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To cite this article: Daniel Whiting (2021): Admiration, Appreciation, and Aesthetic Worth, Australasian Journal of Philosophy, DOI: [10.1080/00048402.2021.1986556](https://doi.org/10.1080/00048402.2021.1986556)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00048402.2021.1986556>



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Published online: 19 Oct 2021.



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Admiration, Appreciation, and Aesthetic Worth

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ABSTRACT

What is aesthetic appreciation? In this paper, I approach this question in an indirection fashion. First, I introduce the Kantian notion of moral worthy action and an influential analysis of it. Next, I generalise that analysis from the moral to the aesthetic domain, and from actions to affects. Aesthetic appreciation, I suggest, consists in an aesthetically worthy affective response. After unpacking the proposal, I show that it has non-trivial implications while cohering with a number of existing insights concerning the nature of appreciation and the constraints to which it is subject. In closing, I note some limitations on the analogy between aesthetic appreciation and morally worthy action.

ARTICLE HISTORY Received 14 April 2021; Revised 7 September 2021

KEYWORDS aesthetic appreciation; aesthetic emotions; aesthetic normativity; aesthetic reasons; moral worth

1. Introduction

A prominent trend within philosophy explores different domains of normativity—moral, say, and epistemic—side by side. This is often guided by, while also testing, the assumption that the normative is uniform. One way to spell this out is as follows: The relations in which normative notions (such as obligation, value, and reason) stand to one another are the same across domains of application.

What constitutes a normative domain is a tricky issue. A helpful way to think about this is in terms of its fundamental concerns. Candidate concerns fundamental to the moral domain include wellbeing and autonomy. Candidate concerns fundamental to the epistemic domain include truth and knowledge. This leads to another way of unpacking the uniformity assumption: while it might be tethered to different concerns in different domains, the structure of normative thought and talk remains the same.

I aim to further the aforementioned trend by exploring a parallel between the moral and aesthetic domains. Which concerns are fundamental to the aesthetic domain? Beauty is the obvious candidate, but we might want to add elegance, balance, liveliness, wittiness, and the like to the list (cp. Sibley [2001: 1–2]). What follows is consistent with more and less capacious conceptions of the aesthetic.

I will argue that a structure familiar in the moral domain—which ‘the folk’ and theorists pick out by using the notion of *moral worth*—is found in the aesthetic domain. Accordingly, I will refer to it as *aesthetic worth*. That this parallel holds between the

moral and aesthetic domains is an independently interesting result, one that supports the uniformity assumption. But it is of special significance for aestheticians. Reflecting on aesthetic worth, I will argue, sheds light on the nature of *aesthetic appreciation*.

The paper proceeds as follows. In section 2, I illustrate the notion of moral worth and present an influential analysis of it. In section 3, I introduce the notion of aesthetic worth and propose an analysis of it inspired by its moral counterpart. In section 4, I use the notion of aesthetic worth to give an account of that in which aesthetic appreciation consists. In section 5, I show how that account is consistent with, although not committed to, a range of existing views concerning aesthetic appreciation. In section 6, I address an objection. In section 7, I explore some possible consequences of the ideas developed. In section 8, I close by suggesting that talk of aesthetic worth serves an important purpose in arriving at the account of appreciation, but that, once the account is in place, such talk is dispensable.

2. Moral Worth

The distinction between morally *right* action and morally *worthy* action dates back (at least) to Kant [1785]. As an initial gloss, I will say that a person's action has moral worth when they not only do what is right, but they do so in a way that reflects well on them from the moral perspective. Alternatively, a person acts in a morally worthy fashion when they are creditable for doing the right thing.

An easy way to get an intuitive purchase on the distinction between action that is (merely) right and action that is (also) worthy is to reflect on cases in which the two come apart—that is, cases of right but unworthy action. Kant's notorious shopkeeper provides such an example. The shopkeeper refrains from overcharging. That is the right thing to do, say, because it is fair. But the shopkeeper refrains from overcharging, not for reasons of fairness, but for reasons of profit. They charge the prices they do because, if they keep prices low, customers will return and spend more money. As a result, while the shopkeeper performs the morally right action, their action lacks moral worth. Refraining from overcharging might reflect well on the shopkeeper from, say, a prudential perspective, but they do not deserve moral credit for it.

Call this a case of *doing the right thing for the wrong reasons*. According to the standard diagnosis of such cases, the person's action is not morally worthy because the reasons for which they act are morally irrelevant: they are not among the reasons that make it morally right to perform the action.¹ As a result, it is an accident of sorts that the person does the right thing (see Herman [1981]). As Kant puts it, if an action is performed on non-moral grounds, its conformity to the 'moral law' is 'very contingent and precarious' [1785: 4.390].

This diagnosis might encourage the thought that a person acts in a morally worthy fashion when they act on the basis of moral reasons. But it is widely recognised (including by those cited in note 1) that this is insufficient. Cases of what I will call *doing the right thing for the right reasons in the wrong way* show this. Consider a revised version of Kant's example. A shopkeeper refrains from overcharging for the reason that it is fair. However, the shopkeeper is only concerned about acting fairly because and in so far as it is conducive to profit: they believe that, by doing what is fair, their

¹ For this point, see Stratton-Lake [2000], Arpaly [2002], Markovits [2010], Arpaly and Schroeder [2014], Lord [2017], and Way [2017].

reputation will improve, which will then encourage trade. In this case, the shopkeeper acts on the basis of a moral reason—the reason for which they act is the reason why it is right for them to do so—but their action lacks moral worth. Plausibly, that is because their concern for fairness, their moral concern, is mediated by a concern for profit, a non-moral concern. Were profit not to align with fairness, the shopkeeper would not do the fair thing, hence the morally right thing. While the shopkeeper is motivated by what is in fact a morally relevant consideration, they are not responding to its moral significance.

Reflection on these cases suggests this thesis:

MORAL WORTH. A person's action has moral worth if and only if (i) they act for the reasons that make so acting morally right (ii) because those reasons make so acting right.²

Clause (i) rules out cases of doing the right thing for the wrong reasons. Clause (ii) rules out cases of doing the right thing for the right reasons in the wrong way. It is supposed to express the idea of responding to a moral reason *as such*—that is, in a way that manifests sensitivity to its moral significance. For present purposes, I do not need to offer an analysis of the 'because'; it is enough to have an intuitive purchase on it of the sort that reflection on cases like the shopkeeper affords.³ However, I will note that (ii) is not meant to imply moral belief. There is no suggestion that, for a person to act for a moral reason as such, they need to think that it is a moral reason or form any other moral belief. Proponents of MORAL WORTH typically maintain that acting in a morally worthy fashion does not require such cognitive sophistication. In support of this point, Arpaly [2002] points to Mark Twain's *Huck Finn* [1884]. In line with the conventional morality of the time, Huck believes that it is right to turn in Jim, an escaped slave, to the authorities. But, in response to his perception of Jim's manifest humanity and dignity, Huck refrains from doing so. Hence, Huck does the right thing and is motivated in doing so by the morally relevant feature of the situation—namely, Jim's autonomy—in a way that is unmediated by nonmoral concerns. As a result, Huck's action is morally worthy, even though he does not believe the basis on which he is acting to morally justify so acting—indeed, even though he believes it not to do so.

That moral belief is unnecessary for moral worth is a popular but not uncontroversial view (cp. Sliwa [2016], Isserow [2020], and Johnson King [2020]). For present purposes, I will take it for granted. My aim is not to defend MORAL WORTH, so understood, but to explore its aesthetic counterpart. Moreover, I will explain later how someone who thinks that moral worth requires moral thought might make a corresponding amendment to the account of aesthetic worth.

3. Aesthetic Worth

I will now generalise the analysis of moral worth along two dimensions—from the moral to the aesthetic domain, and from action to affect (feeling, emotion). I will typically speak of admiration, but this is intended as a convenient catch-all term for

² For versions of this view, see Arpaly [2002] Markovits [2010], Arpaly and Schroeder [2014], Lord [2017], and Way [2017].

³ I am sympathetic to analysing it in terms of the exercise of competences to respond to reasons in the ways that they favour, the manifestation-conditions of which include the presence of the relevant reasons [Lord 2017; Mantel 2018]. But I will not rely on that analysis here.

positive affective attitudes, including delight, respect, enjoyment, and the like, as well as what we would ordinarily call admiration.⁴

In making the first generalization, I do not deny that there is overlap between the moral and aesthetic domains. In particular, I allow that the concerns fundamental to the moral domain might in some way interact with or condition those fundamental to the aesthetic domain.⁵ Nothing in what follows turns on whether that is so.

In making the second generalization, I do not assume that the affects are privileged or basic items of assessment in the aesthetic domain, just as a proponent of MORAL WORTH need not assume that actions are privileged or basic objects of assessment in the moral domain.⁶ I focus on affects only because they are underexplored in this context and because doing so delivers significant results.

Just as we can distinguish morally right action from morally worthy action, so, I suggest, we can distinguish aesthetically right admiration from aesthetically worthy admiration. Talk of right action is familiar. Talk of right admiration is less so, perhaps. As I use the term, right admiration is simply admiration that is fitting, correct, or appropriate—admiration the object of which is admirable.

Talk of aesthetically worthy admiration is less familiar still. As I use the phrase, it is simply a label for instances of admiration that relate to aesthetic reasons in the way that morally worthy actions relate to moral reasons. Accordingly, and mirroring the gloss on moral worth, I will say that a person's admiration has aesthetic worth when they not only admire what it is right for them to admire, but do so in a way that reflects well on them from the aesthetic perspective. Alternatively, a person admires in an aesthetically worthy fashion when they are creditable for admiring the right thing. These remarks will do as first passes. In closing, I will caution that such glosses are useful heuristics but have their limitations.

As in the moral case, we can get a handle on the distinction between (mere) right admiration and admiration that is (also) aesthetically worthy by reflecting on cases in which they come apart. Consider a case of *admiring the right thing for the wrong reasons*.⁷ An estate agent admires the façade of a house. They are right to do so: the curve of the bay window is elegant, the juxtaposition of the yellow paintwork with the grey rendering is delightful, and its proportions are harmonious with those of its neighbours. As a result of these and other features, the façade is (aesthetically) admirable. However, the agent admires the façade, not on the basis of its aesthetically relevant qualities, but because it adds to the selling price of the house and thereby their commission. So, while the agent admires rightly, they do not admire in a way that is aesthetically worthy.⁸

There are also cases of *admiring the right thing for the right reasons in the wrong way*. Consider a revised version of the estate agent example. The agent admires the

⁴ It is, of course, possible to consider one generalization but not the other. Hills briefly discusses the idea of aesthetically worthy action [forthcoming: 9].

⁵ For discussion, see D'Arms and Jacobson [2000], Gaut [2007], Harold [2011], Eaton [2012], Song [2018], Paris [2019], and Stear [2020].

⁶ For the view that aesthetic normativity is not practical, see Kivy [1980: 638–40]. For responses, see Ridley [2016], King [2018], and Lopes [2018].

⁷ Maguire [2018] argues that there are no reasons for feelings. However, Maguire does not deny that there are reasons why feelings are fitting ('fit-making facts'). While I will talk of reasons to feel, this can be replaced, without loss, by talk of facts that make feeling fitting.

⁸ As with their counterpart in the moral domain, the agent's admiration might reflect well on them from, say, a prudential perspective.

façade of the house and does so on the basis of its aesthetically relevant features—the elegant curve, the delightful colours, the harmonious proportions, and so on. However, the agent is only concerned with those qualities because they believe that the qualities contribute to the financial value of the house. In this case, the agent admires the façade for aesthetic reasons—for the reasons why it is right for them to admire it—but their admiration lacks aesthetic worth. They do not deserve credit from an aesthetic perspective, since their response to the aesthetically relevant features is mediated by financial concerns.

As these cases show, the structure that we find in the moral domain in relation to action is on display in the aesthetic domain in relation to feeling. I will capture that structure as follows.⁹

AESTHETIC WORTH. A person's admiration has aesthetic worth if and only if (i) they admire something for the reasons that make admiring it aesthetically right (ii) because those reasons make admiring it aesthetically right.

Clause (i) rules out cases of admiring for the wrong reasons. Clause (ii) rules out cases of admiring for the right reasons in the wrong way.¹⁰

AESTHETIC WORTH might be read as stipulative—that is, as simply introducing 'aesthetic worth' as the name for admiration held for aesthetic reasons as such. However, the principle can also be read as substantive. Manifesting an intrinsic concern for what is admirable or valuable is itself admirable or valuable [Hurka 2001]. This is a general principle, and so it applies in the aesthetic domain as it does in the moral domain [Lopes 2008]. Since worthy admiration involves an unmediated interest in aesthetic values, it is valuable or admirable in a way that admiration falling short of it is not.¹¹ So, worthy admiration, as defined here, is genuinely worthy.

One might grant this, but ask whether admiration of this sort is not just worthy, but *aesthetically* worthy. I will address that question in closing.

Consider now a passage from Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* [1811: 17], in which Marianne Dashwood complains to her mother, Mrs Dashwood, about Edward Ferrars, who has a romantic interest in Marianne's sister, Elinor:

And besides this, mama, he [Edward] has no real taste. Music seems scarcely to attract him, and though he admires Elinor's drawings very much, it is not the admiration of a person who can understand their worth. It is evident, in spite of his frequent attention to her while she draws, that in fact he knows nothing of the matter. He admires as a lover, not as a connoisseur.

The point of introducing this passage is not just to provide a further illustration but also to show that, while it might not be expressed in the same terms, the distinction to which I am drawing attention is one that is already recognised. Marianne's complaint is precisely that Edward's admiration for Elinor's drawings lacks aesthetic worth, as understood here. Marianne is not suggesting that Edward is wrong to admire Elinor's drawings; it is given that they are admirable. Instead, Marianne is

⁹ Hills [forthcoming] explores a similar structure in relation to belief. Her proposal is that aesthetic judgment, properly so called, involves believing that something is beautiful (elegant, balanced, etc.) on the basis of the reasons why it is beautiful (etc.) in a way that manifests an understanding of those reasons.

¹⁰ This account is neutral on traditional meta-aesthetic questions concerning the grounds and authority of aesthetic reasons. For discussion, see Hanson [2018] and McGonigal [2018].

¹¹ If (what I call) aesthetically worthy admiration is a correct response from competence (see note 3), it might be valuable in another respect—namely, as an *achievement* (cp. Greco [2010]).

objecting that Edward's admiration for the drawings is not a response to their aesthetic qualities but is motivated by his incipient love for Elinor.¹²

The Austen passage serves also to introduce a new notion—*taste*. According to Marianne, Edward's failure to appreciate Elinor's drawings reflects a lack of taste on his part. Arguably, to respond to aesthetically relevant features as such—in a way that is not dependent on non-aesthetic concerns or interests—is to manifest taste for those features. To return to the estate agent example, regardless of whether or not they have taste for elegance, proportion, and the like, the admiration that they feel for the façade is not on this occasion a reflection of such taste.

While the suggestion that aesthetically worthy admiration is admiration from taste is a plausible one, nothing in what follows rests on it. Developing and assessing an account of the faculty of taste—its nature and manifestation-conditions—is beyond the scope of this paper. If need be, references to taste in the remainder can be read as (suggestive) shorthand for more cumbersome talk of responding to considerations in a way that reveals sensitivity to their aesthetic relevance.

The Austen passage also helps to make the point that AESTHETIC WORTH allows for cases of what one might call overdetermination. A person might admire Elinor's drawings both as a 'connoisseur' and in a way that betrays love for her. Since clause (i) requires that a person admire for the reasons that make admiring it right, not that they do so *only* for those reasons, it allows that such admiration is aesthetically worthy.

One might object that the examples do not reveal a difference between (mere) admiration and admiration that is (also) aesthetically worthy; rather, they reveal a difference between non-aesthetic admiration and aesthetic admiration. When comparing the cases of the lover and the connoisseur, we do not find the same attitude in each case—admiration *simpliciter*—held on different grounds; we find different attitudes individuated in part by their grounds—respectively, non-aesthetic and aesthetic.¹³

The dispute here does not run deep. I agree that there is an attitude present in the case of the connoisseur that is absent in the case of the lover, one individuated by its grounds. Indeed, in the remainder of this paper I will defend and explore that claim. However, I also think that there is something common in each case, a positive affective attitude of some sort toward one and the same object—in the example, Elinor's drawings. With Austen, I call that attitude 'admiration', but I do not mind if the reader prefers to use a different label.

4. Aesthetic Appreciation

So far, I have suggested that, corresponding to morally worthy action, there is such a thing as aesthetically worthy admiration and that, just as acting in a morally worthy way involves acting for the right reasons in the right way, so admiring in an aesthetically worthy way involves admiring for the right reasons in the right way. The right reasons are those that are morally or aesthetically relevant, respectively, and the right way is one that manifests sensitivity to their moral or aesthetic relevance, respectively.

¹² Austen's presentation of these remarks is ironic. For Marianne, a connoisseur is passionate; in contrast to Edward's 'impenetrable calmness', they show 'spirit' or 'fire'. Presumably, Austen is not inviting us to endorse this romantic ideal.

¹³ The objector need not suggest that this concern generalises to cases like that of Kant's shopkeeper. The individuation of actions might differ from that of attitudes.

I take this to be an independently interesting result, in so far as it reveals a structural parallel between the moral and aesthetic domains. In turn, that result serves to bolster the uniformity assumption. In the remainder, I will argue that the notion of aesthetic worth is of additional significance. My suggestion is that we can understand the notion of aesthetic appreciation by appeal to that of aesthetic worth. More specifically, I propose the following:

AESTHETIC APPRECIATION. Aesthetic appreciation consists in aesthetically worthy admiration.

Plugging AESTHETIC WORTH into AESTHETIC APPRECIATION delivers this:

AESTHETIC APPRECIATION*. A person appreciates something if and only if (i) they admire it for the reasons that make admiring it aesthetically right (ii) because those reasons make admiring it aesthetically right.

I reached this proposal via reflection on the moral domain, where an isomorphic structure is already in clear view and comparatively well-understood. However, the account of what aesthetic appreciation consists in might be true, even if the corresponding account of what morally worthy action consists in turns out to be false. Pursuing the structural analogy between the moral and aesthetic domains is one route to AESTHETIC APPRECIATION, and of importance in so far as the aim is to test the uniformity assumption, but, as with any philosophical thesis, there are no doubt other ways of arriving at it.¹⁴

I take reflection on cases to support the proposal. In both the original example and the revised version, the estate agent admires the house façade but lacks appreciation. More carefully, they might appreciate its financial value, but they do not *aesthetically* appreciate the façade. In the example from Austen, another way to express Marianne's complaint is to say that, while Edward admires Elinor's drawings, he does not appreciate them.

An additional consideration in support of the proposal is that it captures—and domesticates—the Kantian idea that aesthetic appreciation is *disinterested*.¹⁵ According to AESTHETIC APPRECIATION, if a person's affective response to an object is motivated by and dependent on non-aesthetic interests (say, financial or romantic), they do not appreciate it. In positive terms, if a person appreciates an object, their admiration must be based on, and responsive to, its aesthetically relevant features as such.

Another welcome feature of the proposal is that it straightforwardly accords with the widespread thought that appreciating an object requires a positive affective response to it—for example, enjoying or liking it. It is common to make this point by noting that merely representing some object as aesthetically good or beautiful does not suffice for appreciating it [Walton 1993: 505; Kieran 2005: 70–1; Levinson 2009; Gorodeisky and Marcus 2018; Lopes 2018: 105–6; Hills *forthcoming*]. For example, a person might think that Edward Yang's *Yi Yi* is good, but not like it,

¹⁴ Gorodeisky and Marcus [2018] identify aesthetic appreciation with aesthetic judgment. In turn, they identify that judgment with a kind of liking, one that is 'explained by those features of the object that (seem to) make it worth liking; those features that (seem to) explain why it is to be appreciated'. This brings out two differences between our views. First, I do not claim that aesthetic judgments express affects, hence appreciation. Second, for Gorodeisky and Marcus, a person can appreciate an object even though their liking is not in fact explained by the features that make liking the object right. So, appreciation occupies the place in Gorodeisky and Marcus's account that admiration occupies in mine.

¹⁵ For an influential expression of scepticism about this idea, see Dickie [1964]. For recent discussion, see Riggle [2016]. I say that the idea is Kantian (recognizably in keeping with prominent themes in received views of Kant's aesthetic theory), not that it is Kant's [1793]. For exegetical matters, see Ginsborg [1991] and Guyer [1997: ch. 5].

perhaps because the lengthy takes, static camera, and slow-moving plot are not to their taste. As one might put it, the film leaves them cold, their assessment notwithstanding. From AESTHETIC APPRECIATION, it follows that they do not appreciate the film.

Aesthetic belief is, then, not sufficient for aesthetic appreciation. But is it necessary?¹⁶ A widespread view is that it is [Dickie 1971: 105; Iseminger 1981; Walton 1993; Carroll 2016; Dodd 2017; Hills forthcoming].¹⁷ However, the parallel with moral worth is instructive here. There are aesthetic analogues to the example of Huck Finn, reflection on which suggests that appreciation is possible in the absence of—indeed, in the face of—aesthetic belief. Suppose that a person attends a course on architecture appreciation taught by an incompetent instructor. As a result of this influence, when they look at the façade from the earlier example, the student believes (falsely) that the curve of the bay window is ostentatious, that the paintwork is gaudy, and that the proportions are dull, and so believes (falsely) that the façade is not (aesthetically) good. Nevertheless, and to their embarrassment, the student cannot help but be charmed by the window, delighted by the paintwork, and satisfied by the proportions. As a result, they admire the façade. In this case, the student appreciates the façade—they manifest a taste for its aesthetically relevant features—despite their aesthetic belief.

Austen [1811: 92] provides a rather different example, again from *Sense and Sensibility*, which reveals something about the connection—or, rather, mismatch—between appreciation and belief:

Edward returned to them [Elinor and Marianne] with fresh admiration of the surrounding country; in his walk to the village, he had seen many parts of the valley to advantage; and the village itself, in a much higher situation than the cottage, afforded a general view of the whole, which had exceedingly pleased him. This was a subject which ensured Marianne's attention, and she was beginning to describe her own admiration of these scenes, and to question him more minutely on the objects that had particularly struck him, when Edward interrupted her by saying, 'You must not enquire too far, Marianne—remember I have no knowledge in the picturesque, and I shall offend you by my ignorance and want of taste if we come to particulars. I shall call hills steep, which ought to be bold; surfaces strange and uncouth, which ought to be irregular and rugged; and distant objects out of sight, which ought only to be indistinct through the soft medium of a hazy atmosphere. You must be satisfied with such admiration as I can honestly give. I call it a very fine country—the hills are steep, the woods seem full of fine timber, and the valley looks comfortable and snug—with rich meadows and several neat farm houses scattered here and there. It exactly answers my idea of a fine country, because it unites beauty with utility—and I dare say it is a picturesque one too, because you admire it; I can easily believe it to be full of rocks and promontories, grey moss and brush wood, but these are all lost on me. I know nothing of the picturesque.'

Edward admires the countryside. He does not deny that he is right to do so, but he does suggest that the features to which he is responding with admiration are not those that make the countryside admirable. In the terms that I have introduced, Edward is professing that his admiration lacks aesthetic worth. Of course, Austen's tone here is one of irony.¹⁸ It is clear that Edward does appreciate the countryside and it is in fact Marianne who fails to do so, since her admiration is motivated by what one might call *faddism*, a desire to be (seen to be) in keeping with social trends or fashions—in

¹⁶ The issue is not that of whether the affective response in some way involves a representation, say, of value.

¹⁷ Levinson suggests a disjunctive view, according to which appreciation requires either an affective response or an evaluative belief [2009: 451].

¹⁸ Cp. note 12. Arguably, Edward, too, is being ironic.

this case, the picturesque.¹⁹ This suggests that it is possible for a person to aesthetically appreciate an object while believing that they fail to do so.

Reflection on these cases supports the view that, just as morally worthy action does not require moral belief, so aesthetically worthy action, hence appreciation, does not require aesthetic belief. That is not to deny that in some cases—that is, for some candidate objects of appreciation or for some candidate appreciators—aesthetic belief is a means, whether necessary or sufficient, to appreciation.²⁰ The claim is only that it need not be present in all cases.

However, this is a choice point for proponents of AESTHETIC APPRECIATION. One might accept the principle as stated while insisting that aesthetic belief is necessary by taking the satisfaction of clause (ii) in AESTHETIC WORTH to require it. That is, one might claim that, for a person to respond to various features of an object with admiration because those features make admiration right, they must think that those features make it right to admire the object (or form some other aesthetic belief).

5. Optional Extras

Having introduced and explored the proposal that aesthetic appreciation consists in aesthetically worthy admiration, I will now explain how it relates to some other views in the literature. The aim is to show that the proposal is an ecumenical one that can incorporate a number of existing ideas without building them in from the outset.

Arguably, it is within the field of environmental aesthetics that the notion of appreciation has received the most sustained attention. And, at first glance, it might seem that AESTHETIC APPRECIATION is at odds with the dominant view that one finds there. According to it, '[a]ppreciation of any object, from the noblest to the most mundane, requires information about it and, by the same token, that the appropriate aesthetic appreciation of nature requires knowledge of the natural world' [Carlson 1995: 393]. Again, '[i]n appreciation ... what is aesthetically relevant is knowledge of why it [the object of appreciation] is, what it is, and what it is like' [Carlson 2005: 549]. On this view, aesthetic appreciation involves a cognitive state—specifically, knowledge. According to AESTHETIC APPRECIATION, in apparent contrast, it involves only an affective state.

However, there need be no tension here. On the view that Carlson defends, appreciating a natural environment requires, very roughly, knowledge of its workings. This is knowledge of the features of the environment that make it admirable. According to AESTHETIC APPRECIATION, in order to appreciate the environment, a person must admire it on the basis of such features. It is consistent with the proposal that, for a person to be in a position to do this, they must have knowledge of those features. Indeed, it is an independently plausible idea that a person can do something for a reason only if they know the feature that provides it [Unger 1975; Hyman 1999; Hornsby 2008].

This point helps in turn to show that AESTHETIC APPRECIATION is consistent with, but not committed to, the influential idea that aesthetically appreciating an object

¹⁹ Compare Kieran [2010] on snobbery.

²⁰ Nor do I deny that aesthetic belief can be aesthetically worthy in the sense that it is held for the right reasons in the right way (see note 9), only that such belief qualifies as appreciation.

requires experience (broadly construed) of it [Iseminger 1981; Sibley 2001: 34–5; Levinson 2009; Gorodeisky and Marcus 2018; Gorodeisky 2021; Hills *forthcoming*: sec. 6].²¹ To return to an earlier example, it is plausible that a person cannot appreciate *Yi Yi* if they have not watched it. According to AESTHETIC APPRECIATION, in order to appreciate the film, the person must admire it on the basis of its aesthetically relevant features. This, I granted, might require that they know those features. This, in turn, might require that they experience them. More generally, while AESTHETIC APPRECIATION does not make explicit reference to the need for experience in appreciation, it allows for, and in conjunction with some independently plausible ideas might predict, such a need.

Finally, one might think that the proposal clashes with the idea that appreciation is an action [Lopes 2018; Hills *forthcoming*: sec. 6]. According to AESTHETIC APPRECIATION, appreciation consists in a specific sort of admiration, and admiration is a state, something that a person is in, not an act, something that they perform.

If there is a clash here, it is superficial. It is consistent with AESTHETIC APPRECIATION that there are important and wide-ranging connections between appreciation and exercises of agency, both mental and physical. To appreciate the house façade, for example, the student might need to direct their eyes to its upper storey, step back a few paces to bring the structure into view, recall details no longer visible to them, and so on. Moreover, once the student appreciates the façade, they might express their appreciation by returning to the spot the next day, seeking out other properties in the same style, or encouraging others to view it. More generally, while appreciation is not itself an act, acts of various sorts might be a route to appreciation, and acts of various sorts might result from and manifest appreciation. There is no objection to referring to such goings-on as the activity of appreciation, so long as that is not understood to mean that appreciation is itself an action.

I have defended the view that admiration is not an action by seeking to accommodate data that might suggest otherwise. If this does not convince, note that AESTHETIC APPRECIATION is strictly neutral on the ontology of admiration, hence appreciation. A more concessive response is to accept that appreciation is an act but to claim also that admiration is an act. What would be a problem for the proposal is if there were grounds for thinking that there is a mismatch here—that appreciation is an act and admiration is not. I do not know what such grounds would be.

6. Objection and Reply

I have presented AESTHETIC APPRECIATION as telling us something about the nature of appreciation. One might grant its biconditional counterpart but query whether it is possible to analyse appreciation as a matter of admiring for the right reasons in the right way. In particular, one might wonder whether we have an independent purchase on what the ‘right’ way to respond to reasons is; perhaps there is nothing more to say about it other than that it is the way of responding that results in (or from) appreciation. In that case, the notion of appreciation is explanatorily prior.

²¹ This relates to, but is not the same as, the *acquaintance principle*. That principle, at least as Wollheim [1980: 233] articulates it, concerns aesthetic judgment. According to it, such judgments must be based on first-hand experience of the object.

There are two things to say in tackling this objection. First, the notion of responding to a reason in a way that manifests sensitivity to its reason-giving force is a general one; it is not restricted to the aesthetic domain or to reasons for affects [Mantel 2018]. We can ask, for example, whether a person is responding to moral reasons for feeling as such. And we can ask whether a person is responding to aesthetic reasons for acting as such. Since the notion has general application, that suggests that grasp of it is independent of the notion of appreciation in general or of aesthetic appreciation in particular.

Second, and in any event, I am more concerned in this paper to defend the biconditional that AESTHETIC APPRECIATION* expresses than to prioritise one side of it over the other. For one thing, it is the biconditional that has the positive features outlined. For another, it is illuminating to chart the connections between the notions of aesthetic appreciation, admiration, and reasons, and in turn to chart connections between this cluster of notions and their moral counterparts. Those connections remain, and remain illuminating, even if the account does not prove reductive.

7. Possible Consequences

It is frequently assumed that there are reasons for aesthetic appreciation (see McGonigal [2017, 2018], Gorodeisky and Marcus [2018], and Lord [2018]). One interesting implication of AESTHETIC APPRECIATION is that, if there are such reasons, they are *second-order* [Raz 1990]. A second-order reason is a reason, not just for a response, but for a response-for-a-reason. According to AESTHETIC APPRECIATION, to appreciate an object is, not just to admire it, but to admire-it-for-an-aesthetic-reason. So, while reasons to admire are first-order, reasons to appreciate—to admire appreciatively—are second-order.

I have argued elsewhere that there are no second-order reasons [Whiting 2017]. In that case, while there are reasons to admire and to take actions that result in appreciation, there are no reasons to appreciate. If the fact that someone ought to do something entails that there is a reason to do it, a corollary is that it is never the case that a person ought to appreciate something, although perhaps they ought to admire it or take actions that result in their appreciating it.²²

I cannot here defend the claim that there are no second-order reasons. The point is that, if AESTHETIC APPRECIATION is correct, an assumption that might otherwise seem innocuous—namely, that there are reasons for appreciation—turns out to be contentious.

Having identified one consequence of AESTHETIC APPRECIATION, I will now block another. On the account developed, if a person does not appreciate an object that is admirable, they do not admire it in an aesthetically worthy fashion. It does not follow from this that they are aesthetically *blameworthy* or, more generally, criticizable. That is, I am not suggesting that, if a person admires an object for aesthetically irrelevant reasons, or in a way that is mediated by non-aesthetic concerns, or has no attitude at all toward it, they are thereby open to criticism. Arguably, aesthetic reasons are discretionary in a way that, again arguably, moral reasons are not (see Whiting [2021]). As McGonigal says, '[s]ome [aesthetic reasons] may be conditional on our having cultivated a particular aesthetic sensibility' [2018: 932]. To return to the examples,

²² On aesthetic obligations, see Eaton [2008], Kubala [2018], Whiting [2021], and Cross [forthcoming].

Kant's shopkeeper might be criticizable for their indifference to fairness. In contrast, for all that I say here, the estate agent need not be criticizable for their indifference to proportion.

Finally, one might ask whether AESTHETIC APPRECIATION entails a corresponding account of non-aesthetic appreciation. Does it commit me to a view about what it is to appreciate a person's moral qualities, say, or their epistemic characteristics? As it happens, and in line with the uniformity assumption, I think that the proposal does generalise in this way. But, for present purposes, it need not. It is consistent with AESTHETIC APPRECIATION and the arguments in support of it that appreciation differs, not only in its object, but also in its nature in different domains.

8. Closing Remarks

A person can do what is morally right without doing it in a way that is morally worthy. Likewise, I have argued, a person can admire what it is aesthetically right to admire without doing so in a way that is aesthetically worthy. That this parallel holds provides further support for the idea that the normative is uniform—that different domains of normativity might vary in substance but not structure. When a person's admiration is aesthetically worthy, I have also argued, they have aesthetic appreciation. This proposal is non-trivial and accommodates a number of existing insights concerning the constraints to which appreciation is subject.

In closing, I will make what might sound like a paradoxical suggestion: aesthetically worthy admiration is not aesthetically worthy. To make the same point differently, and in a way that reveals it not to be absurd, admiring something for the right reasons in the right way—hence, I have argued, appreciation—is not an aesthetic value. To return to the examples, if Kant's shopkeeper were to start to charge the prices that they do for reasons of fairness as such, the world would be a morally better place as a result. In contrast, if my estate agent were to start admiring the façade on the basis of its aesthetically significant features as such, or if Edward were to start admiring Elinor's drawings as a connoisseur, or if Marianne were to start admiring the countryside on the basis of its steep hills and comfortable valley in a way that manifests sensitivity to their aesthetic significance, the world would not be an aesthetically better place as a result. That is not to deny that one or more of these changes would make the world better in some way, only that any such improvement would be an aesthetic one.

To be clear, I do not deny that the activity of appreciation might realise or promote aesthetic value (see section 5). Nor do I reject the Nietzschean idea that a person can—or should—shape themselves—their thoughts, feelings, and actions—in an aesthetically valuable way [Nehamas 1985; Ridley 2007]. I do not even deny that appreciation is valuable [Nguyen 2019]. On the contrary, in section 3 I argued that it is. I deny only that appreciation—as such—is *aesthetically* valuable.

In response, one might point out that, according to AESTHETIC APPRECIATION, appreciation involves a kind of harmony between the reason for which a person admires something and the reasons there are for them to admire it. Harmony is an aesthetic value. So, appreciation is aesthetically valuable, at least in one respect.

This line of thought overgeneralises. Morally worthy action involves the same kind of harmony—between the reason for which a person acts and the reasons there are for them to act. It does not follow that morally worthy action is aesthetically valuable, at

least not without further ado. As Sibley [2001: 2] points out, terms like ‘harmony’ have aesthetic and non-aesthetic uses. The line of thought equivocates between the two.²³

If this is correct, then talk of ‘aesthetic worth’ was a useful tool for bringing into view a particular structure, but it is misleading on first-order substantive grounds. So, it is a ladder to be kicked away, now that we have reached our destination.²⁴

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Funding

This research was supported by a grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Council [AH/S006338/1].

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²³ An alternative line of thought appeals to the idea that aesthetic appreciation involves pleasure [Walton 1993]. In so far as pleasure is an affect, a proponent of AESTHETIC APPRECIATION can accept this. It follows that appreciation is aesthetically valuable only if the experience (as opposed to its object) is itself aesthetically (as opposed to hedonically) valuable. This is controversial [Shelley 2010]. Even granting it, if the pleasure can be felt for the wrong reasons or in the wrong way, then it is not appreciation as such that is aesthetically valuable but, rather, the pleasure that it entails.

²⁴ For feedback on earlier versions of this material, I am grateful to audiences at Edinburgh, Uppsala, and Southampton, and to two anonymous referees for this journal.

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