

A Fitting-Attitude Approach to Aesthetic Value?

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Abstract. It is a noteworthy disanalogy between contemporary ethics and aesthetics that the fitting-attitude account of value, so prominent in contemporary ethics, sees comparatively little play in aesthetics. The aim of this paper is to articulate what a systematic fitting-attitude-style framework for understanding aesthetic value might look like. In the bulk of the paper, I sketch possible fitting-attitude-style accounts of three central aesthetic values – the beautiful, the sublime, and the powerful – so that the general form of the framework come through.

1. Introduction: Aesthetic Value and Fitting-Attitude Accounts

In contemporary ethical theory, one of the most prominent approaches to value is the so-called fitting-attitude account. Roughly, the idea is that for x to be (ethically) valuable is for it to be fitting to have a pro attitude, such as approval or appreciation, toward x ; and for y to be *disvaluable* is for it to be fitting to have a *con* attitude, such as indignation or disapproval, toward y . It is natural to suppose that for most accounts of ethical value a structurally parallel account of *aesthetic* value is available.¹ Interestingly, however, there is no similarly lively discussion of fitting-attitude-style accounts in aesthetics. Some isolated authors make in passing remarks suggesting an insight in the vicinity (e.g., D'Arms and Jacobson 2000: 728–9, Kauppinen 2014: 581–2, Peacocke 2021: 164–5). But a sustained development and defense is hard to find – Keren Gorodeisky (2019, 2021) perhaps comes closest (more on this in §5). In this paper, I propose to explore what such an approach might look like, and showcase some of its theoretical resources, in particular in capturing the potential variety of aesthetic values.

Let me start, though, with a quick primer on fitting-attitude accounts *in ethics* and the notion of aesthetic value.

1.1. The Fitting-Attitude Account in Ethics

The basic idea of fitting-attitude accounts of value may be put thus:

(FA) For any x , if x is valuable, then (i) it is fitting to take a pro attitude toward x , and (ii) x is valuable *because* (i).

Clause (i) here asserts a *covariance* of value and fitting pro attitude: something is valuable iff it is fitting to take a pro attitude toward it. But this leaves open a certain Euthyphro question: is it fitting to take the attitude because the thing is valuable or is the thing valuable because it is fitting to take a pro attitude toward it? Clause (ii) settles this question: the thing is valuable because it is fitting to take a pro attitude toward it, not the other way round. FA thus grounds the value of things (e.g., generous acts) in the fittingness of pro attitudes (e.g., approval) toward them.

Fitting-attitude accounts go back at least to the 1880s. Franz Brentano is often cited as a pioneer (Brentano 1889). In the English-speaking literature, FA receives its first sustained defense in A.C. Ewing (1939). Partly inspired by Brentano, Chisholm (1981, 1986) later defended the same general approach, and many others followed suit, including Anderson (1993), D'Arms & Jacobson (2000), Chappell (2012), Kauppinen (2014), McHugh & Way (2016), and Howard (2019).

Naturally, one of the big issues within the FA framework is what fittingness exactly *is*. At the most general level, there are two kinds of approach here. Many FAists treat fittingness as a *conceptual primitive* admitting of no analysis or reductive account (Chappell 2012, Howard 2019). Others offer reductive assays of fittingness in terms of more fundamental notions. In ethics, the leading version of this is an analysis in terms of *reasons*: roughly, it is fitting to approve of x just if the balance of reasons to approve of x or disapprove of it recommends approval (Schroeder 2010). Another option is to explicate fittingness through *idealization*: roughly, it is fitting to approve of x just if an ideal subject would (cf. Kauppinen 2014). For those who adopt a reductive take on fittingness, the fitting-attitude account itself reduces to some other sort of account, e.g. a reason-based (“buck-passing”) or ideal-observer account. Still, depending on one’s other commitments, such accounts can play out as *versions* of FA.

The arguments offered *in support* of FA are varied. Two broad motivations stand out. First, some moral philosophers feel attracted to a pair of ideas that can appear initially in tension but which FA promises to reconcile. One is that we cannot make sense of values without reference to subjects’ mental reactions: values do not inhere in the world the way objects like rocks and properties like mass do. The other idea, though, is that values are independent of the subjective reactions people happen to have: in a society that supports genocide, genocide does not *eo ipso* become morally permissible. FA integrates these two

ideas by making reference to subjects' mental attitudes indispensable in the analysis of value and yet insisting on a measure of objectivity regarding the *fittingness* of these attitudes. (To be clear, it is perfectly possible to be independently repelled by either idea, as robust moral realists, on the one hand, and assorted relativists and nihilists, on the other, in fact are. Still, for the many philosophers who are attracted by the two ideas, the fitting-attitude account offers a way to marry them in a single stable framework.)

A second fundamental motivation for fitting-attitude accounts is that they have the flexibility to account for a variety of different and potentially incommensurable values that animate our moral life. For in the FA framework, each different value is grounded in the fittingness of a different attitude, with the speciation of pro attitudes producing, automatically so to speak, the speciation of values: right action is action it is fitting to approve of, admirable character is character it is fitting to admire, unjust policies are policies it is fitting to be indignant about, and so on. At the same time, the unity of these various values as *moral* values can be captured by the unity of *pro/con attitude* as a category of mental state. It is an open question, however, whether the various moral values are commensurable or not, and a metaethical account of value at the level of abstraction we are considering ought to be neutral on this. For some authors, it is a major asset of FA that it *allows* for such incommensurability, since it is an open question whether different fitting attitudes can be weighed against each other. This motivation for the fitting-attitude approach is particularly salient in Elizabeth Anderson's work (see notably Anderson 1993 Ch.1), but irrigates other discussions as well.

1.2. Aesthetic Value

Both motivations cross over naturally to the aesthetic domain. The notion that value cannot be made sense of entirely independently of how anybody is affected is if anything more antecedently plausible in aesthetics than in ethics. Yet in aesthetics too, few believe that "anything goes" and there are no objective standards for comparative aesthetic judgments. Thus accounts of aesthetic value must somehow capture the duality of the objective and the subjective (Hopkins 2001, Gorodeisky and Marcus 2018). A fitting-attitude-like account may hope to do justice to both ideas.

Indeed, this may be seen as the centerpiece of Gorodeisky's case for her FA-like account of aesthetic value (see, e.g., Gorodeisky 2021: 272–5). According to Gorodeisky, for something to be aesthetically valuable is for it to merit our taking pleasure in it (more on this in §5). Her central argument for this is that this view manages to capture what is right both in "aesthetic hedonism" (typically understood as the view that the aesthetic value of an object consists in the value of the pleasure it affords) and in "non-affectivism" (the view that pleasure at most tends to accompany aesthetic value but is not necessary for it). Hedonists are right to insist on a non-contingent connection between aesthetic value and the

subjective experience of pleasure, according to Gorodeisky (2021: 263); but non-affectivists are right to point out that some aesthetically valuable items have been met with no pleasure. Both can be right if something's aesthetic value consists in the pleasure it *merits* (rather than the pleasure it in fact produces). The pleasure component captures the subjective facet of aesthetic value, while the meriting component captures the objective facet.

In this paper, however, I will focus on the second motivation for the fitting-attitude approach. Interestingly, some contemporary aestheticians have sought to distance themselves from hedonism not by denying the constitutive role of subjective experience in aesthetic value, but by stressing the variety of non-hedonic experiences that might be relevant (see notably Peacocke 2021, but also Levinson 1996: 18–20). It is precisely this range of aesthetic experience, and the way it may be leveraged within a fitting-attitude framework to account for the range of different aesthetic values, that I want to highlight here.

Historically, discussions of aesthetic value have tended to center singularly on the notion of *beauty*. In contemporary aesthetics, however, a central theme has been the dizzying plurality of ways in which we evaluatively experience and discuss works of art and other aesthetic objects. Frank Sibley (1959: 421) famously wrote:

Aesthetic terms span a great range of types and could be grouped into various kinds and sub-species... Their almost endless variety is adequately displayed in the following list: unified, balanced, integrated, lifeless, serene, sombre, dynamic, powerful, vivid, delicate, moving, trite, sentimental, tragic.

It is possible to argue that beauty remains *the* central aesthetic value, with all these other aesthetic values ultimately depending on it (Zangwill 2001 Ch. 1); or that beauty is a genus or determinable of which all these are species or determinates (Lopes 2018 Ch. 7). But it is also perfectly possible to embrace an irreducible pluralism of aesthetic values: beauty may be the queen of aesthetic values, but an exhaustive theory should account also for a variety of other, perhaps more minor but still distinct, aesthetic values.

It is thus a desideratum on an FA-style account of aesthetic value that it should be compatible with either view. It would certainly be a dialectical strike against an FA-style account if it were viable only assuming one. Accordingly, in what follows I start by sketching an FA-style account of beauty (§2), but then proceed to present possible FA-style accounts of two other central aesthetic values: the sublime (§3) and the aesthetically powerful (§4). I leave it open how these two relate to beauty. They may be derivative upon it or they may be metaphysically independent. The point is that either way, an account of aesthetic value patterned after the fitting-attitude account in ethics can handle them.

I recognize, of course, that there is a use of the term “beauty” where it just means something like “positive overall aesthetic value,” and then it becomes *analytic* that all aesthetic values are species of beauty. However, setting aside the fact that this is not the only legitimate use of “beauty,” it is in any case a substantive question whether *there really is* such a thing as “overall aesthetic value.” Your family doctor can discuss your health with you, but cannot issue an “overall health score” that aggregates all your infirmities and firmities (“Congratulations: your health is 8.2!”). There may likewise be no overall aesthetic score that an object has in virtue of all its deformities and formities. Again, it would be a strength of an FA-style account of aesthetic value if it did not prejudice such substantive questions.

Before starting, a terminological clarification. An account of aesthetic value patterned after the fitting-attitude account of value in ethics need not account for aesthetic value in terms of a fitting aesthetic *attitude*. The notion of a distinctive, sui generis aesthetic attitude is notoriously controversial, for reasons that will not concern us here (see Dickie 1964). It is not so controversial, however, that we experience a variety of mental reactions to artworks and other aesthetic objects, mental reactions that parallel in some respects the pro and con attitudes (approval, indignation, etc.) that we undergo in reaction to ethically significant matters. Thus although the term “attitude” is useful when articulating an account of ethical value in terms of fitting mental reactions, it becomes a liability when we seek a parallel account of *aesthetic* value in terms of fitting mental reactions. The account I will explore here will make no use of the notion of aesthetic attitude, focusing instead on the various reactions we experience in response to aesthetically evaluable objects. Importantly, though, just as in ethics the fitting-attitude account does not require the postulation of an “ethical attitude” or an “ethical experience,” relying instead on the category of pro attitudes, understood simply as a genus whose species include approval, desire, appreciation, preference, and so on, a parallel account of aesthetic value does not require the postulation of a sui generis aesthetic attitude or experience (more on this in §6).

2. The Beautiful and Fitting Delight

An FA-style account of *beauty* would have to take the following form:

[?] For any x , if x is beautiful, then (i) it is fitting to [insert the right mental reaction] toward x , and (ii) x is beautiful *because* (i).

The question is what mental reaction to plug into [?]. There is little question that *some* reaction to that which is beautiful is fitting, and hence, that there *is* a fitting reaction to the

beautiful. What the FA account adds is the more daring claim that the fittingness of this reaction is in fact *constitutive* of the thing's beauty (or *grounds* it). The question we face is *what* mental reaction is fitting in the presence of beautiful things.

There are, of course, many different ways to react fittingly to a thing of beauty. But there seems to be something they have in common: if we really experience something as beautiful, we experience a certain type of *delight* in it – what we might call, to make things easy, *aesthetic delight*, or “a-delight” for short. Thus we might propose:

(FA-B) For any x , if x is beautiful, then (i) it is fitting to feel a-delight toward x (or: to be a-delighted *with* x), and (ii) x is beautiful *because* (i).

As before, Clause (i) asserts a covariance between beauty and fitting a-delight, while Clause (ii) settles the order of grounding: the fittingness of the a-delight *makes it the case* that x is beautiful.

A-delight is the kind of delight I feel when contemplating Botticelli faces, when listening to Bach partitas, and when following a serpentine George Eliot sentence all the way to its miraculously felicitous conclusion – but also upon surveying the Ryōan-ji rock garden, Maradona's second goal against England in Mexico 86, or Renzo Piano's Aurora Place in Sydney. Although the art forms involved are very different, there is an experiential common thread in my reactions to them, the best English word for which is *delight*. This is not to say, however, that *every* experience we feel comfortable calling delight is of the right kind. I am delighted to meet you, but the fittingness of my delight does not make the meeting beautiful. This is why we need to restrict FA-B to *a*-delight.

To be clear, I do not have in mind that there is some determinate phenomenological quality that all and only fitting experiences of that which is beautiful instantiate. Different experiential reactions to the beautiful can vary immensely – certainly. Nonetheless, there is arguably a *determinable* commonality that runs through them. Compare all and only experiences of red. Some are experiences of vermilion, some are experiences of scarlet, some are of crimson; some are bright, some are dull; some are experienced in perfect lighting, some in the shade. There is no determinate quality found in *all* these experiences. Nonetheless, there is surely some commonality here, however imprecise and open-ended, that corresponds to the experience of *seeing red*. The notion of a-delight I have in mind is similar: it comes in a rich variety of flavors, but some non-arbitrary commonality runs through them.

How can we characterize this commonality? That is, what exactly *is* a-delight, delight in the sense relevant to our fitting reaction to beautiful things? It is certainly a *pleasant* experience, a kind of pleasure. But not any old kind of pleasure. And what distinguishes a-delight from pleasure more generically is not something as simple as vividness or intensity

– there is such a thing as mild delight, after all. No, the difference is qualitative rather than quantitative. Several aspects of this qualitative difference may be noted in cases of prototypical a-delight, such as we may experience courtesy of Botticelli or Maradona.

First, a-delight has a *focal point*, an *object* it is engaged with. The pleasure we feel at the end of a big meal, as we recline and loosen our belt, is unlike this. That pleasure is vague and dispersed; a-delight in comparison has more *objectual acuity* to it. It is characterized, first of all, by object-directedness: the artwork is the object of my a-delight in the same sense my son is the object of my affection. But more than that, this object-directedness is *focally attentive* to the object. Right now I am attending to the writing of this paragraph, and in the background, non-attentively, am hearing Bach's English Suites. So long as the English Suites are in the background of my conscious awareness, they can bring me pleasure or improve my mood, but I do not experience *a-delight* with them. At some point they might *force* a-delight in me, but then they will have also forced my attending to them.

Secondly, a-delight has an admiration-like quality whereby the excellence of the object (and also, sometimes, its creator) is keenly appreciated. This admiration-like quality is often accompanied by a very subtle *humbling quality*: we are faced with the excellence of *something else* (and/or *someone else*), an excellence it may not be in our capacity to embody or create and that in any case would exist even if we did not. This is not the case with an average orgasm and other pleasures, however intense.

Thirdly, a-delight has a dimension of *surprise*, of an *unexpected good* that is taking us by surprise. If you experience *x* as just-what-you'd-expect, you are probably not *delighted* with *x* in the sense that captures our reaction to objects of beauty. The pleasure of drinking cold water when very thirsty lacks this surprising quality: we take it for granted. But what a-delights us it is impossible to take for granted *in the experience of a-delight*.²

There are probably other markers of the kind of delight we are interested in, beyond its objectual acuity, humbling quality, and unexpected good. And there may also be cases of a-delight – perhaps non-prototypical cases – that lack one of these. These three features may serve, however, to focus the mind on what prototypical a-delight is like and how it differs from generic pleasure. It is evident, I think, that we do experience this particular type of delight in the presence of certain things, and is plausible that it is sometimes *fitting* to experience just this type of delight in their presence. The additional claim that FA-B makes is that those are, *eo ipso*, the beautiful things.

This is not to say, of course, that we have never collectively failed to be a-delighted by something that is beautiful. When I was in High-School I had to read *Richard III*. The moment Richard is visited for the first time by what has been entirely foreign to him up till then – conscience – he exclaims in horror “my conscience has a thousand several tongues, / and every tongue brings a several tale, / and every tale condemns me for a villain.” That

captures ever so beautifully a shade of sentiment unfamiliar to most of us who are all too burdened by conscience. Yet reading this for my schoolwork as a teenager, I experienced no delight of any sort, but only frustration that I was not outside playing football. But this was a classic case of pearls before swine: it was and is *fitting* to experience intense a-delight upon reading these lines, even if I did not. And for all FA-B says, it may even be fitting to be a-delighted with something that nobody ever has been, or will be, a-delighted with. The thing is still beautiful, though its beauty eludes all.

3. The Sublime and Fitting Awe

In many dictionaries and any thesaurus, you will find the expression “awe-inspiring” proffered as part of the elucidation of “sublime.” The connection between sublimity and awe is well recognized in traditional discussions of the sublime. Herder, for instance, is said to have held that “the initial feeling of the sublime is an uncomprehending awe, which . . . ‘lowers’ or humbles us” (Zuckert 2003: 220). But traditionally the connection is framed somewhat carelessly, often through the claim that the sublime is that which produces such awe in us. But who is “us” and what guarantees that we will experience awe of any sort in the presence of all and only sublime objects? On the view I want to propose, a sublime object or scene may or may not inspire awe, but it is certainly fitting that it should.

Here too, though, there are surely some experiences we feel comfortable calling awe which are not of the right kind. I am in awe of my colleague George’s productivity, and my reaction is fitting and widely shared; but George’s productivity is not quite sublime. It’s just really impressive. The kind of experience I undergo upon contemplating George’s productivity is also not quite the same, however, as those I undergo when looking up from the foot of a Tahitian mountain on a faintly misty morning, or across Place de la Concorde from the northwest corner of the Tuileries at dusk. We may call experiences of the latter type *a-awe*, to parallel the notion of a-delight. My proposed fitting-attitude account of sublimity would then read:

(FA-S) For any x , if x is sublime, then (i) it is fitting to feel a-awe toward x (or: to be a-awed by x), and (ii) x is sublime *because* (i).

The crucial issue, if we are to give FA-S substantive content, is how to *characterize* a-awe.

The most central and distinctive feature of a-awe, widely recognized in discussions of the sublime going back at least to Moses Mendelssohn (1758), is the elusive *ungraspability* of its object. It is sometimes said that awe is inherently directed at what is grand or vast, but arguably grandness and vastness are only relevant here because they are

conducive to the sense of ungraspability. It is this element of *radical ungraspability*, the quality of the object whereby something about it eludes our capacity to dominate or control it in thought, that is the all-important feature here.

Another central feature of a-awe is the sense of *personal insignificance* that the subject experiences while in the clutches of a-awe: one feels very distinctly how tiny one's place is in the fantastic theater of the universe (cf. Schopenhauer 1818: 205: "we feel ourselves . . . like drops in the ocean, dwindling and dissolving into nothing"). Crucially, however, this personal insignificance is not experienced as demoralizing or dispiriting, as it might when induced by a bout of depression. On the contrary, there is something liberating and uplifting about it. A certain type of angst dissipates as one takes in with special acuity the unimportance of mundane vexations. And as anxiety evaporates, a hint of subdued, non-adrenalined euphoria is liable to flow in, and quite often a feeling of *unarticulated optimism* hums in the background of a-awe.

It is often said that our experience of the sublime involves an element of fear or terror. I find these claims overblown, and blame Edmund Burke (1757) for them. The kind of discomfort one experiences upon watching the stormy ocean from a safe vantage point is really a very pale imitation of fear, a highly intellectualized distant cousin of true terror (of the sort we feel during car accidents, in front of an onrushing snake, etc.). Certainly one does not fear being crushed by the raging ocean waves. What one experiences, I suggest, is rather one's personal significance being crushed by the enormity of the world – or something like that.

For me at least, awe of this sort is typically a relatively short-lived experience, one that is hard to sustain acutely – I often lose that special feeling faster than I would like. Perhaps I am particularly sublimely-challenged. Still, sustained a-awe issuing in a prolonged state of rapture is more indicative of a pathological or pharmacological context, although it can be personally very satisfying to the subject in its intensity and sense of spiritual elevation or meaningfulness. I suspect most of us will rarely feel acute a-awe for more than a few minutes at a time.

As with our discussion of a-delight, a fuller portrait of a-awe is certainly called for. There may be further markers of a-awe beyond the radical ungraspability of its object, the personal insignificance of its subject, and the diminution of anxiety with its oft-attendant optimistic "hum." As before, we should think of these as characterizing a *prototypical* experience of a-awe, and allow that, in the wild mess of our concrete affective life, non-prototypical a-awe will appear regularly. What matters for our purposes is this: this kind of experience certainly exists, and it is certainly sometimes fitting to undergo it in reaction to something we witness. What FA-S adds is that when this is so, the relevant "something" is *eo ipso* sublime, and indeed that this is all there is to its being sublime.

4. The Powerful and Fitting Stir

We describe as powerful artworks from virtually every art form – the narrative arts (film, drama, the novel), certainly, but also music, dance, and even poetry and visual art. What powerful artworks in all these genres have in common, in terms of the feelings they fittingly engender, is that they *move us* – they *stir us*. As before, we may wish to cordon off irrelevant phenomena, such as being moved by your mother’s seventieth birthday despite its regrettable dearth of aesthetic distinction; and may do so by speaking of being “a-moved” or “a-stirred” and offering a substantive characterization of what that is. But in addition, in this case there are also many senses of “powerful” that have nothing to do with aesthetic value (e.g., muscular), so our account should be also restricted to the *aesthetically* powerful. Thus I propose:

(FA-P) For any *x*, if *x* is aesthetically powerful, then (i) it is fitting to feel a-moved (or a-stirred) by *x*, and (ii) *x* is aesthetically powerful *because* (i).

In what follows, I use “being moved” and “being stirred” interchangeably, and use “stir” when what I need is a noun. The basic idea is to account for powerfulness (in the aesthetic sense) in terms of fitting stir, that is, in terms of the fittingness of being moved. When a poem is powerful, it is fitting to be moved by it. But it is not because it is powerful that it is fitting to be moved by it. On the contrary, according to FA-P, the poem’s powerfulness *consists in* it being fitting to be moved by it.

What does it mean to be a-moved? For that matter, what does it mean to be *moved*? It might be tempting to think of being moved as the generic phenomenon of undergoing *some* emotional reaction or other. But this is a mistake. As Cova and Deonna (2014: 448) point out in their seminal discussion of being moved, it would be infelicitous to say “I am moved” when experiencing anger, disgust, fear, jealousy, or shame. No, when we say “I am moved,” we are giving voice to a much more specific affective experience, a particularly tender and vulnerable feeling, one which, on reflection, appears to constitute its own kind of emotional experience rather than be some recurring dimension of emotions in general.

Nonetheless, there are many ways to be moved, just as there are many ways to be delighted and many ways to experience red. Sometimes we well up when moved, sometimes we get goosebumps, sometimes we find we have been bating our breath for long minutes. In all of these manifestations, however, we feel like we are put into this state by an external force – we feel *subjugated*, however delicately. The very expression “being moved,”

with its passive grammar, intimates a state in which we experience ourselves as patients rather than agents. This is a central feature of being moved.

Another central feature is that feeling moved incorporates a sense of *meaningfulness*. It is always a very personal and significant experience to be moved by something, and we accordingly place great value both on the event that has moved us and on our experience of being moved by it. Cova and Deonna (2014: 456) are sniffing in this general territory when they write: “There is a feeling of depth in being moved that directly echoes the depth of what is apprehended in the emotion.” But I prefer to speak of a sense of meaningfulness, rather than depth, because it seems more apt in the aesthetic context. When we are truly stirred by a film or novel, we consequently view our having watched or read it as a meaningful and personally valuable experience – and the film or novel itself as the repository of this meaning and personal significance. I experienced my own life as having gained in felt significance after watching Pina Bausch’s “Café Müller,” after reading Coleridge’s “Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” and other extremely powerful artworks.

It is a curious phenomenon that feeling moved exhibits substantial phenomenological overlap with, and is occasionally subsumed by, the more familiar emotion of sadness. Even when something very positive happens to me that moves me – say, when I read a particularly heartfelt note of gratitude from a student – a doleful tinge of sadness-like emotion washes over me and disarms me. Why this doleful tinge to such a wonderful gift? This is particularly curious because, as Cova and Deonna (2014: 456) point out, generally speaking feeling moved is something that *we like* – whereas sadness is generally something we try to avoid (although it does have its own melancholy sweetness). What to make of this I am not sure. I bring it up because it seems like an important and potentially instructive feature of being moved, one that helps focus the mind on the right phenomenon. (It also appears to be entangled somehow with the so-called paradox of tragedy, which has perplexed philosophers at least since Aristotle. There are many approaches to the question – and a good few takes on what the question exactly is. This is not the place to weigh in on this issue – for a recent overview, see Strohl 2019. Presumably, FA-V should be consistent with all or most approaches here, with different approaches defining different versions of FA-V.)

So much for the general phenomenon of being moved (a phenomenon very much underdiscussed in analytic philosophy of mind). How is being *a*-moved distinguished from being moved? Perhaps just by being directed at aesthetic objects. But there may also be something else. When we are moved by artworks, their value seems to us to emerge from the midst of the uninspiring, charmless, monotonous banality of daily life. Although this mundane banality pulls us all down, something special managed to burst out, and this is part of why we are moved, or more precisely, part of what being *a*-moved consists in. Plausibly, being moved in aesthetic contexts features this emergence-of-the-special-from-

the-midst-of-the-banal more centrally, or more essentially, than being moved in non-aesthetic contexts; and may thus be taken to characterize at least *prototypical* instances of being a-moved.³

To summarize, there is an emotion that we call being moved, which features a mysterious overlap with sadness but casts both its object and itself as specially meaningful, and which in aesthetic contexts typically responds to the emergence of the extraordinary from the midst of the oppressively ordinary; in it we always experience ourselves as subjugated patients rather than masters of our affective lives. This emotion it is fitting to experience in the presence of powerful artworks. And according to FA-P, the fact that these artworks are powerful *just is* the fact that it is fitting to experience this emotion in their presence – to be a-moved, or a-stirred, by them.

5. A Research Program

My accounts of beauty, sublimity, and powerfulness are perforce germinal. My only aim has been to give just enough texture to each account, through a somewhat involved phenomenological characterization of a corresponding aesthetic experience, to enable an adequate appreciation of what a properly developed FA-style account of an aesthetic value might look like. But the general template for an FA-style approach to aesthetic value should be evident by now. We might formulate it thus:

(FA-V) For any aesthetic value *V* and any *x* that is *V*, there is some experience *A*, such that
(i) it is fitting to undergo *A* in reaction to *x* and (ii) *x* is *V* because (i).

We may take FA-V to define an “FA research program in aesthetics.”

I mentioned in §1 that in Keren Gorodeisky’s work we find something that comes closest to a contemporary FA-style approach to aesthetic value. Gorodeisky calls her view VMP, for *Value-Meriting-Pleasure*, and is clear (a) that what she has in mind is a specific kind of pleasure, *aesthetic* pleasure (characterized eightfold in Gorodeisky 2021: 269–71), and (b) that her notion of the *merited* is intended to echo the idea of the *fitting* as understood in fitting-attitude approaches in ethics (2021: 263–4). However, whereas FA-V takes a very specific stand on the direction of grounding or metaphysical priority, as per Clause (ii) of all the fitting-attitude accounts voiced above, Gorodeisky opts for a “no priority” view on the question of grounding-direction (2021: 271–2). Whether this is consistent with a bonafide fitting-attitude approach depends essentially on how we want to use these technical labels; but I note that in the ethical context the term “fitting-attitude account” is reserved for views that give grounding priority to the fitting attitudes.

Another crucial difference between FA-V and Gorodeisky's VMP is that VMP is somewhat monolithic about aesthetic value, and correspondingly about the type of experience matched to it – aesthetic pleasure. What FA-V brings to the table is the resources to accommodate pluralism about aesthetic value, and in any case to capture the *speciation of aesthetic value*. It has the resources to account for different types of aesthetic value in terms of different types of aesthetic experience subjects fittingly undergo. Whether all these aesthetic values are subsumed under a single “overall aesthetic value,” or are on the contrary mutually irreducible or even incommensurable to some extent, will depend on the analogous question about fitting experiences.

Monroe Beardsley (1970) held that the aesthetic value of an object consists in “its capacity to provide aesthetic gratification *when correctly experienced*” (1970: 49; italics original). The requirement of correct experience may suggest a resemblance to the FA approach. Here too, however, there are three important differences. First of course is the focus on gratification as opposed to a wider range of emotional reactions. Beardsley's notion of gratification may well cover a-delight, but presumably it does not cover a-awe and a-stir. Secondly and more deeply, what Beardsley requires correctness *from* is not the gratification experience itself, but the perceptual and cognitive experiences of the object that *bring about* that gratification. He introduces the requirement to handle cases where aesthetically unsophisticated subjects draw great pleasure from a flawed novel, say, because they lack a developed grasp of details of style, composition, characterization, and so on (1970: *Ibid.*). In these cases, what is incorrect, in the first instance, is something like the cognitive antecedents of the gratification, not the gratification experience itself. Finally, even if we bracketed such nuances and considered the Beardsley-esque view that *x*'s beauty consists in *x*'s capacity to provide fitting a-delight, there would still be this difference: FA-V requires only that a-delight in *x* be fitting, not that *x* have the capacity to actually induce a-delight that is fitting. Now, there are ways to hear “capacity” sufficiently undemandingly that this would be no difference at all, and the two views would collapse into one. But if the capacity requirement is supposed to do any work, then there would have to be daylight between the two and the Beardsley-esque view would require more from beauty than is strictly necessary according to FA-V.

The FA research program in aesthetics is thus not without its quasi-precedents: in Beardsley and Gorodeisky we find positions very close, if not quite the same as, FA-V. There are wider questions as to whether any version of aesthetic hedonism, or more generally any view that grounded an object's aesthetic value in the experiences it can or is disposed to elicit, could coincide with FA-V under certain assumptions. Presumably the answer is positive given *some* assumptions about the nature of fittingness – more on this in §7.

The FA program may be pursued in a variety of ways, but they are profitably divided into two broad categories: “local” and “global.” Local contributions involve fleshing out

individual accounts of specific aesthetic values. For example, one might propose the following account of what makes an artwork *compelling* in the aesthetic sense:

(FA-C) For any x , if x is aesthetically compelling, then (i) it is fitting to be a-fascinated by x , and (ii) x is aesthetically compelling *because* (i).

One would then have to offer an informative characterization of “a-fascination” and show how fitting a-fascination covaries with necessity with the aesthetically compelling. This would be an example of a local contribution to the FA research program in aesthetics.

Global contributions to the FA program concern not the analysis of specific aesthetic values, but rather general or structural aspects of the theory as a whole. Perhaps the most obvious examples of this are (a) the theory of aesthetic fittingness and (b) the scope and nature of the sphere of aesthetic experience. I close with preliminary remarks on these two issues.

6. Aesthetic Experience: Unity and Variety

I mentioned in passing the controversy over the existence and nature of “the aesthetic attitude.” Once done with the aesthetic attitude, Dickie (1965) set his sight on the notion of aesthetic *experience* (understood as a distinctive, sui generis type of mental state), arguing that there is simply no such thing in our psychological repertoire.

It may be thought that Dickie’s argument threatens our research program. We have discussed three types of experience that allegedly play a role in grounding aesthetic value: a-delight, a-awe, and a-stir. Given this role of theirs, these experiences may be reasonably called *aesthetic* experiences. We can, moreover, readily form a conception of the *genus* of which these three are species; and the genus we may call, if we wish, “aesthetic experience” (in the singular). Is this not precisely what Dickie argued against?

Setting aside the fact that Dickie’s views are highly controversial (see Carrol 2002 and Levinson 2016 for two prominent responses), I think this worry is misguided. Consider that we call “perception” (in the singular) the genus of which different types of perceptual experience – visual, auditory, olfactory, etc. – are species. I suggested in §2 that the relationship between different shades of a-delight is analogous to that between experiences of different shades of red, with a-delight itself understood as analogous to the (determinable) experience of red. Continuing in the same vein, we might regard “aesthetic experience” as analogous to *perceptual* experience, with a-delight, a-awe, etc. understood as species in the way visual, auditory, olfactory, etc. are species of perceptual experience. In

this conception, “aesthetic experience” is not the name of a single, determinate, *sui generis* experience that recurs on every occasion of aesthetic response to some object. It is rather a label for a *category* of mental responses. Thus there need be nothing more mysterious or “*sui generis*” about the notion of aesthetic experience than about the notion of *perceptual* experience.

Within this framework for understanding aesthetic experience, two immediate questions stand out. The first is what unity there might be across a-delight, a-awe, a-stir, a-fascination, etc. that accounts for their “belonging together” in a single psychological category. Ideally we would point to a set of features common and peculiar to the various species of aesthetic experience; but something that falls short of this ideal may be theoretically useful as well. This kind of question is always a difficult one, as indeed the analogous case of perception instructs: the debates on the perception/cognition divide currently raging in philosophy of mind and cognitive science attest to the difficulty in demarcating perception as a unified psychological category in an extensionally adequate and theoretically satisfactory manner. Things are likely to be just as difficult with the category of aesthetic experience. And in both cases, we should be open to the possibility that ultimately there may turn out to be *nothing* that unifies the alleged category.

The second stand-out question is what *other* aesthetic experiences there might be in our psychological repertoire, beyond those discussed above. A top-down approach to this question would apply a general account of aesthetic experience to different experience types to determine their status as potential aesthetic experiences. This is to derive the *extension* of “aesthetic experience” from its *intension*, although one may form an initial hypothesis about the intension on the basis of reflection on a partial extension. A bottom-up approach would instead examine the various mental reactions we routinely undergo in response to the great variety of aesthetically charged objects we encounter in life, then consider on a case-by-case basis their resemblance to paradigms of aesthetic experience – perhaps (the right kind of) delight and awe.

Using either method (or both!), it is highly probable that we would end up sanctioning many more aesthetic experiences than three or four. Some of these experiences may be so subtle, or so complex, as to lack a name in natural language. Nonetheless, we undergo these experiences, and sometimes it is even *fitting* to do so. Within the FA framework, for each fitting species of aesthetic experience we would have to recognize a corresponding aesthetic value. Thus there may well be a great multitude of aesthetic values, some of which, again, we may have no name for in many or all natural languages.

What about the *overall* aesthetic value of an artwork, or for that matter of a rosebush? There are two ways to go here. We might think of overall aesthetic value as a weighted aggregate of all the major and minor aesthetic values constituted by the variety of

fitting aesthetic experiences. The precise aggregation function – the “formula of aesthetic value” – may not be intellectually surveyable, even if it exists. Alternatively (as noted in §1), there may be no such thing as an object’s “overall aesthetic value.” Again, the FA framework is silent on which is the better option and can play out either way. It can, in other words, accommodate whichever view of the putative “overall aesthetic value” we find independently more attractive.

7. Aesthetic Fittingness

In the absence of a proper understanding of what fittingness is, FA-V provides no real illumination of aesthetic value. In this final section, I lay out some of the main issues a mature account of aesthetic fittingness would have to address. It is not my purpose here to *settle* any of these issues; merely to give more “definition” to the FA research program, by getting clear on some of the most pressing theoretical decision point it faces.

The first question in this area is whether (a) there is a *sui generis aesthetic* fittingness that differs from ethical fittingness, such that aesthetic value is categorically different from ethical value insofar as it is analyzed in terms of a categorically different type of fittingness; or alternatively, (b) there is only one kind of fittingness, and the difference between aesthetic and ethical value has to do only with the difference between the kinds of mental reaction in terms of whose fittingness the two types of value are understood.

In §1, I distinguished two approaches to fittingness in ethics: primitivist, sometimes construing fittingness as the “sole normative primitive” (Chappell 2012), and reductive, attempting an analysis of fittingness in terms of reasons, ideal agents, or whatever. However we go on the question of the relationship between aesthetic and ethical fittingness, the question of primitivism vs. reductivism poses itself for aesthetic just as much as for ethical fittingness.

On the one hand, there is the view that the fittingness of a-delight, a-awe, etc. is primitive and unanalyzable – perhaps the *sole aesthetic primitive*. Even within this primitivist approach, however, something must be said, or *done*, to make us *grasp* what fittingness is supposed to be. Brentano, in his original presentation of the FA analysis of value, claimed that the only resort here is to go through certain mental exercises in which we juxtapose and contrast cases of manifestly fitting mental states with unfitting one, in order to bring into sharper intuitive relief the nature of fittingness (Brentano 1889: 22; for discussion see Kriegel 2018: 225). The proponent of the FA approach to aesthetic value may

propose a similar procedure but focusing on cases of manifestly fitting *aesthetic* experiences.

The other possible approach renounces primitivism and attempts to explain, analyze, or otherwise “get underneath” fittingness. Perhaps the most natural version of this claims that an aesthetic experience is fitting in circumstance *C* just when it is the experience the *right kind of subject* would undergo in *C*. Different versions of this will arise from different construals of the “right kind of subject.” Kauppinen (2014: 581–2) speaks of the subject “occupying an aesthetically optimal point of view,” Lopes (2018: 66) of the “aesthetic counterparts of moral philosophy’s ideal observers.” Historically, the most influential notion of “the right kind of subject” is Hume’s (1757) conception of the “true critic,” quintuply characterized by “[a] Strong sense, [b] united to delicate sentiment, [c] improved by practice, [d] perfected by comparison, and [e] cleared of all prejudice” (1757: §23).

Another reductive approach to fittingness accounts for it in terms of the more fundamental notion of a *reason*: it is fitting to approve of *x*, for instance, just if the balance of reasons to approve of *x* or disapprove of it recommends approval (Schroeder 2010). Although the notion of aesthetic reason is not as prominent in the aesthetics literature as in its ethical counterpart, a parallel analysis of aesthetic fittingness in terms aesthetic reasons should in principle be a live theoretical possibility (see Whiting 2021, King forthcoming for relevant discussions).

As noted, it is not our mandate here to pick a side in this contest between the primitivist and reductivist about fittingness. The FA research program in aesthetics should be consistent with either. My aim in this section has only been to lay out some of the main axes of research for such a program – some of the central decision points it faces when it comes to the assay of aesthetic fittingness.

Conclusion

I mentioned that Franz Brentano is widely credited, within the ranks of contemporary metaethicists, with having pioneered the fitting-attitude approach to value. It is interesting to note that Brentano seemed to have also applied the fitting-attitude approach to *aesthetic* value. In a pair of short essays from 1906, titled on “On the Concept of the Beautiful” and “On the Beautiful,” he *explicitly and self-consciously* offers a fitting-delight account of beauty. The two essays were only published posthumously, in 1959, and to this day remain untranslated. But in them Brentano clearly analyzes beauty in terms of the fittingness of

delight (*Wohlgefallen*). In fact, already in lectures notes for a course on “Selected Questions in Psychology and Aesthetics,” which he taught in Vienna in academic year 1885-86, we find this statement: “The concept of the beautiful has to do with... [that which] elicits in us a delight with the character of fittingness” (Brentano 1959: 17). All the same, in Brentano the application to aesthetic value remains extremely embryonic. Following up on Brentano’s hunch proved fruitful in ethics, and I propose that we try it in aesthetics as well.⁴

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¹ The dialectical pressures in the two fields may of course be very different, resulting in (potentially quite significant) difference in plausibility between "twin accounts." Still, it is reasonable to expect the "logical geographies" to parallel closely, insofar as accounts which are logically coherent for one type of value but incoherent for the other are somewhat unlikely.

² It is true, of course, that listening to Bach's second partita for the hundredth time I experience nothing unexpected; but this is perfectly compatible with it being *sometimes* fitting to have an experience as of an unexpected good that takes us by surprise, namely, when encountering it for the first time.

³ The notion of the special emerging in the midst of the banal is a cousin of one by Cova and Deonna (2014: 451), namely, that the things that move us do so in part because of "important positive values manag[ing] to emerge from the midst of . . . negative values." Ultimately, however, Cova and

Deonna (2014: 451-2) argue that in many cases there seems to be no negative or adverse background. To be clear, I am not claiming that my cousin *is* a universal feature of being *a*-moved; merely that it is characteristic of prototypical instances thereof.

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