

Aesthetic Benevolence

Daniel Telech

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Abstract: While non-moral varieties of goodness (e.g., aesthetic, epistemic, prudential) are readily recognized by philosophers and non-philosophers alike, the philosophical literature generally suggests that benevolence is a uniquely moral phenomenon. I argue, however, that our interpersonal practices display a range of instances of aesthetic benevolence, and that this observation stands to enrich our understanding of the relation between moral psychology, aesthetic experience, and aesthetic community. I illustrate this point via discussion of the evaluative attitude that is the fitting response to being the target of another's manifestation of aesthetic benevolence, namely aesthetic gratitude.

KEYWORDS

Aesthetics, Benevolence, Gratitude, Moral Psychology, Reactive Attitudes

INTRODUCTION

To act benevolently is to manifest good will toward another. While non-moral varieties of goodness (e.g., aesthetic, epistemic, prudential) are readily recognized by philosophers and non-philosophers alike, the philosophical literature generally suggests that benevolence is a uniquely moral phenomenon, such that to act from benevolence is to act with moral motivation.¹ Or, at least, the proposal that there might be a distinctive form of aesthetic benevolence has not received extended discussion.² But if acting benevolently is acting with the motivation of promoting another's *good*, or the motivation to benefit another (for their own sake), then assuming that i) a person's good can include aesthetic goods, and ii) one can be motivated to

¹ But see Roberts and Wood (2007, ch.11) on generosity understood as an intellectual virtue. See also Baehr (2010) on epistemic malevolence, and—given that malevolence is not an essentially interpersonal phenomenon on his view—in particular, his discussion of ‘personal epistemic malevolence’.

² Tom Roberts (2018, p. 433) makes reference to ‘aesthetic forms of generosity’ but although he takes this to be among ‘trait virtues that can shape and inform artistic endeavor’ (ibid.), and provides an account of such virtues generally, he does not specify what aesthetic generosity is. See also Alison Hills (2018, p.270), who entertains but does not take a stand (though seems skeptically inclined) on there being a ‘distinctively aesthetic beneficence’.

promote another's aesthetic good from appreciation of the relevant aesthetic value, aesthetic benevolence appears not only coherent, but psychologically possible. Is it actual?

It is. I argue that our interpersonal practices display a range of instances of aesthetic benevolence, and that this observation stands to enrich our understanding of the relation between moral psychology, aesthetic experience, and aesthetic community. Attention to aesthetic benevolence brings into view a corresponding evaluative attitude to be had *in response* to being the target of another's aesthetic benevolence, namely aesthetic gratitude. While gratitude is standardly understood to be a moral psychological response that contrasts with moral anger (or the reactive attitude of resentment),³ the category of aesthetic benevolence speaks in favor of expanding our repertoire of 'aesthetic psychological' concepts to include interpersonal responses like aesthetic gratitude. Attention to aesthetic benevolence in this way provides an inroad to thinking about aesthetic agents and patients as engaged not only with aesthetic objects, but with one another as co-participants in aesthetic community.

I proceed as follows. In section 1, I set the stage with general remarks on benevolence to serve us in what follows. In section 2, I present three cases of aesthetic benevolence. These are cases in which an agent aims to promote another's aesthetic interests from appreciation of the relevant aesthetic value. Though I do not assume that reasons in favor of aesthetically benevolent actions need conflict with moral reasons, to bring into relief the target phenomenon, the cases under consideration are ones in which agents act to the exclusion of relevant moral reasons. In 2.1 I focus on the attitude that I take to be the fitting response to manifestations of aesthetic benevolence, namely aesthetic gratitude. Next, in section 3, in addressing the objections that, on the one hand, my examples are construable as ones featuring (a broadened)

³ See Strawson (1962); Berger (1975); Walker (1980); McConnell (1993); Roberts (2004).

conception of moral motivation, and on the other, that appeal to a generic conception of benevolence suffices to elucidate the cases, the role of the benefactor's aesthetic appreciation is made explicit. There I clarify also that although the aesthetic domain might not be unique in featuring a distinctive form of benevolence, my proposal does not lead to the unseemly proliferation of kinds of benevolence. By way of concluding, I reflect on further attitudes and motivations (e.g. aesthetic *malevolence*) that may be implied by accepting aesthetic benevolence into our aesthetic-psychological repertoires, and then briefly discuss the possible import of my discussion for other topics in aesthetics, namely aesthetic testimony, aesthetic virtue, and aesthetic community.

1. BENEVOLENCE, GENERAL REMARKS

I use 'benevolence' and 'good will' interchangeably to refer to the motivation to benefit, or promote the interests of, another for their own sake. Substantive accounts of well-being provide competing answers to the question, 'what kinds of things count as benefits?' (e.g., the enjoyment of pleasure; the satisfaction of one's (informed) desires; the attainment of various objective goods, etc.). Taking no stand on this issue, I help myself in what follows to examples wherein persons recognizably, and in a pre-theoretically plausible sense, have their interests promoted. Each example can be read in conformity with an objective list view, a desire-satisfaction view, and a hedonistic (/experiential) view.

While benevolence, unqualified, connotes a disposition (perhaps a virtue) of being motivated to do good, my focus here is on particular *manifestations* of benevolence. This is because I am interested, in the first place, in the interpersonal significance of benevolence. Next, I focus on the subset of manifestations of good will that are benevolent *actions*. Benevolence might also be manifested in one's attentional and emotional responses (e.g., in feelings of

distress in recognizing another to be suffering). But, in paradigmatic cases, ‘willing good’ consists (or eventuates) in *action*, beneficence. For, when it is within one’s power to benefit another and when our motives are also sufficiently strong, barring weakness of will and other agential failures, willing another’s good is a matter of *exercising one’s will to bring about* her good.⁴ Given that benevolence *aims at* another’s good, we can understand paradigmatic manifestations of benevolence as those that achieve their aim of benefitting the beneficiary as intended. In any case, for simplicity’s sake I restrict myself below to manifestations of benevolence that are (or eventuate in) beneficial actions.

2. THREE CASES OF AESTHETIC BENEVOLENCE

This section outlines three cases in which aesthetic benevolence is manifested. While I do not assume that aesthetically benevolent agents need be amoral or immoral agents, or that aesthetically benevolent action need conflict with moral norms, for illustrative purposes the cases presented are ones in which moral motivations are either irrelevant or insufficient for explaining the actions in question.

Finishing Touch— *You* (the reader) are working on a painting in the open air when Oscar, a Wilde-like aesthete, notices you struggling with the final touches of your painting. Though he knows doing so will make him late for some aesthetic endeavor of his own, Oscar stops and suggests that you apply such-and-such hue thus-and-so. Oscar does so from the

⁴ Depending on what we take the nature of volitional activity to be, our view of the kinds of psychological states and processes instantiated in manifestations of benevolence will vary. Addressing this question is not my goal. I help myself to the ordinary notion of manifesting good will as acting from non-instrumental concern, or regard, for another’s interests. For several attempts to precisify this notion, see Arpaly (2018); Brandt (1976); Frankena (1987); Livnat (2004).

motivation to promote your realization and subsequent appreciation of a beautiful work of art for your own sake. After some deliberation, you follow Oscar's advice, realizing with great joy that Oscar gave you, as you put it, *just the right advice*. As you behold the beauty of your completed painting, you are filled with gratitude toward Oscar and thank him profusely for his advice. Though you later learn that Oscar regularly declines requests to help others with matters non-aesthetic, and you correctly judge that Oscar would *not* have helped you had you been instead, say, looking for your keys, sunglasses, or pet, your gratitude remains.

This is a case of benevolently given aesthetic advice. It's not simply that Oscar wants a beautiful work of art to come into being; he is motivated to help you qua aesthetic agent and appreciator (more on this below). Lest the reader worry that in deferring to Oscar, the final touches of your painting are exercised in a less-than-autonomous way, let me emphasize that i) you do not blindly follow Oscar's advice, but recognize it as having aesthetic promise,⁵ and that ii) the content of Oscar's advice is compatible with a range of subtly but non-trivially distinct act-types, and that the final touches that you carry out are expressive of your personal style;⁶ that is, you have made the content of Oscar's advice 'your own'. Integral though Oscar's advice was for the painting's successful completion and your appreciation of it, the painting remains *your* aesthetic achievement.⁷

⁵ Formulated this way, we can allow that although you do not follow the advice blindly, it requires your aesthetic trust in Oscar. We can build into the example that you are familiar with and are antecedently disposed to trust (with good reason) Oscar in his aesthetic judgment.

⁶ We can suppose, for example, that, though informed by Oscar's advice, you complete the painting in a manner expressive of your own artistic ideals. See Riggle (2015).

⁷ For discussion of the importance of balancing aesthetic autonomy (on the one hand) with accuracy (on the other), in the case of aesthetic appreciation, see Nguyen (2020).

Introducing Tragedy— Amia's nephew, Leo, has an unfounded aversion to tragic theatre. He has never read, or seen a performance of, a tragic play, though not for lack of opportunity or because he's incapable of appreciating the aesthetic value of this genre. It's rather that Leo is content with watching comedies and refuses to give tragic drama a chance. Amia recognizes Leo's aesthetic life to be suffering in virtue of his narrow domain of appreciation. But whenever Amia suggests to Leo that he might appreciate some tragic work, Leo jovially rebuffs her, saying things like, 'there is already so much drama in the world! I will stick to comedy'. Now, suppose that Amia knows (or justifiably believes) that, were Leo to give tragic theater a real chance, he would, as she does, find profound aesthetic value in it. Suppose also that Amia has two tickets to see *Oedipus Rex* at the local theatre and knows that a) Leo will not accept her invitation to join unless he believes they will be attending a performance of some non-tragic piece of theatre, and that b) once the performance begins, Leo will not dare leave until the performance is over. While her conscience is pricked by the idea of lying to dear Leo, and though it would be easier for Amia to see the performance with her theatre buddy, motivated as she is by concern for Leo's aesthetic well-being ('I owe it to him to introduce him to Sophocles!') Amia finds herself thinking), Amia decides to bring Leo to the performance of *Oedipus Rex* under the pretense that they will be seeing a tribute to the Marx Brothers. When, several minutes in, Leo realizes that comedy is not in the offing (cunningly, Amia ensured that Leo neglected the theatre programme, etc.), he is briefly angry with her. But Leo gradually becomes captivated by the performance, which ultimately leaves him deeply moved. Leo's aesthetic life is thereafter considerably enriched, and he is grateful to Amia for introducing him to tragic theatre.

Amia manifests aesthetic benevolence in arranging affairs such that Leo comes to appreciate the value of tragic theater. Importantly, we need not think that Amia is blameless for

having deceived Leo (or even that she was ultimately justified in doing so). That Leo is grateful to her for introducing him to tragedy is compatible with her owing Leo an apology for lying to him. Indeed, that Amia's conscience is pained before the fact suggests that Amia herself takes her reasons of aesthetic benevolence to conflict with weighty moral reasons.⁸ Nevertheless, I stipulate that Leo's aesthetic life has gone better in virtue of his having seen, and opened himself thereafter to the value of, tragic theater. His aesthetic interests have been promoted from aesthetically benevolent motivations. Recognizing, after the fact, the quality of will from which Amia acted, Leo is grateful to her for introducing him to tragic theatre.⁹

Oeuvre Rescue – Franz Kafka's dying wish, expressed in a request to his close friend, Max Brod, was that all of Kafka's written work (manuscripts, notebooks, letters, etc.) be burned, unread, upon Kafka's death. Brod, recognizing the literary value of his friend's work, famously disregarded Kafka's request. As Brod's actual motivations are unknown to me, I make

⁸ Implicit here is the assumption that aesthetic reasons can be practical reasons for a wide range of action-types, and not just reasons for aesthetic judgment/appreciation. See Lopes (2017, p. 438) for the view that an 'aesthetic act is an act that counterfactually depends on the content of an aesthetic evaluation'. Ultimately, however, as I clarify below, that the benefactor aims for the beneficiary to *appreciate* some aesthetic object is an irreducible feature of the motivation being one of aesthetic benevolence.

⁹ Is it not possible, however, to hold fixed Amia's manifestation of benevolence and modify Leo's dispositions, such that, contrary to Amia's aims, Leo does *not* come to appreciate the value of tragic theatre? Yes, and admittedly it is difficult to imagine that Leo would be as grateful to Amia (or grateful at all) if the performance had left him unmoved. Though I focus on cases where one's benevolent motivations do in fact bring about the good that is their aim, the possibility of unsuccessful aesthetic benevolence suggests that aesthetic benefactors may be vulnerable to a kind of interpersonal aesthetic luck. For a different notion of aesthetic luck (one focused on the luck involved in one's having dispositions and circumstances suited to aesthetically valuable experience), see Ribeiro (2018).

no claim to the following being true of Brod. I employ ‘Franz’ and ‘Max’ to refer to fictionalized versions of the persons in question. Suppose Max recognizes that although he would betray Franz by doing so, Max preserves the work because he recognizes the work’s aesthetic value and wants future readers to have access to it.¹⁰ Some of those who subsequently read Franz’s work are grateful to Max.¹¹

One might wonder whether Max was not under an obligation to preserve the work.¹² Perhaps he was, but *Oeuvre Rescue* requires neither that Max was under any such obligation, nor that he took himself to be under one. The example requires that Max recognize aesthetic reasons to preserve the work for readers’ sake, where these reasons might justify without requiring aesthetic acts.¹³ We can assume that Max’s concern for future readers’ aesthetic

¹⁰ ‘Future readers’ can be construed restrictively as a) actual persons with whom Max was acquainted, or—for those who accept that gratitude can be fitting in response to benevolence *de dicto*—more inclusively as encompassing also, b) possible future persons, like you and I (or more broadly, future readers with whom Max was not acquainted).

¹¹ Having committed to posterity recollections of conversations with Goethe, Johann Peter Eckermann (1836/1949, p. 2) anticipates gratitude of this sort, writing ‘I have a certain confidence that the world with which I share [the recollections] will also feel gratitude toward me.’

¹² This may be because the works themselves make a claim on all rational subjects (and by extension, on Brod), as per Tormey (1973). Alternatively, the duty may be grounded in a reflectively endorsed relationship of love that some agent (e.g., Brod) stands toward the work (Cross, 2017). On another kind of view, aesthetic obligation is a kind of promissory obligation, owed to oneself (Kubala, 2018). For an argument from aesthetic dilemma to aesthetic obligation, along with discussion of the possibility of obligations including inseparable moral and aesthetic features, see Eaton (2008).

¹³ *Oeuvre Rescue* (like *Finishing Touch* and *Introducing Tragedy*) might be construed as case of aesthetic supererogation—on which, see Archer & Ware (2017)—(in addition to being a case of aesthetic benevolence), but I leave discussion of this idea for another time.

interests was the motivationally decisive factor in his preserving Franz's work.¹⁴ There were reasons pulling in both directions: to preserve and not to preserve. We can imagine that by Max's lights the duty to respect Franz's dying wishes would outweigh whatever duty Max has to preserve the work, were it not for consideration of the aesthetic interests of future readers.

Each of *Finishing Touch*, *Introducing Tragedy*, and *Oeuvre Rescue* are cases in which an agent acts with the motivation to promote another's aesthetic interests from appreciation of some aesthetic value, i.e., from aesthetic benevolence. While I defend below (section 3) the proposal that these examples feature *aesthetic* benevolence, to help secure the intuition that these are examples of benevolence in the first place, notice that in each case the benefactor is motivated to promote another's interests for their own sake. Oscar, Amia, and Max aim to put others in contact (of the right sort) with some value (namely, aesthetic value), and they do so not to promote some further end of their own, but out of concern for their beneficiaries qua aesthetic valuers.

A hallmark of benevolent action is that it carries the risk of paternalism. For, in acting so as to promote another's interests, we run the risk of disregarding their power of choice, their autonomy. While it is possible to construe well-being so that one's interests include being treated as an autonomous agent, it is a natural thought, reflected in our pre-theoretical intuitions, that respect for autonomy and concern for one's well-being come apart. The idea of benevolent paternalism presupposes this. The risk of paternalism is clearest in our first two cases. While it

¹⁴Though Brod betrays Kafka's *request* in preserving the work, among the reasons to preserve might be reasons grounded in *Kafka's* interests (e.g., an objective interest in securing literary legacy, or some such). At least, it appears that *Brod* thought of his preserving acts as partly done for Kafka's sake. As Brod (1921, via Balint, 2018, 28, italics added) wrote: 'I wrested from Kafka nearly everything he published either by persuasion or by guile... What mattered to me was the thing itself, *the helping of a friend even against the wish of the friend.*'

was presupposed in *Finishing Touch* that you, the painter, welcomed Oscar's advice, consider a variant of the example in which you strongly prefer to finish your painting without any external input. As such—at least if we further modify the example such that Oscar nudges you into, or perhaps simply insists on your, completing the painting in accordance with his (let us grant, genuinely insightful) recommendation—you might understandably reply to Oscar's intervention, helpful though it is meant to be, by telling him to, as it were, butt out. You might even choose to disregard Oscar's advice on the basis that, although following it would, as you recognize, lead to an overall better painting, you aim to complete the painting unaided by others' aesthetic judgements.¹⁵

Paternalism is arguably present in *Introducing Tragedy* not simply as a risk, but as an actuality. Leo has determined for himself that he will not watch tragic theatre, deeming it unenjoyable, yet Amia acts from the conviction that she *knows better*. Amia violates Leo's status as an autonomous agent in deceiving him into attending a performance of a type that conflicts with his will. We assumed that by Leo's own lights, Amia's temporary bypassing his autonomy was justified. Leo's gratitude registers his recognition of its having been *for his own good* (as an aesthetic valuer—more on this shortly), in a way that he can subsequently affirm, that Amia promote his aesthetic interests in a way that discounts an autonomy right of his.¹⁶

¹⁵ The precise conditions under which interventions such as Oscar's would be paternalistic, like first-order questions about how we should weigh considerations of (aesthetic) well-being and autonomy, are beside the present point.

¹⁶ *Oeuvre Rescue* has a slightly different structure, in that the autonomy rights of the beneficiary (the future reader) are in no way (at risk of being) discounted. It is, rather, Franz's will (manifested in his request) that is discounted. We can, however, imagine a variant on the case in which Max does not simply *make available* Franz's work to future readers, but foists it upon them.

Readers might not find the examples equally compelling as instances of benevolent action. It is sufficient for my purposes that the reader finds compelling at least one of the examples, for each provides a model for myriad other possible examples of aesthetic benevolence. The idea of aesthetic benevolence will be rendered more precise below (section 3). But first, let us turn to the attitude that was intuitively rendered fitting in response in each of our cases.

2.1 Aesthetic Gratitude

In each of the above cases, the benefactor's benevolence was met with the beneficiary's aesthetic gratitude, and, intuitively, fittingly so. The claim that gratitude construes another to have acted from good will is a mainstay in philosophical discussion of gratitude (Berger, 1975; Walker, 1980; McConnell, 1993; Roberts, 2004).¹⁷ Gratitude, however, is standardly taken to

¹⁷ Another use of 'gratitude'—employed in sentences like, 'the farmer is *grateful that* it rained'—fails to pick out an inherently interpersonal emotion. This response, 'propositional gratitude' (McAleer, 2012; Rush, 2020), involves a dyadic relation between a person and a state of affairs (or a proposition), with no essential reference to a benevolent agent. (For this reason, propositional gratitude is standardly taken to be reducible to appreciation, and as such, to differ essentially from the interpersonal response of gratitude. See Carr (2013); Roberts (2015); Manela (2016a). This is not my topic. By 'gratitude', sometimes called 'prepositional gratitude' (Manela, 2016a, p. 282), I mean the essentially agent-directed emotion involving a triadic relation between two agents and (typically) an action, as in 'Abe is grateful *to* Miranda *for* helping him move'. When we say that we are grateful *for* particular things, say, works of art—see e.g., Williams's (1976, p. 37) talk of gratitude for Gauguin's paintings—this can be construed either as gratitude to the artist (represented, perhaps only implicitly, as motivated by aesthetic benevolence (perhaps *de dicto*, 'for appreciators to come', 'the fans', etc.), or as propositional gratitude (which is insensitive to the artist's motivations). (This may be too simplistic. Max Lewis (personal correspondence) suggests, with some plausibility to my mind,

be a moral emotion, responsive to benefactors' acting in promotion of our moral interests. McCullough et al. are representative, writing that, 'gratitude is a moral emotion which responds to both moral behavior and a motivator of moral behavior' (McCullough et al., 2001, 250).¹⁸ The idea that gratitude is a moral emotion is also maintained by a range of philosophers who follow P.F. Strawson (1962) in understanding gratitude to be a vehicle of moral praise, i.e. a 'reactive attitude' responsive to morally praiseworthy manifestations of good will of which we are beneficiaries of (Eshleman, 2014; Macnamara, 2013, 2015; Martin, 2013; McKenna, 2012; Riedener, 2023; Shoemaker, 2015; Riedener, 2020; Rosen, 2015). Stefan Riedener (2023, p.1837) provides a clear articulation of the view that gratitude is necessarily a response to moral regard, writing that '[i]t's fitting for you to be grateful to me for my ϕ -ing if and only if, and because, by ϕ -ing I manifest [...] a form of positive moral regard towards you that goes beyond what I owe you', where, 'I show 'moral regard' to you if I treat you as an ultimate source of moral reasons' (Riedener, 2023, p. 1832). On their face, the three cases considered present a difficulty for the standard view of gratitude. This is because, in each case, the relevant benefactor is motivated not by the salient moral considerations, but by considerations centered on aesthetic value, albeit as that kind of value concerns the aesthetic interests of another (more on the objection this point harbors, shortly). In each case, we might easily deny that the benefactor in question is morally praiseworthy for what they did, yet maintain that they are fitting targets of gratitude.

To make sense of the cases under consideration, I suggest that we reject the view that gratitude is an essentially moral emotion, or necessarily a way of responding to another as

that there is a *sui generis* form 'gratitude for', which targets concrete particulars (e.g. one's relationship or newborn), and not the states of affairs containing such particulars.)

¹⁸ See also Tagney et al (2007); Algoe & Haidt (2009).

morally praiseworthy.¹⁹ Unless moral psychology has a monopoly over agent-directed motivational responses and their ilk, there will be no barrier to adding the concepts of aesthetic benevolence and aesthetic gratitude to our conceptual repertoire.²⁰ The feasibility of this proposal, however, requires making clearer the sense in which the above cases ought to be conceptualized as ones of *aesthetic* benevolence.

3. 'AESTHETIC' BENEVOLENCE?

I have proposed an understanding of our examples as ones in which benefactors are motivated by “aesthetic benevolence”, understood as a distinctive form of motivation. This proposal might face skepticism from at least two fronts. First, one might doubt whether moral motivation really is missing from our cases. For, although the benefactors in our examples ignore *some* moral considerations, they might nonetheless be understood as acting for the sake of other morally relevant interests possessed by their beneficiaries. Alternatively, one might grant that while benevolence is not essentially a form of moral motivation, narrowly understood, we do not

¹⁹ A similar point may hold of the third-personal analogue of gratitude (approbation or a kind of admiration), i.e., the attitude it is fitting for uninvolved observers to have toward the benefactor concerning her benevolent action.

²⁰ The literature on aesthetic responsibility/aesthetic reactive attitudes focuses on responses toward artists for their works of art—though Wolf (2015) considers a broader category of the aesthetic, wherein an agent can be responsible for behaviors expressive of humor or charm, construed as aesthetic traits. One point of divergence in this literature is whether aesthetic responsibility is understood on the model of attributability-responsibility (where one’s being responsible for X is a roughly a matter of X being expressive of one’s real self) (Wolf, 2015, 2016) or accountability-responsibility (where one’s being responsible for X is roughly a matter of one’s deserving certain kinds of (interest-affecting) responses on the basis of X) (Russell, 2008; Nelkin, 2020).

require positing a distinctive form of benevolence—'aesthetic benevolence'—to accommodate the examples at hand. If benevolence is a matter of being motivated to promote another's interests for their own sake, while true of our benefactors, this does not yet provide reasons for taking there to be a *distinctive* form of motivation. What is more, this opponent might continue, the positing of aesthetic benevolence arguably commits us to an unwieldy proliferation of kinds of benevolence. I address these worries in turn.

3.1 Why not *moral* motivation?

Though the benefactors in our examples ignore certain moral considerations when they act, this is insufficient for establishing that they do not act from moral motives. Amia deceives her nephew, but honesty is not the only moral value. Perhaps we can understand her action as motivated by other moral concerns. After all, Amia acts for other-regarding reasons, rather than say, prudential reasons. Suppose we identify moral motivation with motivation based in non-instrumental concern with others' interests. If we do so, we get the verdict that Amia *does* act from moral motives after all.

A problem with the above objection is that it question-beggingly identifies the moral domain with the other-regarding (or at least, treats other-regarding motivation as sufficient for moral motivation). To see why this is a problem, consider the mafia boss, Tony, who rescues a member of 'the family', Don, but does so *only because* Don is a member of the family. Here, Tony's motivation *is* other-regarding; he does not, suppose, rescue Don, purely (or largely) from reasons of self-interest. Rather, there are bonds of loyalty between Tony, Don, and other members of his in-group. Tony acts from other-regarding motivation in rescuing Don, but given that Tony's rescuing Don is conditional on Don's sharing group-membership with Tony, we are reluctant to characterize Tony as acting from moral motivation. Or rather, it would seem to

dilute what we ordinarily mean by ‘moral motivation’ to include within its extension the motivation from which Tony acts. At the very least, given the conditional nature of his other-regarding motivation, Tony is surely *not* treating Don as ‘an ultimate source of moral reasons’ (as per Riedener, 2020, p.1832) in benefitting him. So, the mere fact that the benefactors in our examples act for the sake of others is insufficient for establishing that they act from moral motivation.²¹

3.2 Aesthetic Benevolence or Benevolence *about* the Aesthetic?

Next, retreating from the idea that benevolence is a distinctively moral form of motivation, one might doubt whether something other than generic benevolence is required to explain the examples at hand. Why, one might ask, should we invoke a distinct form of motivation—‘aesthetic benevolence’—when we can characterize the above examples as featuring benevolence that is simply *about* aesthetic interests? If to act benevolently is to act from the motivation of promoting another’s interests (for their own sake), although the interest in question might be an aesthetic interest, surely this is insufficient for positing a sui generis type of benevolence.

The objection can be sharpened as follows. The rationale for taking aesthetic benevolence to be a distinct kind of benevolence seems to extend to all sorts of non-aesthetic interests, in a way that leads to an unseemly proliferation of kinds of benevolence. To illustrate, imagine a variant on the above case in which Amia tricks Leo into taking tennis lessons, and that she does so from appreciation of the value of tennis playing. Should this lead us to posit a further kind of benevolence, *athletic benevolence*? Or suppose Amia leads Leo to try sushi from

²¹ See Lewis (2024, p.7) on this point.

appreciation of *its* value. Should that lead us to posit *culinary benevolence* as a distinctive form of benevolence? And so on.²²

The above reductio can be resisted. First, and less directly, it is not obvious that the athletic and culinary cases are not case of aesthetic benevolence. Appreciation of sport or food might well amount to aesthetic appreciation.²³

The more direct response to the proliferation worry focuses on the nature of aesthetic appreciation as a distinctive mode of engaging with value. Aesthetic benevolence is not simply benevolence *that is about* (or features the promotion of) aesthetic interests. Each of the three benefactors (Oscar, Amia, and Max) acts from appreciation of the relevant aesthetic value, where appreciation is plausibly a distinctive mode of engaging with aesthetic value. Under the assumption that the proper mode of engaging aesthetic value is not action or belief, but appreciation, understood as a special cognitive-affective response (Gorodeisky & Marcus, 2018; Gorodeisky, 2021), we can see why the benevolence in question deserves to be qualified as aesthetic, rather than merely *concerning* the aesthetic. For, the benefactors in our examples aim to benefit another vis-à-vis some aesthetic value *from appreciation of that very value*, where ‘appreciation’ picks a mode of engaging with value that is proper to the aesthetic.²⁴ The benefactors, further, aim to cultivate their beneficiaries’ engagement with some aesthetic value, on the basis of their own appreciation of that same value. Acquainted with the value of tragic

²² Thanks to Robbie Kubala for this objection.

²³ See Saito (2007); Korsmeyer (1999, p.141); Foster Wallace (2006); Nguyen (2020, p.12, p.108); Plakias (2021, p.6).

²⁴ Aesthetic benevolence features a combination of volitional and appreciative capacities. One’s volitional capacities are exercised in responding to practical reasons to act for the sake of another’s good. One’s appreciative capacities are exercised in responding to the aesthetic merit of the object taken to be relevant to their good.

theatre, and on the basis of the appreciative attitudes afforded by being so acquainted, Amia acts in a way that secures for Leo the possibility of becoming similarly acquainted with that value. We can contrast this with a case in which the benefactor is indifferent to some aesthetic value A, but knowing that, say, their colleague values A (and perhaps that A *is* valuable), benevolently provides that colleague with an opportunity to deepen their appreciation of A. This benefactor is blind to the relevant aesthetic value; his aim is simply to promote their colleague's interests, whatever they may be. *This* would be a case of ordinary benevolence that happens to concern the aesthetic.

It is worth noting that while this response blocks the worry about the proliferation of kinds of benevolence, it does not establish that the aesthetic domain is unique in having a proprietary form of benevolence. This, anyway, would be an odd conclusion. For, in addition to aesthetic normativity, epistemic normativity, for example, is plausibly characterized by a proprietary mode of valuing. On its face, there is plausibility to the idea that an agent might manifest epistemic benevolence in acting for the sake of another's interests qua epistemic agent, from proprietary engagement with epistemic value (perhaps *understanding*). The defensibility of this kind of thesis would be a welcome result, though one beyond this paper's scope. This result would be welcome insofar as it would further bolster my negative aim, namely that benevolence is not an essentially moral form of motivation. But as my positive aim is to make a case for taking more seriously what might be called 'interpersonal aesthetic psychology' *by* making a case for the existence and significance of aesthetic benevolence (and the related phenomenon of aesthetic gratitude), questions concerning epistemic benevolence are beyond this paper's scope.

CONCLUSION

I conclude by highlighting a few ways in which reflection on aesthetic benevolence may have import for other topics in aesthetics. First, the literature on aesthetic testimony focuses on whether testimony concerning the value of aesthetic objects can furnish aesthetic justification or knowledge.²⁵ When we make aesthetic claims, however, we are often not merely aiming to inform others of what is (or what we take to be) the case, aesthetically. We are often presenting our addressees with grounds to engage with some aesthetic object that we take to be worth engaging. If so, an aesthetic claim—to the effect that such-and-such work of art is moving, say—might fail (in some instance, or, if the pessimist about aesthetic testimony is right, necessarily) *qua* aesthetic testimony, yet succeed as an expression of aesthetic benevolence, rendering aesthetic gratitude fitting on the part of the recipient without securing aesthetic knowledge.

Next, reflection on aesthetic benevolence may have import for discussions of aesthetic virtue. Discussion of aesthetic virtue presently focuses on excellences of character underlying not only the production of art, but also aesthetic appreciation (Woodruff, 2001; Goldie, 2007; Kieran, 2012). While the latter is typically discussed at the individual level, i.e., as obtaining between an individual and some aesthetic object, there may also be excellences of character concerning how we engage in aesthetic appreciation *relative to other aesthetic agents*. One such virtue—a kind of interpersonal aesthetic virtue—might be the stable disposition to manifest aesthetic benevolence in the right way.

Aesthetic benevolence (along with aesthetic gratitude) is also poised to contribute to the development of recent proposals concerning aesthetic community. Nick Riggle has argued that ‘the end of aesthetic discourse is [not convergence but] rather a distinctive state of mutual

²⁵ For an overview of the recent debate, see Robson (2012).

interpersonal valuing between individual appreciators' (Riggle, 2022, p.618). Given that aesthetic benevolence and aesthetic gratitude are both ways of valuing another, qua aesthetic subject, these interpersonal aesthetic attitudes are well suited, if not integral, to the building and strengthening aesthetic community. After all, when manifestations of aesthetic benevolence find uptake, the beneficiary is in a position to value the relevant aesthetic object *with their aesthetic benefactor*, and to value them, the benefactor as well, as a being concerned with their aesthetic agency.

Finally, although I have focused on the positive side of interpersonal aesthetic psychology, aesthetic agents can presumably manifest quality of will that is *not* good. That is, if agents can manifest aesthetic benevolence, they can presumably also manifest aesthetic *malevolence*. To illustrate, suppose Carl has a large collection of sculptures, including several Isamu Noguchi works. Although he has ample opportunity to loan some of this work to public galleries and to otherwise make his collection accessible to those in his community, he consistently refuses to do so. We can suppose that Carl recognizes that others have aesthetic interests that would be promoted by engaging with parts of his collection, but that this recognition fails to motivate him. While we might prefer to call this an instance of *insufficient* aesthetic good will (rather than aesthetic malevolence), Carl's aesthetic interpersonal psychology—particularly his quality of will towards other aesthetic agents—presents a barrier to aesthetic community nonetheless (and intuitively manifests a kind of interpersonal aesthetic vice).

In sum, I proposed that while the philosophical literature generally suggests that benevolence is a distinctively moral phenomenon, our interpersonal practices display a range of instances of aesthetic benevolence, which may be highly conditional in nature. Although gratitude is standardly understood as responsive to morally praiseworthy manifestations of good

will, attention to aesthetic benevolence brings into view a corresponding attitude to be had in response to another's manifestation of aesthetic benevolence, namely aesthetic gratitude, where this attitude does not track moral praiseworthiness. I further maintained that aesthetic benevolence is not simply benevolence *that is about* (or features the promotion of) aesthetic interests. Rather aesthetic benefactors aim to benefit another vis-à-vis some aesthetic value *from appreciation of that very value*, where 'appreciation' picks out a mode of valuing that is proper to the aesthetic. I concluded by briefly turning to the import of my discussion for other areas of aesthetics (particularly, aesthetic testimony, aesthetic virtue, and aesthetic community).

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