Aesthetic Appraisal

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In the twenty-five years since philosophers began to bemoan 'the dreariness of aesthetics', students in Wittgenstein's wake have done a great deal to eliminate the grounds of the complaint. Unfruitful essentialist theories have been largely displaced by the vigorous, if somewhat uncontrolled, growth of an enterprise which attempts to characterize and explicate aesthetic phenomena outside the desert of definition. The resulting view portrays typically aesthetic concepts as being indivisibly characterizing and evaluative, relativistic in application, necessarily linked to human attitudes, irreducible to non-aesthetic concepts, and yet as having social conditions which make them capable of intersubjective comparison and test.[1] These characteristics are usefully summarized in saying that aesthetic concepts are concepts of appraisal.[2] The theory of aesthetic appraisal discussed here is clearly incompatible with views which postulate dichotomies between objectivity and subjectivity, fact and value, and it is quite analogous to 'descriptivist' theories in ethics which reject these absolute distinctions. Moral examples are thus often useful for explicating the notion of aesthetic appraisal and the theory embodying that notion likewise has an important bearing on contemporary controversies in ethics.

I

Three sorts of features are commonly mentioned in specifically critical discourse. Some are straightforwardly descriptive. These are the relatively brute features of things perceivable without any critical acumen or knowledge of art, and range from properties which are directly sensed (being red, round, E-flat, and so on) to ones for which empirical tests may be needed (being ten inches high, dating from the fourteenth century, or done in acrylic). Other properties are interpretative, in the sense that their identification depends upon knowledge of various traditions, conventions, rules, and related factors, incomplete information about which may lead to

[1] See the symposium with Frank Sibley and Michael Tanner, 'Objectivity and Aesthetics', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supp. Vol. **42** (1968), pp. 31–72. The two discussions together summarize most of the elements and problems of the theory described here.

[2] This term has no standard use. My use of it resembles A. R. Louch's in *Explanation and Human Action* (Oxford, 1966), Ch. 4.

divergent characterizations. These thus include representational properties (being a horse or an annunciation), semantical properties (being an English sentence or a quarter note) and formal properties (satisfying Aristotle's unities or being a symphony). Whereas descriptive properties can be identified by anyone with human perceptual faculties and relevant factual knowledge, the identification of interpretative properties requires additional knowledge of the conventions which form part of their definitions. The third sort of features includes those 'aesthetic qualities' discussed on various occasions by Frank Sibley,[3] and what he calls the 'exercise of taste' needed for their identification seems identical to the act of appraisal described below. Sibley is inclined to include expressive features, such as being sad or yearning, among aesthetic qualities, and they are indeed appraisal features. It is nevertheless important to distinguish them from others which include a positive or negative desirability characteristic. Such characteristics are ones which, unless overridden by special considerations, necessarily add to or detract from a thing's merits. Balance is usually desirable in works of art and garishness not, but sadness and yearning are neutral in this respect. It is useful to distinguish the former features by calling them aesthetic virtues and vices.

There is no guarantee that 'descriptive', 'interpretative', and 'appraisal' features are jointly exhaustive of aesthetically relevant characteristics of things. If beauty fits anywhere in the classification it is among appraisals, but appraisals characterize as well as evaluate, and it is uncertain whether the word 'beautiful' conveys any information about objects at all. Perhaps a non-cognitive account would suffice for it and for various equally uninformative cognates. This possibility need not be assessed beyond noting (inconclusively) that no number of appraisal features ever entails the presence of beauty, just as no number of non-aesthetic properties ever entails the presence of an appraisal feature. Lack of any guarantee that the three sets of characteristics are mutually exclusive constitutes a more significant problem. Not only is the distinction between description and interpretation somewhat controversial, but also there is room for doubt about the integrity of the aesthetic/non-aesthetic dichotomy. Nevertheless, the essential accuracy of the major distinctions must be taken for granted here.

Sibley has carefully described the main aspects of aesthetic appraisal by illustrating the ways in which reference to non-aesthetic properties can support ascriptions of aesthetic features to works of art, and by compiling persuasive evidence that this support cannot be explained in terms of relations of reducibility or definability. Aesthetic qualities have complex

[3] First in 'Aesthetic Concepts', *Philosophical Review*, **68** (1959), pp. 421–450, later in 'Aesthetic and Non-Aesthetic', same journal, **74** (1965), pp. 134–159, and in the articles cited elsewhere in this paper.

non-aesthetic origins but they are formally primitive. More accurately, since aesthetic concepts are often interdefinable with other aesthetic concepts, no descriptive or interpretative properties provide sufficient conditions for their use. Specious rebuttals of this view are prevalent, and some confusions may be avoided through brief mention of the commonest ones. Sibley himself encourages one mistake by repeatedly describing aesthetic qualities as not condition-governed except for certain 'negatively' governing conditions. Dull objects cannot be garish. It would be clearer to acknowledge that being bright or vivid is a necessary condition of being garish, and although many aesthetic qualities may lack easily specifiable descriptive conditions of this sort, their existence is entirely compatible with Sibley's stated theory.[4] It is no sounder a criticism to point out the definability of interpretative properties in non-aesthetic terms or the interdefinability of certain aesthetic ones, though these things, too, are sometimes done.[5] Quite a variety of observations meant to discredit Sibley's sort of non-naturalism may be just as harmlessly acknowledged with the aid of distinctions and qualifications of the sort made above.

There are more substantial difficulties. The epistemological correlate of 'non-naturalism' is 'intuitionism'. The incomplete explicability of aesthetic qualities in terms of non-aesthetic properties of things means that identification of those qualities cannot be entirely a matter of ordinary perception of non-aesthetic properties or of deductive inference on the basis of such perception. This requirement need not be characterized in terms of empirically suspect modes of awareness if 'intuitionist' theories are more austerely expressible by saying that apprehension of aesthetic qualities constitutes appraisal. It is no gain, however, to avoid unwanted commitments at the cost of vacuity or scepticism, and the explication of 'appraisal' needed to avoid emptiness encourages a subjective turn just as surely as does appeal to sensibility or taste.

No appraisal concept, A, permits a clear distinction between an object's really being A and its merely being considered A. The distinction is possible for descriptive and interpretative properties in virtue of possible tests for determining if a property is rightly considered to be present. The difference between being red and being considered red is established by reference to normal conditions; the difference between being a fugue and being wrongly considered one is explained in terms of definitions set out in musical dictionaries. Though there is a sense in which properties of

[4] Contrast Marcia Cavell, 'Critical Dialogue', *Journal of Philosophy*, **67** (1970), p. 350.

[5] For the first see Cavell, loc. cit. The latter objection is made by even so sympathetic a critic as Isabel C. Hungerland, 'The Logic of Aesthetic Concepts', *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, **36** (1962–63), p. 65, though Sibley mentions the interdefinability of aesthetic concepts in a footnote to his first paper.

both sorts are human products (they originate in human sense and convention), once differentiated their presence is determinable independently of human observation. The nature of the tests for them puts their recognition within the theoretical capacity of suitably equipped automata. Analogous remarks may not be made about an object's being garish, delicate, balanced, or unified. Supposing that Sibley is right to deny the existence of logically sufficient conditions for aesthetic qualities, there are no tests for these qualities which could be automatically applied, no tests apart from human agreement.

Within a group it is often possible, of course, to convince a person that he has wrongly considered something *A* and thus to differentiate being *A* and being considered *A* in such a context. What distinguishes aesthetic qualities is the absence of any clear difference between being *A* and being generally considered *A* within a group—whether a whole society or those whose ability to agree consistently marks them as experts. The logic of aesthetic appraisal thus points more towards relativism than to subjectivism, and it has been well said that 'The concepts of Sensibility should not be absorbed either to those of Sense or to those of Sensation (feeling)'.[6] There is a serious question, however, about how this logic is to be understood. The force of numbers has no logical authority, nor does the unconfirmable testimony of 'experts'; and unless general agreements rest upon factors which distinguish similar appraisals from correct appraisals eccentric characterizations remain logically impeccable. The existence of 'good reasons' for aesthetic ascriptions requires no qualification of this observation, for the logical looseness between reasons and the claims they support merely reflects the peculiarity of appraisals. It does not alter the fact that, in the absence of any clear distinction between really being *A* and being considered *A* (whether by some individual or within some group), aesthetic terms cannot denote genuine properties of things and must have some other function. How, then, is this function to be explained in relation to the social environment of appraisal?

II

The differences between appraisal and other forms of indicative discourse can be clarified by means of some comparisons. To say that a pair of scales is delicate is one thing, to use the term of a pattern or a complexion quite another. In the former case a definable property is ascribed to the object in question, though it is a property definable only in terms of specifiable standards accepted by many persons. In the latter case no such criteria can be specified, and explanation of the characterization must make refer-

[6] Isabel C. Hungerland, op. cit., p. 65. The opinion quoted is supported by arguments which partially duplicate the remarks of this and the preceding paragraph.

ence to the sensitivity, discrimination, or taste of the observer rather than to explicit standards. The difference resembles that between the physician's and the critic's use of 'anaemic', the first of which is explicable by reference to a measurable standard, the second of which is not. It also resembles that between two uses of the word 'criminal', one roughly synonymous with 'illegal' and definable by reference to a body of law, the other a moral concept not so definable. It is not easy to give a positive characterization of this difference, but an extension of the analogy between aesthetic and moral concepts confirms that the *via negativa* is not always required for the explication of *sui generis* concepts. It is possible, indeed, finally to dispense with analogy as well.

One of the most important features of moral qualities (broadly construed to include any aspects of character, such as fidelity, courtesy, and courage) is their being no more condition-governed than their aesthetic counterparts. The claim that a person is courageous, for example, can be supported by reference to aspects of his behaviour, but the assertion cannot be proven thereby, for such assertions do not so much describe behaviour as impute a certain significance to it. Courage is steadfastness in the face of apparent danger or difficulty, but this is only a necessary condition of the quality. An ascription of courage not only attributes a belief in danger or difficulty to the agent but also indicates the observer's belief that the steadfastness exhibited is somehow noteworthy. Beliefs of the latter sort are typical of characterizations of behaviour in general because qualities are significantly attributed to behaviour only when there is something remarkable about it, only when it fails to satisfy one's ordinary expectations.[7] Examples of virtue and vice in particular are always outstanding in this way and, rising above or falling beneath the commonplace, they constitute departures from the norms of behaviour upon which men base their expectations about others. Norms in this sense determine the means described by Aristotle, and the two things vary with each other. In hunting cultures men may be expected to endure greater perils than in trading societies, and the proper balance between virtue and folly will be differently perceived in the two cases. Because of the connection between prevailing expectations and one's notions of virtue and vice, the ascription of courage, for example, not only expresses an evaluation—that the behaviour in question is worthy of note, indeed admiration—but also proves intimately connected with what courage is considered to be. Since, furthermore, variations in patterns of normal behaviour may produce different expectations from one group or period to the next, quite different behaviour may constitute courage or cowardice in different societies or at different times.

[7] For evidence, see J. L. Austin, *Philosophical Papers* (Oxford, 1961), pp. 137–138. There are cases, of course, in which something can be remarkable for its very normality or plainness. Further qualifications occur in the following text.

All this is to say that moral terms no less than aesthetic ones are used to make appraisals. It might be suggested that the argument, hence the concept it is meant to explicate, is vacuous, mistaking the fact that it is always inappropriate to assert the obvious for a presumptive logical feature of characterizations of phenomena, including behaviour.[8] It is always odd to assert what is in no way remarkable, and if the propriety of characterizations of phenomena depended merely upon avoidance of this fault then it would remain undemonstrated that qualities of behaviour are as intimately related to human perspectives as they have been said to be. The argument about predicates of behaviour depends, however, not upon a feature common to all assertions but upon a peculiarity of phenomena. 'Courageous' and the like do not function as ordinary descriptive terms when applied to behaviour because the states and actions of individuals, unlike individuals themselves, lack properties in an important sense. As referents of verbal rather than proper nouns phenomena have 'predicates' with the logical status of adverbs rather than adjectives. In consequence, behaviour can never be literally described as red or mile-high, aflame or straight, but only characterized as faithful or courageous, spontaneous or deliberate, sad or yearning, lively or quick. It can be characterized in such terms because sentences of the form, '*x*'s (verbal noun) is *A*', are equivalent to sentences in which the corresponding adverbs occur, such as '*x* (tensed verb) *A*'ly'. It should be noted that this is no formal equivalence, since many sentences of the former sort lack this particular paraphrase. Something's occurrence may be depressing without its happening depressingly. In this and many similar cases an ostensible characteristic of the state, event, or behaviour in question belongs rather to a class of 'egocentric' features described below. It should be added that there are some genuine features of phenomena which can be specified without reference to human expectations. Spatial and temporal properties are two, but these relational features constitute no important exception to the present thesis.

The variety of features ascribable to behaviour is associated with a number of difficult problems in the philosophy of mind, but it is sufficient to recall a distinction between two sorts of appraisal. To the minimal evaluation carried by any characterization of a phenomenon—that it is somehow noteworthy—use of certain words adds a more specific evaluation—an indication of excellence or deficiency. To call behaviour courageous is to evaluate it in both ways, but to characterize it as spontaneous or deliberate need be to evaluate it only in the first way. A person can be too spontaneous but not too courageous because the latter expression incorporates an indication of approval which the former lacks. Although the double evaluation carried by specifically moral notions increases their

[8] The charge has, in fact, been made by John R. Searle, *Speech Acts* (Cambridge, 1969), p. 144.

interest, the characterizing and evaluative function of both sorts of concept marks them as belonging to the appraisal family. Concepts of both sorts have the pragmatic role which makes them incapable of full explication apart from the situations of their use. Deliberateness, no less than courage, is ascribed on the basis of prevailing patterns of and expectations about behaviour, and its identification may alter with changes in these patterns and expectations. Opinions about which actions are considered with sufficient care and thoughtfulness to be regarded as deliberate are governed by prevailing norms of experience. Much the same is true for the concepts of emotion. Sadness and yearning are mental states, but they are states inseparable from behaving sadly or yearningly. Behaviour is not only the evidence for such states but also in a sense determines them. If everyone behaved in the way ordinarily characterized as 'sadly', the notion of low spirits in terms of which the word is defined would evaporate for want of a needed contrast. Not only would such behaviour not be noteworthy; the significance and quality of 'sadness' for the affected individuals would be quite different from what it now is.

The application of appraisal concepts to behaviour supports a secondary application to persons. Spontaneous, virtuous persons are ones who, according to prevailing norms, behave spontaneously and virtuously. Conduct, however, is only a guide to character, not identical with it, and it is necessary for this reason to distinguish between acting courageous and acting courageously, sad and sadly. A courageous man is one who typically acts courageously and not merely courageous. Because aesthetic objects lack even the tenuous difference between 'inner' and 'outer' which requires this distinction, one may say that an aesthetic object is *A* when it appears *A*. A vase is graceful if it typically appears graceful. In other respects characteristics of appearances resemble characteristics of behaviour. They are to be explicated in terms of human attitudes and expectations rather than treated as independent properties of things, or as having tests specifiable without reference to human agreements. Appearances are phenomena, not individuals, and as features of phenomena aesthetic qualities are necessarily remarkable characteristics. It is impossible that everything should be *A* because aesthetic qualities exist only within a body of experience in which they are distinguished as worthy of note or of admiration or disdain. Expressive properties are noteworthy but lack logical connections with evaluations of the second sort, whereas delicacy, grace, unity, and balance are both remarkable and desirable. The greater complexity of such aesthetic virtues and their respective vices raises particular problems about the validity of their ascription, and the remaining sections of this essay are devoted to their solution.

It is worth mentioning a troublesome question about the way in which the desirability of certain aesthetic qualities is determined, for it tends to promote an incorrect distinction between moral and aesthetic concerns.

In the case of moral qualities, evaluations are linked to natural preferences and the conditions for their satisfaction in a fairly clear manner. Moral virtues, presumably, enhance the viability of any free, secular social organization, and participation in such a community involves expectations about the behaviour of one's fellows and appreciation of those qualities of behaviour which facilitate that organization. In general, if not in every case, virtuous behaviour promotes the general welfare. A similar account is notoriously lacking in the case of aesthetic qualities, they being supposed to lack theoretical or practical interest or importance. Although aesthetic concerns may be 'gratuitous' in a sense defined by this lack, this makes them neither arbitrary nor unserious, and it would be a mistake to infer from the lack of practical concerns in aesthetics that there is an important logical disanalogy between moral and aesthetic *appraisal*.[9] Practical considerations do cause moral judgments to be often based upon specifiable standards, upon rules to which persons are obligated to conform, whereas uniformity in art is not demanded, but both halves of this remark are half-truths. They should be balanced with the observations that moral virtues, which are comparable to aesthetic ones, are not and cannot be obligations because of their inherently exceptional character, while conventions about materials and rules governing the structure of works are no less binding upon the mainstream artist than are moral rules upon the average citizen. Neither sort of evaluation described here belongs to the same family as 'obligation'.

III

The way in which the logical properties of appraisal terms concern coincident opinions makes it appropriate to cast the problem of validity in appraisal as a question whether appraisals satisfy a condition of universality. Use of any characterizing term expresses the universality of the claim ostensibly made thereby. That is, it expresses (though it does not state) a claim that the correctness or incorrectness of the term's application to a given object is determinable in principle. Only if this expressed claim is true can the predicate contribute to a genuine assertion, and if it is false the utterance requires a non-cognitive analysis. In the case of descriptive and interpretative terms the necessary determination is possible in virtue of available tests which justify affirmation or denial of the claim in question, but the use of appraisal terms frequently seems merely to express universality and to lack tests which, in supporting or refuting the appraisal, would corroborate the implicit claim as well. If appraisals do lack these tests, disagreements in aesthetic ascriptions cannot be considered decidable in

[9] Contrast W. E. Kennick, 'Does Traditional Aesthetics Rest on a Mistake', *Mind*, **62** (1958), pp. 330–332.

principle, and agreements in appraisal would have to be explained in terms of contingent similarities of response or attitude. Widespread acceptance of a statement of the form '*x* is *A*' would merely indicate the generality, or uniformity, of such response rather than the universality, or verifiability, which use of 'A' expresses.[10] In this case disagreements in appraisals not attributable to their approximating character, or to mistakes in logic, interpretation, or brute fact, would amount solely to differences of evaluation rather than to substantive questions of validity.

Sibley has attempted to reduce the formidability of distinctions between validity and agreement, universality and uniformity, by denying that correctness in ascriptions must be a function of verifiability independent of agreement. 'The "is" of attribution is tied, for obvious reasons, to the group (not necessarily a majority) able to agree regularly on the maximum of discriminations.'[11] This proves nothing, for the reason already stated. Not even completely general agreement of the sort described would constitute logically sufficient evidence of universality. It would only suggest the existence of unmentioned factors which make possible that agreement, and in order to show that the troublesome distinctions mentioned above do not support a dichotomy between objective and subjective elements in appraisal, one must identify a basis for uniformity in aesthetic ascriptions which distinguishes them from expressions of personal attitudes.

This can be done by distinguishing three sorts of concept. Those earlier characterized as 'descriptive' and 'interpretative' may be termed 'anthropocentric' in virtue of their theoretical identifiability by any man. 'Red' is anthropocentric because its use is founded upon human anatomical structures which permit discernment of the shades the word denotes. (This is not to suggest that only human beings could employ such concepts or that the colour blind cannot use them competently, for other creatures might have nervous systems similar to human ones and persons with adequate vision can provide others with rules-of-thumb for the usual colours of things.) 'Symphonic' is likewise anthropocentric, in spite of the fact that the symphony is a late development in Western music. Sufficient instruction would permit any normally endowed person to recognize one. In contrast to anthropocentric concepts, 'charming' may be termed 'egocentric'. Whereas 'That is red' expresses a universal claim in the sense specified, 'That is charming' expresses at most a general one. Rather than to ascribe an observable characteristic to any object, the latter serves to report or predict a response and to suggest that people are generally

[10] For a similar view about the evaluative connotations of moral appraisals see R. M. Hare, *Freedom and Reason* (Oxford, 1963), pp. 187–189. See also Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, sections 7 and 56, from whom some of the terminology and examples of this discussion are borrowed.

[11] 'Objectivity and Aesthetics', op. cit., p. 46.

charmed by the thing in question. Use of the word 'red' depends upon an ability to distinguish red things from others, but use of the word 'charming' depends upon a capacity for being charmed, and different persons can, without error, be charmed by disparate things. 'That's charming' can always be intelligibly contested and the only things which sanction such unqualified statements in place of ones of the form 'That's charming-to-x' are the frequency of similar responses to similar objects and readiness to attach the rider upon request. It is the fact that even unqualified use of the word is explicable in terms of individual responses which makes the concept egocentric.

The distinction between anthropocentric and egocentric concepts is meant to suggest that between 'objective' and 'subjective' and to frame the suggestion that aesthetic qualities are distinguishably sociocentric. Although the use of words like 'sad', 'yearning', 'elegant', 'delicate', 'garish', and 'balanced' depends upon human responses to things, it also expresses universality; it 'demands agreement'. Such expressed claims can, moreover, be substantiated by reference to social knowledge and experience and by that alone. That this is so is first indicated by the notability of aesthetic qualities and by the membership of notability in a family of attitude-reflecting concepts with distinctive logical traits. This family is a large one and includes qualities such as being interesting, awesome, piteous, and fearful, and a superficial resemblance between these concepts and some egocentric, or response-reflecting, ones easily leads to their assimilation to the latter category. They nevertheless contrast sharply with the concepts of being charming, agreeable, exciting, repulsive, disgusting, depressing, and many others, and it is a mistake to treat the groups alike. Agreement in the application of the former is a legitimate goal rather than a logical accident because there are rational procedures by which warranted agreement can be brought about and disagreements adjudicated.

To call something 'notable' is ordinarily to say that it is worthy of notice (noteworthy) but might also be to say that it is likely to be noticed (noticeable), and the other terms in its group similarly display a possible duality of use. They may be evaluative or dispositional, whereas the terms in the other group are dispositional only. As such, use of the latter may indicate that an object generally charms, pleases, or excites people, but it can express nothing about the appropriateness of such responses. There is, to be sure, a tendency to say to a person who fails to respond in the expected way that he ought to be charmed, excited, or whatever, but this seems to be a device by which people attempt to promote uniformity through the fiction of a right point of view.[12] Such points of view are clearly incapable of substantiation. Unlike these hortatory claims, evaluative judgments about noteworthiness, and the like, have clear test conditions.

[12] In this connection, see Philippa Foot, 'Morality and Art', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, **56** (1970), pp. 131–144.

The great difference between value and obligation is amply illustrated by the fact that although to call something notable may be to commend it to one's attention it is also to make a claim which is subject to confirmation or refutation. Because noteworthiness entails distinctiveness, pointing out that the thing in question is an instance of a familiar technique or commonly employed device may be sufficient to show that it is not genuinely noteworthy; by pointing out another thing's exceptional qualities the opposite claim is supported regarding it. Much the same is true of the items listed along with noteworthiness. To be fearful, for example, something must be dangerous or difficult, and the absence of such qualities may show that fear is inappropriate. In practice, the factors which determine the appropriateness of such attitudes are extremely diverse, but they have in common the raising of levels of knowledge and experience until there is sufficient community of understanding to yield agreement. Agreement results from a similarity of vision which permits determination of the presence of properties which support or undermine the belief in notability or fearfulness—being exceptional or unexplained, conventional or commonplace; being dangerous or difficult, benign or simple. There are no such procedures available for determining the appropriateness of finding something charming or agreeable. In determining whether something is charming one determines only whether it does in fact charm and there are no additional features comparable to distinctiveness which can be referred to in justification of the response. Although as a matter of fact one is usually charmed only by what is somewhat unusual in one's experience, statements of the sort, 'That's charming', lack the logical supports characteristic of notability.

To be noteworthy is to be distinguished in some fashion from the commonplace,[13] and because such distinctiveness is a determinable quality claims about notability are subject to verification. This is so in spite of the fact that notability is not an anthropocentric, or 'objective', concept, being a function of cumulative knowledge and experience and not merely of properties of things. It is so because notability is not an egocentric, or 'subjective', concept either, reference to collective knowledge and experience permitting a distinction between what is notable-to-x or even notable-to-everyone and what is notable *simpliciter*. Not agreement among individuals but the accumulated learning of society substantiates the validity of such claims. An important qualification to this statement reinforces the legitimacy of a distinction between what is notable-to-all and what is simply notable. The content of knowledge and experience

[13] Not all distinctiveness is uncommonplace. *Gestalt* phenomena are very familiar and often unnoteworthy, and the analogy between them and aesthetic phenomena is incomplete. Contrast Virgil C. Aldrich, *Philosophy of Art* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1963), pp. 20 ff.

constitutes an impersonal standard, and appeal to that standard is consistent with the possibility that everyone should, through an odd flaw in logic or observation, wrongly consider something notable. It is also consistent with the possibility that a single individual should be uniquely able to see the implications of contemporary knowledge and show others what they have hitherto overlooked or overestimated. There is thus a difference after all between being *A* and being generally considered *A* within a group, but not one which makes being *A* independent of understandings characteristic of a group.

Judgments of notability, though evaluative, are also true or false, and to this extent appraisals in general are valid or invalid. Agreements about notability are not to be explained either in terms of contingently coincident attitudes or in terms of any variety of coercion but in terms of social facts. The considerations which substantiate this conclusion do not themselves support a similar result about specifically aesthetic appraisal, but they provide the foundation for an adequate account of the latter.

IV

Even when it is granted that what is worthy or unworthy of note can be determined by reference to accumulated experience, it may be doubted that any similar tests are available for deciding between such rival claims as 'It's elegant' and 'It's ostentatious' or 'It's gay' and 'It's garish'. Any ascription of an aesthetic virtue or vice supports a claim of noteworthiness, but noteworthiness is insufficient to distinguish among such qualities. Those appraisals indicate excellence or deficiency in some respect, and a sound distinction between concepts whose characterizing aspects are similar while their evaluative aspects are antagonistic depends upon an acceptable distinction of what is genuinely admirable from what is simply notable. This can be done by showing that purported virtues and vices cannot be discerned at all without the support of the appropriate evaluation. It is an implication of the thesis that aesthetic qualities are not condition-governed that a difference in evaluation involves a difference in perception. A similar result has already been reached for noteworthiness. If people disagree about an object's notability their opinions about its distinctiveness differ, one person seeing it to stand out and another not doing so.

Consider the quality of being garish. It is typical of aesthetic features in involving both certain descriptive properties (or at least ruling some out) and a certain departure from (or, in other cases, conformity to) proprieties of taste or proportion. To believe an object to be garish is to believe it to be bright and vivid, excessively or offensively so. Lack of either belief

leads to rejection of the appraisal, but the first of them is of no specific interest. There are simple ways of settling disagreements about whether something is bright or even exceedingly bright. Disagreements about whether something is excessively bright seem more intractable. They concern not merely the appropriateness of attention but also of disdain, and since attitudes of this second type may still be thought to lack adequate tests, the possibility of validity in such appraisals is suspect.

In the continuing philosophical dispute between those who deny and those who discern conceptual connections between characterizations and evaluations, the negative voices benefit from possession of an argument hallowed by tradition. It maintains, in brief, that although many appraisals indicate beliefs in the excellence or deficiency of their objects, these beliefs are not subject to public validation. Opinions about excellence can ultimately express only contingent responses to their objects, so that the relationship between evaluations and their objects is logically adventitious. It is always possible, therefore, properly to characterize a quality as 'garish', say, without evaluating it as garish. In doing so one recognizes a quality generally evaluated favourably but brackets off the usual evaluation. This sort of argument successfully withstands a variety of challenges. One may point out the non-contingency of some connections between characterization and evaluation—between distinctiveness and notability, for example—but justice may be done to these relationships through restrictions upon the generality of the argument which do not affect its applicability to virtues and vices. The distinction between two sorts of evaluation already drawn is only re-expressed in the admonition not to confuse worthiness in general with imputations of excellence or deficiency in particular. The argument might still be challenged by dismissing this difference as unimportant in virtue of the decided oddity of suggesting that awkwardness and imbalance might be considered better than gracefulness and unity. It can be replied, however, that such oddity may be explained in terms of general similarities of human nature and existence which do not touch the logical point of the suggestion's intelligibility.[14]

This second line of defence conceals an area of vulnerability. What seems intelligible is that 'awkwardness' (not awkwardness) is better than 'grace' (not grace), and these *doppelgänger* raise a problem of identification. What makes 'awkwardness' no deficiency is that the characterizer does not consider it awkward, whether because he considers it unawkward or because he recognizes no such quality. In either case there seems to be a

[14] For parallel moral considerations see Hare's legitimate disagreements with Foot: Philippa Foot, 'Moral Beliefs', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, **59** (1958), and R. M. Hare, 'Descriptivism', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, **49** (1963), both reprinted in W. D. Hudson, *The Is/Ought Question* (London, 1969).

difference of perception as well as a difference of evaluation, and this casts doubt upon the crucial assumption that the objects of evaluations can always be identified independently of the evaluations they take.

The assumption is obviously correct when characterization amounts to description. One ordinarily meets no challenge in saying that sweet strawberries are better than sour ones because people happen to prefer sweet, but preferences might have been, or might become, or might elsewhere be, different, and they are not logically incumbent upon any individual. The assumption is also correct for cases in which characterization amounts simply to interpretation. Specific attitudes do not necessarily attach to the sonnet, which is identifiable by reference to specifiable rules. The assumption remains plausible for measurable conditions, like anaemia, and for appraisals which attribute neither excellence nor deficiency, like spontaneity. (A person might be told, of course, that he *ought* to prefer sweet strawberries and sonnets, or deplore anaemia and spontaneity.) The assumption is implausible only when characterization amounts to the ascription of virtues or vices. Defenders of the fact/value dichotomy typically develop their position in terms of favourable cases and generalize upon the basis of these.[15] The argument should be supplemented by a proof that all appraisal features are identifiable independently of being evaluated—that something could be properly characterized as 'garish' or 'graceful' without being evaluated in the usual way. This possibility is inconsistent, however, with the theory that appraisal qualities are not condition-governed.

In the absence of sufficient descriptive and interpretative conditions for the qualities evaluated in aesthetic appraisal, there is no way to get from 'That's exceedingly bright' to 'That's "garish" ' any more than to 'That's garish'. Lacking conditions of these kinds, the only test of the characterizations inherent in appraisals is social agreement which can be traced to shared experience and knowledge, and since these agreements carry evaluations with them, the opinion that the same qualities could be similarly identified but differently evaluated lacks plausibility. In order to characterize aesthetic qualities correctly while disagreeing with prevailing evaluations of those qualities, one would need a way of identifying them independently of prevailing agreements, and this is the possibility excluded by the theory. There seems to be an equivocation on 'agreement' here, however, for one can, it may be suggested, distinguish the agreements presupposed in any aesthetic characterization from those responsible for favourable or unfavourable evaluations. If so, then the relationship between characterizations and evaluations of the second sort might well be con-

[15] This strategy is evident, for example, in R. M. Hare, 'Descriptivism', op. cit. See also Ernest Nagel, *The Structure of Science* (New York, 1961), pp. 490–494.

tingent, and supposed aesthetic vices or virtues, like garishness and grace, be no less discernible without bias than such neutral qualities as spontaneity and sadness.

A further argument suggests that this is not so and that without a specific evaluation discernment of those qualities considered aesthetic virtues and vices would be impossible. Consider the way in which attitudes that have tests of appropriateness are supported by beliefs which, together with those attitudes, imply worthiness of being so regarded. Thus, a thing which is both noted and distinctive is noteworthy, and a thing which is both feared and dangerous is fearworthy. The relationship between the attitude and the belief which yield the evaluation is intimate. Not only is the relevant belief a necessary condition of the attitude it supports, but the existence of the attitudes in question is also required for formation of the concepts which permit expression of the belief. If no special attention were given to anything, nothing could properly be characterized as distinctive, since there would be no identified norms or observed regularities from which anything could depart. If no one feared anything, then things could be called 'dangerous' only in a diluted sense—'potential cause of dismemberment' and the like. The very existence of danger depends upon people who care about it. Parallel considerations are readily adduced for those aesthetic qualities considered always to constitute excellences or deficiencies, those which are logically tied to such attitudes as admiration or disdain. The proper object of admiration is excellence or superiority and the attitude could not exist apart from recognition of various excellences. Such excellences, including aesthetic virtues, would not exist, however, except in a derivative, descriptive sense were they never admired. The objects of attitude-supporting beliefs cannot be identified yet go unevaluated—whether in the minimal sense of noteworthiness or as excellent in the case of aesthetic virtues. The ascription of aesthetic virtues in particular cannot constitute merely minimal appraisals to which favourable evaluations are contingently attached, simply because of the kind of qualities they are. Ordinarily it makes no sense to call something 'too delicate', 'too unified', or 'too grand', and the peculiarity of contexts in which such expressions are intelligible tends rather to support than to refute this claim. Either it is clear that some other expression would be more literally correct ('precious', 'stiff', or 'garish', for example) or that an intrinsically desirable quality is thought out of place in the work in which it occurs.

Not all attitude-supporting beliefs are linked to the possession of attitudes with the same strength. An intelligent being altogether lacking in attitudes would be able to recognize those things which normally endowed persons consider dangerous on the basis of manifest similarities from case to case. Such a being could not consistently recognize which objects would be considered garish by others. He could, with some success, employ inductive generalizations in the same sort of way that the colour blind can

distinguish colours, but the perceptual diversity of garish objects renders such tools of quite uncertain adequacy.

Tests for aesthetic qualities are quite like those for notability. Comparisons and contrasts from within a common point of view permit decisions in disputes about competing ascriptions—decisions based not upon contingent uniformities of preference but upon preferences inseparable from a point of view. Of course, because appraisal involves approximation there are always undecidable cases. It is always possible, too, that one person may continue to think grand or gay what another thinks garish, and there may be a point at which they have no more to say to each other than that they are mutual outsiders. The relativism represented by this possibility does not, however, represent a logical obstacle to agreement. The obstacles are mundane and human. Disagreement indicates widely different sets of experiences, a divergence there may be no inclination to alter. On the other hand, man is a single species and the inhabitant of one world, and each person's experiences are roughly similar. It is a consequence of the dissimilarities that 'A community of interest and taste is not something given', but more fundamental likenesses make it 'something that can be striven for'.[16] That goal need not be desired, but it need not be illusory either. In virtue, however, of the dependence of aesthetic qualities upon attitudes whose appropriateness is a function of expectations varying with experience, one must also recognize that aesthetic qualities do not represent logical forms or even anthropocentric properties. Appraisals are distinctively cultural phenomena.

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[16] Paul Ziff, 'Reasons in Art Criticism', in W. E. Kennick, ed., *Art and Philosophy* (New York, 1964), p. 619.