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## **Emotion and Aesthetic Value**

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Aesthetics is a normative domain. We evaluate artworks as better or worse, good or bad, great or grim. I will refer to a positive appraisal of an artwork as an aesthetic appreciation of that work, and I refer to a negative appraisal as aesthetic depreciation. (I will often drop the word “aesthetic.”) There has been considerable amount of work on what makes an artwork worthy of appreciation, and less, it seems, on the nature of appreciation itself. These two topics are related, of course, because they nature of appreciation may bear on what things are worthy of that response, or at least on what things are likely to elicit it. So I will have some things to say about the latter. But I want to focus in this discussion on appreciation itself. When we praise a work of art, when we say it has aesthetic value, what does our praise consist in? This is a question about aesthetic psychology. I am interested in what kind of mental state appreciation is. What kind of state are we expressing when we say a work of art is “good”?

This question has parallels in other areas of value theory. In ethics, most notably, there has been much attention lavished on the question of what people express when they refer to an action as “morally good.” One popular class of theories, associated with the British moralists and their followers, posits a link between moral valuation and emotion. To call an act morally good is to express an emotion toward that act. I think this approach to morality is right on target (Prinz, 2007). Here I want to argue that an emotional account of aesthetic valuation is equally promising. There are important differences between the two domains, but both have an affective foundation. I suspect that valuing of all kinds involves the emotions. Here I will inquire into the role of emotions in aesthetic valuing. I will not claim that artworks express emotions or even that they necessarily evoke emotions. I will claim only that when we appreciate a work, the appreciation consists in an emotional response.

I will begin by arguing that emotions are involved in appreciation, and then I will look more specifically at which emotions are involved. Two methodological caveats are in order before we begin. First, I will not survey the important philosophical theories of appreciation here. Instead, I will make an effort, where possible, to ground my conclusions in empirical findings. This is an exercise in naturalized aesthetics. Second, I will focus on fine art (including film). These two methodological choices, reflect limitations of time and expertise, and nothing more. I hope that the proposals here can further the dialogue between scientists and philosophers who share an interest in aesthetic psychology, and I hope that everything I say about fine art can be extended to the other arts as well.

## 1. Affective Appreciation

### *1.1 An Affective Theory of Appreciation*

I want to begin by offering some reasons for thinking that appreciation is an emotional state. I don't think there are any knock-down arguments for that conclusion. Rather, one can defend it by argument to the best explanation. The hypothesis that appreciation has an affective foundation systematizes a number of observations that are hard to make sense of otherwise. I will also consider three objections.

I will divide the evidence into several categories. First, there is evidence that emotions co-occur with emotions. For me, this conclusion can be readily derived from introspection. When I view artworks and arrive at an evaluation it seems to be perfectly obvious that I am having an emotional response. Good art can be thrilling, and bad art can be depressing. An experience with art can be invigorating, stimulating, and exhausting. Obviously, appeals to introspection are not decisive. My introspective experiences may differ from yours. Fortunately, introspection is not the only way to support the conjecture that emotion co-occurs with appreciation. Further support comes from neuroimaging. In an fMRI study, Kawabata and Zeki (2003) found that beautiful pictures correlated with activations in orbitofrontal cortex and anterior cingulate gyrus, both of which are associated with emotion. Vartanian and Goel (2003) correlated aesthetic judgments with left cingulate gyrus as well. Using MEG, Cela-Conde et al. (2004) observed cingulate activations for both positive and negative aesthetic appraisals. And Jacobsen et al. (2006) correlated aesthetic judgment with activations in both anterior and posterior cingulate, as well as temporal pole, which has also been associated with emotion (e.g., Greene et al. \*\*\*). Some of these authors also observed brain activity associated with motor-response, which might indicate engagement of the action tendencies associated with emotion (Frijda, \*\*\*). Kawabata and Zeki found bilateral activation in somato-motor cortex, Vartanian and Goel reported decreases in right caudate response when participant viewed ugly pictures, and Cela-Conde et al. found responses in prefrontal dorsolateral cortex at late latencies, and area associated with selection of action. Each of these studies is different, and each raises as many questions as it answers, but all suggest that some of the areas that show up in emotion studies are also major players in aesthetic response.

Introspection and neuroimaging support the conclusion that emotions arise when we have positive aesthetic experiences. One can also show that different emotional states correlate with different aesthetic preferences. Mealey and Feis (1995) asked people to rate the attractiveness of various landscape paintings after asking them report their moods. Negative moods correlate with preferences for pictures of enclosed spaces and positive moods correlate with preferences for open spaces. White et al. (1981) showed that physical attractiveness judgments could be directly influenced by emotional induction. In their study emotionally evocative audio recordings were shown to increase assessments of physical attractiveness (unfortunately the effect has not, as far as I know, been replicated with artworks).

More enduring links between emotion and preference can also be demonstrated by comparing people who have different personality traits. For example, Furnham and Walker (2001) found that thrill seeking and conscientiousness both correlate with a taste for representational art, while neuroticism and disinhibition correlate with high ratings for abstract paintings and pop art. Pop art was disliked by people who rate high on agreeableness. In another study, Rosenbloom (2006) showed that thrill-seekers use more colors when they paint and show a preference for "hot" colors. These personality traits

can be interpreted, at least in part, as emotional dispositions, and, consequently, these findings point to a link between emotion and preference.

The link between emotion and preference can also be established by exploiting the well-known fact that repeated exposure to a stimulus induces positive affect (Zajonc, \*\*\*). Cutting exploited this fact in a study of aesthetic preferences for impressionist paintings. During the course of a semester, he used both widely reproduced and rarely reproduced impressionist paintings in the background of slides used while teaching his intro to psychology course. He has independently shown that students prefer the frequently reproduced images, even if they could not recall having seen those images in the past. While teaching his intro class, he showed the infrequently reproduced works at a greater frequency and, at the end of the semester, he tested his students' preferences. They couldn't reliably recall whether or not they had seen any of the works before, but they now showed a strong preference for the images that had been shown with greater frequency over the course of the semester. It seems that familiarity (even without recollection) induces positive affect, and positive affect increases aesthetic preference.

Such findings indicate that emotions play a role in directing our aesthetic preferences. There is also evidence that, when emotions are diminished, there is a corresponding reduction in aesthetic interest. People who lack strong positive emotions tend to have less appreciation for aesthetic experiences than others. In a standard scale for measuring anhedonia, people with low positive affect are found to agree with the statement "The beauty of sunsets is greatly overrated" (Chapman and Chapman, 1983). People who score high on alexithymia scales (characterized as having low emotional expressivity quite broadly) often have comparatively little interest in art, and are likely to prefer movies for their superficial entertainment value rather than their deeper meaning (Bagby et al., 1994).

The hypotheses that appreciation has an emotional basis also helps to explain variability in taste (see also Prinz, \*\*\*; \*\*\*). It is often noticed that beauty (and aesthetic worth more generally) is in the eye of the beholder. This platitude expresses both subjectivism and relativism. Folk aesthetics explicitly recognizes that aesthetic merits depend on us. Relativism is also borne out by more empirical findings. We have already seen that individuals with different personalities have different preferences. It is also easy to demonstrate group differences. For example, aesthetic preferences may vary between Eastern and Western cultures, which Westerners preferring to depict focal individuals and easterners preferring more encompassing scenes. Gonzales and Kwan (\*\*\*) asked Japanese and American subjects to take a photo of a seated model, and the Americans took close-ups while the Japanese took shots showing the models entire body and much of the surrounding scene. There are also aesthetic differences divided European cultures and African cultures. For example, among the Yoruba, one of the cardinal aesthetic virtues is shininess (\*\*\*). Of course, Europeans do appreciate African art, but they may do so for different reasons than the Africans who produce that art. As Clifford Geertz put it, "Most [Europeans], I am convinced, see African sculpture as bush Picasso." To take one more vivid example of aesthetic relativism, preferences differ between members of the artworld, and individuals who are less involved in the arts. In an amusing demonstration of the Komar and Melamid surveyed ordinary people and found that that they like landscapes with water, animals, and famous people (not common themes in contemporary galleries!). One explanation for such differences is that aesthetic preferences are based on emotions, and emotions can be conditioned differently in

different cultural settings. Differences in taste are easier to pin on differences in passions rather than differences beliefs—it's far from clear what the relevant beliefs would be.

Curiously, the platitude that beauty is in the eye of the beholder is contradicted by other aspects of folk aesthetics. In some ways, people are objectivists about art. We tend to think that artworks would be beautiful even if no one continued to admire them (Nichols, \*\*\*), and we also tend to think that some people have better taste than others. There are aesthetic experts, and we sometimes defer to them when, for example, we invest in art or decorate our homes. On the face of it, this objectivist tendency is difficult to reconcile with the widespread recognition of aesthetic relativism, and it is also ostensibly difficult to reconcile with the conjecture that appreciation has an emotional basis. On closer examination, however, it turns out that aesthetic objectivism actually provides further grounds for equating appreciation with an emotion. The reason for this is that we tend to project our emotions out onto the world. Suppose that a painting makes us feel good, and then we are asked would the painting still be beautiful if people didn't react to it. When we imagine the case, we continue to imagine the painting, and as long as we imagine the painting, we get that good feeling. That leads us to think the painting is intrinsically good. And if artworks can be intrinsically good, then there may be objective aesthetic facts. Ironically, the very thing that makes tastes subjective and relative, also dupes us into think that aesthetics worth is objective.

In a test of this hypothesis, Nichols and Prinz (\*\*\*) administered a questionnaire about whether artworks are objectively good to a group of undergraduate students, and we also gave the same group of students a questionnaire used by clinicians to measure anhedonia. People who are anhedonic have a diminished capacity to experience positive emotions. If objectivism is a consequence of projecting the positive emotions elicited by artworks onto the world, then anhedonic individuals should be less prone towards objectivism. This is exactly what we found. A non-affective theory of aesthetic appraisal would not predict this result.

The findings surveyed so far suggest that emotions arise during aesthetic appreciation, influence aesthetic preference, and may even be necessary for appreciating art. One can also argue for the emotional basis of appreciation by arguing against competing hypothesis. If appreciation is not affective, then what is it? The most obvious answer is that it is a rational process (or the output of a rational process). There is good reason for doubting this view. Here as elsewhere, reasons seem to under-determine values. Suppose one studies a painting and discerns every fact about its genesis form and content. No deduction from these features seems to be sufficient for determining that the work is good. One might find that the work is compositionally balanced, original, and skillful executed. One cannot infer that the work is good on this basis unless one values balance, originality, and skill. The value of these things cannot be a further descriptive fact about them, because for any descriptive fact there can be a question about whether it is worthy of appreciation. So it seems much more plausible that appreciating a work depends on the emotional responses we are disposed to have to its many features. This argument echoes a long tradition in the literature on value theory (cf. Hutcheson on art, and Hume on morals).

None of the evidence that I have been considering is decisive, but it can be systematized by supposing that appreciation is an emotional state. More specifically, I propose the following model. We need to distinguish two stages in the appraisal process.

There is an initial response to the work, and an assessment of the work, which is informed by that response. Both of these stages involve emotions.

First consider the response stage. This is that stage at which we perceive the work and react to its features. Some of those reactions are passive. Some elements may elicit emotions because they resemble emotionally significant things in the real world, some combinations of form may satisfy us, irritate us, or draw our attention. In many cases the response is driven by perceptual factors that we are totally unaware of. For example, judgments of beauty are strongly affected by prototypicality. A more beautiful face is a more average face, and likewise for other objects (Langois, \*\*\*; Hekkert and Wieringen, 1990). In addition, we have implicit biases for certain compositional features. Most of us are right-handed, and right-handers like works that have their focal objects on the right, and, in the case of portraits, we like to see the left cheek more than the right, (otherwise we would have to turn leftward to look the sitter in the eyes). It turns out the 73% of works have a right-handed bias (Grusser et al. 1988), though the pattern is not found among artists (such as Leonardo) who are known to have been left-handed.

The response stage can also be affected top-down by knowledge. If we know that a picture was produced in a certain way (say, made out of human hair), it might excite us more. Beliefs can also affect attention and interpretation. For example, there has been a dramatic change in how people view the Mona Lisa (Boas, 1940). Writing in Leonardo's time, Vasari described the painting as remarkable for its realism, and he described its sitter as a pretty young woman with a light expression and innocent smile. This all changed with the rise of romanticism. Romantic critics viewed the painting as otherworldly and unreal, and they described the sitter as a femme fatale with eyes that track the viewer and a mysterious smile. We have inherited the romantic construal and it affects how we experience the work. For example, we attend to the eyes and spooky landscape in the background. This results in a feeling of intrigue, vulnerability, and gratifying unease.

The second stage of aesthetic appraisal is assessment. We consider the responses evoked by the work in light of our aesthetic values. I think an aesthetic value is a rule stored in long term memory that can be schematized: if a work W has feature F, then, to that extent W is good to degree N. For example, we may value words that evoke certain emotions or works that surprise us or impress us with their technical skill. We also bring in more background knowledge at this stage: is the work original? Does it respond in interesting ways to other works in the history of art? Such explicit forms of deliberation may be comparatively rare, however. Research shows that when we explicitly reason about our preferences, we make bad choices that we come to regret (Wilson et al., 2003). There is also evidence that explicit reasoning is post-hoc (Johansson, et al. 2005). People will come up with explanations for why they prefer one of two images even when experimenters secretly swap the two images, so that people end up generating reasons for preferring a picture that was not the one they in fact selected as preferable minutes earlier. This suggests that assessment often involves unconscious rules.

I think assessment is as an affective process. All of the good-making features of a work are added together and combined with bad-making features, and the result is an over-all level of goodness (or badness), which is what we report when we verbally appraise the work as good or bad. I propose that units of goodness that are tabulated in this way are affective. Any feature that we regard as good, whether consciously or

unconsciously, contributes a bit of positive emotion. The evaluative rules that we apply, generate positive emotions. In the scheme, “if a work W has feature F, then, to that extent W is good to degree N” the “good to degree N” is constituted by an positive feeling of degree N. There are also negative emotion rules (corresponding to features that we depreciate), which contribute negative emotions. Each feature that we assess in this way contributes to the total emotional state that results from our encounter with the work, and the valence and intensity of that total emotional state ordinarily constitutes our aesthetic appraisal.

### *1.2 Three Objections*

I will refine this model below, but first I want to consider three knee-jerk objections.

First, even if emotions often arise in the context of aesthetic evaluation, it seems perfectly obvious that they are dispensable. Consider the experienced art dealer who can quickly distinguish bad art from good. Such a dealer, well aware of the latest trends, might go to an art fair or gallery and buy some work by unknown young artist because it resembles work that is doing well on the market. Recognizing such resemblances (or recognizing technical mastery, originality, composition, or almost any other feature that might contribute to a work’s value) requires visual perception and some background knowledge about other works; it does not seem to require emotion. It is very plausible that some dealers are so accustomed to assessing art that they rarely react strongly to works, but they retain an eye for quality. They can appreciate that a work is good dispassionately.

Despite appearances, the dispassionate dealer is not a counter-example. Two possible replies are available, depending on the details of the case. First, it could always be argued that dispassionate dealers do not actually appreciate the art that they buy; they merely recognize that it will be appreciated by others. We might say that the dispassionate dealer is jaded, and is merely working like an anthropologist who keeps track of trends without having any genuine convictions about which trends are really good. We might say that the dealer is giving lip service to aesthetic praise, and has confused aesthetic worth with market value. Alternatively, it might turn out that dispassionate dealers are actually disposed to experience emotions of appreciation; it just happens that those emotions do not arise because they are over-practiced at aesthetic appraisal. When such dealers assess a work as good they are in effect recognizing that they would have a positive response to it if they weren’t so harrassed.

The second objection that I want to consider has to do with our ability to filter out misleading emotions when we make aesthetic judgments. I suggested earlier that appreciation is a positive emotional response to an artwork. But consider cases where a work induces negative emotions, such as sadness, fear, indignation, or disgust. In the latter category, one might include Mark Quinn’s “Lucas”—a bust of his three-day old child cast in liquidized placenta. One can appreciate such works even though they are repellant. In addition, there are countless many bad works that induce positive emotions: works that are derivative, saccharine or silly. One might be amused or charmed by paintings in the Museum of Bad Art, while still judging that they are bad (consider “Pauline Reclining” or “Love is Being Out on a Limb Together”). In sum, good art can elicit negative emotions, and bad art can elicit positive emotions.

Appreciation seems to transcend these feelings, and must therefore have a non-emotional foundation.

I think this objection is important because it reveals something about the complex interaction of emotions during aesthetic appraisal, but it ultimately rests on a non-sequitur. The fact that we can positively praise works that elicit negative emotions (and conversely) does not entail that such works fail to elicit positive emotions. A single work of art can elicit emotions that are both positive and negative. One might have a positive emotion precisely because the work so successfully elicits a negative emotion. Someone who appreciates the Quinn sculpture might be enthralled by the concept of depicting a baby out of the very materials that kept the baby alive in utero. The use of this medium—fragile, organic, and unprecedented in the history of art—might strike the viewer as clever, and the attribution of cleverness might lead to a positive emotion, and hence a positive appraisal of the work. Another viewer might regard Quinn's choice of materials as an exercise in gratuitous shock value—banal, superficial, commercial, and vulgar. In that case, the initial disgust response, elicited by the placenta will be followed by a feeling of disgust at the artist and his work: a depreciating appraisal.

In the case of "Bad Art," one might begin by noticing how inelegant and inept the works are. The awkward lines and distorted proportions, the unnecessary details, the hokey sentiments—all of this may lead to a negative feeling. But the failure to conform to aesthetic standards might be so extreme and so charmingly innocent that one might be amused. One might explicitly compare bad works to good counterparts: "Pauline Reclining" evokes Modigliani, and, if viewed with irony, "Love is Being Out On a Limb Together" has many of the virtues of a David Shrigley drawing. Sometimes these comparisons amplify the negative appraisal (ugliness is even more apparent when juxtaposed with beauty), and sometimes it mitigates the negative appraisal (why celebrate Shrigley, while scoffing off "Love Being Out On a Limb"). This complex unfolding of emotions raises some interesting questions. For example, one might wonder which of the many conflicting emotions qualifies as the appraisal. I will return to this question below. For now the main point is that there are resources for addressing the objection under consideration. The fact that we can appreciate works that elicit negative emotions (and conversely) does not entail that appreciation is not a positive affective state.

There is one more knee-jerk objection to consider. In arguing that appreciation has an emotional basis, I cited evidence that emotions arise when we appraise art and exert an influence on our appraisals. Such findings are ambiguous. They show that emotions are part of the appraisal process but they don't necessarily show that appreciation is itself an emotion. An alternative possibility might go like this. When we consider a work, it elicits various emotions in us, and then, partially on the basis of those emotions, we judge whether the work is good or bad. The judgment that a work is good or bad is not an emotion, but rather a dispassionate. In other words, emotions might lead to appreciation rather than constituting appreciation. In terms of the model proposed above. The emotions may be part of the response process rather than the outputs of the assessment process. The data don't distinguish between cause and constitution.

I certainly admit that emotions can play a role in causing appreciation (e.g., we can appreciate a work because it moves us, for example), but I also want to insist that emotions constitute appreciation. My main reason for this conclusion is that it accounts for the phenomenology, evaluative nature, and motivational consequences of aesthetic

appraisal. If the units used to assess art were not affective in nature, then it's not clear why we should call them units of goodness. To dramatize this point, imagine that units of goodness were jellybeans. We could say a unit of goodness is a green jellybean and a unit of badness is a red jellybean. Now imagine that a work is tabulated to get a jellybean score of 32 green and 16 red. Greens win. But what makes this green jellybeans counts as good, rather than bad? What makes the score qualify as an evaluation of the work rather than a mere quantification of its properties? It seems that, in order to qualify as evaluative, the units could not be arbitrary markers, like jelly beans. Emotions are not arbitrary. They are intrinsically valenced. If the units of goodness are feelings, we can explain why assessment qualifies as a form of evaluation. We can also explain why we are drawn to good works, why we seek them out, why we surround ourselves with them, why we pay for them, and treasure them. We do this even when they also elicit negative emotions, such as disgust. Somehow, those feelings must be outweighed, and they can only be outweighed, it seems, by other feelings that have a positive valence.

The arguments in this section are not demonstrative, but they do support the conclusion that appreciation is an emotional state. That conclusion is, as far as I can tell, the best explanation for what goes on during aesthetic appraisal.

## **2. What Is Appreciation?**

### *2.1 Aesthetic Emotion*

I have been defending a model of aesthetic appraisal according to which appreciation is constituted by a positive emotional response. But this formulation is under-specified. What exactly is this positive emotion? This is not an easy question to answer, but I think we can make some progress on it. In this section, I will narrow down the possibilities by arguing against some tempting proposals.

To begin, let's consider three possibilities. The first is that appreciation is a biologically basic emotion dedicated to aesthetic evaluation. I find this implausible. It is not so implausible that we have a biologically basic emotional response to attractiveness (that might help us pick nutritious foods, opulent habitats, and ideal sexual partners), but aesthetic appreciation is not the same thing as attractiveness. An attractive thing can be disvalued aesthetically (a forgery, some soft pornography, a cliché sunset), and an unattractive thing can have aesthetic value (e.g., some Dubbafet paintings). Attractiveness is just one factor that may be assessed when decide whether an artwork is good. Might we have evolved an emotion for aesthetic appreciation in addition to the emotions underlying attractiveness judgments? I doubt it (Prinz, forthcoming). I can't develop the case here, but I don't think that the production and appreciation of art is an evolved response. It seems to appear relatively recently in the history of our species, and makes no obvious contribution to fitness. There is also considerable variability in what people aesthetically value, suggesting that it is not a biologically fixed response.

If appreciation is not biologically basic, then it is derived from other emotions. Here there are two possibilities. One is that appreciation is not one emotion, but many—perhaps an open-ended range of positive emotions that arise during the experience of art. The other possibility is that appreciation reduces to a single emotion, or perhaps a small class of emotions. I think a more unified theory would be better, all else being equal. If



there were multiple different emotions that factor into appreciation, it would be harder to explain how we add them all up together to make an over all assessment of a work. It would also be hard to find coherence in the phenomenon of evaluating art. Aesthetic goodness would vary from work to work, and comparison would be difficult. Granted, there are some difficulties in comparing artworks, because there the features by which we assess are often seem incommensurable. Two works can be good for different reasons. But we do seem to be able to make comparisons. We can compile list of favorite paintings, for example, and we can decide which postcard to buy at the museum shop. For such reasons, I think we should assume that appreciation has a kind of emotional uniformity is until forced to conclude otherwise.

If appreciation is a single emotion (or small family of emotions) and not *sui generis*, then presumably it reduces to or derives from some other emotion. In other words, in trying to determine what appreciation is, we should try to identify it with an emotion that also arises outside of aesthetic contexts. Let me consider some candidates.

In the previous section, I described appreciation as a positive emotion. That might immediately bring to mind pleasure (for discussions of aesthetic pleasure, see Levinson, 1996; Walton, 1993). It might be proposed that appreciating an artwork is a matter of taking pleasure in it. This proposal has some intuitive appeal, because encounters with art often are pleasurable, but it also faces some serious objections. Some artworks are depressing, terrifying, or disturbing (the point has been made by other, e.g., Carroll, 2002). Consider the Kathe Kollwitz Mother and Child or Goya's Disasters of War. This is even more so when we move from pictures into film. Consider de Sica's *Shoeshine*, Bresson's *Mouchette*, Bunuel's *Los Olvidados*, or Resnais' *Night and Fog*. It would be a gross mischaracterization of the phenomenological call these works pleasurable.

Pleasure seems so unapt in such cases that one wonder whether I was too hasty in describing appreciation as a positive emotion. In some cases, encounters with great art is a largely negative experience. This objection trades on an ambiguity, however. "Positive" does not necessarily mean pleasant. Elsewhere I have argued that emotional valence is quite independent of good feelings. Valence has to do with appetitive dispositions. More precisely, a positive emotion is one that we will work to seek out or sustain. Positive emotions are positive reinforcers. We certainly seek out art. In economic terms, we are willing to incur costs to have aesthetic experiences. We invest money, time, and effort. This suggests that art induces emotions that are appetitive, and hence positive valenced in that technical sense, even if the emotions are not always pleasurable.

With this in mind, let's consider another candidate. Perhaps appreciation is a kind of admiration. Admiration is, strictly speaking, a social emotion—one that we would direct at the creator of a work rather than the work itself. It is intuitively plausible that art elicits admiration. When we see good art, we quickly turn our thoughts to the artist. When see a Carravaggio, you see it as a Caravaggio. You don't merely say, this painting is great; you say this painter is great. It is also clear that we would withdraw praise if we discovered that an object of appreciation was not intentionally created. A pattern in concrete might strike us as genius if we think it is created intentionally by Tapies, but it may not be worthy of aesthetic praise if it turns out to be an unintentional accident. Preissler and Bloom (forthcoming) have shown that two-year-olds regard something as

an artwork only if they have reason to believe it was created intentionally. Spilled paint is art, and hence a candidate for aesthetic appraisal, only if it was spilled on purpose.

Admiration has an advantage over pleasure: it is not necessarily pleasurable. Admiration can even involve feelings of subordination, which can be unpleasant. It is nevertheless a positive emotion in the technical sense. We seek to experience things we admire. There may even be roots of this response in other species. Many mammals have social status hierarchies, and studies show that a macaque monkey will actually forego a food award just to look at pictures of an alpha male (Platt, 2005)!

Nevertheless, several serious problems arise if we equate appreciation with admiration. First, as a social emotion, admiration may be too intellectually demanding to explain many cases of appreciation. Young children and individuals with autism may appreciate art without having the capacity or tendency to think about the fact that art works are intentionally created any one. Second, admiration often seems to be a *consequence* of appreciation rather than a constituting part. We admire an artist because we appreciate the work. Third, admiration sometimes comes prior to appreciation. We find a work impressive, which involves, appreciating what the artist has accomplished, and that leads us to appreciate the work. Fourth, admiration renders it difficult to have an aesthetic appreciation of nature and other objects that were not products of intentional creation. Fifth, admiration seems to be an odd emotion to attribute to an artist, who, in the course of creating a work, appreciates that it is good; self-admiration seems arrogant and requires a curious split in the self (the admirer usually looks up to the person admired). Sixth, appreciation generally seems directed toward the artwork, not toward its creator. Seventh, while looking at some works of art we don't dwell much on who in particular created them (think of decorative arts, or arts created by large groups or artisans, like the tomb reliefs in Egypt's Valley of the Kings). For all these reasons, I think it would be a mistake to equate appreciation with admiration.

Another possibility, which may seem somewhat more promising, would be to equate appreciation with interest. When we look at good works of art, we often attend to them with great interest. Good works can be stared at and contemplated at length. They often repay these efforts, by leading us to new insights and discoveries. Moreover, like admiration, interest does not necessarily feel pleasurable. Horror and despair can warrant interest.

I think interest is on the right track, but also problematic. For one thing, interest need not be a form of praise. Sometimes bad works interest us because they are so bad. Another problem is that interest is most readily applied while we are experiencing a work, while appreciation often takes place afterwards. This is especially true in the performing arts. We might be so engaged by a performance—so interested in it—that we don't step back and evaluate it. Then, after it's over we reflect and conclude that it was a good work. Finally, some good works are actually difficult to sustain interest in. Consider slowly paced films, like Tarkovsky's *Solaris* or Antonioni's *Red Desert*. Such works are challenging to watch, because our minds may wonder, our attention may wane, our patience may go thin. But they are often great precisely because of their pacing. The Iranian director, Abbas Kiarostami puts it this way:

[T]here are films that nail you to your seat and overwhelm you to the point that you forget everything, but you feel cheated later. These are the films that take you

hostage. I absolutely don't like the films in which the filmmaker take their viewer hostages and provoke them. I prefer the films that put their audience to sleep in the theater.

There may well be a sense in which such films are nevertheless interesting, but the term "interest" implies that good works engage us more than bad works, and that simply isn't the case. It might be better to say that appreciation warrants attention, even if the works that we appreciate do not always attract or sustain interest easily.

I have considered three possible candidates for reductively explaining the emotion of appreciation, and I found all of them wanting. But I also think each also captures something that a correct account should try to preserve. Appreciation is not a form of pleasure, but like pleasure it is positive valenced. Appreciation is not admiration, but admiration may capture something right about the upward directionality of appreciation: good works strike us as elevated. Appreciation is not interest, but good works warrant attention.

Integrating these lessons, I want to offer another proposal. Perhaps we can identify appreciation with a kind of wonder. Wonder is no longer widely discussed in emotion theory, but it once had a privileged place. It was widely discussed and celebrated in medieval thought (Bynum, 1997), and it is included on Descartes' (\*\*\*) of list basic emotions. Indeed, Descartes describes wonder as the most fundamental emotion. On his account, wonder is a kind of surprise, but this is not the best characterization, because we can respond with wonder to something that is familiar. One might feel wonder when looking in a lover's eyes no matter how often you've done it before. "Wonder" is synonymous, as I understand the term with marvel. So the proposal is that to value a feature of an artwork is to marvel in it. This marveling can vary in intensity. When the response is very strong, we call it "amazement" or "awe."

It is unknown whether wonder is itself a biologically basic emotion. One possibility is that it evolved as a kind of reward signal when attending to things that are valuable to survival. The wonder experienced when staring into a lover's eyes may be an example of this. We can also experience wonder when we look at newborn babies. This may be a mechanism that helps motivate us to care for them. In addition there is the wonder we experience when we see certain natural scenes. Perhaps paying attention to nature, especially when it is complex, unusual, or grand was advantageous in the past. These are wild speculations, of course. I think it is a bit more plausible that wonder is a culturally elaborated extension of a biologically basic emotion. Perhaps positively valenced attention is a basic emotion, and that state takes on a distinctive character through enculturation.

I think the principle difference between mere positive valenced attention and wonder is that wonder is also be characterized a feeling of reverence. The object of wonder is an object of veneration. When we contemplate artworks, this veneration usually lacks religious significance, but perhaps not entirely. Artworks are often treated as sacred, and artists are sometimes viewed as if they were endowed with magical powers. Like other sacred objects, we also want to come into contact with wondrous things, and the destruction of an object of wonder is regarded as a more significant loss than the destruction of objects that merely please us. Artworks are more like people, in this respect. We see them as unique, and irreplaceable (no mere copy will do). If the

Mona Lisa burnt in a fire, we'd sooner visit the ashes than a perfect replica. This may be a culturally-driven phenomenon. In Western culture, like many others, artworks were once widely used in ritual contexts, and the secular appreciation of art is informed by that history. If so, wonder has biological roots, but it is also a product of culture. If appreciation is wonder, then appreciation is a biocultural response.

Wonder captures the features of pleasure, admiration, and interest that seem central to appreciation. Like pleasure, it is a positive emotion, though not always pleasant. Like admiration, it involves a feeling of elevation: the wondrous thing has an elevated status, and we are elevated by it. Like interest, wonder is a kind of regard, though whereas interest can be characterized as a way of looking, wonder might be better characterized as a way of seeing: we see things with wonder (or, alternatively, we see the wonder in things). Wonder also warrants attention. Something wondrous is worthy of attention and reflection

For these reasons, I think wonder nicely captures what goes on when we positively appraise artworks. I think it is the best candidate for the emotion underlying aesthetic appreciation. This is just speculation, of course, and preliminary speculation at that. I have not provided a complete analysis of wonder, and further evidence is needed establish that wonder is the basis of appreciation. It remains possible that appreciation involves a more open-ended range of emotions. I have also said nothing about depreciation. Is that a single emotion too? If so, which one? I leave these tasks for another occasion. For now I simply present the wonder hypothesis as a possibility worthy of further investigation. Before concluding, I will address one more objection.

## *2.2 Aesthetic Wonder*

I have been pursuing a reductionist account of appreciation. I have suggested that appreciation reduces to some emotion that is not specific to the domain or aesthetic appraisal. And in particular, I proposed that appreciation is a form of wonder. The problem with pursuing a reductionist account is that this approach makes it difficult to see what is *distinctive* about aesthetic responding. Wonder arises in non-aesthetic contexts. I already mentioned the wonder that can be experienced when staring in a lover's eyes or a newborn child. One can experience wonder when looking at a at a bee-hive, at a tornado, or at an intellectual achievement. If wonder plays all these roles, how can aesthetic appreciation simply reduce to wonder? That seems to imply that we have an aesthetic response to tornados and newborns. Of course, we can appreciate such things aesthetically, but we need not, and, crucially, when we are having a response of wonder to a baby or a storm, we are not necessarily at that moment having an aesthetic response. It seems something has gone wrong.

The answer to this worry is quite simple, I think. Aesthetic appreciation is a form of wonder, but it is not the case that all forms of wonder are forms of aesthetic appreciation. Elsewhere I have defended the view that we can generate new forms of emotion by re-calibrating previously existing emotions to new classes of elicitors. "Re-calibration" is simply setting up a mechanism in our long-term memory that links the emotion to a specific set of stimuli, which may not have been disposed to elicit the emotion before. Schadenfruede is joy re-calibrated to suffering; guilt may be a blend of anxiety and sadness re-calibrated to situations in which we have harmed a love one;

accidie is despondency calibrated to religious worship; patriotism is pride re-calibrated to one's nation and symbols thereof. And so on. In each of these cases, we first construe a class of stimuli is a way that naturally elicits the more fundamental emotion, and thereby set up an association between those stimuli and that emotion. Representations of those stimuli are stored in memory, in what I call an elicitation file, and, on future occasions, encounters with a stimulus of the right kind elicits the emotion. Then we introduce a verbal label to refer to that fundamental emotion as elicited by the kinds of things represented in the elicitation file. I want to say that aesthetic appreciation is wonder that has been re-calibrated to artworks and things that we construe as artworks.

The solution comes easy enough, but it immediately leads into one of the largest and thorniest questions in all of aesthetics: what exactly is an artwork? Fortunately, I don't need to provide an answer here. I think ordinary consumers of art probably have no good theories about what artworks are. They could not make much progress on questions about the ontology of art. Philosophers have spent centuries on this question without arriving at consensus. From the perspective of aesthetic psychology, the question isn't about the essence of art. Rather, it's about how we recognize something as an artwork. Posed this way, the question is just one instance of a more general question about how we classify things. Most people couldn't tell you the essence of a tiger or even of gold. But, we are all pretty good at identifying things. Likewise, we usually have little difficulty recognizing something as an artwork. With tigers, gold, and artworks, we probably use similar mental tricks. In particular, we probably store representations of category exemplars, and then, when we encounter a new object we compare it to exemplars we already possess. We may also store information about where category instances are likely to occur: tigers are found in jungles and zoos, gold in found in jewelry, and artworks are found in museums (or on stages and screens). We use all of this information to classify. In some cases, classification is difficult: is a happening an artwork? It's hard to tell, because it's unlike the most familiar exemplars. We can construe a happening as an artwork by focusing on the features it shares with paradigm cases. We can also view a perfume mixture, a meal at a restaurant, or a natural landscape as artworks in a similar way. When we do this, we may be making a mistake, but that doesn't matter. For present purposes, the key thing is that, in the absence of any adequate theory of what artworks are, we can classify things as arts, and we have a stored mental file of exemplar representations that helps us do that.

So the story that I am telling can be summarized as follows. When we encounter an artwork, we first classify it as such by comparison to memories of other artworks. Then we respond to it. Then we assess it. Each merit induces a small amount of wonder.<sup>1</sup> And the sum of all the wonder is the degree to which we appreciate the work. Because wonder so-induced is calibrated to things that we classify as artworks, it can be referred to as "aesthetic wonder" or, if I am right, "appreciation."

### 3. Conclusions

In this discussion, I have been investigating the nature of aesthetic appreciation. A lot of the work on appreciation has focused on the question of what we appreciate, rather than

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<sup>1</sup> [[I'm not sure yet about this piece of the story. Maybe wonder is the result of adding up the positive units, and the units are something else.]]

on the nature of appreciation itself. Of course, there has been some important work on the topic in the past. Major contributors to aesthetics have made relevant proposals, including Hutcheson and Kant. My goal here has not been to review the philosophical literature. Rather, this has largely been an exercise in naturalize aesthetics, with a focus on what we can learn from contemporary cognitive science and philosophical psychology. This exercise led me to draw two main conclusions. First, appreciation is an emotional state, and, second, it may be a form of wonder. Both of these conclusions are hostage to empirical fortune. Little work has been done to tease apart the emotions that are involved in aesthetic response and the emotions that are involved in aesthetic appraisal, and, to my knowledge, there has been no empirical exploration of the role of wonder in appreciation art. The second part of this paper is even more speculative than the first. If the conclusions do not hold up, I hope at least that progress on the nature of appreciation will be made in the course of refuting them.