

Motivational Internalism & Disinterestedness

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Forthcoming in the *British Journal of Aesthetics*, please cite published version

Abstract: According to the most important objection to the existence of moral beauty, true judgements of moral beauty are not possible as moral judgements require being motivated to act in line with the moral judgement made, and judgements of beauty require not being motivated to act in any way. Here, I clarify the argument underlying the objection, and show that it does not show that moral beauty does not exist. I present two responses: namely, that the beauty of moral beauty does not lie in the moral goodness per se (the “adjacent properties” response); and that only a dispositional motivation to act is required for the moral judgements that are typically made as part of judgements of moral beauty, whereas aesthetic judgements only rule out state motivations to act (the “equivocation of motivation required” response). In addressing the objection, I show how moral beauty is consistent with disinterestedness, and so should be accepted more widely; and also clarify where the beauty in moral beauty resides, and how the moral-aesthetic distinction should be drawn.

Keywords: motivational internalism, disinterestedness, beauty, ugliness, moral beauty.

§1. Introduction

In recent years, there has been renewed interest in moral beauty among philosophers. It has been argued that there is beauty in internal dispositions such as moral virtues (e.g. fair-mindedness, charity, and compassion), morally good actions, and in the appearances of people who are morally good, with most recent work focusing on the former cases (see e.g., McGinn, 1998; Gaut, 2007; Paris, 2018a, 2018b, 2020; 2022; Doran, 2021, 2023; Author, redacted for anonymity a, b).

In making the case for the idea that internal dispositions such as virtues are beautiful, it has been argued that this view should be accepted as it is robust to certain objections—such as the objection that talk of virtues as beautiful is metaphorical, loose, or confused (see e.g. Gaut, 2007; Paris, 2018a; and Doran, 2021), as well as the objection that beauty is a perceptual property and so cannot be found in internal dispositions, such as virtues (Doran, 2023).

But arguably the most important objection to a number of forms of this view—including the forms of the view which say that morally good actions and internal dispositions are beautiful—is that morally good entities cannot be beautiful because, roughly, true judgements of beauty are necessarily disinterested, and true judgements of moral goodness are necessarily interested.

This objection (labelled the “objection from incompatible motivational requirements” hereafter), which is thought to be latent in parts of Kant’s account of aesthetic and moral judgement, is thought to be the most important objection historically, as it seems to be the principal reason why moral beauty fell out of philosophical favour from the eighteenth century onwards (see e.g., Gaut, 2007: 124; Norton, 1995: 225), despite its popularity among the ancients and the British moralists.

Moreover, it likely continues to be the greatest impediment to wholesale acceptance of moral beauty. The idea that beauty is disinterested has been widely and robustly held since the eighteenth century—having been articulated in some form, in addition to Kant (1790/2000), by e.g. Schopenhauer (1818/1969), Bell (1914), Stolnitz (1960), Beardsley (1981), Mothersill (1984), Levinson (1996: 15-6), Kemp (1999), Stecker (2001), Zangwill (2001), Parsons and Carlson (2008: 104), Scruton (2009) and Matthen (2017)¹—and is even acknowledged by its recent critics to continue to be influential (e.g. Riggle, 2016: 3), and is treated as the default position (Nehamas, 2007; Riggle, 2016; Lopes, 2018).² In fact, as we will see, the ideas that judgements of beauty are disinterested, and moral judgements are not (in the relevant ways), have a great deal of plausibility.

¹ A different kind of disinterestedness from the broadly Kantian disinterest referred to here was posited by the British moralists—namely that beauty is disinterested in the sense that we can find objects beautiful that do not serve our ends, by, for example, entering sympathetically into the mind of an individual whose ends would be served by the object (see e.g. Hume, 1739-40/1978: 3.3.1.8, 576-7; 3.3.1.15, 581-2; 3.3.1.20, 584-5; 3.3.5.6, 617; Smith, 1759/2002: 209-210). On this view of disinterest, there may be nothing inconsistent about the idea of moral beauty: Hutcheson (1725/2004: 9-10), for example, suggests that both virtue and beauty can be judged as such without serving any interest that the person making the judgement may hold.

² In some of these cases, we might even wonder if the Kantian disinterestedness claim is indeed rejected, or whether the figures marshalled in support of an interested conception of beauty do in fact support such a conception. The “interest” that Riggle (2016) proposes is involved in judgements of beauty is, as he himself notes, compatible with the Kantian conception of disinterest (13). And while Nehamas (2007) is keen to return to what he claims is Plato’s interested view of beauty—namely, that true judgements of beauty can rightly involve desire for the good—both opponents and supporters of Kantian disinterest have appealed to Plato to support their positions. Scruton (2009: 54), for example, glosses “Plato’s original idea” as “that beauty is not just an invitation to desire, but also a call to renounce it.” For discussion of this matter, see Konstan (2014).

As such, it is clear that if moral beauty were to violate the constraint that beauty is disinterested, for many it would count as a serious impediment to accepting its existence.

Despite the importance of the objection from incompatible motivational requirements to the debate surrounding the existence of moral beauty, the argument underlying the objection itself remains surprisingly ill-defined, and the existing responses to it (such as they are), as I will show, are inadequate.

In what follows, I undertake three main tasks: First, I make the nature of the objection precise, by making explicit the argument that is best taken as underlying it. Second, I suggest that the brief existing responses to the objection are either not successful or are not sufficiently decisive. Third, I argue instead in favour of two new reasons why the objection is not successful: one response—the “adjacent properties” response—according to which the argument underlying the objection is not successful because some of the beauty in cases of moral beauty is not found in the moral goodness per se but rather in a property that is adjacent to it, and so the argument is either not sound or not valid (depending on the nature of the adjacent property); and another response—the “equivocation of motivation required” response—which suggests that the motivations that are involved in the moral judgements that are made in cases of moral beauty are not of the same kind as the motivations that are typically required for ordinary moral judgements as such and which are ruled out by aesthetic disinterestedness, and so the argument is not valid.

A number of benefits are envisaged to flow from this contribution. On the side of moral beauty, it is envisaged that it should be clearer where the beauty in putative cases of moral beauty lies, and how the distinction between moral judgements and judgements of moral beauty should be understood. Moreover, it is envisaged that more philosophers will embrace the existence of moral beauty in seeing that it is not inconsistent with disinterestedness. On the side of disinterestedness, it is envisaged that it will be clearer what disinterestedness entails and that a certain kind of motivational internalism may even be true in the aesthetic domain. Moreover, it is

envisaged that it will help prevent philosophers from using the existence of moral beauty to argue against disinterestedness.

§2. *Motivational internalism & the objection from incompatible motivational requirements*

What is the objection from incompatible motivational requirements exactly? In this section, I attempt to make the objection more precise, and make the argument that is best taken as underlying it explicit.

The objection from incompatible motivational requirements is thought to be latent in §42 of the *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, where Kant writes:

We have a faculty of merely aesthetic judgment, for judging of forms without concepts and for finding a satisfaction in the mere judging of them which we at the same time make into a rule for everyone without this judgment being grounded on an interest or producing one. – Alternatively, we also have a faculty of intellectual judgment, for determining *a priori* for mere forms of practical maxims (insofar as they qualify in themselves for universal legislation) a satisfaction which we make into a law for everyone without our judgment being grounded on any interest, *although it produces one*. The pleasure or displeasure in the first judgment is called that of taste, in the second that of moral feeling. (1790/2000, §42, 5: 300: 180)

Based on this, Gaut glosses the latent objection in the following way:

The idea of aesthetic disinterest in Kant's sense is that when we make an aesthetic judgement, we are not concerned with the existence of the object of that judgement, but only with its appearance; and relatedly, we have no practical interest in the object, that is, no interest in acting in any way towards it, as opposed merely to contemplating it. The moral judgement, in contrast, does ground an interest: in judging that an action is

morally wrong or right, I necessarily have a motivation to act in that way, if I am able to. (2007: 123)

On the kind of views of moral judgement that Kant and Gaut articulate here, which are called ‘motivational internalist’ views by contemporary philosophers, roughly, whenever we judge something to be morally right or wrong, or good or bad, we are necessarily motivated to act in accordance with that judgement to that extent, such that if one is not, at least defeasibly, motivated in this way, then one has not made a bone fide moral judgement.

If we judge it good or right to give money to a homeless person, we will be motivated to give money to them *to some extent*; and if we aren’t motivated to act in this way *to any extent*, then we cannot *truly* be said to have judged that giving money to them is good, despite what we might say.

Kant and Gaut differ, however, with respect to whether they formulate the interestedness of moral judgements in a constitutive or non-constitutive manner. On Gaut’s gloss, the motivation is part of the moral judgement itself—that is, it partly constitutes it; but on Kant’s conception, it is simply a necessary product. Since nothing about the plausibility of the objection itself turns on this, it is best to remain with the idea that the relevant motivations are merely necessary (without the further requirement that they partly constitute moral judgements), in the interest of not making the objection committed to additional and unnecessary metaphysical views that might be controversial.³

³ In the recent literature on motivational internalism, non-constitutive internalism has been proposed to show that it does not follow from the truth of internalism that moral judgements are fundamentally non-cognitive (see e.g., Tresan, 2006). The issue of the precise nature of moral judgements, however, is not one that we need not take a stand on here, as the idea that the relevant motivation is necessary is enough to get the objection from incompatible motivational requirements off the ground. In addition to differing with respect to whether they are constitutive or non-constitutive, contemporary forms of motivational internalism differ on a number of other dimensions, including along an unconditional-conditional dimension, and along a direct-deferred dimension (for this taxonomy, see Björnsson et al., 2015). Conditional formulations include standard conditions that rule out various kinds of amoralists, such as apathetic, psychopathic or weak-willed moral agents (defences of conditional formulations are offered by e.g. Koorsgaard, 1996; defences of unconditional formulations are offered by e.g. Lenman, 1999; Eggers, 2015). This dimension will not be discussed further, as it doesn’t have a bearing on the cogency of the objection—even if the apathetic, psychopathic or weak-willed are ruled out, there would still seem to be a tension between the motivational requirements for moral judgements, and those for aesthetic judgements. The deferred-direct dimension, however, can be made relevant, as we will see in §4.

By contrast, on the view of aesthetic judgement articulated here, whenever we judge something to be beautiful or ugly, we are necessarily *not* motivated to practically act in any way with respect to the beautiful or ugly object, and if the object does give rise to a motivation, then one has not made a bona fide judgement of beauty or ugliness. Moreover, to the extent that we judge something to be beautiful or ugly, we cannot do this if it satisfies or fails to satisfy some antecedent interest.

Here, however, some amendment to the view of aesthetic disinterestedness is required for this view, and the objection to moral beauty of which it forms a part, to be plausible. For it is clear that people who are judged to be beautiful regularly stir sexual or romantic attraction—that is, they ignite a desire to have sexual intercourse with, or become romantically involved with, those people; and this would, absurdly, be ruled out by such a conception. For this reason, it is best to conceive of this conception of disinterest in a *pro tanto* manner. That is to say, whenever we judge something to be beautiful or ugly, we are necessarily *not* motivated to practically act in any way with respect to the beautiful or ugly object *to that extent*, and if the object does give rise to a motivation *to that extent*, then one has not made a bona fide judgement of beauty or ugliness. Moreover, to the extent that we judge something to be beautiful or ugly, we cannot do this if it satisfies or fails to satisfy some antecedent interest *to that extent*.⁴

If we judge someone to be beautiful, for example, we do not want to do anything, such as have sexual intercourse with, that person, *to that extent*. Such a desire may *result from*, or *accompany*, such a judgement; but in cases where we wouldn't make the judgement if this desire weren't aroused, then one would not have made a bona fide judgement of beauty. Moreover, if we judge someone to be beautiful, we do not do so to the extent that they satisfy, or would satisfy, our sexual mores. Here too such satisfactions, or judgements of the ability to satisfy such desires, may

⁴ While Kant doesn't mention the *motivation to act* in this passage; his notion of "interest" seems to refer to having an interest to act, and connectedly, caring about whether the object of the judgement truly exists. For a similar interpretation of this passage, as well as of Kant's broader views of the incompatibility of moral and aesthetic judgements, see Gaut (2007: 124) and Shelley (2022).

also arise; but if we wouldn't make that judgement of beauty if our mores weren't satisfied, or if we didn't judge the object of the judgement to have the power to satisfy such mores, then we would not have made a bona fide judgement of beauty, despite what we might say.

Indeed, such a *pro tanto* conception jibes better with what Kant says elsewhere in the critique. In §2, for example, he notes that judgements that combine an interest with a judgement of taste, are “partial” or not “pure” judgements of taste, and that “the pure judgement of taste does not in itself even ground any interest” (1790/2000: §2, 5: 205, 91). As such, he is clear that the mere presence of an interest does not preclude a candidate judgement being a judgement of beauty—it just cannot be a judgement of beauty *to that extent*.

With this in mind, and filling out the suppressed premise that is not made explicit, the objection from incompatible motivational requirements is best pressed in the following way:

(P1) If an agent, A, makes a moral judgement, MJ, of object, O, then, necessarily, A is motivated to act practically towards O in accordance with the MJ to that extent (the interestedness claim).

(P2) If an agent, A, makes an aesthetic judgement (e.g. a judgement of beauty), AJ, of object, O, then, necessarily, A is not motivated to act practically towards O in any way to that extent (the disinterestedness claim).

(P3) If an agent, A, makes a judgement of moral beauty of object, O, then A makes an aesthetic judgement, AJ, of O to the extent that, and because, A makes a moral judgement, MJ, of O (the putative structure of judgements of moral beauty claim).⁵

⁵ I have not said much to justify the idea that this is indeed the structure of judgements of moral beauty that those who are sceptical of moral beauty have in mind. One reason for this is, as I have noted, that the full argument underlying the objection has not been made explicit. Nonetheless, it seems plausible that it is thought that the beauty of moral beauty is found in its goodness per se. As I discuss at length in §4, this is *partly* right.

(C) By (P1) and (P2), an agent, A, cannot make an aesthetic judgement of object, O, to the extent that, and because, A makes a moral judgement of O (as P3 has it), and therefore, true judgements of moral beauty cannot exist.

§3. *Dealing with the objection from incompatible motivational requirements: Existing solutions*

What are the existing solutions to this objection? And how persuasive are they? In this section, I outline the two strategies that have been pursued to date, albeit briefly: Gaut's (2007) strategy, which can be thought of as rejecting the disinterestedness of aesthetic judgements claim (P2), and so as claiming that the argument underlying the objection is not sound. And Doran's (2021) strategy, which can be thought of as assuming the truth of the disinterestedness of aesthetic judgements claim (P2), and as arguing, indirectly, that either the interestedness of moral judgements claim (P1) or the structure of moral judgements claim (P3) is false, or that the argument is not valid. I will suggest that Gaut's argument against disinterestedness is not successful, and that Doran's (2021) argument remains less than fully persuasive, before turning to argue for two more promising solutions in §4.

Gaut (2007: 124-5) can be taken to briefly argue that the disinterestedness of aesthetic judgements claim (P2) is false and that therefore the argument underlying the objection is not sound. Gaut argues against disinterestedness by noting that there are cases where there is an interest that seems to be *internal* to the aesthetic practice or act of aesthetic appreciation: artists commonly make aesthetic judgements in creating a work of art, and these judgements ground an interest in changing the work so as to improve it aesthetically (e.g. in deciding which brushstroke to add next); similarly, people commonly make aesthetic judgements in getting ready to go out (when e.g. selecting an outfit, or looking in the mirror), and these judgements ground an interest in changing one's appearance aesthetically (e.g. by substituting a garment which "fits" the overall look better, or adjusting an accessory).

The problem with this strategy is, simply, that it threatens to miss its target. For, as shown by the clarification of the objection in §2, the disinterestedness claim when best formulated doesn't rule out the idea that beauty cannot give rise to a practical interest. It merely rules out the idea that something is beautiful *to the extent that* it gives rise to such a practical interest, such that if the practical interest were to disappear, so too would the judgement of beauty. And that isn't the case with respect to the cases that Gaut points to: if one considers adding a broach to a combination of garments, and finds the new combination beautiful, then one may thereby come to have an interest in adding the broach, and indeed, wearing the combination of garments out that evening; but it wouldn't thereby be beautiful *to the extent that*, and because, it gives rise to any such interest. Rather, arguably, it would be beautiful, at least in the broad sense⁶, because it tends to be pleasing independently of the satisfaction of any such interest (see also §4).⁷

Doran (2021), in contrast to Gaut, adopts an empirical strategy to argue that moral beauty is consistent with the disinterestedness of judgements of beauty. Having found evidence that the folk judge morally good people to be beautiful, he takes steps to rule out the possibility that this could be due to the influence of an interest that is incompatible with the disinterestedness of beauty (P2). For example, he considers the possibility that people might be using their judgements of beauty to merely satisfy their desire to express their moral approbation (rather than making aesthetic judgements) since they were given no other outlet for their positive moral evaluation. In defusing the threat that this possibility presents, Doran conducts further studies, the results of which suggest that giving people the opportunity to express their approbation—and thereby giving them an outlet for any pragmatic pressure they may feel to approve of the person—does not

⁶ For discussions of beauty in the broad (or thin) and narrow (or thick) senses, see e.g. Beardsley (1981), and Doran (2023).

⁷ In a similar vein to Gaut, Nehamas (2007) wishes to suggest that beauty rightly leads to the desire to make the object apart of one's life; Scarry (1999) suggests that beauty may lead to the desire to bring more objects of that kind about; and Doran (2017) suggests that we might use beautiful objects as a means of affective regulation. But whether judgements of beauty are truly judgements of beauty *to the extent that*, and because, they lead to these responses is far from clear (cf. the discussion of aesthetic internalism in §4.2). Moreover, given the popularity of the disinterestedness view, if there were a way of arguing against the objection without having to reject the disinterestedness view (or even wade into the debate surrounding attempts to defenestrate it), as I suggest is the case in §4, this may be preferable.

eliminate the effect of moral goodness on judgements of beauty (even if it seems to reduce the size of the effect somewhat). This shows, Doran suggests, that the evidence of moral beauty cannot be deflated fully in terms of an interest to express approval.

However, it might be thought that these first steps that Doran takes to show that moral beauty is consistent with the disinterestedness of beauty are not fully persuasive. While Doran's evidence might well show that people's judgements of moral beauty are not *fully deflatable* as stemming from an unalleviated pragmatic pressure to express approval, in the absence of which, moral goodness would not affect judgements of beauty (since, presumably, people's concept of beauty is disinterested, as he assumes), there are other possibilities. One such possibility is that people are making judgements of beauty to the extent that, and because, they are romantically attracted to the target individual in virtue of their moral goodness, and either that they do not consider this an error (as their concept of beauty is not disinterested), or that they would consider it an error but have failed to identify this erroneous source of their judgement of "beauty."

As such, at worst, it might be thought that Doran's evidence may merely show that people are subject to errors in making judgements of beauty, and so this evidence doesn't count against the cogency of the objection from incompatible motivational requirements (rather, it may be a casualty of it). And at best, supposing that the evidence is not the result of people making an error of some kind, it might be thought that this evidence remains unpersuasive because it does not clarify which part of the argument underlying the objection fails and why, and so lacks rational purchase in the face of the objection's prima facie plausibility: for example, does this evidence show that the argument fails because one or more of the premises is not true, and the argument is not sound, or because the premises are all true, but the argument isn't valid for some reason?

§4. *Dealing with the objection from incompatible motivational requirements: Two novel responses*

Failing Gaut and Doran’s existing solutions, how is the objection best dealt with? In this section, I want to propose two new responses to the objection, which apply to the two main kinds of moral beauty—the moral beauty that has been said to lie in internal dispositions (e.g. Gaut, 2007; Paris, 2017; 2022; Doran, 2021; Doran, 2023) and the beauty that has been thought to lie in actions (Schiller, 1793a; 1793b; Author, redacted for anonymity a; Author, redacted for anonymity b). First, I want to suggest that some of the beauty in these cases lies in a property that is adjacent to the moral goodness (the “adjacent property” response). As I will show, depending on the beauty-making property concerned, this shows that either (P3) is false—and the argument is not sound—or it shows that there is an ambiguity in (P1) and (P3), where the kind of moral judgements specified in (P1) are *evaluative* moral judgements, and the moral judgements specified in (P3) may be merely *descriptive* moral judgements—and the argument is not valid. Second, I turn to suggest that the argument is not valid for another reason (the “equivocation of motivation” response): namely, that the motivations that are necessary for the judgements that are referred to in (P1) are different from the motivations that tend to be part of the moral judgements that are referred to in (P3).⁸

§4.1. *The adjacent property response & the atomistic principle*

With respect to the first strategy, I want to suggest that whereas the kinds of moral judgements referred to in (P1) are evaluative moral judgements, the judgements of beauty in putative cases of

⁸ A final strategy, which is not pursued in any of the existing answers or in the proposals here, is to argue that (P1) is false, by arguing in favour of motivational externalism (see e.g. Copp, 1997; and Svavarsdottir, 1999). The problem with such a strategy is that the debate surrounding motivational internalism and externalism continues, with many still supporting a form of motivational internalism (for a summary, see Rosati, 2016). In fact, currently, a wafer-thin majority of philosophers seem to favor internalism: in the 2020 PhilPapers’ Survey 38% accepted or leaned towards internalism, and 37% accepted or leaned towards externalism (Bourget & Chalmers, 2023). As such, the hopes for settling this matter by resolving the debate about motivational internalism are slim, and to argue against the disinterestedness objection on these grounds would run the risk of only convincing a portion of philosophers—namely, just those who subscribe to moral externalism—of the cogency of moral beauty. Moreover, to pursue this strategy would also run the risk of tying the fate of moral beauty to the outcome of a further debate, perhaps unnecessarily. As a result, if there were a way settling this issue without having to settle the divisive debate surrounding motivational internalism, as I will suggest below, this would arguably be preferable.

moral beauty aren't always grounded in evaluative moral judgements of those cases; but rather in some adjacent property, the detection of which, at most, only requires descriptive moral judgements, but may not even require these in certain cases (see e.g., Shaftesbury, 1711/1999; Paris, 2018b, 2020; and Doran, 2023). There are two notable candidate adjacent properties here. As will become clear, whether the argument underlying the objection is, as a consequence, not sound, or not valid, depends on the adjacent property concerned.

First, in line with Paris (2018b, 2020), Shaftesbury (1711/1999), Schiller (1793a; 1793b), and Author a and b (redacted for anonymity), when we make some judgements of moral beauty, the object of our judgement of beauty may be some variety of form. Paris (2018b, 2020), for example, proposes that it is sufficient for beauty that something is well-formed—in the sense that the constellation of its parts achieves its proper function well—and pleases as such; and that this explains why virtues are beautiful.⁹ For Paris, virtues are constellations of dispositions that have the proper function of tending in the direction of certain kinds of moral behaviour. The virtue of charity, for example, is constituted, *inter alia*, by the tendency to believe that it would be a good thing to give money to those in need, and by the desire to do so, and the proper function of this constellation of dispositions is to lead people to act in charitable ways. Virtues are beautiful, for Paris, because the set of dispositions that constitute them work together to achieve the virtues' proper functions, and please as such. In the case of charity, for example, the belief that it is good to give money to those in need works together with the desire to do so, to tend to give rise to charitable behaviour, and pleases to that extent.

With this in mind, when we judge moral virtues to be beautiful—and indeed, even when we judge other kinds of moral beauty too, *mutatis mutandis* (e.g. Schiller, 1703a, 1793b, Author, redacted for anonymity a, b)—this judgement may not be grounded in a judgement that the virtue

⁹ Shaftesbury holds to a similar account, although he claims (at least at times) that pleasure is merely correlative, rather than constitutive (for discussion, see Gill, 2022, Ch. 2).

is morally good per se, but rather may be grounded in a judgement that the constellation of mental dispositions that constitute the virtue is well-formed, and tends to please as such.

Second, in line with Doran (2023), when we make judgements of moral beauty, the judgement of beauty may be grounded in the fact that the object has a disposition to give rise to a certain kind of emotion. Doran (2023), for example, suggests that the disposition to give rise to the emotion that is variously labelled “elevation” and “ecstasy” (among other terms) is sufficient for beauty—and that different virtues are beautiful, to varying extents, to the extent that they possess this disposition to different extents. He presents evidence that suggests that compassionate people are thought to be more beautiful on the inside than just people to the extent that the former have a greater disposition to give rise to this state. With this in mind, it might be suggested that when we judge moral virtues to be beautiful—and indeed, even when we judge other kinds of moral beauty too, *mutatis mutandis* (e.g. Author, redacted for anonymity a, b)—the judgement of beauty may be grounded in a disposition to give rise to a certain emotional state rather than a judgement of goodness per se.¹⁰

Against these “adjacent property” proposals, it might be suggested that they face an important problem: namely, that it is not yet clear that even judgements of the properties picked out by these accounts do not involve a judgement of moral goodness in the case of judgements of moral beauty, and so manage to evade the objection.

In the case of Paris’ formalist account, while we might be able to judge that a virtue is *well-formed* without making a moral judgement, it might be suggested that it is not clear that we can judge a virtue to be *beautiful* without making a moral judgement.

We might know that a charitable person has a well-formed virtue (in the relevant sense)—by variously knowing that the proper end of the virtue of charity is to lead to charitable behaviour, that a person believes that it is good to be charitable and desires to be so, and that this belief and

¹⁰ In further support of this idea, here one might note that this beauty is not fundamentally connected to morality, as the same kind of beauty is found in clearly non-moral cases. Doran (2022) presents evidence that beautiful flowers tend to give rise to this emotion, but there is no moral goodness to be judged as such in these cases.

desire work together to make this person behave in a charitable manner—without also believing that such things are themselves good. In support of this, we might note that CHARITABLE is a thick ethical concept, and like many such concepts, it is at least in principle able to be thought to be objectionable: the ethical egoist might describe an individual as “*charitable*” with disdain.

But, it might be pressed, while the ethical egoist might judge someone as having a well-formed virtue of charity, they will hardly take pleasure in this; and so, since Paris’ formalist account is conjunctive, requiring both well-formedness *and* pleasure, the well-formed virtue of charity would fail to be beautiful for the ethical egoist. In further support of this, it might be noted that we (who are not, presumably, ethical egoists) would not regard a case that is identical in all of the relevant ways, but morally bad, to be beautiful. To treat the ethical egoist as the object of appreciation rather than the appreciator: a person could be perfectly selfish—evinced a belief that it is good to be selfish, and desiring to care only for themselves, and thereby achieving the proper function of the vice of selfishness by acting selfishly (if vices have proper functions)—but they would not, it might be suggested, be beautiful, because they would not please to that extent. Indeed, it might be suggested that they would be positively *ugly* to that extent. In fact, Paris himself makes his account conjunctive—in requiring well-formedness *and* pleasure—precisely in order to be able to deal with just these kinds of counterexamples, such as well-formed torture instruments. In sum, it might be proposed that a judgement of moral goodness seems to be required to take pleasure in the well-formed virtue, and therefore to find the virtue beautiful on the grounds that Paris puts forward, and so the objection from incompatible motivational requirements still holds.

The same may be true of the emotional disposition account. A skilful sadist might torture someone with the most fluid and soft movements, losing themselves in the act; properties which may, in the context of moral saints, have the disposition to give rise to the emotion that Doran (2023) labels “ecstasy.” However, in this context at least, the moral badness of the act may defeat the propensity that such features have to give rise to this emotion. As such, it might be pressed that in order for cases of moral beauty that are grounded in this emotional disposition to be

beautiful, these judgements must also be grounded in a judgement of moral goodness, and therefore these judgements will also fall foul of the objection from incompatible motivational requirements.

What is to be done about this? I want to suggest that the problem can be avoided by adopting an atomistic principle in interpreting the accounts of beauty that are used in the “adjacent property” response to the objection: that is, that we should only consider the property specified in these accounts narrowly, and independently of the context in which it appears.

To take Paris’ formalist account: this principle would suggest that we can use our knowledge of the ethical content of a virtue—e.g. that the proper function of the virtue charity is to lead people to act in a *charitable manner*, and that the person in question believes that *charity is good* and *desires charity*, and that these work together *to lead the person to act in a charitable manner*—in order to identify that there is well-formedness. But this principle also suggests that we need to suspend our evaluative moral judgement of this content, or even draw our attention away from this content (on which the well-formedness supervenes) once this identification is done, to focus only on the well-formedness. When considered in such a way, even the ethical egoist can take pleasure in the well-formed virtue of charity.¹¹ That is to say, when we adopt the atomistic principle, we can see that the kind of judgement that is involved in (P1) is different from the kind of judgement involved in (P3), and so the argument underlying the objection is not valid. To make this clear, (P1) and (P3) can be reformulated to:

¹¹ Indeed, even the progenitor of the objection based on disinterest—Kant himself—might be thought to be able to avail himself of a similar response from his characterisation of the disinterestedness claim in §42: we may judge the ‘form’ of the moral goodness, without the aid of concepts, and thereby without judging its moral content. Similarly, one might be able to build a view of this kind from a neglected, and somewhat obscure, section of the *Critique*—§18. Let us suppose that someone helps a homeless person, as a result of reasoning in line with the moral law. One might think that such a person is approaching the human ideal—insofar as freely choosing what the moral law dictates is not only the distinguishing feature of humans, but also their *telos*—and so their action displays a kind of dependent beauty. Here, the beauty-making adjacent property might be said to be approximating the human ideal, which, on the atomistic principle, doesn’t require making an *evaluative* moral judgement. The same point can be made with respect to accounts of the beauty of morally good actions—such as are offered by Schiller (1793a; 1793b) and Author (redacted for anonymity a; redacted for anonymity b).

(P1*) If an agent, A, makes an *evaluative* moral judgement, EMJ, of object, O, then, necessarily, A is motivated to act practically towards O in accordance with the EMJ to that extent (the interestedness claim).

(P3*) If an agent, A, makes a judgement of moral beauty of object, O, then A makes an aesthetic judgement, AJ, of O to the extent that, and because, A makes a *descriptive* moral judgement, DMJ, of O (the putative structure of judgements of moral beauty claim).¹²

The same can be said, *mutatis mutandis*, for the emotional disposition account. In this case, however, we don't even need to make descriptive moral judgements in order to detect and judge some of the sources of this kind of beauty in cases of moral beauty, and can, rather, for example, simply focus on features such as the fluidity and softness of skilfully-performed compassionate actions—features which are not essentially moral, and do not even require the possession of descriptively moral concepts to detect and appreciate. On the atomistic reading of this kind of “adjacent property” account, it isn't the case that the argument underlying the objection is not valid (as it is by the form accounts); rather, the structure of the judgements of moral beauty claim (P3) is false, and so the argument underlying the objection is not sound.

I do not want to leave my discussion of the reasons why the objection from incompatible motivational requirements fails there, however. For one thing, to solely adopt this view may be to diminish the sources of beauty in putative cases of moral beauty, as one important source of beauty in many putative cases of moral beauty seems to reside in their moral goodness itself, as will become clear below. For another, it might be unclear why we should adopt the atomistic principle, since this strips moral beauty of its proper context. For the beauty-making properties in both the “adjacent properties” accounts are realised by moral entities. Indeed, one might worry that to adopt the atomistic principle would be to adopt an amoral, or even immoral, perspective on the

¹² Although not discussed here at length, the same move can be made with respect to the form of moral beauty that says that knowledge of thick morally good traits can cognitively penetrate the perception of thick aesthetic properties (see Doran, 2021), as it seems that only a descriptive moral judgement is required in this case too.

world—as it encourages us to knowingly suspend moral evaluation of the world. So we may have (moral) reasons to resist adopting this perspective.

§4.2. *The equivocation of motivation required response*

I want to propose a second way of dealing with the objection from the incompatibility of motivational requirements: namely, by showing that it is not valid because there is an equivocation in the argument.

The cases that motivational internalists intend to target are, typically, first personal cases concerning what we ought to do in a given situation; and, since ought implies can, involve what we can do. As a result, in these cases the kind of motivation that is necessary for having made a moral judgement is, plausibly, a *state*—that is, when making moral judgements in these cases we are required to feel an *occurrent urge* to act in a certain way.¹³ When we judge it right and good to help a homeless person, we are required to have felt an urge to help them to some extent since we *can* do this, even if this urge doesn't ultimately result in us acting in accordance with this judgement. If judgements of moral beauty were to require such motivations to act to bring about consequences, then it is clear that they would violate the disinterestedness of beauty (P2).

But in cases of moral beauty, by contrast, the moral judgements that are involved are typically not first personal; they do not concern what *we* ought to do with respect to an occurrent or likely future situation, where our actions at least *could* have a bearing on the outcome of that situation. Rather, in cases of moral beauty, we judge, for example, other people, traits, characters or actions as beautiful. In many such cases, we need not experience any occurrent motivation to act. After all, in many cases, we often *cannot* act in accordance with the judgement: The person judged might, for example, be fictional, or dead, or not present, and the situation that led us to

¹³ These occurrent motivations only *typically* accompany first personal judgements, and the kinds of moral judgements that internalists intend to target can, of course, be dispositional too. For I can, for example, judge that I ought to pay my tax bill when it arrives, and only have a dispositional motivation to pay my tax bill.

this judgement may have taken place in the past. As such, an action (or state motivation to act) doesn't seem to be warranted in such cases in a certain sense. Rather, all that seems to be required in such cases to be truly said to have made a moral judgement is that we are *disposed* to be motivated to act in accordance with the moral judgement *in the appropriate circumstances*, where these circumstances typically include those circumstances that are comparable, but where we *would* be able to influence the situation.

When we judge someone to have acted in a morally beautiful manner in helping a homeless person, or when we judge that someone's kindness is beautiful, we need not feel any inclination to do anything practical towards the action or trait in order to have truly made a moral judgement. We need not even feel the urge to praise the agent committing that action or possessing the good trait. Indeed, praise may be unwarranted in a certain way, since the agent may not be around to receive that praise. All that is required to make a true moral judgement is that we *would* feel the urge to act in accordance with that moral judgement by, for example, feeling the urge to perform the action oneself in comparable circumstances, or at least feel the urge to praise the action or trait, where the opportunity arises. That is to say, ordinary, first personal moral judgements typically require *state* motivations, but the moral judgements involved in judgements of moral beauty only typically require *dispositional* motivations. And only the former, but not the latter, seem to be intuitively ruled out by the disinterestedness claim (P2).¹⁴

¹⁴ As noted earlier, some contemporary supporters of internalism have favoured a deferred, rather than direct, form of internalism, according to which if a person makes a moral judgement then, necessarily, *either* she feels a motivation to act in accordance with the moral judgement in the very moment of making the judgement, or a relevantly connected judgement is accompanied by a motivation. The rationale for this move is that it has been argued that the possibility of amoralists only makes sense against a background of cases that do involve moral motivations: while it might make sense to say that someone who asserts that long-term service to others is good but *only used* to be motivated accordingly (due to e.g. fatigue) is truly making a moral judgement, it is far from clear that the same could be said of someone who asserts the same but has never been motivated accordingly (see e.g. Björnsson et al., 2015). But irrespective of the potential benefits of deferred formulations in accommodating possible deviations from normal conditions, since moral judgements can involve dispositional motivations too—as in the case of someone who makes a moral judgement that it is right to pay their tax bill when it arrives (see footnote 13)—a deferred formulation of internalism is preferable to capture the distinction between occurrent and dispositional motivations on which the equivocation pointed to here rests.

With this clarified, we can see that the argument is not valid—since the motivations required in the case of moral beauty for the moral judgements involved to be truly moral judgements are typically dispositional, but only state motivations seem to be ruled out by the disinterestedness claim. To make this clear, we can reformulate the premises of the argument in the following way:

(P1**) If an agent, A, makes a moral judgement, MJ, of object, O, then, necessarily, A is motivated [*qua* state or *qua* disposition] to act practically towards O in accordance with the grounds for the MJ to that extent (the interestedness claim).

(P2**) If an agent, A, makes an aesthetic judgement (e.g. a judgement of beauty), AJ, of object, O, then, necessarily, A is not motivated [*qua* state] to act practically towards O in any way to that extent (the disinterestedness claim).

A couple of closely related questions remain: First, does this response suggest that a state motivation to act is never consistent with moral beauty? Second, what of the prospect, raised earlier, that this response allows us to explain a number of other sources of beauty in ostensive cases of moral beauty—such as the idea that there can be beauty in the moral goodness itself? And third, since (P2**) is essentially a negative claim, and (P3) seems to underdetermine why something is beautiful—in merely saying that the moral judgement is at least among the grounds for the aesthetic judgement—one might wonder: what makes these cases of finding beauty in moral goodness indeed cases of finding *beauty*?

In answering these questions, it is helpful to develop the case of the person helping a homeless person (discussed throughout) into a set of cases: Person A sees a homeless person, person B—hungry, cold, not being aided by the agencies of the state or passers-by—and helps them, without hesitating, and showing tenderness, in a way that tends to be characteristic of the

innately or skilfully good. Person C, who is near to person A, sees person A helping, and expresses praise to A; and people D and E watch a recording of person A helping person B. Persons A, C, D and E truly make a moral judgement. Person A judges that it is morally good to help, and feels an occurrent motivation *qua* state to help. Persons D, and E also judge that it was morally good for person A to help, and although they cannot help and do not feel a motivation *qua* state to help, they hold a motivation *qua* disposition to help—that is, if they were able to help, then they would have felt a motivation *qua* state to help. Person C makes the same judgement, and feels a motivation *qua* state to praise person A. Persons C, D, and E all make a judgement of moral beauty, though for different reasons:

In line with Paris' (2020) “form” account, person D appraises that the spontaneity with which person A helps expresses the fact that the moral dispositions that constitute person A's charity—such as their moral beliefs, desires, and morally-relevant emotional sensitivities—are working together well to achieve the proper end of charity. Person D also takes pleasure in this well-formedness, in part because they evaluate the achievement of this end as good. As such, person D finds person A's virtue beautiful, without stripping the well-formedness of the virtue of its proper context. In this case, even an *evaluative* moral judgement of the person can form part of the grounds for the aesthetic judgement, thereby satisfying (P3), and since this judgement only involves a motivation *qua* disposition to act in line with that judgement, it satisfies both (P1**) and (P2**).

In line with Doran's (2023) emotional disposition account, person E feels the emotion that is sometimes labelled as “ecstasy” and “elevation,” insofar as they appraise person A as exhibiting softness, and displaying a kind of unity with person B. Indeed, to the extent that they appraise person A as morally good, they experience this emotion to a greater extent. As such, person E finds person A's action (or virtue) beautiful, without stripping the disposition to feel this special emotion of its proper context. In this case too, an *evaluative* moral judgement of the person can form part of the grounds for the aesthetic judgement, thereby satisfying (P3), and since this judgement only

involves a motivation *qua* disposition to act in line with that judgement, it satisfies both (P1**) and (P2**).

Finally, person C makes a judgement of beauty of person A just to the extent that they are motivated to praise person A's moral goodness. This might seem doubtful at first. It might be thought that this person cannot make a judgement of beauty, even though they can truly make a moral judgement, since they feel an occurrent motivation to act in a certain way—namely to praise the person (and therefore might seem to satisfy (P1**) but violate (P2**)). Indeed, if this were the only state that person C felt, then this would be the case. But there is another way in which person C truly makes a moral judgement and a judgement of beauty insofar as they are motivated to praise person A.

To see this, we first need to note that there are two varieties of praise. One kind of praise (which we might call “encouraging praise”) has a clear mind-to-world direction of fit—and so seems to involve the kind of motivation to act to bring about consequences that is inconsistent with the disinterestedness of aesthetic judgements (and so violates P2**). We tend to experience this kind of praise in cases where we appraise that those who we are expressing praise towards, or are in the presence of, have the ability to control their actions or the traits that they possess to some extent, so that they will tend to bring about further episodes of that action in the future, or choose to maintain or cultivate that trait. The functional profile of this kind of praise is fine-tuned to encourage further episodes of the action to be performed, or for the trait concerned to be maintained or even cultivated, either by the agent concerned or others. This kind of praise is typically expressed towards the agent committing the action or possessing the trait that is the object of the praise, and in the presence of others, and it is rewarding to be the recipient of this kind of praise.

But there is another variety of praise that is *appreciative*, rather than *encouraging* (we might call this “appreciative praise”). This is most clearly demonstrated by cases where we praise someone for an action or trait that they could not control, and which they had no role in bringing about, as

is the case for the innately, and hopelessly, kind person, who acts for the right reasons. As Wolf (1980: 156) rightly observes in cases like this, we take expressions of the fact that someone could not do or be otherwise—such as ‘he couldn’t hurt a fly’ and ‘I cannot tell a lie’—as reasons for, rather than against, praising. And this kind of praise (along with other similar emotions, such as admiration and the emotion that Doran labels “ecstasy”) seem to be able to undergrid a judgement of beauty, at least in the broad sense, since it concerns the way that people are, and moreover, it concerns the intrinsic value of this way of being (and not its instrumental value), and it is appreciative (see e.g. Lewis, 1946; Iseminger, 1981; and Livingston, 2005, and Author, redacted for anonymity a, among others).

With this distinction in mind, the way in which person C truly makes a judgement of beauty becomes clear. While person C cannot truly judge person B (or some aspect of them) to be beautiful to the extent that, and because, they feel *encouraging praise* for person A, with the motivations for change in the world that this involves (though, as I have noted, above, this could satisfy the interestedness claim, P1**), person C can truly make such a judgement to the extent that they feel *appreciative praise*, since this does not violate the disinterestedness of aesthetic judgements (and indeed, seems to constitute an aesthetic response).

Moreover, this final case also reveals that the grounds that make the moral judgements involved in some cases of moral beauty *truly* moral judgements can be the same grounds that make the aesthetic judgements involved in cases of moral beauty *truly* aesthetic judgements: person C may make a moral judgement in part because they feel appreciative praise of person A, and so are motivated to continue to appreciate or contemplate their action, and person C makes an aesthetic judgement of person A for the same reason. As such, there may be a more intimate relationship between the moral judgement and the aesthetic judgement involved in some cases of moral beauty than is suggested by the minimal condition outlined in (P3): the aesthetic judgement may not only

have the moral judgement *among its grounds*, but what makes something able to be a moral and aesthetic judgement may be the same.¹⁵

To this, it might be suggested that since there is an occurrent motivation *to act* in such cases—namely to continue to appreciate or contemplate—even such cases violate the disinterestedness of aesthetic judgements (P2).

This wouldn't be a problem, however, as supporters of disinterestedness standardly suggest that disinterest does not rule out a small number of non-practical actions such as contemplation or appreciation (e.g. Kant, 1790/2000: 90, see §2).¹⁶ Indeed, if we judge something to be beautiful in the broad sense (at least), but do not feel any of the relevant responses—including the inclination to continue to contemplate and experience the object of that judgement—howsoever defeasibly, in the appropriate circumstances, then arguably we have not truly judged it to be beautiful in the broad sense, given that such beauty is plausibly thought to be necessarily connected to pleasure (see e.g. Kant, 1790/2009; Matthen, 2017), and pleasure seems to be necessarily motivating. That is to say, arguably a variety of internalism is also likely to be true of at least some judgements of beauty.¹⁷

§5. Conclusion

¹⁵ For this reason, even (P1**) may need to be revised further to target mere actions, rather than “practical actions.”

¹⁶ For this reason, Lopes (2018: 34) is right to suggest that supporters of disinterest, such as Mothersill (1984: 97) and Wollheim (1991: 38) misspeak when they suggest that no action is called for by true aesthetic judgements.

¹⁷ Recently, certain varieties of aesthetic internalism have been rejected by philosophers. Strandberg (2011, 2016) and King (2018), for example, variously argue that sincere judgements of aesthetic goodness do not necessarily involve being motivated to act accordingly (e.g. by being motivated to be acquainted with the object concerned), on the grounds that the person making the judgement may, for example, be tired of the experience the aesthetically good object concerned brings (though see Archer, 2018, for a defence of aesthetic internalism in terms of what we have most reason to do, all things considered). It is less clear, however, that the same counterarguments could be successfully made against internalism about judgements of beauty in the broad sense, especially when the relevant internalist claim is formulated in a deferred manner, for the reason that it is plausible that beauty in the broad sense (at least) is necessarily connected to pleasure, as noted above. With that said, even here, there may be grounds for resistance: setting aside the question of whether hedonism about beauty in the broad sense is correct, on certain accounts of pleasure, such as reflexive imperativism (see e.g. Barlassina & Hayward, 2019), pleasure only motivates the pursuit of pleasant experiences, rather than their objects. I leave full discussion of this issue for another occasion.

In this article, I have clarified the objection from incompatible motivational states, and made the case for two novel responses—the adjacent property response, and the equivocation of motivation required response—which show that the argument underlying the objection is neither sound nor valid. In making these arguments, I have made progress in clarifying where the beauty in cases of moral beauty lies, and in specifying which cases of moral judgements can and cannot be involved in judgements of moral beauty. In showing that disinterestedness is compatible with moral beauty, it is hoped that the existence of moral beauty will be widely embraced by philosophical aestheticians.

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