide the comparative evaluative significance of these components. You say: "Perhaps we should weigh the visual features of this music video more heavily—after all, we are evaluating a music video and not the audio recording." I say: "Perhaps we should weigh the musical features more heavily—after all, isn't *music* important for a music video?" In cases like this, we have latitude in the weight we give to such features. There are multiple acceptable ways to assign evaluative significance to different properties. I can decide to place more evaluative weight on music, you can decide to place more evaluative weight on the movie.

If we have latitude in the evaluative weight we assign to these features, then we can have control over how we assign such significance—we can decide over whether the music matters a

lot or just a little. Furthermore, the significance we assign to individual evaluative features determines how we evaluate the work overall. If we think that the music is important, then we'll tend to think the music video is a failure.

What's important for my view here is that we can often decide to make an evaluation by deciding to place more evaluative weight on one feature rather than another. I can decide that *This Is America* is good by placing more weight on the film than on the music. So, by manipulating the weight we give to certain kinds of features, we have control over our evaluations overall.

### The Weight-of-Significance Argument

- P1. Our evaluations of a particular work  $W$  is often centrally guided by the weight of significance we assign to certain features  $F_1, F_2, \dots, F_N$  of  $W$ .
- P2. We can have control over the weight of significance we assign to features  $F_1, F_2, \dots, F_N$  of  $W$ .
- C. So, we can have control over how we evaluate  $W$ .

One may object that this is improperly holist. "This requires aesthetic properties to be isolated, but aesthetic properties cannot be isolated because they are *gestalt* properties or because they are organic unities." But this argument does not require aesthetic properties to be completely atomized. It only requires them to be compared against each other, which is possible with *gestalt* properties or organic unities. I assume only that we can focus on some central properties, such as acting and screenplay, comparing those elements against one another.

This, I believe, is what occurs in the coffee case at the beginning. Nothing in our perception of the properties have changed; and we still evaluate the properties individually as

before. What has changed is the weight we give to such properties. Whereas I know that being floral is a good-making feature of coffee, I decide that it does not count for very much.

Both of these arguments have corollaries to arguments by Charles Taylor (1985) and Richard Moran (2001) about the importance of self-interpretations. Both Taylor and Moran argue that some kinds of self-ascriptions are partly constituted by our own self-interpretations. In order to be ashamed, I might not need the concept of shame, but I will need to interpret myself as being guilty. In the same way, having an interpretation requires certain conceptual tools at one's disposal. Moran, of course, is not concerned to show that we have authority over which conceptions we use; but he is concerned to show that the kinds of conceptions we use are responsive to reason, and, by employing certain kinds of self-interpretations, we constitute our states of mind in certain ways. By adopting certain self-interpretations, we constitutively effect our states of mind. Moran points out that *making up your mind* is often not a function of any kind of learning new evidence, but rather in terms of positioning ourselves differently in light of such evidence. For Moran, it is crucial that making up our minds is a matter of being responsive to reasons. But this responsiveness in no way precludes the importance of the importance of *adopting* a certain interpretation.

What goes for self-interpretation goes for art interpretations. We can consider various interpretations, sliding between them, but ultimately we often *adopt* an interpretation. And while our adopting interpretations is responsive to reasons, it also involves the kind of conceptions we choose to employ in our interpretations. Given the Waltonian view of categories, we can switch between interpretations, and an interpretation comes hand in hand with an evaluation.

And there is more than just a similarity between self-interpretation on the one hand, and artistic or aesthetic interpretation on the other. Self-interpretation is often wrapped up in our

interpretation of objects. Your decision about the coffee, is, as I introduced it, a decision about what kind of person you are, what kind of style you have, what you go in for. By undergoing various self-interpretations, we implicate ourselves in various interpretations—and evaluations—of food and drink, movies and music. And crucially for this argument, I believe that perspectival slides about self-interpretation can happen directly and easily. This part about self-interpretation is not crucial for the Multiple Interpretations Argument, but I believe it helps to give the argument some context.

One may point out that you can expose yourself to one aspect of the thing, but then, through mere exposure effects, come to love other aspects of the film. So say you like the video, but as you watch it more and more, you begin to enjoy the music as well. In this case, there is nothing about your decision to like the thing that has changed; all that has happened is that the constant presence of, say, the music video has simply worn down any resistance you might have had to the music. My response is that certainly this happens. However, there is no reason to think that because mere exposure effects occur, they are the only things responsible for aesthetic evaluations.

### 5.3 Objections

Here are three larger-scale objections that stick out against both of the above arguments:

The first objection is that there is no real agency in either case. Here we appeal to another classic definition of agency: Agency exists only in choices that are guided by reasons. While our weighing of reasons here *involves* reasons, it is not always *determined by* reasons. So, these choices do not arise from real agency. Consider, for example, Sydney Morganbesser and Edna

Ullmann-Margulit's (1977) distinction between picking (selection which is not guided by reasons) and choosing (selection which is guided by reasons). One might claim that both of these cases are cases of picking, not choosing. Reasons do not determine how you should weigh evaluative features, nor do they determine which associations you should make in gustatory cases above.

The essence of this objection is that our choice in either case is arbitrary. But one's choice here is not arbitrary. For Morganbesser and Ullmann-Margulit, the paradigmatic case of picking is between different cans of Campbell's chicken noodle soup in the grocery store aisle. It does not make a difference which one you choose. But it *does* make a difference how you weigh different features, since it makes a difference to your evaluation of the artwork. The fact that we often disagree and passionately argue over the values and properties of various artworks. This is not a case of picking.

The second objection is that the final arguments rely on a mischaracterization of aesthetic experience. According to a careful account of aesthetic appreciation, the aesthetic appreciation of an object involves a reaction to a feeling: namely, that the feeling is merited by the object in question (Gorodeisky and Marcus 2018). Moreover, one might say that neither of these elements are under one's control, neither the feeling nor the attribution of merit.

I would not want to rule out such a view of aesthetic experience. Within that view of aesthetic experience, my claim here is just that aesthetic experience itself involves many different components (say, the acting and the script), each of which can involve feelings and thoughts of merit. One still makes a decision—when one watches a film, reads a book, or listens to music—about which of these feelings and thoughts of merit to prize over the others.

The final objection is that these are not cases of direct evaluative agency, since they are not temporally immediate. One might think that *any* change in evaluation necessarily takes time. Agnes Callard claims that “people do not seem to be able to *choose* or *decide* to have different values” for this very reason. She continues:

Coming to value something tends to represent a deep change in how one sees and feels and thinks. Acquiring a new value often alters the structure of one’s priorities by demoting or even displacing something one valued before. Such changes take time, over the course of which one has done many different things in the service of value-appreciation. (Callard 2018: 3)

The idea here is that, while evaluative change is possible, it requires a very long process. A change in evaluation involves changes in many different levels of evaluation, each of which takes time. Callard’s claim is that any change in evaluation is necessarily indirect.

Applied to central moral values, it may be correct that such values, and attendant evaluations, would take substantial time to change. However, it seems false about evaluation in general. Not all evaluations in general necessarily take time in this way. To insist that this is true without some sort of argument is to beg the question in the present context.

One might try to push this line in this context by presenting positive evidence that it takes time to change our aesthetic evaluations. For instance, one may revert to a kind of generalism, either about weighting aesthetic properties or about interpretive practices. The idea here is that we have general principles regarding what interpretive strategies we apply, or how we weigh aesthetic properties. And while we can change the general principles we employ, it takes time. So our control over our evaluations is still not direct.

For one thing, such a generalism is contentious, especially as a claim about aesthetic evaluation. But let’s grant that generalism is true. Notice that we have no problem weighing

properties differently—and perceiving them to have different valences—across different genres. Brashness is important, and positively valenced, in punk music. That same sort of brashness is usually not important, and not positively valenced, in jazz ballads. I know fans of both jazz ballads and punk that have no problem switching between the two. General principles may be applied within a specific genre, are not generally applied. Furthermore, in new and original works within a genre we have no trouble adjusting whatever thoughts we had of the genre to accommodate the inventive work. We can change the principles by which we evaluate artworks.

## 6. Conclusion

I have argued that sometimes, we have evaluative agency. In particular, we have such agency in the aesthetic realm. If I am right, there are consequences for traditional accounts of aesthetic value. If we have direct aesthetic agency, our responses look very different than response-based theories often make them out to be; we have control over our responses. It looks like some part of traditional aesthetic theories, then, is in need of repair. Our evaluations are not always immediate; they are functions of the perspectives we take on objects. Since we can change our perspectives, we can change our evaluations. We are not always at the mercy of subagential perceptual, emotional, or social processes. Sometimes, we can make a direct choice about what is beautiful, even though the objective good-making features are objective in the world.

This leaves us with a question: What is the point of deciding to evaluate something in a certain way? Having a choice in an evaluation might start to seem arbitrary. What is the point of giving one or another evaluation? Even if it is not arbitrary (even if it is not picking), there must be something more—something that drives our agential choices.

This is a good question, and the larger answer leads to another suggestion; I believe that our motivation lies in our practical identities. We choose to like things, or not, because we craft our practical identities in large part on our aesthetic values. Indeed, this speaks to the significance of choosing our own evaluations. I think these kinds of choices are far more common than we often realize, especially in light of the fact that many of our aesthetic choices are built towards developing a distinctive style or taste. We decide what suits us—and the process of deciding, renegeing, re-evaluating, is ultimately a process of deciding who we will be. We do this about haircuts, coffee, alcohol, clothes, and tattoos. Far from being a trivial part of our aesthetic lives, our choices mark the core of our practical identities. However, this leads to another, larger area of research, which I leave for a later chapter.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> For helpful comments, discussion, and suggestion, thanks to audiences at Camp Aesthetics 2018 and the American Society for Aesthetics in Berkeley, and thanks to the CUNY dissertation working group. Thanks to Anthony Cross and James Mock for comments at those presentations. Thanks to Noel Carroll, Susan Feagin, Jonathan Gilmore, Jonathan Gingerich, Thi Nguyen, and Kate Ritchie for helpful comments and suggestions on earlier versions of this paper.

## Chapter Two: Aesthetic Reasons

ABSTRACT. Do aesthetic reasons ever have normative authority over us? Could there be anything like an aesthetic ‘ought’ or responsibility? Some philosophers have argued that the answer is ‘yes’. I argue here that the answer is ‘no’. There are no aesthetic oughts. We have reasons to act certain ways regarding various aesthetic objects—most notably, reasons to attend to and appreciate those objects. But these reasons never amount to duties. Aesthetic reasons are evaluative, not deontic. They can only *entice us* or *invite us*—they can never *compel us*. Beauty gives us *goods* but not *shoulds*.

What kind of authority does beauty have over our lives and our actions? Some evaluative realms, like morality, seem to have normative authority; moral reasons compel us. They issue demands that we should follow. Does beauty issue such demands? Does the aesthetic realm have normative authority?

We talk as though it is; our aesthetic language has this ring to it. I’ve told people that they *need* to listen to Carly Rae Jepsen’s landmark pop album E-MO-TION. I’ve been told that I really *ought* to use Punt e Mes vermouth when I make an Americano. And besides the linguistic evidence, there is some intuitive attractiveness to the idea: When presenting a paper at a conference, I *should* wear a nice shirt. If a lunar eclipse is happening, your child *should* watch the lunar eclipse instead of playing around on their phone.

It might seem clear, then, that there are some aesthetic oughts or obligations.<sup>29</sup> Beauty seems to compel us; it seems to have some authority over us, or make some kind of claim on us. If this picture is right, then the aesthetic realm is *deontic*—it presents authoritative reasons.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Of course, I allow that normative words like ‘ought’ and ‘should’ may have non-normative and non-deontic uses; my focus here is on normativity rather than the meaning of ‘ought’ per se. See for example Chrisman 2015.

<sup>30</sup> If they exist, aesthetic oughts seem more modest than, say, moral oughts. A moral duty (say, to save a life) carries more authority than any aesthetic call. Perhaps words like ‘obligation,’ ‘duty,’ and even ‘ought’ are too strong for the aesthetic case. This doesn’t show that there are no aesthetic oughts; it only shows that these oughts can be outweighed.

John Broome articulates this very point: “I once advised a guest that he ought to eat a mangosteen because mangosteens are delicious. I was speaking correctly. ‘Ought’ is certainly not particularly a moral word.” (Broome 2013: 8). If I ought to eat mangosteens in virtue of their deliciousness, then it looks like there are aesthetic oughts or obligations. Aesthetic reasons can be *deontic*: They have normative force.

The question of whether there are in fact aesthetic obligations (or whether aesthetic reasons can be deontic) gives rise to a crucial meta-ethical question about the relationship between the evaluative, the deontic, and the normative. What is the reach of the authority of reason? Are all reasons deontic? The question here is just whether aesthetic considerations can have binding force at all. After all, aesthetics, like morality and epistemology, is at least an evaluative realm. Is it also a deontic realm? Is it *automatically* a deontic realm?

And the question raises a challenge to the volitional account of aesthetic value. If aesthetic reasons are strong enough to create duties in us to appreciate or attend to objects, then it is difficult to see how we could have any serious agency in the realm of aesthetic value.

Recently, several philosophers have claimed that there are aesthetic obligations (Cross 2017; Eaton 2008; Kubala 2018; Lopes 2018; McGonigal 2018), either by arguing for such obligations by presenting accounts of aesthetic obligations, or by arguing for general accounts of reasons. My goal here is to present an alternative structure of the normative force of aesthetic reasons. I will argue that the aesthetic realm is evaluative, but not deontic. Beauty gives us *goods*, not *shoulds*. Beauty may seem to issue demands, such as in the examples above. But, I will argue, these demands vanish under a closer look. My goal here is twofold. First, I provide a metanormative picture of aesthetic reasons that shows why aesthetic reasons could never compel. Second, I motivate this picture.

I begin in §1 by considering what aesthetic obligations would look like if they existed. In §2, I consider some accounts of aesthetic obligations, and raise some worries about these accounts. I show that the strongest case for aesthetic obligations rests on a widely-accepted view about the general normative structure of reasons. According to this view, all reasons have some deontic force. In §3 and §4, I outline some resistance to this widely-accepted view of reasons, drawing on work by Jonathan Dancy, Margaret Little, and R. Jay Wallace. I propose an alternative normative structure for aesthetic reasons: Due to the nature of the aesthetic realm, aesthetic reasons could never have deontic force; they could never have the authority of anything like obligations. Using Jonathan Dancy's notion of enticing reasons, I propose that aesthetic reasons are always merely enticing—they never compel us. If we hold that aesthetic reasons are anything stronger, I argue, we give up on a central insight of aesthetic theory: The aesthetic realm is a realm of both play and free agency. In §5 I consider some objections. Finally, in §6, I argue that there are important consequences for this for the importance of agency in aesthetic value.

## 1. Characterizing Aesthetic Obligations

Let's start by getting clear on what aesthetic obligations would look like if they existed. First of all, what are obligations in general? Second of all, what makes an obligation *aesthetic*?

I assume here that obligations are derived from reasons. In particular, obligations are reasons that have deontic force; they issue a binding directive. Over the past couple of decades there has been much discussion of how reasons derive their force. For now, I rely simply on the

notion that an obligation is a reason with a deontically binding directive. The reason need not be universally binding, and it need not be an overriding reason.

What would make an obligation *aesthetic*? Given my project, I will be liberal about what aesthetic obligations could be if they existed: I take it that an obligation is aesthetic just in case it arises from an overriding or decisive *aesthetic reason*. In other words, if there are aesthetic obligations, then one ought to undertake some action  $\phi$  for some aesthetic reason R.<sup>31</sup> Here I understand actions in a broad sense, to include mental actions such as *attending to* and *appreciating*; attention and appreciation have been paradigmatic cases of aesthetic obligations (Cross 2017; Kubala 2018; McGonigal 2018). Aesthetic value can, of course, provide reasons for actions besides appreciation (Lopes 2018); but I take appreciation to be the central case. The big question, as I see it, is whether a thing's aesthetic value—its beauty, say—can ever provide a binding reason for us to attend to it.

If they exist, then, aesthetic obligations arise from decisive aesthetic reasons. But what is an aesthetic reason? There are many reasons; what makes a reason aesthetic rather than, say, practical? Here we want to distinguish the right sorts reasons—properly *aesthetic* reasons—from non-aesthetic reasons. Some reasons might be related to aesthetics, but they are not really aesthetic reasons.

Here's an example. Suppose an evil demon appears before me. To prevent the destruction of the world, he orders, I must enjoy the complete recordings of Kenny G. Suppose that, fortunately, I *can* bring myself to enjoy the large discography of Kenny G, by undergoing a strenuous process of musical re-education and enculturation. In this case, I plausibly have a

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<sup>31</sup> This issue is distinct of whether there are norms in the artworld, which clearly exist. For discussion see e.g. Neufeld (2015).

reason—and a *duty*—to appreciate these recordings; and so would anyone in my position. But while this is a reason, and while it involves aesthetic properties, it does not seem to be an aesthetic reason. This reason is only accidentally aesthetic; it seems fundamentally moral, not aesthetic.<sup>32</sup>

So what does it take for a reason to be aesthetic in the right way? While there must be an important relation to aesthetic content, I'll grant that aesthetic reasons need not be grounded exclusively in aesthetic properties. But they must have an important connection to aesthetic properties. Just what connection I mean here is an important question that I will leave unanswered. Here I will follow Andrew McGonigal's liberal characterization of aesthetic reasons: they are either (i) "grounded in ultimate value of some aesthetic property," (ii) "aesthetic property plays the right role in the content of the reason," or (iii) "an aesthetic property mediates in the right way".<sup>33</sup> On this characterization, aesthetic reasons need not reduce to aesthetic properties. It is enough that aesthetic properties simply figure in some robust way. This may seem overly permissive—doesn't this allow exactly the sort of evil demon case we were worried about? I will simply assume that there is a sense of 'mediating in the right way' that does not occur in the Evil Demon case above.

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<sup>32</sup> So, for example, Howard Press has argued for an aesthetic obligation: "One ought to appreciate what is beautiful" (1969: 525). But Press explicitly relies upon the moral salience of such appreciation. <sup>32</sup> Such obligations are really moral, not aesthetic. "in the appreciation of beauty, as in all our relationships to the world, the sensuous no less than the intellectual, we exercise a power, a moral power, and ... the exercise of this power involves moral achievement." (525) "moral sensibility and aesthetic sensibility, the moral interest and the aesthetic interest, unite in aesthetic experience." (526)

<sup>33</sup> As McGonigal says, one could put a lot of pressure on what it takes for an aesthetic property to mediate in the right way. I will simply assume that a satisfactory and intuitive account can be given.

## 2. Three Strategies

In this section, I survey three prominent strategies for establishing the existence of aesthetic obligations. I will argue against two of them, leaving the third for the next section. It's worth noting at the outset that none of these strategies attempts to show that there is a distinct realm of aesthetic obligation, or that aesthetic realm has a distinctive structure which gives rise to a particular kind of obligation.

### 2.1 Intuitive Cases

The first strategy is an appeal to intuition: Some philosophers present what they take to be intuitive cases of aesthetic obligation. The idea is that these cases present clear evidence for aesthetic obligations.

Marcia Muelder Eaton considers *aesthetic dilemmas*. Suppose that you can save only one of two paintings from a burning building, “paintings that you believe are equal in moral value”. Suppose that one of these paintings is more beautiful than the other. Eaton writes: “I believe that you have an uncontroversial, nonconditional aesthetic obligation to save one rather than the other, namely, the more beautiful painting” (Eaton 2008: 5). Likewise, Andrew McGonigal presents *drowning art cases*—cases where you can easily prevent the destruction of a beautiful artwork if it costs very little (say, getting your clothes wet). In drowning art cases, MacGonigal claims, it is clear that you ought to save the art. Both arguments involve an appeal to intuitions to establish that there are aesthetic obligations.

Notice that both cases presumably appeal to relatively objective or quasi-realist properties. The way these cases are presented, the obligations are not rooted in any personal

relations one bears to the objects; the obligation is simply rooted in the aesthetic value of the pieces—a value that is independent from any attachment one has. One’s obligation is to save the more beautiful paintings in both cases—it is the beauty that seems to ground this obligation.

There are some doubts about how aesthetic these cases are. We may wonder whether we are smuggling in historical properties to pass as aesthetic value here. For example, when we are thinking that we ought to save the more beautiful painting, we may deep down really be thinking that we ought to save the more *art-historically important* painting. This suggests that art-historical importance— and perhaps not aesthetic value—can create a duty to save a painting.<sup>34</sup>

But even if you find these cases compelling, notice that at best they provide a question rather than an answer. If there are aesthetic obligations as these cases putatively show, what is their normative structure? In both cases, the obligations are presumably underwritten by the aesthetic value—the beauty—of the objects in question. How could beauty give rise to such obligations?<sup>35</sup> This, I take it, is the crucial question about aesthetic obligation: What is the normative structure of aesthetic value such that it can create obligations? This strategy does not give an answer.

## 2.2 Relations

The second strategy is both *reductive* and *relational*: Aesthetic obligations are instances of more general obligations brought about by relations, either to oneself or to something else. This

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<sup>34</sup> I acknowledge that culture and aesthetics are obviously closely related. This opens up a big question about how subjective the aesthetic realm is.

<sup>35</sup> This is not to say that the authors do not take this seriously; McGonigal provides an account of aesthetic normativity which I discuss below.

strategy is developed along different lines by Anthony Cross, Robbie Kubala, and Andrew McGonigal. While these are promising options, I argue that they are ultimately unsuccessful.

On Cross's account, aesthetic obligations exist as instances of duties of love.<sup>36</sup> Cross describes duties to love as "obligations to some individual that one incurs in virtue of standing in a particular relationship to that individual—namely, a loving relationship." Since we love artworks, we incur obligations that result from relationships of love. Cross's picture consists of two stages. At a first, stage, we develop *relationships* with artworks, just like we develop relationships with people. Certain movies, paintings, or albums are especially important to us. At a second stage, we make *commitments* to these objects in virtue of the value they have for us. Think of the punk, the metalhead, the opera lover, the movie buff, the foodie. These types of fans have practical commitments to kinds of beauty. It is in virtue of these commitments that we develop aesthetic obligations. Cross notes, crucially, that these relationship to art must be merited by qualities in the artworks, just as relationships to friends must be merited by qualities in the friends. So one could not generate an obligation to love bad art.

On Kubala's account, aesthetic obligations are instances of self-promises. Kubala invokes a passage from Proust, in which Marcel promises to return to admire the hawthorns. According to Kubala's account, Marcel promises to become the kind of person who attends hawthorns, and therefore creates an obligation for himself to attend to hawthorns.<sup>37</sup> Kubala argues that we have

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<sup>36</sup> Cross discusses obligations to *artworks*, not to aesthetic objects. I assume here that non-artistic aesthetic objects could be subject to the same obligations.

<sup>37</sup> "On the morning of our departure ... my mother ... found me standing in tears on the steep little path close to Tansonville, bidding farewell to my hawthorns, clasping their sharp branches in my arms. ... 'Oh, my poor little hawthorns,' I was assuring them through my sobs, 'it isn't you who want to make me unhappy, to force me to leave you. You, you've never done me any harm. So I shall always love you.' And, drying my eyes, I promised them ... I would never copy the foolish example of other men, but that even in Paris, on fine spring days, instead of paying calls and listening to silly talk, I would set off for the country to see the first hawthorn-trees in bloom." Proust 1992: 203-204.

duties to ourselves—commitments or self-promises—to attend to things. These self-promises often arise out of our practical identities, especially as fans, aficionados, and the like.<sup>38</sup> You shouldn't neglect punk shows if you're a punk; you should attend to the catalogue. Kubala's account is a *self-promise* account of aesthetic obligation; the obligation is rooted from commitments we make to ourselves in virtue of our own practical identities.

According to McGonigal's account, aesthetic obligations are based in our personal obligations of integrity. In particular, we have obligations to honor our own aesthetic preferences: we should pursue aesthetic projects that authentically express the kinds of things we like. If you are really into French cuisine, you shouldn't neglect it.

These three accounts share two core features. The first core feature is that they are grounded in individual or personal relationships to artworks. In particular, they rely on similar notions—commitments, self-promising, and obligations—all of which place obligations squarely in one's own self-conception or practical identity. Even McGonigal's account, rooted in integrity, derives crucially from one's own self-conception.<sup>39</sup> The second core feature is that they appeal to practical identities or self-conceptions that are importantly related to *fanhood*. On all these views, aesthetic obligations relate to *deep* personal attachments. The promise to one's self, the commitment, and one's integrity all depend upon holding something in high regard.

Let's focus on the second core feature—the rootedness in deep personal attachments. Because these accounts are all rooted in deep personal attachments, the scope of the phenomenon is now smaller than we might have thought. On these accounts, aesthetic obligations only arise as

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<sup>38</sup> Kubala's account takes inspiration from Richard Moran's (2012) claim that beauty, in some sense, stakes a claim on us—a claim that is binding without being universal.

<sup>39</sup> Cross's account requires that the object have some merit in the first place. But this meriting property does not ground the obligation itself; it is only necessary for the obligation.

relations between fans and for the objects, genres, or products of which they are fans. But this limits the phenomena. Think back to the list of cases mentioned at the beginning. It's not clear that this will explain why my child should put his phone down and see the sunset, or why I should wear a clean shirt when I present a paper. Neither of those are rooted in personal attachments.

But, secondly, we might wonder whether even fans have personal connections so deep as they are portrayed here. Do fans really make *commitments* to the objects of their fandom? Certainly some fans make commitments; Kubala helpfully gives several such examples. But it's not clear that many fans make anything like promises to themselves, or commitments to the objects, or that their integrity lies in their fanaticism. I'm a fan of several genres, but I wouldn't say I'm committed to those genres, or that my integrity rests upon my appreciation for them, or that I've made a promise to myself regarding my future pursuit of them. Commitment (or integrity, or promising) implies a future-directed diachronic attitude regarding one's future self. Certainly I buy tickets to see these artists at later dates, but this is as far as it goes. I keep things open; I come back to Kanye with fresh ears every once in a while, willing to hear his music in a new way—willing to be wrong. The central point here—one which I will return to later—is that our aesthetic loves seem to pin us down on these accounts in a way that doesn't accurately reflect the freedom we experience in our aesthetic lives.

And, thirdly, these accounts do not explain the intuitive cases of burning or drowning art presented earlier. Aesthetic obligations, according to these accounts, rest ultimately in personal orientations or attitudes. In the intuitive cases above—the cases presented by Eaton and McGonigal—our obligation seems to derive purely from the objective (or at least quasi-realist) aesthetic value of the artworks. This matters for the arguments of Cross and McGonigal, since

they both appeal to these intuitive cases to motivate the view that aesthetic obligations exist in the first place. If the intuitive cases are supposed to motivate the view that there are aesthetic obligations, the account ought to accommodate them as genuine instances of aesthetic obligations. But these relational accounts cannot explain the intuitive cases. For recall that the obligation in the intuitive cases seems to derive from an objective or quasi-realist source. But, in the relational accounts, the obligation has its normative source in personal reasons rather than from general aesthetic value.

Indeed, these relational accounts of aesthetic obligations can start to chafe against the intuitive cases presented by McGonigal and Eaton. Consider the burning art case. Suppose I have developed a personal relationship with the less beautiful painting. Perhaps I made a promise to myself to save the less beautiful painting, or suppose my integrity depends upon it. According to these relational accounts, it seems like we ought to save the less beautiful painting. The intuitive cases for aesthetic obligations seem to rest upon the idea that aesthetic properties themselves are enough to demand action of us.

One worry occasionally raised against this approach is that these obligations are meaningless, because we can opt out of them. Obligations of our practical identities, or obligations of integrity, have no hold on us when we change our practical identities anyway. As a metalhead, perhaps Jill ought to listen to some metal, or particular metal albums. But if Jill no longer has a practical identity as a metalhead, it seems that she no longer has an obligation to listen to any metal. Again, we are left with the question of how aesthetic reasons could evince authority over our persons. If we are free to change our practical identities, then these obligations do not have much hold on us.

Cross has replied to this objection, saying that one can have obligations even if it is possible to be released from them. For instance, I may have obligations while I'm in a marriage, but I can be released from those obligations if my spouse and I end the marriage. The fact that I can be released from those obligations doesn't show that they don't exist in the first place. I agree with Cross here. However, note that this response does emphasize the fact that commitments from self-promises, relationships, and integrity are usually codified in some form—a form that is lacking in the art case. We all know what commitments of love look like; they often involve explicit promises to people. Relationships to artworks rarely involve explicit promises. Either they do not occur very often, or they involve an implicit structure that needs to be spelled out more.

### 2.3 Monism about Reasons

The final strategy I consider here is more promising. Dominic McIver Lopes's argument for aesthetic obligations rests upon a metanormative claim: Reasons for action are just reasons what lend weight to what one *ought* to do. This picture relates to Lopes's view about values. Values are aesthetic reasons when the fact that something has some value contributes to the claim that one ought to do it.

the fact that  $x$  is  $V$  is an aesthetic reason for  $A$  to  $\phi$  in  $C$  = the fact that  $x$  is  $V$  lends weight to the proposition that  $A$  aesthetically should  $\phi$  in  $C$ . (Lopes 2018: 38)

Aesthetic values *just are* reasons to undertake some action, and reasons *just are* things that you should do. So, since there are aesthetic reasons, there are aesthetic obligations.

The key premise here is Lopes's general claim about reasons: That reasons to act *just are* things that lend weight to the fact that one *should* act. On this conception, reasons are constitutively deontic; what it is for something to be a reason is just for it to lend oughtness. This view about reasons is popular. It's endorsed by John Broome (1999), Jean Hampton (1998), Thomas Scanlon (1998), and Joseph Raz (1999): Reasons always issue or contribute to directives because we have a rational responsibility to always do as well as possible. We might call this view *monism about reasons*, since it holds that all reasons share the same normative profile: They are deontic in force.<sup>40</sup> As long as there are aesthetic reasons, then, those reasons are deontic.

Furthermore, theorists such as Scanlon often reduce values to reasons. Christine Tappolet describes this view as follows: "To be valuable or good would be nothing else than to have natural properties that make it the case that one *ought*... to act or react in certain ways. An imperative would lie at the heart of values." (2005: 397) This results, as Tappolet shows, as a reduction of all values to imperatives. It makes all value deontic; there is no distinction between the right and the good.

Lopes's view succeeds where the relational views fail: It explains the intuitive cases. It explains why we ought to save the drowning painting just in virtue of the thing's value: Its beauty presents reasons for us to save it.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> How exactly the normative demand gets spelled out need not concern us here. Perhaps every reason has its own *pro tanto* obligation. Or perhaps obligations pertain to all-things-considered reasons, or to overriding reasons. As Lopes acknowledges, aesthetic reasons may not always be decisive (Lopes 2018: 39). But, as we have allowed, this does not mean that there are no aesthetic obligations—the form of aesthetic reasons is still a form of *shoulds*. What it is to be a reason for  $\phi$  is just to contribute to the strength of the proposition that one *ought* to  $\phi$ .

<sup>41</sup> Importantly for Lopes, this doesn't mean that we all ought to pursue the same aesthetic goods. Such a world, Nehamas points out, would be unbearable (Nehamas 2007: 83-4). Reasons press us differently depending on where we are in life, but this only shows that we are accessing different reasons, not necessarily opposing reasons.

What could be wrong with this picture? If all reasons compel us, it looks unavoidable that aesthetic reasons give rise to aesthetic obligations. The only reason there would be no aesthetic obligations is only that aesthetic reasons never quite stack up to moral reasons. But that is a contingent fact. In the next section, I present a challenge to this monist account of reasons.

### 3. Enticing Reasons

There are some familiar strategies for arguing that aesthetic obligations do not exist. Stuart Hampshire (1959) argued against aesthetic obligations on the basis of the normative profile of the aesthetic realm. Hampshire argued that aesthetic objects could never present pressing reasons for action—cases where there is a demand for us to act immediately. But, he claimed, obligations only extend to realms with pressing action. Expressing a similar point, Martha Nussbaum claims:

“I can, visiting a museum, survey many fine objects with appropriate awe and tenderness. I can devote myself now to one, now to another without the sense that the objects make conflicting claims against my love and care. If one day I spend my entire museum visit gazing at Turners, I have not incurred a guilt against the Blakes in the next room. (1990: 132)

In some ways, the view of aesthetic normativity I endorse here will be close in some ways to Hampshire and Nussbaum. But I believe that this is unsatisfying as a first move, since it only pushes back the question: If aesthetic reasons aren't pressing, what makes them this way in the

first place?<sup>42</sup> This strategy hints at an alternative to the monistic account of reasons, but it does little more to motivate or spell out such an alternative.

Andrew McGonigal (2018) sketches a Kantian style of argument against aesthetic obligations: Aesthetic reasons are always subjective—that is, dependent upon an individual’s sensibility (see also Egan 2010, Goldman 2006: 339). But, the argument goes, obligations are categorical; they always apply universally and objectively, not subjectively. So, there are no aesthetic obligations. I will return to consider this style of argument.

Finally, one might transpose Sharon Ryan’s (2003) argument that there are no epistemic obligations. Transposed to the aesthetic realm, Ryan’s argument goes like this: (1) Our aesthetic attitudes are never under our voluntary control. (2) Aesthetic obligations could exist only if our aesthetic attitudes were under our control. (C) Therefore, there are no aesthetic obligations. I find this strategy interesting and original, but I don’t accept either premise.<sup>43</sup> Most notably, I reject the first premise: We seem to have some control over our aesthetic attitudes, since we hold each other responsible for our evaluations (Wolf 2017).

My proposal rests upon an alternative model of aesthetic reasons from a familiar position in meta-normative theory. My strategy here is to offer a competing account to the dominant view of reasons, and therefore to allow for a view according to which aesthetic reasons are not binding. This would eliminate the possibility of aesthetic obligations, since, as introduced above, I take it that aesthetic obligations must arise from aesthetic reasons.

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<sup>42</sup> Another worry is that Hampshire’s argument rests on a disconnect of aesthetics from action—a move which runs against the grain of a host of recent research in aesthetics (King 2015, Cross 2017, Lopes 2018, Nguyen forthcoming; though see Gorodeisky and Marcus 2018).

<sup>43</sup> For discussion, see Steup (2000, 2005) and Weatherson (2008). Pamela Hieronymi gives an argument against the second premise.

As we have seen, a familiar general claim about reasons that all reasons create oughts. This is the monist view of reasons that Lopes endorses. Following up on a suggestion from Joseph Raz (1999), Jonathan Dancy (2004) has argued against this monistic view of reasons. Dancy argues that some kinds of reasons do not create oughts; he calls these reasons ‘enticing reasons’.<sup>44</sup> Dancy writes: “A set of enticing reasons can be sufficient to make the action they recommend worth doing, fun, exciting, attractive, and so on.” (99) However, while they recommend, they do not mandate or compel. Here’s an example similar to Dancy’s: Suppose you are thinking about seeing a play tonight. Let’s say it’s Annie Baker’s play *The Flick*. *The Flick* is a great play (both subjectively and objectively, let’s suppose), and this is a reason to see it. But if you do nothing instead, you have done nothing wrong. This is because a reason to see a play is a merely enticing reason, and cannot create a duty. Dancy calls the more familiar kinds of reasons—reasons that create oughts or shoulds—‘peremptory reasons’. While reasons may often be like this, Dancy claims, they are not *always* like this.<sup>45</sup>

To some, it sounds like enticing reasons are weightless. If this were true, it would be a problem for enticing reasons. Weightless reasons cannot be compared against each other. But we compare enticing reasons against each other all the time. We compare *The Flick* with another play, deciding which play would be better. We compare Rocky Road ice cream against cookies ‘n cream. So it seems that enticing reasons must have weight. I grant that enticing reasons have weight; I deny that they have any binding force.

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<sup>44</sup> Dancy repurposes this notion from Raz (1999), who introduces the notion of enticing reasons only to argue that they do not exist.

<sup>45</sup> This is the inverse of Julia Driver’s (1992) category of the suberogatory—actions that are permissible but not wrong. These actions are permissible—indeed, they are good—but they are not required.

If enticing reasons don't have any binding force, what grounds them as reasons?<sup>46</sup>

Perhaps, in line with McGonigal's suggestion above, enticing reasons are not binding because they are grounded in subjective, non-universal preferences. On this view, a reason has deontic force only when it has universal applicability—and since aesthetic reasons lack universal applicability (the objection goes), they do not have deontic force. Dancy considers this option. But as he immediately notes, this is clearly false; many reasons have peremptory force, but they do not have universal applicability (e.g. obligations to family members). Instead, Dancy suggests, enticing reasons are distinctive in virtue of their unique style of outputs. Enticing reasons take us to bests; peremptory reasons take us to oughts. On this account, enticing reasons are evaluative without being deontic in virtue of their unique teleology. They take us to bests, but without a demand; they are purely evaluative.

Two other philosophers help to make a case for enticing reasons. Margaret Little (2013) bolsters the case for enticing reasons. She says: We often think of the justificatory force of reasons as having a deontic force (think of reasons to act morally or reasons to believe something). But, Little argues, justificatory reasons do not have this weight in other realms. She provides two examples of justificatory reasons that are not deontic: (1) *Fittingness in emotions*. Emotions are often warranted—think of anger—but we don't think that one *ought* to have that emotion. It's fine if one has it and fine if one doesn't. You are permitted to get angry at the person who cuts in front of you in line, but ordinarily, there's no sense in which you *ought* to get angry at them. (2) *Doing something sweet for one's partner*. Sweet actions for a loved one are nice to do, and they are justified. But one is not wrong for *not* doing them—otherwise one would

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<sup>46</sup> It might be thought that the burden of proof is on the defender of enticing reasons to prove that some reasons are not deontic. I don't think there's a clear default position here, so it's not clear to me that the burden of proof falls on the person who accepts enticing reasons rather than on the person who rejects them.

be required to do something sweet for one's partner every chance one has!<sup>47</sup> Little's thought is that we ought not to confuse a reason's justificatory force with its deontic force.

R. Jay Wallace argues for this same distinction with slightly different terminology: He distinguishes deontic reasons (claims about what an agent ought to do) from aspirational reasons (claims about what it would be best to do). Wallace distinguishes three cases based upon their "difference in deontic structure". In one case, MOVIE, you have a choice between going to see an Antonioni film or staying home and watching some trash TV. Wallace holds that it seems wrong to hold that one *ought* to see the movie. In another case, SMALL LOAN, you have a choice between paying your credit card bill or not. Here, it seems that you ought to pay the loan in a practical sense. In another case, DISTRAUGHT FRIEND, it seems you ought to comfort a distraught friend rather than attending a fairly unimportant meeting. Here it seems that you ought to comfort your friend in a moral sense.

The difference between these cases pertains to what Wallace calls a "dimension of deontic structure." Only MOVIE lacks deontic reasons. Wallace considers what he calls a teleological approach to normativity, according to which "the fundamental normative relation is the productive relation that our potential actions stand in to valuable states of affairs". In other words, the teleological approach to normativity says that one ought to promote value. If this is true, there is no room for aspirational normativity; all reasons become deontic. The teleological approach to normativity is familiar from, for example, traditional consequentialist accounts. If our duty is to promote pleasure, then any kind of pleasure, aesthetic or not, can at least theoretically create an obligation.

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<sup>47</sup> For more on justifying vs requiring reasons, see Gert 2007.

Importantly for us, Wallace argues that aesthetic responses are not deontic; he argues that deontic force applies exclusively to the realm of morality. This is because, for Wallace, moral demands are necessarily second-personal. To make a moral demand is to make a demand of someone. And, Wallace says, aesthetic reasons are precisely not second-personal in this sense.

“Unlike, say, an aesthetic response, ... moral blame makes a demand; it addresses the *charge* of having acted culpably, that is, having done wrong, violated an all-things-considered moral obligation, without adequate excuse. It holds someone answerable in a way that third-personal responses like aesthetic attitudes do not.” (Wallace 2013: 220).<sup>48</sup>

Aesthetic reasons do not make demands of others. So, they do not issue oughts or obligations.

#### 4. Aesthetic Reasons Are Merely Enticing Reasons

Enticing reasons, then, offer an alternative—hopefully an alternative that the reader finds promising—to the monistic view of reasons. But why think that all aesthetic reasons are enticing reasons? There is already some reason above—both Dancy and Wallace bolster their arguments by appealing to the aesthetic domain. In this section, I suggest that aesthetic reasons are enticing reasons. The argument here is not exhaustive, but I believe it helps to spell out why such a connection has been natural.

The main idea is that aesthetic reasons do not compel because the aesthetic realm is a realm of freedom. That is why aesthetic reasons are enticing and not peremptory, aspirational and not deontic. These are two hallmarks of aesthetic life that suggest the importance of freedom

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<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, some theorists like Thomas Scanlon reduce values to reasons. As Christine Tappolet says, this results in the claim that values are just deontic. “To be valuable or good would be nothing else than to have natural properties that make it the case that one *ought*... to act or react in certain ways. An imperative would lie at the heart of values.” Tappolet 2005: 397

in our aesthetic lives. First, aesthetic life is marked by *play*; and second, aesthetic life is marked by *autonomy*.

Kant famously emphasizes aesthetic experience as essentially involving a free play of the faculties, and it is the pleasure wrought by this free play that is the basis for aesthetic pleasure. Schiller thought that play was the heart of beauty: “With beauty shall man *only play*, and it is *with beauty only* that he shall play” (Schiller 15.8, p. 107). Something sounds wrong about a life where our aesthetic choices are required rather than free. I suspect that the reason this rings wrong to our ears is that aesthetics involves free play.

I want to dwell on an important connection between play and freedom. Consider Bernard Suits’ famous definition of games as “the *voluntary* attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles” (2005: 54-55, my emphasis). Play involves the ability to experiment. When you play, you’re not forced to choose the best option. If aesthetic reasons were deontic or peremptory, we would be compelled to always choose the best thing.

This is, on the one hand, a claim about what aesthetic motivation feels like. Aesthetic value expressly does not strike us as something that compels us—and this is related to its playfulness. It may seduce us, we may obsess over it, it may even drive us crazy—but it precisely does not bind us.

But it is also a claim about play itself. Hilde Hein distinguishes several elements in Schiller’s account of play; the first two are as follows:

“a) Play originates as the natural and spontaneous expression of a primary instinct activated by the overflow of vital energy. b) Play consists in the functioning of the faculties in the fashion to which they are normally adapted, cognitive as well as physical, but without the compulsion of either internal pressures or external demands.” (Hein 1968: 67)

The connections here to freedom are unmistakable: *natural and spontaneous; without compulsion of demands*. Both of these were dispensed as claims about what play is, but they relate to aesthetic action. Think of when you're listening through new albums on Spotify on a Friday. If it's a good week for music, you'll find a track or an album that really hits you—one that you can't stop listening to. The music seems to be a natural and spontaneous expression of an instinct activated by energy. But, along the lines of Schiller's second (more Kantian) thought, it also seems *fitted for you*—it occurs freely and without pressure.

Recall Schiller's claim that "With beauty shall man *only play*." (Schiller 15.8, p. 107). If the most we can do with beauty is play with it, and if play involves freedom, then beauty does not compel. If we had a duty to aesthetically maximize, then there would be pressure to maximize our aesthetic lives. And if we had such pressure to maximize, we would not be able to explore in natural and spontaneous ways. But, of course, we are able. Indeed, this is *part of what it means* to have aesthetic experience.

The second hallmark of aesthetic life is *free agency*: We are free to choose our aesthetic pursuits. I like country music, you're a metalhead. I see the big band on Monday nights at the Village Vanguard, you're seeing experimental music at The Stone. If aesthetic reasons compelled us to choose what's best, then we would not have this freedom. But we do.

In response, one may claim that what's proper or fitting for us to do depends on *who we are*. Philosophers have emphasized the importance of aesthetic autonomy; our aesthetic attributions necessarily come from ourselves. But, one may continue, this is exactly what creates aesthetic obligations. Kubala emphasizes the importance of practical identities; through our practical identities, we forge passions, and aesthetic reasons come to be more powerful.

It will be helpful to state the point more carefully: It is not just that we have freedom to choose different things from each other. The key point is that, even when aesthetic reasons are decisive—and even if they are decisive for me in a way that they are not for you—that decisiveness does not compel us, it does not create an *ought*. But, in an ironic twist, if aesthetic reasons exerted deontic force, then this yields a very limited picture of aesthetic agency: We would be compelled to attend to beauty that is expressive of our selves. In fact, I claim, we have freedom to explore things that are not related to ourselves. Our aesthetic freedom is related to our freedom to change over time.

Margaret Little argues that, if all reasons exert a deontic force, then to be a good agent is to be one who acts only for the best reasons. But this, Little argues, is a thin picture of agency: to be a free agent seems to require the ability to act freely even in the face of optimizing reasons. Here we can distinguish actions that we perform out of a sense that we ought to act from our own self-conceptions, and actions we perform, unfettered by our past lives, driven by beauty. Picture a someone who is a fan because they love it—because they feel it is a free expression of who they are. Contrast this with the fan who attends the concert because they feel committed to the persona. Our practical identities do not force our aesthetic pursuits.

Consider a person who Alex King calls the *indifferent anaesthetic*: someone who recognizes what's beautiful but is not called to pursue it. Intuitively, there's nothing wrong with such a person (King 2018). If aesthetic reasons only entice and don't create demands, there's nothing incoherent with both recognizing an aesthetic reason and not feeling compelled to act upon it. King's point is that motivational internalism seems particularly implausible in the aesthetic realm. To my mind, this goes some way towards explaining the freedom of the aesthetic realm.

The core upshot of this normative structure, of course, is that aesthetic reasons are evaluative but not deontic—they live in the kind of logical space for which Dancy argues.

## 5. Objections

Someone who believes that rationality demands the optimal, like Lopes, may try to account for this kind of free choice. Joseph Raz attempts to do just this. Raz claims that we are able to exhibit free choice because many reasons are incommensurable; they stack up the same on the deontic scale, and we're free to choose among the remaining options. Should you listen to the Dixie Chicks, or Prince? They're both very good along incommensurable values (let's assume), so you're free to choose. On the view I am endorsing, aesthetics is a realm of agential freedom, which implies that you need not pick the best option, every time.

Distinguish this from some neighboring phenomena. For one thing, this is not evaluative freedom. Evaluative freedom is the freedom to decide what's best for yourself. If all reasons are peremptory or deontic but they were on a par with each other, you could still have evaluative freedom—and if so, then your ability to construct your own best options turns them into oughts that have force for you (Chang 2009, 2013). Instead, the view I endorse here is that it's permissible for you to knowingly choose what you think is *not* the best, even if you have the freedom to decide what's best for you. (And here I mean not just something that you are supposed to like but don't—I mean something that you know you would think is better.) For another thing, Raz-style freedom wrought by incommensurability is not free in the sense I am discussing here. All of these still make sure you must be an optimizing actor, always making the

best aesthetic choice. Absent enticing reasons, we are left with a view that we always ought to perform at our aesthetic best. This doesn't sound like freedom.

Another objection stems from the thought that there are different degrees of deontic force. Lopes considers the objection that these shoulds are not "serious" enough to really be shoulds or obligations. As Lopes says: "Morality has no lock on normativity, and not all normativity is heavy-duty normativity." (2018: 40)<sup>49</sup> "We wonder what we should do, even when there is no dilemma in sight, nothing serious at stake, and no impending guilt or shame." (2018: 40). But it is not so clear that Lopes can avoid this view. Similarly, John Broome argues against Dancy's picture of enticing reasons (2013: 60-61). Broome claims that you should do what your reasons say, even when it comes to aesthetic matters like eating mangosteens. But, Broome says, these shoulds are not obligations.

In reply, note that it's not clear how to back up the idea that not all reasons have the same strength. Reasons still have deontic force on this view. So one thing to say is that this view needs to more development. But, secondly, even allowing that some reasons have lesser deontic strength, it still challenges the idea that we have aesthetic freedom.

There are three more objections which stem from intuitive cases.

One thought is there are clear obligations in some realms of art. For example, it seems clear that, when performing a work of art, one ought to play the notes of the score—there is, in other words, some duty on behalf of the performer to the composer (Paul Thom, Aron Edidin). Elsewhere, I've argued extensively against taking these obligations seriously; throughout western fine-art music, performers frequently disregard notes of the score (Dyck 2014). If that is

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<sup>49</sup> In support of this claim Lopes cites Raz, Wedgewood, Thomson, Parfit, Wallace, and Scanlon

true, then it is less clear that these duties exist. However, there is still a conceptual problem that such a norm exists in many circles; how do we deal with *those*? I share with Guy Rohrbaugh (forthcoming) the view that this norm in performance is a constitutive element necessary for the practice (or at least a subset of the practice); it is not related to aesthetic value. These reasons seem artistic, not aesthetic. But notice anyway that this is not a central aesthetic obligation of appreciation, which is the case I focus on here.<sup>50</sup>

Another objection comes from the following case: Imagine someone for whom aesthetic value plays no role. They do not seek out beauty; they do not appreciate it when it comes around. It is not that this person is hostile to aesthetics, or that they are a crank. We can imagine that they live a very happy life, surrounded by good friends, and doing a great amount of good. There seems to be something intuitively wrong with such a person. And what is wrong seems to be that they do not live up to an aesthetic demand; it seems that everyone ought to appreciate *some* aesthetic value in their lives. And therefore, one might conclude, there is an aesthetic obligation to appreciate *some things*, at least *sometimes*.

While this might be some kind of aesthetic obligation, it is not an obligation in the sense I am concerned here. This only shows that we should make room in our lives for the aesthetic domain. It does not tell us how to fill that domain. This, I take it, is the central question about aesthetic obligation—at least, it is the question that has occupied the literature on aesthetic obligations. Even if we admit that these are aesthetic obligations, I emphasize that these are not the kinds of obligations that the literature has concerned itself with.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Thanks to Julian Dodd, Keren Gorodeisky, and Guy Rohrbaugh for helpful comments on this point.

<sup>51</sup> Thanks to Henry Pratt for discussion on this point.

The final objection comes from clear cases where we weigh moral reasons against aesthetic reasons. Consider a debate between installing more lights in a highway—for safety—or no lights—for beauty.<sup>52</sup> Here we have a debate between moral reasons and aesthetic reasons. People may very well choose not to install the lights because of aesthetic value. Yet, if aesthetic reasons are merely enticing, how could they ever stand up so compellingly to moral reasons? If I am right, then moral reasons and aesthetic reasons are not of a piece. And if they are not of a piece, then they cannot be compared against each other. Yet they are compared against each other. So (the objection goes) I am wrong.

In response, I allow that enticing reasons are often compared against deontic reasons. And I allow that enticing reasons often win out. Tonight, I am going to spend my money at the movies rather than at Oxfam. The fact that there are two different realms of reasons, with different normative profiles, does not imply that we cannot compare those reasons against one another.

Finally, someone may wonder whether this is even a theory of aesthetic normativity. According to some definitions of normativity, ‘normativity’ has to do only with the deontic. But my claim here is just that the aesthetic realm is not deontic. So, really, one may say, the theory I provide here is not a theory of aesthetic normativity; it is a theory that precludes any aesthetic normativity.

If one wants to define ‘normativity’ in an exclusively peremptory way, then my theory of aesthetic reasons is one that does not allow for normativity in this sense. However, it is not clear that it is not a theory of normativity; it is an eliminativist theory of normativity, which is a theory

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<sup>52</sup> Thanks to Derek Matravers for this example.

of normativity nonetheless. And, further, it is not clear that normativity needs to be defined in terms of peremptory or deontic reasons anyway.

## **6. Enticing Reasons and Agency**

What does any of this have to do with volitionalism? The goal in this chapter has been to establish a theory of aesthetic normativity according to which aesthetic reasons do not carry any normative force. If aesthetic reasons do not compel us from a normative perspective, we are free to choose which reasons to endorse. So the argument here serves to provide theoretical space for volitionalism, although it is still not an argument for volitionalism. Volitionalism is a theory of aesthetic value. This account of aesthetic reasons is not meant to serve as an account of aesthetic value, although it is meant to be the start of one. In the next section, I will argue for a two-stage account of aesthetic value.

This chapter works in tandem with chapter one in order to create a picture according to which we are free to pick what we like in the normative realm. The goal of Chapter One was to show that we have freedom from an internal perspectives; our own evaluations, from the inside, can be up to us. This shows that we have agency from the inside. The goal of this chapter, by contrast, is to provide a backing for the view that there is no normative requirement—no requirement of rationality, practical action, or morality—that we take particular aesthetic actions. This allows for room for agency from the outside. Free of demands, we can pursue whatever aesthetic projects we like.

One may argue that the accounts of Anthony Cross and Robbie Kubala, rooted in practical identities, allow us freedom with respect to our aesthetic obligations. By creating our practical identities, we create aesthetic obligations for ourselves. However, I stress that, while my account of aesthetic value will make room for importing elements of practical identities, an account of aesthetic obligation is implausible as rooted in our practical identities. It does not seem, as I said, that we make anything like commitments. And only commitments are strong enough to foist obligations upon us.

## 7. Conclusion

Kant thought that aesthetics involves a *sensus communis*, a common sense or understanding. Kant believed in this so strongly that he thought that what pleases us aesthetically pleases us necessarily—the common sense extends to all of humanity. For Kant, this is intimately related to our aesthetic response—it *demand*s agreement. And for Kant, this is where the normative force of aesthetics comes in. Although it seems plausible that there is a common sense that's important for aesthetics, it's not clear that this is a demand. Instead, it looks to be a kind of invitation.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> This paper was presented at a CUNY Workshop, the Canadian Philosophical Association 2018 meeting in Montreal, and at the American Society for Aesthetics National 2018 meeting in Toronto. I am grateful to audiences at those presentations for very insightful questions and comments. I'm grateful to Robbie Kubala and Ira Newman, who gave comments at those meetings. And I'm grateful to Anthony Cross, Alex King, Robbie Kubala, and Dominic McIver Lopes for detailed and helpful discussion on earlier versions of this paper.

## Chapter Three: The Personal Nature of Aesthetic Value

“But there isn’t actually a most beautiful person in the world, because there are so many kinds of beauty. Some people love roundness and softness, and other people love sharp edges and strong muscles. Some people like thick hair like a lion’s mane, and other people like thin hair that pours down like an inky waterfall, and some people love someone so much they forget what they look like. Some people think the night sky full of stars at midnight is the most beautiful thing imaginable, some people think it’s a forest in the snow, and some people... Well, there are a lot of people with a lot of ideas about beauty. And love. When you love someone a lot, they just look like love.”

Rebecca Solnit, *Cinderella Liberator*

### 1. Introduction

My goal in this chapter is to set the stage for the theory of aesthetic value that I will present in the next chapter. I present a structural basis for aesthetic value. I briefly argue for a commonly-accepted baseline view about aesthetic value: aesthetic value is response-based but object-sensitive. In other words, aesthetic value is based in human response to the actual properties of objects. Here I propose a two-stage view of aesthetic value. In the first stage, objects have reasons for aesthetic value, positive and negative. This is necessary but not sufficient for aesthetic value, however. Aesthetic value requires a response to those reasons; that response is the second stage. Exactly what form this takes is the subject of the next chapter.

In this chapter, I argue for three constraints on a theory of aesthetic value. I claim that aesthetic values are rooted in personal importance, and that personal importance is distinctive; it differs from person to person. This is the *personal condition* or the *nonconvergence condition*. I also argue that an adequate theory of aesthetic value should not merely justify the aesthetic value of objects, persons, and events; it should go further, explaining the motivational profile of

aesthetic value. This is the *motivational condition*. Finally, and in particular, a theory of aesthetic value should explain the unique motivational significance of authentic personal values; we should explain why people are especially motivated by their aesthetic loves. This is the *authenticity condition*.

I then consider traditional response-based theories of aesthetic value from Hutcheson and Hume. These theories are both (a) dispositional and (b) hedonist. According to these theories, value is a response that ideal or real agents are disposed to have. And aesthetic value is specifically a kind of value from pleasure. I argue that these traditional theories do not adequately meet any of the three constraints above.

Finally, I propose an alternative view about what kinds of responses constitute aesthetic value. Aesthetic value has its basis not upon beliefs that something is good or upon dispositions of valuing, but upon acts of valuing. I draw upon recent work on valuing to develop this claim.

Before I do any of that, however, I begin by clarifying what I take to be the relationship between aesthetic value and aesthetic experience more broadly. I argue that an account of aesthetic value ought to be distinct from an account of aesthetic experience.

## **2. Aesthetic value and aesthetic experience**

Aesthetic experiences may typically be experiences of value. When you watch a film, it's difficult not to be evaluating the film while you're watching it. Going out for drinks afterwards with friends, the first thing you ask is: "What did you think?" If you're more urbane, you might use a little tact—say, by starting with a witty comment comparing the movie to something else. What goes for conversation goes for criticism: As Noel Carroll (2008) has argued, the job of the

critic is a primarily evaluative job; the critic's goal is to give a thumbs-up or a thumbs-down about the work.

And yet, while aesthetic experiences are typically value-laden, an aesthetic experience is not necessarily or constitutively an experience of value. My experience of a symphony, for example, may not be an evaluation of the film. I may listen to a set at the Village Vanguard just to get a sense of the music. Indeed, this is how many critics approach new kinds of music. While their ultimate goal as critics is to evaluate works, this involves subsidiary aesthetic experiences which stave off an evaluation for the time being.

Some theories of aesthetic experience tie aesthetic experience to value; they provide an account of aesthetic experience which is constituted in part by an account of aesthetic value. According to the *evaluative* or the *axiological* approach to aesthetic experience, aesthetic experiences are “self-rewarding or valued for their own sake” (Carroll 2015: 172). This view is endorsed by Iseminger (2006). Carroll (2012: 165) cites a problem with this view, a problem initially raised by: Many aesthetic experiences are not primarily, or even at all, about valuing an experience for its own sake. The classic example here, owing to Dickie, is the music student. A music student may listen carefully to a symphony the night before a test; and they may listen with their attention structured exactly the way a music fanatic might listen. The music student is not attending to the music for its own sake; the music student is attending to the music for an instrumental reason: They want to do well on the test. Yet it seems entirely plausible that the structure of their attention looks exactly like that of a music fanatic.

Furthermore, as Carroll points out, this view seems to imply, wrongly, that “aesthetic experiences are always positive” (2012: 166). If the evaluative approach is correct, then any aesthetic experience is valued for its own sake, and therefore it is valued. But, as Carroll points

out, this is far from obvious. Many aesthetic experiences are of ugliness, tragedy, horror, or plain old bad art. The fact that these experiences are negative—or that the evaluation is negative—arguably does not make them any less aesthetic. Here we have a straightforward reason not to endorse a theory of aesthetic experience which comes with a built-in theory of aesthetic value

Another approach to aesthetic experience is the affective approach. According to this view, aesthetic experience is characterized by a certain kind of emotional state. Proponents of this view include Jesse Prinz, who argues that aesthetic experience is characteristically one of wonder.

The affective approach falls prey to the previous two objections. This view cannot explain Dickie's music student either; the student, let us suppose, is not having an experience of wonder, but clearly is having an aesthetic experience. Indeed, consider many music or art critics, for whom art is part and parcel of their everyday lives. A Thursday spent at Chelsea Galleries is like any other Thursday. While some art may spark a sense of wonder, presumably the experiences they have of ordinary art are also aesthetic experiences.

I follow Carroll here in advocating for a *content-based approach* to aesthetic experience. Aesthetic experiences are characterized by a certain kind of content of the experience. In artworks, this means the content of the work of art. This approach allows for many different kinds of reactions to aesthetic experience. This approach includes “formal properties, expressive properties, and aesthetic properties” (171). And yet, I do not think that my account of aesthetic value here relies on any particular theory of aesthetic experience. So if the reader is skeptical of this particular approach to aesthetic experience, this should present no obstacle to my view of aesthetic value.

For all this, I will advocate an account of aesthetic value which is closely tied to experiences of aesthetic value. I have insisted above that an account of aesthetic experience need not imply any account of aesthetic value per se; a theory of aesthetic experience can be distinct from a theory of aesthetic value, because aesthetic experience is not constitutively value-laden. However, this is not to say that a proper theory of aesthetic value will be untethered from experience; a theory of aesthetic value should be beholden to our experience of aesthetic value in particular. In fact, in both this chapter and the next, I appeal to experiences of aesthetic value.

### **3. Aesthetic reasons and aesthetic value**

One approach to aesthetic value holds that aesthetic value is mind-independent. Let us call this approach the objectivist or object-based view of aesthetic value. According to an object-based model, aesthetic value exists whether or not humans do; it is a natural property of the world. This view has been defended by Zemach (1996).

The objectivist model gets something importantly right. As I suggested in the last two chapters, it aligns closely with realism about aesthetic reasons, a framework for thinking about aesthetic reasons that I have advocated in the past two chapters. Aesthetic reasons present objective properties, and some of these properties have objectively good and bad valences. Consider, for example, that artistic originality is typically an aesthetic virtue. The fact that X presented a radical departure is a reason to positively evaluate it. Or, drawing upon the first chapter, consider that we often evaluate an artwork by evaluating several of its component parts, and it is often clear the value that these component parts have. For example, it might be clear that the acting is good, or the cinematography is good. This is especially true of aesthetic properties

which are properly perceived only in the context of certain art-historical contexts and creators' intentions. I suggest that at least some aesthetic reasons are objective properties of objects. This is especially true for the aesthetic value of artistic properties. The fact that Florence Foster Jenkins was unable to sing on key, in the context of midcentury chamber song, is a reason that her performance was bad. Following Ruth Chang, I will call these reasons *given* reasons. I am silent here on whether these reasons are internalist or externalist.

Whatever aesthetic reasons are, however, they are not enough for aesthetic value. It seems clear that aesthetic value depends in some way upon our sensibilities. Recall the argument in chapter 2 that aesthetic reasons within a work are not decisive. The acting can be good, the directing bad. But notice that, in fact, this is exactly the situation we find ourselves in in many aesthetic and artistic disagreements. Sometimes we disagree about the valence of particular properties. More often, however, we disagree about the way we weigh these properties.

Either way, the basis for the resistance to an object-based theory of aesthetic value seems to be a thought that aesthetic value depends upon human response. I assume that aesthetic value involves some kind of response, even if aesthetic reasons do not. Whether or not aesthetic reasons are mind-dependent, they are not enough for aesthetic value. Another way to put this is that aesthetic value is, at least partly, based on or constituted by some aesthetic evaluation, whether real or ideal. To repeat the last section: It seems clear that an adequate account of aesthetic value should be based upon human evaluation. In a world without beings to value things, there would be no beauty.

So, then, the proper account of aesthetic value seems to be a response-based view. But what kind of response-based view should we adopt? My goal in this chapter is to take some steps towards answering that question.

#### 4. Three Constraints on Aesthetic Value

I argue here for three constraints on aesthetic value. These constraints are required by the volitionalist theory of aesthetic value, but they are not sufficient for it. Still, these constraints are vital for the overall argument of this dissertation. In this chapter, I introduce and motivate these three constraints. I argue that traditional hedonic theories of aesthetic value cannot accommodate them. In the next chapter, I show that the volitionalist account succeeds where traditional views fail, since it can account for these constraints. The overarching argument, running in this chapter and the next, is an abductive argument for the volitionalist view.

I will argue here that an adequate theory of aesthetic value should explain a different set of facts than it has traditionally been called upon to explain. I begin with the thought that aesthetic value should be analyzed for its importance to us. This is significant with respect to the paradigmatic cases that a theory of aesthetic value should explain: They suggest that paradigmatic cases of aesthetic value should be cases of personal importance. Yet traditional theories of aesthetic value take masterworks as their paradigms. Second, I will argue that a theory of aesthetic value should explain aesthetic motivation. This much is increasingly accepted (see, for example, Levinson 2010; Riggle 2014; Lopes 2017). Finally, I will argue, art motivates us in ways that speak to our aesthetic authentic personalities. A theory of aesthetic value should explain the personal nature of our aesthetic loves. Aesthetic values, in other words, are personal. These three ideas intersect closely, but they suggest an unorthodox picture of aesthetic value. I argue that traditional, idealist response-based theories cannot accommodate these conditions.

I then argue that a theory of value should be based in activities of valuing. I call this view the valuing-first model of value. This suggests a theory of aesthetic value that is response-based (in a loose sense of ‘response’) but not idealist. A valuing-first model of aesthetic value, I argue, preserves these three core insights.

#### **4.1 An account of aesthetic value should explain distinctive personal values**

In his famous article “The Importance of What We Care About,” Harry Frankfurt argues that there are three important domains of philosophical inquiry. He begins by discussing the first two: The first, epistemology, tries to answer the question of what we should believe. The second, ethics, tries to answer the question of how we should behave. The third, Frankfurt argues, pertains to what we should care about. Frankfurt writes that this final branch, like ethics, concerns how we should act. Frankfurt explains this similarity, but goes on to isolate an important difference between how we should behave and what we care about:

There is naturally an intimate connection between what a person cares about and what he will, generally or under certain conditions, think it best for himself to do. But while the third branch of inquiry therefore resembles ethics in its concern with the problems of evaluation and of action, it differs significantly from ethics in its generative concepts and in its motivating concerns. Ethics focusses on the problem of ordering our relations with *other people*. It is concerned especially with the contrast between *right* and *wrong*, and with the grounds and limits of *moral obligation*. We are led into the third branch of inquiry, on the other hand, because we are interested in deciding what to do with *ourselves* and because we therefore need to understand what is *important* or, rather, what is *important to us*. (1982: 257)

Frankfurt claims that the question of what to care about is fundamentally a question of what is important to us.

My suggestion here is that aesthetics falls into this third category. Beauty and art are important to us not primarily because of what they teach us, although they may teach us things. Nor are beauty and art important to us primarily because of how they help us order our relations with other people, although they may help us help others. It seems clear that the importance of aesthetics has to do with its status as something we care about—as something that is important to us, independently of such benefits. Susan Wolf has argued that art and beauty, along with philosophy, are “good for nothing” (2010): “many academic works and many works of art are such that if they had never been produced no one would be worse off” (2010: 48); yet, despite the fact that they are not instrumentally good, they are still valuable to us. When we think of our aesthetic lives, we primarily think in terms of what is important to us. And this suggests in turn that the question of aesthetic value in particular is a question about what matters to us; aesthetic value is a question of what we care about. This is a Frankfurtian starting point for aesthetic value.

So far, this is all consistent with ways that philosophers have talked about aesthetic value. It is easy to construe traditional theories of aesthetic value as being consistent with the view that aesthetic value is something we care about. But consider now the ways that aesthetic theories have structured the answer to this question: The question is about what *we* care about—together. The traditional approach of aesthetic value aims at convergence; the goal is to answer a question of which artworks are good and which are bad. Consider, for example, Hume’s approach to questions of artistic value. In stating his antinomy of taste, Hume takes it as a crucial datum that there are clearly good works of art, masterworks: works that have withstood the test of time. These works are taken to be benchmarks of artistic value. Likewise, Hutcheson begins his essay

on aesthetics by considering obvious cases of beauty; cases where Hutcheson takes there to be obvious agreement. Both of these cases begin with putatively universal cases of beauty.

The traditional approach aims to account for *convergence*—for commonly-found aesthetic and artistic greatness. On this view, aesthetic value should primarily be conceived of as something of universal appeal. The reason masterworks are called upon to serve an important methodological role is that they seem to be reliable indicators of commonly-accepted value (across time—and hopefully across cultures, too). We might even call it *the universal approach*. This is the approach taken by Hume, Hutcheson, and Kant, and many other general theories of aesthetic value. It is possible for these approaches to be consistent with Frankfurtian starting point for a theory of aesthetic value; they can certainly account for aesthetics as important to us. But they will think of it as something that is important to us, *collectively*—as a group, as a culture, as a species.

But there is another way to approach the question of what we care about—a way more in line with how Frankfurt understands what we care about. We might also think of our aesthetic lives as being filled with things that we care about as individuals, the way that Frankfurt describes them. We might approach aesthetic value, then, in terms of what is important to us personally, in terms of what we love individually. The aesthetic parts of our lives are some of the intimate and important parts of our lives. Call this approach *the personal approach*.

The crucial element here is that the personal approach will not necessarily yield convergence, since what is important to us will not be held in common. The personal approach changes what we take to be our paradigmatic cases of aesthetic value. Riggle calls these kinds of things our aesthetic loves. This is what Levinson calls having a distinctive aesthetic personality (Levinson 2010: 230).

Consider, for example, the ways in which we construct our tastes and styles: We take on certain things as important to us. Some of us will shop at Hot Topic, others will shop at Costco, still others at Macy's. Consider which movies we take to be the most important to ourselves. There's a lot of divergence. And we think carefully about which movies fit us best, which speak to us most. The clear answers to this question will not converge. More importantly, however, they will start from our aesthetic loves, not merely our likes. We like a lot of the same things, but I doubt we love a lot of the same things. As an answer to the question of what we care about aesthetically, the personal approach reaches deeper. The personal approach, then, will yield *nonconvergence*. This is not a necessary truth about a personal approach; we can imagine a world in which, in fact, we all had the same aesthetic loves. Certainly we love some of the same things, but our own aesthetic lives differ wildly from person to person.

Why should we take the personal approach to be important for aesthetic value? My main argument here is blunt: An account of aesthetic value should capture our experience of aesthetic value. Our experience of aesthetic value is primarily as something that matters to us in the way Frankfurt specifies above. But the way in which it matters is not primarily in a shared way, but in an individual way. This is true of how experiences of aesthetic value present themselves: The most valuable things to us, aesthetically, are often distinctive. This is also true of the importance with which aesthetic objects present themselves to us. It is very rare that masterworks are the most important aesthetic objects to us. And even if they are, we rarely find the same personal importance from the same masterworks.

Why have early modern philosophers taken the universal approach to aesthetic value? One reason starts with an epistemic dimension: convergence shows which objects are most likely of greatest aesthetic value. But what is the point of identifying and isolating objects with primary

aesthetic virtues? Once we have a set of objects that have great aesthetic value, we can ask what properties (intrinsic or relational) they have in common. Presumably, the properties they share will be an indicator of aesthetically valuable properties. This approach, then, is aimed at convergence for the goal of isolating some properties in common. Clearly, the answer is that aesthetic value is realized in objects which will be shared. Notice, though, that this seems to be an implicitly generalist strategy: Convergence plays an important role because it helps to pinpoint the properties or principles that make artworks have maximal possible value.

The overriding motivation for taking the universal approach, I believe, is an anxiety about objectivity in aesthetic value. The assumption of these early modern authors is that, in order for aesthetic value to be objective and real, it must be universal; there must be convergence about objects of aesthetic value. According to Hutcheson, our capacity for perceiving beauty is a faculty for apprehending a certain kind of ratio of unity-in-variety. In later chapters of his aesthetic treatise, Hutcheson has more to say about how enculturation can be a necessary condition for perceiving some kinds of beauty—but also how biases, both personal and cultural, can lead one astray. The more universal one's objects of aesthetic pleasure are, the more comfort one can take that one is getting things right.

As I mentioned, Hume begins his “On the Standard of Taste” by claiming that the benchmarks for aesthetic value *just are* masterworks—works that have stood the test of time. Hume begins his antinomy of taste with the initial reflection that everyone seems to have their own taste. However, the counterbalance to that reflection—what creates the antinomy of taste—is that there are clear standards of taste. Masterworks are central to Hume's methodology in establishing standards of taste. They are central to Hume's epistemology of artistic value.

The personal approach may not be maligned, but it has been minimized. One illustrative way to see this is through Ted Cohen's essay on high and low art. Cohen argues for a revisionary take on the distinction between high and low art: The difference between them, Cohen argues, amounts to a difference about whether art's value is universal or personal. Low art, Cohen claims, has to do with our own individual loves—artworks that we do not demand everyone share an appreciation for: *LAPD Blue*, *Happy Days*, *Doonsbury*, and Justin Bieber. We know that our love of low art is idiosyncratic. High art, claims Cohen, is art that we think that everyone should love: Mozart, the Chrysler Building, Shakespeare, Miles Davis. High art is art that we think ought to be prized universally. Of course, Cohen's point here is to provide a revisionary definition of high and low art; it is not to provide an account to aesthetic or artistic value. And Cohen does not explicitly connect this to the view that real artistic value should be thought of as coming from universal appealing art, not from personally appealing art. But the line is clear: High art strikes us as having necessary appeal, whereas the appeal of low art strikes us as being contingent.

Cohen's thought here tracks the main problem people have had with personally appealing art: personal appeals must somehow be rendered together with the particularities of one's own life—that one may be confusing. Hutcheson, Hume, and Kant are all clear that a proper judgement of taste must not be susceptible to any prejudices. Indeed, the notion of disinterest has traditionally been meant to keep exactly this notion at bay. This can also be found in the arguments above. The assumption is that our personal favorites must be infected by facts about our practical identities, personal histories, and so forth. For this reason, they are not tracking pure aesthetic qualities; they are infected by extra-aesthetic value.

To be clear, the worry here is that, if we allow personal values to infect aesthetic value, then aesthetic value is at the whims of the personal and particular contingencies of individuals. Let us call this worry *the associationist worry*, since the worry is that we do not want to construct a theory of aesthetic value that relies upon trivial associations that people make between personal details about aesthetic value. This worry is connected to the idea that our judgments are not in fact aesthetic at all; they are based upon practical concerns or idiosyncratic emotional valences with certain objects. Riggle 2015: 442: “The meaningful attachments we form with aesthetic objects arguably reflect broader non-aesthetic concerns of ours—our values, ideals, personalities, histories, cultures, or projects.”

One response to the associationist is to hold that aesthetic value *just is* rooted in any kind of connection. Some people have interpreted James Cutting’s (2003) work to show that aesthetic value may be merely a function of mere exposure. I am skeptical of this kind of response; as I have said, I think that a theory of aesthetic value ought to be rooted in real properties and reasons, not in extra-aesthetic preference.

There are two points I have in response to the associationist worry. First, consider the claim that these associations are illicit because they are extra-aesthetic. Notice that this response requires a strict autonomism about the aesthetic realm—it requires aesthetic properties to be divorced from other kinds of properties. This is an extreme view. Here I will appeal to two distinct arguments from Noel Carroll against an autonomist view. First, consider Noel Carroll’s (1996) argument for moderate moralism, the view that artistic value/properties sometimes depend upon moral properties. Some films require us to take certain moral attitudes towards characters or situations; they require the right kind of moral uptake. In a slightly different vein, but more appropriate for the current discussion, notice that many artworks require certain

practical identities of their audiences. Country music often calls upon its audience to think of themselves as working-class. Bruce Springsteen songs require us to think about labor in a certain kind of way. Rap songs also require a certain understanding of justice. In these cases, having a practical identity of a certain sort can enhance, not detract, one's proper appreciation of an artwork. Second, Daniel Kaufman (2002, 2003) has argued that artistic value is a matter of how well an artwork fulfills its intended functions; and many of these functions are given by genres. Comedies are supposed to make us laugh; horror movies are supposed to scare us in particular ways. Noel Carroll (2008) approvingly cites this view of artistic value. But how, Carroll asks, do we assess the value of an artistic function in the first place? Carroll suggests that we assess functions for the role they play in a culture at large. On this view of artistic evaluation, assessing a work of art requires assessing culture at large. What goes for artistic evaluation here seems to go for aesthetic evaluation, at least some of the time. Appreciating something's aesthetic value often requires knowing not only how it serves its function, but the value of that function in a culture at large.

But a second point is easy to miss. Notice that our personal preferences are often rooted in *aesthetic* differences, not practical differences. Some of these may arise because of certain dispositions or sensibilities. A sensitive soul, I prefer Paul Simon to Korn. Our aesthetic preferences are not due simply to associations. The associationist worry assumes that any difference between individuals will be due to an extra-aesthetic difference. But there is no reason to think that is the case. Differences between individuals may be aesthetic rather than practical. We may think of this as an individualist challenge to the universalist approach. Why think that all people will prefer the same things in the first place? The universalist has to appeal to a claim

that humans are all alike in important aesthetic respects (or that they all ought to be alike), but it is far from clear that such a claim is true.

There are other worries about the universalist approach. One is that the universalist approach, as Hume takes it, starts by considering masterworks. The problem here is that our assessment of masterworks is frequently infected by social influences. This worry is epistemic: It does not deny that there are masterworks, it just denies that it is too difficult to identify such masterworks, since we frequently confuse aesthetic properties for power relations, given social, racial, gender, and class inequality (e.g. Bourdieu 1986, Hein 1990, Taylor 1999).

There is another worry, particularly fitting for the present discussion. If we take the universal approach, we cannot make sense of aesthetic values as *things we care about* in Frankfurt's sense. Very few of us spend the most time with masterworks. This doesn't capture what's important about Frankfurt's claim, and it doesn't capture what's important about why art is so important to so much of us personally.

This isn't to suggest that a shared sensibility is irrelevant to aesthetics, or that art's importance has nothing to do with a shared sensibility. On the contrary, sharing parts of our sensibilities is a great part of aesthetic joy. But it is not the only part of our personal lives. When we start to get convergence, it's because we become more similar anyway.

So far I have discussed a theoretical motivation for convergence, and therefore for universalist theories: These theories provide us with a normative foundation for some sort of realistic aesthetic value. I have proposed that we might instead begin with the demand that we understand aesthetic value as something that is important for us.

But there is another kind of motivation for accepting the convergence required for universalism about aesthetic value: Some aestheticians, most notably Kant (1796), has claimed that aesthetic judgment has a universalist phenomenology. Part of making a judgment of taste, according to Kant, is that it demands agreement from everyone constituted the way I am. Of course, this is just a claim about the phenomenology of aesthetic value. From the fact that aesthetic evaluation presents itself as universalistic, it doesn't follow that aesthetic value itself is universalistic. But recall Kant's transcendental methodology: The fact that judgments of taste reveal themselves as such means that, in order for them to be satisfied, they must meet with universal agreement.

But it's not clear that aesthetic phenomenology in fact has this kind of universalist character. Nehamas asks us to consider this world of convergence in detail; consider a world where everybody liked the same things. This world, Nehamas claims, would be a nightmare. As Nehamas says:

“If aesthetic judgment makes a claim to universal agreement, then, ideally, everyone would accept every correct judgment: in a perfect world, we would all find beauty in the very same places.

But that dream is a nightmare. ... Imagine, if you can, a world where everyone likes, or loves, the same things, where every disagreement about beauty can be resolved. That would be a desolate, desperate world.” (2007: 83)

Nehamas is claiming that, for from universal agreement being a precondition of aesthetic judgment, aesthetic judgment is horrific from the point of view of an aesthetic judgments; it is something we resist when making an aesthetic judgment. Ted Cohen briefly says something similar: “A world in which you and I never connected would be a horror. And so would a world in which we were exactly the same, and therefore connected unfailingly, with every object on every occasion.” (1993: 156)

The point of this line of argument is that aesthetic value discloses itself as something that ought to be individual. While there may be some convergence, complete convergence would be terrible. So, theories of aesthetic value are wrong to begin by taking complete convergence as a desideratum.

Replying to Nehamas, Nick Riggle argues that this world is not in fact a nightmare.

Riggle writes:

“normally, it is exciting when one meets someone who likes or loves artworks that one likes or loves. For all I know, in every city in the world there is someone who has an aesthetic sensibility nearly identical to mine. That does not bother me in the slightest. What difference does it make if there are two or two thousand such people? And if there is a difference, then where is the line to be drawn?” (2015: 437)

Riggle goes on to argue that Nehamas’ scenario is ambiguous between two situations. In one situation, everyone genuinely loves the exact same things. In another situation, people only *pretend* to like the same things; people, in this second scenario, are posers. Riggle argues that the second scenario is bad, but poses no real argument for aesthetic uniqueness. He argues that the first scenario is not bad the way that Nehamas thinks it is bad. I agree with Riggle that the second scenario is not a problem, but it seems clear that Nehamas means to describe Riggle’s first scenario: A world where everyone likes the same things.

So who is right, Nehamas or Riggle? Is a scenario of complete convergence a nightmare? Riggle is certainly correct that we like to meet someone who loves the same artwork that we do. But notice that the claim Nehamas makes is not mere agreement about some artworks. In Nehamas’s situation, there is agreement across an entire aesthetic profile. Consider Nehamas’s situation now, even for two people. At first, you find out that you both like films by Jim Jarmusch and Kelly Reichart; you both dislike Wes Anderson films and Marvel movies... or,

almost all Marvel movies. Suppose you find out that you both find that *Venom* is the rare exception of a good Marvel movie. Slowly, you realize that you and this person share an exact aesthetic preference profile not just about film, but about music, visual art. You have the exact same tastes in food. You share the exact same judgments about human beauty, cities, architecture... The situation starts to sound spooky! Finding a couple of shared judgments is fine, but finding even one person who is exactly like you, in all respects, would be strange. The point here is that Riggles is right that some aesthetic agreement between two people is often welcome. But it is not strong enough to cast doubt on Nehamas's thought experiment: agreement across a whole aesthetic profile would be very strange. And here, in fact, we can see the strength of Nehamas's claim. Agreement across a whole aesthetic profile, even between two people, would be weird. Imagine if there was agreement with everyone!

And anyway, notice that, applied as a response to Kant, Nehamas does not need the claim that universal agreement is a nightmare; he needs only the claim that, normally, aesthetic judgments do not demand such convergence. This is a much lower bar than the one Nehamas provides.

However, Riggles still raises an important question. Nehamas paints a scenario of aesthetic uniqueness, but doesn't explain what's wrong with it. So, what's the problem? Put more aggressively, the challenge could be put as follows: If aesthetic uniqueness is a core part of our identity, then what we like depends upon those around us. And if that is true, then it is not purely based upon aesthetic considerations.

Here again the points from above can be re-applied. For one thing, I resist the notion that the aesthetic realm is autonomous, cut off from other domains of life. But even the autonomist can agree that aesthetic autonomism does not imply a need for universal convergence. It is

simply false that, if something is due to personal considerations, it is extra-aesthetic, or not aesthetic. Instead, it is perfectly plausible that we have distinct aesthetic sensibilities or characters, where the difference between these characters is not necessarily due to any aesthetic difference.

Of course, traditional, universal approaches can explain personal distinctiveness in a way. They explain personal distinctiveness as the vagaries of life playing a role in disturbing what should be ideal human response. My point here is not merely that an adequate theory of aesthetic value should have some explanation for personal distinctiveness; it is that an adequate theory of aesthetic value should reflect the importance of personal values. Since the importance of distinctive values looms large in our own experience, and since a proper theory of aesthetic value should be based upon our own experience of aesthetic value, a proper theory of aesthetic value should explain the importance of personal values.

My goal here has just been to argue that an adequate theory of aesthetic value should take a personal rather than universal approach. Later on, I will spell out the traditional Humean theory in more detail, focusing on its ideal and hedonic aspects. Some of these criticisms will reappear, but I want to note that Hume's starting point—the demand for convergence—can be distinguished, at least in principle, from the ideal and hedonic aspects of his theory.

#### **4.2 An account of aesthetic value should explain aesthetic motivation**

Theories of aesthetic value have tended to focus on a justificatory aim: They aim to justify the aesthetic value of objects. This is true of hedonic approaches, dispositional approaches, etc. The

goal of these theories has been to show under what conditions some object is worthy of attention or appreciation.

From a philosophical standpoint, it might seem natural to take a justificatory approach. But when we look at a theory of aesthetic value in more closely, this approach seems less natural.

Consider a practical or motivational question about the aesthetic realm: What should I do? What should I attend to or appreciate? What should I spend my hard-earned money in? Should I invest my time in planting a flower garden, or finally watching Antonioni films? Notice that a justificatory approach does not answer this question; these things are all fully justified. In fact, there are thousands of aesthetic actions that are justified.

Imagine that one looked to these traditional theories of aesthetic value for advice on what to do. Traditional theories of aesthetic value, by providing only a justification of aesthetic value, treat us as though we live in an aesthetic world of scarcity, seeking anything that might be beautiful, and making certain that it is in fact beautiful. The justificatory approach treats aesthetic value as though it were extremely rare. Furthermore, the justificatory approach treats beauty as though the stakes were extremely high—as though skepticism about aesthetic properties were the proper starting point for a theory of aesthetic value.

There may be justifications for both of these implications, but at least on first glance, both implications seem false. We do not live in a world of aesthetic scarcity, seeking beauty in the few places where it may be found. It seems obvious that we live in a world filled with beauty—natural beauty, human beauty, artistic beauty and creative beauty.

Another approach to aesthetic value is to start by asking the motivational question: What should I pursue? Faced with this question, we do not need any justifications, since beauty is all around us. Instead, the question now becomes: Why should I pursue the things I do? Indeed, the justificatory answer is a useless answer to such a question. It is not enough to say why things are good, or even great; there are plenty of good and great things around. Plenty of good options abound.

Indeed, the motivational question promises much more interesting and rich answers about aesthetic value: Why do we value the things that we do? If the motivational question serves as our guide to aesthetic value, our answer to the question of aesthetic value will be that much more informative and fulfilling. In other words, an account of aesthetic value that answers the motivational question will be capable of more explanatory work than an account of aesthetic value that answers merely the justificatory question.

In response, someone may claim that, by demanding that a theory of aesthetic value answer the motivational question, I am endorsing a form of aesthetic motivational internalism. Let's back up for a moment and review the notions of internalism and externalism from moral psychology and meta-ethics. The motivational internalist holds that a moral (or aesthetic) judgment that one ought to act in some way is necessarily motivating. When I judge that I ought to save the drowning child, I'm necessarily motivated to save the drowning child. The motivational externalist, by contrast, holds that one may make a moral judgment and yet not be motivated to act upon it. So, the objection goes, I am assuming the truth of aesthetic motivational internalism. And, since aesthetic motivational internalism is wrong, a theory of aesthetic value should not be responsible to explain aesthetic motivation.

The problem with this objection is that I do not assume the truth of motivational internalism here. There is no need for a theory of aesthetic value to come fully loaded with an account of aesthetic motivation. I am not claiming that all aesthetic judgments are necessarily motivating. I am merely claiming that an account of aesthetic value which explains aesthetic motivation ought to be preferred, all else being equal, to an account of aesthetic value which does not explain aesthetic motivation.

Understood as such, then, I take this claim to be relatively uncontroversial. And indeed, as I will argue below, it does not eliminate very many options in terms of aesthetic value alone. Many standard theories of aesthetic value can explain aesthetic motivation. The question is whether they can do so adequately.

Before I move on to the third condition, I want to briefly note one point about aesthetic motivation.

Notice that, given the preceding discussion, the aesthetic case will not be similar to the typical moral case. I do not mean to take a stand on the question of internalism here. But notice that the plausibility of motivational internalism for some case depends strongly on the normative profile of the content of that judgment. Internalism is much more plausible for obligatory action, or duty, than it is for supererogatory action. It is certainly not plausible for merely permissible action. Regarding merely permissible action, this view would say that, if you judge that phi is permitted, then you are motivated to phi. But of course this is not the case.

So we can see that the internal motivation may be affected by a judgment's *normative profile*. If a judgement regards mere permissibility, we should not expect internal motivation. If a judgement regards obligation, perhaps there is internal motivation. But remember a point made

in the last chapter: Aesthetic reasons are merely enticing, and never have a deontic profile.

Aesthetic reasons, I argued, do not compel. But ordinarily—at least in the kinds of cases that are usually discussed in the literature on moral motivation—moral obligations do compel us. When discussing moral obligations, moral philosophers typically discuss moral actions that compel us.

The point here is simply that, given the conclusion of the last chapter, we need to think carefully before articulating exactly what aesthetic motivational internalism would look like. I do not mean to suggest that aesthetic motivational internalism is necessarily false. Perhaps we could still have necessary aesthetic motivation to act when we perceive that some action would yield aesthetic goods—it seems possible that motivation can occur without a demand. Instead, the point is just that we do not need to answer the question about whether aesthetic judgments are necessarily motivating in order to want a theory of aesthetic value to be able to explain aesthetic motivation.<sup>54</sup> A theory of aesthetic value is better when it can explain aesthetic motivation here, whether or not it is internalist.

### **4.3 An account of aesthetic value should explain the unique motivational profile of aesthetic authenticity**

I argued above that a theory of aesthetic value should take as benchmarks of aesthetic value not (merely) universal goods, but also personal goods. It should explain the aesthetic value not just of masterworks but also what is distinctive of our individual lives. Furthermore, I argued that a theory of aesthetic value should explain our motivation. This final constraint unites the two, with a small modification. The idea here is that an adequate theory of aesthetic value should explain

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<sup>54</sup> For more on aesthetic motivational internalism and externalism, see Archer (2018) and King (2018) respectively.

that some of our personal aesthetic values ought to be (or are) *authentic* to ourselves. Very minimally, the aesthetic values that motivate someone are the ones that are authentic to their self. I will have much more to say about how one's aesthetic pursuits should express one's self. This builds slightly upon the first constraint above. Not only are our aesthetic lives distinct, they are distinct in the things that really speak to us.

The motivation for this comes from taking Frankfurt's seriously that aesthetics is important because of our personal attachments. The first constraint on a theory of aesthetic value was that it should explain the *distinctiveness* of these personal attachments (Levinson 2010). This condition, by contrast, has to do with the *authenticity* of personal aesthetic attachments (Levinson 2010: 230). I may have several distinctive aesthetic attachments, but only some of them are authentic. Only some of them seem to express my own aesthetic sensibility—a sensibility that is properly expressive of and responsive to my character.

To see what it means to be authentic to one's self, let me build up levels of aesthetic authenticity. Let's start with a negative condition, that one should not be motivated by things that one does not like. This means, minimally, that one should not be a poser; one should not pretend to like things that one knowingly dislikes. This is a minimal condition on authenticity. Secondly, we may try out several kinds of authenticity. One may go through a grunge phase, a punk phase, a street clothes phase, before one determines which of these are most expressive of one's true self.

But neither of these get to the core case of authenticity, which occurs when we form meaningful personal attachments with objects. Both Cross and Kubala discuss cases of commitments to aesthetic objects, and both state that the commitment must come from one's practical identity. My claim is not that one is committed to attend to things that are authentic to

one's aesthetic self. Instead, my claim is that one is motivated to attend to things that are authentic to one's aesthetic self. Any adequate of aesthetic value should explain how aesthetic objects that we prize the most have a special motivational force.

What does it mean for an account of aesthetic value to explain aesthetic authenticity? Minimally, an account of aesthetic value should allow for the possibility of aesthetic authenticity—that is, it should allow for meaningful attachments we form to objects that are expressive of our aesthetic characters. More fully, an account of aesthetic value should explain how things have aesthetic importance for us based upon our real selves.

In the next section, I will mount a stronger challenge from authenticity. This challenge will come from the sources of authenticity: I argue that evaluation ought to properly come from our selves, which implies a kind of volitional attitude. For now, however, my goal is just to show that much of what is most important to us in art and beauty, whether positively or negatively, pertains to judgments which are authentic to our selves.

What is so hard about this constraint? One might think that it is very easy for an account of aesthetic value to explain why we are motivated to love the things that speak to our authentic selves. Levinson, for example, seems to take this approach. In the next section, I will show that it is not so easy after all.

#### **4.4 The Personal Importance Challenge**

In this section, I have argued that a proper theory of aesthetic value should meet three underappreciated constraints. A theory of aesthetic value should explain aesthetic motivation. It should also explain personal authentic values—personally authentic and personally distinctive.

Let us all these three constraints ‘the personal importance challenge’. The personal importance challenge is distinctive because it does not demand that aesthetic value is realized in the same kinds of objective properties. Instead, it allows that different objects may have different aesthetic value for different people. Instead of finding a shared property of objects, the goal instead is to search for a shared relation between people and objects. Of course, all of these constraints are closely intertwined. My goal has not been to show that they come apart, only to distinguish three important elements.

In the next section, I will consider standard response-based theories of aesthetic value. I will argue that these theories cannot explain the personal importance challenge.

## **5. Traditional response-based theories of aesthetic value**

For the past few hundred years, philosophers have more or less agreed upon a standard story about aesthetic value. While their views may diverge significantly, standard philosophical theories have shared a response-based view of aesthetic value: Whatever else it might be, aesthetic value is rooted in human response. On this view, aesthetic value is either a property of human response (ideal or actual), or it is a property that depends on human response. Different versions of these standard theories appeal to different kinds of responses. Figures such as Kant, Hume, Hutcheson, and Burke have variously invoked responses of sentiment, pleasure, reason, or perception. And indeed, a response-based view undergirds contemporary hedonic theories of aesthetic value. Since they appeal to responses, I will call these theories *response-dependent theories*. Response-dependent theories belong to a family of views that I will call *subjectivist*. Subjectivists all share the view that aesthetic value is a feature either of individuals, or that

depends on features of individuals, rather than on features of objects themselves. Most subjectivist theories are somewhat sophisticated in that they are not committed to all-out relativism; they attempt to show that aesthetic response is intersubjective, so that aesthetics is not totally individualist.

Not all theories of aesthetic value are subjectivist. According to *object-based* theories of aesthetic value, aesthetic value is a real property of objects—objects have their aesthetic values independent of any subjects' responses to those objects. Certainly object-based views, and arguments for them, enjoy some support (see Beardsley, Shelley 2010 and Zemach 1997).<sup>55</sup> But subjectivist theories, and therefore response-based theories, are still the main game in town.

There are probably many reasons why response-based theories enjoy such popularity. I believe that one reason for the popularity of response-based theory is that it is implied by two very natural assumptions. The first assumption is that *object-based theories are false*—or, conversely, that subject-based theories must be true. (What could aesthetic responses be if not based upon actual human responses? Imagine that the universe contains a single, lonely object; that object could not have aesthetic value.) The second assumption, reiterated earlier in this chapter, is that *response-based theories are the only alternative to object-based theories*—or, conversely, that response-based theories are the only plausible versions of subjectivism.) How else could humans ground aesthetic value, if not by our responses? Since object-based theories are wrong, some form of response-based theory must be right. Yet the great virtue of these views is that they provide for some kind of

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<sup>55</sup> Shelley claims that Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and Reid also held an object-based view of aesthetic value.

I will argue that prominent response-based theories are false. I start by laying out familiar response-based theories: Humean and Hutchesonian theories.

### 5.1 Hume's view

Here, I will read Hume's view to be composed of two stages, in the most orthodox interpretation.

The first stage consists of a picture about aesthetic experience. According to Hume, an aesthetic experience occurs when one perceives an object, and thereupon has an affective response of approbation, in the case of beauty (and disapprobation in the case of ugliness—here I will focus on beauty). Aesthetic experiences are all instances of these feelings of approbation (or disapprobation). So, this first stage has at least two parts. The first part is perceptual: We have a perception of an aesthetic or artistic object. The second stage is affective: we have a reaction of *approbation* in response to the perception. According to Hume, this elicitation is automatic.<sup>56</sup>

A natural question arises: How do we sort out disagreement regarding aesthetic value? Why is there divergent taste? At this point it looks as though Hume's account makes every response equally normatively valid. Either we never have aesthetic disagreements; or, if there are disagreements, then no one is wrong. And both options seem false. Hume is aware of this problem. The second stage of his theory is designed to answer this problem and to provide a normative theory.

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<sup>56</sup> There is some disagreement about whether approbation is this emotional response itself, or whether it is a further reaction to this emotional response. On the former view, a perception immediately elicits some emotion, which is equivalent to approbation. On the latter view, perceptions elicit emotions, and emotions in turn elicit approbations. Either way, Hume is clear that, when our response is one of approbation, we find the thing is beautiful.

Hume's strategy is to show that his view can get some kind of convergence. The second stage provides a normative basis for correct aesthetic experiences. According to this stage, aesthetic value is fixed or identified by ideal critics. Hume holds that good artworks—beautiful artworks—are whatever the ideal critics prefer. (Here Hume famously lists five features of the good taste of ideal critics: “strong sense, united to delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by comparison, and cleared of all prejudice”) There is an important debate about what makes the ideal critics' judgments normatively binding. Ideal critics identify the beautiful not because they establish it by fiat. Instead, they identify the beautiful because they are in the best epistemic position to do so. The most popular answer is that ideal critics are the best at appreciating the work, but that the virtue of delicate taste is ultimately what undergirds aesthetic value. So, then, what makes delicate taste so great?

The standard answer is *hedonic*.<sup>57</sup> Ideal critics are ideal because their delicacy of taste results in an ability to detect which artworks will cause the most pleasure, either because more delicate objects cause more pleasure (Levinson) or because ideal critics are not derailed by having associations which tend not to lead to optimal pleasure (Railton).

On the hedonic interpretation that I explore here, Hume's view amounts to the following. There are two stages in aesthetic experience: A perceptual stage, and an affective stage. The affective stage follows automatically from the perceptual stage. Artworks are beautiful when they result in a feeling of approbation for a qualified audience, an ideal critic. What grounds the

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<sup>57</sup> Note that the hedonic answer here is not the only answer. On Jacqueline Taylor's view, delicate taste is good because of its sociability. And there is an object-based answer here as well: what makes ideal critics ideal is not that ideal critics know how to get more pleasure out of the thing, but instead can properly appreciate the intrinsic value of the object. This reading of Hume is object-based rather than response-based. I will set aside this final possibility for now, since I will return to consider object-based views of aesthetic value at the end. I do not consider it to be a plausible reading of Hume, since Hume has comments that seem explicitly against such a view. See Gracyk 2016. Note also that James Shelley articulates a Humean view upon which artworks are intrinsically good.

ideal critic's responses as ideal are a sensitivity to the actual object, and an ability to detect what artworks produce the most pleasure.

Peter Railton expounds a version of this theory according to which masterworks are great because they most reliably elicit the greatest amount of pleasure. According to Railton, we can think of masterworks and our sensibilities as cogs in a machine. Masterworks are like smooth cogs, without any "bumps" that we will get stuck on. Many non-masterworks have bumps: They have features that cause folks to get "stuck" on some aspects of those works and experience more displeasure. True judges are important because they guide us towards the reliably "non-bumpy" artworks. On this account, ideal critics serve an epistemic role. The real value of works lies in their ability to elicit pleasure. This is a causal account; good art is good because it causally elicits the right sort of reaction in the right sort of audience. The dispositional element of Hume's view is clear.

There is some degree about whether this view is subjectivist or not. On one interpretation, Hume is a *dispositionalist* about aesthetic value: Beauty is a disposition of an object to cause reactions in ideal critics. On another interpretation, Hume is a *subjectivist* about aesthetic value: The value is purely in our feeling. I will take Hume to be a dispositionalist here. For one thing, this is the most popular view as an interpretation of Hume (Savile, Mothersill, Levinson). For another thing, is also how Hume's view has lived on in the contemporary literature (Railton, Lewis).<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, dispositional theories of value have been prominent in fairly recent

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<sup>58</sup> Savile, Mothersill, and Levinson endorse a dispositionalist reading of Hume; so does David Wiggins. Gracyk and Baxter argue against dispositionalist readings of Hume. On another interpretation, Hume is a subjectivist about aesthetic value—for example, when he says that "The very *feeling* constitutes our praise or admiration" (Treatise, 471).

metaethics, having been defended by David Lewis (1989), Michael Smith (1989, 1994, 2002), Peter Railton (1986), and Mark Johnston (1989).

Given all of this, then, it is clear that Hume's view cannot account for personal distinctiveness. Because Hume has as an aim to explain a shared standard, and because that standard requires convergence, Hume cannot allow for personal distinctiveness. It is true that people in different ages, or times, or cultures, may justifiably find things valuable when those things have the same degree of aesthetic value. But one should always trade up one's own pleasures for objects that will offer the maximum amount of pleasure.

## 5.2 Hutcheson's view

Famously, Hutcheson says that beauty cannot be perceived by any of the five traditional senses; he posits a sixth sense, a sense of beauty. However, says Hutcheson, beauty is not purely internal. It corresponds to a pattern in the world; beauty is a reaction we have to objects which exemplify a formula of *unity-amidst-diversity*. This position has been variously described as dispositionalist or subjectivist. While there is substantial textual support for both readings, I believe the issue is often terminological; I will assume that, like Hume, we can adequately describe Hutcheson's view as dispositional.<sup>59</sup> Hutcheson provides a clear and succinct

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<sup>59</sup> Kivy: "the 'object' of the sense of beauty is, for Hutcheson, a complex Lockean idea that is 'constructed' by the external senses, by the mental activities of compounding, abstracting, and so forth—and, yes, by the understanding. And in that 'construction' process, certainly, epistemic perception is deeply involved. It is that constructed object that may or may not, in the relations of its parts, possess *uniformity amidst variety*; and it is that property that causally, non-epistemically interacts with the internal sense of beauty, whether one knows it is there or not, producing the idea of beauty in the perceiver."

explanation of the basics of his view in this passage, where he argues why there is a dedicated aesthetic sense:

This superior Power of Perception is justly called a Sense, because of its Affinity to the other Senses in this, that the Pleasure does not arise from any Knowledge of Principles, Proportions, Causes, or the Usefulness of the Object; but strikes us at first with the Idea of Beauty . . . . And further, the ideas of Beauty and Harmony, like other sensible Ideas, are necessarily pleasant to us, as well as immediately so; neither can any Resolution of our own, nor any Prospect of Advantage or Disadvantage, vary the Beauty or Deformity of an Object. (Hutcheson 1726/2004, 25)

In this passage, Hutcheson mentions the core of his view: beauty is a perception of unity-amidst-variety. Hutcheson also mentions two additional important aspects of his view. The first is that aesthetic judgments are immediate, or non-inferential. The second is a stipulation on the kind of psychological attitude with which one approaches the aesthetic: Aesthetic experience is essentially disinterested, so that one's pleasure is purely in the form of the object and not from the prospect of any practical advantage which the thing offers: say, financial, or romantic.

Hutcheson also mentions another view he shares with Hume: The good of aesthetics comes from *pleasure*. Hutcheson, then, advocates hedonism about aesthetic value; unity-amidst-variety is good because it causes pleasure of a certain kind—i.e., pure pleasure in the perception of unity-amidst-variety. Notice that Hutcheson here seems to be committed to an evaluative or axiological view of aesthetic experience. What it is to have an aesthetic experience is just to have a positive aesthetic experience. Hutcheson knows that, on this account, he cannot account for negative aesthetic experiences like ugliness, and he tries to explain them away as based upon interests. However, I set aside this point about Hutcheson's account of aesthetic experience. What's important is just that, for Hutcheson, aesthetic value essentially involves pleasure.

Like Hume, Hutcheson must provide some account of divergent taste. If the perception of beauty is a sense, and if it is the sense of things that have unity amidst variety, then it seems as though everyone should agree when it comes to matters of taste. So why don't we?

And again, like Hume, Hutcheson is aware of this problem. He has two responses. The first way he deals with this problem is to insist that sometimes, we are misled in aesthetic perceptions; we can get a kind of good feeling that is not a result of our aesthetic sense, but is instead an association of a perception with an emotional state, contingently made and reinforced. Consider what Hutcheson says about differences regarding fashion:

As to Dress, we may generally account for the Diversity of Fancies from a like Conjunction of Ideas: Thus, if either from any thing in Nature, or from the Opinion of our Country or Acquaintance, the fancying of glaring Colours be look'd upon as an evidence of Levity, or of any other evil Quality of Mind; or if any Colour or Fashion be commonly us'd by Rusticks, or by Men of any disagreeable Profession, Employment, or Temper; these additional Ideas may recur constantly with that of the Colour or Fashion, and cause a constant Dislike to them in those who join the additional Ideas, altho the Colour or Form be no way disagreeable of themselves, and actually do please others who join no such Ideas to them. (p. 22)

We make associations between perceptions and emotions—we associate a certain “glaring colour” with levity, say—and this is what is responsible for disagreement. But, strictly speaking, that these are not really judgments of taste, since they are not perceptions of unity amidst variety. These are only associations of perception and emotion. Hutcheson rejects the sort of aesthetic associationism that Hume adopts above.

The second way that Hutcheson accounts for divergence of taste is that people perceive different amounts of beauty, relative to one's expectations about beauty. Here is what he says:

Deformity is only the absence of Beauty, or deficiency in the Beauty expected in any Species: Thus bad Musick pleases Rusticks who never heard any better, and the finest Ear is not offended with tuning of Instruments if it be not too tedious, where no Harmony is expected; and yet much smaller Dissonancy shall offend

amidst the Performance, where Harmony is expected. A rude Heap of Stones is no way offensive to one who shall be displeas'd with Irregularity in Architecture, where Beauty was expected. (61-62)<sup>60</sup>

One's reaction can be tempered by one's expectation. And this can explain why we might disagree about the *degree* to which something is beautiful—although, for Hutcheson, there could never be any real disagreement about whether something is beautiful or not. The only explanation Hutcheson has for *that* is the misleading associations above.

### 5.3 Two shared commitments

Hume and Hutcheson, then, share two commitments that I want to highlight. The first is to a *dispositional*, response-based understanding of aesthetic value. In particular, the right kinds of dispositions are connected to *convergence*. The proper responses are responses that everyone ought to have. The second commitment they share is to a hedonic picture of aesthetic value. Art and beauty are good because they give us pleasure, or a certain kind of pleasure. When I refer to 'traditional response-based theories,' then, I mean a commitment to these two core aspects. In what follows, I want to explain why neither Hume nor Hutcheson can allow for the Personal Approach to aesthetic value.

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<sup>60</sup> "There are indeed many Faces which at first View are apt to raise Dislike; but this is generally not from any positive Deformity which of it self is positively displeasing, but either from want of expected Beauty, or much more from their carrying some natural indications of morally bad Dispositions, which we all acquire a Faculty of discerning in Countenances, Airs, and Gestures." (p. 62)

#### 5.4 The first problem: Personal Distinctiveness

First of all, response-based theories cannot explain the personally distinctive nature of aesthetic evaluation. At the very least, they cannot tolerate personal distinctiveness as a permissible basis for evaluation. These force aesthetic value into convergence, since they provide a normatively binding view about what makes for a good aesthetic evaluation.

Hume, for example, holds that aesthetic value is determined by ideal critics, and ideal critics are ideal because—given Mill’s test—they can identify the best pleasures. This view aims at convergence. Ideal critics are ideal because the same things should please all of us. So, then, as Levinson (2002) argues, we should trade up whatever worse things may please us for better things.

Hutcheson holds that aesthetic value is again a kind of pleasure, and that the right kind of ratio will be found pleasing by everyone. The extent to which there is disagreement is the extent to which someone is getting things wrong. I showed above that, for Hutcheson, there are two sources of aesthetic disagreement. In the first kind of case, people disagree because extra-aesthetic considerations are clouding their judgment. We can set this aside, since it is clear that one person is making a mistake according to Hutcheson. In the second kind of case, people disagree because they have different expectations about beauty. The bumpkin, who has never heard early French music, will find Rameau beautiful. But the esthete will find Rameau a bit tawdry, because the esthete has had greater exposure to better early French music. In the latter case, it seems, the bumpkin ought to expose themselves to more French music; the bumpkin is still making a mistake.

But why can't we modify the hedonism to hold that different things appeal to different people? Why not hold, for example, that there are different personality types, and, for each different personality type, different things will be found to be more or less reliably pleasing? One kind of person, the normie, will be pleased by Costco, *The Notebook*, and Coldplay. Another kind of person, the emo kid, will listen to Fallout Boy and shop at Hot Topic.

Both Hume and Hutcheson will resist this move. To make this move is to give up on Hume's real standard of taste, a desideratum of his theory. Hutcheson will also hold that, to the extent that we find different things beautiful, it is because either our judgment is clouded or because there are different degrees of exposure, one worse than the other.

Andy Egan (2012) explains why dispositional theories of value aim for convergence in general. Without convergence, the theories of aesthetic value cease to have any normative significance. If everyone has a different standard, it seems that everyone is the benchmark for their own value. These theories of value therefore lack any normative force. Secondly, without convergence, there is no real disagreement. If peoples' disagreement is based upon different meanings of a term, or upon different standards, then we cannot explain real aesthetic disagreement. Suppose there is a disagreement about the normie and the emo kid about Coldplay. The normie thinks that the sentence "Coldplay is a good band" is true. The emo kids thinks that the same sentence is false. Intuitively, there is real disagreement about the truth of the sentence. But if we contextualize the sentence by personality type, there is really no disagreement. The normie means "Coldplay is pleasing to normies." The emo kid means "Coldplay is pleasing to emo kids." There is therefore no real disagreement. This modification isn't successful.

At this point, one might appeal to a different reading of Hume. Stephanie Ross has argued that Hume's critics are real, not ideal. The argument is as follows: P1. If Hume's critics

were ideal, then they would be perfect beings with respect to taste. P2. Any perfect being with respect to taste would never have to learn by practice or experience. P3. But Hume is clear that critics have to learn by practice and experience. C. So, Hume's critics are not ideal. If Hume's critics are real and not ideal, then the need for convergence disappears.

Ross's argument here is ingenious, and seems right at first. However, I have three responses. First, I believe that casting Hume's critics as real rather than ideal undersells the amount of normative work that they are doing in Hume's theory. Recall that Hume is after a real standard of taste. I believe it is clear that, given Hume's desire for a standard of taste, Hume takes critics to be ideal; only ideal critics can provide the normative basis for convergence that Hume wants out of his theory. Second, while it is true that Hume says that ideal critics must learn by practice and experience, I believe that this is a recommendation as to how we may do our best to approximate an ideal critic when we make aesthetic judgments. So, I deny P3: Perhaps surprisingly, on my reading, it is not ideal critics themselves that learn by practice and experience. Hume's claim here about critics is meant as practical advice for how we might do our best to approximate, imperfectly, the ideal critic. Secondly, I deny P2 anyway. It is conceivable that one could become a perfect being with respect to taste through practice. As long as we are positing ideal judges anyway, there seems to be no problem with supposing that the ideal judge, given unlimited time and access to aesthetic goods, could gradually become a perfect judge through practice and experience.

## 5.5 The second problem: Aesthetic motivation

These standard theories are also unable to provide a satisfactory theory of aesthetic motivation. Of course, traditional theories have an account of aesthetic motivation, as Dominic McIver Lopes (2018) has pointed out. Pleasure motivates; it gives us reasons to do things. But there are two problems.

These theories require us to train up. We should be aesthetic optimizers—after all, the proper perceivers are correct perceivers, ideal perceivers. Lopes puts the problem as follows: Aesthetic value is based upon pleasure, but not all pleasures are equal. How to tell the best pleasure? Consider Mill's test for pleasure: The better pleasure is one that an expert would choose, where an expert is someone familiar with both pleasures. This, then, reveals the importance of ideal critics: Since they are familiar with both pleasures, they will know the better one. This is where the idealist dispositional component enters: It is a way to tell true pleasures from false pleasures.

But notice the resulting picture of motivation on this view: We are motivated by gaining pleasure, and accordingly we should be motivated to pursue the choices of the ideal critic. But, first of all, this is radically revisionary. We often do not seek to radically revise our aesthetic selves in order to conform with the recommendations of ideal critics. One thought may be that the demands of ideal critics are too expensive. But consider that we would be fairly unwilling to make even a relatively easy and inexpensive switch.

At the end, this view is at radical odds with our experience. There are various ways to put this. One is to say that the result is radically revisionary. We might also say that it is too

demanding: We are unwilling to go this far. It is just this point with which I began: Our aesthetic lives are personally distinctive.

In reply, one may claim that pleasure motivates different people in different ways. What brings me pleasure is different than what will bring you pleasure. But to say this is to opt for a relativist theory of value.

And this applies to the third aspect of the particular strength of motivation when it comes to our aesthetic loves. We often pursue aesthetic goods that express our own personal authentic selves, even though it may give us greater pleasure to ‘trade up’. What is important to us instead is a kind of personal authenticity. We should stop watching *Chopped* and start watching *The Sopranos*; we should stop going to Carly Rae Jepsen or Lil Nas X, and instead listen to more Beethoven.

The hedonist may reply that this is still a consideration of pleasure. The idea is that it is a significant cost to rework one set of pleasures for another. Training up is simply not worth it once we run the cost-benefit calculation.

In reply, however, note that this simply displays that our aesthetic lives typically don’t work when we try to figure out what will maximize our pleasure. The problem is that we do not consider the cost-benefit calculation in the first place. What is important to us is our distinctive aesthetic personalities.

## 5.6 The third problem: The distinctive aesthetic motivation of aesthetic loves

It should be clear that traditional theories of aesthetic value will not be able to account for the distinctive aesthetic motivation of our aesthetic loves. If they cannot explain for distinctive personal values, and if they cannot explain aesthetic motivation, then this will be hopeless.

It is worth noting, however, that traditional theories take distinctive values as threats to a coherent theory of aesthetic value in the first place.

## 6. Toward a valuing-based theory of aesthetic value.

If dispositional theories of aesthetic value are false, then we have several options. One option is to rework the idealist theory. According to this idealist approach, we should seek some other form of ideal value. I will not explore this approach, since it does not seem plausible.

Two other available options remain. One option is to hold an object-based theory of aesthetic value, according to which value is purely in objects themselves, and does not involve a relation to human subjects. Another option is to hold that aesthetic value is to modify the idealist strategy: Hold that aesthetic value is based upon evaluations, but that it is based upon *actual* acts of evaluation rather than *ideal* acts of evaluation. I call this a valuing-based approach of aesthetic value.

In the next chapter, I endorse a hybrid theory of aesthetic value—a theory of value that consists of two stages. On the first stage, aesthetic objects present reasons for their value and disvalue. But these reasons are not enough to establish aesthetic value. Here I appeal to the intuition that aesthetic value would not exist in a world without humans; aesthetic value depends

upon our *taking up aesthetic reasons*. This is the second stage: Through acts of value, we take up reasons for objects. This is how we create aesthetic value. As Lopes claims, aesthetic values occur when agents act for aesthetic reasons. But it is not enough to act for a reason; one has to adopt the value of the reason. In the next section, I will argue that this amounts to an act of the will.

## Chapter Four: The Volitionalist Account of Aesthetic Value

### 1. Introduction

In the first chapter, I argued that it is possible, rationally and psychologically, for us to choose our evaluations; we have evaluative freedom when it comes to the aesthetic realm. In the second chapter, I tried to provide a normative framework for allowing that this kind of evaluative freedom is not just possible, but permissible—and not just permissible, but embedded in the structure of aesthetic normativity. It is an essential part of aesthetic reasons that they allow for choice. In the third chapter, I argued for three unorthodox constraints on any plausible theory of aesthetic value. I argued that any theory of aesthetic value should explain our distinctive aesthetic values, and I should that traditional hedonic accounts of aesthetic value fail to do so.

Here I provide a further and stronger argument, not just that we have agency over our aesthetic evaluations, but that our agency is an essential part of our aesthetic evaluations. In particular, I argue that our volition is the basis for our valuing in the aesthetic realm. In other words, I present a voluntarist, or volitionalist, theory of aesthetic value.

The voluntarist theory is a response-based theory of aesthetic value. It holds, with the theories discussed in the last chapter, that aesthetic evaluation is based upon responses. But the volitionalist theory holds that aesthetic value is not built out of responses of pleasure or desire. Instead, the volitionalist theory holds that aesthetic value is built out of acts of valuing, and those acts of valuing in turn are best understood as responses of *endorsement*. Your finding something beautiful is not a matter of being pleased by that thing, or a matter of desiring it, or a matter of

cognizing it. Your finding something beautiful is a matter of putting yourself behind it—of avowing it, or committing to it, or aligning yourself toward it.

But the volitionalist theory of aesthetic value, as I articulate it here, is not entirely response-based. Here I take a cue from Ruth Chang’s “hierarchical voluntarism” about practical normativity. My theory involves two stages. The first stage a reason-stage, a stage at which objects have objective reasons to be evaluated in certain ways. These reasons are objective parts of the fabric of the world. But those objective reasons are not enough for a theory of aesthetic value, since aesthetic value requires things to be valued; objective aesthetic reasons underdetermine aesthetic value. Aesthetic value exists only when a subject endorses one of these reasons. And this endorsement is to be understood as an act of volition.

The complete theory of aesthetic evaluation, then, looks like this:

For some object, action, or event  $X$ , and some aesthetic value,  $V$ ,

$X$  is  $V$  =df

1. there exists some reason  $R$  for some subject  $S$  to aesthetically value  $X$  as  $V$
2.  $S$  aesthetically values  $X$  as  $V$  for  $R$ , where
3.  $S$ ’s aesthetically valuing  $X$  occurs in virtue of  $S$ ’s alignment of their will to regard  $X$  as  $V$  in virtue of  $R$ .

Of course, (3) is the core element of volitionalism; it claims that valuing occurs in virtue of the will. Most of this chapter is aimed at defending (3). But this also requires a defense of (2), the claim that aesthetic value occurs in virtue of valuing. I suggested some reasons for this in the last chapter. In the next section, I provide a defense of (1) in the next section, arguing for hierarchical voluntarism. I argue that, in the aesthetic realm, there are given reasons; but these given reasons

run out. I introduce the volitional model of aesthetic value in §3: I explain how it builds upon traditional models of volitionalism, and how it differs from those. I devote §4 to considering a crucial question: Is the will too strong? The will seems to imply commitment, and commitment seems too strong to characterize aesthetic value. By clarifying this question, I clarify what I take the will to be. In §5 I provide four arguments for volitionalism. In §6, I argue that there is some precedent for volitionalism from two very different historical sources, Jonathan Edwards and Frederick Nietzsche. In §7, I explain the lessons of aesthetic volitionalism for versions of volitionalism about value more generally.

## 2. Hierarchical Voluntarism

My model of aesthetic value follows Ruth Chang's (2009) *hierarchical voluntarist* model of practical action. According to the hierarchical voluntarist model, there are two stages of reasons. At the first stage there are *given reasons*, reasons which objects present for or against their value. But, crucially, given reasons are not enough to motivate us to action, or to valuing. As I suggested, a proper theory of aesthetic value ought to be based upon valuing.

I will focus most of the argument in this chapter on the third condition: That aesthetic evaluation essentially involves an alignment of the will. However, I want to briefly address the first stage of the hierarchy here, the claim that there are given reasons. I have provided some arguments for this in previous chapters. Here, I appeal to an understanding of given reasons inspired by Scanlon (1998): Given reasons exist in virtue of properties in the world. It is a fact that Caroline Shaw's choral music is original, and the fact that Caroline Shaw's music is original is a reason to listen to it (although it may be defeated by other reasons). Properties in the world

provide pro tanto reasons for action. Some of these given reasons are reasons for aesthetic action, rooted in aesthetic properties.

An important objection to traditional volitional accounts of normativity is that these accounts render anything good, as long as it is endorsed by an agent. Since normative force comes from rational autonomous reflection, any kind of reflection is sufficient to make something good for an agent. This is what is known as the mafioso's problem: The mafioso reflectively endorses that he should send someone to sleep with the fishes tonight. Volitionalist theories of normativity imply, wrongly, that, since the mafioso reflectively endorses this option, this is what he ought to do. In the aesthetic realm, the correlate problem might be the problem of stinky trash. If all it takes to make something beautiful is to avow oneself towards it, then it follows that a bag of stinky trash could be beautiful, since someone could avow oneself towards it. But this is absurd; stinky trash is not beautiful. So, aesthetic volitionalism is false.

By endorsing a hierarchical voluntarist model of evaluation, we are able to avoid the stinky trash objection. For not just any volitional attitude is sufficient to make something valuable for someone. Instead, the volitional attitude must be based in an objective reason—a reason that actually exists. Presumably, stinky trash lacks any reason for positive evaluation in the first place; it fails the first stage of the hierarchy.

But it is equally part of the hierarchical voluntarist model that given reasons run out; the claim here is that, when it comes to the aesthetic realm, given reasons do not yield a clear normative or practical result. Given reasons underdetermine our responses. There are several arguments which can be given for this, gleaned from previous chapters.

The first argument, made in the first chapter, is an object-based argument that our given aesthetic reasons run out in the sense that our evaluation is still up to us, in some sense, even after we recognize reasons. The argument in the first chapter was meant to show that we can often make a decision about how we evaluate things. Two of the arguments in this chapter showed that the reasons that speak for or against the value of objects are often inconclusive; they do not show decisively what an object's aesthetic value is. There were two cases in which this happens, cases which I used as arguments. The first argument was an argument from interpretation. Recall the argument: Evaluating an aesthetic object is often up to one's own interpretation. Aesthetic objects admit of multiple interpretations, several of which are equally warranted. And the object may have a different aesthetic value depending upon which interpretation one endorses. Second was an argument from weight-of-significance. Artworks and aesthetic objects often have many properties. Some of these properties speak in favor of the object's aesthetic value; others are reasons for the aesthetic object's disvalue. These reasons are given by the object—but the significance which we endow to one over the other is often a function of our own choice. The key point—a point which speaks in favor of hierarchical voluntarism—is that the given reasons run out; they underdetermine the final evaluation of an object.

The second argument, made in the second chapter, is a normative argument that our given aesthetic reasons run out in the sense that they do not demand any aesthetic action; our aesthetic lives are free. In other words, aesthetic reasons underdetermine our actions from a normative point of view. I argued that aesthetic reasons never compel us to action, since the aesthetic realm is essentially a realm of enticing reasons, not of deontic reasons. Aesthetic reasons speak in favor of objects, and they invite our attention, but, since they do not compel us, they do not require any

action. Since this is the case, aesthetic motivation is more complicated than simply the value of the objects striking us. This is another sense in which given reasons run out; they are not normatively required for valuing. No matter how many aesthetic reasons there are for something's value, a subject can acknowledge that it is valuable, but the subject need not value it.

The third argument, referred to in the previous chapter, arises from the intuition that aesthetic value is somehow mind-dependent. There I suggested that aesthetic value must be built out of acts of valuing. And acts of valuing require something more. What more they require, I argue, is particular orientations of the will. If aesthetic value is built out of acts of valuing, then objective (given) aesthetic reasons are not sufficient for aesthetic value.

So, I endorse a version of hierarchical voluntarism here. While there are given aesthetic reasons, these reasons “run out” in the aesthetic realm—they are not enough for value, since they are not enough for our individual acts of valuing.

Note that, while I endorse Chang's model for aesthetic reasons, I do not assume it is true of reasons in general. Indeed, some of these arguments rely on particularities of the aesthetic realm. Furthermore, I do not assume the truth of Chang's argument regarding practical reasons. While I find it personally convincing, nothing on my argument hangs on Chang's model being correct in the practical realm.

### **3. Articulating Volitionalism about Aesthetic Value**

The core of volitionalism about aesthetic value is that holding something or someone to be beautiful is not just in perceiving something good, or in receiving pleasure (whatever particular

kind of pleasure it might be) from that thing or that person. To find something beautiful, you must adopt a certain kind of stance towards it: a stance involving some orientation of the will. This may be understood in various traditional ways: As commitment, as avowal, as resolution, as endorsement. It may be understood as putting oneself behind something. I will primarily speak in terms of commitment (and I will say more about how to understand commitment in later sections). The volitional theory says that this stance is best understood as a certain orientation of the will—it is not based in cognition, perception, or desire. You like something because you go in for it. And you find things aesthetically disvaluable because you orient yourself against it. These commitments we make are how we create our aesthetic values.

There are four things to keep in mind. First, not all aesthetic values are positive. Some are negative. This theory is meant to account for both positive and negative aesthetic values. One's volitional orientation *against* something is what partly constitutes negative aesthetic value.

Second: I do not mean to claim that the theoretical tool of volition is exhaustive as a theory of aesthetic value. Aesthetic valuing requires other cognitive attitudes in order to evaluate something as beautiful or ugly. Aesthetic valuing also typically involves conative attitudes, such as desiring and wanting. Perhaps these conative attitudes are also required for aesthetic valuing. The claim, instead, is that this is a feature that is partly constitutive of our experiences of aesthetic value; it is a core feature of values like beauty.

Third: Our aesthetic valuing are typically reflected in our aesthetic actions. My claim here is that valuing is constituted by endorsement. So, I hold that our endorsements typically result in aesthetic actions. This is especially the case where we thinking of the aesthetic will as a kind of commitment; aesthetic commitments typically revolve around actions. But not all aesthetic actions arise from our own aesthetic commitments. I might see a movie at my brothers'

behest; there, my action is not guided by an aesthetic commitment to the art-object in question—although my commitments will still guide my evaluation. I make no claim that commitments guide all of our aesthetic actions. My claim is that commitments guide our aesthetic action when our aesthetic action is motivated by our own values.

Finally: This is a subjectivist theory of aesthetic value; aesthetic value, on this view, is a relation between a person and an object. This follows quickly from my claim, defended in the last chapter, that aesthetic value is rooted in acts of valuing. However, while the view is subjectivist, it is not relativist. This is because volition alone is not sufficient to make something good: I can't will that a bag of trash be beautiful. So the voluntarist picture is supposed to make volition alone necessary, not sufficient. As I have argued above, proper orientations of the will must be based upon features that are presented by the objects as reasons for its positive or negative appraisal.

In order to articulate aesthetic volitionalism, I'll explain two prominent contemporary accounts of volitionalism.

### **3.1 Contemporary accounts of volitionalism**

In the past two decades, volitionalism (or voluntarism) has emerged as a powerful source of thinking about normativity, due in large part to work by Christine Korsgaard and, more recently, Ruth Chang. While there are other important figures in the volitionalist literature, I will focus on Korsgaard and Chang in particular.

According to Korsgaard, normativity must have some kind of force to it; normativity compels us in certain ways. A theory of normativity, therefore, should answer a motivational

question: *Why should I be moral?* Korsgaard finds traditional internalist and externalist answers wanting. Korsgaard argues against neo-Humeans that the force of normativity cannot come from desire. In a Kantian line of argument, Korsgaard argues that desire might motivate, but not in a genuinely normative way. Nor can purely external moral properties motivate us. If the property of the good exists, claims Korsgaard, I still haven't been shown why I ought to pursue it. Instead, claims Korsgaard, the force of normativity comes from the will; only a volitional source is enough to motivate us in the right kind of way. Through various alignments of ourselves—through our wills—we constitute ourselves to be people for whom certain kinds of reasons present themselves as authoritative. It is in virtue of our commitments to being certain kinds of people that we find ourselves motivated to pursue certain forms of action.

Obligation, according to Korsgaard, requires reflective endorsement: The autonomous, volitional act of putting one's self behind something. "in one sense no human action can happen without reflective endorsement. When people skip reflection or stop too soon, that is a kind of endorsement, for it implies that the work of reflection is done" (Korsgaard 1996: 161).

Korsgaard argues that, through reflection, we have the opportunity to take ourselves out of the throw of our impulses, free of their force. Only when we act through reflection can we act as autonomous agents. But, in addition to this rational element, Korsgaard holds that we also need commitment to act. Proper commitment to action, claims Korsgaard, comes only through endorsement of a reason. The following passage explains this connection:

"our capacity to turn our attention to our own mental activity is also a capacity to distance ourselves from them, and to call them into question. I perceive, and I find myself with a powerful impulse to believe. But I back up and bring that impulse into view and then I have a certain distance. Now the impulse doesn't dominate me and now I have a problem. Shall I believe? Is this perception really a reason to believe? I desire and I find myself with a powerful impulse to act. But I back up and bring that impulse into view and then I have a certain distance. Now the impulse

doesn't dominate me and now I have a problem. Shall I act? Is this desire really a reason to act? The reflective mind cannot settle for perception and desire, not just as such. It needs a reason. Otherwise, at least as long as it reflects, it cannot commit itself or go forward." (1996: 93)

Korsgaard argues that our reasons are normatively binding only when they align with our practical identities. A practical identity, according to Korsgaard, is "a description under which you value yourself, a description under which you find your life to be worth living and your actions to be worth undertaking" (1996: 101). It might be a conception of one's self as Muslim, or as an American, or as a writer, or as a family person. By conceiving of ourselves in these ways, we have normative reasons to act. I may see myself as someone who likes to fish on the weekend; you like to go gallery hopping, and she sees herself as someone who rides motorcycles. Our conceptions of our own practical identities give us reasons to act—self-chosen, autonomous reasons to act.<sup>61</sup> Since these reasons are autonomously chosen, they have a real normative hold on us.

Ruth Chang has provided another argument that what she calls "voluntarist reasons" can be important sources of practical normativity. Chang considers what she calls 'hard choices'; choices where a person is stuck between two options which may be equally good, and seem equally good to that person. For example, you may be deliberating between graduate school in philosophy, and getting a law degree. External reasons do not solve the problem, because the decision may be equally hard. Nor do internal reasons solve the problem, because the reasons you have may also be equally good. If neither internal nor external reasons help you make a hard

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<sup>61</sup> Korsgaard: "you must have *some* conception of your practical identity, for without it you cannot have reasons to act." (Korsgaard 1996: 120)

choice, what will? Chang claims that there is another way that we can decide; we can *put ourselves behind* one of the options. This, she claims, is a voluntarist reason.

That solves the problem of hard choices. By choosing to endorse one of the options, by putting ourselves behind it, we constitute ourselves as being someone for whom that option is in fact better. We change our practical identities so that one of these options is better. So, for example, what the hard choice requires is for you to see yourself, say, as a lawyer—and not just to see yourself as one, but to construct your own identity as partly lawyerly. This creates more reason for you to pursue that option. If you are a lawyering kind of person, then the lawyering option wins over the philosophizing option. By putting yourself behind lawyering, you thereby give additional reason for you to become a lawyer.

Voluntarist reasons for Chang are different than Korsgaard's reflective endorsements. Reflective endorsements, as Korsgaard thinks of them, arise out of conceptions of our practical identities. But voluntarist reasons, according to Chang, arise out of our "rational identities"—that is, out of our "ideal rational selves": "Your rational identity, in short, is who you would distinctively be were you perfectly rational. It is the rationally angelic you" (2009: 117). Rational identities are distinct from practical identities on two grounds. First of all, rational identities need not be grounded in self-conceptions; and second, they are grounded on reasons, not action. Yet, like practical identities, ideal rational selves are distinctive to each person. We have different reasons to do this, because we make ourselves into different people for whom different reasons are important. The fact that one aligns oneself with, say, being a lawyer, provides a further reason for one to choose the lawyering option.

The distinction between practical identities and rational identities is important. However, the larger commonalities between Chang and Korsgaard are my focus here. I will assume

Korsgaard's view that our self-conceptions of our practical identities are what give rise to reflective endorsement (in Korsgaard's terminology) or voluntarist reasons (in Chang's terminology).

### 3.2 Aesthetic Volitionalism

Both of these accounts of volitionalism provide us with a blueprint for what aesthetic volitionalism might look like. Consider, first, Korsgaard's account of practical normativity. Korsgaard argues that normativity has a hold on us in virtue of our commitments to our practical identities. But notice that practical identities may motivate us to aesthetic action. The work of Eileen Myles may appeal to a person in virtue of that person's practical identity as urbane. Country music might appeal to a person in virtue of that person's identity as being from the country. But we also create aesthetic practical identities that can be purely aesthetic. I may have a practical identity aligned with some particular artform, sensibility, or artist (I might consider myself an opera lover, a pop music fan, or a Phish fan).

And consider how Chang's account helps us construct a version aesthetic volitionalism. As I showed in the last section, several of the last chapters have all shown that our *given choices run out* in the aesthetic realm. If Chang is right, then, our aesthetic choices are typically hard choices. Hard choices, by definition, occur when our given reasons run out. The way we make this choice, I claim, is through a volitional act: *We put ourselves behind* one of the options. By identifying myself as a country fan, I construct myself into someone for whom country music has value. )Of course, this may not be true of every case of aesthetic action, since not all aesthetic action necessarily involves an endorsement. I might go to see a movie because my partner wants

to see it, not because I want to see it. I'm perfectly happy to see the movie, but it's not my thing. It is the desire to please my partner that motivates me, not the aesthetic qualities of the thing. But that is not an ideal case of aesthetic valuing anyway. I am concerned to analyze not just any motivation to pursue aesthetic activities; I want to analyze specifically aesthetic motivations.)

When we face a hard choice between two aesthetic options, it is our own commitments to one of the two options that allow us to decide, not merely the aesthetic merits of the thing—or even our own desires! It is our willingness to put ourselves behind one of the options through which we engage in the activity of valuing these things. I will go on to make this argument in more detail in a later section.

In both Korsgaard and Chang's arguments, the key point is that our practical identities in the aesthetic domain have special value for us—we value them—partly because we commit to them, and by committing to them we make ourselves into whom they are valuable. More specifically, we make ourselves into people who value the reasons that make these things worth attending to. The dazzling displays of technical virtuosity in heavy metal may be a reason to like heavy metal. But it is not until I align myself to the value of technical virtuosity that it actually becomes a value for me.

To many, this may seem to be the exact opposite of a correct theory of aesthetics. It has been a core orthodoxy in aesthetics that aesthetic judgment is *disinterested*. There are two problems this raises for the volitionalist theory. The first problem is that the volitionalist theory, as I have presented it, draws upon commitments. Since they seem interested, commitments would get in the way of proper aesthetic judgment, not aid it. Rather than illuminating aesthetic value, our commitments would leave us blind to aesthetic value. The second problem that disinterest raises for the volitionalist theory is that the volitionalist theory, as I have presented it,

draws upon our practical identities. But, while disinterest is divorced from action, practical identities are necessarily tied to action.

My response to this objection runs throughout the last chapter: This line of defense assumes that our practical identities must be social or moral, and that any influence they have over our values must be extra-aesthetic influence. But notice that one may have a purely aesthetic identity. As I argued in the last section, this practical identity may be purely aesthetic; it may not be necessarily connected with a particular extra-aesthetic social identity. My love for Eileen Myles may be based in her terse, blunt, emotional sensibility.

Consider, for example, an example of an aesthetic disagreement with a friend. Suppose you are trying to convince your friend that something is delicious, or gorgeous. Your friend disagrees. You appeal to some aspect, arguing that it's good. Importantly, your friend might see the value of that thing, but still not value it themselves. What would make the difference for your friend to come around? I hold that your friend must come to *adopt* a certain kind of value. They must take it on, avow it, get behind it—they must change the orientation of their will with respect to that thing.

These accounts, of course, are meant to be accounts of ethics and practical rationality respectively. I do not advocate volitionalism in these domains, nor do I argue here that volitionalism is an adequate theory of normativity in general. My only goal here is to argue for volitionalism as a theory of aesthetic value.

### 3.3 What are our commitments to?

I have claimed that aesthetic value is created out of a certain kind of volitional relation to something. I will soon consider questions about what this relation must look like—how should we understand attachments of the will? Before I address the question of the relation, however, I will address the question of the relata. What are these commitments to, or endorsements of?

Typically, I claim, our commitments (or endorsements) are directed towards practices. Committing to aesthetic practices forms are core part of our practical identities. We can understand practices smaller or more largely. I may have a commitment to being a film buff, so that I try to see films generally. More likely, however, I see myself as into a more restricted set of films. Maybe it's films by a certain kind of person—say, Jim Jarmusch films. Maybe I am into the Marvel cinematic universe, so that I try to see every Marvel movie.

When we think about the cases, we see that we rarely commit solely to one type of aesthetic practice. Consider a person who's really into Marvel movies. They like Marvel movies, but they might have thought that *Venom* was just a little too goofy for them. In this case one kind of aesthetic commitment (Marvel movies) brushes up against another kind of commitment (a commitment against goofy movies). Indeed, aesthetic commitments are rarely so cut-and-dry. Country fans have endless debates about where the boundaries of country lay, and—more importantly, if not so frequently—what is “real country”. Outlaw country fans hold that Waylon Jennings is the heart of country music. Importantly, this is not just true for country music. It exists in hip-hop, jazz, avant-garde, and even the standard classical repertoire (who is better: Bach or Handel? Mozart or Haydn?).

What we start to see is that almost no one shares the exact same set of aesthetic commitments. I might see myself as a goth, and commit myself to every goth thing. More likely, however, if I am goth, I see myself as a *certain kind of goth* and am more selective about what kinds of goth things I am into.

So our endorsements are typically towards practices. First of all, 'practices' is understood in various degrees of fineness of grain. Different people may have the same word for a practice, but they may refer to different practices under the same description. Second of all, endorsements or commitments are not solely towards practices. One may have a commitment towards an object, or a work, or a movement, without committing to the practice as a whole.

Furthermore, practices themselves often have constitutive norms. Consider, for example, a constitutive norm of western art-music: When playing a piece, one should play all and only the notes written in the score, in the order they were written. Guy Rohrbaugh (forthcoming) argues that this norm does not have its basis in any value- or pleasure-maximization. Instead, it seems to be a deontological norm of the practice. But from whence does this norm get its force? Rohrbaugh argues that it is simply a constitutive norm of the practice. The norm makes the practice what it is. Notice that these norms require certain attitudes on the part of participants: Attitudes to take up those norms. Classical music wouldn't exist the way that it does if audiences and performers simply ceased paying attention to these norms. So practices themselves require certain kinds of commitments to their constitutive norms, if they are to continue.

#### 4. Is the will too strong?

In this section, I want to consider a crucial objection to aesthetic voluntarism: The will is too strong to play the role it is called upon to play in aesthetic value. Contemporary volitionalists such as Korsgaard and Chang do not say too much to provide positive characterizations of the will. But whatever it is, the will is often tied crucially to the notion of commitment. And, it might be thought, commitment is too strong of a way to think about aesthetic value.

Consider, for example, Richard Holton's (2006) argument for the will as functionally distinctive from belief and desire. Intending, Holton claims, is not a matter of belief, but nor is it a matter of desire. I can try to remove the big tree from the middle of the road even if I don't believe that I can do it. Likewise, I can try to do things that I don't desire. Richard Holton takes the notion of intention to be central for his account of volition. In particular, Holton argues, the will has to do with a certain kind of resolution that one stands by in the face of resistance. Furthermore, Holton argues that the will is a faculty which has the function of regulating our own intentions, such that one follows through on those intentions.

Or consider Cheshire Calhoun's account of commitment. Calhoun takes commitment to be extensionally equivalent, if not identical, to volition. She defines commitment as follows:

“commitments are authored rather than passively suffered; they are a species of intention but differ from mere-intentions insofar as they involve a strong resistance to reconsideration; and they involve a preparedness to see to it that one's intention to engage persists.” (2009: 622)

This picture of commitment—and volition—makes it look like volition is a heavy-duty notion. Calhoun's definition involves three parts, each of which seems to chafe against our experiences of aesthetic value. Calhoun claims that commitments are actively authored rather than passive.

But our aesthetic experiences may seem to be frequently passive. We simply catch a glimpse of the sunset, and we're struck by its beauty; we don't commit to it. Calhoun claims that commitments are a species of intention that are resistant to reconsideration (similar to Holton's claim that volitional intentions are resolutions in the face of resistance). But there is nothing wrong with reconsidering my aesthetic passions; people frequently do this. Finally, there is an intention to see to it that one's commitment persists; one may enjoy something aesthetically as a one-off event, without intending to return to it.

Indeed, my project of accounting for aesthetic value in terms of commitment may seem to contradict earlier parts of this dissertation. Earlier, in Chapter Two, I considered accounts of aesthetic obligation based upon commitment from Kubala and Cross respectively. There I argued that commitment was not sufficient to do the work there that it was called upon to do. Commitments issued obligations, I claimed, only when they are calcified and codified as such—as contracts or promises. But, I argued, we do not have contracts or promises in our aesthetic lives. That would detract from our freedom. This may strike some as curious in the present context, where I am appealing to the will. It may be thought that the paradigmatic activity of the will is one of commitment.

In what follows, I will call attention to several features of commitment that may make it seem too strong to play the role it is called upon to play here. My goal is to argue for a much weaker notion of commitment than the one that philosophers traditionally have in mind. Further, I will suggest, the notion of the will need not require anything so strong as commitment.

#### 4.1 Four problems about commitment

Here are four reasons for thinking that commitment is too strong to characterize aesthetic life.

For one thing, commitment may seem to imply a *formal profile* that is not characteristic of aesthetic life: It may seem to require codification. The paradigmatic case of commitment is marriage, which involves a formal commitment with explicit commitments about faithfulness, maintaining attitudes of love, and so forth. Yet our aesthetic lives do not involve commitment in this sense. Another way of putting this is that commitments may imply certain procedural requirements that look too strong for the aesthetic realm.

For another thing, commitment may seem to imply a *temporal profile* that is not characteristic of aesthetic life. Cheshire Calhoun (2009) has argued that commitments typically involve promising to take a course of action in a future-directed way, even when one no longer desires to take that action, or when one thinks that is no longer the most pleasing course of action. Again, in the stereotypical case of commitment, marriage, one pledges one's commitment for the rest of one's life. Promises to stay together in marriage, for example, are explicitly made to show that one will remain faithful to one's partner even when the going gets tough—even, in other words, when one no longer wants to stay in the same location as one's partner, or when one no longer wants to be sexually faithful to one's partner, or when one no longer wants to love one's partner. One may object that our aesthetic lives are not characterized by these kinds of lifelong commitments. I may take up Beethoven symphonies for a couple years, and then leave them for a while. I might take up choral singing while I'm in grad school, and then leave it behind when I begin a postdoc.

The third problem is that commitment may seem to imply a *phenomenologically modal profile* that is not characteristic of aesthetic life. Harry Frankfurt has argued that caring for things involves commitment, and commitment implies what Frankfurt calls a “volitional necessity” (1982: 264). Things we care about, claims Frankfurt, seem to present themselves as things that we need—things that we couldn’t do without. Think about love for one’s children or one’s spouse. Commitment to caring for important people in our lives seems unavoidable.

Indeed, this necessity often intersects with the force of aesthetic normativity. As a strain of thinking about aesthetic normativity, voluntarism frequently has arisen as a way to explain the *force or compulsion* of normative values. That was how I explained the view above. According to Korsgaard, only the will can provide the kind of normative force necessary to explain the compulsion that (according to Korsgaard) is typical of normative judgment. However, there is another way to understand normativity as something that essentially involves a kind of motivational force. Korsgaard writes that “An obligation always takes the form of a reaction against a threat of loss of identity” (1996: 102). Crucial for Korsgaard’s argument is the notion that we are motivated to act on our own endorsements, grounded in our practical identities, because without those endorsements, we wouldn’t be who we are. So obligation presents the compelling form that it does because it is necessary for our identity.

Stated this way, Korsgaard’s theory is one of obligation, not merely of value. Duties are so pressing precisely because our very existence relies upon them. I do not make such a dramatic claim about our practical identities, that we could not survive a change in practical identity. Instead, I merely claim that, when we have a certain practical identity, part of what it is to have that practical identity is to endorse some aspect. So our practical identities involve valuing certain things, but they do not involve obligations.

Some philosophers have thought that aesthetic objects do in fact present themselves as volitional necessities. Richard Moran (2012) has argued that philosophers have viewed beauty with suspicion because of its seductive power in our lives. It may seem that one is fascinated by a movie and feels the need to return to it over and over again—like Nehamas feels, in his book *Only a Promise of Happiness*, about an artwork. (See Kubala 2017 for more examples.) Yet, as it should be clear from Chapter Two, I consider this too strong to be truly aesthetic. It would be a problem if my view had the result that aesthetic goods seemed to possess volitional necessities.

Finally, referring to Calhoun's first condition on commitment, commitment may seem to have to be active rather than passive. Commitments involve being in a dynamic state rather than a passive state. In other words, commitment may have the wrong *state profile* to count as relevant to aesthetic value.

So these four problems present worries about any theory of aesthetic value that is rooted in volition: Volition implies commitment, and aesthetic values do not seem like commitments. We might also think of this as a demandingness problem: If aesthetic value is rooted in the will, then it is rooted in commitment. And if aesthetic value is rooted in commitment, then—for the four reasons above—aesthetic value is very demanding. But clearly aesthetic value is not this demanding. So aesthetic value is not rooted in the will. In what follows, I want to argue that the notion of commitment is not so stringent as it seems.

## **4.2 A lower bar for commitment**

While marriage may be a prototypical case of commitment, it is far from the typical case of commitment. Consider all of the many commitments we make throughout our days: to work

lunches, happy hours, shows, friends, and so forth. Not every commitment is a commitment for one's whole lifetime. I can commit to going to a party next week.

But this raises the question: What are commitments? And it invites a second question: What is a theory of the will meant to provide? Can there be volitional exertions that are less than intentions? In theories of the will, commitment is the core feature of the will. I mentioned earlier that, for Holton, the will is meant to provide a particular kind of intention: A theory of the will should explain how we have resolute intentions in the face of resistance. Calhoun, too, understands the will as intimately tied to commitments, which are (among other things) resolute intentions in the face of resistance. These two ideas go together: Commitments are stronger than mere intentions. Mere intentions can be undone. Commitments are also stronger than what Calhoun calls "provisional plans", since, by definition, provisional plans are easily undone. Commitment involves an intention to carry through on an action come what may. Commitment requires a forward-directed resolute plan, according to Calhoun. Volitionalists do not have much to say when it comes to exactly what the relationship of the will and commitment is. It is usually assumed that an argument for commitment is an argument for volitionalism (or voluntarism).

In the face of this problem, we might think that either the will should involve more than commitment, or we should lower the bar for what counts as commitment. Think of other elements that the will is called upon to explain: taking up reasons (Chang), or endorsement (Korsgaard). 'Endorsement' does not seem as stringent as the typical sense of 'commitment'. In what follows, I want to argue that we should relax how strongly we think about commitment.

Calhoun argues that commitment is necessary for an identifiable normative identity—it is something that unifies one's action as an agent. Here is what she says:

“Someone who does not make any commitments, even relatively simple commitments to time-extended projects, relationships, social identities, and the like, will appear not to have made up her mind what she really values. Having no commitments that unify her agency across time, she will not have anything convincing to say to others about what she cares about and about who she is as an agent—that is, as someone who chooses and acts on the basis of what she values. Thus having an identifiable normative identity appears to go hand in hand with making commitments.” (2009: 620)

(Calhoun goes on to argue that nothing follows about the content of those commitments. Just in virtue of the fact that commitments may be required for having an identifiable normative identity, it doesn't follow that one will make a commitment to any particular project or what principles one will endorse. In other words, people can choose what they want to commit to.)

I want to focus on Calhoun's argument that commitment is required for an identifiable normative identity. Notice the ubiquity of these kinds of values: “relatively simple commitments to time-extended projects... and relationships”. These suggest that commitment is far more common than the stringency with which we usually associate the word. Notice, first, that these commitments may be stable even if they are not frequent. This might include going biking with your kids a couple times over the summer, or going skating in the winter. It might include giving a friend a call a couple times a year. And think how this applies to the aesthetic realm—the things that I choose and act on the basis of what I value are very many things indeed. And notice, second, that these commitments may be stable even if they are not intense. Consider this example: I like a certain kind of good action movie, so I will try to see John Wick movies when they come out. I don't always like action movies, but I like, and try to see, some of them. This looks like a commitment in Calhoun's sense. These are all values that guide relatively simple commitments to time-extended projects. Indeed, even important commitments—careers, for example—are not commitments to something forever.

Notice how ubiquitous these kinds of low-grade commitments are in the aesthetic realm. When I buy a ticket to a show, I often thereby make some kind of commitment to myself to go to that show. Of course, this doesn't always happen; sometimes I buy a ticket without making that commitment. I can buy a ticket to go see a show at the Village Vanguard in October, but I might not be committed to going; I might buy it with the idea that I'll go if I'm feeling up to it, knowing that often I'm totally wiped by the end of the day. Usually, however, I buy tickets as a way of making commitments to myself that I will go.

And we don't just make commitments to one-off events or objects. Indeed, our commitments to events are often driven by more global commitments to a certain kind of practice. My commitment to go to the Vanguard show manifests itself in virtue of my more global commitment to be a jazz fan. It is not an intense, feverish commitment, but it is a commitment nevertheless. My commitment to go to the Chelsea galleries a few times a year manifests itself in virtue of my more global commitment to attend to certain strands of contemporary art. Aesthetic commitment does not require fandom.

Still, the word 'commitment' often seems to imply something more intense than we need. To develop a more permissive notion of commitment, it is helpful to draw upon a final notion of Calhoun's essay. Calhoun considers what she calls *prizing*. To prize something, says Calhoun, is not just to believe it is valuable; it is to value that thing. Calhoun defines prizing as "a normative attitude toward what one takes to be not only valuable but also special in a way that cannot be fully accounted for by showing what makes the thing, person, or activity valuable" (637). She claims that prizing has two features: "(1) a value judgment about the prized objects (or person, activity, way of life, identity, etc.) that is based on intersubjectively available reasons for assigning that particular value and (2) a personal attitude of regarding the object as special and

worthy of behavioral and attitudinal responses that treat it as special.” (638). Prizing is involved in loving relationships, but it is also clearly involved in many aesthetic relationships with objects and practices as well.

Calhoun argues that this kind of prizing typically involves commitment, since our normative identities typically involve commitments. Calhoun:

“The principal practical expression of prizing something, of one’s regarding it as special, is commitment—commitment to living one’s life as an X, to collecting X, to taking care of X, to rooting for X, to striving to achieve X, and so on.” (638)

Notice, again, that this commitment may not be forever.

So, instead of commitment, we can think of prizing. Prizing implies commitment, but without the heavy-duty baggage. And it is not just prizing that we can think of as a less stringent form of commitment; consider Korsgaard’s notion of *endorsement*, or Chang’s notion of *taking up reasons*.

Calhoun herself is skeptical that humans are necessarily prizing creatures, and it seems that some humans are in fact not prizing creatures. But prizing seems to be a very important and ubiquitous feature of what is important to us as humans. In order to prize something over any length of time, one needs to make a commitment to that thing, not just be driven along by a plan or a mere intention. My claim here is that planning—and therefore, prizing—are psychologically ordinary features of humans. Indeed, they are not just typical of us, but aspects we rely upon from each other in a crucial way.

So, our normative identities are rooted in prizing, and prizing involves commitment. ‘Prizing’ is better than ‘commitment’, since ‘prizing’ lacks the deep seriousness of commitment.

As I will argue below, this kind of prizing is not understood in terms of belief or desire; only volition offers the right kind of analysis.

All this helps get clear on a picture of the will. In particular, this yields a low bar for the will: The will need not require anything as substantial as high-grade, life-long commitment. Commitments may take low-stakes forms as well. One may commit to watch one horror movie a year, or to be on the lookout for particular kinds of horror movies. Furthermore, commitments do not need to be lifelong. One may commit to get into a band, but that does not involve a commitment to stay interested in that band. In fact, given what I have said in chapter two, a commitment to stay interested in a band would preclude aesthetic freedom in one's own life.

### **4.3 Replying to the four problems**

Now we can begin to reply to the four objections above. Commitments need not involve the formal and temporal profile that they were alleged to have in the last section. Not all commitments are codified, and not all commitments persist forever; they need only persist, but virtually all of our aesthetic pursuits persist for some amount of time.

Furthermore, as Calhoun herself argues, commitments need not take the form of volitional necessities. She argues that this sense of commitment—of volitional necessity—seems too strong to capture most of what we find important about many of the things we care about and commit to. The landscape of a full life is constituted not just by things that need to be done; it also involves things that we voluntarily, freely, place there. What Calhoun says here is especially important about our aesthetic lives. Beauty does not present itself as having to be chosen; it presents itself as something that we can freely choose—as something that we could take or leave.

This leaves us with one final objection. Calhoun claimed that commitment must be active and not passive. The problem is that many aspects of our aesthetic lives are passive, but they can still have aesthetic value. My friend Dan, growing up in Oklahoma, yearned for the aesthetically and artistic thrills that life in New York City would bring, and moved here as soon as he was old enough. Dan's brother was content to enjoy the wide-open plains and common music in Oklahoma. Dan's brother presumably has no less aesthetic experience—and still prizes his own aesthetic goods—even though he may have been more passive.

My response is that this objection is too slippery about the distinction between 'active' and 'passive'. One may stay in Oklahoma, but this is still a choice enough. Dan's brother is the author of his own aesthetic life, even if it is not so exciting; Dan's brother still makes a choice to stay in Oklahoma. So, we should be generous about what we allow for in maintaining an active aesthetic life.

#### **4.4 Making commitment safe for aesthetic volitionalism**

In this section, I have tried to show how integral commitment is to our aesthetic lives. On the one hand, I have tried to argue that a kind of commitment is essential to the way we live our aesthetic lives. On the other, I have tried to show that the bar for commitment is very low. To commit to something, one need not see it as connected to the core of one's own identity. One need only have a conception of oneself as someone who values that kind of practice or object.

According to the view I have advocated here, aesthetic value is rooted in the will, since valuing things, as prizing them, involves a certain kind of commitment to them. However, this commitment may have a somewhat short temporal lifetime. And it may not present itself as a

stringent commitment; we have parts of our aesthetic lives that we keep on the back burner. Furthermore, this commitment may not present itself as necessary. And, finally, a commitment may be active while seeming to others to be very passive.

## **5. Four Arguments for Volitionalism**

In this section I give four arguments for volitionalism. Some of these arguments draw upon previous chapters of the dissertation.

### **5.1 The Agency Argument**

The first argument begins with the fact that we have aesthetic agency in our aesthetic lives. Because our lives are characterized by agency in the aesthetic realm, the argument claims, the faculty to best understand aesthetic value is the will. The argument can be formalized like this.

1. Our experiences of aesthetic value are characterized by agency.
2. If our experiences of aesthetic value are characterized by agency, then volition is essential for aesthetic value.
3. So, volitionalism about aesthetic value is true.

The agency argument reaches back to Chapter One. It uses that same argument and propels it forward to a bolder conclusion. I will not defend premise (2) here; I will focus on defending the first premise. There are two arguments I have for (1).

The first argument for (1) is based upon aesthetic responsibility. First of all, responsibility exists in the aesthetic realm. We hold each other responsible for our opinions

about beauty and art. If someone has a bad judgment, we try to show them why it is wrong; we take our opinions to be revisable. Furthermore, we think that aesthetic evaluations should hang together in a consistent way; if someone likes *this*, they should also like *that*. We hold each other responsible for views similar to how we hold artists responsible for their work. The argument, then, is that our aesthetic values involve responsibility, and responsibility implies agency.

The second argument for (1) is based upon our experiences of personal style. It is important that we construct our own aesthetic identities in personal style. We find our own style, we craft our own views about what's good and what's bad, we figure out who we will make ourselves to be. By 'personal style' here, I mean not just how one dresses, speaks or comports oneself, though those are absolutely aspects of personal style. I also mean the kinds of films one thinks are great, the kinds of books one likes, the kinds of aesthetic objects one takes the most delight in. Maybe you're the kind of person who spends their week off in the woods, with an all-terrain vehicle, drinking and camping and fishing. Maybe I'm the kind of person who spends their week off doing wine tasting. Maybe she's the kind of person who spends their week off reading at home. These are all ways we have different personal style.

In the aesthetic realm, personal style is highly individualized and includes a norm of authenticity: People's style should be expressive of who they are. Both of these facts suggest that personal style is something that is created, not discovered; it is something people make through trial and error, but it is something that people use to make themselves into who they are.

Aesthetic values as regarding personal style, then, since they are constructed individually.

Personal style is a project of self-constitution, since it involves acts of self-interpretation. But these acts of self-interpretation are not inevitable; they involve choices we make about how we will see ourselves.

If this is true, then the aesthetic values we work out in our personal styles. We have a strong sense of agency in our personal style. Indeed, something stronger is true: Our personal style is how we *express* our agency.

Putting the argument in terms of self-constitution suggests a deep connection to volitionalism, since Korsgaard's (1996) account of volitionalism is based upon self-constitution. Furthermore, it is worth noting that values seem to stem from our character—a phenomenon applied much more frequently to moral considerations than to aesthetic considerations. Charles Taylor holds, for example, that our character reflects our deeper self in the sense that, while it may be created by external influences, it is not entirely the result of those influences. We have a character such that, when actions flow from our character, we are responsible for those actions.

## 5.2 The Valuing Argument

The second argument goes like this:

1. Aesthetic value is based upon acts of valuing.
2. Acts of valuing typically involve a kind of prizing—an act of the will.
3. So, aesthetic value is based upon acts of the will.

In his work in free agency, Gary Watson (1975) takes individual values to lie at the heart of the issue of agency; we act as free agents, Watson claims, when we act from our values. Watson distinguishes our values from our desires, bringing attention to cases in which we seem to desire things that we do not value. Watson's example is of a tennis player who briefly desires to obliterate her opponent, but who does not really value obliterating their opponent—they keep this desire only to help them win the game. Or one may have sexual desires that one does not

value—say, if one is trying to be celibate. Watson points out that: “some desires, when they arise, may ‘color’ or influence what appear to be the agent’s evaluations, but only temporarily.”

(214) Watson claims that we have valuational systems—decision-making processes which yield judgments about what it is best to do. Watson defines a valuational system as follows:

*“The valuational system of an agent is that set of considerations which, when combined with his factual beliefs (and probability estimates), yields judgments of the form: the thing for me to do in these circumstances, all things considered, is a. To ascribe free agency to a being presupposes it to be a being that makes judgments of this sort. To be this sort of being, one must assign values to alternative states of affairs, that is, rank them in terms of worth.”* (215)

The central point is that one’s motivational system—a set of considerations which move someone to action—may not be consistent with one’s valuational system. But, Watson claims, this divergence frequently occurs when we act from desires rather than from values. So the two can come apart.

What this shows, Watson holds, is that the mechanism of values (and our agency!) is not desire, but something more volitional, like identification or commitment. Watson considers the standard way to accommodate these cases from Harry Frankfurt: Evaluations are rooted in second-order desires—what you want to desire. So your evaluations are still rooted in your desires—they are just not rooted in fleeting desires, but in stable, considered desires which take first-order desires as their subject.

Let’s take a moment to recognize the import of this for aesthetic value. First of all, as we noticed, it seems that we have aesthetic agency, and our agency is good when it arises from what we value. Furthermore, note that there are aesthetic cases where our valuational system and our motivational system diverge. Consider my judgment that it is best to go to BAM, but I end up staying at home and watching Real Housewives. Or often, in our aesthetic lives, we choose our

values over our desires. I do not particularly desire, in the moment, to watch a movie on a Sunday afternoon; but, since I value it, I go anyway.

According to Watson's own early account of valuing, one values something when one has a positive evaluation of it. Later, Watson holds that judging good is distinct from valuing. Samuel Scheffler points out that this is inadequate as a theory of valuing; positive assessment is not enough for one to value something. Scheffler's example is Bulgarian history; he believes that it is valuable, but he himself does not value it, since he has not studied it and never intends to. This has special significance for the aesthetic realm, where it has frequently been argued that mere acquaintance is not sufficient for aesthetic judgment.

Bratman argues that valuing can be present in a being who has beliefs and desires. But, he argues, this is not what valuing looks like for creatures like us. Valuing something, according to Bratman, "is not simply a matter of its present, considered desires and preferences. It is in part a function of its higher-order self-governing policies. The introduction of these self-governing policies has changed the structure of its valuing." (2000: 260) For Bratman "the agent's reflective valuing involves a kind of higher-order willing." (2000: 261)

How should we understand a higher-order willing? The hedonic theorist may claim that we can have Frankfurtian self-governing policies at this point; higher-order willing may just be second-order desires. But there is good reason to think that self-governing policies are a matter of the will. Consider Richard Holton's argument that this is a matter of the will. Intending, Holton claims, is not a matter of belief, but nor is it a matter of desire. I can try to remove the big tree from the middle of the road even if I don't believe that I can do it. Likewise, I can try to do things that I don't desire. Furthermore, Scheffler argues that this too is not enough for valuing something. I may want to desire whiskey, but if I cannot bring myself to desire it, it is not a real

value of mine. Values, Scheffler points out, necessarily involve the right kinds of first-order desires.

It may seem that we're squarely in the realm of moral psychology and have left aesthetics squarely behind. But appreciate the importance of self-governing policies and plans for our aesthetic lives. Notice how much our aesthetic values are reflected by our policies and plans and self-governance. Sometimes, of course, we act without consideration to aesthetic reasons. You may see a play because your spouse wants to go see it, not because you want to. But ordinarily, our aesthetic lives are free choices we make about how we govern the aesthetic parts of our lives. Consider, for example, how many of these things are done beforehand. We buy tickets to shows, we get haircuts, we buy clothes. Notice that these are aesthetic commitments to our future selves. So it looks, as Bratman claims, that our aesthetic values involve a kind of willing about the kinds of people we choose to be—and not a willing rooted in second-order desire.

At this point, it is worth repeating a crucial explanatory advantage that volitionalism has over traditional hedonic theories. This point is one made by R. Jay Wallace (1999). Wallace argues that forms of motivational internalism in terms of belief-desire psychology face a serious worry: They cannot explain how one is a source of their own action. Wallace's crucial point is that, if one endorses a second-order desire account of willing, one is committed to two theses about motivation. First, that only desires can be motivating; and second, that one cannot cause a desire in oneself. Only desires can cause other desires. Indeed, this is just part of the deeply Humean view that Frankfurt endorses when he endorses the second-order desire account of values. One's values, on Frankfurt's view, are desires to desire. But where do those second-order desires come from? One cannot have control over these, Wallace alleges. Only the voluntarist picture can provide an account which reconciles freedom. It is from the will that we commit to

certain paths of action—to being certain ways, to orienting ourselves for or against the Jonas Brothers. Only the volitionalist can provide an adequate account of willing. Otherwise, we are left without evaluative agency.

Back, then, to the main question: What is valuing? According to Scheffler, valuing something requires a cluster of attitudes. The following are necessary conditions on valuing:

1. A belief that X is good or valuable or worthy,
2. A susceptibility to experience a range of context-dependent emotions regarding X,
3. A disposition to experience these emotions as being merited or appropriate,
4. A disposition to treat certain kinds of X-related considerations as reasons for action in relevant deliberative contexts.

Valuing may be accompanied by all of these features, but my point here is that they are not enough. Valuing, at least in the aesthetic realm, requires a fifth dimension, the most crucial dimension: Valuing something requires a volitional attitude of avowal. In order to value X, one must avow oneself to X, or to the reasons that speak in favor of X. One must put oneself behind the thing. In short, one must prize it.

### **5.3 The hard choices argument**

The second argument for aesthetic volitionalism comes from Ruth Chang's hybrid account of reasons. Chang considers, as you recall, hard choices—choices where we are faced between two equally good options. How do we rationally choose? We choose, Chang argues, not merely by assessing the value of the reasons; that is not enough in a case where we face two equal options. Instead, Chang argues, we choose by putting ourselves behind one of the options; we choose to

avow ourselves to one course of action. This avowal, claims Chang, is essentially an act of the will; we decide to become a certain kind of person, and thereby give ourselves more reason to perform one course of action over the other.

My arguments in the first two chapters help to apply Chang's claim to the aesthetic realm. In Chapter Two, I argued that there are no aesthetic obligations; the realm of the aesthetic is never a realm of duty. It is better to describe the aesthetic realm as purely supererogatory, a realm of pure freedom. While we can weigh aesthetic options against each other, no aesthetic option presents itself as needing to be done.

But if that is true, notice how similar our aesthetic choices are to hard choices. There are plenty of aesthetic goods all around us, and we have plenty of reason to attend to each of them. How do we choose? This is relevantly similar to Chang's case, given that we need not optimize in the aesthetic case.

How we choose what we value is by deciding to put ourselves behind some option or another—by avowing one option or another. One might decide to get into a book club, or join a choir, or buy a MoMA membership. These are all concrete ways of avowing particular aesthetic identities to one's self. But one's steps need not be as formal as this. One may buy a vinyl player, or get a haircut, or start shopping at Hot Topic (or American Eagle! Or Old Navy! Or Brooks Brothers!).

Furthermore, this is not a calculation of what we desire; it is a decision we make about the kinds of people we will be. And inasmuch as it is a commitment to the kinds of people we will be, these avowals are rooted in the will. Again, these commitments do not need to be marriages. I might think of myself as someone who will love country music forever. I like sour

beers these days, too, but I suspect it's just a phase. Yet it does not follow that my love for sour beers is any less a volitional avowal. And one may think of oneself as having catholic aesthetic tastes. In an attempt to be cosmopolitan, one may

What happens when one avows one course of action but cannot adopt it? Here we should think of one believing something is good, but not valuing it, given Watson's definition of value as involving a particular set of dispositions.

#### **5.4 An abductive argument: Voluntarism explains the Personal Approach**

The final argument for volitionalism, drawing upon the argument in the last chapter, is that it does a better job of explaining the Personal Approach than its main competitor, the hedonic theory of aesthetic value. For one thing, volitionalism can explain how our aesthetic lives are distinctive. Yet, it can explain this in a nonblameworthy place. The hedonic theory can explain distinctiveness as something that is actually occurring—it can explain descriptive distinctiveness—but it cannot explain the permissibility of distinctiveness, or the fact that it's a good thing.

Furthermore, the volitionalism does a better job of explaining aesthetic motivation in general. It can explain why we're motivated to pursue things that don't always bring us pleasure: Because our avowal motivates us rather than the prospect of pleasure.

Finally, the volitionalist theory of aesthetic value does a better job of than hedonism at explaining our special motivation towards our aesthetic loves. Certainly traditional hedonisms can explain why aesthetic loves exist, but they cannot explain why this is a good thing.

But notice that even if the reader rejects the Personal Approach that I argued for in the last chapter, they can still accept the volitionalist theory of aesthetic value. The arguments above do not rest upon the Personal Approach. The core of those two arguments was, first, that volitionalism explains aesthetic freedom where other theories of aesthetic value do not. This sense of aesthetic freedom was not the sense of freedom used in the Personal Approach; it was not an attempt to defend the distinctiveness of our aesthetic lives, but instead was an attempt to explain the indeterminist freedom we have in our aesthetic lives. and, second, that volitionalism explains our hard aesthetic choices in a way that other theories of aesthetic value do not.

## **6. Historical precedent for evaluative volitionalism**

Korsgaard and Chang have cited various historical influences for voluntarism, including Hobbes, Locke, Pufendorf, and Sartre. In this section, I discuss two further historical sources of thinking about aesthetic value. Despite the historical and ideological difference of these two thinkers, they seem to have a similar view about valuing: Jonathan Edwards and Freiderich Nietzsche.

Jonathan Edwards, an early American idealist, is often known as a theologian and preacher. But Edwards' account of metaphysics is coming more into view in contemporary analytic philosophy (see Reid 2006; LeLordo 2014, 2017). Edwards' original theological system held a high place for aesthetics. Edwards was influenced by early modern accounts of beauty, especially Hutcheson's view that beauty was a perception of harmony and proportion; Edwards included this component in his account of secondary beauty. Yet, for Edwards, the primary feature of beauty is in similarity or agreement. Edwards says that beauty—or 'excellency', as he calls it,

“consists in the similarness of one being to another—not merely equality and proportion, but any kind of similarness. ... This is an universal definition of excellency: The consent of being to being.” (Edwards 1957, p. 336)

I want to immediately note that Edwards’ term ‘excellency’ here may not refer uniquely to aesthetic value; for Edwards, it looks like aesthetic and moral values are bound together. But we can take Edwards’ account as important for aesthetics. There are several surprising elements of Edwards’ view here. One of these aspects is that beauty should be defined as a relation directed towards being in general. Why think that being itself is the only proper object of aesthetic attitudes? While this is an interesting topic, I want to focus elsewhere.

Key to Edwards’ account is his notion of of *similarity* or *agreement*, crucial for Edwards. One may interpret Edwards’ view as having to do with objective similarity; in other words, that someone finds something else beautiful when they share some of the same (or similar) properties. Suppose that two Midwestern couples meet each other by happenstance on vacation in Italy. Since they are similar in so many respects, they may find themselves liking one another. Here, the mere agreement is enough to create an aesthetic sense. However, there is something deeper involved in this for Edwards. William Wainright (2016) explains this view as follows: “One who loves others, for instance, actively desires their welfare, ‘agrees’ with them or ‘consents’ to them.” Wainright explains that Edwards himself is concerned to show that this shows the supreme excellency of God, since, given God’s omniscience, God can consent to the most beings: “consent is ‘comprehensive’ or ‘universal’ only when directed towards being in general.” And only God’s consent is big enough to be directed towards being in general. Of course, the theological details here are entirely beside the point. The important part is that, for Edwards, beauty is a relation that involves a certain orientation—consent or agreement—between a person and something else. Edwards understands beauty as a kind of valuing, in line

with the view of value we have seen in the previous chapter. For Edwards, beauty involves an activity, since it involves a kind of consent.

Furthermore, this activity is standardly volitional. Multiple commentators have noted that the aesthetic sense, for Edwards, is active. Roland Delattre explains that this beauty, for Edwards, consists “in creating and bestowing beauty, not in being passively beautiful, but in joyful, beautifying activity” (Delattre 2003: 281). In his classic 1949 study of Edwards, Perry Miller is clear that this kind of consent involves the will: “the moment of beauty and virtue depends... upon the consent, upon an act of the will” (1949: 243). Not all interpreters of Edwards hold that the aesthetic sense is rooted in the will. Sang Hyun Lee (1976, 1988) argues that the aesthetic sense is fundamentally a sense of habit—where habit, Lee argues, is a partly active sense. But it is at least plausible that Edwards had a volitional account of aesthetics, especially since Edwards refers to the aesthetic sense as “a sense of the heart”.

Secondly, consider Nietzsche’s account of value, at least on one interpretation. Some interpretations of Nietzschean value are fictionalist, others are neo-Humean. Aaron Harper argues that, for Nietzsche, value is rooted in acts of valuing. “central to Nietzsche’s conception of value is that valuing is, first and foremost, an activity” (2012: 73). According to Harper, these acts of valuing are essentially commitments. A Nietzschean value, Harper claims, is “a commitment made to oneself, where the individual is accountable to oneself rather than another” (2012: 71). To summarize: “Valuing is an activity for Nietzsche because it is a process of becoming and remaining committed to [a] certain set of cares and concerns” (2012: 119). I am not concerned to defend this as an exercise in Nietzsche interpretation, but it is at least a plausible precedent for the view that, according to Nietzsche, values have their source in commitments.

Commitments, standardly, come from the will. Nietzsche is very clear that our values have their ultimate source in our physiological drives and desires; but drives and desires are not their only source. If we accept Harper's interpretation, it is plausible that, according to Nietzsche, the will is a source of valuing.

My goal here is not to defend this as a correct interpretation of Nietzsche. I raise it only because Nietzsche may be a plausible ancestor to the kind of thesis about aesthetic value I defend here.

## **7. Lessons for volitionalism as a general normative strategy**

The goal of this chapter is not merely to show something about aesthetic value—most notably, that aesthetic value can take a volitionalist form. The goal of this chapter has also been to think about values and reasons in non-standard ways. I mean to have shown how to think about volitionalism in a new kind of way.

First of all, I have shown that volitionalism provides an adequate account of normativity that is neither moral nor practical normativity. The most prominent form of volitionalism, Christine Korsgaard's, takes a moral form. Only the will, according to Korsgaard, can provide the normative force necessary to answer a motivational question about morality—namely, why be moral? Another prominent form of voluntarism, Chang's, is meant to solve a moral problem. Only the will, according to Chang, can explain how we can choose rationally in hard choices when our reasons run out.

While these theories have their virtues, the aesthetic realm is well-suited for volitionalism. After all, the aesthetic realm seems personal, individual, and it seems particularly relevant for our ideal rational identities and our practical identities.

Aesthetic volitionalism also shows that the will plays a role in many more situations than we might have realized. In traditional versions of voluntarism or volitionalism, the will is called upon to provide a basis for morality, and to answer hard questions about which career we choose. And certainly these kinds of heavy duty questions have aesthetic aspects. The choice about a career involves multiple aesthetic aspects. Furthermore, aesthetic questions have significant consequences for our lives, since they themselves meaningful attachments, but they also form the basis for their meaningful attachments. Browse a dating app and you'll find people talking about their favorite movies and music, the kinds of clothes, whether they like the outdoors, and so forth.

But many aesthetic choices are not that significant. Again, volitional actions need not involve lifelong commitments. They involve whether one will spend money for that play five months from now. Looking over the flannel sleeveless sweater, you ask yourself: Could this be my look for this fall? My claim in this chapter has been that, in answering any of these questions, you often put yourself behind (or against) one option or another. This kind of voluntaristic avowal is no less volitional even if it is temporary. It still involves prizing.

Finally, a related point: Applications of volitionalism to the aesthetic realm shows that we need not think of the will as something requiring heavy-duty commitment. Commitment has been the paradigmatic case of volition, and marriage is the paradigmatic case of commitment. Holton's account of volition is based upon resolutions for the future. But volition need not be so heavy-duty as marriage. For one thing, it's worth noting that commitment may not be so strong.

Resolutions for the future take many forms, very few of which are as heavy-duty as marriage. But, more importantly, volitionalism is often understood not just as a commitment or avowal, but also as a kind of endorsement or (I have argued) even a prizing. These cases of volition offer less-stringent examples of commitment.

So, then, I take it that this chapter shows that we need not think of the will, or commitment, as something so serious. The will doesn't have to involve such a strong modal profile. I have shown theoretical reasons that we need the will to play a role in smaller, more ordinary actions as well.

## **8. Conclusion: An Intentionalist Account of Aesthetic Value**

The importance of intentions has long been recognized as crucial for the existence, nature, and interpretation of aesthetic value. Indeed, this is one of the crucial insights of the past fifty years in philosophy of art. Artworks are the kinds of things they are because they have been made with certain intentions (Mag Uidhir 2015). Furthermore, it is essential when interpreting a work of art that one knows the creators' aims (Carroll 1996). And knowledge of creators' aims is essential for evaluating works; we must know what creators were aiming at in order to know whether, and how well, they fulfilled those aims (Carroll 2008).

Volition is at least partly based in a particular kind of intention. So, if what I have said here is right, I have suggested the basis for an intentional account of aesthetic value: Value is based not just in the intentions of creators, but also in the intentions of audiences.

I believe that much more can be said in favor of volitionalism. For example, I believe that volitionalism solves longstanding problems in aesthetics, such as the problem of disagreement. I

also believe that volitionalism offers clear advantages to Lopes' recent (2018) network theory of aesthetic value. Those arguments, however, will have to wait for more development. It is enough here that I have argued for volitionalism as a plausible account of aesthetic value.

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