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CAN AESTHETIC VALUE BE EXPLAINED?

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I

IT SEEMS that we can distinguish two levels of discourse about a work of art, which I shall call levels 1 and 2.[1] Level 1 contains descriptions that are purely factual: such descriptions give the sort of information about the shape and construction of a work of art that could be appreciated by someone with no aesthetic sense. Level 2 concepts can only be grasped by someone who has an aesthetic sense—in fact the ability to do so is constitutive of possession of the faculty of aesthetic perception (taste). Another way of drawing the distinction is in terms of codifiability: facts of level 1 can be detected by a machine (they can be codified); facts of level 2 cannot be so detected (they cannot be codified).

A couple of brief examples should suffice to make the distinction between levels clear. In part III of *Little Gidding* T. S. Eliot wrote:

> Sin is Behovely, but
> All shall be well, and
> All manner of things shall be well.

One is talking at level 1 if one says that the three clauses here minus the conjunctions are lifted from Julian of Norwich, that the 'b' of 'Behovely' is capitalized, and that the lines are enjambed. Similarly, one would be talking at level 1 if one said that *Das Rheingold* begins in the key of E Flat Major, and rises slowly and quietly from the tonic in a series of major thirds. One would be talking at level 2 if one tried to say how we should respond to these features. One might say, for example, that the 'b' of 'Behovely' is capitalized to emphasize the authority of the source and the gnomic status of the *sententia*, that the poet follows this with 'but' split from its clause (the enjambement) so as to deflate it in a somewhat wry but not disrespectful way. His use of 'but' here encapsulates the theme of part III: we should not ignore our tradition, but equally we should not be enslaved to it—we must not 'follow an antique drum'. Similarly, one is talking at level 2 if one says of the opening of *Das Rheingold* that the major third interval expresses 'the very idea of harmony—the pleasurable, amoral state of nature'.[2] One is also talking at level 2 if one advances to a more general evaluation of what has been identified either at level 1 or 2: if, for example, one says that Eliot manipulates the 'but' to express a profound truth, or that Wagner's evocation of the very idea of harmony is sublime.

I include together in level 2 both what might be called 'thick' and 'thin'

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evaluative concepts.[3] Examples of thick aesthetic concepts might be 'voluptuous', 'sad', 'piquant', and of thin 'beautiful', 'superficial' and again 'good'. Now there may sometimes be considerable difficulty deciding how to fit particular concepts into this categorization of the two levels, with level 2 further split into thick and thin. Does 'garish' belong in level 1 or 2? 'Harmonious'? 'Sublime' is clearly a level 2 concept but is it thick or thin?[4] It is quite hard to characterize precisely the difference between thick and thin. The basic idea is that thin concepts are more general than thick. This is reflected in the following asymmetry: thick can rationally support thin, but not vice versa. One might suppose that this asymmetry derived from a greater proximity of thick to level 1 than thin: what this proximity amounts to will be considered below in section 3. For the moment I want to abstract from the particular difficulty mentioned here and proceed with an admittedly imprecise, but I hope intuitive, grasp of the hierarchy. The difficulty will, however, recur at an important point below. In this piece I want to explore the phenomenon of explanation of the aesthetic, comparing what I say there with what I take to be the nature of explanation of ethical evaluation. Many people have felt that there is something ineffable about the aesthetic. I want to see if this intuition can be made precise and what there is to be said for it. I shall reach an equivocal verdict on the possibility of explaining the aesthetic, and hence try to mark a clear discrepancy between the aesthetic and the ethical.

II

If there is a parallel distinction between levels to be made in the case of ethical value, then it is plausible to suppose that advancing facts from level 1 in support of level 2 facts can constitute a species of explanation. Certainly it is clear that we are *educated* into a moral sense by being exposed to remarks which have that general shape. For example, I educate a child into the (level 2) concept of cruelty towards animals by showing him the connection between such cruelty and, centrally, actions that (on level 1) inflict pain. And I think we should accept that I do so precisely by explaining *why* particular actions are cruel in terms of their tendency to cause pain. That is, I give him *reasons* why particular actions are cruel or wrong, and these reasons are facts from level 1. Thus it is plausible to say that in the ethical case what educates also explains. Now given that we can also be educated into an aesthetic sense, and given too that the critical remarks we are exposed to have the same general shape as in the ethical case (namely: level 1 facts cited in support of higher-level facts), we can ask: is it the case in the aesthetic domain that what educates also explains?

Consider the following passage from *Emma*, which marks a turning point in the novel. Emma has just visited Miss Bates as a gesture of goodwill and implicit apology for her rudeness the previous day. On returning to Hartfield she finds Mr Knightly, who has just been informed of her pacific mission:

> He looked at her with a glow of regard. She was warmly gratified—and in another moment still more so, by a little movement of more than common friendliness on his part. He took her hand;—whether she had not herself made the first motion, she could not say—she might perhaps have rather offered it—but he took her hand, pressed it, and certainly was on the point of carrying it to his lips—when, from some fancy or other, he suddenly let it go.—Why he should feel such a scruple, why he should change his mind when it was all but done, she could not perceive.—He would have judged better, she thought, if he had not stopped.—The intention, however, was indubitable; and whether it was that his manners had in general so little gallantry, or however else it happened, but she thought nothing became him more.—It was with him, of so simple, yet so dignified a nature.—She could not but recall the attempt with great satisfaction. It spoke such perfect amity.—He left them immediately afterwards—gone in a moment. (Chapter 45, *init.*)

This is one of the finest passages in the novel: in the first place, it excellently conveys the discrepancy—fundamental to the characterization of Emma—between her perception of reality and the reader's. The reader sees clearly here, what Emma still does not, that she loves Knightly (and that he loves her: the cold word 'amity' conceals from Emma, but not from the reader, the emotion he really expressed). But it is obvious from the passage that she has all the material requisite for self-knowledge. For the first time in the novel Emma's feelings are laid out clearly in front of her: she only has to open her eyes. (She thinks Knightly 'would have judged better if he had not stopped'. She only has to ask herself why she thinks this.) Now how does the passage achieve its suggestiveness? It is clear that there is a certain dislocation of thought in it: Emma's reflections take on a will of their own and proceed in directions of their own choosing. The heroine becomes a passive (potential) observer of them. The most striking device employed by Jane Austen to create this effect is the solecism in the sentence containing the words 'whether it was that his manners had in general so little gallantry, or however else it happened, but she thought nothing became him more'. The insertion of 'but' here destroys the grammaticality of Emma's thought; this is (I think) unique in the novel, and hence its occurrence here suggests more than anything else the presence of undercurrents in Emma's feelings which are surfacing far enough for the reader—but not yet for Emma—to perceive them.

What, in terms of my levels, is going on in this piece of criticism? Well, some facts of level 1 are cited in support of assertions—both thick and thin—at level 2. In particular I alluded to the unique employment of a solecism: that was the insertion of a co-ordinating conjunction ('but') into a sentence where the anterior presence of subordinate clauses meant that there is no syntactic room for one. If one wants to say how we should respond to this passage and what is so good about it, I think that fact has to figure crucially in such an account.

But one might be struck by the following doubt: surely the level 1 facts here are too *remote* from the higher-level facts to support them? How can the mere fact of solecism, combined with its uniqueness, have anything to say about the

marvellous sense which the reader gets in this passage of Emma simultaneously losing her grip on her emotions and yet at last coming in sight of self-knowledge? The levels of discourse here seem too divorced from one another to be bridged in the way the criticism attempted. That criticism tried to make the level 1 facts speak higher-level truths; but surely such facts just don't speak.[5]

As it stands this worry may not seem difficult to quiet. Reasons, it might be said, simply do perform the bridging function queried in the above paragraph. A reason in this context is precisely a level 1 fact seen in a certain way. What it is to have a moral sense is to see certain facts—facts which may equally be available to someone lacking such a sense—as *motivationally* alive. Similarly, the reply runs, what the above piece of criticism attempted to do was to make us see Jane Austen's employment of a solecism—a syntactic feature which can be detected purely mechanically by an organism or gadget entirely lacking in aesthetic sense—as *aesthetically* alive.

III

This reply is, I think, good as far as it goes; but the issues raised when one tries to penetrate more deeply into the nature of aesthetic rationalization are more difficult than it allows for. There seems to be a difference between the two types of explanation, which can be appreciated if one thinks of approaching the second level from the first, rather than vice versa. When viewed from this angle facts do not seem to be aesthetically alive in a way they can be morally alive. A grammatical solecism could, surely, support just about any higher-level description. If I just tell you that a novel contains a unique case of one, you would not thereby be given any indication as to whether the solecism was felicitous, an embarrassing slip by the author, or entirely unworthy of remark. This seems to be quite general to the aesthetic. Suppose—to take an example from a non-linguistic area—that one wanted to explain the effect of Britten's aria 'Now the Great Bear and Pleiades . . .' (*Peter Grimes*, Act One). Here one might point to the following level 1 feature: the presence of a sustained tonic pedal underlain by a slowly descending bass figure. One could suggest that by the combination of these features Britten achieves a deepening sense of Peter's insight into something universal (Man's place in Nature); the shifting base suggests Nature's mutability, the pedal its constancy in change; further, the combination seems to set the stability of Peter's mystical vision against the unreflective waywardness of his companions. When looked down on from an achieved aesthetic position, all this seems to me to be there in the level 1 feature I mentioned. But when we look up, as it were, from just that feature itself, there seems to be nothing in the bare idea of a tonic pedal supported by a slowly descending bass figure to give us any of this: for we find exactly the same device used elsewhere to achieve an entirely different effect, for example by Smetana in the coda to his autobiographical First String Quartet. Here the pedal represents an aural defect: a very high note which Smetana came to hear continuously before he finally went deaf.

The effect could not be more different from that of the Britten excerpt. We have no sense of peace in the eye of the storm, but of disruption (after the even flow of the preceding bars) and distress. The point is that a level 1 phenomenon (or cluster of such phenomena) seems to be able to support variable effects at the second level.[6] I shall call this possibility the possibility of *duplication*, understanding thereby replication at level 1 combined with divergence at the higher level. It will play an important role in what follows.

But now the difference with the moral case is that duplication does not appear to be a possibility here. If I tell you that I have seen someone hurting a dog, although you won't know just from that piece of information whether the action is morally right or not, you can know that *if* the action is right, it is right for some reason *other* than that the dog was hurt; if, on the other hand, the action is wrong, the reason for the wrongness can be (and is very likely to be) that the dog was hurt. The level 1 description 'hurting a dog', when it supports (is the reason for) an evaluation, cannot support any old evaluation: if it supports an evaluation at all, that will be one of condemnation for cruelty. When the action in question is right, it gets its rightness from elsewhere in level 1 (e.g., that the dog is being trained). Rather than support rightness, hurting a dog does not support at all; it is a *pro tanto* marker of wrongness.

We might sum up the difference we have uncovered here by saying that level 1 facts cited in support of aesthetic evaluations are aesthetically 'free' in a way that level 1 facts cited in support of moral evaluations are not. This point stays in place when we acknowledge, as we must, that there are indeed well-attested correspondences between first-level and higher-level aesthetic phenomena which hold in many cases. Deryck Cooke gives some more or less speculative examples of these in his book (note 2), going well beyond such traditionally agreed associations as that between minor keys and sadness, or the major seventh interval and a feeling of tense expectancy.[7] The point survives this acknowledgement just because these associations cannot be hardened into rules: a piece of music may be intensely sad precisely because it is in a major key and not in spite of that fact (think of the ending of Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*), whereas hurting a dog, when right, can only be right, as we have seen, in spite of the pain caused to the animal, and never because of it. This consideration does not, then, undermine our conclusion that there is more aesthetic than moral 'freedom' in first-level phenomena.[8]

This distinction between the moral and the aesthetic can be given an epistemic gloss: the associations between first-level phenomena and second-level *moral* evaluations are a priori; those between the first-level and second-level *aesthetic* evaluation are a posteriori. We did not have to find out that hurting a dog is a *pro tanto* marker of wrongness: to understand the concepts involved is to know that much. But it was never a priori that the augmented fourth should prove to be the *diabolus in musica*. That this interval is apt for the evocation of hellish connotations has been a matter of artistic discovery by composers as diverse as Mozart

(Don Giovanni's cry when he grasps the Commendatore's proferred hand) and Busoni (Faust's request to Mephistopheles: 'willst du mir dienen?').

There are two objections to this account which the reader may wish to make. First, it might be objected that in my selection of pain-infliction as the level 1 fact to talk about in the moral case I am ignoring unfavourable examples. Is not 'eating a meal' a level 1 phenomenon which is morally 'free'? In fact I am not at all sure that facts such as this ever pull any weight in moral explanation. Surely eating a meal could only have moral value instrumentally, i.e., if it was a way of doing something *else* which supported the evaluation directly? But I don't mind letting the objector have this point: my thesis will then be that level 1 facts are without exception aesthetically 'free', whereas at least some such facts are not morally 'free'.

The second objection is more important. Frank Sibley has argued[9] that there are a priori connections of a negative kind between (in my terms) thick level 2 concepts and level 1 concepts: for example, that a delicate piece of music could not consist of loud brass discords. If he were right about this it would mean that level 1 facts are not aesthetically 'free' after all, although the fact that the restrictions were *negative* in the aesthetic case would still mark an important and interesting divergence from the moral case. But is he right? The problem is connected with the difficulty—which I mentioned earlier but set aside—of locating certain concepts in my hierarchy. Is 'delicate' a level 2 concept? Could a machine identify its extension? It is not clear to me how we should jump on this one. I am tempted simply to deny Sibley's point and say that in the sense in which 'delicate' is a level 2 concept it would be possible to have a loud, discordant and delicate piece. (It might have delicate modulations.) Conversely, in the sense in which such a piece couldn't be delicate I am inclined to say that 'delicacy' here is operating as a level 1 concept, and hence would be codifiable. Now clearly one has to be careful here to avoid merely legislating oneself out of difficulty. In this section I have developed my argument in terms of an undifferentiated second level. But I could just as well have cast it solely in terms of an indisputably thin concept like 'beauty'; in that case the difficulty broached here would not arise (there could not be any such a priori links between level 1 phenomena and *thin* aesthetic concepts), and the argument goes cleanly through. The reader who feels inclined to agree with Sibley (I am reserving judgement on the matter) should treat the difference I have found in this section between the moral and the aesthetic as just relating to the connection between level 1 phenomena and *thin* aesthetic/moral concepts.[10]

IV

Let us now look in more detail at the process of explanation. We return to the phenomenon of duplication. Surely, it might be said, we can grant that duplication is a feature of the aesthetic without conceding that this damages the possibility of genuine explanation. It only looked as if it could damage that

possibility in the Britten/Smetana case above, it might be said, because the level 1 characterizations I gave were too *sparse* to differentiate the pieces at the first level. But surely if we do not stop at such impoverished characterizations, we shall be able to locate first-level phenomena which intelligibly differentiate purported duplicates: duplication is, in other words, eliminable, and when, in particular cases, we have eliminated it, we shall have restored the possibility of genuine explanation. For example, we only need to start adding such things as that the Britten aria is in a major key and the Smetana coda in a minor; that Britten's bass figure descends smoothly in contrast to the agitated activity of Smetana's lower strings; that the effect of the aria is partly directed by the meaning of the poetry it sets, that of the Quartet excerpt by the painful autobiographical fact which it represents—we need go no further than these obvious level 1 facts before we start making sense of the very different moods the two pieces evoke. Surely, the objection runs, if we go on like this for long enough we can always close off the possibility of duplication and hence deliver genuine explanations.

The objector's point is that as long as duplication is not ineliminable we can have explanation; he can point out, indeed, that although duplication *as such* is not to be found in the moral case (recall that duplication involves the level 1 material rationally *supporting* the varying level 2 effects), nevertheless a weakened version of it—duplication minus the rational support—is available (hurting a dog may sometimes be right and sometimes wrong). Let us call duplication as we have defined it 'strong duplication' and duplication minus the requirement of rational support 'weak duplication'. Now we need weak duplication to be eliminable from the moral as much as we need strong duplication to be eliminable from the aesthetic if in either case explanation is to get going. I think we should accept this point. But it doesn't put the moral and the aesthetic on all fours, because if we accept a version of the supervenience thesis (of the moral and the aesthetic on the material), that just gives us the eliminability of weak duplication. So we still have the disanalogy between the moral and the aesthetic which we pinpointed in section 3—the possibility of strong duplication in the latter case but not the former. And I think we should accept that because strong duplication is eliminable from the moral but not from the aesthetic, the availability of explanation of the aesthetic is vitiated.

There are two ways, as far as I can see, we might try to explain aesthetic evaluations. We can *either* regard *all* first-level phenomena needed to close off the possibility of weak duplication as jointly explanatory, i.e., as constituting the reason why the work in question has the second-level properties it has; *or* confine the function of rational support to only *part* of the first level, and regard the rest of the first level as forming an explanatory *field*[11] embedding the reasons, i.e., as providing a context for those reasons, but not itself constituting a (set of) reason(s) for the second-level effects. What happens if we try to explain evaluations in the first of the above ways? In that case, *all* the first-level

phenomena we cite to close off the possibility of weak duplication count as *reasons* for the second-level effect. As reasons, they are all on an equal footing. But now we encounter the following problem: as we supply more first-level information about a work we approach an individuation of it. This is because works of art are, at least for the purposes of explanation, abstract objects.[12] This is quite unlike the ethical case, for there it is plausible that in giving the full explanation of the cruelty of an action we do not have to go beyond the purely general: the explanation may then exactly fit the cruelty of another action without the two actions thereby tending to coalesce. Actions are spatio-temporal particulars: they are not individuated by their first-level characterizations alone; works of art (given the above rider) are.

Let us consider the limiting case first, namely a work that we have to go all the way to individuating in order to avoid weak duplication. The explanation of this work's sadness, say, or beauty, will then in outline run: this work is sad (beautiful) because it has the first-level features it has (because it is the work it is). This doesn't look like a case of explanation at all, but rather a simple statement of supervenience. And to advert to the presence of a supervenience here is not to explain (make illuminating sense of) the supervening level in terms of the supervened-on level: the connection remains wholly obscure. Of course in specifying enough level 1 material to avoid weak duplication we may not quite *individuate* a work; nevertheless we shall arrive at a set of works which look or sound extremely similar—too similar for the fact that the features in question are reproducible in what are technically different works to be explanatorily illuminating. What we have here is still really just supervenience.

In contradistinction, the possibility of explanation in the moral case is preserved by the difference between the way we individuate morally significant units from the way we individuate aesthetically significant units. In specifying enough level 1 information about an action to avoid weak duplication, we do not individuate *particular* (datable) actions, but rather *types* of action. It is these types that the second-level features of the action attach to, so that we can always explain why a particular action has the moral character it does by adverting to the fact that it exemplifies a certain type of action. This is a perfectly respectable species of explanation: we often cite the frequent occurrence of an event in at least partial explanation of why it is occurring on one particular occasion; hence the explanatory superiority of correlating moral evaluations with *types* of action over correlating aesthetic evaluations with *particular* works of art. Furthermore, we have already seen that the correlations here differ crucially in that strong duplication is a possibility in the aesthetic, but not the moral, case. So the upshot is that if we explain evaluations in the first of the above ways (taking all first-level phenomena to be relevant to aesthetic explanation) the aesthetic emerges as inexplicable, but the moral remains explanatorily intact.

The inexplicability of the aesthetic has, we can now say, two respects to it. The first is that the totality of features in a work of art which are responsible,

either directly or indirectly, for its second-level characteristics are not repeatable in a genuinely different work. The second respect is the failure of strong duplication in the moral but not the aesthetic case. This latter discrepancy between the two has repercussions on their respective prospects for explanation, because the a priori links between first-level phenomena and second-level moral phenomena which rule out the possibility of strong duplication help *make sense* of the connections between the two levels (if indeed there really is a distinction of levels to be drawn in respect of the moral; see note 10). In the aesthetic case there are no such links: the correlations which obtain between the first and second levels are brutely a posteriori, and to that extent not susceptible of being illuminatingly *explained*.

Suppose we attempt to explain evaluations in the second of the two ways mentioned above: here we deploy the notion of a reason operating within an explanatory field. Weak duplication will now be avoided because of any two distinct works the fields (at least) will be different, and it will not be the case, on this approach, that the field enters the picture as a *reason* for the evaluation: its role remains stubbornly enabling and not participatory. This approach will also allow us to respect the traditional associations which we earlier acknowledged to obtain between the levels. The prospects for explanation will not be undermined, because we shall be able to make room for the recurrence of different particular associations of the same type. So mention of the frequent association between minor keys and sadness, say, against varying fields, can constitute a way of explaining how they come to be associated in a particular case. The fact that these fields can vary prevents these associations from being mere cases of the same supervenience (the associations straddle *different* works of art), and hence prevents the explanation from evanescing. Consequently, if we wish to preserve a place for the explanation of aesthetic value, we should try to run the second model of explanation offered above. If we do this, we do not need to relinquish all explanation of the aesthetic merely because strong duplication is a possibility in the aesthetic case but not the moral. On this model of explanation, then, the possibility of explaining how *particular* works achieve their effect obtains, although it remains true that there is no explanation of the a posteriori associations between levels.

V

It is not always possible, however, to refuse to absorb the background field into the domain from which reasons for evaluation are drawn. To see this, we must avail ourselves of a distinction between two ways in which a work of art *expresses* a higher-level feature. Following Roger Scruton, we may call the types of expression transitive and intransitive.[13] Transitive expression is what we have been working with up to now. We say that a work of art expresses an emotion such as sadness, and our use of this word, common as it is to many circumstances, indicates our perception of something common to what this work of art

expresses and what may be expressed and experienced in other contexts. Intransitive expression is what Wittgenstein alluded to when he wrote:

> We say this passage gives us a quite special feeling. We sing it to ourselves, and make certain movements, and also perhaps have some special sensation. But in a different context we should not recognize these accompaniments—the movement, the sensation—at all. They are quite empty except when singing this passage. 'I sing it with a quite particular expression.' This expression is not something that can be separated from the passage. (*PI* pp 182–3)

Intransitive expression is what the teacher means when he tells his pupil to play with more expression: he does not expect to be asked 'expression of what?'.[14] Intransitive expression differs from transitive in being at least partly individuated by the work of art which expresses it: it is not something which any other work of art could convey.[15]

Now here we surely have a significant divergence from the moral case. For while there is such a thing as intransitive cruelty (to take a thick concept, but the point could equally be made using a thin one)—the quite particular way in which someone performs a cruel action, the cruelty of *that* action—the particularity (in this sense) of a cruel action is not morally relevant: morally relevant features are essentially repeatable—they are universals. But the quite particular melancholy of Madame Butterfly's 'Un bel di' or of Isolde's Liebestod cannot but be aesthetically relevant to the individual beauty of each. What is essential to the moral evaluation of an action *lifts off* from it; what is essential to the aesthetic evaluation of a work of art does not. We can reproduce exactly what makes some particular action cruel in another action which is spatio-temporally distinct from it, and cruel in its own quite particular way; we can only reproduce exactly what makes 'Un bel di' beautiful by having it sung again. Since moral situations arise between persons, it is tempting to suppose that the spatio-temporal *particularity* of persons must somehow be morally relevant in the application of moral concepts, especially of thin ones. But I think we should resist this temptation. The core of the wrongness of infidelity, say, does not rest on one's obligations to a particular person in any sense in which the particular resists capture at the general level. The obligation to be faithful to one's spouse is not radically particular: it attaches to *any* marital relationship.

What makes the difference here between the moral and the aesthetic is that in the latter case those features whose presence or absence provide material for full explanations of evaluations (in the sense of explanations which regard *all* features of a work of art as explanatorily functional), have to descend to the particular. This is because works of art are individuated by their universal features, so that in providing the (necessarily full) explanation of the *intransitive* expression of a work of art, the list of relevant features will individuate the work in question. But since actions are not individuated merely by their universal features, the parallel list we compile in the moral case will do no such thing. Accordingly, the distinction between transitive and intransitive expression can

be seen as keyed to the explanatory goals of giving, respectively, partial and full explanations. I have allowed that there are general a posteriori associations between phenomena of different levels which have explanatory force. I think it is clear that these associations operate between universal features at level 1 and *transitive* features of the second level. That is, we can give some explanation of the sadness of a work, just *qua* sadness, in terms of level 1 features which are regularly associated with sadness *qua* sadness. Those features are *pro tanto* markers of sadness.[16] But as soon as we particularize the effect in terms of the work, our powers of explanation give out. The impossibility of explaining the *intransitive* features of a work of art just is the impossibility of compiling a full explanation (in the above sense) of its aesthetically relevant features. One might say, echoing Mendelssohn,[17] that aesthetic emotion is indescribable because it is too precise for words. Nothing parallel holds in the moral case: there we have no explanatory stutter.[18]

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REFERENCES

[1] My levels = Scruton's orders see his *Art and Imagination* (London· Methuen, 1974) I do not discuss natural aesthetic value as such in this piece, but what I say is readily applicable to it.

[2] D. Cooke, *The Language of Music* (Oxford U.P , 1959), p 57

[3] The terminology here derives from Bernard Williams See his *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (London: Fontana, 1985). Williams deploys the terminology to mark a distinction between different kinds of *ethical* concept Examples of thick ethical concepts are 'brave', 'cruel', 'helpful', and of thin 'good', 'wrong'

[4] Longinus (*De Sublimitate*) seems officially to thicken the sublime But in practice he thins it out again· he counts as sublime Sappho's delicate lyric 'phainetai moi kenos . .'

[5] See Burke, *On the Sublime and Beautiful* III.2–4, for the claim that facts about proportion in vegetables, animals and humans do not speak

[6] See Sibley, 'Aesthetic and Non-aesthetic' (*Phil. Rev* 1965), at p 148: 'A may *be* the reason why something is B, and yet the knowledge that the thing has A may provide *no* reason or justification for supposing that it has B.'

[7] In his 'Aesthetic Appraisal and Works of Art' (reprinted in *Freedom and Resentment* (London. Methuen, 1974)), Strawson claims that 'there are no merit-conferring properties with non-evaluative names' (p 186) I do not think we can accept this just as it stands the associations referred to in the text hold, of course, between first-level characteristics and *thick* second-level characteristics But although there is no simple way of connecting the thick and the thin (section 1), there is none the less some evaluative content to thick characterizations. But there is a truth underlying Strawson's claim, and the main thesis of his article (the impossibility of giving general descriptive criteria of aesthetic excellence) which I shall try to bring out.

[8] I presume this difference is connected to the fact, stressed by Kant, that moral evaluation is related to practical deliberation and hence to human interests in a way in which aesthetic evaluation is not There are some good remarks to this effect in Hampshire: 'Logic and Appreciation' in Elton, ed., *Aesthetics and Language* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1970), pp. 162–6

[9] 'Aesthetic Concepts', *Phil Rev*. 1959

[10] John McDowell has suggested to me that the distinction I draw between the moral and the

aesthetic is not correctly put by saying that level 1 facts are free in the aesthetic case but not the moral. Rather, we should allow levels 1 and 2 to be distinguished *at all* only in the aesthetic case The point is that if it is essential to the infliction of pain, say, that it have these-rather-than-those ethical repercussions, then it is already a morally significant phenomenon, and hence not codifiable One might put this as follows· pain is experienced by subjects of significance, and significance is not codifiable. This correction, if accepted, would not of course damage the claim that there is a genuine distinction here between the moral and the aesthetic.

[11] Cf. the notion of a causal field; see, e g., Mackie, *The Cement of the Universe* (Oxford Clarendon, 1974), p 34f.

[12] As Strawson put it (art cit., p. 185). 'the *criterion of identity* of a work of art is the totality of features which are relevant to its aesthetic appraisal' See also Meager, 'The Uniqueness of a Work of Art', *Proc Aris. Soc.*, 1958–9 I am assuming that pieces of literature and music, for example, are abstract objects which bear the same relation to their physical realizations as statements do to sentences. Concrete objects such as paintings and sculptures count as abstract objects for the purposes of evaluation, because only those first-level features which a replica would have are relevant to the business of from Scruton in finding nothing improper in the idea of intransitive expression Scruton explaining the second-level features. Authenticity is a special value. it doesn't underwrite the others

[13] *The Aesthetic Understanding* (London: Methuen, 1983), p 49ff.

[14] See Scruton, op cit. (note 13), p 50 I diverge thinks the two types of expression conflict with one another, but it seems on the contrary that two artefacts may instantiate a common property, e g , sadness, in different particular ways. Compare faces

[15] See again Wittgenstein: *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*, ed Barrett (Oxford: Blackwell, 1966) at p 34: 'You *could* select either of two poems to remind you of death, say. But supposing you had read a poem and admired it, could you say "Oh, read the other, it will do the same"?'

[16] See David Pole's fine essay 'Art and Generality' (reprinted in his *Aesthetics, Form and Emotion* (London: Duckworth, 1983)). I diverge from Pole in my claim that there is an aspiration towards *full* explanation of the effect of art (keyed to its intransitive expression), at which point merely *pro tanto* reasons (and they are all we have) give out.

[17] Quoted by Scruton, op. cit., note 13, p. 58.

[18] I am grateful to J H McDowell, Sir Peter Strawson and R. W. Thompson for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.