RESEARCH ARTICLE

Feeling the Aesthetic: A Pluralist Sentimentalist Theory of Aesthetic Experience

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Sentimentalist aesthetic theories, broadly construed, posit that emotions play a fundamental role in aesthetic experiences. Jesse Prinz has recently proposed a reductionistic version of sentimentalist aesthetics, suggesting that it is the discrete feeling of *wonder* that makes an experience aesthetic. In this contribution, we draw on Prinz's proposal in order to outline a novel version of a sentimentalist theory. Contrasting Prinz's focus on a single emotion, we argue that an aesthetic experience is rudimentarily composed of a plurality of emotions. We acknowledge and discuss significant problems that follow from such a theory, arguing that a pluralist version of sentimentalism is nonetheless the soundest position within sentimentalist aesthetics.

Keywords: sentimentalist aesthetics; pluralist sentimentalism; aesthetic feeling; aesthetic emotion; wonder

A central theme in aesthetics regards accounting for what exactly makes an experience *aesthetic*, that is, pointing out what psychological processes differentiate aesthetic experiences from other sorts of experiences. For example, while some might claim that a sunset over the Serengeti suffices as an aesthetic experience, it is still left to philosophers to explain what makes that experience psychologically different from non-aesthetic experiences. Attempts to answer this fundamental question have included many different considerations, such as: whether aesthetic experience relates to a biologically encoded propensity;[1] whether these sorts of experiences are merely derived from one's cultural heritage;[2] whether there are certain properties that cause aesthetic experience;[3] and so forth.

In contemporary research, a growing number of philosophers and psychologists have gravitated towards explanations that posit sentiment or emotion as a foundational part of

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[1] Denis Dutton, *The Art Instinct: Beauty, Pleasure, and Human Evolution* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009).

[2] Larry Shiner, *The Invention of Art: A Cultural History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

[3] Noël Carroll, 'Defending the Content Approach to Aesthetic Experience', *Metaphilosophy* 46 (2015): 171–88.

aesthetic experience.[4] While these so-called sentimentalist theories exhibit great diversity in their overall account, they nevertheless share the basic thesis that aesthetic experiences are intimately tied to the emotional, valuative content of our perceptions; that is, when we experience something aesthetically, this experience is to some extent undergirded by emotion processes. One of the more recent attempts at outlining a sentimentalist theory comes from Jesse Prinz, whose version emphasizes the positive emotion of *wonder* as the foundation of aesthetic experiences (EAV). When we are appreciating an object/event aesthetically, Prinz suggests, the undercurrent of this sort of appreciative experience is a feeling of wonder: it is a positive appreciation facilitated by a positive emotion.

However, sentimentalist accounts of aesthetic experience are not unproblematic. As Noël Carroll points out,[5] Prinz's sentimentalist theory will eventually face the same sort of difficulties that philosophers associate with *valuing theories* of aesthetics, for instance, with the theory promoted by Gary Iseminger.[6] Although Iseminger portrays aesthetic valuing as an essentially cognitive process, his theory maintains (similarly to Prinz) that to have an aesthetic experience is to have a positive experience, that is, an experience that is valued positively for its own sake. But as Carroll (and others) have rightfully pointed out, such a view seems incapable of explaining how negative aesthetic experiences are possible, as it would be unclear what it would mean to value a negative experience positively for its own sake.[7] Similar to Iseminger's proposal, Prinz's theory will meet the same challenge of explaining how a negative aesthetic experience can be based on the single positive emotion of wonder.

In this contribution, we draw on Prinz's proposal in order to outline a novel version of a sentimentalist theory, a version we believe is better equipped to answer well-known objections to valuing approaches and sentimentalist aesthetics. Whereas Prinz posits that a single emotion (that is, wonder) is capable of explaining all forms of aesthetic appreciation, we argue that aesthetic experiences are rudimentarily composed of a plurality of emotions. An aesthetic experience, we shall argue, is nothing above and beyond perceiving an object/event while associating it with one's (valuative) emotional response that is either positively or negatively valenced. A decisive objection to our pluralist sentimentalist proposal is that it entails that aesthetic experiences turn out to be type-identical to ordinary (non-aesthetic) experiences of valuing, thus seemingly subsuming the aesthetic into a general valuing theory; to be sure, an aspect that cuts against orthodoxies in the philosophy of aesthetics. While this consequence is seemingly unattractive, we shall argue that a pluralist version of sentimentalism is still the soundest position within sentimentalist aesthetics.

The paper will proceed as follows: first we outline Prinz's reductionist sentimentalist theory; then we present some challenges and objections to Prinz's emphasis on wonder; thereafter, we outline our pluralistic sentimentalist account of aesthetic experience. We conclude with a

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4 See Derek Matravers, *Art and Emotion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Jenefer Robinson, *Deeper than Reason: Emotion and Its Role in Literature, Music, and Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006); Edmund T. Rolls, 'The Origins of Aesthetics: A Neurobiological Basis for Affective Feelings and Aesthetics', in *The Aesthetic Mind: Philosophy and Psychology*, ed. Elisabeth Schellekens and Peter Goldie (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 116–65; Jesse J. Prinz, 'Emotion and Aesthetic Value', in Schellekens and Goldie, *Aesthetic Mind*, 71–88; hereafter EAV. These theories are commonly traced back to the eighteenth-century British sentimentalists (for example, David Hume and Francis Hutcheson), though the interest in the role of emotion in aesthetic experience dates back to Plato and Aristotle.

5 Noël Carroll, 'Recent Approaches to Aesthetic Experience', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 70 (2012): 165–77.

6 Gary Iseminger, 'The Aesthetic State of Mind', in *Contemporary Debates in Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art*, ed. Matthew Kieran (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 98–110; 'Experiential Theories of Aesthetic Value', in *Aesthetic Experience*, ed. Richard Shusterman and Adele Tomlin (London: Routledge, 2008), 45–57.

7 See Carroll, 'Recent Approaches', 166.

discussion of some key problems familiar to sentimentalist and valuing theories, highlighting the advantages and challenges that follow from a pluralist view.

I. Prinz's Sentimentalist Aesthetics

Within the field of aesthetics, two major branches seem to have dominated recent discourse. There are those investigations that consider *what* kinds of objects, events, properties, and so on, elicit an aesthetic experience. These concerns are sometimes filed under the label of philosophy of art. And there are those approaches that consider the *how* of an aesthetic experience, asking what an aesthetic experience consists of, that is to say, asking what is happening in our minds when we deem something to have aesthetic value (for example, judge an object/event beautiful, sublime, ugly, and so forth). This question is sometimes addressed under the heading of psychology of aesthetics. While Prinz's writings weigh in on both of these topics, his primary interest is in the latter how-question, namely, 'when we praise a work of art, when we say it has aesthetic value, what does our praise consist in?' (EAV, p. 71).[8]

The theory of aesthetic experience that Prinz proposes is a so-called sentimentalist value theory. It posits that aesthetic judgements – that is, aesthetic appreciation and depreciation – have an emotional basis. On a generic reading of a sentimentalist theory, we would say that when we judge that an artwork is good, what is essentially being communicated is that we have a positively valenced feeling associated with it. Similarly, when we judge that an artwork is bad, we derive this assertion from a negative feeling. Following this sentimentalist line of thought, Prinz theorizes that aesthetic experiences are the final outcome of a value assessment, which functions on two dimensions: valence and intensity (EAV, p. 77). When perceiving, say, an artwork, the emotions that we associate with it are valenced (that is, positive or negative) and the emotions are processed with a certain intensity (that is, from low to high). Thus, the feeling of a high intensity, positive emotional response as the result of looking at an art object/event equates to a highly valued aesthetic experience; medium intensity positive emotions equate to a medium-valued aesthetic experience, and so on. These are the fundamental tenets of Prinz's theory.[9]

Yet Prinz does not believe that the sundry emotions that we might experience as a result of viewing an aesthetic object all count toward making the experience an aesthetic one. He eventually argues that *wonder* is the only true candidate emotion for underpinning aesthetic responses (EAV, p. 83). This theoretical turn is partly motivated, so it seems, by his desire to contextualize his sentimentalist theory with the kind of objects/events traditionally believed to cause or induce aesthetic experiences in the viewer (that is, the *what* of aesthetic

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[8] Prinz details his theory of aesthetics through a series of articles: 'Really Bad Taste', in *Knowing Art: Essays in Aesthetics and Epistemology*, ed. Matthew Kieran and Dominic McIver Lopes (Dordrecht: Springer, 2007), 95–107; 'How Wonder Works', *Aeon Magazine*, 21 June 2013, https://aeon.co/essays/why-wonder-is-the-most-human-of-all-emotions; 'Seeing with Feeling', in *Aesthetics and the Sciences of Mind*, ed. Gregory Currie et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 143–58. These have fostered fruitful discussions in the psychology of aesthetics (for example, Carroll, 'Recent Approaches'). See also Joerg Fingerhut and Jesse J. Prinz, 'Wonder, Appreciation, and the Value of Art', *Progress in Brain Research* 237 (2018): 107–28.

[9] A central caveat here is that Prinz uses his own account of emotion as the basis of his theory. See Jesse J. Prinz, *Gut Reactions: A Perceptual Theory of Emotion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). While this presupposition is inconsequential for the present discussion, all kinds of sentimentalist value theories will have challenges unique to which theory of emotion is assumed. For example, it will eventually matter whether you adhere to, say, appraisal theories of emotion – see Phoebe Ellsworth, 'Appraisal Theory: Old and New Questions', *Emotion Review* 5 (2013): 125–31 – or feeling theories of emotion (like Prinz's). Due to the notoriously thorny issue of defining emotion, such discussion is too comprehensive to include in this contribution. The reader may, for the sake of the argument, assume that we agree with Prinz's theory of emotion.

experience).[10] What he seems keen to account for here are instances of appreciating fine art and pristine natural vistas. It is in this context, then, that Prinz suggests that it is only when we truly wonder over an artwork or natural scene that we are actually having an aesthetic experience. This, in turn, explains why some experiences of, for instance, artworks are not aesthetic at all (that is, those that are not awesome, marvellous, wondrous, and so on). However, the final emphasis on wonder raises a number of challenges for his theory, which we shall return to in the next section. But before we do so, we must review why Prinz finds his sentimentalist approach more compelling than other approaches.

First, Prinz believes there is something intuitively appealing about sentimentalism. For example, in comparing a sentimentalist approach to approaches that posit aesthetic appreciation as a purely rational endeavour (or the outcome of a rational process),[11] Prinz thinks that a sentimentalist theory comes out as the more compelling alternative. Suppose that we carefully study a painting, and in doing so we start rationalizing the ways in which its formal qualities highlight the levels of skill and originality of the artist. By reasoning about the formal features of the painting, is it then possible to arrive at an aesthetic judgement? Prinz thinks not: 'No deduction from these features seems to be sufficient for determining that the work is good' (EAV, p. 75).[12] Trying to make sense of, or reason about, one's aesthetic preferences is, according to Prinz, impossible without also making inferences to the emotions we associate with our preferences (EAV, p. 79). Only when an artwork engages and triggers our emotional dispositions are we able to draw a valuative (that is, negative or positive) conclusion about the work. As Prinz states:

> I think an aesthetic value is a rule stored in long-term memory that can be schematized: if a work W has feature F, then, to that extent W is good to degree N. For example, we may value words that evoke certain emotions or works that surprise us or impress us with their technical skill. […] There are also negative emotion rules (corresponding to features that we depreciate), which contribute negative emotions. Each feature that we assess in this way contributes to the total emotional state that results from our encounter with the work, and the valence and intensity of that total emotional state ordinarily constitutes our aesthetic appraisal. (EAV, pp. 76–77)

Put briefly, the emotional response *is*, according to Prinz, the value judgement. Thus, for instance, when Samuel Coleridge writes about the heavenly objects in his *Dejection: An Ode* that he 'see[s], not feel[s], how beautiful they are!',[13] Prinz's sentimentalist theory would oppose such a claim. If Coleridge truly experiences beauty when gazing upon the sky, it is because he is feeling it.

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[10] We can recognize in Prinz's outline central aspects of the philosophical tradition in aesthetics. For one, he quickly rules out the possibility that pleasure is the single emotion underpinning aesthetic experience; a well-known thesis in Kant's third *Critique*. Secondly, his belief that aesthetic experience can be accounted for by a single emotion seems rooted in the British empiricists and their belief that there was a single sense devoted to aesthetic appreciation; see James Shelley, '18th Century British Aesthetics', in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, fall 2018 ed. (Stanford University, 1997–), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/aesthetics-18th-british/. This, of course, is mere speculation on our part.

[11] For example, Iseminger, 'Aesthetic State'.

[12] Such a view is well-supported in the history of twentieth-century philosophy. Sibley famously argues that 'there are no non-aesthetic features which serve as conditions for applying aesthetic terms'. Frank Sibley, 'Aesthetic Concepts', *Philosophical Review* 68 (1959): 424. Several other prominent philosophers of art have agreed with him, for example, Gary Iseminger, 'The Aesthetic State of Mind', in Kieran, *Contemporary Debates*, 98–110, and Mary Mothersill, *Beauty Restored* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984).

[13] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Poems of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1921), 364.

Beyond the intuitive appeal of sentimentalism, Prinz also offers a number of empirical justifications. First, trivial introspection appears to support his theory. For example, as Prinz notes, 'good art can be thrilling, and bad art can be depressing' (EAV, p. 72). Indeed, the claim that emotions are in play when we have aesthetic experiences seems fairly uncontroversial, perhaps immediately supported by the sheer number of philosophy of art articles that have been dedicated to investigating the role of emotion in art.[14] The second set of empirical reasons Prinz offers comes from a growing body of evidence in neuroscience and behavioural psychology, which reliably demonstrates that when people have ordinary aesthetic experiences, emotion appears to play a fundamental role. For example, functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) reveals that when engaged with standard aesthetic objects (for example, pictures normally seen as beautiful), the parts of the brain that neuroscientists believe to process emotional content is reliably activated.[15] This suggests 'that some of the [brain] areas that show up in emotion studies are also major players in aesthetic response' (EAV, p. 72). In addition, psychologists have found that certain moods are correlated with aesthetic appreciation and preferences,[16] that personality traits are correlated with preferences for specific art categories[17] and with specific properties within those categories,[18] and that positive affection in the form of unconscious familiarity with a certain work predicts a preference for this work when displayed among other works.[19]

Prinz believes that all of these reasons support the view that emotions play a *necessary* role in the process of aesthetic experience. But how does Prinz imagine this process taking place? Prinz wants us to differentiate between two stages of aesthetic experience, namely, the initial response and the final assessment. The former stage is where we perceive the artwork and engage with its features and properties. This can be purely rational and contemplative but may also involve and engage our emotions. The assessment stage, on the other hand, is where we form a final judgement about the work, and this judgement is necessarily informed by the emotional response triggered by the aesthetic object/event (EAV, p. 75). In reality, this entire process may unfold with immense speed or over a period of time. We can often immediately determine whether we appreciate a painting, and sometimes our initial response to a painting results in affective states that guide and limit our final assessment (EAV, pp. 76–77, 80).

Central to Prinz's reasoning is that the two-stage model can be understood more generally as a blueprint of how we come to assess and attach value to our experiences.[20] For example,

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[14] See Mette Hjort and Sue Laver, eds., *Emotion and the Arts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Jerrold Levinson, ed., *Suffering Art Gladly: The Paradox of Negative Emotions in Art* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

[15] See Thomas Jacobsen et al., 'Brain Correlates of Aesthetic Judgment of Beauty', *Neuroimage* 29 (2006): 276–85; Hideaki Kawabata and Semir Zeki, 'Neural Correlates of Beauty', *Journal of Neurophysiology* 91 (2004): 1699–1705.

[16] Alice M. Isen and Thomas E. Shalker, 'The Effect of Feeling State on Evaluation of Positive, Neutral, and Negative Stimuli: When You "Accentuate the Positive", Do You "Eliminate the Negative"?', *Social Psychology Quarterly* 45 (1982): 58–63. Linda Mealey and Peter Theis, 'The Relationship between Mood and Preferences among Natural Landscapes: An Evolutionary Perspective', *Ethology and Sociobiology* 16 (1995): 247–56.

[17] Adrian Furnham and John Walker, 'Personality and Judgements of Abstract, Pop Art, and Representational Paintings', *European Journal of Personality* 15 (2001): 57–72.

[18] Tova Rosenbloom, 'Color Preferences of High and Low Sensation Seekers', *Creativity Research Journal* 18 (2006): 229–35.

[19] James Cutting, 'The Mere Exposure Effect and Aesthetic Preference', in *New Directions in Aesthetics, Creativity, and Arts*, ed. Paul Locher, Colin Martindale, and Leonid Dorfman (Amityville, NY: Baywood, 2006), 33–46. Prinz has elsewhere argued that the emotional basis of aesthetic judgements may account for the great diversity and variation in taste (Prinz, 'Really Bad Taste').

[20] For instance, Prinz has also used this model when accounting for moral evaluations, namely, the judgements and experiences that involve valuing something as either right or wrong, which he believes (similar to aesthetic judgements of appreciation and depreciation) is grounded in approbation (that is, positive valence) and disap-

when we eat a piece of sweet candy, first we respond to the feature of sweetness, and subsequently we assess whether, in fact, we appreciate or depreciate said candy (that is, do we like this experience of sweetness as caused by the candy? A positively valenced reaction leads to appreciation, and a negatively valenced reaction leads to depreciation). The next question is obvious: can we equate the mechanics of the appreciation of a piece of candy to that of aesthetic appreciation?

According to Prinz, a central way to approach this question is to clarify whether aesthetic appreciation involves a plurality of emotions or a singular emotion. On the plurality-view, enjoying a piece of candy is not necessarily qualitatively different from aesthetic appreciation, since sentimentalist value experiences in general are composed of an open-ended number and type of emotions. What matters is the intensity and valence of the overall emotional assessment, not the exact emotions that make up the experience. For example, a number of emotions may go into the final value judgement of a candy regarding issues such as: is the texture pleasant, is the packaging intriguing, what is our mood at the time, do we have any nostalgic childhood associations with the product, and so on. Thus, on the plurality-view, when we speak about aesthetic appreciation, we are not necessarily denoting a discretely defined category of experience different in type from other valuative experiences. The singularity-view, on the other hand, posits that enjoying a piece of candy is not necessarily the same kind of experience as an aesthetic experience, since value experiences can be categorically reduced to specific, singular emotional responses and thereby classified. Put differently, value assessments of objects that rely on distinct, singular emotions will be more likely to constitute categorically different types of experiences. So if philosophers want to individuate a distinct kind of experience and explain how it differs qualitatively from other experiences, they will most likely have to identify a distinct type of emotion that undergirds it.

Speaking to this latter observation, Prinz believes that the singularity-view – or as he calls it, a reductionist approach – is the most compelling approach for a sentimentalist account of aesthetics. The kinds of value judgements that belong to the aesthetic realm, Prinz argues, reduce to a single emotion, namely, wonder (EAV, pp. 84–85). When we are engaged with wondrous objects/events chances are that we are having an aesthetic experience.

The account that Prinz proposes faces a number of challenges, many of which are general for sentimentalist theories, to which we shall return in subsequent sections. However, one challenge that is unique to his reductionist emphasis on wonder is the need to clarify whether wonder is necessary and/or sufficient for aesthetic appreciation. Prinz has already declared that wonder is necessary for an aesthetic experience (that is, his reductionist approach), but are all cases of wondrous experiences aesthetic in nature? This seems implausible. As Prinz readily admits, wonder sometimes occurs in contexts that are not normally seen as aesthetic. For example, the wonder we take 'in a lover's eyes or a newborn child' (EAV, p. 85) may not be traditionally conceived as aesthetic experiences. In other words, wonder is a necessary condition, but not a sufficient one. But if wonder can have this non-aesthetic role, how do we know which instances of wonder are instances of aesthetic experience?

Prinz concedes that wonder is a fundamental emotion invoked by a variety of stimuli. However, when we wonder over, say, an artwork, what is essentially happening, Prinz asserts, is that we have learned, that is, stored a new rule in our long-term memory, that the kind of properties associated with said artwork are wonder-invoking: 'Aesthetic appreciation is wonder that has been re-calibrated to artworks and things that we construe as artworks.' As such, a primitive emotion has been culturally trained to respond to a certain class of objects, and

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probation (that is, negative valence). See Jesse J. Prinz, *The Emotional Construction of Morals* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

in this process, Prinz argues, new forms of emotions have been generated 'by re-calibrating previously existing emotions to new classes of elicitors' (EAV, p. 85). Prinz claims that this re-calibrating of emotions is actually more common than we may think; for example, we may be culturally trained to take joy in other people's downfall (that is, *schadenfreude*), or pride may be re-calibrated to be triggered by our national heritage and symbols (that is, patriotism). So, to recapitulate Prinz's thesis, the emotion of wonder counts as an aesthetic experience when, it would seem, it is triggered by 'artworks and things we construe as artworks' (EAV, p. 84). When the feeling of wonder is triggered by other entities/events, it does not count as aesthetic experience.

II. Wondering about Aesthetic Wonder

The aim of this section is to offer objections to Prinz's theory, in particular, his emphasis on wonder as the foundation of aesthetic experience. While we believe that Prinz's basic theory is on the right track, we do not think that his advocacy for a reductionist approach is persuasive; or better, that any reductionistic sentimentalist approach is viable. We initiate our argument by bringing attention to the reasons we think Prinz has for pursuing a reductionist approach. Then we offer some concrete challenges to the claim that aesthetic experiences are experiences of wonder. Altogether, we think these problems undermine the very foundation of a reductionist account of aesthetic experience, which serves as our motivation for considering a pluralist version of Prinz's theory in section three (a version Prinz himself briefly hinted at).

As we discussed in the previous section, the basic outline of Prinz's value theory – that valuations are constructs of valenced emotional assessments – can, according to Prinz himself, be accepted without further taking on board his reductionist position. One of the main reasons Prinz advocates for the reductionist position over the pluralist position strikes us as perplexing, since it appears to be rooted in practical considerations (that is, not necessarily philosophically motivated). For example, when hesitating about the pluralistic approach to aesthetic experience, Prinz says:

> If there were multiple different emotions that factor into appreciation [that is, the pluralistic view], it would be harder to explain how we add them all up together to make an overall assessment of a work. It would also be hard to find coherence in the phenomenon of evaluating art. Aesthetic goodness would vary from work to work, and comparison would be difficult. (EAV, p. 81)

In this passage, we suspect Prinz confounds the aim of aesthetics – that is, explaining the psychology of aesthetic experience – with the desire to create a simplistic or uniform account of aesthetics. Moreover, Prinz does not appear to be giving voice to fundamental precepts in the field. In fact, that 'aesthetic goodness varies from work to work' and that 'comparison [between artworks is] difficult' are well-known truisms in aesthetics and philosophy of art. Namely, that (1) aesthetic goodness does vary greatly from work to work, that there is an open-ended number of reasons why we find one work appealing and another revolting, which in turn (2) makes it staggeringly difficult to compare and evaluate artworks within and across art forms and genres, amount to mundane observations in the field, which we think a sound theory of aesthetics ought to be able to account for instead of dismissing. In support of these two truisms, for instance, Sibley has advanced the following widely accepted philosophical thesis: 'There are no non-aesthetic features which serve as conditions for applying aesthetic terms.'[21] In other words, the non-aesthetic features that make one work graceful

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[21] Sibley, 'Aesthetic Concepts', 424.

may make another boring. Sibley's position straightforwardly implies that goodness varies from work to work and that comparison is difficult. Thus, if Sibley is right, aesthetic theories should therefore not seek to avoid the trouble of explaining these core complexities, but rather treat them as their proper aim. Prinz, if we read him correctly, appears to propose that a satisfactory theory may circumvent this complexity.

In addition, the basic tenets of Prinz's sentimentalist account, in particular his two-stage explanation of aesthetic assessment, seem fully equipped to handle a pluralistic view. It therefore seems like Prinz is selling his own theoretical considerations short when he claims that a pluralistic view would make it harder to explain how we add emotions 'together to make an overall assessment of a work' (EAV, p. 81). While we certainly agree with Prinz that it would be more theoretical labour to systematize the many different emotions that go into a pluralistic approach, it does not seem to be exponentially harder to explain the mechanics of aesthetic experiences. As Prinz's theory states, emotions are inherently valenced, and as such, positive emotions count toward appreciation and negative emotions count toward depreciation, allowing for a variety of emotional responses to be summed up, resulting in a single conclusive aesthetic judgement. Prinz considers a rule-based mechanism where we put the negative units to one side and the positive units to the other, and finally count which side (or which valence) is the most dominant (EAV, pp. 78–79). The outcome *is* the judgement. In this sense, the many emotional responses we undergo when engaging with, say, an artwork, count as units of either appreciation or depreciation, making the process complex for sure, but nevertheless rule-based. Thus, a person might find a work both clever and disgusting, but just so long as the finding of cleverness is in some sense stronger than the repulsive reaction, the ensuing judgement of the work will be positive.[22]

These are some of the reasons why we believe Prinz's reductionist approach is unappealing. However, the dominant reason for why we believe his approach must eventually be rejected is not necessarily rooted herein. We might be wrong in implying that Prinz's motivations are not substantial. More crucially, though, we think that his focus on wonder presents problems and paradoxes that, on their own, constitute sufficient reasons for abandoning a reductionist approach. We discuss these problems under the headings: (1) aesthetic wonder vs. non-aesthetic wonder, (2) semantic re-calibration, and (3) aesthetic depreciation.

II.1. Aesthetic Wonder vs. Non-aesthetic Wonder

The first criticism we offer bears on the observation that Prinz gives no clear criteria that allow him to distinguish between instances of aesthetic wonder and instances of non-aesthetic wonder. That is, his theory should be able to explain why some events/objects elicit aesthetic wonder, for example when a sunset over the Serengeti inspires feelings of wonder,[23] and other events/objects elicit non-aesthetic wonder, for example, when we wonder over the fact that the neurons in a human brain could be stretched the distance between London and Berlin.[24] In response to this problem, Prinz offers a story about how certain emotional dispositions (for example, that of wonder) can be re-calibrated to be triggered by new conditions (for example, certain artworks).

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[22] Prinz considers a metaphorical example where the outcome of an assessment is counted in units, similar to dealing out jelly beans of red and green colour, with red standing for a negative valenced emotion and green standing for a positive valenced emotion; whatever colour is dealt out in the greatest number will produce the final verdict (EAV, p. 79). This example has identical logic to the example we have just given.

[23] An example of an aesthetic wonder-inspiring experience that Prinz himself recounts in his 'How Wonder Works'.

[24] Prinz uses this non-aesthetic example in ibid.

Yet this explanation doesn't actually provide a criterion for distinguishing between aesthetic experiences and non-aesthetic experiences of wonder. To be sure, it is not the claim that emotions can be re-calibrated that we find problematic.[25] Instead, the problem with Prinz's re-calibration explanation is that we suspect it is not doing what Prinz claims it does, namely, explaining how the re-calibration of the disposition to wonder establishes a *new category* of experiences (that is, aesthetic experience). Prinz has merely pointed out that many different phenomena cause us to wonder (which, of course, is trivially true). We believe that a simpler explanation is more plausible: while feeling wonder when contemplating the complexity of the human brain and feeling wonder about the Serengeti sunset differ in (perceptual/intentional) content, they are nevertheless underpinned by the same basic feeling; thus, they are valuatively similar, that is, they are the same type of experience. It is not that the one is non-aesthetic and the other is aesthetic. Our emotions can be triggered by various stimuli, sometimes as a result of acculturation and sometimes as a result of our basic nature. But the different perceptual content, by itself, doesn't make the experiences categorically different. Similarly, we do not believe that the emotion of fear as caused by a coat rack mistaken for an intruder in a darkened room differs in kind from the fear caused by walking through an eerie dark alley at night, although the circumstances and events causing the emotion differ drastically. Thus, as we see it, either both types of wonder discussed by Prinz are aesthetic, or neither one constitutes an aesthetic experience. A reductionist sentimentalist theory cannot have it both ways.

In case one finds this objection unconvincing, it may be beneficial to briefly consider what follows from not accepting it. If the claim is that aesthetic wonder is simply wonder elicited by aesthetic objects/events (for example, artworks), and non-aesthetic wonder is wonder elicited by non-aesthetic objects/events (for example, non-artworks), then it would introduce the other (and perhaps much more challenging) task of defining what exactly makes something an aesthetic object/event. Now, it is uncontroversial to suggest that scholars have reached little agreement about what makes something aesthetic or artistic,[26] so if it is not possible to explicitly define and differentiate aesthetic objects/events from other objects/events, Prinz would then be unable to convincingly demarcate the two alleged types of wonder from each other.

In addition, and similarly problematic, insisting on differentiating between types of wonder by referencing their content would then make Prinz's theory a content-driven theory insofar as aesthetic experience (that is, experiences of aesthetic wonder) would be essentially defined by reference to its content (that is, that which triggers or causes aesthetic wonder). But content theories[27] are open to a host of objections, many of which are scarcely reconcilable with the sentimentalist claim that aesthetic experience is a thoroughly subjective and emotional matter.[28] Having said this, we have little reason to think that Prinz would find this strategy compelling in the first place, since he seems to hint at the possibility that one and the same object/event can give rise to both aesthetic and non-aesthetic wonder, for instance,

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[25] Indeed, we certainly believe that emotions can be re-calibrated. For example, we would readily agree that we are culturally trained to associate the emotion of disgust with certain objects and phenomena. See Carolyn Korsmeyer, *Savoring Disgust: The Foul and the Fair in Aesthetics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). But notice that in cases of culturally learned disgust, we still use the same word to describe our experience, namely, 'disgust'. An individual may say she is disgusted both by rotting flesh and by eating dog meat, although, the latter is arguably the result of acculturation.

[26] See David Sackris and Rasmus R. Larsen, 'A Consideration of Carroll's Content Theory', *Journal of Value Inquiry* 54 (2020): 245–55.

[27] See Carroll, 'Defending the Content Approach'.

[28] For a discussion of Carroll's so-called Content Theory, see Sackris and Larsen, 'Consideration'.

when he suggests that tornados and newborn babies can be wondered over both aesthetically and non-aesthetically (EAV, p. 85). Thus, we think the objection stands, that Prinz has yet to explain the central distinction between aesthetic wonder and non-aesthetic wonder.

II.2. Semantic Re-calibration

As alluded to above, Prinz's use of the term 're-calibration' strikes us as an unfortunate word choice. Prinz explains re-calibration as the appropriation of artistic properties to trigger feelings of wonder: 'Aesthetic appreciation is wonder that has been re-calibrated to artworks and things that we construe as artworks' (EAV, p. 85). According to Prinz, 'aesthetic wonder' is a *new form* of emotion generated by a so-called re-calibration of elicitors. While this explanation may be particularly useful when dealing with artworks, Prinz alleges that it also applies to other aesthetic phenomena (EAV, pp. 84–85). However, in many of the examples Prinz offers, it is not necessarily clear that an actual re-calibration of emotional elicitors/dispositions has taken place. Instead, we suggest that in some cases it is the use of the semantic terms that we use to describe a phenomenon that gets re-calibrated. For instance, if a person finds a specific phenomenon wondrous at one time, and at another time she is told that this experience is called an 'aesthetic experience', it seems plausible to us that she has merely changed her semantic label, and not necessarily re-calibrated her emotional dispositions. In other words, the use of different words and phrases to describe one's experience does not necessarily indicate that one is having a different type of experience with new forms of emotions; instead, the individual may merely be using different labels to talk about qualitatively similar experiences and emotions.

Suppose we are feeling wonder when entering the Sagrada Família in Barcelona. Perhaps you marvel over the fantastic and surreal shapes of the doorway, or maybe you are struck by the grandiosity of Gaudí's architectural plans. If you were subsequently told that you were having what is called an 'aesthetic experience', this would not thereby mean that you have had a whole new type of experience but rather, we think, that you have just learned a new word that describes the same feeling you have experienced. Again, it does not necessarily follow from Prinz's re-calibration explanation that the association of certain terms with certain experiences results in a whole new category or form of experiences and emotions, which is exactly what Prinz needs to establish in order to support this reductionist theory.

The strength of Prinz's explanation, however, seems to lie in its ability to explain how we learn to use aesthetic terms, such as 'beauty', 'sublimity', 'ugliness', and the like. We learn to attach/associate our emotions to and with specific labels. Thus, when we say that something is 'sublime', many people would likely agree that those kinds of value-experiences may involve wonder, marvel, awe, and so on. In this sense, the term 'sublimity' is synonymous with having a wonder-experience (that is, with all its phenomenological complexity included). But notice that the experience of the sublime is not limited to one domain of human life: experiencing Caspar David Friedrich's painting *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* may induce a feeling of the sublime just as well as a peaceful meditation session in one's attic. Both experiences could include feelings of wonder, and both may be equally worthy of the label 'sublime'. But it may be that meditation in an attic is simply not often called sublime, because the word 'sublimity' has come to be associated with experiences of art, thanks to, perhaps, the contingent word choices of philosophers of art and art critics, even though both events cause qualitatively similar or identical value experiences. So, we propose that it is left to Prinz to tell us why the feeling, when caused by a classically conceived art object or a scenic vista, is aesthetic, and why a qualitatively identical feeling, when caused by, say, meditation in one's attic, is not.

II.3. Aesthetic Depreciation

Prinz admits that he has said nothing about the mechanics of depreciation, that is, negative aesthetic experiences (EAV, p. 84). Like Carroll's objection to valuing theories in general,[29] we also find this lack quite telling, since we anticipate that a reductionist outline cannot account for such experiences. Indeed, Prinz's theory is committed to the feeling of wonder as playing a necessary role in aesthetic experience. But how can a positively valenced experience such as wonder give rise to aesthetic depreciation? One answer would be to argue that negative wondrous experiences are those kinds of experiences where an object/event is both marvellous *and* emotionally depreciative (that is, negatively valenced). Maybe very bad art can have this effect: we marvel over how painstakingly untalented the artist is. However, it is doubtful that most bad art does in fact involve any wonder at all – at most, bad art might cause us to wonder over how the piece even ended up on display – but this is not the kind of wonder that Prinz seems to be concerning himself with. The deeper problem with this tenuous answer, though, is that it is actually not a reductionist account, since it allows for several kinds of emotions to count toward the final assessment (that is, wonder *plus* some intense negative emotion). This makes it pluralist. Thus, the most straightforward way to account for aesthetic depreciation therefore turns out to undermine Prinz's reductionist approach. At most, then, wonder can explain positive aesthetic evaluations, but ostensibly not aesthetic depreciation. And this, we agree with Carroll, is a problem for Prinz's theory.

There are, however, other ways Prinz may get around the problem of aesthetic depreciation. But those that we could think of are all fundamentally unattractive. First, he could argue that what we call aesthetic depreciation is essentially a completely different and discrete type of experience based (again) on a single emotion, and as such unrelated to aesthetic appreciation. However, if aesthetic depreciation reduces to a different emotion, what is it, then, that makes it deserving of the label 'aesthetic'? A fundamental motivation for emphasizing wonder was, according to Prinz, that there is something fundamentally aesthetic about the emotion of wonder; wonder is what makes experience aesthetic in nature for Prinz. So, we anticipate that this is not a direction that Prinz would follow.

A second avenue could be to amend the basic outline of his theory, and argue that there really is no such thing as aesthetic depreciation; all there is is aesthetic appreciation, and the negative kind of experiences we associate with, say, bad artworks, are just the absence of appreciation; absences of wonder. Similarly, one might argue that we do not need an antonym for pain; either you feel pain or you don't. While this explanation might have some immediate appeal, we think it conclusively fails to take seriously the reality of how we make depreciative judgements; we certainly know when we are appalled by an artwork or think that a landscape is not worth contemplating. As Prinz himself notices: 'Good art can be thrilling, and bad art can be depressing' (EAV, p. 72). Judgements of aesthetic depreciations are not neutral or non-existing; they are, we think, tangible claims based on negative valuations, and a sentimentalist theory of aesthetics must therefore account for them.

The three objections just covered capture the main reasons why we believe a reductionist theory will stall. In the next section we shall argue that Prinz's basic outline – that valuations are constructs of valenced emotional assessments – is better substantiated by positing a pluralist sentimentalist version that he has already alluded to.

III. Pluralist Sentimentalist Aesthetics

Before we elaborate our pluralist account, we should note that Prinz seems to anticipate some of the concerns we have raised: 'The problem with pursuing a reductionist account is that this

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[29] Carroll, 'Recent Approaches'.

approach makes it difficult to see what is *distinctive* about aesthetic responding. Wonder arises in non-aesthetic contexts' (EAV, p. 85). Indeed, we argued that this worry is significant: a reductionist theory cannot account for the difference between aesthetic and non-aesthetic wonder. And we expect that Prinz is thoroughly aware of this challenge. Perhaps this is the reason why he describes his reductionist turn as the most speculative aspect of his theory (EAV, p. 86). Prinz also prudently addresses his openness to considering a pluralistic account if the reductionist approach turns out to be futile: 'I think we should assume that [aesthetic] appreciation has a kind of emotional uniformity until *forced to conclude otherwise*' (EAV, p. 81, our emphasis). Up until now, we have tried to provide reasons why we think Prinz should, in fact, reconsider his initial reductionist, uniform proposal. In the remainder of this article, we outline what a pluralist alternative would look like, and defend it against possible objections.

Due to their unique properties, different artworks elicit different types of emotions. For example, we marvel over Michelangelo's stamina when we see the thick heavy layers of lime plaster covering the ceiling in the Sistine Chapel; and we feel terror when we study the details in Goya's *Disasters of War* drawings. Where Prinz's reductionist account focuses on wonder as the necessary and guiding feeling of aesthetic experience, a pluralist account will have it that all the emotions elicited by the object/event under consideration count toward the final value assessment. In other words, all types of emotions could be considered 'aesthetic responses' if they are elicited by aesthetic objects/events. While we may have an aesthetic experience of a famous painting because it makes us feel wonder, an aesthetic experience can just as well be substantiated by the joy we feel when attending a comic play in the local theatre. Further, we might aesthetically depreciate a ballet because it was boring or be similarly depreciative of a statue because it made us feel anger and disgust. In a pluralist theory, all of these judgements are outcomes of the same valuation function: Appreciation is overall positive valence to a specific degree; depreciation is overall negative valence to a specific degree. This is the logic of Prinz's basic outline: 'An aesthetic value is a rule stored in long-term memory that can be schematized: if a work W has feature F, then, to that extent W is good to degree N' (EAV, p. 76).

An important up-side of a pluralist account is that it proposes a way to address the *degrees* to which an artwork is appreciated or depreciated. In that sense, the function or logic just schematized is not only a description of how we arrive at a binary valuation (that is, either a work is appreciated or depreciated), it is also a way of describing the degree to which we appreciate or depreciate an artwork. We imagine this working in the following way: the emotions evoked by an object/event will not only be experienced as being present (for example, feeling depressed), but there is also a felt degree or intensity of said emotion. For example, when watching the movie *Marley and Me*, we might be extremely saddened by the ending when Marley, an adorable Golden Retriever, is euthanized due to illness, and even though the movie made us feel many positive emotions along the way (for example, humour, romance, admiration, and so on), the intensity of the sad finale may end up overwhelming the earlier feelings and dominate in our final judgement of the movie (for example, good or bad). This example brings to mind that perhaps the analogy Prinz employs – speaking about emotional units counting toward appreciation or depreciation – could be replaced with an analogy focused on how an amplifier measures the many inputs that contribute to the volume of the emitted sound. Sometimes it is the drummer that amps up the decibels, and sometimes it is the closing E-minor pitch of a guitar solo that makes the needle dwell momentarily in the red zone. We can thus imagine a metaphorical sound system measuring the different emotional valences bursting and shooting in different degrees. Whichever valence (that is, negative or positive) speaks the loudest and makes the most lasting impression is where the final verdict/assessment is likely to fall: appreciative or depreciative, to some high or low degree.

The ability of a pluralist sentimentalist theory to account for the degrees of aesthetic experience should not be trivialized. Recall two shortcomings that Prinz expected to follow from a pluralist account, namely, that 'aesthetic goodness would vary from work to work, and comparison would be difficult' (EAV, p. 81). We have already covered that it should be unproblematic that goodness varies: a given feature might count towards appreciation in one work, and towards depreciation in another.[30] A pluralist sentimentalist account can capture this fact: different features trigger our emotional dispositions in different ways and degrees, presumably in a manner that depends on context, categories, form, and genre.[31] In terms of the problem of comparing aesthetic objects/events (for example, art), it appears as if a pluralist sentimentalist theory can offer a convincing argument for how the many objects/events of aesthetic experience are, in fact, comparative. Since valuation is the outcome of rudimentary affective processes (that is, valence and intensity), our valuations then seem directly comparable across, say, art genre and form: whether we appreciate one type of work more than another depends on our affective responses. While this does not lend itself to an objective standard of comparison, it at least hints at a comparable subjective taxonomy based on concrete feelings. On a pluralist sentimentalist account, statements such as 'I feel that Michelangelo's *David* is more compelling than his *The Torment of Saint Anthony*' might be understood literally without further qualification.

A final appeal of a pluralist sentimentalist theory is that it escapes the thorny issue of providing necessary and sufficient conditions for distinguishing an 'aesthetic experience' from other 'value experiences' (that is, the main problem in Prinz's reductionist account). The reason is that those experiences ordinarily or traditionally labelled as 'aesthetic' are not posited as a qualitatively discrete type of experience in a pluralist theory. Instead, these experiences belong to a broader category of *value-experiences*, namely, perceptions we have of specific phenomena (for example, objects, events, and so on) that elicit emotion processes (that is, the basic outline in Prinz's theory). Thus, by theorizing how value perceptions are necessarily and sufficiently composed of emotional content of whatever type and in whatever combination (awe, anger, disgust, joy), a pluralist sentimentalist theory will only be committed to acknowledging that some objects traditionally seen as 'aesthetic' (for example, fine art, landscapes) *may* or *may not* be perceived as having appreciative or depreciative value: it is not the case that the perception of artwork necessarily results in an emotional experience, and so it is not the case that looking at an artwork necessarily results in a value experience.[32]

To re-emphasize this point, when theoretically accounting for aesthetic experiences, what we are really addressing is the psychological mechanics of value-experiences – those experiences that are underwritten by feelings of negative or positive valence. There is nothing psychologically unique, so it seems, or type-distinctive about those objects/events that philosophers and their ilk have traditionally spoken of as 'aesthetic objects'. To be sure, some artworks may prompt immensely more complex experiences than other valuative artefacts, but the type-experience is, on the pluralist version, nevertheless the same (that is, a value experience).

IV. Objections and Challenges to a Pluralist Sentimentalist Value Theory

Sentimentalist theories of aesthetics face a number of challenges, many of which are standard ways to object to the general approach. One familiar challenge is that some artworks with clear negative emotional content can be appreciated aesthetically, for instance, a horror

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[30] See Sibley, 'Aesthetic Concepts'.
[31] See Kendall L. Walton, 'Categories of Art', *Philosophical Review* 79 (1970): 334–67.
[32] Comp. Carroll, 'Recent Approaches'.

drama such as Gaspar Noé's *Irréversible* or social realist paintings such as Yosl Bergner's *Father and Sons*; but if aesthetic appreciation is rooted in positively valenced emotions, how can thoroughly negative emotional reactions result in aesthetic appreciation?[33] Another familiar objection is that emotions do not always seem necessary when assessing art. Indeed, some artworks are completely deprived of emotionally expressive content, for instance, minimalist sculptures such as Carl Andre's *Equivalent VIII*, raising the question whether emotions are necessary for aesthetic judgements.[34] Such concerns belong to a cluster of familiar challenges, and it is our opinion that Prinz (and others) have already done an adequate job explaining why these are not as problematic as they may appear.[35] For this reason, we will not focus on these (familiar) objections, but instead focus on difficulties particular to a pluralist sentimentalist value theory.

The first challenge relates to Prinz's concern about the implicit difficulties in arranging and weighing our emotions for a final aesthetic assessment (EAV, p. 85). As the theory stands, aesthetic appreciation is grounded in a general positive feeling, and depreciation in a negative feeling. This is straightforward. But what about cases where the emotional reaction comes out to a tie, that is, where an artwork elicits many positive as well as many negative emotions, making it impossible to feel exactly which valuation is the most dominant? In such a case, one is surely having an aesthetic experience, perhaps of a very potent kind, and the reality of such experience does not appear to be adequately explained by portraying it as a tie; to say that one is having a *neutral* reaction does not seem satisfactory. So how does a pluralist theory account for such raucous, yet valuationally perplexing experiences?

It is a trivial observation that an artwork or a natural phenomenon can trigger many different kinds of emotions, and the assessment process may therefore be complex. For instance, some medieval Gothic artworks convey messages that aim at generating reflection upon human mortality (that is, memento mori). In doing so it makes use of properties that invoke different feelings such as disgust (for example, depicting a decaying body), anxiety (for example, emphasizing the fragility of life), pettiness (for example, worldly affairs as unessential), relief (for example, redemption is inevitable), and so forth. Similarly, a mother may be emotionally overrun by a myriad of different feelings when she gazes at her newborn daughter. Perhaps she is taken aback by a nervous feeling of unparalleled responsibility, which at the same time is countered by a pulsating realization of pristine love and devotion. To a pluralist sentimentalist theory these are all instances of profound aesthetic experiences, and such a theory ought therefore to do them justice.

While these examples are difficult to account for, we do not believe that they are genuine challenges. As we see it, it is only when we endorse a pluralist theory that we can fully account for these kinds of phenomena. A pluralist account can explain such complexity by emphasizing the temporality of aesthetic experiences. For instance, when a mother is gazing at her newborn child, the experience evolves in time; she takes in sensual impressions, and processes these with ongoing afterthought, over and over again. At one moment she is overwhelmed by anxiety, and in another moment, she is filled with love. The metaphor about the (valence) amplifier from the previous section is here useful. Mirroring the emotional processes, the amplifier bursts with varying sounds at varying levels of intensity, each distinct sound leaving a momentary impression, pulling back, and then reappearing with renewed intensity. The metaphor captures the fact that emotional life can be a hectic experience and attempting to do these episodes theoretical justice by representing them in simplistic binary

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[33] See ibid.
[34] See Nick Zangwill, 'Against Emotion: Hanslick Was Right about Music', *British Journal of Aesthetics* 44 (2004): 29–43.
[35] See Prinz, 'Really Bad Taste'; EAV.

terms seems futile. The experiences of equally amplified positive and negative feelings are not valuative ties or neutral; they are descriptions of how we can, at the same time, and over the course of time, perceive negative as well as positive emotions. Ordinary expressions such as 'having mixed feelings' are common for a reason. Indeed, such experiences are busy, noisy, perplexing, and above all, defy neat and simplistic theorizing. Instead, we believe that a pluralist sentimentalist theory would be one way to map these impressions and draw inferences about the kind of valuative content they transmit.

A second, and perhaps the most significant objection to a pluralistic account, is that it seems to imply that there is no such thing as 'aesthetic experience'. Indeed, we finished section three by pointing out that a pluralist theory escapes the trouble of providing necessary and sufficient conditions for defining an 'aesthetic experience'. Instead, having an aesthetic experience, it was argued, is simply equivalent to having a 'value-experience', which was already accounted for in Prinz's basic outline (that is, valuations are constructs of valenced emotional assessments). A consequence hereof being that there is no clear qualitative difference (in valuing) between experiencing, say, a work of fine art or any other phenomena that elicit valenced emotional responses (for example, eating a piece of sweet candy). While we proposed this consequence as a virtue of a pluralist account, this virtue might turn out to be the biggest vice of the theory: it seemingly undermines a good deal of the work in the field of aesthetics. Surely, if our theory does not provide an account of aesthetic experience, but merely an argument for why the category of aesthetic experience must be discarded, some might see this as a reason to categorically reject the theory altogether.

We certainly agree that this objection is substantial. And we also agree that the consequence (at least on the surface) appears controversial. However, there are good reasons why a pluralist account should not be discarded so quickly. First, as we see it, the fundamental question is whether or not one finds a sentimentalist outline convincing, that is, whether there are good reasons to believe that valuative experiences and judgements are underwritten by feelings (that is, emotional valence and intensity). As Prinz (and others) have pointed out, both our intuitions and the empirical evidence make sentimentalism a compelling thesis to adopt. The next question is, then, which of the two versions of sentimentalism – that is, reductionist or pluralist – is the most attractive. As we hope to have demonstrated, a reductionist version might not be controversial in the light of aesthetic tradition; however, a reductionist account is nevertheless both inconsistent and shorthanded. Thus, if we are forced to abandon a reductionist account, what is left is a comparatively much sounder theory, namely, the pluralist account, which in turn might be deemed controversial. In other words, if one finds sentimentalism worth pursuing, the most philosophically sound avenue for doing so is a controversial one.

Next, the notion that a pluralist account is conclusively controversial may, however, turn out to be an overstatement. The objection was that a pluralist sentimentalist theory cannot account for aesthetics as a discrete type of experience, and therefore it must be rejected. But is this consequence really that philosophically problematic? Note that the theory did not posit that there was nothing special about the kinds of experiences traditionally portrayed as aesthetic (for example, experiences of fine art and natural vistas). Quite to the contrary, a pluralist account describes these experiences as unique in the sense that they (when invoking valenced feelings) are, in fact, value-experiences. These kinds of experiences are qualitatively different from other kinds of experiences, such as locating the nearest exit in the parking lot, watching the local news, or buying a cleaning detergent online. On the pluralist account, then, traditionally conceived 'aesthetic experiences' turn out to be an arbitrary sub-type of 'value-experience', as opposed to a discrete taxonomic (or bona fide) type of experience. And, of course, positing traditionally defined aesthetic experiences as an arbitrary sub-type is not the same as claiming that these kinds of experiences do not exist or that

they are not significant. Instead, on the pluralist view, 'aesthetic experience' simply refers to *whatever* valenced experience results from perceiving aesthetic objects as traditionally conceived. Perhaps all there really is is value-experiences of varying phenomena, which, in our opinion, makes for a much more interesting and fruitful premise for the fields of philosophy and psychology to investigate.

Lastly, it may be stressed that since so many philosophers take it for granted that there is something unique about traditionally conceived aesthetic experiences, a pluralist sentimentalist scheme must then be ready to give a compelling explanation for this widespread assumption: if 'aesthetic experience' is not a discrete type of experience, why is it that philosophers generally assume that traditionally defined aesthetic experiences are qualitatively different from other valuative experiences, and have sought to account for this difference? This, we think, is not a question that allows for one simple answer, and it is certainly not a question we could do full justice to in this contribution. In beginning to address this question, first we have to acknowledge that for the better part of the history of philosophy, it was not widely assumed that there was something psychologically discrete about experiencing, say, an artwork. For example, Monroe Beardsley seems to track this change in attitude as something that occurs with Renaissance and Enlightenment thinkers and their interest in so-called fine art.[36] Similarly, I. A. Richards has argued that the philosophical qualification of aesthetics as related to a discrete type of judgement proliferated, above all, with Immanuel Kant's third *Critique*.[37] Before Kant, there is little indication that philosophers thought of aesthetic judgement as a distinct type of judgement.[38] Having said this, we think that one reason for this widespread assumption might be that traditionally conceived aesthetic experiences simply appear *as if* they are a discrete type of experience. But it is quite a different thing to philosophically substantiate what appears obvious to us. For example, to any person it should appear obvious that the sun revolves around the earth, that spicy chilli burns your mouth, and that a wooden stick bends when immersed halfway in water. However, in all of these examples, the phenomenally intuitive experience is misleading. There is little doubt that the experience of a well-executed aesthetic object can be an overwhelming and memorable one. The question is whether we have any strong evidence for thinking that such an experience constitutes a distinctive type of value experience. It seems that philosophers since Kant have simply assumed that it does. In part, a pluralist sentimentalism raises doubt about this two-century old assumption.

V. Concluding Remarks

Besides the intuitive and empirical reasons for advocating a sentimentalist approach to aesthetics, a core motivation is also that it may do a better job accounting for some of the challenges that opposing theories find difficult to answer. For example, a key challenge for so-called cognitive accounts of aesthetic experience, such as those offered by Kendall Walton or Noël Carroll,[39]

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[36] Monroe Beardsley, *Aesthetics from Classical Greece to the Present: A Short History* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press), 1975.

[37] I. A. Richards, *Principles of Literary Criticism* (New York: Routledge, 1924), 9.

[38] Kant's predecessors Hutcheson and Hume are both well-known for giving accounts of aesthetic judgement, but they do not clearly see such judgements as distinct types; in fact, we can read both as giving theories of value judgements generally, as both provide similar mechanisms for moral and aesthetic judgements. For a discussion of Hume's aesthetics, see Theodore Gracyk, 'Hume's Aesthetics', in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, summer 2016 ed. (Stanford University, 1997–), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2016/entries/hume-aesthetics. For a discussion of Hutcheson's view, see Alexander Broadie, 'Scottish Philosophy in the 18th Century', in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, winter 2017 ed. (Stanford University, 1997–), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2017/entries/scottish-18th/.

[39] Walton, 'Categories of Art'; Carroll, 'Defending the Content Approach'.

is to make sense of how people are able to instantaneously perceive an object as beautiful.[40] As Arthur Danto succinctly put it: 'Beauty is really as obvious as blue; one does not have to work at seeing it when it is there.'[41] What we have to ask ourselves is this: how can a theory that focuses on a single cognitive process or a single emotion account for all the ways that individuals come to see beauty (in its broadest sense) in the world?

One might expect that a non-cognitive approach, such as a reductionist sentimentalist theory, would be able to account for this phenomenon: we perceive and we feel, no thinking necessary, end of story. However, not all instances of aesthetic experience are underpinned by awe, even a very weak version of it; nor are they all immediate. Sometimes, for example, beauty is underpinned by attraction; sometimes it is underpinned by innocence; and sometimes it is, in fact, underpinned by feelings of awe. But the problem cognitive theories struggle with here also stands out for Prinz's reductionist theory: it cannot adequately explain how the experience of (all kinds of) immediate beauty is possible. For instance, to say that all beauty is awe-inspiring is to discount everyday beauty. To appreciate a clear blue sky and feel happy as a result sounds quite a bit like something a general theory of aesthetic experience should want to capture, but it doesn't sound anything like a feeling of wonder. Thus, we take this seeming lack as another sign as to why a pluralist version is more attractive than a reductionist approach. Indeed, a pluralist version finds no problems in explaining how the many feelings associated with beauty can be immediately perceived, as well as how we can come to judge an object as beautiful after a period of contemplation (that is, our emotions evolve over time). On such issues, a pluralist sentimentalist theory gains the upper hand when confronting cognitive theories. We are often struck by beauty (thankfully), but it is doubtful that a single emotional mechanism can account for all the various ways objects and events impress themselves upon our senses.

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The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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[40] See Roddy Cowie, 'Beauty Is Felt, Not Calculated; and It Does Not Fit in Boxes', in Schellekens and Goldie, *Aesthetic Mind*, 89–105; Prinz, 'Seeing with Feeling'; David Sackris, 'Category Independent Aesthetic Experience: The Case of Wine', *Journal of Value Inquiry* 47 (2013): 111–20.

[41] Arthur C. Danto, *The Abuse of Beauty: Aesthetics and the Concept of Art* (Chicago: Carus, 2003).

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