1 Aesthetic essence

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Does the aesthetic have an essence? If so, can it be captured in non-aesthetic terms or is the aesthetic an irreducible concept?

Whatever the scope of "the aesthetic" may properly be thought to be—I return to this issue in section II—three preliminary points. In the first place, "the aesthetic" ranges over items in different categories: there are aesthetic judgments, aesthetic pleasures, aesthetic values, aesthetic attitudes, aesthetic interest, aesthetic sensitivity, aesthetic properties, aesthetic character, aesthetic appreciation, aesthetic responses and so on.[1] Second, aestheticians have been inclined to privilege one of these categories of the aesthetic, assigning to it a basic status and explicating the others in terms of it. Third, the various categories of the aesthetic are inter-definable, no matter which, if any, is taken as basic, how exactly they are related to one another (not everyone understanding them as being connected in the same manner), and despite disagreements about what should properly be thought of as falling within a particular category. Such disagreements arise from different requirements for membership of the category. For example, whereas some require an aesthetic judgment about an item to be one acquired through first-hand acquaintance with the item,[2] others allow a belief founded on the opinion of another to be an aesthetic judgment. Again, some of those who agree that pleasure in the perception of a single color, sound, taste or smell is an aesthetic pleasure operate with a notion of judgment, as Kant did, which is such that the mere announcement of such a pleasure in the linguistic form of a judgment—"It's pleasurable"—counts as the expression of an aesthetic judgment. Others hold that the linguistic expression of an aesthetic pleasure or response is an aesthetic judgment—is a judgment at all—only if it claims intersubjective validity, as no mere expression of pleasure, even one formulated in judgmental form, properly does: it would be an aesthetic judgment only if it claimed an item's capacity or suitability to give pleasure, or that it merits a pleasurable response. I will skirt disagreements of this kind.

Now the idea of aesthetic judgment might well be understood to include general, universal and comparative (or superlative) judgments: "Some/most/all

of the [46!] prints in Hokusai's *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji* are wonderful"; "Hokusai's *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji* is a finer set than Hiroshige's *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji*." To illustrate the inter-definability of the various aesthetic categories, it will simplify matters if the idea of aesthetic judgment is restricted to singular judgments and is understood to include only judgments that are solely about the aesthetic value or character[3] of a single item: on the one hand, those that are purely evaluative, restricted to expressing an assessment of the aesthetic value of an item, grading it as aesthetically good, mediocre, or bad, for example ("verdicts," as Frank Sibley called them); on the other hand, those that attribute to an item a property that is a ground of aesthetic value (positive or negative), a property in virtue of which the item may be aesthetically praised or faulted, the set of such properties constituting the item's aesthetic character.[4] If any ground of an item's aesthetic value, as realized in the item, is itself called an aesthetic value (positive or negative) of the item,[5] then with the idea of aesthetic value assigned the basic role, and exploiting the ambiguity of the notion,[6] the ideas of aesthetic judgment, pleasure, property and attitude might be defined in some such economical fashion as this:

- An aesthetic judgment is a judgment that ascribes (positive or negative) aesthetic value to an item.
- An aesthetic pleasure is a pleasure taken in the apparent perception or imaginative realization of aesthetic value.[7]
- An aesthetic property of an item is any property of it that has aesthetic value.
- An aesthetic attitude is an attitude of a kind conducive to a reliable perceptual- or imagination-based judgment of aesthetic value.

If, however, the basic status is assigned to the idea of aesthetic judgment, the other categories might be defined in terms of it just as easily:

- An aesthetic value is a value of a kind ascribed by an aesthetic judgment.
- An aesthetic pleasure is a pleasure taken in the apparent perception or imaginative realization of a value rightly or wrongly ascribed to the object of pleasure by a positive aesthetic judgment.
- An aesthetic attitude is an attitude towards an item of a kind that is conducive to an aesthetic judgment about the item being well founded.
- An aesthetic property is a property ascribed to an item by an aesthetic judgment.

And so on round the circle of aesthetic categories.

It follows that if any category can be defined in non-aesthetic terms, all can. Nevertheless, one category might still be basic if the others can be defined (in non-aesthetic terms) only in virtue of their connections with it,

whereas it can be elucidated independently of its connections with them (as with a word used paronymously).

II

Any attempt to articulate the essence of the aesthetic runs up against the problematic scope of the aesthetic. For there are different conceptions of its scope, no one of which has a proper claim to be the right one. Consider purely sensory (or sensuous) pleasure. The crucial feature of purely sensory pleasure, understood as pleasure in the perception of a single undifferentiated color expanse, as such, or in the perception of a sound of a constant pitch, loudness and timbre or a taste or smell in which a single sensory quality, sweetness or acidity, for example, is detected, is that there is no variety in the object as it is perceived, just a single, structureless, homogeneous quality. Accordingly, a pleasurable series of such perceptions—successive perceptions either of coexistent items or of items that occur one after another—each of which yields pleasure, the pleasure of each being independent of the relation of its object to that of any other, affords only sensory pleasure, since no pleasure is taken in anything other than a homogeneous quality. Likewise, a single perception of a complex object yields only sensory pleasure if different elements of it delight one but not in virtue of any relations among them. Some think of purely sensory pleasure as being a species of aesthetic pleasure. But for others, aesthetic pleasure, by contrast, involves variety in its intentional object, pleasure being taken in the manner in which the various aspects are related to one another or in a property generated by the character of the aspects and the relations among them (so that the experience of a "well balanced" wine qualifies, not as purely sensory, but as aesthetic). Accordingly, it is not just that the intentional object of aesthetic pleasure must be complex: the pleasure must be due to the way in which the elements relate to one another. This conception distinguishes aesthetic from purely sensory pleasure by the requirement that aesthetic pleasure is pleasure resulting from structure (in one sense of that word).[8]

This divergence in understanding of the scope of the aesthetic is not the only one. As yet there has been no need to distinguish art from non-art or to draw a distinction between one art and another, between different works within the same art, or between different aspects of a work. But for some, not all forms of artistic appreciation are aesthetic. In the first place, there are those who, seeking to stay close to the original meaning of the term, allow into the aesthetic only those arts that address a specific sensory mode (or a number of such modes), the conduit and appeal of these arts being specifically visual or specifically auditory, for example, open only to those who possess the necessary sense and use it to take in what the art offers (or who are able to imagine the work, as someone now deaf can imagine a piece of music by means of the score), thus placing the appreciation of literature—or at least literature the specific appeal of which does not reside essentially in

the sounds or visual appearance of its constituent words—outside the aesthetic.[9] According to the simplest form of this conception, for those arts that fall within the domain of the aesthetic there is no distinction between a work's artistic and its aesthetic value, but for those that fall outside that domain, although a work possesses an artistic value it lacks an aesthetic value. Second, whereas the term "aesthetic" is often used in a wide sense to cover not only the aesthetic appreciation of nature and non-artistic artifacts but every kind of artistic appreciation, some prefer to operate with a narrower sense of the term, effecting a distinction between two kinds of properties of works of art—aesthetic and artistic properties. For those who use the term in the wide sense, artistic appreciation just is aesthetic appreciation of works of art. For those who use it in the narrower sense, although the aesthetic appreciation of a work of art is part of its artistic appreciation, it does not exhaust it, since the distinction between the aesthetic properties of a work of art and its artistic properties carries with it a distinction between its aesthetic and its artistic value. Not everyone who recognizes the distinction between the two kinds of property, each kind being relevant to the artistic evaluation of a work that possesses such a property, draws it in just the same way. But perhaps it would be agreed that artistic properties, unlike aesthetic properties, are such that they cannot be directly perceived or detected by attending exclusively to the work itself, even by someone who has the cognitive stock required to understand the work, since they are properties the work possesses only in virtue of the relations in which it stands to other things.[10] It would, of course, be possible to combine these two conceptions, both excluding from the aesthetic any art that does not address a specific sensory mode (or a number of such modes) and imposing the distinction between aesthetic and artistic properties of a work of art. This would yield the result that the idea of a work's artistic value diverges everywhere from that of its aesthetic value.

There are two reasonable responses to this proliferation of conceptions. A proposed account of the essence of the aesthetic might be intended to capture one particular conception of the scope of the aesthetic, or it might, in virtue of the generality of its formulation, be sufficiently elastic to be molded to fit a number of conceptions.

III

Two promising candidates for the status of the basic category of the aesthetic are the ideas of aesthetic pleasure and aesthetic value. Whether either is basic, or whether any category is basic, two impressive recent accounts propose definitions of aesthetic pleasure that do not presuppose a prior understanding of the aesthetic. One of them also advances a definition of aesthetic value based on the fundamental component of the idea of aesthetic pleasure.

The distinctive feature of Kendall Walton's account[11] is the crucial role assigned to the notion of pleasurable admiration. This figures in the following

way in his initial definition of aesthetic pleasure: aesthetic pleasure is "pleasure which has, as a component, pleasure taken in one's admiration or positive evaluation of something; to be pleased aesthetically is to note something's value with pleasure." Pleasure taken in the object is part of one's aesthetic pleasure if it is combined with pleasure taken in one's admiration for the object. Correlatively, an item's aesthetic value is its capacity to elicit "reasonable" or "apt" pleasurable admiration—the pleasurable admiration must be appropriate or merited. In fact, Walton confesses to the temptation to define an item's aesthetic value, not just in terms of its capacity to elicit (appropriate) pleasurable admiration for some value, but in terms of its capacity to elicit pleasurable admiration for its capacity to elicit pleasurable admiration for that value. To appreciate a work of art is to reap the benefits of the work's value, and this involves taking pleasure in admiring it (judging it to be good).

The initial definition of aesthetic pleasure is modified in two ways. First, in order to rule out "pleasure of a self-congratulatory sort in admiring something" from constituting aesthetic pleasure, Walton adds that "Aesthetic pleasure is not just pleasure in my admiration of something, but in its getting me to admire it." Second, Walton broadens the range of attitudes that are such that, if pleasure is taken in them, the pleasure is aesthetic pleasure: the attitude need not be admiration, but, for instance, awe or wonder (attitudes that are especially pertinent in the case of aesthetic pleasure in nature), or even revulsion or annoyance.

Building on the idea that a work of art has a character and a content, which can include a variety of different kinds of property, formal (such as balance and unity), aesthetic (gracefulness, garishness), expressive (melancholy, cheerfulness), representational (a woman, a landscape), semantic (the meaning of words), and symbolic (of death or the disintegration of life), all such properties not being first-order properties but second-order, properties that an item possesses only in virtue of its possessing other properties on which the second-order properties are dependent, Jerrold Levinson[12] proposes a very different account of aesthetic pleasure:

> Pleasure in an object is aesthetic when it derives from apprehension of and reflection on the object's individual character and content, both for itself and in relation to the structural base on which it rests. That is to say, to appreciate something aesthetically is to attend to its forms, qualities and meanings for their own sakes [and to their interrelations,][13] but also to attend to the way in which all such things emerge from the particular set of low-level perceptual features which define the object on a non-aesthetic plane.

And he maintains that in order for pleasure in a work's "cognitive content, moral import or political message"—aspects of a work that have traditionally been reckoned not to be aesthetic—to be aesthetic it must involve "appreciation of the manner in which—the work being viewed in its proper historical

context—these are embodied in and communicated by the work's "particular perceptual substructure," its specific elements and their structure, the work's "concrete construction."

Although this account appears to be geared more to pleasure in art than pleasure in nature, Levinson rightly requires that aesthetic pleasure in art should be related intelligibly to aesthetic pleasure in nature, which is, he asserts, "typically a multi-level affair, involving reflection not only on appearances per se, but on the constitution of such appearances and the interaction between higher-order [and lower-order][14] perceptions."

IV

Neither of these conceptions of aesthetic pleasure appears to be satisfactory, each being inadequate both to pleasure in art and pleasure in nature. But something can be learnt from each.

Walton's theory imposes no restrictions on what something is admired for: whatever something is admired for—whatever value it has that it is admired for having—if the admiration is pleasurable then it is an instance of aesthetic pleasure. But this opens the theory to counter-examples, for it is clear that the theory does not provide a sufficient condition of a pleasure's being appropriately thought of as aesthetic. Consider, for example, my pleasurable admiration of John's fortitude in finishing the race despite his bad cold, or any other pleasurable admiration taken in someone's heroic, sterling or admirable performance in the face of danger or difficulty. By deeming these aesthetic, Walton's account is unattractively idiosyncratic. And this inadequacy of Walton's account of aesthetic pleasure is starkly revealed if we leave aside the notion of admiration and consider just the notion of positive evaluation—judging something to be good—that is often substituted for it. For "noting something's value with pleasure" means nothing other than taking pleasure in something's possessing a valuable quality of some kind—pleasure in the reliability of one's car, the thickness of the walls of one's house, the speed of one's computer, the excellence of one's spectacles, the good fit of one's new shoes, the purity of the water, the power of the vacuum cleaner, the high level of one's IQ, the strength of the cable, the accuracy of the thermometer, and so on. But none of these is an aesthetic pleasure, each of them being disqualified by the fact that it is a propositional pleasure—pleasure in the fact that one's shoes fit so well, for example.

It seems clear that for pleasurable admiration of something's value to constitute aesthetic pleasure, the value must be aesthetic value and the pleasure non-propositional. Now if admiration is merely judging something to be good, then, as Walton remarks, admiration is not necessarily pleasurable, for there is such a thing as grudging respect or admiration. But to experience admiration is not just to judge something good: it is to experience an emotion. So whereas it is obvious that pleasure is not integral to judging something to be good, a pleasurable element might be integral to

the experience of admiration. Indeed, the emotion of admiration might well be construed as something like pleasurable contemplation of something's value. But suppose that pleasure is not integral to admiration, as it is not to judging something to be in some manner good. It would then, it seems, be possible for someone to take pleasure in an object, to admire it—to judge it to be good—and yet not to take pleasure in admiring it. Would this preclude the person's pleasure in the object from being aesthetic pleasure? If not—and this seems to be the right answer—then pleasurable admiration is not a necessary condition of pleasure's being aesthetic. There is an another problem for Walton's account if admiration is not necessarily pleasurable. An item's aesthetic value is said to be its capacity to elicit "reasonable" or "apt" pleasurable admiration. It follows that non-pleasurable admiration of a work of art is not a matter of judging the aesthetic value of the work favorably. But why does the addition of pleasure to admiration turn it into a judgment of aesthetic value? Furthermore, if it is possible to derive pleasure from listening to a piece of music or reading a poem or watching a movie for the sake of it without judging it to be good ("I enjoyed it but it's kitsch, sentimental ..."), then admiration itself (judging something to be good) seems to be unnecessary for a pleasure to count as aesthetic.

Now "pleasure taken in one's admiration of something" must be understood to mean that the pleasure qualifies the experience of admiration, rather than taking the admiration as its object. This is recognized implicitly by Walton in his rejection of pleasure of a self-congratulatory sort—delightedly patting oneself on the back for one's sophisticated and subtle taste in recognizing something's merit—as being aesthetic pleasure. But Walton's qualification of his initial definition of aesthetic pleasure—"Aesthetic pleasure is not just pleasure in my admiration of something, but in its getting me to admire it"—appears to conceive of pleasurable admiration, not as admiring with pleasure, but as pleasure in an item's capacity to generate admiration, and fails to bring out the most salient feature of the example. A distinguishing mark of pleasure of a self-congratulatory sort, other than its being directed at one's own admiration, is that it is a propositional pleasure—pleasure in the fact that one's aesthetic sensitivity is of a superior kind. It is this distinguishing mark that counts decisively against the pleasure's being aesthetic.

Two final points: First, it is clear that the doubling of pleasurable admiration that Walton is tempted by—defining an item's aesthetic value, not just in terms of its capacity to elicit (appropriate) pleasurable admiration for some value, but in terms of its capacity to elicit pleasurable admiration for its capacity to elicit pleasurable admiration for that value—if imposed as a condition of a pleasure's being aesthetic, would increase the implausibility of the account. Second, Walton's final account represents aesthetic pleasure as requiring that a component of a person's pleasure must be pleasure, not necessarily in the person's admiration of an item, but perhaps in some other attitude, such as awe or wonder. Accordingly, "The aesthetic value of sunsets, alpine meadows, waterfalls, and flowers may

consist (in part) in our taking pleasure in the awe or wonder we feel towards them." But although forms of awe and wonder are feelings that at least some of us often experience towards natural objects or phenomena, it appears not to be a necessary condition of someone's deriving aesthetic pleasure from such an item that the person should experience some such feeling towards it, rather than merely finding it inherently rewarding to look at. This seems clear if awe is understood as reverential fear or wonder, i.e. fear of or wonder at something held in deep respect, and wonder is an emotion excited by what is unexpected, unfamiliar or inexplicable, especially surprise mingled with admiration or curiosity. For surprise, curiosity, fear, the unexpected or unfamiliar are often lacking when people take delight in the appearance of natural items; respect is appropriate only for forms of life and even so is hardly shown towards, for example, flowers whose lives are shortened by being picked for their beauty and displayed only briefly, perhaps in a buttonhole; and much in the natural world that is experienced as being beautiful or sublime is not thought of by many of those who find them so as being inexplicable.

The crucial defect of Levinson's account is that it elides the distinction between aesthetic pleasure and aesthetic appreciation (between which he often slips). First, it is over-demanding in requiring, in the case of pleasure in a work of art, that the subject should reflect on the relation between the work's "character and content" and the vehicle of the work, the relation "between what a work expresses or signifies, and the means it uses to do so," i.e. the way in which these are realized in the work. This is perhaps a requirement on the full appreciation of a work as art, since full appreciation of a work of art involves understanding, as it were, how it works—how its aesthetic properties are realized in and determined by its non-aesthetic properties—but it is not a necessary condition of pleasure taken in the work being aesthetic pleasure. Pleasure in the mere apprehension of a work's character and content, for its own sake, is deemed not to be aesthetic by Levinson's account: for apprehension of that character and content to be aesthetic it must be accompanied by reflection on the manner in which that character and content is determined by its structural base: a person's attention must be engaged, not solely by that character and content, but also by how the second-order properties emerge from the first-order properties. But how else would it be reasonable to characterize pleasure in the mere apprehension of a work's character and content, i.e. apprehension of the work's character and content in the relevant way, by listening, looking, reading or whatever, but without reflection on the relation of this character and content to the structural base, perhaps without the kind of attention to the structural base that is necessary for such reflection to take place—the kind of pleasure that many people derive from reading a gripping novel, watching a comedy, spending the average amount of time in front of a picture in an art gallery, or listening to a melody with a certain emotional quality—if not as aesthetic? Apart from exceptional cases, there appears to be no good reason to disqualify this kind of pleasure from being aesthetic.

It is equally clear, if not more so, in the case of aesthetic pleasure in nature that the account demands too much: for being favorably impressed by a mighty waterfall, being delighted by a glittering iceberg, the flickering reflections of clouds in a river, the gracefulness of a gazelle, or the beauty of a rainbow or an alpine meadow to count as aesthetic pleasures, no reflection of the kind required by the account—which involves attention to the "perceptual and conceptual underpinnings" of nature's "manifest effects"—is necessary. Levinson claims that:

> Even to enjoy aesthetically something as simple as the luminosity of the sun's color at sunset is to enjoy such luminosity as the upshot of a particular shade and brightness of yellow, and as somehow appropriate to the heavenly body which is the source of all life.

But this seems to be too strong even as a requirement on the aesthetic appreciation of a natural phenomenon as the phenomenon it actually is, let alone on the pleasure being aesthetic.

Levinson's explanation of how pleasure in aspects of a work that have traditionally been characterized as "non-aesthetic" can be aesthetic pleasure might be thought to add plausibility to his position. But even if the claim is true, it does not follow that pleasure in any aspect of a work is aesthetic only if it involves reflection on the manner of embodiment of character and content, or attention to how higher-order properties emerge from first-order ones. Of course, to perceive or apprehend any higher-order properties of an item you need to perceive lower-order ones, and in particular those lower-order properties upon which the higher-order ones are dependent: whenever you perceive or apprehend higher-order properties you perceive or apprehend them, not in the abstract, but as they are realized in the item. But to derive pleasure—aesthetic pleasure, surely—from the graceful shape of a vase or the mournful quality of a melody, no reflection on the relation between the item's gracefulness or melancholy and its structural basis is required. Furthermore, it is one thing to claim, rightly, that "the relationship of substructure and superstructure in the total impression that an object affords is necessarily of concern when an object is approached aesthetically," or that various higher-order properties are not in themselves aesthetic virtues and constitute aesthetic merits only as they are realized in particular works, and another to claim that any pleasure taken in a work of art is aesthetic only if it involves reflection on the relation of substructure to superstructure. Here it is important to recognize that the relation of substructure to superstructure may be an essential determinant of one's pleasure in a work, and one's pleasure be pleasure in the superstructure as embodied in the substructure, in the absence of any reflection on that relation. And this, it would seem, is all that is necessary for one's pleasure to be aesthetic. In order to accommodate under the banner of the aesthetic pleasure in aspects of a work traditionally conceived of as being non-aesthetic, it is unnecessary

to insist that this pleasure must involve reflection on or appreciation (rather than mere awareness) of the manner in which they are realized in the work: it suffices that the pleasure should be pleasure in them as so realized.

V

We can bring away from our consideration of these accounts two significant features of aesthetic pleasure, whether this is aesthetic pleasure in a work of art or aesthetic pleasure in a natural item or an artifact that is not a work of art. From the consideration of Walton we take the important fact that aesthetic pleasure is a non-propositional pleasure: for the account of aesthetic pleasure as pleasure taken in the perception of aesthetic value to be adequate, pleasure in the perception of aesthetic value must not be understood as simply pleasure from that perception. From the consideration of Levinson we take a near neighbor of his conception, weakening his account in order to jettison the over-strong requirement imposed by his eliding the distinction between aesthetic pleasure and aesthetic appreciation: aesthetic pleasure, as distinguished from purely sensory pleasure, is pleasure taken in relations among the elements of the object and/or in higher-order properties of the object—by which I shall understand properties dependent on the nature of its elements and the relations among them—as they are realized in the object. But this must be qualified in order to accommodate misplaced pleasure—pleasure misplaced through the misrepresentation of an item's aesthetic character, through the experience of the item as possessing aesthetic value that it lacks.[15] A plausible definition of aesthetic pleasure in non-aesthetic terms, which takes these features on board, which straddles both art and non-art, and which is flexible enough, if it is suitably tailored, to accommodate different conceptions of the scope of the aesthetic, is as follows. First, a minimal conception of aesthetic pleasure: aesthetic pleasure is non-propositional pleasure taken in the character of an item as experienced in perception and/or imagination. Second, a conception that discriminates against purely sensory pleasure: the minimal conception bolstered by the condition that the pleasure must be taken in the apparent relations among the elements of the item—in a pattern, for example—and/or in the item's apparent higher-order properties as they are realized in the item.[16] Third, a conception that allows into the aesthetic only those arts that address a specific sensory mode (or a number of such modes): the enhanced conception reinforced by the condition that if the item is a work of art, it must be of a kind that addresses a particular sensory mode (or set of modes). Fourth, a conception that takes on board the distinction between aesthetic and artistic properties of works of art: the enhanced conception strengthened by the condition that if the higher-order properties are properties of a work of art, then they must be directly detectable as realized in the work itself.[17] If something along these lines is acceptable, then, having achieved an account of aesthetic pleasure in non-aesthetic terms, it might seem that this can be used as the basic category

and the other categories of the aesthetic defined in non-aesthetic terms by means of it, the set of definitions of the various categories encapsulating the essence of the aesthetic. Accordingly, operating with the minimal conception strengthened by the condition that discriminates against purely sensory pleasure, restricting the categories to those previously considered, and disambiguating the notion of aesthetic value:

- An aesthetic value—a positive aesthetic value—of an item is a relation among its elements, or a higher-order property as realized in the item, which is fit to yield non-propositional pleasure in the perception or imaginative realization of it.
- An item's overall aesthetic value is its fitness to yield non-propositional pleasure in the perception or imaginative realization of it in virtue of the ensemble of the relations among its elements, its higher-order properties as realized in it, and the interrelations of these.[18]
- An aesthetic judgment (one that is not a verdict) is a judgment that ascribes to an item a relation among its elements or a higher-order property and which is true if and only if the item possesses that relation or property and this is such that, as realized in the item, it is fit to yield non-propositional pleasure or displeasure in the perception or imaginative realization of it.
- An aesthetic property of an item is any relation among the elements or any higher-order property of it that, as realized in the item, is fit to yield non-propositional pleasure or displeasure in the perception of imaginative realization of it.
- An aesthetic attitude is an attitude of a kind conducive to the reliable perception or judgment of an item's fitness to yield non-propositional pleasure or displeasure in the relations among its elements or its higher-order properties as they are realized in it.

A word of explanation. There is a contentious issue I have not as yet acknowledged, and definitions of the category of aesthetic judgment in terms of pleasure will vary with the side adopted. While it is clear that an assessment of the aesthetic value of an item (a verdict) is an evaluation, there is an ongoing dispute between those who, following Sibley, regard the attribution of a property that is, from the aesthetic point of view, in itself a merit or demerit, as being purely descriptive and which does not require that the person making the judgment should regard the possession of the property as a value or disvalue,[19] and those who maintain that the attribution to an item of a ground of aesthetic value (positive or negative) should properly be understood as an expression of a favorable or unfavorable attitude towards an aspect of the item, one that indicates, perhaps, that the person making the judgment considers the experience of the aspect as being fit to yield pleasure or as being fit to yield displeasure. I intend to skirt this disagreement, although my formulation, in terms of a judgment that ascribes a property

that is fit to yield pleasure, rather than a judgment of a property's fitness to yield pleasure, expresses my belief that it is not of the essence of the attribution of a ground of aesthetic value that it carries with it an evaluative attitude.

However, although this set of definitions does perhaps capture a certain narrow conception of the aesthetic, the concept of pleasure is not a sound foundation upon which to build a broader and more usual conception of the aesthetic. For unless the idea of an experience in which we take pleasure is understood in an unnaturally wide sense, so that it is equivalent to an experience that we find inherently rewarding to undergo, it is not possible to elucidate the notion of artistic value—the value of a work of art as art—in terms of pleasure.[20] Moreover, this is not due to the distinction between a work's artistic and its aesthetic value drawn by those who distinguish artistic from aesthetic properties of works: this notion of a work's aesthetic value is itself resistant to explanation in terms of pleasure. The point is, rather, that the experience of a work of art can be intrinsically rewarding to undergo, worth undergoing for its own sake—rewarding to undergo independently of any beneficial consequences that might be anticipated to accrue to one as a result of having had the experience—for reasons other than the pleasure the experience might afford; and the right idea to use to elucidate the notion of artistic value is not that of pleasure but the more fundamental idea of the rewards intrinsic to experiencing a work of art with understanding.[21] The modifications in the above accounts of aesthetic categories necessary to accommodate this conclusion are easily made:

- An aesthetic value—a positive aesthetic value—of an item is a relation among its elements, or a higher-order property of it, which, as realized in the item, is fit to make the perception or imaginative realization of it intrinsically rewarding.
- An item's overall aesthetic value is its fitness to make the perception or imaginative realization of it intrinsically rewarding in virtue of the ensemble of the relations among its elements, its higher-order properties as realized in it, and the interrelations of these.[22]
- An aesthetic judgment (one that is not a verdict) is a judgment that ascribes to an item a relation among its elements or a higher-order property and which is true if and only if the item possesses that relation or property and this is such that, as realized in the item, it is fit to make the perception or imaginative realization of it intrinsically rewarding or unrewarding.
- An aesthetic property of an item is any relation among the elements or any higher-order property of it that, as realized in the item, is fit to make the perception or imaginative realization of it intrinsically rewarding.
- An aesthetic attitude is an attitude of a kind conducive to the reliable perception or judgment of an item's fitness to make the experience of

the relations among its elements or its higher-order properties as they are realized in it intrinsically rewarding.

It counts in favor of the approach I have suggested if these accounts of categories of the aesthetic are, as I believe, independently plausible.

Notes

1 I do not engage directly with the somewhat nebulous idea of aesthetic experience, the intended scope of which is unclear to me, preferring instead to work with what I take to be rather more precise notions, such as the idea of the perception of an aesthetic property or the idea of aesthetic pleasure or of an experience involving an aesthetic response.
2 See, for example, Frank Sibley, *Approach to Aesthetics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001) 34–35.
3 I take the notion of aesthetic character from Frank Sibley: see his *Approach to Aesthetics*, 123.
4 This will impose a restriction on the idea of an aesthetic judgment if an aesthetic judgment is understood, as it might well be, to be a judgment that attributes an aesthetic property to an item, an aesthetic property of an item being conceived of as any property of the item, relevant to an assessment of the item's aesthetic value, which is dependent on the lower-order properties of the item, and which the subject can experience the item as possessing. But on this more liberal conception of an aesthetic judgment (and an aesthetic property), the categories of the aesthetic remain, mutatis mutandis, inter-definable.
5 I am not assuming that someone who perceives a ground of aesthetic value recognizes it as the value it is or even as a value at all.
6 The notion of aesthetic value covers both the notion of an item's overall aesthetic value and the idea of any property that is a ground of it.
7 "Apparent" is needed to accommodate the common phenomenon of misplaced aesthetic pleasure—delight in an object, usually a work of art, that is based on an aesthetic character the object does not possess, that is, which lacks the aesthetic values that seem to be found in it. "Imaginative realization" is to be understood in a wide sense to cover every way other than perception in which aesthetic value might be experienced.
8 Another attempt to distinguish aesthetic from purely sensory pleasure insists that pleasure is aesthetic only if it involves the exercise of conceptual powers. I leave aside the question whether this criterion succeeds in effecting the desired distinction.
9 One important distinguishing feature of fiction is that the engagement of the imagination, which is an essential feature of its aesthetic appeal, does not consist in the (imaginative) perception of the imagined characteristics or scenes in the constituents or material of the work itself.
10 Jerrold Levinson provides the clearest rationale of the distinction in his "Artworks and the Future," conveniently reprinted in his *Music, Art, and Metaphysics* (Ithaca NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1990) 182–83.
11 Kendall L. Walton, "How Marvelous! Toward a Theory of Aesthetic Value," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 51:3 (summer 1993).
12 "Pleasure, Aesthetic," in David Cooper (ed.) *A Companion to Aesthetics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992) reprinted as "What is Aesthetic Pleasure?" in Levinson's *The Pleasures of Aesthetics*.
13 Added in the reprint.

14 Added in the reprint.
15 I leave aside the possibility of perverted aesthetic pleasure—pleasure taken in the perception of a property that from the aesthetic point of view is inherently a demerit (which I distinguish from pleasure taken in a work of art's badness—amusement at its remarkable crassness or vulgarity, for example).
16 Pleasure in higher-order properties as they are realized in the item can now be understood to include, but not entail, attention to and pleasure in how the higher-order properties are generated by lower-order properties.
17 I am unconvinced that many of what are taken to be artistic properties—being influential, for example, or originality (as it is often understood)—are in themselves relevant to an assessment of a work's artistic value (its value as a work of art). By far the best examination of the concept of originality in art is Frank Sibley's "Originality and Value," conveniently reprinted in his *Approach to Aesthetics*.
18 This is a simplification, for more than one reason. In the first place, it needs to be adjusted to accommodate the fact that overall aesthetic value is a matter of degree and involves the weighing of merits and demerits. But this rectification is easily made. Second, the notion of an item's overall aesthetic value—where this means its overall aesthetic value considered as the kind of thing it is (work of art, non-artistic artifact, or natural object, more specifically, cubist painting, church, or Scots pine . . .)—not only imposes requirements on the cognitive stock of the perceiver but is afflicted by a number of uncertainties. For example, the notion of the aesthetic value of a natural object, so I have argued, suffers from an indefiniteness that does not attach to the idea of the aesthetic value of a work of art. See my "The Aesthetics of Nature," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, C. 2 (2000). The starting point for reflections on the aesthetic significance of the categories to which objects belong is Kendall Walton's seminal "Categories of Art," *The Philosophical Review*, 79:3 (1970).
19 I simplify Sibley's position by expressing it in terms, not of the nature of words but of the attribution of properties, and by representing it as applying to all, rather than to the majority of attributions. See Sibley's incisive discussion in his "Particularity, Art and Evaluation," conveniently reprinted in his *Approach to Aesthetics*. Sibley's position is well defended in Jerrold Levinson's "Aesthetic Properties, Evaluative Force, and Differences of Sensibility," in Emily Brady and Jerrold Levinson (eds) *Aesthetic Concepts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001).
20 The best discussion of this issue is Jerrold Levinson's "Pleasure and the Value of Works of Art," conveniently reprinted in his *The Pleasures of Aesthetics*.
21 See my *Values of Art* (London: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1995) part I. For a general conception of an aesthetic response in terms of an experience that is found to be intrinsically rewarding (or not inherently worthwhile, even worth not having), see my *The Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002) 14–15.
22 See note 17 above.