

ABSTRACT

If I find aesthetic value in an image depicting violence, have I done something wrong? Am I at fault for finding the image aesthetically appealing? Is my enjoyment of this work immoral? These are the sort of questions this thesis aims to address. In this work, I ask two primary questions: “Are we responsible for our aesthetic judgments?” and, “Is it possible for aesthetic tastes to be morally wrong?” Prior philosophy work on desire, aesthetic reason theory, and moral value theory are examined in order to explore possible answers to these questions.

As an intuitive answer to the first question, I propose that individuals are not responsible for their aesthetic tastes, and therefore cannot be held morally responsible for them. Prior work on the nature of desire argues that a moral agent ought not be held responsible for desires they do not choose, as an unchosen desire is not voluntary, and is against the agent’s will. I posit that aesthetic judgments are relevantly similar to desires in that both desires and judgments are non-voluntary, and thus not related to an agent’s will. In order to show how desires and aesthetic tastes are similar, I examine two theories on the formation and structure of desires, as well as a few different accounts of how aesthetic judgments are formed, in order to show how the two operate in similar ways. Specifically, I look to show that both desires and aesthetic judgments are non-voluntary due to the way in which they are formed. From this, I argue that since a moral agent is not held morally responsible for non-voluntary desires, they ought not be held responsible for their non-voluntary aesthetic judgments either.

In answer to the second question - whether aesthetic judgments are morally wrong - I evaluate problematic aesthetic judgments from the perspective of each of three moral value theories. The theories I consider are: consequentialism, which determines morality based on the

consequences of an action; deontology, which focuses on an action's consistency with general moral rules; and virtue ethics, which holds that an individual's actions and beliefs are reflective of their overall moral character. Based on these evaluations, I conclude that merely having problematic aesthetic judgments can be consistent with consequentialist and deontological ethics, even if only in a limited set of cases. However, since virtue ethics suggests that the enjoyment of problematic aesthetic works is reflective of poor moral character, the enjoyment of problematic works seems inconsistent with virtue ethics. However, I offer a suggestion as to how aesthetic judgments may not in fact be reflective of moral character. My concluding answer overall is that the ethics of aesthetic judgments is very complex, and whether or not an aesthetic judgment is morally wrong depends upon how the nature of the individual judgment itself.

After my investigation, I ultimately conclude that individuals are not responsible for their aesthetic judgments in cases where the individual does not cause, create, or choose their aesthetic judgment. I note that aesthetic judgments may sometimes be considered morally wrong, however, in cases where individuals are not responsible for their judgments, they are "off the hook" for any problematic judgment they may have. Finally, I close with a brief speculation on whether it may be possible to change our aesthetic judgments, and, if so, whether we ought to try to change our problematic judgments.

Rationality and Moral Responsibility in Aesthetics

Kathryn Gullen
Mount Holyoke College Department of Philosophy
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INTRODUCTION

My purpose in this thesis is to address two primary questions: “Are individuals responsible for their aesthetic tastes?” and, “Can aesthetic tastes be morally wrong?” In the course of attempting to answer these, I also consider a number of other questions about the nature of desires, the existence of aesthetic reasons, and moral theories.

My initial, intuitive response to the first question - whether individuals are responsible for their aesthetic tastes - is that individuals are not responsible for their aesthetic tastes because their aesthetic tastes are sometimes automatic and non-voluntary. As a starting point for examining the reasoning behind this intuition, I look at the nature of desires. Prior work in philosophy provides a good basis for thinking that some desires are non-voluntary, and beyond an individual’s conscious control. My goal in considering desires is to theorize and understand the mechanism by which desires are formed, as well as what about that mechanism puts desires beyond an agent’s control. My hope is to then show that aesthetic tastes are formed in a similar way, and therefore must also be beyond an agent’s control.

In the first chapter of this thesis, I evaluate two proposed theories on the structure of desires, one by Harry Frankfurt, and one by Gary Watson. The structure of desires is a subject that Frankfurt and Watson debated with each other over a series of essays. I summarize the portions of this debate that are relevant to my topic, focusing specifically on each of their frameworks for understanding desires. I carefully consider the advantages of each of their theories, as well as objections to each other’s frameworks. Ultimately I determine Watson’s theory of desires to be the stronger and more compelling of the two. Using this framework as a guide, I examine how some desires are formed in such a way that they are unresponsive to

reasoning, and beyond an agent's control. I then argue that because of this, the agent cannot be held morally responsible for these arational desires.

Armed with an understanding of desires, and the conclusion that some desires are beyond an agent's moral responsibility, I continue into the second chapter with the goal of drawing a parallel between desires and aesthetic tastes. My plan in this chapter is to assess whether aesthetic tastes are responsive to reason. First, however, I attempt to explain the nature of aesthetic judgments, drawing upon the aesthetic theory of Immanuel Kant. Then, returning to my primary question, I look to a decisive and complex debate in aesthetics: the debate of aesthetic reasons. The subject of this debate is aesthetic rules, specifically whether an individual's aesthetic judgments are governed by a set of logical principles. These principles, if they exist, would function much like ethical norms do in moral theories.

There are two main positions to this debate: the view that aesthetic reasons do exist, and the view that they do not. I consider key arguments on either side of this debate, looking to arguments from philosophers like Arnold Isenberg, Monroe Beardsley, and Marcia Eaton, among others. I also consider a particular argument by Frank Sibley, which I think is (arguably) not firmly rooted on either side of the aesthetic reasons debate, and consider it to be in a category of its own.

Since I take aesthetic judgments to be like desires in that they are non-voluntary and not within an agent's control, I want to be able to conclude that aesthetic judgments do not respond to reasons. Accordingly, my hope is to be able to refute the arguments for existence of aesthetic reasons, and conclude the second chapter of this thesis by arguing that aesthetic judgments do not respond to reasons, because aesthetic reasons do not exist. However, I encounter a challenge

in the form of Beardsley's theory and argument for aesthetic reasons.

In spite of my best efforts, I find myself unable to refute Beardsley's argument. Fortunately, however, I realize that I do not have to refute Beardsley's argument in order to ultimately conclude that individuals may not be responsible for their aesthetic judgments. Instead, I explain how the fact that an agent may fail to properly respond to aesthetic reasons allows for Beardsley's argument to be consistent with my view. Modifying the strength of what I initially hoped to claim, I am able to conclude my second chapter having shown how there are at least some cases in which an agent's aesthetic judgments are arational, and therefore the agent cannot be held responsible for these judgments.

With the conclusion that there exist some aesthetic judgments for which agents are not responsible, I feel I have adequately addressed my first question, and move on to the second. The focus, then, of my third chapter is whether it is morally wrong to have an aesthetic appreciation for an aesthetic work that is morally problematic. To aid in answering this question, I pick out an example of an aesthetic work that I think would be unanimously agreed upon to be morally problematic. The image I use is a murder scene from NBC's television series, *Hannibal*. Pointing out the aesthetic elements of my example, and imagining that it is a real murder scene, I move forward in evaluating the morality of aesthetically enjoying such a work. I examine the morality of my example aesthetic taste by taking on the perspective of each of three moral theories: consequentialism, deontology, and virtue ethics. Since each of these moral theories prioritizes different values that are taken to be good, the theories may disagree about the moral permissibility of a single action.

For the consequentialist perspective, I am able to conclude that liking my example problematic work is morally permissible, so long as it is just a liking. The deontological and virtue ethics perspectives prove to be more complex. For deontological ethics, I determine that whether or not a problematic aesthetic appreciation is permissible ultimately comes down to the content of the aesthetic work. Thus the permissibility of enjoying a problematic work depends upon the content of the work, and would vary from case to case. Virtue ethics offers the most challenging analysis. Initially virtue ethics seems to unequivocally reject the appreciation of a problematic aesthetic work as immoral. However, by delving further into the main source of value for virtue ethics, and drawing on my earlier conclusion that some aesthetic tastes are involuntary, I am able to provide reasons for virtue ethics to, in an admittedly limited set of circumstances, take the appreciation of problematic aesthetic works to be morally permissible.

Having provided answers to each of my main questions, I wrap up this thesis by reflecting briefly upon each of my arguments. I offer a summary of my conclusions, reflect upon what I was unable to conclude, and finally I close with a few statements about things I could not address here, as well as the implications of this work.

CHAPTER 1

GOALS AND PRELIMINARIES

Across moral theories, it is widely accepted that an agent is not responsible for actions that are beyond their control. So in cases where an agent commits, or is unable to prevent, a moral wrong beyond their control, she is not held responsible since she was unable to do or choose otherwise. Imagine, for example, a doctor who is trying to treat a patient with a severe cancer. In spite of the doctor's best efforts, the patient's cancer is very aggressive and unresponsive to treatment, and the patient dies. Since the doctor had done her best to save the patient, the doctor is not morally responsible for the patient's death; it was beyond the doctor's control. Here the doctor has failed to prevent a moral wrong - a patient's death - but is not morally responsible. Similarly, imagine a case in which a doctor is forced, against her will, to operate on a patient. The particular mechanism by which the doctor is forced is unimportant, so long as it leaves her powerless over her own actions. In the course of this operation, the doctor kills the patient. In this case the doctor has committed a moral wrong - killing a patient - but is not responsible because she was not in control of her actions. She could not have chosen to do otherwise - to not operate on the patient. It seems this second set of cases, in which an agent is unable to prevent a moral wrong, may be relevantly similar to desires. In other words, I think an agent is not morally responsible for some of her desires due to the same reason she would not be responsible for preventing some moral wrongs: because both the moral wrongs and the desires are beyond the agent's control. My goal in this chapter will be to make clear this parallel between actions that are beyond an agent's control, and a class of arational, non-voluntary desires. I will attempt to do this by first finding a framework with which to understand how desires function,

then using that understanding to show how some desires are simply beyond an agent's control. Having established the control an agent importantly lacks over some actions as well as some desires, it should follow that if an agent cannot be held responsible for actions they cannot control, then they ought not be held responsible for desires they cannot control.

FRANKFURT'S FRAMEWORK

In order to discuss the nature of desires it is necessary to first decide upon a framework for understanding and conceptualizing them. One notable preexisting theory of desire comes in Harry Frankfurt's essay "Freedom of Will and the Concept of a Person."¹ There Frankfurt offers an account for the structure and functioning of desires, and details the implication this has for agents' responsibility for their actions. Frankfurt's intent is to extend this theory in order to explain free will and attempt to define personhood. Though interesting, some of Frankfurt's latter claims are irrelevant to what I aim to discuss. For that reason, I will set aside most of Frankfurt's comments on free will and personhood in favor of focusing on his theory of desire. Frankfurt begins by creating a distinction between what he calls *first order desires* and *second order desires*. A first order desire is the basic wanting of a thing - such as a new car - or the successful completion of an action - going out and purchasing that new car. Simply having a first order desire does not automatically mean that an individual will act upon that desire, or that she even truly wishes for that desire to come to fruition. Someone may want to go out and buy a new car, but she will not necessarily actually do so. Perhaps she will not even truly want to do so; maybe she cannot afford a new car, or has a stronger desire to use her money for some other purpose. It

¹ Frankfurt, Harry. "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person." *The Journal of Philosophy* 68, no. 1 (1971): 5-20.

is possible, under Frankfurt's theory, to have a first order desire that one fundamentally disagrees with, or otherwise feels conflicted about.

This is where second order desires come into play. Second order desires, in a sense, are an agent's judgment on her first order desires, her examination of whether she "wants to want what they want." In other words, a second order desire concerns whether an agent wishes to have that particular first order desire, and whether she wants that desire to be acted upon successfully. Continuing with the new car example, perhaps an agent does not want to want a new car; she thinks wanting new, better things is a selfish kind of desire, and she does not want to have selfish desires. Or perhaps she does not want to want the new car because it is too expensive, and she cannot afford it. In this case, she would not want to successfully act upon the first order desire to go out and purchase a new car, as she would not want to put herself into debt.

Should an agent wish for this second order desire - such as the desire not to go out and purchase the car she wants on the first order level - to be acted upon successfully, it becomes what Frankfurt calls a second order volition. A second order volition is the desire which often leads an agent to act. However, a volition need not be of the second order: just as there are different orders of desires, volitions can be of different orders as well. What sets volitions apart from desires is not their order, but rather the fact that an agent aligns themselves with the volitions. As explained above, an agent can have a desire which she does not really wish to see come to fruition. In this sense, desires are arational, and passive as they do not move an agent to action. Volitions are different. Volitions are desires which the agent takes to be reflective of her own values, and which she wishes to see come to fruition. Volitions are also active motivators, prompting the agent to take steps to secure her volition-desire. Whether or not the agent is

actually successful in obtaining the object of her volition is another matter. However, the significance of a volition lies in the fact that the individual truly *wishes* for it to be successful, and takes steps to secure it. In the case of the new car example, the action taken toward fulfilling the second order volition appears rather like a lack of action: the agent would purposely not go out and purchase a new car, instead choosing to save her money.

To examine how this theory operates, I will rely again to the new car example. As a start, a first order desire is formed: the desire to buy a new car. Frankfurt is unclear on how exactly the desire comes to be, but it is clear - and important for my aims - that the process of forming the desire is not a rational one. This means that the formation of the desire is not a result of a consideration of evidence, reasoning, or argument. It happens independent of rational reasoning. Rationality does not come into play until an agent either forms second order volitions, or chooses between conflicting (mutually exclusive) first order desires. For our example story, suppose that a moral agent already has the desire for a new car, a desire which is brought to the front of her mind by seeing an advertisement for a car dealership. At this point, the agent may do one of a few things. She may impulsively act upon this desire by rushing out to buy a new car; she may ignore the desire by setting it aside, perhaps in favor of a more pressing desire; or she may form a second order desire corresponding to her first order desire. If the agent acts immediately upon her desire, or sets it aside, then the story ends, as the desire has been dealt with - even if only temporarily in the latter case. However, should the agent take the time to reflect upon her (first order) desire, then she will form a second order desire. The formation of a second order desire is a rational process, wherein the agent takes a moment to consider her desire and all its implications. Does the agent really want a new car - is she committed to all that the reality of this

desire entails? Can she afford a new car? Would it make her happy? What are the consequences of buying a new car? What are the consequences of not buying one?

The second order desire our agent comes to form in this rational process is a result of careful consideration of potential consequences, evidence, reasoning, and arguments. This resulting desire (second order desire) will either agree or disagree with her first order desire. Perhaps the agent truly does want to purchase a new car, with all the consequences that entails and, besides, maybe she needs a new car because her current one is in poor condition. Or perhaps the agent does not want to purchase the new car with all the consequences it entails, or perhaps she cannot afford one. Whichever of these is true, if it is a desire that the agent identifies with, and which will motivate the agent to act - by either going out and purchasing the car or not - then it will become a second order volition, and our agent's desire process has ended with a confident decision. If her second order desire is not one she identifies with - that is, not one she takes to be consistent with her values, and the way she wants to be - then she may go on to form a third order desire.

The formation of third order desires is the same as that of second order desires, except instead of reflecting upon a first order desire, an agent is reflecting upon her second order desire. Again, the agent will go through a reasoning process, this time questioning whatever her second order desire may have been. If the resulting third order desire is one with which the agent identifies, then it will become a third order volition and motivation for the agent's actions. If the third order desire still is one which the agent does not identify with, then the agent could go on to form a fourth order desire. Then perhaps the agent will form fifth, sixth, or seventh order desires. The process of forming higher orders of desires could theoretically go on indefinitely, resulting

in interminable indecision. But ideally, and as I imagine for our new car agent, a volition is eventually formed and the agent moves forward with it.

Frankfurt presents an example of his own which he uses to illustrate both the functioning of his framework, as well as a distinction he wishes to make about free will. This example also brings out an element of desires that is significant for my argument: the fact that desires can be beyond an agent's control. The subject of Frankfurt's example is an agent called the "unwilling addict." This agent suffers from a severe addiction to drugs, an addiction that the agent does not wish to have and makes every attempt to break. In spite of having tried every possible method, the agent has been unable to overcome her addiction. She still craves the drugs to which she is addicted, in spite of desperately wanting to be free of her craving and overall addiction. Looking at this example through the lens of Frankfurt's framework of desire, the unwilling addict's desire for the drugs is the agent's first order desire. The agent's desire not to take or be addicted to the drugs is a second order desire with which the agent identifies. The agent takes the second order desire to be in alignment with her values and the way she truly wishes for things to be, and thus it is a second order volition. Unfortunately for the addict, her efforts to cure her addiction are unsuccessful. In spite of her second order volition, she is unable to break her addiction and her first order desire prevails.

For my purposes, the case of the unwilling addict demonstrates the way in which desires can be arational - or even irrational - and beyond an agent's control. In this case the agent's first order desire was irrational, as is the nature of addictions. Further, it was inconsistent with what the agent truly wanted. The desire she identified with, the second order volition that motivated her to action, was her desire not to have the addiction. Yet, her addiction prevailed in spite of her

volition, defying the agent's rationality. This example also makes clear that the agent was unable to control her first order desire: all her attempts to do so were unsuccessful, as her desire was beyond her control. For this reason, it seems the agent should not be held morally responsible for her uncontrollable first order desire.

The unwilling addict's inability to fulfill her second order volition is significant for Frankfurt in a different way. It seems that the agent's inability to get what she wants constitutes some lack of freedom; that the unwilling addict is in some sense unfree. But it does not seem right, Frankfurt notes, to say that the unwilling addict lacks free will. After all, what sets apart the agent's second order volition from her first order desire is, in part, that it aligns with the agent's will. Frankfurt takes freedom of will simply to be the freedom to want what one wants. For the unwilling addict, the agent's ability to consider her first order desire, his addiction, then form and identify with her second order desire against that addiction demonstrates that the agent has freedom of will. The freedom the unwilling addict lacks is what Frankfurt calls freedom of action. Freedom of action is the ability to successfully act as one wishes, to carry out one's will. The unwilling addict's will is her second order volition to beat her addiction. However, the addict is unable to carry out this will, as her addiction prevents her from doing so. Therefore the unwilling addict demonstrably has freedom of will, but lacks freedom of action.

Using his desire framework and distinction between freedom of will and freedom of action, Frankfurt goes on to make claims about the nature of personhood. He holds that second order desires are essential to being a person, and are reflective of a true self. It is these claims that draw notable criticism from philosopher Gary Watson, who becomes an opponent of Frankfurt's view. Watson offers objections against both Frankfurt's conception of personhood, as

well as to the structure of Frankfurt's desire framework. Since personhood is not an intended discussion of this thesis, I will set aside that issue and focus instead on what I take to be Watson's strongest objection to Frankfurt's desire² framework.

WATSON'S OBJECTION

Watson's objection to Frankfurt's desire theory is an issue with the formation of higher orders of desires. Watson notes that Frankfurt's theory does not provide a mechanism for an agent to turn a desire into a volition. Frankfurt says that the difference between a desire and a volition is that an agent identifies with and tends to be moved to action by volitions. But this is rather vague. Frankfurt is not very clear on *how*, on what the method is by which desires are identified with and transformed into volitions, if there is even a method at all. Without such a method, it seems there is nothing to prevent an individual from simply forming infinitely higher levels of desire, never forming a volition and never acting. In fact, even with a process for changing desires into volitions, there is still the possibility of an agent failing to do this and instead just going on to form higher levels of desire *ad infinitum*. Thinking back to the new car example, suppose that the agent never formed her volition to either buy or not buy the car. Without forming a volition, the agent would not go on to act. Instead she could form third, fourth, fifth... infinitely higher levels of desire. Watson's objection is that without a method of identifying with desires and thereby forming volitions, or some other way of cutting off desire formation at some point, Frankfurt's desire framework dissolves into this infinite regress. An agent is stuck considering her desires and forming new ones indefinitely, never acting or otherwise coming to a resolution, of an agent continually considering and re-considering her

² Watson, Gary. "Free agency." *The Journal of Philosophy* (1975): 205-220.

desires.

In response to Watson's critique, Frankfurt³ all but admits that the outline of his theory was vague on the issue of volition-formation, and offers an allegorical explanation for how desires become volitions. Frankfurt claims volitions are born out of commitment to a desire in a manner similar to the way in which one commits to the answer to a math problem. When trying to solve an equation, one makes a calculation and arrives at a number. This initial outcome is like a first order desire. An individual could make a single calculation and take it to be the right answer (unquestioningly following one's first order desire). But more often than not an individual runs the calculation again to double check her first outcome, in case she made an error. Double checking is like reflecting upon a first order desire, and forming a second order desire. This may be enough for some individuals to conclude they have found the right answer, or to realize and correct an earlier mistake. Others, though, may go on to triple-check, quadruple-check, and so on. Theoretically, one could go on re-checking her calculation indefinitely, but one eventually gets to a point at which she believes she has the right answer. She comes to a point where her confidence in her conclusion is unwavering, and she believes that even if she were to go on indefinitely re-checking her answer, she would always arrive at this same result. So this then becomes the answer to which she is committed, and with which she goes forward. This is the same way in which an agent commits to a desire. The agent examines and even re-examines her desire until she reaches a point at which where she is confident. The desire then becomes a volition, upon which the agent acts. Thus, by this mechanism, Frankfurt asserts that his desire framework does not reduce to an infinite regression, as Watson suggested.

³ Frankfurt, Harry. "The Importance of What We Care About." *Synthese* 53, no. 2 (1982): 257-272.

I find Frankfurt's response here unsatisfying. Firstly, I do not think his analogy is a very good one. In assessing a math question, one is trying to find a right answer, the calculation is aiming at an objectively correct solution. The process of double-checking here is an attempt to rule out errors until one is confident she has the true answer (when the number she arrives at is the same each time she calculates it). It seems strange to say that in considering our desires, we are trying to find our objectively correct desire, aiming to rule out erroneous wants. Though I agree that agents may have a "true" desire - something she rationally wants, in the same way that the unwilling addict wants to overcome her addiction - and that it would be in the best interest of one's own satisfaction to determine that desire before acting, I do not think the process of doing so is parallel to that of solving an equation. The reasoning involved in considering a desire involves variables differently nuanced and complex than those involved in merely double-checking a basic math fact. Alleging the two are the same sort of process is an oversimplification of the detailed emotional and logical consideration that goes into aligning oneself with a desire.

Secondly, I do not see how Frankfurt's system really resolves the infinite regress problem. The only cutoff it offers for higher order desires comes when an agent forms a volition. Upon forming a volition, the agent ceases to form meaningful higher order desires. However, there is no guarantee that an agent will form a volition. One can easily imagine a case in which an agent never quite arrives at the level of unwavering confidence that Frankfurt describes, never forms a volition or is motivated to action. Just as Watson worries, it seems this agent would go on to form infinitely higher levels of desires.

In fact, Frankfurt acknowledges that the possibility of this situation, and responds with one of his claims about the nature of personhood. Frankfurt alleges that an agent who is not

capable of forming a volition is not a person. The ability to reason about one's own desires, and to identify them with one's will is essential to being a person, a capability that sets persons apart from other creatures. Frankfurt refers to an individual lacking these abilities as a "wanton," and claims that in addition to lacking personhood, the wanton also lacks agency and a will. This response, however, does not really defend against Watson's criticism, as it does not eliminate the possibility of infinite regress in Frankfurt's framework. I think too that Frankfurt's response is unclear in a way that results in his claim being too strong. Frankfurt defines the wanton as someone who is unable to reflect on her desires and form volitions. But he is unclear whether one has to be consistently unable to form volitions, or if being unable to form a volition on merely one occasion is sufficient. Since individuals have many different desires throughout their lives, I can also imagine a situation in which an individual is able to form volitions the majority of the time, but is unable to do so in a few specific cases.

Suppose that an agent is usually able to form volitions; she manages to decide between buying a new car and not buying one, going to a party and going to bed early, going for a walk and gardening, and so on. Nine times out of ten, she is able to reflect upon her desires and identify which one is most aligned with her will. Other times, one time in ten, she is unable to come to identify with any of her desires, and is unable to act. It may be on something small, such as being unable to decide what to have for lunch, and being stuck in inaction until she ends up skipping lunch altogether. The point is that for the most part, the individual is able to reflect on her choices and form volitions, like a person with agency. But on a handful of occasions, she behaves as Watson alleges a wanton would. I agree that someone unable ever form even a single volition likely lacks agency, will, and personhood. However, it seems overly harsh to dismiss an

individual who occasionally acts as a wanton as altogether lacking agency and personhood. In light of my disagreement with Frankfurt's math analogy for volition-formation, his lack of an ultimate solution to the infinite regress problem, and his overly harsh treatment of indecisive agents, I am inclined to reject Frankfurt's model of desire.

WATSON'S FRAMEWORK

After detailing the flaws he finds with Frankfurt's desire theory, Watson offers a model of his own as an alternative. This is the theory of desire that I accept, and will move forward with. Rather than ordered levels of desire, Watson outlines three "systems" agents have, which play a role in motivation and desire formation. These systems are the valuation system, the motivational system, and the evaluation system. The evaluation system is where an agent "stands," so to speak: her particular viewpoint in making judgments about the world. An agent may have many of these, and her viewpoints need not be fully developed on every possible issue and subject. For example, part of an agent's viewpoint may include her moral views. She may have one moral viewpoint that is consequentialist - believing, roughly, that the good of an action should be evaluated based on its outcome. But the same agent may simultaneously have another moral view that is deontological - believing that the good of an action should be evaluated by adherence to moral rules and duties. These viewpoints may not be fully formed, as an agent may be uncertain about the morality of a particular case, or set of cases. In other words, an agent could have the viewpoint that the right action is one that follows moral rules and fulfills moral duties, but she could be unsure whether something like euthanasia is morally permissible. The agent clearly has a moral viewpoint (or viewpoints) but it is not fully formed, resulting in

uncertainty about euthanasia cases.

An agent's valuational system, as the name implies, is an agent's system of values. It consists of what the agent takes to be important, and the degree of that importance. Though this system interacts with an agent's evaluation system, it is distinct from the evaluation system. For example, an agent may have a moral viewpoint, but not take morality to be of particular importance. The agent's moral leanings would be part of her evaluation system, while the importance (or lack thereof) placed on what that viewpoint contains (morality) is part of their valuational system. An agent's motivational system, then, is what brings an agent to act. Though the motivational system is often in agreement with an agent's valuational system, this may not always be the case, as they are two separate systems.

As discussed, an agent may not value morality in spite of having a moral viewpoint. Nevertheless, she may act morally because she is motivated to do so, perhaps by some external factor. External factors would include things such as social pressure from peers and society as a whole to act in an acceptable, moral way, or from a system (such as a legal system, though morality and legality may not always overlap) whereby the agent is and punished for immoral behavior. With such factors in place, an agent may act morally because she knows doing so will gain her approval from her peers, while acting immorally will result in disapproval from her peers. The agent then acts morally because she values the acceptance of her peers, rather than valuing morality itself.

Responding to Frankfurt's view, Watson holds that unfree actions result from an agent's motivational and valuational systems being in disagreement on a particular point. As a result, an agent may act upon a desire which is her strongest, but not her most valued. Borrowing again

Frankfurt's case of the unwilling addict, we may apply Watson's theory of desire to illustrate this point. What Frankfurt described as the unwilling addict's second order desire/volition to break her addiction becomes, in Watson's framework, part of the agent's valuational system. Suppose that in the unwilling addict's evaluation system, the unwilling addict has a viewpoint that being addicted to drugs is bad - whether it be based upon morals, health, etc. The unwilling addict's valuational system places importance on being moral, healthy, etc., and thus places a high value on not being addicted to drugs. Unfortunately, her motivational system does not always (save for when she attempts to quit, but ultimately fails) match her valuational system - such as when she gives in to the stronger desire to take drugs over the most valued desire to not take drugs - the agent is unfree. This disparity between the two systems of desire can arise for multiple reasons. For the unwilling addict, the agent's motivational system is being influenced by what would traditionally be thought of as the agent's physical and psychological addiction to the drugs. This addiction's influence on her motivational system is what causes the disagreement between the agent's valuation and motivational systems. However, lack of agreement between systems can also arise from momentary impulses - such as a sudden craving for milkshakes, or the angry, fleeting impulse to punch one's boss in the face - as well as other uncontrollable physical urges. In such cases, the agent is unwilling to fulfill the desire she most wants fulfilled - the thing she most values - as a result of this misalignment of her systems.

So just as in Frankfurt's model, the case of the unwilling addict is one in which the agent is unfree, as she is unable to act on the desire she most wishes. It seems that in this case the desire for the drug is irrational; it would be irrational to have a desire that conflicts with one's values. This suggests that maybe such desires (those which conflict with one's values) are

beyond an agent's control: why would an agent choose an irrational desire that would undermine her freedom? Additionally, it seems that the agent's attempts and rational desire to rid herself of her addiction are further evidence for the claim that the agent's desire for drugs is beyond her control. That being the case, the agent should therefore not be responsible for them.

Both Frankfurt's model and Watson's model allow for cases in which an agent has desires for which she is not responsible. Since one of my goals is to show how an agent may not be responsible for some of her desires, it seems that the two models should be of equal value to me. However, it would be in the best interest of this argument to use the strongest model as a foundation on which to build. Having already rejected Frankfurt's theory in light of Watson's criticism, it should be clear that I take Watson's view to be the stronger of the two. In addition to avoiding the objections to which Frankfurt's theory is subject, Watson's theory also rings truer to me in terms of how desire are actually formulated in the psyche. It is for these reasons that I will use Watson's formulation as my model of desire formation.

Returning now to the moral responsibility for desires, although Watson does not specifically discuss moral responsibility, it seems to me that his theory allows for a set of cases in which agents ought not be held responsible for their desires. Cases in which an agent's motivational system does not match with her valuation system are cases in which Watson says an agent is unfree, unable to get what she wants. Watson holds that what an agent really wants is that which she values, but her motivational system sometimes gets in the way of that goal. Watson notes that the valuation system is rational, basing the values it assigns on reason and logic, while the motivational system is independent of this and arational. So when an agent's motivational system hinders her ability to obtain that which she values, then the agent's actions

are both unfree and arational. This lack of freedom and rationality are elements which should absolve an agent of moral responsibility, as she could not have chosen to do (or desire) otherwise. So it seems that although Watson does not specifically address responsibility for desires, his theory is constructed in a way that specifically points out a set of cases in which an agent is not morally responsible for her desires.

Naturally, the cases in which an agent is unfree do not constitute all cases. In instances where an agent's motivational and valuation systems do match, the agent is free and therefore responsible for her desires. Because an agent's values are formed freely and rationally, the agent has an inherent responsibility for them. When desires match the values an agent has, she is responsible in turn for those desires because they correspond to the values which the agent chose freely and rationally.

Having accepted Watson's theory as my model for desires, I can conclude that although an agent is responsible for some of her desires, there is also a substantial class of cases in which an agent is not responsible for her desires. When an agent is unfree, and her motivational desires do not match her values, the agent is then not responsible for those desires. Going forward, I will attempt to use this as a foundation to draw an analogy between desires and aesthetic judgment.

CHAPTER 2 GOALS AND PRELIMINARIES

My aim in this chapter is to explain the relevant similarity between desires and aesthetic tastes. Specifically, I contend that the two are alike in that both are things over which agents cannot exercise control, and therefore cannot be held responsible for. In the previous chapter I outlined a theory of desires in order to explain how some desires may be arational and thus beyond an agent's control. I also explained that the reason some desires are beyond an agent's control is because they are arational - without reason - which means that the agent cannot choose whether or not have the desire. Without the freedom to make this choice, the agent cannot be held morally responsible for her desire. For this chapter, I take up the debate as to whether "aesthetic reasons" exist, in order to illustrate how aesthetic judgments may be analogous to desires. The aesthetic reasons debate addresses, roughly, whether aesthetic judgments are rational, or arational - like desires. If aesthetic evaluations are arational like desires, then this relevant similarity would mean that agents do not have control over their aesthetic judgments for the same reason they do not have control over their desires. Therefore, just as they cannot be held responsible for their desires, agents could not be held responsible for their aesthetic judgments either.

Rationality in aesthetic judgments takes the form of normalized aesthetic rules, which would form reasoned bases for aesthetic judgments. If such rules do indeed exist, it would demonstrate that aesthetic judgments are responsive to and governed by logic and rationality. Functionally, this would mean that an agent uses a normative set of aesthetic rules to logically determine whether they find an aesthetic work to be valuable and enjoyable. If aesthetic judgments do function in such a way, then they are utterly unlike desires, and their rationality

would suggest that agents are responsible for their aesthetic judgments. But if aesthetic reasons do not exist, then aesthetic judgments are arational, analogously to desires, and therefore something for which agents are not morally responsible.

Aesthetic rules, should they exist, would be much like the normative rules seen in ethics.

An example rule may look something like this:

“Possessing a quality, X, will always have an effect, Y, on the aesthetic value of a work.”

or;

“Possessing smooth lines will always have a positive effect on the aesthetic value of a work.”

As for the exact content and structure of these rules, there is a great deal of uncertainty. What qualities of works are generalizable? Does each quality have only one effect on aesthetic value (ex: smooth lines always add to aesthetic value, and never detract) or is there variability from cases to case (ex: smooth lines sometimes add to aesthetic value, and sometimes detract)? If there is such variability, then how can the qualities in question really be thought of as generalizable in the first place? These intricacies and more are what make up the details of the aesthetic reasons debate.

There are many individual positions to the aesthetic reasons debate, which I think can be grouped into three rough categories. I will address each of them in turn, however I feel it necessary to first make a distinction. As previously stated, the aesthetic reasons debate focuses on whether generalizable rules provide a rationale for aesthetic judgments. But aesthetic judgments are not my sole focus in this thesis. My discussion also focuses on what I refer to as “aesthetic likings.” The difference between aesthetic judgments and aesthetic likings can be roughly thought of as a difference between subjective personal opinion, and a more universal

assessment of a work's aesthetic value. The commonly accepted understanding of "universal" aesthetic judgments is derived from the work of Immanuel Kant⁴. Kant takes aesthetic judgments to be both subjective and universal. They are subjective in that judging something to be aesthetically good (or bad) results from receiving pleasure (or lack thereof) from experiencing an aesthetic work. The pleasure derived from aesthetic goodness⁵ is a very particular kind of pleasure. Aesthetic pleasure is different from pleasures of the body, senses, or perceptions. Rather than a satiation of a bodily desire, or the enjoyment of a particularly good meal, aesthetic pleasure is the feeling that a work stirs within an agent. The goodness of an aesthetic work draws forward a feeling of pleasure and contentment within the viewer, not merely consisting of, but maybe caused by, a specific sensory or perceptual input. Another significant feature of this pleasure is that it is free of desire. It does not entail, arise from, or create a desire for the object of aesthetic appreciation. Though it is a personal pleasure, it is not a self-interested one. My understanding of the way this pleasure works in practice is that upon experiencing an aesthetically good work, the viewer has a sense of enjoyment that leaves them fulfilled, and content to enjoy the work for the sake of the work itself. Though not explicitly stated, I suspect too that the viewer would also feel a sense of reverence toward such a work, as though the experience were a special gift. This feeling is what results in a positive aesthetic judgment of a work.

⁴ Zangwill, Nick. "Aesthetic Judgment." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Stanford University. February 28, 2003. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aesthetic-judgment/>.

⁵ Kant actually refers to beauty, but I have substituted "aesthetic goodness" as it seems clear to me that the value of an aesthetic work (which aesthetic judgments are about) can be derived from attributes other than just beauty. The sublimity of a work, for example, is another such quality.

Although this pleasure sounds like a highly individual experience, it is also normative in that we, as admirers of aesthetically good works, expect others to derive aesthetic pleasure from the same things we do. There is a tendency to think of others as wrong or mistaken when they do not recognize the aesthetic goodness we see in a work. This is because we take ourselves to see a genuine goodness in a work, our judgment is correct and any one else with correct judgment and taste ought to share our evaluation. Along with this comes, of course, the idea of correct and incorrect judgments. Consider two people who look at the same painting, but have completely opposite judgments. One says the painting is beautiful and aesthetically valuable, while the other says the painting is neither of those things. Clearly the two cannot both be right, as their judgments are mutually exclusive. It must be the case that one of them has better perceived and judged the painting. In this way, aesthetic judgments are like an attempt at making what I take to be an objective assessment of a work's aesthetic value. Assessments of this kind are the subject of theories of aesthetic reason.

However, they are not the only sort of judgments I wish to discuss. In the practice of appreciating aesthetic works, I think there is a difference between aesthetic judgments of the Kantian variety, and another set of more personal, non-universal judgments. This other category of judgments includes cases in which a viewer experiences a work and enjoys it, but recognizes that it is not a beautiful or aesthetically valuable work according to the "universal" standards of beauty and aesthetic value. In such cases the agent would neither require nor expect others to have the same judgments they do, because they would not take their judgment to be necessarily correct. This is what I think of as a mere liking, where the viewer enjoys the aesthetic work without judging its objective aesthetic value. While aesthetic judgments result from a high sense

of self-disinterested pleasure, likings form a more basic, self-interested enjoyment. In this chapter I wish to address both aesthetic judgments in the more Kantian sense, as well as the “mere likings” of aesthetic works.

Since theories of aesthetic reasons aim to explore a rationality behind the more Kantian aesthetic judgments, there is a question as to whether theories of aesthetic reason would extend to mere likings. The answer I want to give to this question relies on reasoning from some of the aesthetic reason theories I will cover in the following section, so for this reason I will put aside question about aesthetic likings for now and return to it at the end of this chapter.

There are several different takes on the aesthetic reasons debate, but I think each of these can be, as stated earlier, grouped into three categories. The first position is the view that aesthetic reasons do not exist. This view is held by Arnold Isenberg and Stuart Hampshire, both of whose arguments I will detail. The second position is the opposing view that aesthetic reasons do exist. This position is argued by Marcia Eaton - who responds directly to Hampshire’s work - and Monroe Beardsley. Eaton uses cases of what she calls “aesthetic dilemmas” to support her position, while Beardsley explains his view by way of defending his theory on the functioning of aesthetic reasons. Finally there is what I take to be an intermediate position. This is held by Frank Sibley, who argues that although there may be something like aesthetic reasons, they are not rule based and therefore not available to be used in rationalizing aesthetic judgments. I will elaborate on each of these positions in turn, analyze each position, then return to the case of aesthetic likings, and finally close the chapter with my conclusion on the overall debate.

THE CASE AGAINST AESTHETIC REASONS

One argument against the existence of aesthetic reasons comes from Arnold Isenberg as he examines art criticism.⁶ He notes that art criticism arguments are not structured quite like other arguments, and takes their nature to be demonstrative of the lack of aesthetic rules.

Isenberg considers ethical arguments as a parallel. In ethics one may argue that an agent's action (X) is good (or bad) because it has the outcome (Y) of making a lot of people happy. For example, an agent's action of stealing from the rich to give to the poor may be considered to be a morally good action because it has the outcome of making a lot of people (the poor) happy, and better off than they were before. This argument relies on the general ethical rule that making people happy is, usually, an outcome that adds to the ethical goodness of an action.⁷ So the general structure of an ethical argument is that there is a verdict or value judgment, followed by a reason for the judgment, and then an appeal to a general rule or norm. For the ethical case the verdict or value judgment is that the action in question was good, the reason it was good is that it made people happy and better off, and the norm is that making people happy and better off is generally good. Critical arguments seem to follow this form too, Isenberg states, but this is merely an appearance. Art critics seem to make value judgments on a particular work - aesthetically good, or bad - provide a reason - because the work contains feature X - and attempt to justify this with a generalization - feature X adds to the value of aesthetic works. However, there is more to this than there may appear.

⁶ Isenberg, Arnold. "Critical Communication." *The Philosophical Review* (1949): 330-344.

⁷ Of course, there are often more factors to consider in such cases - the presence of one generally good feature does not alone determine the overall morality of the case. However, for the sake of explanation, I will forgo complexity for the sake of understanding.

As an example, Isenberg looks at a piece of criticism which focuses on the “wavelike contour” of a painting titled *The Burial of Count Orgaz*. The argument looks something like this: “*The Burial of Count Orgaz* is a good painting (in part) because it possesses a wavelike contour, which adds to the aesthetic value of the painting.”

Here the verdict is that the work in question, *The Burial of Count Orgaz*, is aesthetically good.

The reason is that it possesses this feature of a “wavelike contour.” Accordingly, the norm this argument rests on is that wavelike contours are features that generally add to the aesthetic value of a work. However, this is where critical arguments start to differ from their ethical counterparts. In the ethical argument outlined earlier the supporting factor - the outcome of making people happy - referred to both the specific instance of stealing from the rich and giving to the poor to make people happy, as well as other non-specific scenarios in which people are made happy. The phrase is equally applicable to both the specific case, as well as the general set of actions and outcomes of making people happy. In the aesthetic criticism argument the factor discussed is the “wavelike contour.” Although the phrase “wavelike contour” can refer to a general type - “wavelike contours” as a set of shapes, this is not what the art critic is referring to in their argument. The art critic is referring not to the general idea of wavelike contours, or even necessarily to the particular wavelike contour in *The Burial of Count Orgaz*, rather the critic is referring to the aesthetic experience of a particular part of the painting. The phrase “wavelike contour” is simply a stand-in for a specific section of the painting. Using the phrase “wavelike contour” just happens, almost incidentally, to be the best way to describe the specific part of the painting’s visual experience. So the norm that the critic seems to be referring to is not a claim about the aesthetic value of wavelike contours, as the critic is not referring to the set of wavelike

contours as a whole. Instead, the critic is saying that this particular visual experience is an aesthetically good one, which adds to the aesthetic value of the painting. The critic's argument then ends up being something that really should look more like this:

"The Burial of Count Orgaz is a good painting because the visual experience of this particular section of the painting, best described as a wavelike contour, is an aesthetically good one which adds to the value of the painting."

This is quite different from the structure of the ethical argument. In spite of how it first may appear, the critic's argument does not rely on a generalized rule. This is because the features in an aesthetic work are not generalizable; they are highly specific experiences that exist only in the works in question. In a critical argument, the critic is not attempting to make any statements about the value of "wavelike contours" (or whatever relevant features the critic may be discussing) as a whole, but rather the value of a particular experience. Critical arguments do not persuade readers with appeals to logical norms, but guide the reader's attention in hopes that the reader is able to have the same experience the critic has had. It is only with this experience that the critic can convince a reader of the aesthetic value - or lack thereof, depending on the case - of a piece of art. Given the specificity of these aesthetic experiences, not only is the critic not attempting to appeal to general aesthetic rules, but such aesthetic rules could not exist. There is simply no way to generalize these highly variable aesthetic experiences, which means that there can be no aesthetic rules. Rather than being rule-based, Isenberg argues that aesthetic value is experience-based.

Though Isenberg's argument looks specifically at art criticism as an example for explaining the impossibility of aesthetic "reasoning," even outside of art criticism the artistic

merit of a work is so reliant on experience that it seems there indeed cannot be any generalizable aesthetic rules. The question then is whether art is actually as reliant on specificity and experience as Isenberg's account implies. Art criticism is one example that fits with Isenberg's understanding of the nature of artistic value. This account would also serve to explain why an individual artistic element seems to have a positive effect on one work, but a negative effect on another. For example, the use of poor grammar and spelling seems to add to Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, while it would certainly detract from a work such as F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. Of course, the discrepancy between the value of the elements in these two works could simply be due to there being no generalizable rule about the elements of spelling and grammar in particular, or it could be that the rule is one such that it allows for grammar and spelling to have both negative and positive effects - something which is allowed for in a view I will later address. But one can think of endless other examples to add to the one I have mentioned, and it is likely that for nearly every feature of art, one can find both a case in which the feature adds value, and a case in which it reduces value. I think these phenomena would be consistent with the fact of generalizable aesthetic rules simply not existing. Though, admittedly, that fact is not itself enough to conclude that Isenberg is correct about the nature of art, and that general aesthetic rules do not exist.

To add to the case against general aesthetic rules, there is an argument from Stuart Hampshire.⁸ Going perhaps farther than Isenberg, Hampshire argues that art cannot have reasoning because art is gratuitous by nature. Again, Hampshire contrasts ethics and aesthetics.

⁸ Hampshire, Stuart. "Logic and Appreciation." *Aesthetics and Language* (1954): 161-9.

In ethics one looks to answer a question or solve a problem. To solve a problem or answer a question - or attempt to do either of these things - is obligatory. So ethics is obligatory. But a work of art, especially when viewed through a detached, purely aesthetic lens, provides no solution, nor any answer. A purely aesthetic piece has no obligation. In this way, aesthetics has no practical purpose: it is “gratuitous,” as Hampshire describes it. Ethics, however, does have a practical purpose, and with this comes obligation. When faced with an ethical issue one is obligated, by moral imperatives among other things, to act. In fact, action is unavoidable in ethical, and other action-based situations, as even abstaining from acting is an action in and of itself. This is not so with aesthetics, because aesthetics is based on appreciation rather than action. Additionally in ethics, since multiple actions offer a potential solution to a single problem, there is a need - an obligation - to determine which of them is the most effective, most morally sound method.

For example, say you explicitly promise your friend Mark that you will attend an event of his. You are also invited to a party held by your friend Sarah. Later you realize - having already made your promise to Mark - that the events fall on the same day, at the same time. Since it will be impossible to attend both events at once, you will have to choose between them. You promised Mark you would attend his event, but Sarah’s party sounds like it will be much more fun and you would prefer to attend that event. This dilemma has (at least) three actions that serve as possible solutions. You could

A) Attend Mark’s event, keeping your promise to him;

B) Attend Sarah’s party because it will be more fun;

or

C) attend neither event.

Note here that even refusing to choose between the two events is certainly an option, but that in and of itself constitutes an action. So it is impossible not to act in this situation. In choosing one of these courses of actions over the others, one would want to be rational. Hampshire holds that to be irrational is to either give no reasons at all, or to always give different reasons, even in similar cases. So in order to make a rational choice in favor of one of the above courses of action, one must give reasons that are consistent with reasons given in similar situations. This is where general rules of ethics become relevant. A set of ethical rules helps to ensure that an agent's reasoning will be consistent in similar cases. For these cases, one might take a rule that looks something like this: "It is important to keep your promises." as a rationale for choosing option A - attending Mark's event in order to keep your promise - over options B and C. Although one of these other two options may be more enjoyable, option A is rationally the morally superior choice. Here we can see that the need for generalizable rules arises out of an obligation to choose between different options.

However, this does not happen in aesthetics. Since works of art do not have any obligation - they do not provide answers or solutions - it makes no sense to ask which of them does so "best." There is no need to select one work of art to appreciate at the exclusion of all others; one can enjoy multiple works. Without the need to choose between art works, aesthetic has no need for generalized rules.

Of course it is possible - and I think frequently demonstrated in life - to prefer one work of art over another. But in doing so one does not, and cannot, give reasons. According to

Hampshire, this is because aesthetics lacks generalized rules, again, in part because it does not have the same level of obligation as ethics. However, there are a few other salient differences between ethics and aesthetics that Hampshire finds to further explain why aesthetics lacks general rules. For one, although it makes sense to find some art works flawed, it is clear that aesthetic criticism does not function in the same way that ethical criticism does. An ethical critique would be that the agent did not take best course of action in the situation in question. The critic often offers a suggestion as to what the agent could have done in order to better solve the ethical problem. The same reasoning does not make sense in the context of aesthetic criticism. It makes no sense to ask what an artist could have done differently to solve the problem, as the artist has no problem to solve.

Additionally, the questions or puzzles in ethical case provide a reason for comparing them to one another. Different courses of action are evaluated and judged against each other because they are attempting to provide solutions for the same, or similar problems. Since art works not aim to provide answers, there is no “question” that can be used as a reason to compare them to each other. To compare art works to each other - or to attempt to, in a manner similar to that of comparing ethical courses of action - goes against the very nature of aesthetic appreciation. Recall that Hampshire thinks looking at something purely aesthetically, appreciating art for art’s sake, entails looking at it without considering its context. Other works would constitute context; therefore Hampshire holds that other art works should not be considered in aesthetic evaluation. Intuitively, I think this point seems right, though perhaps for reasons other than those Hampshire cites. It seems reasonable to say that the value of one art work does not affect the value of another. Each art work is its own independent work. The value

of one does not impact the other; the value of *Starry Night* does not impact the value of the *Mona Lisa*.

Lastly, Hampshire proposes that one of the purposes of using generalized rules is for replicability. Using general rules and rational reasons, an agent can evaluate, and choose to replicated good moral behavior. But replication is not something art aims to do. In ethics an “original” good action and a mimicked good action are both good. But, Hampshire points out, the same cannot be said for art works.

THE CASE FOR AESTHETIC REASONS

Though she does not directly address Hampshire’s arguments, it is in response to one of Hampshire’s claims and his conclusion that Eaton makes her argument in favor of the existence of aesthetic reasons.⁹ In addition to trying to refute the existence of aesthetic rules, Hampshire also states that there are no aesthetic obligations. This is an assessment with which Eaton disagrees. Eaton notes that in ethics, moral dilemmas occur in situations where two moral obligations conflict with one another. Ethical obligations result from a set of generalized ethical rules; the problem in a moral dilemma comes down to deciding which rule is most important to follow in a situation where two or more rules conflict. The existence of moral dilemmas seems to entail the existence of ethical rules, as the existence of moral dilemmas is directly caused by ethical rules. So, similarly, Eaton reasons, if there are aesthetic dilemmas, there would also have to be generalizable aesthetic rules. Eaton thinks that there are examples of aesthetic dilemmas, and she details a few examples in order to try to argue for the existence of aesthetic rules.

⁹ Eaton, Marcia Muelder. "Aesthetic Obligations." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 66, no. 1 (2008): 1-9.

One case, or rather, set of cases, Eaton discusses is the decisions an artist makes in telling stories. In works of art - literature, film, music - an artist may take some liberties in storytelling for the sake of the work's aesthetic value. Even in cases where the work is supposed to depict a factual event, information will be added, removed, or reworked for the purpose of making an art work more aesthetically appealing. This presents a sort of aesthetic-moral dilemma where aesthetics are in conflict with moral obligations. There is, Eaton argues, an aesthetic obligation to make a work as aesthetically valuable as possible, just as there is a moral obligation to be truthful. In some cases, the aesthetic obligation is chosen over the moral one, and in other cases the opposite is true. While Eaton concedes that moral obligations are most often stronger than aesthetic ones, she believes that there are some cases in which one ought to fulfill aesthetic obligations even over moral obligations.

For example, imagine a film that aims to be both aesthetically pleasing, and to motivate its audience to donate to charity. A real-world example of a philanthropist is chosen to be the protagonist of this film. The film is set to play out like a biopic of the philanthropist's life, highlighting how beautiful and enjoyable her life was because she was so generous. However, in order to maximize the film's aesthetic value, the filmmakers elect to dramatize some scenes to make them even more beautiful, as well as to leave out some unsavory details of the philanthropist's life. These "details" are somewhat immoral activities in which the real life philanthropist engaged. In eliminating these details, the film is failing in its moral obligation to be truthful, and causing viewers to sympathize and align themselves with the protagonist more than they would if the film contained these morally unsavory elements. However, the immoral actions the film is omitting are not egregious moral failings, or wrongs committed on the part of

the protagonist. But they are something to which the filmmakers think the audience would have a significant negative reaction, thus detracting from the film's artistic merit, and thereby lessening its positive moral impact. I imagine this is the sort of case in which Eaton would say that the aesthetic obligation should be chosen over the moral one, as the amount of aesthetic good that will be done seems as though it will outweigh the amount of moral bad. Though some of these aesthetic obligations may be reducible to moral obligations, she thinks there are cases in which aesthetic obligations are clear. For example, Eaton proposes that one general aesthetic rule could be that in telling a story one has a moral obligation to make the story as aesthetically valuable as possible.

Another aesthetic dilemma Eaton details is what she calls the burning museum case. The scenario is as follows: an art museum has caught fire. Among the exhibits in this museum are two incredibly famous and aesthetically valuable paintings. Unfortunately, there is only time to save one of these paintings; the other will be destroyed in the fire. One has to decide which of these paintings to save. It happens that both paintings are equal in terms of their moral value, so it seems that one's decisions ought to be based on which painting is of higher aesthetic value, the better painting *qua* art. This decision seems to be an example of an aesthetic dilemma. Parallel to an ethical dilemma, the solution to the case lies in deciding which of the two aesthetic works is more imperative to save. Here, Eaton argues, one is obligated to save the aesthetically better painting: an aesthetic obligation.

The presence of these aesthetic obligations, illustrated in the above examples, necessarily entails, as Eaton earlier states, the existence of generalizable aesthetic rules. Thus it is on the merit of these cases of aesthetic obligations that Eaton concludes there must in fact be some

universal, generalized rules of aesthetics.

Though he shares Eaton's conclusion, Beardsley argues for the existence of aesthetic reasons in a very different manner.¹⁰ Instead of resting his case on the existence of "aesthetic dilemmas," Beardsley chooses to bring up and respond to potential objections to his theory, which he calls the "General Criterion Theory." Beardsley's General Criterion Theory states that there exists a set of aesthetic elements which can be generalized as either good or bad, and correspondingly either add or subtract value from a work of art which possesses them. Beardsley is a little obscure on what exactly he takes these traits to be, but the significance lies not in what the exact traits are, but rather their mere existence. The existence of generalizable aesthetic rules, as I have discussed, would mean that there is indeed rational reasoning underlying aesthetic judgments or criticisms. Beardsley refers to those who deny the existence of aesthetic reasons as "critical skeptics," and considers four objections such an individual would likely make against his General Criterion Theory.

The first objection Beardsley considers is that there is no one necessary and sufficient element for goodness, even in any individual art category. In other words, there is no one aesthetic feature that would automatically make a work of art good as art. For example, say that balance was an element that was necessary and sufficient for a work of art to be good. Were that the case, then any work of art that had balance as one of its qualities would automatically be judged to be a good work of art, regardless of whatever other properties it may or may not possess. Or, perhaps the trait was only applicable to a specific medium or genre of art. In that

¹⁰ Beardsley, Monroe. "On the Generality of Critical Reasons." *The Journal of Philosophy* 59, no. 18 (1962): 477-86.

case, having balance may only serve to make any painting that has it a good painting, whereas a novel with balance would not automatically be a good novel. Or maybe balance made for a good surrealist work, but not for a good portrait. But as it stands, no such quality seems to exist, whether one is looking at individual genres and mediums, or at art as a whole. This is the first objection.

Beardsley agrees that the point the objection raises is true; however that fact is not mutually exclusive with his theory. He makes note of an important clarification: having generalizable aesthetic rules does not mean having a single rule, or trait, that can generalize to all cases. This is seen in ethics as well. Ethical theories have many rules, and the rule to which one should defer may depend upon the case. A moral theory may hold the rule that it is wrong to lie. In most cases when one has to choose between lying and telling the truth, one ought to defer to the rule that it is wrong to lie. But if a murderer comes to the door looking for the friend one is harboring in the attic, one should not defer to the lying rule.¹¹ Instead it would be better to defer to the rule that it is wrong to let someone be harmed or murdered. So it can be seen that different cases call for different responses in order to be morally correct. The rule that lying is wrong is not generalizable to every case; there are cases in which telling the truth does not automatically mean one has acted morally. The same is true of aesthetic rules: no one rule generalizes to every case.

The second objection Beardsley considers is the fact that there are examples in which two good features in a single work seem to make each other bad. Imagine, as an example, a novel

¹¹ Kant, Immanuel. "On a Supposed Right to Lie from Altruistic Motives." *Critique of Practical Reason and Other Writings* (1949): 346-350.

that has flawed characters, and a positive moral message. Flawed characters are generally good features of novels, as they are realistic, more relatable to the audience, and their flaws often serve as metaphors. Positive moral messages are also good elements for a novel, as the spreading of positive moral messages is itself good. However, these two features may conflict in a particular novel. The flawed characters might make the moral message more difficult to understand, or even undermine the message all together. Likewise, the moral message may conflict with the characters' flaws, suddenly minimizing or harshly condemning them. So although the work possesses two good features, its value is not what one would expect for a work with two good features. How can the value of a good trait suddenly reverse to become a bad trait? This is in the presence of another good trait, no less. It seems counterintuitive; two positive traits should make for a work with twice the value.

Beardsley, again, acknowledges that this interaction of traits may indeed happen. But this possibility, like that of the first objection, is not mutually exclusive with his General Criterion Theory. He holds that the General Criterion Theory allows for this when one considers that two completely opposite, generally good elements - for example, humor and tragedy - may be used together in a way that makes them interact to both appear less effective. Contrary to the way it may seem, it is not that the two qualities are changing their value, rather the two qualities retain their value, but it is their *interaction* that serves to detract from the work's overall value.

Objections three and four under Beardsley's consideration, and his responses to them, are very similar. The difference between them is subtle. Both objections allege that a given aesthetic quality seems subject to change. The third objection notes that qualities seem subject to change based on context, while the fourth points out that they are also subject to change in different

individual art works. The idea behind both of these objections is that if an individual feature is subject to change based on context, or individual work, how can this be compatible with the General Criterion Theory? This is a question touched upon earlier by my discussion of Isenberg. If aesthetic elements are subject to such variability, then it seems they are not generalizable at all. To say that the value of a trait depends on its context and the work it is found in seems no different than saying that each art work must be evaluated individually (as Isenberg concludes), because generalized standards do not exist.

Beardsley's response to these objections is, as with the earlier objections, to explain how his General Criterion Theory can account for these things which appear to be evidence against his view. In the case of aesthetic features being variable by context, Beardsley explains that this can be accounted for by the fact that different elements of a work interact with each other. If a given feature seems to have a positive effect in one context, but a negative effect in the next, this must be because of an interaction between the feature in question and another feature of a work. For example, if balance - a trait that the general rules say is good - appears to have a positive effect in context A, but a negative effect in context B, it is not that balance, the trait, is changing in value. Rather, as was explained with the second objection Beardsley considered, it must be that in one of the contexts, either A or B (in this case B, since it is the context in which balance appears to defy the general rule), there is another feature with which balance interacts. That interaction between balance and the other features is what really causes the difference between the value of the two contexts, not the trait itself.

Similarly, in the case where the value of a trait appears to depend upon the individual work in which it is found, it is not truly due to the value of the trait changing. Beardsley posits

that some generalizable features must be subordinate to others in such a way that an otherwise good feature can become a flaw when it hinders an aesthetically superior good feature. For example, think of colorfulness and balance as two aesthetic features. Suppose that both of these - balance and colorfulness - are considered good features under the general aesthetic rules. However, balance is a much more important feature than colorfulness; so colorfulness must also be subordinate to balance. Now imagine an artwork, titled Piece E, which possesses both balance and colorfulness. Suppose colorfulness fails to be subordinate to balance in Piece E. Rather than being an additional, but lesser, positive feature of the work, the colorfulness quality overtakes and disrupts the balance of the work. By failing to follow the generalization that balance supersedes colorfulness, the colorfulness quality of the work is no longer a good feature, but a flaw in the work. So it is not that the value of a given trait is variable to the individual work in which it is found. Instead, whether a trait is good or bad depends upon its interactions with other key traits in the work. It is that interaction that affects the trait's value to the work as a whole.

The subordination of some aesthetic traits for others is, Beardsley concludes, another important element to his General Criterion Theory. Adding these into the earlier formulation of his theory, Beardsley's General Criterion Theory can be summarily defined as:

There exists a set of aesthetic elements which can be generalized as either good or bad. Good traits are subdivided into two categories: primary positive criteria, and secondary positive criteria. Primary positive criteria are those traits which their addition or increase (without the decrease of other positive criteria) will always add to the value of an aesthetic work. Secondary positive criteria are those which their addition or increase will always increase a primary positive

criteria. These three kinds of traits (primary positive, secondary positive, and negative) and their interactions correspondingly either add or subtract value for a work of art which possesses them.

AN INTERMEDIATE VIEW

Finally there is a view that I do not think firmly falls within either of the two categories I have discussed. This is the view of Frank Sibley.¹² Rather than asserting that there either are or are not general rules governing aesthetic judgments, Sibley suggests there may be a relationship between lower and higher level properties of art works - between aesthetic qualities and the overall value of a work - that does not quite reach the level of what could be thought of as a rule. In other words, there is a relationship between aesthetic qualities and the value of an aesthetic work, but the relationship is not one that could be quantified by something as strong and cohesive as rules. The relationship Sibley proposes is more tenuous than the relationship between ethical rules and ethical goods. Sibley also suggests that aesthetic properties are not just entities in themselves, but are made up of and dependent upon more basic, non-aesthetic properties. For example, balance is an aesthetic property. But what really is "balance?" To what does it refer? It seems that it refers to a collection of more basic attributes. We may say that a work, like a painting, is balanced when it has figures of roughly the same number and shape on either half, were it to be divided. The distribution and size of figures are non-aesthetic properties that seem to make up, in part, the aesthetic concept of balance. However, it is not clear that balance can simply be reduced to these attributes. Additionally, the vague explanation as to how these concepts make the aesthetic quality of balance is demonstrative of the way in which aesthetic

¹² Sibley, Frank. "Aesthetic Concepts." *The Philosophical Review* 68, no. 4 (1959): 421-50.

qualities seem to defy being formulated into rules. There is no reliable way of relating non-aesthetic properties to aesthetic properties in such a way that one can determine a work's aesthetic properties by examining its non-aesthetic properties. When looking at the size and distribution of shapes in a painting, one cannot necessarily conclude that the painting in question is balanced. The fact that it would be impossible to look at a work's non-aesthetic traits and determine its aesthetic traits is demonstrative of the way in which aesthetic qualities seem to defy being formulated into rules. From this it seems that although there is a relationship between aesthetic traits and artistic value, it cannot be put into rules and thus cannot be used for reasoning. Though Sibley's view does not deny the existence of the relationship that aesthetic rules intend to explain, the inability of this relationship to be used in rationalizing aesthetic judgments means that under Sibley's view, there effectively is no relationship between aesthetic qualities and artistic value. Or, at least, any such relationship is relatively insignificant. Given this conclusion, it seems that there is a good argument for considering Sibley's view to be one that denies aesthetic rules. However, since Sibley does not deny the relationship that aesthetic rules attempt to quantify, I consider the theory to be in a third category of its own.

MY ANALYSIS: EATON

Looking closely at Eaton's view, I think her case for the existence of aesthetic dilemmas is not a very strong one. It seems to me that each of Eaton's examples of "aesthetic" obligations are in fact reducible to moral obligations. As it stands, Eaton's first set of cases is not a pure aesthetic dilemma. An aesthetic dilemma would be a case in which two aesthetic obligations are in conflict. But in Eaton's storytelling cases, there is an aesthetic obligation in conflict with a moral obligation, which means that the dilemma is not purely aesthetic. Even so, Eaton's

illustration argues that there is certainly an aesthetic obligation to be considered. But rather than an aesthetic obligation, it seems these cases of choosing between moral (truth) and aesthetic (beauty) can be reduced to a simple moral dilemma, having to weigh the good that will result from a beautiful film against the good that will result from an honest film. Redescribed in this utilitarian way, it seems that even choosing the “aesthetic” option may not be the result of an aesthetic obligation outweighing a moral one, but a moral obligation with aesthetic factors prevailing over another moral obligation.

In Eaton’s second case, I think a similar reduction can be made to a utilitarian moral dilemma. The burning museum case attempts to take morality out of the equation by stating that the moral value of the paintings are equal. Thus one should default to considering the aesthetic values the paintings, and opt to rescue the more aesthetically valuable one. But this means that one painting, in having more aesthetic value, is more valuable *qua* art. In choosing between two works of art, it seems that picking the more valuable one - whether it be aesthetic or moral value - is a moral obligation. One is morally obligated to pick the more aesthetically valuable painting precisely because it has more aesthetic value. The utilitarian consequence of this that future patrons of the art museum will have a better and more fulfilling experience with the aesthetically superior painting than they would with the aesthetically inferior one. Art students and scholars would benefit more from studying the aesthetically superior painting, than they would from studying the aesthetically inferior one. Thus, even when one is left to choose between two “aesthetic” obligations, these aesthetic obligations ultimately are reduced to moral obligations. This, I think, is because artistic value inherently carries a measure of moral value with it; the viewing experiences and teachings that come from an aesthetic work have moral value.

So I take each of Eaton's aesthetic dilemmas to in fact be moral dilemmas involving aesthetic works. Since Eaton rests her argument on the existence of aesthetic dilemmas, I am inclined to dismiss her argument.

MY ANALYSIS: BEARDSLEY

I take Beardsley's theory to be the strongest case for the existence of general aesthetic rules. His formulation of the manner in which rules interact with each other is complex, and he offers strong defenses against foreseeable objections. However, I do have one point of criticism, and an argument as to why I do not take Beardsley's theory to be inconsistent with my view.

Firstly, it seems that Beardsley's theory may presuppose the existence of aesthetic reasons. The theory outlines a way in which aesthetic rules may interact with one another. But in order for aesthetic rules to interact, they must first exist. Beardsley details their possible interactions without proving their existence. The framework relies heavily upon the existence of aesthetic reasons as a fundamental presupposition. So although Beardsley's theory provides a compelling understanding of aesthetic reasons, it fails to make a case for their existence in the first place.

Although I take this to be a substantial criticism - if perhaps a bit too simplistic and concise - I recognize that it does not negate Beardsley's theory. Beardsley's understanding of aesthetic reasons is a plausible, and coherent one which I do not think I can refute here. But I do not think I need to refute Beardsley's theory in order to successfully argue my view. I am willing to grant that aesthetic reasons may exist, and interact as Beardsley describes. However, I take these reasons to be objective reasons. That is, I take Beardsley's theory to presuppose that there is an objective truth about the value of a work, and his theory to be outlining the way in which

traits interact to yield that value. This is not inconsistent with my view, as I am discussing subjective aesthetic value: the value an agent takes a work to have. It is entirely possible for an agent's assessment of a work to be inaccurate, for the value they perceive in a work to be different from the work's actual value. The existence of objective aesthetic reasons does not guarantee that an agent will perceive and properly respond to those reasons. An agent may incorrectly respond to the objective aesthetic traits of a work - mistaking an objectively good trait as something that detracts from overall value - thereby forming an irrational aesthetic judgment. Or an agent may fail to perceive or respond to the aesthetic rules all together, forming an arational aesthetic judgment. In this way, even if I accept Beardsley's theory, it is still consistent for me to claim that aesthetic judgments, or at least some of them, are arational. In cases where an agent fails to respond to a work's objective aesthetic reasons - should they exist - that agent's aesthetic judgment is arational, and therefore beyond their control.

For this reason, although I am not personally convinced Beardsley is correct on the existence and nature of objective aesthetic reasons, I am comfortable with being unable to refute his theory. I think I have offered sufficient reason to show that even if Beardsley is correct in his General Criterion theory, this does not contradict my claims.

Having dealt with the arguments in favor of aesthetic reasons, the views against aesthetic rules, and the intermediate view remain. The difference between these two is somewhat subtle. In fact, in practice, they both seem to have the same result: aesthetic judgments are unreasoned. For proponents of the first set of views, this is because they do not exist. Meanwhile, for Sibley, it is because the connection between aesthetic traits and aesthetic value is too vague and tenuous to be considered a rule, and be used in reasoning. On a practical level, there is really no difference

between the two: in either case, there are no reasons that one can articulate to support their aesthetic value judgment, and thus their aesthetic judgments are effectively arational. For this reason, I do not think it is necessary for me to choose between them for the purpose of this thesis. In considering an individual's level of responsibility for their aesthetic judgments, the subtle, technical difference between these two positions is insignificant; it does not impact whether an individual is responsible for their judgments. For both theories aesthetic judgments are effectively arational. This arationality is something which aesthetic judgments have in common with desires, suggesting that aesthetic judgments - like desires - are involuntary. However, to remain consistent with Beardsley's theory, it is necessary for me to allow that not necessarily all aesthetic judgments are arational, just as not all desires are arational. Still, since one does not properly engage in reasoning to formulate at least some of their aesthetic judgments, one cannot say these aesthetic judgments are chosen. As such, an agent does not voluntarily make these judgments, and therefore cannot be held responsible for them.

Having reviewed the debate of aesthetic reasons, I will now examine whether the aesthetic reasons debate can be amended to include aesthetic likings. The question of whether reasoning plays into aesthetic likings is something Ted Cohen considers in his paper "On Consistency on One's Personal Aesthetics."¹³ Cohen observes that people generally try to be coherent in their aesthetic likings, and do so by giving reasons for their likings. Cohen explores this process. Suppose, Cohen proposes, that an agent likes an artwork - a painting for example - painting A, and the agent takes themselves to like this work because of a particular quality. For the sake of clarity, I would like to pick an actual quality this work might have, so suppose that

¹³ Cohen, Ted. "On Consistency in One's Personal Aesthetics." In *Aesthetics and Ethics: Essays at the Intersection*, edited by Jerrold Levinson, 106-125. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

the quality is possessing neutral colors. So the agent takes that, as a general rule, they like paintings with neutral colors. But then the agent encounters another painting, painting B, which has neutral colors, yet the agent does not like it. In order to maintain consistency, the agent has to refine this rule. Accordingly the agent comes up with a new refined rule that they like paintings which have neutral colors and depict nature scenes.¹⁴ With this new rule, the agent is able to maintain coherent reasoning for their likings. Until they come across a third work. This third work, painting C, has neutral colors and depicts a nature scene, yet the agent does not like it. So the agent is again forced to refine their rule for the sake of consistency. This process of refining rules to levels of higher specificity would conceivably go on indefinitely, as the agent encounters more and more works of art. But is this reasoning process really necessary? Do agents need to worry about consistency in their likings? Here Cohen states that he endorses Isenberg's view, noting that although Isenberg is talking specifically about aesthetic criticism and aesthetic judgments, Cohen takes Isenberg's point to be applicable to any attempts to rationalize why someone likes or enjoys something. So ultimately, Cohen thinks this process of attempting to maintain coherency is futile, as no matter how much an agent refines their rules, the agent will never really quantify what they like about the work. From here Cohen goes on to clarify that although the rationalization process will never yield the results an agent is looking for, the process is nonetheless important in and of itself. Cohen holds that this process is helpful for an agent in part because it helps the agent to understand something about themselves. However, I am concerned only with whether likings are reasoned. The importance of the reasoning process makes no impact on my point, so I leave that to Cohen. The take away for my thesis is that

¹⁴ Supposing, of course, that although both painting A and B had neutral colors, only painting A - the painting the agent likes - depicts a nature scene.

ultimately Cohen shows that aesthetic likings are no more reasoned than aesthetic judgments. So it can be concluded that just as some aesthetic likings are arational, so is a corresponding set of aesthetic likings. And, of course, since an agent is not morally responsible for their arational desires or aesthetic judgments, neither can they responsible be for their arational aesthetic likings.

Having determined what constitutes aesthetic judgments and aesthetic likings, and showing how individuals are not responsible for some of these judgments and likings, I will not take a step back to ask whether it is possible for aesthetic judgments to be morally wrong. Since I have shown an individual cannot be held responsible for some of these judgments and likings even if they were morally wrong, the question of whether judgments can be wrong may not seem very important. But I think it is still a question worth addressing. I think the moral flaws of a judgment (or liking) are significant regardless of an agent's responsibility for them. Additionally, I admit that there are some judgments and likings for which an agent is responsible. If these judgments are morally wrong, then - in cases where an agent is responsible for their judgment or liking - an agent would need to be held responsible for that wrong. Therefore my goal in the next chapter will be to examine whether it is possible for aesthetic judgments to be morally wrong.

CHAPTER 3

GOALS AND PRELIMINARIES

There are many things considered to be immoral, nearly all of which factor - or could theoretically factor - into aesthetic works. Naturally, not all of these factors can be properly considered here, so I will provide my examples with the understanding that the moral wrongs within these examples are far from constituting a comprehensive list. That said, one example of an immoral act is harming another human being. Murder is, I dare to say, universally accepted as morally wrong under (nearly) all ethical theories. Though it may pose incredibly difficult to argue that murder is a form of art, I do not believe this prohibits it from having aesthetic elements. Consider, for example, the display of this murder from NBC's television series

Hannibal:



Surely there are aesthetic elements in the presentation of this body¹⁵. The twining of the tree's branches around and through the victim, the way the victim's arms are incorporated into the branches of the tree, and the delicate, colorful flowers that have been substituted for internal organs. These are elements for which one could have an aesthetic appreciation, or derive aesthetic enjoyment. Though this example is fictitious, and a bit unrealistic, it should help with imagining the sort of aesthetic features one may find in a murder scene.

Now consider a person who enjoys these sorts of images. In the case of fictional examples like that of above, perhaps the enjoyment is not quite as reprehensible, since anyone looking at the image can tell that it is fictitious. But imagine someone who happens upon a real crime scene - or photograph of a crime scene - and derives aesthetic appreciation or aesthetic enjoyment from it. Is this appreciation morally wrong? What about merely liking - rather than aesthetically enjoying - such an image? What is the difference, and why might either or both of these be wrong? These are questions which I will aim to address in this chapter.

In using the terms "aesthetic appreciation" and "aesthetic enjoyment" I mean to refer to the sort of enjoyment that goes along with Kant's understanding of aesthetic judgments, as discussed in Chapter 2. This is the very particular sort of abstract, self-disinterested pleasure that comes from experiencing aesthetic goodness. Mere liking, on the other hand, refers to enjoyment in the more standard, colloquial sense. It is an enjoyment not necessarily tied to aesthetic value, which may be self-motivated. But for either of these enjoyments, the question of whether they are right or wrong depends upon what moral theory is being used to evaluate them. Thus I will evaluate the morality of problematic aesthetic enjoyments - such as the enjoyment of a murder

¹⁵ Fuller, Bryan. "Futamoto." *Hannibal*. NBC Universal. April 4, 2014.

scene - through the lens of three main moral theories: consequentialism, deontology, and virtue ethics.

CONSEQUENTIALISM

For the consequentialist, the morality of an action is determined by evaluating its consequences.¹⁶ Turning this to the murder scene example, it does not seem there would be a difference in the outcome between merely liking, and aesthetically enjoying a murder scene. For both mere liking and aesthetic enjoyment, assuming that the individual in question has not committed the murder they are observing, and does not outwardly condoning it, it does not seem that their appreciation has any negative consequences. Whether it be a mere liking or an aesthetic enjoyment, the mere act of simply appreciating a work seems to be almost entirely self contained. The process consists of perceiving the work, then experiencing their response to it, which affects no one other than the agent, and has no external consequences. This process seems harmless from the consequentialist view. The appreciation of the scene does nothing to affect the wrongdoing - the murder - necessary to create the work. The act having been already completed, the agent's admiration neither improves nor worsens the act itself, the admiration is neither a moral success nor a moral failing. I think here there is a distinction between the basic act of liking or enjoyment of a work, and other acts which may be caused or influenced by that appreciation. The appreciation itself is harmless with no external consequences, but if the agent were to promote murder - whether the specific murder in question, or the act in general - as an aesthetic triumph, something to be positively valued, then this would be morally wrong - unless

¹⁶ Sinnott-Armstrong, Walter. "Consequentialism." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Stanford University. May 20, 2003. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/consequentialism/>.

the agent also made it clear that the act was morally wrong and should not be replicated. Such an endorsement would implicitly support the act of murder. It would also be wrong if the agent, inspired by their appreciation of the murder scene, were to go out and recreate the scene by committing a killing of their own, or if they were to encourage others to do so. These acts would clearly have negative external consequences, which would be condoned by the consequentialist viewpoint. But these acts are not entailed by aesthetically appreciating, or merely liking a murder scene. So from the consequentialist perspective, simply having an aesthetic enjoyment or an aesthetic liking for a morally problematic work of art is permissible. However, one must be very careful in acting on such a liking, as in doing so it would be very difficult - perhaps even impossible - to avoid committing a moral wrong.

DEONTOLOGY

The focus of deontological ethics is on moral rules, and an agent's intentions in acting. For this ethical theory, a morally right action is one done out of a duty to do the right thing. This can be determined both by an agent's motive, and adherence to a formulation of Kant's creation, the categorical imperative. The categorical imperative states that an agent should act in such a way that they would be comfortable willing their action into becoming a universal law, that an agent must conduct themselves at all times in this manner, and that they must treat other people as ends in themselves rather than mere means.¹⁷ Since the scenario in question deals with a single action rather than a general principle an agent follows for their entire life, the second portion of the categorical imperative does not apply. This leaves the first and third parts of the imperative.

¹⁷ Kant, Immanuel. *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Hutchinson University Library, 1972.

For the first portion, the agent must be comfortable willing that her action become universal law. So is having an enjoyment or liking for problematic aesthetic work - a murder scene - something it would be permissible for everyone to do? Though it would be odd, I can see no reason why it would be morally troublesome for this liking or enjoyment to become universal law. We can imagine a world in which it is a universal law, with no adverse effects. But this may apply to the liking or enjoyment alone, as it would certainly pose a problem were it a universal rule that everyone be permitted to create an aesthetically pleasing murder scene. This would create an strange world in which agents are able to appreciate murder scenes - or otherwise problematic works - but unable to create such works. This seems to create a sort of paradox in our hypothetical world that has these universal laws. How can agents have aesthetic enjoyments or likings for works which do not exist? I think there are at least two solutions to this. First, one can simply accept that not everyone adheres to moral rules. This is part of the reason murders and other morally problematic things happen in the world in which we currently live. We may not will immoral actions to become universal laws, yet they happen anyway. Presumably this could be the case in a world where the appreciation of problematic works is permissible, but the creation is not. Secondly, the reason creating a problematic aesthetic work is problematic is presumably because it entails morally problematic actions. The immoral act in creating an aesthetically pleasing murder scene is the murder. But in a fictitious or imagined example, this is not the case. In the above Hannibal example, or in an imagined murder that one uses to create a painting or drawing, there need be no actual murder. Thus an artist could create a work that depicts a moral wrong without actually committing the morally wrong act they are depicting. So it seems that appreciating morally problematic aesthetic works can be consistent with at least a

portion of the categorical imperative.

This then leaves the third, and final, portion of the categorical imperative against which to check the morality of enjoying a problematic aesthetic work. Does the appreciation of a murder scene treat people as ends, rather than mere means? It first seems as though the murder scene violates this portion of the imperative: the agent seems to be using the murdered victim simply as a means for their aesthetic liking or enjoyment. But is the victim really still a person? I think they cannot be since they are no longer alive, and it would be a mistake to treat them as such. That being the case, I think the aesthetic enjoyment or liking of a murder scene follows the rules of the categorical imperative, and is therefore permissible under deontological ethics.

However, a murder scene is not the only sort of problematic aesthetic work that could exist, and not all of these may follow the “treating people as ends rather than mere means” rule of the categorical imperative. Consider an aesthetically pleasing torture scene. In this case, the victim is still alive, and in enjoying such a scene they are being used as a mere means for aesthetic enjoyment. So this example would not be permissible with deontological ethics. This variability complicates the question considerably, in such a way that I cannot comfortably make a general conclusion as to the deontological morality of problematic aesthetic likings and enjoyments as a whole. Rather, I think the morality of such likings would need to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. In cases where there is a living person involved in the problematic aesthetic work, then the appreciating of that work would violate the third portion of the categorical imperative and be morally wrong under deontological ethics. But in cases where there is no living person involved in the work, then the appreciation of the work would not violate the imperative, and therefore be permitted under deontological ethics.

VIRTUE ETHICS

The third and final moral theory I wish to consider is virtue ethics. Virtue ethics is primarily concerned with the sorts of actions that would be typical of an ideally virtuous agent. An action is taken to be good if it reflects thoughts and values that are in line with those of an imagined ideal moral agent; someone who has the 'right' thoughts and values. The virtue ethicist would contend that there is something wrong liking or enjoying anything that has morally problematic elements, as this would be reflective of something wrong in an agent's moral character. Of all the ethical theories, I take this objection of virtue ethics to be the strongest. To provide an illustration of virtue ethics in practice, consider an example from Berys Gaut.¹⁸ The situation Gaut describes is something like the following: suppose a man, Steve, has come into some good fortune. He has gotten a promotion and a raise at work. All of Steve's friends tell him they are very proud and happy for him, and act accordingly. However, some of Steve's friends are really quite jealous of him. Their actions, words, and treatment of Steve do not reflect this, but it is a sentiment that is strong within them. Even though their outward behavior is appropriate, the inward attitude of Steve's jealous friends is not virtuous, and this is something for which one should judge them. It seems Steve's jealous friends are not as virtuous as the friends who were genuine in their happiness for Steve, both inwardly and outwardly. The jealousy of some of Steve's friends revealed something bad about their moral characters. Applying this to aesthetics, it would be the appreciation of a morally wrong work that would function as jealousy does in the Steve example.

¹⁸ Gaut, Berys. "The Ethical Criticism of Art." In *Aesthetics and Ethics: Essays at the Intersection*, edited by Jerrold Levinson, 182-203. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Returning to the example of a murder scene, there does seem to be an inherent level of violence in looking at the aesthetic features of such a scene, a strong link between them and the moral wrong. In looking at other works, the features may be more easily divorced from their context and the method of their creation, making them more easily to regard from a purely aesthetic perspective. Looking at a murder scene, however, the violence of its creation is immediate and inescapable. A painting, for example, may consist of a series of colored brush strokes on a canvas, all of which come together to make a single image and work. One can look at a painting and be aware of the process of its creation: an artist mixing paints, sitting down to their canvas, and painting the work. But if one focuses closely on the image of the piece, the feelings the colors elicit, then the process of its creation can be easily forgotten. This is not quite the same for a murder scene. While colors and shapes may be the aesthetic elements of a painting, blood spatter, bruises, lacerations and wounds, and limp, lifeless bodies are the aesthetic elements of a murder scene. These are much more difficult to separate from their context, harder to regard as purely aesthetic. Each element, as well as the image as a whole, is one of suffering and death. The individual elements - dripping or pooling blood, exposed organs, fresh wounds, perhaps even the smell of death, carries a visceral, raw, psychological reaction. It is gruesome, and tied so strongly to vulnerability and death that it seems very compelling to think the virtue ethicist is right. Surely there must be something wrong with enjoying a work with these gruesome elements, just as there is something wrong with being jealous of Steve's promotion.

However, I am not entirely satisfied with the virtue ethics argument, and I believe there are a couple of ways in which its conclusion may be rejected. Firstly, it seems to me that the

primary reason for an agent's aesthetic liking or enjoyment may be significant. If an agent likes the murder scene - or other problematic work - for the aesthetic value they take it to have, then I think their appreciation may be consistent with being virtuous. Surely a virtuous agent would appreciate things that have aesthetic value. So if an agent is appreciative of a work they take to have aesthetic value, in spite of the work's immorality, then their appreciation is virtuous. However, if the agent likes the work because of its ethical flaws, then this would not be virtuous. This would be, of course, because liking unethical things is not a virtuous action. But if an agent's appreciation is motivated by a work's aesthetic value, it seems there may be cases in which enjoying a problematic aesthetic work is permissible from the virtue ethics perspective.

A second possible way of avoiding the virtue ethics conclusion may come from appealing to the involuntary and arational nature of the agent's aesthetic liking or enjoyment. Naturally this applies only to cases in which the agent's appreciation is arational and involuntary, therefore beyond their control. In such cases, since the likings are beyond the agent's control, that means the agent cannot use their own beliefs, values, or reasoning to change their appreciation. This means that the agent's own personal values and virtues may not be reflected in their aesthetic liking or enjoyment. The connection between an agent's aesthetic appreciations and the agent's values is a necessary assumption for the virtue ethics conclusion. But in cases where an agent's aesthetic appreciations are arational and not reflective of their values, their appreciation really says nothing of the agent's moral character. This means that the virtue ethics conclusion should not hold for aesthetic likings or enjoyments that are arational and beyond an agent's control.

CONCLUSION

In the course of this paper I have focused on addressing two main questions: whether agents are morally responsible for their aesthetic judgments, and whether aesthetic judgments can be morally wrong. In the first chapter I debated between the theories of Frankfurt and Watson in order to select a conceptualization framework for understanding the nature of desires. Taking Watson's theory to be the stronger and more coherent of the two, I used his framework to explain how desires are formed in such a way that some of them are arational, and involuntary. In cases where an agent is unable to choose to do otherwise, the agent ought not be held morally responsible for their action. For desires, this means that when an agent's desire does not respond to reason and is formed involuntarily, then the agent is not responsible for the desire. Thus I closed my first chapter with the conclusion that there exist some desires for which an agent cannot be held morally responsible.

In my second chapter, I shifted focus to aesthetic judgments and aesthetic likings. My goal was to argue that aesthetic judgments and likings are parallel to desires in that they are also capable of being arational. To do this I summarized the aesthetic reasons debate, with the hope that I would be able to side with the "aesthetic reason skeptics," and ultimately conclude that aesthetic reasons do not exist. Unfortunately, I was not able to do this as I had intended. Beardsley's General Criterion Theory of aesthetic reasons offered a very compelling case for the existence of aesthetic reasons, and one which I was not able to refute. This left me unable to conclude that aesthetic judgments and likings are always unresponsive to reasons. However, fortunately, the existence of aesthetic reasons as described by Beardsley is not mutually exclusive with the statement I ultimately make about the nature of an agent's responsibility for

some of their aesthetic judgments and likings. Beardsley's theory deals with objective aesthetic reasons, whereas my point speaks to an agent's response to those reasons. Since Beardsley and I are discussing two different aspects of aesthetic judgment formation, our claims are not inconsistent with each other. So although I was unable to refute the possible existence of objective aesthetic reasons, I am still able to end my second chapter with the conclusion that some aesthetic judgments and likings are like desires in that they are arational, and thus beyond an agent's moral responsibility.

Looking at these first two chapters, I think I am able to provide an answer to the first question I aimed to address: are agents morally responsible for their aesthetic judgments and likings? My answer is both yes and no. Supposing aesthetic reasons exist, as Beardsley claims, then in cases where an agent's judgments and likings are properly responsive to aesthetic reasons, then yes. When an agent is able to properly rationalize and exert control over their tastes, then they are morally responsible for them. However, there are also some cases in which an agent does not respond properly to aesthetic reasons, and their likings and judgments are unresponsive to rationality. In these cases, the answer is no, the agent is not morally responsible for their aesthetic judgment. However, it is important to bear in mind that when I say an agent is not "morally responsible" for their judgment, when I mean is that the agent is not the cause of that judgment. Although the agent is not responsible for having the desire in the first place, this may not completely exempt an agent from all moral responsibility. An agent may be responsible for what they do with that judgment or liking. Should an agent's judgment or liking be morally wrong, I accept that there is a possibility that the agent may have an obligation to try to change their taste. This supposes, of course, that it is possible for an agent to change their taste, which is

an entirely different matter about which I am uncertain.

After addressing the first of my main questions - whether agents are responsible for their aesthetic judgments and likings - in chapters one and two, in my third chapter I finally turn my discussion to the first question: whether aesthetic tastes can be morally wrong. My goal for the chapter was to determine whether having an aesthetic liking or enjoyment of a problematic aesthetic work is in and of itself morally problematic. To assist in my examination, I selected what I think is a helpful, almost ideal example from popular culture. Then I set about analyzing aesthetic likings and judgments from the perspective of each of three prominent moral theories: consequentialism, deontology, and virtue ethics.

Having examined aesthetic judgments through the lens of each different moral theory, I found that the answer to the second question was complex. Like many things in philosophy, there are a number of ways to approach the problem, and no single, straight-forward answer. For the consequentialist, there is nothing wrong with merely having an aesthetic judgment or liking, since there are no external consequences. Anything beyond a mere appreciation, however, quickly gets into the territory of morally impermissible, and one must be careful to avoid negative external consequences. For the deontological ethicist, whether an aesthetic taste is morally wrong really depends on what, exactly, is involved in the work one is appreciating. Ultimately, it seems to come down to whether there is a living person involved in the wrong of the aesthetic work. If there is, then appreciating the work violates part of the categorical imperative and is impermissible. But if there isn't, then the appreciation is consistent with the categorical imperative, and is permissible. Finally, for the virtue ethicist, matters get even more complicated. There seems to be good reason to for the virtue ethics to outright reject the

enjoyment or liking of a morally problematic aesthetic work. If the initial virtue ethics interpretation is correct and the agent's appreciation is reflective of something problematic in their moral character, then the virtue ethicist should reject the enjoyment of morally problematic aesthetic works. However, I think I offered a couple of plausible reasons to think that an agent's appreciation of a morally problematic work does not necessarily reflect their moral character. If the agent appreciates the work *in spite* of the work's moral flaws and not *because* of its moral flaws, then this may reflect well on an agent's moral character. Or, if the agent's judgment or liking is beyond their control, then the agent's appreciation may not be indicative of their moral character at all. In either of these cases, the virtue ethicist may be able to accept the aesthetic appreciation of morally problematic works.

Looking at the variability in response across moral theories, one may raise the question as to which moral theory is correct, or the best. This is a problem that I fear I am not equipped to even begin to tackle here. That, I think, is a topic for another thesis - or several.

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