

Chapter Two

What Aesthetic Judgements Are About

1. Aesthetic Difference

One can view *Languages of Art* as an elaborate attempt at sorting out the aesthetic difference between a forgery and its original. However, it remains to be seen to what extent Goodman indeed explains what aesthetic difference is, and what distinguishes aesthetic from more normal perceptive properties. He does explain why there can be no fakes in certain species of classical music as there are in painting. He explains how the notationality of musical scores, by providing us with the means to univocally determine the identity of a musical work, has emancipated the musical work of art from the dangers of forgery. There is no pictorial analogue to this identificatory efficacy. The difference between these two art forms comes down to this: the relation between an original and its copies (performances of music, and, respectively, fakes of pictures) is semantic in the case of notated music, and strictly causal with depiction.

Goodman starts his discussion by introducing two perfectly identical paintings, one authentic, the other, evidently, a fake. He asks ...

Thus the critical question amounts finally to this: ... can anything that x does not discern by merely looking at the pictures constitute an aesthetic difference between them for x at t ?¹

Goodman's own answer to the question is, yes: non-perceivable differences do make an aesthetic difference in that they induce us to scrutinize the paintings in new ways. Morton and Foster have recently objected to Goodman's slide here from a nominalistic change between ways of perceiving to a realistic change between what one perceives.² Evidently, to know that there must be differences between the two paintings does not amount to an

¹ Goodman, *LA*, p. 102

² In effect, he has collapsed the distinction between what we see when we look at a painting and how we look at a painting. Morton and Foster, 'Goodman, Forgery, and the Aesthetic', 1991, p. 158

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ability to perceive them, nor to knowing how even to start looking for them in practice. And this is especially the case when the forgery is stipulated to be a perfect fake, in the sense of being perceptually absolutely equal to the original, i.e. the invisibility of the differences is an analytical necessity, not merely an empirical one. Suppose indeed that the difference between the two paintings can only be established beyond doubt with the help of sophisticated scientific instruments, or with the help of information which generally is external to the mere perception of the work. It follows then from the 'perfection' of the fake that these differences cannot be perceived and that, respecting the principle of acquaintance, they cannot be aesthetically relevant. However, if one were also prepared to agree with these differences' having a significant effect on our perceptual activities, then they may appear, as it were from the outside, to re-enter the aesthetic event. But there are two flaws to this argument. First, it puts no limitation on what is aesthetically relevant: everything may make us watch differently, and ought for that reason to be aesthetically relevant, which for lack of a notion of correctness is an absurdity which leads to a solipsist variety of relativism. Secondly, if one is ready to accept Goodman's argument, one must also be willing to accept the possibility of there being aesthetic differences between two instances of looking at a single picture: in between events the beholder will have received some kind of (cultural) education and will therefore look at the same picture in a different manner. This brings us to a deeper defect of Goodman's position. Goodman seems unable to make sense of a single painting remaining the same over time independent from obvious changes in the context or in the terms we are prepared to apply to it. He appears to be unable to conceive of individuals in their individuality. Now, events such as looking differently at a work after a good night's sleep occur more often than being confronted with an original hanging side by side with its perfect fake. Goodman's problem therefore, may be interesting ontologically, but from an aesthetic point of view it seems redundant, or better: worded wrongly. In effect, the question Goodman has analyzed is an economic, or art historical question, rather than an aesthetic one. Indeed, science nowadays provides ample ways to establish authenticity whenever we are in doubt. These scientific ways, needless to say, all are non-aesthetic in nature, even though conclusions made on their behalf may have aesthetic relevance at times, for instance, when the establishment of a work's inauthenticity leads us to depreciate it aesthetically. This specific problem of authenticity (and there are others) becomes relevant aesthetically no sooner than aesthetic experience and evaluation pop up.

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Let us now look at the adequacy of Goodman's argument concerning the relevance of knowing that there is a fake to the aesthetic difference between the fake and the original. If we find ourselves confronted with a self-portrait by Rembrandt, we shall try to establish its aesthetic value by looking at how it is made and at what it is 'telling' us by way of its style, representation, and expression. We will pay attention to its strokes of paint and shades of colour as well as what we take to be the meanings it exhibits, such as the expression on the face, and ask what it is expressive of, what it teaches us about a life, Rembrandt's, and what it teaches us about the mental life inherent in the mind of the depicted. We may perceive the double function of the paint: of showing its being manipulated by the artist, and of depicting the subject of the painting. Thus we come to appreciate, among other things, the experience which Rembrandt himself has depicted himself as going through. We are involved in finding meaning and significance in this painting, and the more care we profess the more morally deep the painting and our own experience of it may become. We take the work to be such as to merit such an appraisal. If during our appreciative activities a curator were to enter the room and put an exact copy of this painting alongside it then our attitude towards the painting would change fundamentally. We are all acquainted with the fact that painters do not usually paint a painting twice, let alone in an absolutely identical manner. Copying a painting is an activity entirely different from painting an original one, and we shall see below that the reasons why no painter ever sets himself to such copying are aesthetic ones, reasons, i.e. that are related to aesthetic evaluation. With the introduction by the curator of an identical second instance of our Rembrandt painting we realize at once that a fake is involved, but remain in the dark as to which of the two is the original and which the fake. This makes us wonder which is which. Indeed our perceptive activities change fundamentally. We shall start looking for differences between two seemingly identical objects, instead of searching for meanings and significance. These perceptive activities are fundamentally different. Whereas looking for differences may inform us about certain meanings, looking for meanings shall tell us nothing about the relevant differences. The differences between the two paintings are neutral as to their respective pictorial meanings, because if a fake would of itself present us with a different meaning it would most certainly not be the perfect fake the argument started out with. With the introduction of the fake then an aesthetic, appreciative activity changes into a cognitive investigation of secondary and primary qualities which aims at solving a puzzle irrelevant to the pictorial and artistic meaning of the painting. The strokes of paint and shades of colour become relevant now not for their role in the artistic

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'semantics' or style of the painting but as an instrument merely to locate tiny material differences. Yes, our perceptive activities do change here, but not aesthetically: they merely stop being aesthetic. Thus the demonstration of a work's status as a forgery does not of itself make an aesthetic difference at all. Now suppose next that after having studied the two works to no avail the curator re-enters the room and puts two signs under the paintings identifying the left one as the original and the right one as the fake. Again our perceptive activities change, only this time we are forced to treat one painting as authoritatively exemplifying authentic properties with which we supposedly can then spot the faked properties in the other one. This opens up the possibility of an aesthetic appraisal of the left painting, in that perhaps we shall now try to view it as successful in occasioning some aesthetic experience. Evidently, we shall take the right one as ineligible. However, the chances are great that our appreciation will remain cognitive throughout and that we do not stop looking for a solution to the 'which is which' puzzle. By the juxtaposition of the two works our aesthetic perceptions are ruined phenomenologically. Little more than accepting Goodman's thesis that the signs make an aesthetic difference suffices for introducing the legitimacy of testimony in aesthetic matters, and for giving up altogether on the specificity of the aesthetic domain, and on the principle of acquaintance. I know Goodman wouldn't mind about giving up the aesthetic domain's specificity; it's what he wants. However, not answering the principle of acquaintance implies leaving out an essential moment in our experience of art and aesthetic values.

I have just argued that to know that a forgery exists alongside an original is aesthetically neutral; to know which of the two works is the original and which is the fake can make an aesthetic difference but only insofar as it may induce us to look better at the alleged original. But again the problem of authenticity hardly touches on such a change of attitude. If we do not succeed in perceiving the differences, however, such aesthetic difference ought to remain inconsequential. Therefore, if a difference which is not perceived at time t leads to relevantly different aesthetic assessments than this difference between assessments shall be due to non-aesthetic, illegitimate considerations. Normally also we have far less aesthetic reasons to judge a forgery differently from its original, than we have for judging differently a singular work under different circumstances, notwithstanding the fact that it can easily be proven scientifically that in reality only one work is involved. So, yes, different attitudes lead to different perceptions, and to perception of different properties, but this is hardly provocative. The correlate thesis that such differences are of an aesthetic nature needs

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sophisticated arguments apparently unavailable to Goodman's extensionalism. The question arising now is what makes a property of a work of art aesthetic, or, better, what makes a property of relevance for aesthetic evaluation? I shall now turn to this question.

2. Aesthetic Properties

Starting our examination of aesthetic properties with the utterances with which we express them—aesthetic evaluations—the following ensues. Disagreement and argument about aesthetic values are quite common and a philosophical tale that has been told for two hundred years or more assumes that aesthetic judgements are typically expressed with grand terms like 'beautiful', 'sublime', or 'excellent' at the predicate place.³ However, we hardly ever argue about aesthetic judgements like "this is beautiful". Indeed, these terms do nothing to specify the 'this' at the grammatical subject place of the proposition, but rather express a specific, aesthetic type of experience of judgement.⁴ They inform us about the speaker's claim of having based his or her judgement upon such an experience and of, therefore, being justified to judge. Anthony Savile argues in a recent book that we shouldn't treat aesthetic judgements as propositions in the first place.⁵ He ascribes a truth value to aesthetic propositions, but not to the judgement connected with these. Resisting plain objectivism he suggests we distinguish between such propositions' truth which can be ascertained by normal procedures, and the legitimacy of the judgement underlying them, which derives from the experience upon which the judgement is based. Aesthetic argument, he concedes, concerns the truth of the proposition, not the grounds of the judgement. Epistemologically speaking, Savile thinks these two aspects of the aesthetic judgement—the propositions we use to express its content and its experiential foundation—are mutually independent. In what follows I shall challenge the intelligibility of this mutual independence. We agree that the grand categories do not inform us: they do not specify the state or states of mind that supposedly legitimize our judgement, nor do they even attract our attention to them, and although we sometimes think that they attract

³ Cf. Cohen, 'An Emendation in Kant's Theory of Taste', 1990.

⁴ I.e. in more specifically Kantian terms: aesthetic judgement expresses a subjective, pleasant awareness of a free play of the cognitive faculties with regard to the esteemed object, of which we nevertheless claim that it be valid for everyone suitably equipped. I shall return to this in Chapter 4.

⁵ Savile, *Kantian Aesthetics Pursued*, 1993, One. 'Taste, Perception and Experience'. pp. 1-17.

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attention to the object and its details, in reality they do nothing of the kind. Saying of a Rembrandt self-portrait that it is excellent may situate the portrait (logically speaking) within a comparative horizon of other paintings, or it may merely invite people to look at it more intently. Either way, such an evaluation does not specify what to look for. This suggests the relative unimportance of these grand aesthetic terms. They do not inform us about the object, or about the judging subject. Returning for the moment to the object, an analogous problem arises: we cannot infer the aesthetic value of an object from its 'objective' properties, due to a lack of rules or theories that link specific (combinations of) objective properties with aesthetic values. As a consequence the grand aesthetic terms may possibly occasion disagreement, but they will be of little help—if any—in subsequent aesthetic arguments. It is for reasons like this that we use a different terminology to argue matters aesthetic: a terminology that is devoid of highbrow pretensions. These terms primarily are descriptive. However, this is not unproblematic either. It is not evident how these descriptive terms should be relevant for the aesthetic judgement they are supposed to help explain.

The existence of these two sets of terms whose mutual relevance is the common goal of our arguments rather than their solution confronts us with a dilemma: either we give up the grand categories and their normative claim to experiential legitimacy, and consequently restrict the analysis of aesthetic discourse to allegedly descriptive, critical remarks; or we honour the grand categories and their experiential implications, but will be helpless in specifying these categories' relevance for our aesthetic discussions. Kant took the latter strategy; the former, defending the relevance of critical language stems from a more recent date, from the analytical approach to linguistics.⁶ What is needed here are, first, disputable categories to describe the aesthetic object with. These categories must, secondly, be so deeply involved in the aesthetic experience that is alleged to justify our judgements, that they at once clarify how they can form the reasons for our seemingly incorrigible grand claims. Starting in the present chapter with the first demand of descriptive relevance, I shall provide arguments for the necessity to expand our ontology, elaborating first on Locke's position on primary and secondary qualities, and secondly on Frank Sibley's seminal position. This strategy is to serve the achievement of the 'tertiary' mixture of seemingly incompatible strategies

⁶ I will, in the end, propose to dissolve the dilemma by expanding our ontology with tertiary qualities. Although these properties are attributable to aesthetic objects they depend for their discernment on specific mental activities that are central for our aesthetic experience as well. This, however, shall have to wait until we reach the third part.

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that I shall be proposing in the third part when returning to the second demand of experiential embeddedness.

Kant argued that the grand terms are aesthetic if and only if their application is not ruled by understanding, but by taste, and we shall see below that Kant has analyzed this in terms of the free play of the cognitive faculties. Kant links the 'aesthetic' with taste. According to Sibley aesthetic difference depends upon aesthetic properties, which are the referents of aesthetic descriptive terms.⁷ He proposed a rather more elaborate set of terms than Kant did in his analysis of beauty and the sublime, but did not change the linkage of 'aesthetic' with taste. According to Sibley we describe an aesthetic object as 'tender', 'tense', or 'harmonious', or we call it 'frightening', or 'appalling'—without meaning these terms to be literally applicable; or 'dainty', 'graceful', and 'elegant', used in more straightforward ways.⁸ The propositions tagged 'aesthetic' by Sibley derive their aestheticness from the fact that their 'correct' assessment is alleged to be an exclusive matter of taste, which supposedly supplements our more normal perceptive activities. I think Sibley was right in sustaining the taste-'aesthetic' link, but I will argue that he was wrong in thinking that terms other than the Kantian 'grand' ones deserve to be tagged 'aesthetic'. This much shall follow from my argument. According to Sibley there are (and can be) no necessary or sufficient conditions for the application of these aesthetic terms, but they do describe the object. They provide the information we would need to convince other people of the correctness of our aesthetic assessment. Aesthetic descriptive terms can be compared with more normal objective terms denoting an object's natural properties in that their criteria of application lie in the object.

Evidently, the terms we are looking for must inform us of the whereabouts of the object, but it is an open question whether some object or event described correctly with whatever terms apart from the grand ones is thereby judged aesthetically, or, as we have it, with taste. One can deny that this is an open question by arguing that calling something 'elegant' means judging it aesthetically, because this descriptive term's aesthetic implications supposedly form an analytical part of its meaning. But can we not think of things that are elegant yet ugly—perhaps for different reasons? And how do we make the necessary distinctions? The answers to such questions may depend not on the meaning of the terms involved but rather on the objects we want

⁷ Sibley, 'Aesthetic Concepts', 1959

⁸ I am using the examples put forward in Sibley, 'Aesthetic Concepts: A Rejoinder', 1963; and, 'Aesthetic Concepts', 1959. I do not take it as my task to distinguish between literal and metaphorical uses of language, nor to explain or defend such a distinction. Clarification on this count does not seem to touch upon the problem at issue.

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them to describe. So that, once we accede to the idea of there being more than one distinguishable grand category it is indeed an open question whether by applying any of the ‘descriptive’ terms to an object we also judge this object aesthetically.

Let us accept for the moment the existence of aesthetic categories referring to objects more or less like more normal object-terms such as ‘telephone’, ‘hard’, or ‘brown’ do. As far as their respective rules of application are concerned it seems much easier to correctly apply the word ‘telephone’ to the relevant entity than to establish an object’s ‘triteness’—unless of course this trite object is a story told too often and we are merely bored with hearing it. However, in such a case a merely subjective response is attributed and the triteness does not pertain to the story itself, but is projected onto it in a rather contingent manner. In general, the exact applicability of the term ‘trite’ may always be subject to some feeling we have towards the object, but to warrant the correctness we need something else on top: some disposition in the object to cause this feeling. Put differently, aesthetic terms describe aesthetic properties, but these are not lawfully connected to non-aesthetic properties. How then are they related?

To explain to someone how to apply the word ‘brown’ we merely have to point at things with a brown surface or show a brown sample and point at it, presupposing of course that one already has a concept of ‘colour’. If subsequently one proves that one knows how and when to point to brown things one will have grasped the meaning of ‘brown’. We could try to follow a similar procedure in explaining the meaning of an aesthetic concept, but evidently, this will prove much harder, and, what’s more, we cannot possibly in the process show a sample of the property involved. We might try empirically to find delicate things of all kinds and point out which of their properties make out their delicacy—for instance, their tiny movements, the smallness of their surface changes, et cetera. Perhaps aesthetic terms can be defined in terms of their relation to non-aesthetic terms.⁹ Such definition might then to a satisfactory degree play the role of the sample-sheet we use with colours. However, sheer enumeration of objective properties shall do little if anything to explain why we find an object beautiful. We do not point at the ‘lively’ Kandinsky painting and say “Look, it is square, three inches high, it has a red patch over there, and a yellow stripe beneath it, and, there, from left to right this blue diagonal daub of paint” in defence of its liveli-

⁹ This thesis certainly was defended by Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, 1958 (1757)

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ness.¹⁰ Recognition of the painting's liveliness presupposes that we project certain psychological and behavioural considerations onto the plane of paint; considerations, for example, like the ones attributed to a lively boy's wild movements and frivolous yellings. Aesthetic properties involve this subjective projection instead of a more or less passive taking in.¹¹ Before specifying the nature of such projection let us first look at the qualities that admit of being taken in more or less passively.

3. Primary, Secondary, and Aesthetic Qualities

Eighteenth-century empiricism suggested that there exist two kinds of perceptive properties, primary and secondary qualities, neither of which, I will argue, sufficiently explains the subjectivist projection characteristic of aesthetic properties. Locke used three arguments.¹² An epistemological argument in terms of the role of our mental faculties; an ontological one in terms of what does and does not belong to the object in itself; and a third in terms of whether or not the ideas we have of these qualities resemble them. In what follows I shall not go into the third argument, as I don't think it is intelligible. First, because my idea of a red patch is not itself 'red', and my idea of a table is of neither the same form nor the same matter as the relevant table; secondly, because trying to conceive of a criterion to compare the idea with the property would lead us into an infinite regress.¹³ Locke's epistemological argument runs as follows:¹⁴ Primary qualities such as mobility, solidity, number, and figure are perceived by more than one of the senses—they are polymodally accessible; in particular they can be sensed by touch and sight alike.¹⁵ Secondary qualities, such as colours, tone, taste, and smell, on the contrary, are revealed (unimodally) to one of the senses only, and it is impossible for a person missing the appropriate sense to ever form the right idea of such a property. (One cannot possibly explain a tone or, for that matter, the concept of 'tone', to a person born deaf.) In his second, ontological, argument Locke argues that primary qualities, such as figure, are

¹⁰ I took this example from Berys Gaut, 'Metaphor and the Understanding of Art', 1994, who used it to argue for the necessarily metaphorical nature of critical language.

¹¹ Cf. Wollheim, 'Art and Evaluation', 1980.

¹² That is in: Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 1690, Book II, Chapter VIII 'Some further considerations concerning our Simple Ideas of Sensation'.

¹³ We need a criterion to establish the fitness of the criterion et cetera. McDowell, 'Values and Secondary Qualities', 1985, p. 113 too has argued against this use of resemblance.

¹⁴ Locke, *op.cit.*, Chapter III 'Of Simple Ideas of Sense', 1.

¹⁵ Locke, *op.cit.*, Chapter V 'Of Simple Ideas of Divers Senses'.

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inseparable from the bodies they adhere to: splitting a grain of wheat still leaves us with extended, solid bodies that are mobile or at rest, and which have a certain number. Secondary qualities, on the contrary, are said to be nothing in the object but dispositions to produce, by way of the primary qualities of the object, some specific sensation in a subject suitably equipped.¹⁶

If it weren't sustained by the epistemological argument, however, this ontological argument would not hold, for several reasons. First, if secondary qualities are identified by the impressions they produce in us, then there is hardly a reason to posit in the object such ontological oddities as 'dispositions to produce them'. How would we know that secondary qualities are to be identified by such powers in the object, if not by our perceiving these powers. But either we perceive them by perceiving the secondary qualities they cause in us, or we have an independent access to them which would reduce them in the end to purely primary qualities. In neither case do they explain what they are supposed to explain. Eddy Zemach has suggested to me that we know a secondary quality's being based in some 'primary' disposition, analogously to seeing the magnetic power of a metal bar not by perceiving the (dispositional) power itself, but by perceiving its effects.¹⁷ I agree that this is how we might perceive magnetism, but disagree that this example teaches us how to understand the dispositional basis of secondary qualities in primary qualities, because we can see the metal bar without seeing its magnetic effects, but there is no sense to seeing a thing that is disposed to look red without seeing its redness. Perceiving it with a distinct sense (e.g. touch) evidently does not help either in perceiving the disposition apart from its effects.¹⁸ I agree with the Lockean assumption that a changed object will still have a figure—even though it be different from its original figure—and also some or other extension—even though it be different from its original extension—but in the same vein a changed object shall also have some or other colour, taste or tactile quality. The related argument that only primary qualities are causally effective is oversimplifying: secondary qualities are causally effective as well, as the hot sunshine on the black roof attests.¹⁹ Finally, we may all agree that specific sense modalities are needed to develop general concepts of secondary quality kinds, such as 'colour', or

¹⁶ Locke, *op.cit.*, Chapter VIII, 10.

¹⁷ In a private communication, November, 1995.

¹⁸ This relates also to the translation problem of polymodality that I will go into shortly.

¹⁹ Cf. Hacker, *Appearance and Reality: A Philosophical Investigation into Perception and Perceptual Qualities*, 1987 for an extended critique of this and other arguments for and against the distinction between primary and secondary qualities.

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‘tone’. But no sense modality on its own suffices for the perception of a red rather than blue, shade of colour. For singular perceptions of secondary qualities real objects are presupposed, not mere dispositions: actualities.²⁰ (Hallucination forms no objection to this thesis—we have intersubjectively-available means of establishing with objective certainty whether some attribution of colour is true or not, i.e. whether it does or does not pertain to the object.) So out goes the idea that secondary qualities are illusory and that only the primary ones really adhere to the object. My point is, in short, that the ontological argument cannot be sustained independently from the epistemological argument.

The epistemological argument—that secondary qualities are perceived by only one of the senses whereas primary qualities are perceived by several—is incapable of proving the point it is designed to bring home: that there is an ontological distinction between primary and secondary qualities. The argument serves two theses, and this leads to confusion if not conflict. The first thesis relates polymodal perceivability to ontological provability; the second relates it to knowledge of the nature of the perceived. As an existential proof polymodality—if elaborated sufficiently—seems to form a convincing criterion,²¹ but as a source of establishing the exact nature of properties—what they are like—it is rather weak. These theses do not put secondary qualities on a different footing from primary ones. First of all: secondary qualities are as real as primary ones. We have produced artificial means of polymodal efficacy that suffice to establish the existence of secondary qualities. Even though we must have seen a red patch to understand what ‘red’ means, once we are in the possession of the relevant faculty (colour vision) we can prove just what colour is there in the object by referring to sample sheets, or by intellectually interpreting some scientific diagram or number. Through samples, scientific measurement, and possibly yet other operationalizable procedures we can accurately establish the existence of secondary qualities even though such means as these do absolutely nothing to further our

²⁰ In response to yet another objection by Eddy Zemach: Upon my report “the house was all green” someone might ask “what shade of green?” and I might show her a sample set from the paint shop, and point out the relevant green sample. Thus I am showing the house’s phenomenal quality without proving it to be like this—without proving the reality of the house’s green appearance. Indeed, in the absence of the house we can thus convey its colour. The epistemological legitimacy of my pointing at the sample, however, is based not on the specific phenomenal nature of this shade but on the fact that a sample such as this might also be used to prove this colour’s pertinence to the house. This is why one would want to believe my testimony of the house’s greenness.

²¹ In this I adhere to the experimental realism defended by Hacking, *Representing and Intervening: Introductory Topics in the Philosophy of Natural Science*, 1983

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insights into the exact nature of the properties involved. The conditions under which secondary qualities shall be correctly perceived can be operationalized as convincingly as we claim they can with primary qualities. We may conclude that our perception is equally efficient regarding secondary qualities as it is regarding primary ones. Therefore, the existence of both kinds of qualities can be proven by polymodal means. Secondly, if primary qualities are such that they are perceivable by more than one of our senses, then it is presupposed that they be perceivable, and that notwithstanding their ‘primacy’ they resemble secondary qualities in being dispositions of objects that cause perceptions in us. Thus, the exact nature of species of both kinds of properties is response-dependent, as our contemporaries would call it, and, consequently, this nature cannot be assessed objectively.²² This goes for primary as well as secondary qualities.

This creates a problem of translation for the polymodality-thesis. It is evident that no light-wave numbers can explain what a red patch should look like, but we hardly fare better with the primary qualities. If ‘figure’ is supposed to be perceivable through two senses, sight and touch, we are still confronted with the task of specifying exactly how the data from touch are to be translated into those of sight, or the other way around.²³ Tactile data are processed by causal connections between one’s body and its objects, whereas visual and audible data stem from rather distinct kinds of distasteful processing. Let me give an example: when I watch my son brush his teeth, I hear the sound of the brush and see it going up and down, and common sense tells me that this indeed is how brushing one’s teeth should look and sound. However, I also see the tiles on the wall glistening from being polished, I see the colour of my son’s face and clothes, none of which do I also hear; instead, I hear the ticking of the clock in the adjacent room, a car passing by outside, and none of these things I see. What I see is in this room, and much of it remains inaudible, whereas what I hear is inside and outside this room, and is only partially visible. Now if these two senses structure the world in so incomparably different ways, on which grounds do we come to think of the sight and sound of teeth brushing as hanging together, and as forming the phenomenal appearance of a singular event?²⁴ Seen from this angle the distinction between primary and secondary qualities appears to

²² Cf. Johnston, ‘Dispositional Theories of Value’, 1989; Pettit, ‘Realism and Response-Dependence’, 1991; Lewis, ‘Dispositional Theories of Value’, 1989.

²³ It is no insignificant matter what direction of fit this translation is supposed to obey.

²⁴ Arguments such as these lead me to direct realism concerning (embodied) perception—cf. Chapter 8, Sect. 2.

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arise from a misunderstanding of the logical incompatibility of data produced by the various senses. We may conclude that polymodality is of no help once we try to explain the phenomenal nature of the relevant qualities. Therefore, for an assessment of their nature primary qualities are as dependent upon perceptual states as secondary qualities are supposed to be. Regarding both types of qualities then existence can be proven once some sort of operationalizable polymodality is installed, but with or without such polymodality no explanation of their specific nature is forthcoming. If there were properties confronting us with a reduced polymodal accessibility, however, we would most certainly have to be antirealists regarding their ontology, since we would be incapable of proving their existence. It would be this ontological peculiarity that would mark them off from primary and secondary qualities. Well, aesthetic properties are like that.

Sibley has chosen a different strategy to account for our application of aesthetic terms, and so he should, because of his allegiance to the thesis that these terms in their own right describe the object. In order to describe we must be willing to assert what is the case, and for an assertion we must have some epistemological access to the world. According to Sibley for the application of more normal 'objective' terms all we need is perception, whereas for the application of aesthetic terms we also need taste. With this thesis—that taste provides the criteria for a successful assertive description of an object as delicate, or trite, et cetera—Sibley, however, begs the question. Taste either functions cognitively, in that it merely determines the kind of object we are confronted with, just as perception does; however, if that were the case, why would we want to introduce this supplementary faculty, taste? Or taste does not function determiningly, but otherwise. But now the specifications of taste's miraculous functionality, I am quite confident, will bring in the very problems the faculty was designed to solve. Sibley does not specify the functionality of taste, so that we really do not know where taste finds its criteria, if indeed it has any.

Taste is the faculty with which we discern whether an object does or does not have aesthetic value. Possibly only a person with taste can experience aesthetically a Bach Cantate, or a Warne Marsh ballad. Taste decides whether we find the cantate or ballad beautiful or not; however, it does not imply clear-cut perceptual or conceptual criteria, so that, if one takes taste to be decisive for our aesthetic descriptions one is still only half way there. Reversely, aesthetic descriptive terms have only a limited relevance. To describe a ballad as trite merely provides other people with a hint as to how they might listen to it, but does not automatically cause one to experience it accordingly. Sibley's is just one more cognitivist answer to the threat of

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subjectivist relativism. Jerrold Levinson, among others, put forward the thesis that aesthetic properties supervene upon non-aesthetic ones.²⁵ Crucial in this is the idea that the emergent—supervenient—aesthetic attributes are irreducible to their non-aesthetic basis.²⁶ One cannot translate e.g. ‘sad’ into properties like ‘grey’, etc. We must have an answer to the question why this is so, lest the notion of aesthetic supervenience begs the question: how do we perceive supervenient qualities? Merely by looking (as e.g. colours are perceived), or do we need the homunculi faculty of taste, as Sibley thinks. However illuminating the notion of supervenience may be, for the most part it illuminates where those who defend it think we should stop asking questions.

In conclusion: The distinction between primary and secondary qualities—as it stands—has little relevance for ontology. Making the distinction means proposing some account of perception in terms of sense modalities. The account of perception that follows from my arguments is a direct realist one: ‘perceiving something is being in direct, polymodal-embodied contact with it’. We perceive things under a description and this accounts for our ability to bring such a large number of different data from the various senses into the perception of singular events. I will return in Chapter 8 to this theory of perception. Sibley’s suggestion that aesthetic properties are perceived not merely through the normal senses but through taste illustrates that aesthetic qualities are unlike primary and secondary qualities. However, in contrast to Sibley I understand this distinction between aesthetic and perceptual properties in terms of a restriction of perceptual polymodality and embodiment. Sibley’s use of ‘taste’ does not explain why we would want to describe aesthetic (disembodied) properties in terms borrowed from emotional, and ethical contexts. I will argue in the second and third parts of this study that the mental power which is missing from our awareness of aesthetic properties is imagination, not taste.

4. Subjectivism—Preliminary Remarks

According to Wollheim there are four important answers to the question of the status of aesthetic properties.²⁷ According to realism aesthetic evaluations are either true or false. The realist compares aesthetic values with primary qualities by taking their existence to be independent of other properties and of

²⁵ Levinson, ‘Aesthetic Supervenience’, 1990, p. 134.

²⁶ Levinson, *op.cit.*, p. 146-48.

²⁷ Wollheim, ‘Art and Evaluation’, 1980 He doesn’t explicitly distinguish between aesthetic descriptive properties and our aesthetic evaluations.

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(human) psychological states. Aesthetic values are independent from the person attributing it to an object. The second answer—objectivism—holds that values in general depend on mankind, not on specific people (like a relativist thinks). For the objectivist too aesthetic judgements are true or false but what decides their truth is not the properties of the object but the ‘correlated experience’. This ‘correlated experience’ entails various mental phenomena that derive their relevance to the matter from being a response to the work of art shareable by everyone.²⁸ According to the objectivist all people should have the very same response containing thoughts about the object—not about the subject. This, however, Wollheim thinks, disqualifies objectivism as an account of aesthetic values. Objectivism should explain why and when an aesthetic judgement is valid, and should do so by referring to objective properties and to our understanding of the work of art, not to a consensus among judges.²⁹ Nor does objectivism really entail an objective account because it doesn’t specify the sufficient conditions for objectivity. Suppose, for example, that everybody agrees about some work’s aesthetic value, but all cite the wrong reasons (e.g., economic or social ones), then, evidently, the attributed value does not pertain to the object, and therefore, is not objective. Objectivism ought to specify when and how an evaluation is caused by a work, and, how this causality relates essentially to human nature. Because the theory cannot possibly provide these specifications (no theory can) it doesn’t give a necessary condition either for the existence of some value property. Consensus alone is insufficient. Moreover, someone missing one of the requisite human characteristics may for that reason miss the experience demanded by the work or he may have the experience in the absence of the work’s meriting it—but neither of these failures proves or disproves some value’s presence in the object. Lastly, according to an objectivist point of view aesthetic values compare with secondary qualities. Frank Sibley is an objectivist. He identifies taste as the faculty requisite for the perception of aesthetic values. Persons with taste shall perceive values aright, but what to do with a person lacking in taste who claims to perceive some aesthetic value or other? Persons with taste should be able to correct him, but how do we know who has taste and who hasn’t? We might take some aesthetic value and check who are the people perceiving it aright, but how are we to take an aesthetic value if it hasn’t been established that we have taste? I have argued above that aesthetic properties are not comparable to secondary qualities because of their restricted modality.

²⁸ Wollheim, *op.cit.*, p. 232-33.

²⁹ Wollheim, *op.cit.*, p. 234.

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The third answer—relativism—alleges the dependence of aesthetic values upon specific people or groups of people. Which people or groups are involved depends on the exact theory held. There are two varieties of relativism. According to the first, one group holds the authority and all others must comply with its judgements. This relativism should first explain where the authority stems from, and it cannot answer this by giving a realist or objectivist account without lapsing into these respective positions. So the authority is not based on de facto considerations. If, however, it is de jure, then relativism offends the principle of acquaintance, in excluding alternate routes to the judgements of the group holding the authority. One might want to back out by retreating into a ‘everybody holds an equal authority’ stance, but this merely multiplies our problems, because of every object contradictory judgements will be true. One might also want to retreat into the ‘an aesthetic judgement does not attribute a property to an object, but means: “this object is held beautiful, by someone”’ stance. Evidently, this changes what began as an aesthetic problem (what is the status of aesthetic value?) into a sociological one: ‘who holds that this or that value pertains to this or that object?’ Aesthetic value thus is sacrificed to sociology. Yet another variety of relativism alleges that it is a certain experience that justifies someone's attributing an aesthetic value. Here, however, aesthetic value becomes a problem of the truth of the claim of having had the appropriate experience. Wollheim: “The issue about Relativism might be put by saying that, when Relativism goes in one direction, it takes the predicate ‘is valued’ as this occurs in aesthetic evaluation and reinterprets it as ‘is valued by’: when it goes in the other direction, it takes the predicate ‘is true’ as this applies to aesthetic evaluation and reinterprets it as ‘is true for’.”³⁰ The fourth, and most plausible answer—subjectivism—is not a brand of relativism. It has a double task: first, it must argue against objectivism that the relevant aesthetic experience is complex enough to introduce doubts as to whether or not subjective considerations form part of it. Secondly, it must argue for the plausibility of the idea that somewhere between the object and the perceiving subject the direction of fit is reversed: the beholder does not merely passively perceive what is in the object but actively projects idiosyncracies into it as well. The appreciative experience more or less fills the object with value. Both demands Wollheim puts to subjectivism shall be amply met in the chapters to come.

³⁰ Wollheim, *op.cit.*, p. 238.