Fine Discernment and the Priority of the Particular

by

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Abstract

Recent work at the intersection between ethics and aesthetics has focused on the interaction between ethical value and moral value. The philosophical work being done here arises from asking the interaction question: what is the interaction between moral and aesthetic judgment and value? Some questions are asked regarding the possible interaction between ethical de(merits) and aesthetic (de)merits; for instance, can an ethical flaw ever count as an aesthetic flaw in an artwork? While the work done here has paid off in interesting new positions and has also enlightened the long debate between the possible legitimacy of the ethical criticism of art, much of the work misses out on a more primary question.

This dissertation, while at the intersection between ethics and aesthetics, will buck the interaction question in favour of the structural question: what, if any, structural features are shared between moral and aesthetic judgment? I believe there are three such structural similarities. The first is that ethical and aesthetic reasons share a common metaphysics: holism of reasons is true in both ethics and aesthetics. Ethical and aesthetic reasons are capable of changing their evaluative polarity across cases. The second similarity is that, given holism, the particular should be given priority when making appreciative moral and aesthetic judgments. Our appreciative judgments should be informed by the particulars of the case before us. Third, moral and aesthetic emotionism is true: ethical and aesthetic concepts are essentially related to the emotions.

Given these three structural similarities, this dissertation argues that the skill of fine discernment is required in order to make appreciative judgments. Fine discernment makes good on the demand that the priority of the particular requires: in order to apprehend the
evaluative property of the ethical situation or aesthetic object, we must discriminate and unify the discrete particulars into a coherent whole.
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For Budders and Mother Dearest
Chapter One: Introduction

The first chapter of Art, Emotion and Ethics, Berys Gaut’s book on the intersection between moral and aesthetic judgment, begins with the “long debate,” and indeed, the issues involving art and morality have a long history. Plato, in book ten of The Republic, famously banishes the mimetic poets from his ideal city for fear that art morally damages and corrupts an audience. Even today some echo Plato’s thinking. Some artworks are criticized for being too morally outrageous and dangerous. After all, artists do seem quite happy to push the boundaries of what is morally acceptable in art. For example, Com&Com, a Swiss duo of dadaist–inspired artists, offered $10,000 dollars to a expectant couple if they would agree to name their baby “Dada.” David Wojnarowicz’s video work Fire in My Belly, which depicts ants crawling over a crucifix and assorted homosexual images and themes, was recently taken off view by the Smithsonian Institution as a result of pressure from members of the Catholic Church and some U.S. Congressmen. These are only two examples which show that the “long debate” is very much still alive and going. The issues revolving around art and morality have long gripped us and still do.

That we are still in their grip is shown by work being done by philosophers. There is a lively debate currently at the intersection between moral and aesthetic value and judgment. Some of that debate concerns the question of whether or not censoring art is ever a moral good or morally required. This censorship debate harkens back to Plato and his concern for the moral character of the citizens living in his republic. However, much of the debate has focused on a different question: whether or not a moral defect in an artwork diminishes that artwork’s aesthetic value. This debate is concerned with the question of whether or not
ethical criticism is also a form of aesthetic criticism. Some philosophers think that the two spheres are distinct: that ethical defects never diminish an artwork aesthetically (Anderson and Dean 1998; Harold 2011; Lamarque 2010; Posner 1997). Others, like Gaut, believe that these two spheres are somehow connected, that moral value does interact with aesthetic value (Carroll 1996; Eaton 2001; Gaut 2007; Lopes 2005; Jacobson 2006; Kieran 2003).

Other philosophers have associated aesthetics and ethics in different ways. Julia Driver claims that “being good is sometimes a matter of looking good” (1992: 343). Her approach here is to question whether “mimetic immoral acts,” acts which could be construed as immoral acts, are in fact immoral. To use one of her examples, consider the feminist who enters the sleazy strip club in order to use the toilet. Should the feminist be concerned that he/she may be seen at the strip club? While there is nothing inherently wrong with such actions, they could be construed in the wrong way and have negative consequences. Driver argues from consequentialist grounds that if a mimetic immoral act has negative consequences, then there is a moral reason not to perform that act.

A different angle to ethics and aesthetics is taken by Mark Packer. He argues that some acts can be offensive for purely aesthetic reasons, even when these acts present no threat or injury nor interfere with anyone’s rights (1996). For him “the use of our aesthetic values to justify prohibition is already well–established in our moral and legal culture” (ibid.: 57).

Still others associate the aesthetic with the moral in differing ways. Mark Johnson argues that aesthetic experience enhances moral imagination (Johnson 1993). Some argue that moral experience and aesthetic experience are linked (Tolstoy 1896/1960). Yet others
think that “on the whole, every new aesthetic reality makes man’s ethical reality more
precise. For aesthetics is the mother of ethics” (Brodsky 1988: 17; see also Eaton 2001: chp 7).

There is much to be said on the topic concerning the relation of the ethical sphere to
the aesthetic sphere. However, what is characteristic of most of the debates and issues is the
interaction between ethical value and aesthetic value. That is, how ethical judgment should
influence aesthetic judgment (if it should), how aesthetic judgment should influence ethical
judgment (if it should), and how ethical/aesthetic properties/experiences interact with one
another. What has received little attention are the similarities shared between ethical and
aesthetic judgment. Call the following the structural question: what, if any, structural
features are shared between moral and aesthetic judgment? This dissertation will eschew the
interaction question in favour of the structural question.

It is not as though I think the interaction questions are unimportant; indeed, I find
them to be extremely important. However, I wish to take a few steps back from the
interaction line of questioning and look at what it is to make a moral judgment and what it is
to make an aesthetic judgment and try to locate the relation between the aesthetic sphere and
the moral sphere from this location. After all, one way of showing the relevance of the
aesthetic to the moral, and the moral to the aesthetic, is to show that when we judge morally
and when we judge aesthetically we are doing the same sort of thing, and, further, that the
lessons applied to judgment in one domain apply as well to the other. In essence then, I wish
to build a bridge between the ethical sphere and the aesthetic sphere, and show how this
bridge informs the similarities between moral judgment and aesthetic judgment.
What do I mean by structural similarities? It seems plausible to suggest that for any domain, a warranted judgment in that domain will reflect facts about that domain. So, a judgment in applied physics will reflect the laws of physics so far understood. The claim of this dissertation is that the moral and aesthetic spheres share—in at least three respects—a common structure, such that this shared common structure is reflected in similarities in moral and aesthetic judgment. Further, given these three structural similarities, I argue that a skill is required in order to make moral and aesthetic judgments, and that skill I call “fine discernment.” Fine discernment is an ability to discriminate and unify the morally or aesthetically salient features which result in moral and aesthetic properties and appreciative judgments.

Chapter two concerns the first structural feature: moral and aesthetic reasons share a common metaphysics: holism of reasons is true in both spheres. Holism of reasons states that “a feature that is a reason in one case may be no reason at all, or an opposite reason, in another” (Dancy 2004: 7). This is contrasted to another theory of reasons, that of atomism. Atomism holds that “a feature that is a reason in one case must remain a reason, and retain the same polarity, in any other” (ibid.). Atomism should be rejected in favour of holism, since it fails to take into account the evaluative shifts that features can undergo in different situations.

Further to holism, features in aesthetic and moral cases share at least three other features in common: First, they are contributory. Reasons in aesthetics and ethics are “feature[s] whose presence makes something of a case for acting [or judging], but in such a way that the overall case for doing that action can be improved or strengthened by the
addition of a second feature playing a similar role” (Dancy 2004: 15). Second, they are resultant properties. The moral or aesthetic property (such as beauty or goodness) will result from the non–aesthetic or non–ethical base properties of the evaluable item. Resultance is contrasted with supervenience, and is favoured over supervenience because the resultant base properties will be much more specific than the supervenient base properties. Specificity is a friend to holism. Finally, third, features in ethics and aesthetics function differently and have different forms of relevance given the evaluable context. Two forms of relevance are stressed: that of enabling and that of favouring. On this account, for a reason to be a reason is for it to hold a certain relation to action/judgment, and that relation is favouring. A reason to judge something beautiful is for it to favour the judgment “it is beautiful.” Favourers will be contrasted with enablers, as enablers are not reasons for action/judgment, but are an important part in explaining why it is the case that some features are reasons and others not.

It is important to note that while I think holism of reasons is true, this dissertation is not arguing the truth of particularism in ethics or aesthetics. Particularism is a thesis about whether or not there are any useful and informative principles of evaluation for correct action/judgment. Moral particularism would deny that principles are required for moral judgment, and aesthetic particularism would deny that principles are required for aesthetic judgment. While holism was originally thought to entail particularism, this is no longer the case (see McKeever and Ridge 2006; Väyrynen 2006, 2009). One can be a holist without being a particularist, and I need not take a stand on the truth of particularism for my purposes here.
Given holism of reasons, chapter three argues that there is a second structural feature common to aesthetic and moral judgments: that the particular nature of cases, situations, and artworks should be stressed. This chapter concerns drawing lessons from the priority of the particular and how these lessons inform our moral and aesthetic appreciative judgment. The priority of the particular is stressed because, assuming holism, the evaluative nature of cases depends upon what particular relevant features of the case are evaluatively salient, their interaction with one another, and how they are grouped into a whole.

The priority of the particular will be cashed out into four “lessons.” They are as follows:

1) **unique**: An evaluable item’s moral or aesthetic property q is particular to x.
2) **appreciation**: In order to appreciate x’s property q, subject S must apprehend x.
3) **apprehension**: In order to apprehend x, subject S must get to know x through direct experience of x or through artificial representations of x, where inseparable content is preserved.
4) **ground**: In order for subject S to be justified in making an appreciative judgment on x’s property q, S must know the non–aesthetic or non–ethical grounds for q.

These lessons result from putting the particular prior in moral and aesthetic judgment.

Chapter four concerns the third and final structural feature: moral and aesthetic concepts are essentially related to the emotions. This will be supported by work done in empirical psychology and cognitive science, making this structural similarity empirically informed. To explain what an emotion is, I will outline a dominant position in emotional psychology, that of appraisal theory, which takes emotions to be mediated by appraisals of the objective stimulus features of the case/situation/object.

In the fifth chapter I tie these structural similarities together. Given these three structural similarities, a skill is required in making moral and aesthetic appreciative
judgments. This skill I will call “fine discernment.” Chapter three stresses the priority of the particular in making moral and aesthetic judgments. If I am correct, then moral and aesthetic deliberation is a bottom-up process where the particular is prior. In that chapter, **apprehension** will inform us that in order to reveal an item’s evaluative property we apprehend that item. This chapter will work towards fleshing out the conception of “apprehension” as the skill of fine discernment.

Finally, the concluding chapter will point out three future research projects which can be undertaken given the claims made in this dissertation. These projects are not only made viable given this dissertation, but they will also serve to better inform the claims made here.

As a final terminological point: throughout this dissertation I use “moral” and “ethical” interchangeably. For the purposes of my dissertation, I do not take the “moral” to be a subclass of the ethical, as it may (rightly or wrongly) be thought, or to pick out special features of the ethical. Likewise, I do not distinguish between “aesthetic properties” and “artistic properties” nor value. For the purposes of this dissertation, artistic properties are considered a class of aesthetic properties.
Chapter Two: Reasons in Aesthetics and Ethics

The starting point for my approach is a particular view about the metaphysics of reasons and how they function in aesthetics and ethics. Since reasons play a role in justifying judgments, and since what I am largely concerned with is moral and aesthetic judgments, a theory of reasons is a natural place to start. The conclusion of this chapter will be that aesthetic and ethical reasons share a similar metaphysics, therefore grounding the first structural feature shared between ethical and aesthetic judgment.

Before I lay out the theory of reasons I think right, I want to present its diametrically opposed counterpart. To stage set this other view, it is often assumed that a rational decision procedure requires consistency (consistency being a necessary condition, not a sufficient condition). On this view, a decision procedure concerning judgment is rational when the judgments produced are consistent with one another. If I judged one act wrong because it was an act of stealing, then I should judge similar acts of stealing wrong as well. More schematically, if one act was wrong because it had some moral feature f, then whenever f appears again it will be a wrong–making feature of the act. Of course, there may be other considerations present in future cases that defeat the wrongness of f, but even in these cases f is still a wrong–making feature, just a defeated one (i.e., other reasons might outweigh the wrongness of f such that the act is made right because of the presence of these more evaluatively weighty features). The same goes for the aesthetic sphere as well: if something is made beautiful by some feature, then when that feature appears again it should count towards beauty. The underlying assumption here is that in order for moral and aesthetic reasoning to be called reasoning, and certainly to be called good reasoning, it must be
consistent across relevant cases. The sort of consistency relevant here is “coming to a view about particular features under which they function as reasons in the same way on each appearance” (Dancy 1993: 63). On this view, the reasons cited in judgments must themselves have the same evaluative polarity across cases in order for moral and aesthetic reasoning to be consistent.

The influence of this supposed consistency requirement on good judgment is easily seen in our argumentative practices: a highly effective way of undermining your opponent is to show that he or she has made inconsistent judgments. So, if you think consistency is a feature of good reasoning, and good reasoning is essential for moral and aesthetic judgments, then the following view in the theory of reasons will be quite attractive:

**Atomism in the Theory of Reasons**: “a feature that is a reason in one case must remain a reason, and retain the same polarity, in any other” (Dancy 2004: 7).

This is because consistency makes a particular theoretical demand on reasons which atomism can happily meet. According to atomism, reasons are universally relevant and retain the same evaluative polarity from case to case. If a reason citing some feature $f$ failed to be universally relevant, then it will only be relevant in some cases. But then this would undermine the consistency of judgments in which being $f$ is cited as a reason. If it failed to retain the same evaluative polarity, then it would have a negative polarity (be a reason against) in some cases, and positive polarity (be a reason for) in others. But then this would undermine the consistency of judgments in which being $f$ is cited as a reason (on this point, see McNaughton 1988: 190-94). Consistency requires what atomism can provide: the retention of evaluative polarity and universal relevance.
Examples of atomistic thinkers in aesthetics and ethics are easily found. Monroe Beardsley, a prominent aesthetician in the 1960s, held that there are three primary criteria that *always* count towards aesthetic merit in artworks: unity, complexity, and intensity of regional quality. An artwork possessing one or more of these features can only have positive aesthetic merit in virtue of possessing that feature(s). Moreover, for a secondary criterion (e.g., balance, shading, colour) to be a merit in a work it must properly be linked up with one or more of the primary criteria; that is, the meritorious nature of the use of colour in the painting is to be explained via one or more of the three primary criteria. So, whenever unity, complexity, and/or intensity of regional quality is found in an artwork, they will and can only count towards aesthetic merit (Beardsley: 1962).

An example of ethical atomism is provided by the British moral philosopher W. D. Ross. Ross asserts “without hesitation that if a feature counts in favor of acting in one case, then necessarily it counts in favor in any case in which it appears” (Dancy 2004: 7; also see Ross 1930). Ross lists a set of *prima facie* duties which ground obligations in deciding what to do in a moral act. The polarity of Ross’ *prima facie* duties are invariant across cases, that is, they have the same polarity across all possible cases. We have a *prima facie* duty not to act with maleficence because maleficence will always count against an action.

I reject atomism as a theory of reasons. In order for atomism to be true, features that are reasons in one case must retain the same evaluative polarity in similar cases. But features commonly change evaluative polarity across cases. Because of this, the theory of reasons favoured in this dissertation will be

**Holism in the Theory of Reasons**: a feature that is a reason in one case may be no reason at all, or an opposite reason, in another. (Dancy 2004: 7)
According to holism, the agent cannot judge or know in advance what definite contribution any one feature will make to the nature of the action or artwork. This is because the evaluative contribution of any single feature depends upon the contribution of other features present in the case at hand.

Atomism cannot account for the interaction effects between features present in a case to be judged because atomism takes features to retain whatever evaluative polarity they have across situations. They are *atomists* because they think individual features are not responsive to contextual variance. However, features are sensitive to contextual variance, and they do interact with one another, and this can cause evaluative polarity shifts which cannot be accommodated if atomism were true. Margaret Little, in fleshing out holism, appeals to an analogy with aesthetics to make the case clearer (and so assuming holism is true for aesthetics): “...we wouldn’t think that the dab of red always constitutes a beauty–making feature wherever there are no other aesthetic properties: the aesthetic import — if any — that it carries is still dependent on the further particulars of the case” (Little 2000: 289).

Going further, take the following example as an elucidation of the contrast between holism and atomism: consider that the an act is pleasurable is usually a reason for action. I take my friend out to eat at her favourite restaurant when bad news hits because it will give her pleasure. That taking her out to eat will give her pleasure is a reason to perform the action (and further, explains the action should I be asked why I did it). From this, does it follow that we have reason to perform any pleasurable action is a good action? According to the holist, the answer is no, but according to the atomist the answer is yes, since their commitments entail that pleasure would always be a good–making feature of actions (although, again, that
pleasure may be trumped by other features). However, the following example shows that pleasure can be a bad–making feature of an action given a particular context:

A government is considering reintroducing hanging, drawing and quartering in public for terrorist murders. If reactions to public hanging in the past are anything to go by a lot of people may enjoy the spectacle. Does that constitute a reason in favor of reintroduction? ...The fact that spectators might get a sadistic thrill from the brutal spectacle could be thought to constitute an objection to reintroduction (McNaughton 1988: 193).

The above example shows that pleasure is capable of changing its polarity from case to case. In one case pleasure is a good–making feature, in the other it is a bad–making feature. It is important to note that pleasure here is not being outweighed by the other features of the situation. Rather, the pleasure itself is a reason against the action. To take another classic example: some may think that the pleasure had from hunting animals merely for fun is a reason for condemning such practices (see Dancy 2003: 61). Atomism denies that individual features are capable of changing evaluative variance, and so would have trouble explaining why in one case pleasure is a good–making feature, while in another it is not. For the holist this is a good reason to reject the theory.

If the worry is that the above example makes an unwarranted plea for certain moral sentiments, the point can be illustrated with another example, this time using non–moral reasoning:

Suppose that it currently seems to me that something before me is red. Normally, one might say, that is a reason (some reason, that is, not necessarily sufficient reason) for me to believe that there is something red before me. But in a case where I also believe that I have recently taken a drug that makes blue things look red and red things look blue, the appearance of a red–looking thing before me is reason for me to believe that there is a blue, not a red, thing before me. It is not as if it is some reason for me to believe that there is something red before me, but that as such a reason it is overwhelmed by contrary reasons. It is no longer any reason at all to believe that there
is something red before me; indeed it is a reason for believing the opposite (Dancy 2009, also see his 1993: 61).

The holist strategy against the atomist is to “give a range of such examples and to show how odd it would be if moral reason–generating features alone functioned as generalists [atomists] suspect, either in this world or possible worlds” (Kirchin 2007: 12). Elijah Millgram has called this the “defusing move” which “works on just about anything” (2002: 72).

But what about consistency? Does the acceptance of holism come at the cost of consistency? It certainly denies the conception of consistency we started with, one which requires reasons to function in the same way on every appearance. There is still room for consistency however, just a different type of consistency. For holists, the crucial question is what is the nature of the case before them: they can see that pleasure is involved for instance, but is it a reason for action or a reason against action in this case? On the holist picture, consistency is not tied to a theoretical demand on reason, but instead tied to “one’s main duty” in moral judgment, which “is to look really closely at the case before one” (Dancy 1993: 63). This is not to deny that one should not be aware of other cases, since “comparison with other cases may help us to decide how things are here, just as a long experience of car engines may help us to diagnose the fault this time ... but in neither case is one’s first question what one can say here that is consistent with what one has said elsewhere” (ibid.).

Given the defusing move above, the holist strategy against the atomist is to present them with a challenge: if there are invariant reasons, what are they? Suppose an atomist were to answer this question and was able to come up with an example of an invariant reason, some reason which always counted in one way in all cases. Justice, for example, might be
such a invariant moral reason: that an action would have the feature of being just is always a reason for doing the act. A holist can suggest a defusing move here: perhaps in the public sphere justice would demand one thing of a person, whereas in the private sphere justice would demand another (perhaps in a family setting when distributing portions of the Thanksgiving turkey). As Dancy states, while “family decisions can involve justice, [...] the inappropriateness of approaching ordinary family life in the way that one approaches public institutions reveals that the role of justice as a reason can vary according to context” (Dancy 2004: 121). However, suppose this is move is unsatisfactory, perhaps because it relies on two different senses of justice, one legal and one moral, and further these different senses of justice can be made sense of. What then?

As Dancy states, what would result is “a concept that plays an invariant normative role as a reason–giver” and this is what atomism demands from reasons (2004: 121). Given this, has the atomist succeeded in proving atomism true for reasons? As Dancy goes on to say, “this would, however, do little or nothing to show that there is a decent supply of similar concepts” (ibid.). Holism does not fall with there being some invariant reasons. It would fall should it turn out that the great majority of reasons are invariant; but this isn’t the case, or at least the atomist has not proved this to be the case. In ethics there are a great majority of concepts which can count towards or against action in a case, most of the “thick” concepts for example: integrity, fidelity, gratitude, reparation, courage, lewdness, honour, temperance, care, and so on. Likewise in aesthetics, there are thick aesthetic concepts that can count
towards or against some positive evaluation of aesthetic merit: graceful, delicate, dainty, handsome, comely, elegant, garish and the like.¹

Another objection to holism comes from David McNaughton and Piers Rawling, who have argued that according to the best reading of W. D. Ross, in order for there to be such a thing as morality then there is a need for invariant reasons. According to them, morality requires a theory of primary as well as secondary moral reasons, “in which secondary reasons have force only in so far as it is their presence in the particular context that ensures the presence of a primary reason” (2001: 267).

The distinction between primary and secondary reasons can be cashed out in the following way: On McNaughton’s reading of Ross (McNaughton 2002), there is a distinction between basic duties (which are invariant across cases) and derived duties (which are not). Basic duties are what are found on Ross’ list (duties of fidelity, duties of reparation, etc). Derived duties “arise from” these basic duties. One’s duty to obey the laws of one’s country arises from the basic duties of gratitude, fidelity, and beneficence. However, it is not always the case that it is good to obey the laws of one’s country; for example, when one’s country is corrupt (ibid.: 79–80). Put generally, whatever normative force a derived duty has, it has in virtue of its connection to an invariant basic duty, which has the same normative force across all cases. Morality requires these invariant basic duties in order for there to be normativity at all.

¹ Further, should one want to try the route of finding a non–normative feature that is normatively relevant in the same way in all contexts, the same considerations would apply. First off, it is hard for me to even think of one non–normative feature that is always relevant, and even if one did come up with one, would there be a decent supply of such features?
In response to this line of argument it is first of interest to point out how similar it is to the thinking of Monroe Beardsley’s above: for him there were primary aesthetic criteria that always counted towards aesthetic merit and secondary criteria which had to be linked to the primary criteria in order to count towards aesthetic merit. Ross and Beardsley end up on the same coin then, each representing the ethical and the aesthetic side of atomism. And according to this approach, the secondary reasons need the primary reasons in order to be reasons, precisely because the primary reasons are invariant reasons. So, if there are no invariant reasons, then the secondary reasons lose their reason–giving force, and then the whole business of making moral and aesthetic judgments cannot get off the ground.

It is telling that Dancy appeals to aesthetics in coming up with a plausible solution to the above:

how well would such a claim fare when applied to the aesthetic? Is there a sufficient supply of invariant aesthetic reasons? Here, my own view is that there is little sign of any such thing. As I would say of moral reasons, there may be some aesthetic concepts of invariant relevance ... But it seems very improbable that all aesthetic reasons depend on invariant ones. There just aren’t enough to go around. And there seems to be no need for them anyway. So why should morality not be like that? (2004: 123).

Indeed, why shouldn’t the moral realm be like the aesthetic realm, at least in terms of reasons? In fact, that question is a rather nice way of looking at the project of this dissertation. I do think moral and aesthetic judgment do share common structural features, holism of reasons being just one structural feature. However, Dancy assumes aesthetic reasons are holistic. I will attempt to show below that aesthetic reasons are holistic, and in fact mirror moral reasons as the holist understands them.

If holism is true, then reasons do not retain the same polarity from case to case (the pleasure example). However, the truth of holism also entails that reasons can quit being
reasons, that is, a reason that is a reason in one case may not be any reason at all in another (the red/blue ball example). The atomist suspects that the reason–generating features not only retain polarity, but that they are also universally relevant. So, “the rejection of universalizability is part and parcel of the rejection of generalism [atomism] in the theory of reasons” (Dancy 1993: 57, also see Crisp 2000).

The above basic structure gives one a grasp on holism in the theory of reasons. But in order to have a better grip on holism a theory or what a reason amounts to is required. I will show that there are different forms of relevance the basic features present in actions and artworks can take. This is to be expected given holism, since holism demands a rather fine-grained approach to the appraisal of particular acts or artworks (a demand we shall see cashed out in the third and fifth chapters). I begin with the ethical sphere and in particular Dancy’s classification of what sorts of considerations are relevant to moral reasoning and then turn to the aesthetic sphere.

2.1 Ethical Reasons

In *Ethics Without Principles* Dancy defends the idea that all reasons for action are contributory. A contributory reason for action is “a feature whose presence makes something of a case for acting, but in such a way that the overall case for doing that action can be improved or strengthened by the addition of a second feature playing a similar role” (Dancy 2004: 15). The phenomenon of the contributory is often expressed using other terms, namely *prima facie* or *pro tanto*. When one says that they have a *pro tanto* reason to do some action, what they mean is that one has *some* reason (literally: “a reason as far as that goes”) to perform the act.
One nice feature of contributory reasons is that they can easily explain moral dilemmas. We have a moral dilemma when we are torn on what to do, when there is a conflict of moral judgments. On the contributory reading, a moral dilemma would be simply a case of conflicting contributory reasons, that is, the presence of a contributory reason on both sides of the question of what to do here in this situation. For example, I have some reason to stay in order to help the elderly man who has fallen down and hurt himself, but I also have some reason to leave in order to keep a promise I have made. If I stayed I would be able to help the man but break the promise, and if I leave I would keep the promise but will be unable to help the man. A situation in which we can act can present us with multiple contributory reasons: some for and some against acting, and dilemmas can easily result from the contributory reasons present in the case.

Because contributory reasons are concerned with what we have some reason to do, the contributory is to be set apart from overall oughts, that is, those reasons which have normativity in so far as they have absolute obligatory force, issue in absolute directives, give absolute commands, and the like. It is clear that if contributory reasons can be present on both sides of the practical question of what to do in a situation, and if contributory reasons are best understood along the lines of pro tanto considerations, then it can not be the case that there are pro tanto commands. If moral reasoning resulted in judgments that I am commanded to do some act and also commanded to not do some act, then moral reasoning has failed, if that reasoning is taken to have the goal of issuing commands since partial commands are not commands (see Dancy 2004: chp 2).
Now this is a rather striking suggestion. We commonly take reasons to provide us with exactly what the contributory cannot: that of having absolute obligatory force, and this absolute obligatory force issues in “oughts,” an ought that is more than just an aggregation of reasons but instead delivers absolute commands: that I ought to do this or I ought to do that, full stop. It is commonly taken that reasons ground overall oughts, and if moral reasons are contributory, and if the contributory reason is not involved in an overall ought–making relation, then where does that leave “ought” as a normative notion?

Take for instance Ross, who does think there are such things as absolute obligations, what he calls “duty proper:”

We have to distinguish from the characteristic of being our duty that of tending to be our duty. Any act that we do contains various categories. In virtue of being the breaking of a promise, for instance, it tends to be wrong ... tendency to be one’s duty may be called a parti–resultant attribute, i.e., one which belongs to an act in virtue of some one component in its nature. *Being* one’s duty is a toti–resultant attribute, one which belongs to an act in virtue of its whole nature and of nothing less than this (Ross 1930: 28).

What Ross is doing here is making a distinction between those attributes (to use his words) that are contributory (the parti–resulant attributes) from absolute duty (those attributes that are toti–resultant) and then deriving normativity from the toti–resultant attributes.

If Ross is right then this poses a problem for a holistic account of the nature of reasons. This is because for Ross, “for an act to be a prima facie duty in virtue of having a certain feature is for that feature to be such that, if it were the only relevant feature, the act would be a duty proper” (Dancy 2004: 100). What this entails is a form of generality and atomistic conception of reasons, since we know that if a feature is relevant here then it will
always be relevant when it occurs next, since if it were the only feature it would ground duty proper.

If this were the case then there could be absolute obligations, and in order for holism to be true it must be the case that there are no absolute obligations, no moral reasons but the contributory. This is because holism takes it to be the case that the features themselves in the context of action give one reason to act—not from some absolute obligation—and it is the features themselves as they stand to action which have normative force. As Dancy informs us, “if I have some duty to do this action, there must be some feature of the situation that makes it so. If in some more general way I ought to do it, still there must be some feature of the situation that makes it so” (Dancy 2004: 33).

For this reason the truth of holism depends upon making the contributory reason do a lot of theoretical work. Because of the threat of atomism and general reasons, we need an independent account of what work the contributory reason is doing. And this is exactly what Dancy provides. He is happy to understand the contributory as separate from the overall ought, as he wants to reject the idea that one must understand what a reason does in terms of some relation to an overall ought. Contributory reasons are enough, and there is no further need to link them to overall oughts to obtain normativity.

Instead of opting for normativity at the overall “ought” level, Dancy, following H. A. Prichard, injects normativity into contributory oughts. Prichard, responding to Ross’ idea of having a “duty proper” (that is, an overall duty), says

... if we think that of two acts there is greater obligation to do one of them, we cannot go on to think that we ought to do that action without implying that there is no obligation to do the other in any degree whatever. Consequently we gain nothing by
maintaining the existence of degrees of obligation in addition to absolute obligation (Prichard 2002:79).

If we opt for thinking of oughts as a matter of degree, which the contributory makes possible, then we can make sense of such remarks as “so far as this goes, you ought to x” and “in this respect, you ought to x,” which seem to be present in common discourse about moral matters. In essence then, contributory oughts—oughts as a matter of degree—are required in order to make sense of moral conflict. Should there be absolute obligations, then moral conflict seems to be an illusion, since the prescription of an absolute obligation dissolves any conflict that may arise in a situation.

So the picture so far is taking the following shape: the overall ought is to be understood in terms of the contributory ought. The contributory ought does not issue in absolute commands, since these oughts are a matter of degree. Further, contributory oughts are to be understood in terms of contributory reasons. Finally, contributory reasons are to be explicated in terms of having a certain relation to action or judgment. What that relation is will shine further light on the theoretical justification of holism. To that relation I now turn.

For a reason to be a reason for action/judgment is for it to stand in a certain relation to action/judgment, and that relation Dancy calls “favouring.” Simply put, for a reason to count towards some action is for that reason to favour that action. What this favouring relation amounts to is hard to describe in any specific way, so, and following Dancy’s lead here, the
best way of explicating this relation is to see how it might work in a piece of practical reasoning in some instance.\(^ 2\) Take the following for example (Dancy 2004: 38):

1. I promised to do it.
2. My promise was not given under duress.
3. I am able to do it.
4. There is no greater reason not to do it.
5. So: I do it.
5*. So I ought to do it.

What we want from this example is to see which considerations present in 1–4 is favouring the action (5) or to the contributory ought in (5*).

One might think that 1–4 are all clear favourers for the conclusion. After all, they in part, or in combination, favour the action. However, only (1) is playing the favouring role. The other considerations are relevant to (5) and (5*), but their form of relevance is different from the favouring relation. For example, in the absence of (2), that I made a promise would not favour the action of keeping the promise made, since the promise made was under duress. However, the presence of (2) is not a further reason for keeping the promise made. Given (2), I should keep my promise because that is what I engaged myself to do by making the promise. Only (1) favours the action, but the presence of (2) enables (1) to favour the action. With (2) a different form of what it is to be a relevant consideration is introduced: that of enabling. The presence or absence of enablers is sometimes required for favourers to do

\(^ 2\) Dancy himself only uses this example to explicate the idea of a favourer. It should be noted though that Dancy’s taxonomy of relevant considerations does not stop with favourers or (the soon to be introduced) enablers. He also talks about enticers, intensifiers/attenuators, among others (see his 2004). This leads even more support to holism since the array of relevant considerations and the role they play among each other widens. However, for my purposes, only the favouring and enabling relations will be required. Further, the structure of the following example may lead one to suppose that moral reasoning is inferential in character. However, for Dancy, this is not true (see Dancy 2004: 101–8).
their job, but they do not stand as reasons like favourers do. Instead they act as supporters for the favourers. If (2) were a reason, then it would be an odd sort of reason: that “I promised to do it” implicitly relies on the truth of (2). It is not as though I count (2) as a additional reason alongside (1). This is not to say that (2) is somehow unimportant, it is important precisely because it enables (1) to be a reason in this case, which can (at least in part) explain, motivate, and justify my action in (5).

The distinction between favourers and enablers is really an instance of a more general distinction, that of “a feature that plays a certain role and a feature whose presence or absence is required for the first feature to play its role, but which does not play that role itself” (ibid.: 45). To use a rather absurd — but perhaps clarifying in its simplicity — example: the lighter enables the cigarette to be lit and therefore to be harmful to my health, but the lighter itself is not harmful to my health.

Likewise, (3) and (4) are enablers for the favourer in (1). To see why, imagine that (3) and (4) were in fact favourers. Given the generality of (3) and (4), it would then be the case that all the actions we have reason to do would share at least two common favourers. But it is wrong to suppose that for every act (3) and (4) must be included as reasons. I went to the cinema because it would be pleasurable, and the (potential) pleasure to be had is the reason why I go to the cinema. It’s not the case that I go to the cinema for pleasure, and I was able to do it, and there was no greater reason not to do it (as though I had to have all 3 as reasons in play in order to practically decide what to do). While (3) and (4) are important for action and judgment, they have a different sort of relevance to action, and that relevance is of the enabling kind.
There is further reason to think that (4) in particular is not a favourer. This is because (4) is a verdict: “to assert (4) is to pass judgment on the balance of reasons present in the case. If (4) was itself a further reason over and above those on which it passes judgment, we would be forced to reconsider the balance of reasons once we had asserted (4), in a way that would continue ad infinitum.” (Dancy 2004: 40).

The idea of verdicts entering into the reasoning process makes problematic moral judgment. Moral judgment takes as its data the relevant features of the case, the enablers and favourers so far mentioned. Should verdicts become part of the data of moral judgment, and not the result, then the process would constantly require revision. Verdicts, then, are the results of the process of moral judgment.

Perhaps there is lingering doubt however. An objector may insist that the holist has a problem regarding how he/she identifies reasons. Recall the example where I take my friend out to dinner because it will be pleasurable. That it would be pleasurable will favour the action of taking her out, and that is the reason I do it. However, that it would be pleasurable doesn’t always favour action: that people would get pleasure from seeing mass torture would probably disfavour the act of televising torture. So pleasure, the holist maintains, can sometimes count towards action, and sometimes count against action. The worry is that the holist misidentifies the reason in each case. The objector will claim that the holist has a cheap victory, for they are asserting that maximally unspecific reasons—causing pleasure for instance—aim at covering all cases, and it can be easily found that these maximally unspecific reasons often fail to do so. That maximally unspecific reasons fail to cover all cases will not come as a surprise to anyone, so really what is all the fuss about? What is
behind this objection is the thought that if we were to have much more specific reasons, then there would be less evaluative variability across cases. So, instead of taking my friend out to dinner because it would be pleasurable, I take my friend out to dinner because it is good to cheer up unhappy friends.

One response to this sort of worry would come in the form of the defusing move, and attempt to show that “it is good to cheer up unhappy friends” is not always a reason for action. Perhaps my friend is suffering through the loss of a parent. It seems to me that “cheering up” is the last thing I would want to do. If I came to my friend with the goal of cheering them up after a loss like that, it seems to me that I am not taking the situation as earnestly as I should. Certainly I can be there for them, but as someone who will be responsive to their wants and needs, not as someone who acts because it is always a good thing to cheer someone up despite what they may be going through.

Another way of putting the objection that the holist misidentifies the reason is to claim that whereas the holist makes a distinction between favourers and enablers, no distinction need be made at all. So, according to this approach, the total combination of 1–4 below is the reason to act:

1. I promised to do it.
2. My promise was not given under duress.
3. I am able to do it.
4. There is no greater reason not to do it.

Above it was argued that there is only one reason present, that I promised to do it, and the other features have a different relevance, they are playing an enabling role for the favourer. However, why not just think that there is a complex reason at play, where all these features make up the reason to act? This sort of objection was issued against Dancy’s position by
Joseph Raz (2000). Raz wishes to abandon talk of contributory reasons and speak of “complete reasons” (ibid: 59). On his account, a stipulative definition of a complete reason is all the facts stated by the non–redundant premises of a sound, deductive argument entailing as its conclusion a proposition of the form “There is a reason for \( P \) to \( V \)” (where \( P \) stands for an expression referring to an agent or a group of agents, and \( V \) for a description of an action, omission, or a mode of conduct) (Raz 2000: 59n).

If 1–4 is a complete reason, then why is it that we do not refer to all these features when explaining why we did what we did? According to Raz, it is a matter of ordinary usage: “ordinary usage allows reference to many aspects of a complete reasons as reasons when the context is appropriate [...] Generally, any aspect of a complete reason can be cited as a reason in some circumstances” (ibid.: 59n). So, even though 1–4 is the complete reason for me to keep my promise, I often just explain my keeping the promise by saying “because I promised to do it.”

In response to Raz, I find his identification of a reason to be odd. Raz wishes to claim on the one hand that there is one complete reason at work, while on the other hand also wants to be able to identify each aspect of that complex reason to be a reason itself. One must ask the question how many reasons are at play here? If Raz would agree that 1–4 can each individually be reasons, while also at the same time making up a complete reason, then the risk is that we are substituting a needlessly complex theory to undermine holism; a theory which would take each premise of a sound deductive argument as a reason if that sound deductive argument ended with the proposition “there is a reason for \( P \) to \( V \)” If parsimony is any guide in this case, then it should favour the holistic account of reasons, since for the holist, there is only one reason present in 1–4, and that reason is good enough to do the work of motivating action.
Dancy’s own response to Raz picks up on this point (Dancy 2004: 97–99). If Raz is correct, then the notion of a “complete reason” seems to suggest that the holist picture is guilty of putting forth incomplete reasons. Raz wants to suggest that the complete reason is the combination of 1–4, so if the holist thinks that (1) is a reason, then Raz must think that somehow (1) is incomplete as a reason, since it is not a complete reason. Dancy’s response is to just deny that (1) is an incomplete reason. Contributory reasons for him function “perfectly well, and completely. They are not hopelessly trying to do something else, something that can only be done by several considerations acting together” (ibid.: 99). For Dancy, there is a distinction between the question of what it is that makes the act right and the question of what determines whether it is right, and “to answer the latter question we have to mention everything that is in any way relevant; Raz supposes that when we have done this, we have the premises of a valid deductive argument to a normative conclusion. To answer the former question we have no need to go into such enormous detail” (ibid.). The lingering worry should vanish once we see that these are two distinct sets of questions, where the first can be answered by the favourers and enablers, and the second by the favourers alone.

But, really, what does all this talk of favouring and enabling have to do with holism? It provides the support holism requires. If one thinks holism is right, then they should find the above distinction between the sorts of relevance a consideration can have attractive for what it establishes. What it establishes is a certain metaphysics of moral properties. One common metaphysical structure for moral properties is that of supervenience. According to this relation, “if an action has a moral property, then any other action exactly similar to the
first in non–moral respects will have that moral property too” (Dancy 2004: 86). While I think this is right, it is informatively uninteresting as a claim to why some action has the ethical property it does have. What supervenience is concerned with is the totality of *all* the non–moral features of the action. What we get under supervenience is the idea that should you want to recreate a particular morally right action, what one would do is determine what the world is like at the particular time that moral action occurred, then recreate those exact conditions of the world, and then one would be guaranteed a morally right action. However, not all of the non–moral features of the action actually make the act right. As we have seen, there are enablers, and while they enable the favourers—which are responsible for making the action right—to do their “right–making” job, enablers are not serving as reasons for the rightness of the act.

If we are looking for a relation that better tracks what features *in fact* make an action right or wrong, then we need a more discriminate relation between moral properties and the non–moral properties which is narrower in scope than the supervenience relation, a relation that only has as its base features those features that actually make the act right/ wrong. This relation Dancy calls “resultance.” The resultant base properties are those properties that favour the act in the case of rightness or disfavour the act in the case of wrongness. The resultant base properties are thus only the reasons that actually make the act right or wrong.

With resultant the holist now has a way of addressing a potential concern one might have, that of relevant similarity. One might object to holism based on the idea that if two cases are relevantly similar—that is, share all the same favourers—then the action that was
right in the one should also be right in the other. The motivation for this type of objection would be thoughts about supervenience. The thought runs like this: if the moral supervenes on the non–moral, and the favourers are responsible for giving the act the moral property it does have, then whenever you have an act that has the same favourers you will get the same moral property. However, to think in such a way is to leave out the important role that enablers play. Whereas it is plausible to think that supervenience does capture an important insight about the relation between the non–moral and the moral, namely that if a morally right action is exactly replicated down to the last non–moral detail then that replicated action will also be morally right (and for the same reasons),

it is nothing like plausible to suggest that if an action is wrong, every other action that shares the features that make the first one wrong must also be wrong. Two actions may be similar to each other in a limited way, that is, in respects that disfavour the first one wrong and thereby make it wrong, but differ in other respects so that the second is not wrong; the features that manage to make the first wrong are prevented from doing so in the second case because of variations that lie beyond the common resultance base (Dancy 2004: 87).

This is what the distinction between favouring and enabling along with resultance gives us. For two cases may share the same favourers, but differ in enablers, such that the difference is evaluatively relevant.

Since moral properties result from non–moral properties, and since the relevant non–moral properties are favourers, we can see why holism is true. For even if we fix the favourers of an action and find another suitable context in which they occur, the presence or absence of enablers may prevent the potential favourers from actually favouring in the new context. What the atomist misses, and what the holist sees as playing a major role, are interaction effects between morally salient features. These features may interact with one
another in new and interesting ways from case to case depending on what other favourers/disfavourers are present and the presence or absence of enablers/disablers.

2.2 Aesthetic Reasons

My starting point for a discussion of aesthetic reasons is work done by Frank Sibley. What I will attempt to show is that the same general metaphysical picture that was laid out for ethical reasons can be applied to aesthetic reasons as well.

According to Sibley, the judgments we make in aesthetics can be divided into two different kinds:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kind 1</th>
<th>Kind 2</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>...has a great number of characters</td>
<td>... is tightly-knit or moving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...uses pale pastels and wavy lines</td>
<td>... lacks balance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...has a kneeling figure in the foreground</td>
<td>... has a certain serenity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...has a stretto at the close of a theme</td>
<td>... sets up exciting tension</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Kind 1 judgments are referencing a certain feature of the artwork which is in principle possible for just anyone to recognize. As long as I know what pale pastels and wavy lines look like then I can see that a certain painting has a combination of pale pastels and wavy lines. Kind 2 judgments, however, are different. First, they are somehow dependent upon Kind 1 judgments. It is because of the combination of wavy lines and pale pastels that this painting lacks balance. Second, it is not the case that just anyone can easily see the lack of balance in the painting in the same way that they can easily see the lines and colours. In order to make Kind 2 judgments something more is required. For Sibley the making of Kind 2 judgments “requires the exercise of taste, perceptiveness, or sensitivity, of aesthetic discrimination or appreciation” (Sibley 2001: 1).3 Consequently then, Kind 1 judgments are

3 For criticisms of this view, see Cohen (1978) and Kivy (1979).
termed non-aesthetic whereas Kind 2 judgments are termed aesthetic. For Sibley, the making of Kind 2 judgments requires an exercise of taste (what I will call fine discernment in the fifth chapter).

Aesthetic judgments can be further broken down into levels. The distinction between aesthetic terms and non-aesthetic terms allows for the following picture to develop:

Level 3: aesthetic verdicts: “... and this results in the work being beautiful”
Level 2: aesthetic judgments: “... results in the picture having a certain serenity”
Level 1: non–aesthetic judgments: “The kneeling figure in the foreground...”

At the very top we have aesthetic verdicts. These terms cast judgment upon what is thrown up from below: the work is beautiful because of (or in virtue of) the certain serenity present in the work. To use a bit of terminology that is currently in favour when talking about concepts, Level 3 verdicts employ what are termed thin concepts. A concept is thin just when it is purely evaluative — that is, it tells you how things evaluatively stand taking into account what is present at the second and first levels of judgments. Contrast these thin concepts to the thick concept present in Level 2: when saying that something is serene you are at once making an evaluative judgment and a descriptive judgment. Thick concepts, unlike the thin, have both an evaluative and descriptive component; however, a further verdict is required to tell you how things evaluatively stand as a result of all the features present when taken together.

At the bottom level we have the non–aesthetic features which are responsible for Level 2 and 3 evaluations. Borrowing from Dancy, I will call these the “resultant base properties” for the higher level aesthetic evaluations. In fact, the same picture of resultance that was given for moral properties can be given to aesthetic properties. The metaphysical
relation of resultanse, as Dancy explicates it, was actually already present in the work of Sibley. Although Sibley never fully explicates the idea, the basic structure is the same. For example,

... and in non–aesthetic matters there is the same sort of situation, for instance, with the features that make a remark funny, are responsible for a facial resemblance or expression, and so on. The inevitable consequence is that unless one is in some degree aware of these responsible features, one will not perceive the resultant quality (Sibley 2001: 74).

Sometimes when a critic helps us to see aesthetic qualities, we have missed them by simply overlooking some important and responsible non-aesthetic features, or by not seeing these in relation, in a certain light, or in the light of the title; one cannot expect to see a dancer’s grace without in some degree noticing the features that make her graceful. But sometimes, although these were seen, the resultant aesthetic quality was still missed (Sibley 2001: 38).

What we have here are a set of properties that are actually responsible for the resultant aesthetic quality. While it may be the case that aesthetic properties supervene on non–aesthetic properties, this metaphysical relation is unhelpful for the reasons laid out above. What we are really after are those specific features which are in fact responsible for the aesthetic quality. This is what resultanse gives us. While the above quotes can be taken as evidence of a supervenience thesis, are they evidence of a resultanse thesis? I think they are, but this point will be made below when I suggest that Sibley also makes a distinction between favouring and enabling as well. If we can get the favouring/enabling condition out of the work of Sibley, then the resultanse claim will also be supported as well (since the supervenience thesis does not require a fine–grained account of the evaluative relevance of considerations, whereas resultanse does).
For now though, aesthetic properties result from non-aesthetic properties, and it is the non-aesthetic properties that are responsible for the aesthetic properties. Given this it might be natural to think that once one knows all the non-aesthetic properties of a work then one can infer or deduce the aesthetic quality. However, and perhaps this is Sibley’s most famous epistemic claim regarding the evaluation of artworks, one can not. For him, aesthetic concepts are not positively conditioned governed: “there are no sufficient conditions, no non-aesthetic features such that the presence of some set or numbers of them will beyond question logically justify or warrant the application of an aesthetic term” (2001: 5). Even though the kneeling figure in the foreground is responsible for the serenity present in the picture, there is no logical inference one is justified in making from “kneeling figure” to the aesthetic judgment employing “serenity.” What brings one from seeing the “kneeling figure” to seeing it as “serene” is one’s possession of taste.

Imagine if aesthetic reasoning were inferential in the way Sibley denies. Take deduction first. If we could deduce the aesthetic quality simply from knowledge of the non-aesthetic features present, then we could safely infer from “has a red patch in the corner” to “balanced,” for example. However, this is cannot be right. That there is a red patch in the corner of a painting in no way logically entails any aesthetic quality (though it might entail the lack of an aesthetic quality, a point which we shall shortly come to). The feature “red patch in corner” is consistent with a myriad of aesthetic qualities. The very same feature that makes a painting lively may make another painting bland.

4 Though, for reasons laid out at the end of the chapter, it is not the totality of non-aesthetic properties that are responsible for the aesthetic property, keeping in mind the distinction between favourers and enablers.
Does induction do any better? Not really. Even if the last 27 previous pictures I saw in which there was a red patch in the left corner made the pictures balanced, I cannot infer that this one which has that feature will be balanced. All the previous pictures have shown me is that a red patch in the corner can make a picture balanced, not that it must. Atomism requires something stronger from relevant features.

Sibley’s argument for the claim that aesthetic concepts are not positively condition governed can be given the following structure:

1. If a concept’s warranted application is positively condition governed, then either the concept is closed or the concept is open.
2. Aesthetic concepts are neither closed nor open.
3. So, aesthetic concepts’ warranted application is not positively condition governed.

Closed concepts are those concepts that can be given necessary and sufficient conditions for their application. So, we are warranted in calling a thing square if and only if that thing has four equal sides and four right angles. However, it will be easily admitted that aesthetic concepts do not have such strict necessary and sufficient conditions for warranted application. What would the necessary and sufficient conditions be for “beautiful” or “garish,” for example?

Open concepts are those concepts that are governed by a loose set of sufficient conditions. Take “intelligent” for example. Imagine that I am trying to convince you that a friend of mine is intelligent. I might start listing some features which I think are responsible for her intelligence (or at least contribute to her intelligence). I will say things like: “she plays chess well;” “she went to Princeton and graduated with the highest honours;” “she follows instructions quite well and never seems to go wrong;” “she is a master of facts,” and
so on. Intelligence is a loose concept in so far as some set of these features (perhaps more
will have to be given) will guarantee the application of intelligence.

However, aesthetic concepts are not even like these open concepts. There is no set of
conditions guaranteeing that the aesthetic term applies:

We are able to say ‘If it is true that he can do this, and that, and the other, then one just
cannot deny that he is intelligent’, or ‘if he does A, B, and C, I don’t see how it can be
denied that he is lazy’, but we cannot make any general statement of the form ‘If the
vase is pale pink, somewhat curving, lightly mottled, and so forth, it will be delicate,
cannot but be delicate’... Things may be described to us in non–aesthetic terms as fully
as we please but we are not thereby put in the position of having to admit (or being
unable to deny) that they are delicate or graceful (Sibley 2001: 5).

Aesthetic concepts, then, are neither closed nor open. Thus, their warranted application
cannot be positively conditioned governed.

Sibley does however make room for the idea that aesthetic concepts are at the most
negatively condition governed. For example, if the only available information on some
artwork were the non–aesthetic features of it, and I find that these features were all pale
pastel colours, then it impossible for that artwork to be garish.

Sibley’s claim that aesthetic concepts are not positively condition governed gives us
some reason to believe that he thought holism in aesthetics is true, but it doesn’t exactly get
us all the way there. After all, if holism is true in aesthetics, then aesthetic features can
change their evaluative polarity from case to case. That features can change their polarity
from case to case can explain why they are not positively conditioned governed, but we need
more than just the lack of positive condition governance to secure holism; what we require is
the stronger claim that features can actually change their evaluative polarity.
Sibley’s commitment to holism is best exemplified in his paper “General Criteria and Reasons in Aesthetics.” Here Sibley argues against Beardsley’s atomistic claims. Recall that for Beardsley unity, complexity, and intensity (what he calls primary criteria) always count in a positive direction for a work’s merit and for any other qualities to be merits they must be linked with these primary criteria. Beardsley’s motivation here is to save genuine reasons and genuine reasoning in aesthetic discourse. For him, genuine reasons require generality, generality requires consistency, and consistency requires that reasons count only one way (see Beardsley 1962). Holism belies Beardsley’s conception of genuine reasons, and this is why Sibley attacks it.

Sibley’s response to Beardsley is to point out that he has overlooked an important aspect of aesthetic reasons: namely that they are not independent of each other but can interact with one another. They are in this way distinguished from other merit qualities of things whose value is merely summative. Take the merit qualities of a corkscrew for example. That the corkscrew has a good handle, has a sharp blade to cut the foil, and can easily remove corks will all independently count towards the goodness of the corkscrew. However, with artworks, the merit–features interact in such a way that the mere addition of more and more merit features will not entail a more and more aesthetically valuable artwork. According to Sibley “what are merit–features tout court or in vacuo for that sort of thing may not work satisfactorily together with other such tout court merit–features in a particular thing of that sort” (Sibley 2001: 107).

The above quote ushers in terms that should be clarified, those of tout court and in vacuo merit features. As we have seen, for Sibley, there are no guaranteed inferences from
the non–aesthetic (Level 1) to aesthetic judgments employing thick concepts (Level 2).

However, Sibley is willing to admit that there is something like inferential relations between Level 2 judgments and Level 3 verdicts. As he says, “the attribution to an art–work of dramatic intensity, tout court, like the attribution of grace or elegance, is the attribution to it of a property that inherently possess aesthetic merit ... one cannot intelligibly say tout court ‘this work is bad because it is graceful’” (Sibley 2001: 105-06). In other words, properties like witty, balanced, and joyous possess positive aesthetic merit when understood in vacuo. If an artwork only had one relevant aesthetic property—like dramatic intensity—then we can say something about how things evaluatively stand overall.

However, these in vacuo inherent merit–properties may change their polarity when understood in situ. So, although humour and dramatic intensity both have inherent aesthetic merit when considered in vacuo, in the context of a particular artwork they may reverse their polarity and actually become defects. Take Macbeth, for example, in particular the Porter scene (I take this example from Lyas: 1997). Some critics think that the humour present in this scene is actually a bad–making feature of the play, since it breaks up the dramatic intensity in such a way that the continuity of the play is unsettled. So, if they are right, then “...where there is possible interaction in a complex whole, as in art–works, what in vacuo is inherently an aesthetic merit may itself, in conjunction with other inherently positive features in that complex, become a defect” (Sibley 2001: 107).

Given Sibley’s talk of in vacuo and inherent merit, he is often seen as taking a similar approach to aesthetics as Ross took to ethics. Indeed, given Dancy’s understanding of Ross, one can see how this connection can be made: “to say that an act is a prima facie duty is to
say that, in virtue of a certain kind, it is an act which would be a duty proper if it had no other property that functions in this same sort of way (Dancy 2004: 19).

This understanding of Ross allows that prima facie duties, when understood in vacuo, just are duties proper, and Sibley holds that some aesthetic properties are aesthetic merits when considered in vacuo, they could be “aesthetic merit proper” terms. However, I dislike this reading of Sibley. Should we want to align Sibley with a counterpart in ethics, it should be Dancy and not Ross, since the connection between Ross and Sibley isn’t as easy as it may seem. Remember that for Ross a prima facie duty, when competing against other prima facie duties, retains its polarity. When prima facie duties compete, they may be defeated by other duties, but their polarity never reverses. However, Sibley explicitly says that the reversal of aesthetic merit qualities is not like this: “this is not a case of defeasibility, inherent positive features being overridden or defeated by inherent negative features. With defeasibility, inherently positive features never become negative in a particular instance...” but, as the example of Macbeth attempted to show, the prima facie merit of humour actually became a defect, this being a case or reversal of polarity and not mere defeasibility (Sibley 2001: 107).

One may question Sibley’s holist commitments by recognizing that despite his claims that aesthetic merit qualities reverse, they still have value as in vacuo merits. The Dancyian holist will find this remark quite odd, since for them no feature has inherent value apart from its status in situ. As Anna Bergqvist has pointed out “Sibley’s restricted holism is a rejection of that radical [Dancyian] approach, as instead of the context determining what is to count as aesthetically relevant, the context merely determines the valencies of the (already established as relevant, that is to say, prima facie) aesthetic reasons” (2010: 5). However, both Bergqvist
and I believe that this does not damage Sibley’s holist commitments. While she argues that Sibley’s *prima facie* merits can be understood along the lines of Dancyian default reasons (an approach I think right), I think Sibley’s motivation for thinking in terms of just *in vacuo* merits is just misplaced.

First off, and this is a point Bergqvist rightly makes, the inherent value of any feature *in vacuo* is just evaluatively irrelevant. As Sibley is at pains to stress in multiple articles, the critic’s job is to get us to see the particular merit features of the particular work, and in order to do this we have to attend not to value *in vacuo* but value *in situ*. What we are concerned with is the particular work, and the particular features that give the work its particular aesthetic character. As Sibley says elsewhere, the aesthetic value an object has results from the determinate, not the more general determinable, properties: a line is not graceful because it is curved but because of its particular curve ... if this account is in the main correct, if in the aesthetic sphere the possession by *x* of determinable characteristics is not what is responsible for *x* being P [some aesthetic property] ..., *it follows at once* that a thing cannot be judged to be P, or to have merit, by ‘general descriptive criteria’ if this means criteria mentioning determinable properties which are responsible for merit–qualities (Sibley 2001: 96).

What we are concerned with in evaluation and explanation—what we are concerned with when making aesthetic judgments—is essentially the particular, and the particular can only be accessed through those properties apprehended *in situ*. The priority of the particular and the notion of apprehension when making aesthetic judgments will be further emphasized in chapter three.

Second, Sibley’s approach to *in vacuo* merit can be seen as an isolationist approach to understanding how reasons work. What Sibley seems to be saying is that talk of *in vacuo* merit sheds light on how reasons function *in situ*. However, this isn’t quite a fruitful way to
think about how a reason functions or what role it plays in judgment. Dancy criticizes this approach on two fronts: the first is that this “is trying to characterize something that a feature can do in concert with others by appeal to something that can only be done in isolation, and this is a peculiar procedure” (Dancy 2004: 19). He likens it to trying to figure out the contribution of a single football player to the team’s victory by only talking about “how things would have been had he been the only player on the field” (ibid.). This seems quite right to me. I don’t see the motivation for pursuing the *in vacuo* line when interaction effects are as prevalent as they are in aesthetics.

The second front from which Dancy attacks isolationist approaches is that they wrongly assume “that each relevant feature could be the only relevant feature” (ibid.). Although he uses moral cases in which a reason is present only in the presence of another reason (for example, to have a reason to tolerate someone means that there are other reasons to condemn or interfere with them), aesthetic examples are easily found. Perhaps a play is touching only in relation to the joyful elements in it. Perhaps the joke is humorous only in relation to the lewdness of it. To think that these *prima facie* aesthetic merits are capable of doing the work alone is to forget about the important role that the interaction of these features plays.

Third, and finally, it may not even matter to the holist that there are these connections between Level 2 and 3 aesthetic judgments that are not present between Level 1 and 2. Dancy himself can accept the possibility that some thick concepts are invariant, but this would not be a significant issue. What would make it significant is if the invariant ones can be shown to constitute some sort of centre or core. The aim here is to reach a picture which has an invariant core of thick ethical concepts, surrounded
by a variable periphery. With this picture in hand, one could say that invariance of this sort is required for ethical thought ... the promise will be to show that the variable ones depend in some way on the invariant ones (Dancy 2004: 85).

This would result in making the variant only possible against a background of invariability. But Sibley has not attempted to go this far. What is required for holism to be true is that moral and aesthetic thought and judgment do not depend upon general (that is, invariant) reasons. For Dancy, as well as for Sibley, invariance of reasons is not required in order for moral and aesthetic judgment to occur.

For these reasons a holist of my variety can have the option of either accepting Sibley’s claim of *in vacuo* reasons, but not seeing it as especially relevant to how we go about evaluating and judging artworks, or just give it up completely. This is a virtue of my account, not a vice.

So far I have presented a view of aesthetic reasons where two claims come out true: first, aesthetic reasons are resultant and second, aesthetic reasons are holistic. This puts aesthetic reasons alongside moral reasons in at least these two respects. However, the work is not done yet. What about the favouring/enabling distinction, and the idea that reasons are contributory? Something must be said on these two features.

What we are looking for in the realm of aesthetics in order to make sense of the favouring and enabling relations is the distinction between what makes an artwork have the aesthetic value it does and what determines the artwork’s aesthetic value. In other words, what we want is to find that there are some features of an artwork that are responsible for the aesthetic value the artwork does have (the first question), while also keeping in mind that
these features may require the presence or absence of other features in order for them to do the work they do (the second question).

Happily this distinction is already present in the work of Sibley. He contrasts two different relationships of dependence of the aesthetic on the non-aesthetic: total specific dependence and notable specific dependence. First, total specific dependence tells us that the particular aesthetic quality an artwork has is a result of the entire totality of the non-aesthetic features present in the artwork. As Sibley remarks,

Features one would hardly think of signaling out as notably contributing to its aesthetic character—say, background colours, hardly noticed brush strokes, and so on—nevertheless do contribute because, being as they are, they at least allow it to have the character it has, a character it conceivably might not have if they were altered (2001: 36).

Total specific dependence determines the aesthetic value of the artwork, as it includes all the features of the artwork that are relevant.

Notable specific dependence, on the other hand, is much more specific:

... A critic frequently tries, as one of his central occupations, to say why a picture is unbalanced or what gives a complex work its grace, unity, or serenity. In doing so, he is not setting out to assert the merely general truth that its non–aesthetic features make it so; but neither is he ordinarily trying to state the [total specific dependence] relationship, that it is all these lines together with all these colours ... that make it so. He is usually interested in much more pointed explanations: he tries to select certain peculiarly important or salient features or details. He may mention a concentration of blues and grays as responsible for the unity of tone, certain wavy lines as giving a restless quality, a change in key as giving a sombre or indecisive character; more broadly, he may point out that the aesthetic character results from organization rather than colouring, from changes of tempo rather than harmonic devices. In short, what the critic is doing is selecting from a work those features which are notably or especially responsible for its character. For often in a work there are some features that a small alteration would work a remarkable aesthetic change (2001: 36).
It is easy to anticipate my move: the favouring relation is expressed by the notable specific
dependence relation, whereas the enabling relation is characterized by total specific
dependence. In particular, enablers for any work are those features that are totally
specifically dependent but are not notably specifically dependent. Aesthetic enablers, then,
are those particular features like “barely noticed brush strokes,” “background colours,” etc.
Though, of course, these features will not always be enablers, as it is the context of the
artwork that must determine the relevance of the particular features.

The distinction between total specific dependence and notable specific dependence
allows for the favouring and enabling distinction to work. Sibley brings this out: “when we
have singled out certain features in a work that strike us as notably responsible, it may
sometimes still be worthwhile for someone else to point out in turn that these particularly
noticeable features achieve their effect only because other elements in the complex, elements
that do not force themselves on our attention, are exactly as they are” (Sibley 2001: 36, my
emphasis). Here Sibley is making a contrast between those notable properties that are
especially responsible for the aesthetic character of the artwork and those properties which
are themselves not notably responsible, but which play an enabling role (“achieve their
effect”) for them. Thus, Sibley’s characterization of notable dependence and total specific
dependence maps nicely onto Dancy’s characterization of the favouring and enabling
relation.

However, all may not sit so well, and it can be objected that the mapping is not so
nice. An objection one may have is that features which are notably specifically dependent are
also totally specifically dependent. But this is not the case with favourers and enablers, since
favours are not also enablers. I think this is a good sort of worry to have, as it provides a useful demonstration which further elaborates a point I made above regarding Raz’s criticisms of the holist’s identification of a reason.

There is a distinction between the question of what it is that makes the act right and the question of what determines the rightness of that act, and this is illuminating to the distinction between favourers and enablers. Dancy’s answer to these particular questions was that in answering the question of what determines the rightness of an act we must mention those features that are both enablers and favourers, but in answering what it is that makes the act right we need only mention the favourers. I think the same distinction between these two questions applies in the aesthetic case as well: on the one hand there is the question of what determines the artwork’s aesthetic quality (say delicacy), and on the other the question of what it is that makes it delicate. When answering the former question we must say that it is the totality of the aesthetic features present, but in answering the latter question we need only say that it is the notably specific features that are present in the artwork.

Assume Edvard Munch’s *Summer Night’s Dream: The Voice* is unsettling and unhinging. Why is it so? Well, notably, it is the figure of the woman who despite being in the foreground is painted as though she is seen through a dirty lens and is out of focus—almost not there—but despite this she still calls out to the viewer and beckons him/her to her. However, it is also the totality of the features of the artwork: the eerily painted sun with its flat reflection, the flatness of the background juxtaposed against the depth of the foreground, and so on. In another helpful passage, Sibley remarks: “often then, one can say without any conflict both that all the features of a thing are jointly responsible for its aesthetic character
and that *one particular* feature is responsible” (Sibley 2001: 36). This thought demonstrates nicely the distinction between those features that enable and those features that favour an aesthetic judgment.

Lastly, are aesthetic reasons contributory? That aesthetic reasons are contributory I take it has been secured by Sibley’s remarks about the non-positive condition governance of aesthetic interaction effects. To add further support to this we can turn to Dancy himself:

Whatever [aesthetic reasons] are, they are largely holistic. It is undisputed that a feature that in one place adds something of aesthetic value may in another make things worse: a given metaphor may be telling in one context and trite in another. Converted into talk of reasons, there are reasons to introduce that metaphor in the one case and reasons not to do so in the other (Dancy 2004: 76).

This chapter has set out to show that aesthetic reasons and ethical reasons share a similar structure. Both sets of reasons share the following characteristics: (1) they are contributory, (2) they are holistic, (3) they are resultant properties, and (4) different forms of relevance are applicable to them. This is the distinction between features that favour a judgment and those that enable a judgment.

What has been said in this chapter is the both the groundwork for my approach, but also a result. It is the groundwork in the sense that throughout the rest of this dissertation I will be assuming holism to be true in both ethics and aesthetics. It is the result in the sense that I have made a case for thinking that aesthetic and ethical reasons are holistic in nature.
Chapter Three: The Priority of the Particular

Dancy was quoted in the last chapter claiming that one’s main duty in making a moral judgment is “to look really closely at the case before one ... the crucial question [to ask] is how things are in the case before us” (Dancy 1993: 63). The case before us will have features which are capable of changing their evaluative relevance, making it impossible to determine in advance of looking at the case what will be of evaluative relevance and what not. Because of the way features interact with one another, we must know the particular nature of the case at hand.

An immediate consequence of holism is that the landscape of moral and aesthetic reasons is much more complicated than the more simplified theory of atomism would suggest. Such a simplified theory takes reasons to be universally relevant across similar cases. So if a reason is a reason in one case, it must be a reason in a similar case to the first. Further, such a simplified theory takes reasons to retain the same evaluative polarity across cases. However, this simplified atomistic theory of reasons is wrong for yet another reason: it gets the requirements of judgment wrong.

Imagine, contrary to the claims made in this work, that holism is false and atomism true. What would then be required of a judge to judge correctly? Requirements on correct judgments arise in part from the nature of reasons. Atomistic judgment would then be characterized by what is required by the atomist conception of reasons. According to this conception, the judge is one who can, first, appropriately discern the features that count for reasons present in the case and, second, weigh the features properly to arrive at a judgment. On the first point, only those features that satisfy the atomist constraint on what reasons are
can count as reasons. And, as I say in the previous chapter, the atomist constraint is that reasons are universal. On the second point, since atomists constrain reasons to be universal, they must always be evaluatively relevant when they appear in cases. That I stole something, for example, will count against the rightness of my act, and will always count against the rightness of any act. This can lead to a “kitchen scale” approach to judgment. On this approach, the following two claims are true (adapted from Dancy 2004: 190):

1. The weight of a moral feature is not affected by the weight, nor the presence, of any other moral feature.
2. Once one has assessed the separate weight of each feature, evaluative judgment consists of adding up the pros and cons to see which side is weightier.

According to the kitchen scale approach, the good judge just weighs the reasons together to come to a judgment on the evaluative nature of the case present to them. Perhaps then, for an act or an object to be called good or beautiful, courageous or delicate, and to be distinguished from the merely pleasing or mundane, there must be some threshold normative weight that the act or object must pass. The judge puts the positive reasons on one scale, the negative reasons on the other, and then whatever weighs more informs him/her as to the evaluative nature of the case. On the atomist conception of reasons then, the good judge not only discerns the reasons present in the case at hand, but also can accurately weigh them in order to reach a considered judgment on the value of the act/object in question.

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5 It should be noted that this “kitchen scale” approach to judgment would be rejected by W. D. Ross. For him it is not just a matter of weighing reasons when we move from prima facie duties to absolute duties, but a matter of discerning judgment. While Ross holds that absolute duties are invariant, he is on the holist’s side in so far as—at least for derived duties—priority must be given to the particular. Given this, I think he would be appreciative of the need for fine discernment, which will be the topic of the fifth chapter.
The conception presented above, although brief, points out certain features that the atomist judge must accept, should their theory of reasons be correct. I want to set this view aside and have it function as a contrast possibility. Both (1) and (2) are to be rejected if the claims present in this dissertation are correct.

However, this way of conceiving of judgmental justification has certainly been influential in the history of axiological theory. According to this conception, the justification of a particular judgment arises not from the particulars of the case, as I will soon argue that it must, but rather from the generalizations that the particular case is subsumed under. That is, atomistic forms of justification are top-down, often appealing to principles, rules, or duties which are used to justify the particular instances which reflect those principles, rules, or duties.

Henry Sidgwick in his classic work *The Method of Ethics* takes such a top-down approach to ethical theorizing (1874). Sidgwick classifies three different phases in which intuitions played a role in moral epistemology. His own favored approach, what he called “philosophical intuitionism,” has as its methodological goal the result of making ethical judgments as much like judgments in science as possible, and the assumption of this methodology is that if ethics does contribute to knowledge, then that form of knowledge must be scientific.

What’s scientific about Sidgwick’s philosophical intuitionism is the reliance on general principles. According to a common-sense conception of science, for a science to succeed as a science, it must be able to make general statements. Likewise, in order to make general ethical statements, there must be some generality of ethical reasons. Through much
work, Sidgwick comes to offer a monistic account of the general principle that should concern ethical inquiry, and this principle turns out to be a hedonic utilitarian principle. According to Sidgwick, this principle is intuitively clear, and to decide what is right or wrong given a case, we apply this principle to the case at hand to decide which course of action is the morally correct one. This is a top–down approach because the justification of the rightness or wrongness of a particular act comes from the fit of the act with the principle itself, not from the particulars of the case at hand. While it is true that the particulars make it the kind of act it is, it is the principle that shows us that this kind of act is either right or wrong.

In arriving at philosophical intuitionism, Sidgwick goes through other stages of what ethical intuitionism may look like. The first he developed, then discarded, was perceptual intuitionism. This sort of intuitionism has a bottom-up structure of justification. Sidgwick initially characterizes this approach as the first of a three–phase progression of intuitionist theory (philosophical intuitionism being the highest). Sidgwick rejects perceptual intuitionism because it is contradictory to his goal of making ethics a science. According to perceptual intuitionism, what justifies a judgment on the rightness or wrongness (and how we come to know the rightness or wrongness) is not done through general principles like his hedonic utilitarian principle, but rather the particular nature of the case at hand.

This way of conceiving intuitionism as been suggested by other philosophers as well. H. A. Prichard, who sometimes comes close to accepting this perceptual intuitionism, thinks that the particular nature of the case at hand is all we have to go on when he states

if we do doubt whether there is really an obligation to originate A in a situation B, the remedy lies not in any process of general thinking, but in getting face to face with a
particular instance of the situation B, and then directly appreciating the obligation to originate A in that situation (1912: 37).

Prichard supports this claim with an analogy to mathematical practice. If one is unsure that they did the calculation correctly, one does not ruminate over the general principles of mathematics, instead, one does the calculation again. In essence, one does not check at the general level for rightness, but rather checks at the level of the particulars.

Other bottom-up intuitionists include W. D. Ross and F. H. Bradley, though they are willing to allow more room for general principles than Prichard. Ross holds that there are seven general duties that are responsible for moral guidance (see the above contrast between primary and secondary reasons in chapter two). However, these general duties are only arrived at through a process of making particular judgments which then lead to the realization that these general duties are self-evidently true, the process Ross calls “intuitive induction.” It is not as though we start with a principle which grounds the particular judgment, but rather, through a long process of making particular judgments on the goodness of non-maleficence (for example), we eventually come to ground the duty. According to Ross, because in so many cases doing harm has been wrong, we can safely infer that we have a duty not to cause harm. After this duty is grounded, we then can rely on the abstract duty to justify our judgment about the rightness of non-maleficence in a particular case.

Likewise, Bradley allows some room for the use of general principles, but also stresses the particular.

But the ordinary moral judgment is not discursive. It does not look to the right and left, and considering the case from all sides, consciously subsume under one principle. When the case is presented, it fixes on one quality in the act, referring that
unconsciously to one principle, in which it feels the whole of itself, and sees that whole in a single side of the act. So far as right and wrong are concerned, it can perceive nothing but this quality of this case, and anything else it refuses to try to perceive (1876/1988: 197).

The passage above is illuminating for two reasons. First, it attempts to secure what seems like an account of reasons that is holistic. A reason, remember, is just a feature (or for Bradley, a “quality”) that favours an action or judgment. Bradley wants to keep a place for general principles, but Bradley’s constraint on moral judgment is to limit it so that it takes as its data, as it were, nothing other than “this quality of this case.” In order to be as focused on the particular when considering the features of this case as I think Bradley wants to be, he must have something like holism in mind. It would be odd for an atomist to stress the pronoun “this” in such a way, since for them there is nothing particularly special about this quality in this case: this quality (whatever it is) will have the same evaluative polarity across all cases. Bradley, I think, is trying to close the gap between a holistic account of reasons and a generalist approach to principles. However, even for Bradley, and as one commentator has noted, “from the perspective of judgment, priority lies with the verdict concerning the particular case at hand, and it is only by subsequent reflection that we can abstract the principle involved” (Baldwin 2002: 102). So, like Ross, the priority lies with the particular.

The particular runs through the work of Prichard, Bradley, and Ross. If holism is true, then we should expect there to be a natural stress on the particular. The holist will claim that for morality and aesthetics, we live in a world of token instances, not of types. The thinking employed by the atomist, one which is likely to make universal claims is simply ill–suited for the world populated by particulars. In aesthetics and ethics, the particular should be prior.
3.1 The Priority of the Particular: Aesthetics

The place to begin is with aesthetics, as this is the domain in which the priority of the particular is most intuitively clear. Mary Mothersill, Arnold Isenberg, and to an extent Frank Sibley have all made contributions to this line of thinking, and I shall focus on them.

By way of introducing the priority of the particular in aesthetics, it is fruitful to introduce the historical background in which many of these authors were writing. Mary Mothersill’s book *Beauty Restored* nicely accomplishes this, and it is from her that I will take my lead. Her book largely responds to a pair of opposed viewpoints in 1950s aesthetics, and these viewpoints reflect different thoughts on what the discipline of aesthetics was meant to accomplish.

Definitions of art that philosophers propose have implications for our critical assessment of particular works of art—at least definitions that mention evaluative properties. However, some philosophers, call them the “anti–theorists” (e.g., MacDonald 1959, Hampshire 1959, Isenberg 1973), thought that the concept art—art in general—was empty, and that any attempt to provide an analysis of the art concept was doomed. According to these philosophers, our critical practices run independent from our commitment to a general aesthetic theory, precisely because no general aesthetic theory is possible. The reasons they offered in support of this claim are: first, different art forms do not share any interesting properties; and second, individual works within a given medium do not share interesting properties with other individual works in that medium. While Mothersill rejects these claims, she does want to do justice to an idea that is associated with anti–theory: that artworks must be evaluated on a case–by–case basis.
In opposition to the anti-theorists, the “pro-theorists” were philosophers (e.g., Monroe Beardsley 1958, 1962) who held that a general account of art was possible, but also that our judgments about what is valuable cohered together in a way that can be formulated in “principles” (though they spoke of “criteria,” and “good-making features”). Thus, the pro-theorists believed that a general aesthetic theory was possible and could aid evaluation.

What Mothersill does is to reject a thought held by both the pro- and anti-theorists: that if a general aesthetic theory is possible, the theory will yield grading criteria for particular works of art. Mothersill takes from both theories, and leaves what she finds troublesome or problematic. Regarding her pro-theory tendency, her position is that “there is such a [general] feature: works of art are beautiful, or lay claim to beauty, and everything that is beautiful is unique” (1984: 45). So there is an interesting property that art objects have in common (as the pro-theorists thought). Regarding her anti-theoretical impulse, Mothersill argued that beauty—the interesting common feature—does not let us derive any rules for its application, and we are thus unable to grade works according to criteria (as the anti-theorists thought).

Mothersill stresses the priority of the particular in her approach to understanding beauty and, especially, to evaluating beauty. Here she takes a cue from Aquinas’ description of beauty as *pulchrum dicatur id cujus apprehensio ipsa placet* (let us call that beautiful of which the apprehension in itself pleases), which itself entails that the pleasure resulting from a beautiful object can only be successfully achieved through apprehension (see Aquinas: 1952/1265–1274). Apprehension (*apprehensio*) is “not just the perception of a more or less determinate context of pleasure, it captures the *individual* of which it is true that it pleases
and that it is beautiful” (Mothersill 1984: 324). To clarify, if I found pleasure in a play and thought it beautiful, I must be sure that my judgment of the beauty of the play is not really just a result of a nice evening out, or that the felt pleasure arose from considering how great it is that I am the type of person that enjoys such things.

I think there is much to learn from Mothersill regarding the priority of the particular in aesthetic judgment and deliberation, and in what follows I will present the lessons that putting the particular prior allows. First, I will focus on the anti–theorist insight which Mothersill accepts: artworks must be evaluated on a case–by–case basis. It is important to evaluate artworks on a case–by–case basis because an artwork’s aesthetic property is unique to it.

To begin explaining this point, let’s start with a modified example of Mothersill’s (1984: 335-36): imagine that there are two objects and both of them please you. However, you only find one of the objects to be beautiful. There is, then, something that the beautiful object has that the non–beautiful object lacks. But what is it? How would you explain your judgment that the object is beautiful? Suppose that the beautiful object has a feature that the other object lacks, perhaps it has purple stripes. Is it enough to say that because of the purple stripes it is beautiful? But isn’t it at least a possibility that there are other objects that have purple stripes that are not beautiful? Not knowing this you bring another purple–striped object to compare with the beautiful purple–striped object, and you find that the other purple–striped object is not beautiful. But how can this be? The beautiful object has something that non–beautiful objects lack, and it seems to have something to do with purple stripes. However, other objects which have purple stripes are not always beautiful. And this
makes sense, since surely purple stripes don’t always count towards beauty, otherwise the world would be filled with purple stripes because that would be a guarantee of beauty. But, in this case, all that your aesthetic judgment amounts to is that the object is beautiful because of the purple stripes. How then do we explain that in one case purple stripes contribute to beauty, but at the same time affirming that purple stripes do not always contribute to beauty?

Arnold Isenberg has, to my mind, the best way of explaining this phenomenon, and getting at the heart of the priority of the particular. He begins with a passage of criticism by Ludwig Goldscheider of El Greco’s *The Burial of Count Orgaz*. I quote him at length:

“Like the contour of a violently rising and falling wave is the outline of the four illuminated figures in the foreground: steeply upwards and downwards about the grey monk on the left, in mutually inclined curves about the yellow of the two saints, and again steeply upwards and downwards about... the priest on the right. The depth of the wave indicates the optical center; the double curve of the saints’ yellow garments is carried by the greyish white of the shroud down still farther; in this lowest depth rests the bluish-grey armor of the knight.”

This passage—which, we may suppose, was written to justify a favorable judgment on the painting—conveys to us the idea of a certain quality which, if we believe the critic, we should expect to find in a certain painting by El Greco. And we do find it: we can verify its presence by perception. In other words, there is a quality in the picture which agrees with the quality which we "have in mind"—which we have been led to think of by the critic's language. But the same quality ("a steeply rising and falling curve," etc.) would be found in any of a hundred lines one could draw on the board in three minutes. It could not be the critic's purpose to inform us of the presence of a quality as banal and obvious as this. It seems reasonable to suppose that the critic is thinking of another quality, no idea of which is transmitted to us by his language, which he sees and which by his use of language he gets us to see. This quality is, of course, a wavelike contour; but it is not the quality designated by the expression "wavelike contour." Any object which has this quality will have a wavelike contour; but it is not true that any object which has a wavelike contour will have this quality. At the same time, the expression "wavelike contour" excludes a great many things: if anything is a wavelike contour, it is not a color, it is not a mass, it is not a straight line. Now the critic, besides imparting to us the idea of a wavelike contour, gives us directions for perceiving, and does this by means of the idea he imparts to us, which narrows down the field of possible visual orientations and guides us in the discrimination of details, the organization of parts, the
grouping of discrete objects into patterns. It is as if we found both an oyster and a pearl when we had been looking for a seashell because we had been told it was valuable. It is valuable, but not because it is a seashell.

I may be stretching usage by the senses I am about to assign to certain words, but it seems that the critic's meaning is "filled in," "rounded out," or "completed" by the act of perception, which is performed not to judge the truth of his description but in a certain sense to understand it. And if communication is a process by which a mental content is transmitted by symbols from one person to another, then we can say that it is a function of criticism to bring about communication at the level of the senses, that is, to induce a sameness of vision, of experienced content. If this is accomplished, it may or may not be followed by agreement, or what is called "communion”—a community of feeling which expresses itself in identical value judgments. [...] There is a contrast, therefore, between critical communication and what I may call normal or ordinary communication. In ordinary communication, symbols tend to acquire a footing relatively independent of sense-perception (Isenberg 335-37).

Here Isenberg argues for a different notion of reasoning when using aesthetic terms (what he calls “critical terms”). For Isenberg, the critic’s activity is distinguished from that of the scientist and that of the ordinary reason giver. Ordinary reasons (captured in “ordinary communication”) have two characteristics: they are general and self–sufficient (i.e., if I give you a reason to believe “that p,” then you would believe “that p” if you accept the reason for p. In other words, there is “reason enough” to believe p). However, according to Isenberg, critical terms are neither general nor self–sufficient.

Isenberg rejects the generality of critical terms because the properties cited in one reason may be found in other reasons where the verdicts differ. So, for example, I may find two paintings with a warm wash of pale hues and think that the wash makes one beautiful and the other horrible. Isenberg rejects that critical terms are self–sufficient because “there is not in all the world’s criticism a single purely descriptive statement concerning which one is prepared to say beforehand, ‘if it is true, I shall like that work so much the better’” (Isenberg: 164). (On this point there is a slight contention between Isenberg and Sibley. In the last quote
Isenberg is concerned with preferences and likings, whereas Sibley concerns himself with aesthetic concepts which are not tied to preferential judgments. For this reason Sibley takes a stronger stand than Isenberg, for Sibley would be in a position to say that we would not be able to determine in advance of seeing the artwork which aesthetic term applies to an artwork, let alone determine whether or not we liked the work (see Sibley 2001: 5n3)).

Isenberg’s subtle point is that critics have the same surface vocabulary in critical communication as they do in ordinary communication, since there is no other way to talk about the rising and falling curve (without inventing a new language), but ordinary communication and critical communication do differ. If I were to ask you to mathematically model the rising and falling curve of the El Greco painting, I would simply say “please model using your math skills the rising and falling curve in the El Greco painting.” You can then model this curve, and show me a printout of what the curve is. However, in critical communication, something more is needed than pure description. In talking about the rising and falling curve I am, of course, talking about the rising and falling curve that the El Greco painting can be described to have, even modelled to have, but I am also talking about the quality of that curve which outlines those four figures. Critical communication is designed with a purpose in mind, and that purpose is to draw the viewer’s attention (in the case of the El Greco, their visual attention) to the quality of those features that are relevant to the critic’s task of signaling which properties are responsible for aesthetic (de)merit.

Holism of reasons gives theoretical support for this position. Isenberg’s commitment to holism of reasons is reflected in his rejection of the generality of critical reasons. Isenberg is keenly aware that properties cited in one judgment may be found in other judgments where
the verdicts differ. What particular features we come to know when we are involved in
critical communication are aesthetic properties, and these aesthetic properties are context
sensitive properties, that is, these properties can count in favour of an evaluative judgement
in one instance, and against an evaluative judgement in another instance. In the case of visual
art, to know the evaluative difference, to know which critical term applies, we must “fill in,”
“round out,” or “complete” these properties by acts of perception. Thus, Isenberg’s
commitment to the priority of the particular is his rejection of the self–sufficiency of critical
terms: in giving reasons the critic is giving his audience a way to perceive those specific
features of the artwork.

So, to return now to our purple–striped objects: when justifying my judgment that
the object with the purple stripes is beautiful it is true that I can only say “it’s beautiful
because of the purple stripes,” but to think that this is all there is to critical communication is
to equate critical communication with ordinary communication. When asked why I think the
purple–striped object is beautiful, I want to not only point out the quality of the purple stripe,
but also to get you to “fill-in” this description with an act of perception. It is that purple
stripe that counts, and apprehending the that can only be completed by perception (in this
case). A purple stripe may be reproduced in many numerous ways, but it is not purple stripes
in general that aesthetic justification is after, let alone my particular judgment here; rather, it
is the quality of that purple stripe on that object that is my concern.

The theory of resultance introduced in the previous chapter backs up this claim, and
further adds the clarification that aesthetic properties are resultant properties. That theory (at
least in aesthetics) took its cue from Frank Sibley:
... and in non–aesthetic matters there is the same sort of situation, for instance, with the features that make a remark funny, are responsible for a facial resemblance or expression, and so on. The inevitable consequence is that unless one is in some degree aware of these responsible features, one will not perceive the resultant quality (Sibley 2001: 74).

The resultant base properties are what are in fact responsible for the resultant aesthetic property. These non-resultant base properties can, for instance, result in the aesthetic quality of joyfulness in a certain painting. That painting’s joyfulness is unique in the sense that it has just those base properties. Those base properties give that painting that joyfulness. Now, joyfulness itself isn’t unique, in the sense that it is an uncommon feature of the world; lots of things are joyful. However, lots of things are joyful for different reasons, and the difference in reasons tracks the difference in which the way joyfulness results from interactions of the base properties.

Given the above, the first lesson to draw regarding the priority of the particular is the following:

**Unique**: Artwork x’s aesthetic property q is particular to x.

One can cast this thought in a different way: following Sibley (2001: 123), we can distinguish between the aesthetic character of an artwork from its specific aesthetic character. The aesthetic character of a work is “the quality or assemblage of qualities in virtue of which it may be aesthetically praised or condemned—its grace, serenity, dynamism, gaiety, balance, unity [...] etc.” (ibid.). Specific aesthetic character is how the qualities mentioned above are instantiated in the work, “... the particular serenity of the close of the Goldberg Variations is not that either of a Claude sunset or of Beethoven’s Op. III Adagio, and so on.” (ibid.). The specific aesthetic character is instantiated by the artwork’s basic features, which are its
resultant base properties, “order of words in a poem, lines and colours in a painting, notes in a musical composition” (ibid.). **Unique** is the claim that an artwork has basic features which result in the artwork’s specific aesthetic character, and each artwork has a unique specific aesthetic character.

The denial of this claim commits one to affirming the following: if all the objects in the world which are beautiful were listed with all of their relevant resultant base properties, then we will find that there is a common feature of some beautiful things that makes them beautiful. However, there is simply no one common base feature that beautiful items have in common such that in virtue of that base feature they are beautiful. There is not beauty in general, but beauty as revealed through the *Mona Lisa*’s specific aesthetic character. And the properties that result in the beauty revealed in the *Mona Lisa* are unique to the *Mona Lisa*. The specific aesthetic character of the *Mona Lisa* is not the same as the specific aesthetic character of a painting by Kandinsky, even though they may be both beautiful. To be clear, when saying this I am not claiming that there is no property of beauty, the *Mona Lisa* is beautiful, as well as some of Kandinsky’s paintings. What I am instead denying is that beauty generally can be analyzed in terms of some conjunction of particular base properties of some work. That is, the base features that result in the some x’s specific aesthetic character of beauty varies from instance to instance.

For Isenberg, the correct use of critical terms requires an act of perception. However, it doesn’t seem to be just any act of perception. A glance at an artwork doesn’t seem to fit the bill for Isenberg’s peculiar use of perception. In order to grasp aesthetic properties, something more is required of a perceptual act then mere perusal. Isenberg (unhelpfully)
specifies that this perceptual act “fills in” and “rounds out” the non-aesthetic resultant base properties for the aesthetic property. But is there a better way of understanding what is going on here? We can turn to Mothersill for our next lesson regarding the priority of the particular: that in order to reveal the aesthetic property unique to an artwork, one must apprehend that artwork. As Mothersill (following Isenberg) states, aesthetic properties are those “qualities,’ ... which have no simple names, [which] are revealed, if at all, in acquaintance; they are what is grasped in an *apprehensio* of an individual” (Mothersill: 342).

Achieving this apprehension requires more than just a mere perusal of the individual object under consideration. It is more like a grasping than a mere act of noticing. As Mothersill states, “‘x pays attention to y’, through necessary, is not a sufficient condition for ‘x grasps y.’ To be appreciated, music must be listened to but also heard; paintings must be looked at but also seen; poems, not only read but understood” (ibid.). A constraint on appreciative judgment for Mothersill is then this apprehension. The second lesson is **appreciation**: in order to appreciate artwork x’s aesthetic property q, subject S must apprehend x.

What we appreciate when we appreciate x is x’s specific aesthetic character. Without apprehension we cannot appreciate the aesthetic property of an artwork, since the aesthetic property of an artwork is that which is achieved through apprehension. I’ll have much more to say about what apprehension actually is in the final chapter (as I understand it, the act of apprehension is an act of finely discerning). For now though, apprehension can be generally understood to be a grasp, where that grasp is a process of getting to know an object’s unique specific aesthetic character. To “get to know” an object of aesthetic interest adequately
certainly requires something, and, as Mothersill stated above, that something is characterized as “apprehending” the object. Getting to know a thing happens in various degrees, and it is a “process; it takes place over time, and although there is no upper limit—no point at which it would be natural or even intelligible to say, ‘I know x completely’ (any more than it would make sense to say ‘There is no true sentence about x that is not known to me’)—nonetheless we have a conception, though certainly vague and perhaps variable, of an ‘adequate’ knowledge” (2004: 331). So, in terms of explicating the concept of apprehension, let “getting to know” suffice at present.

This way of thinking about apprehension tracks the commonsense meaning of “getting to know x” What we usually mean by “getting to know x” is that x’s individual nature is being revealed to us, and this revealing deepens our appreciation of x. When, after a party, I say I “got to know” the mysterious individual who was sulking in the corner of the room, what I mean is that I got to know that person in a way that revealed her to me. That person’s character, attitude, sense of humour, and the like were revealed to me in a deeper way than if I merely noticed her. Similarly with artworks. When we get to know an artwork, aspects of it are revealed to us, and if we care about the artwork, then these aspects are the artwork’s aesthetic properties (on the idea of caring about an artwork, see chapter five). By continuing to get to know an artwork, it is possible that more of its aesthetic properties are revealed, and as more aesthetic properties are revealed, the more we can become confident in our appreciative judgment of it because we are more acquainted with it. Just think of a particular artwork you enjoy—be it a film, a song, a painting, whatever—I would guess that
the more time spent with this particular artwork you have gotten to know it better, and through getting to know it better it has deepened your appreciation of it.

Appreciative judgments, then, are tied to the unique nature of the item being evaluated. What we appreciate when we appreciate is that item’s specific aesthetic character. Given that they are tied to the unique nature of the item, appreciative judgments require experience of the particular nature of the item, since it is only through the particular properties of the item that the aesthetic property is revealed. Thus, to appreciate an item, we must get to know the item’s particular properties. But how do we get to know the item’s particular properties? What is the type of knowledge gained through getting to know an item? Mothersill suggests that in order to appreciate an object aesthetically it is “necessary ... to ‘get to know’ the item; background information will not do; what is called for ... is the knowledge that comes by acquaintance” (Mothersill 1984: 331). In order to get to know an object then—to apprehend it—we must become acquainted with it. This leads to our third lesson.

We can expect, given that particular nature of aesthetic properties, that in order to appreciate aesthetic properties, one must be acquainted with their particular nature. The notion of acquaintance has already come up in both Isenberg and Mothersill. It is easy to see why as well: given the insistence on “acts of perception,” Isenberg must reject attempts that claim that aesthetic judgment can occur without acquaintance with the object judged: “reading criticism, otherwise than in the presence, or with direct recollection, of the objects discussed is a blank and senseless employment ... There is not in all the world's criticism a single purely descriptive statement concerning which one is prepared to say beforehand, ‘If it
is true, I shall like that work so much the better’’ (Isenberg: 337-38). Mothersill, as well,
rejects such claims. For her, “getting to know” an object is knowing an object through
acquaintance, one cannot “get to know” a piece otherwise than through acquaintance. If you
have not seen the El Greco painting then you are not acquainted with it. If you have not seen
it then you may be wondering why the steep rising and falling curve is even worth
mentioning (as it figures in criticism, not as it figures as a philosophical example), and you
will not know why it is worth mentioning for aesthetic appreciation until you see it.

Frank Sibley also believes that acquaintance with the object is required in order to
form a warranted aesthetic judgment. For him, “we have to read the poem, hear the music, or
see the picture (not merely have it described in non-merit and even determinate descriptive
terms if that were possible), and then judge or decide whether an aesthetic merit-term applies
to it or not” (2001: 99).

The idea that aesthetic appreciation requires direct experience is nothing new. As
Paisley Livingston has put what has become known as the “acquaintance principle”

It is a necessary condition on a person’s adequate aesthetic judgments (ascriptions and
verdicts pertaining to the aesthetic qualities and value of works of art and other items) that
they be based, not only on description of the item—no matter how accurate these may be
—but on that person’s direct experience of the item (2003: 261-2).

The acquaintance principle falls out from the above characterization of the priority of the
particular along with the characterization of aesthetic qualities offered by Isenberg. However,
the acquaintance principle invites a question: how much direct experience of an item is
required in order to make an appreciative judgment? If one thinks that direct experience with
an object is a condition on adequate judgment (as Livingston does above), then the
conditions on direct experience must be fleshed out. Presumably, one wants direct experience
that is, minimally, *adequate* to make an appreciative judgment. In terms of acquaintance though, what makes an appreciative judgment adequate as opposed to inadequate? In order to make an aesthetic judgment of an object that can be considered warranted, is there some minimum direct experience threshold one must meet? Is there such thing as “too little” acquaintance with an object?

Suppose I am walking down the street and walk by a window display where a sharp looking suit is dressed on a mannequin. I take notice of it, but my stride never breaks, and I continue walking without stopping. Now, I have had, no doubt, “direct experience” of the suit. But does this fleeting experience allow for an adequate aesthetic judgment of the suit’s sharpness? Or should I think that my judgment of the suit’s sharpness, based on my brief encounter, is in need of closer examination? Or, to take an example from Mothersill (2004:334): imagine that you and your friends are alone in the Louvre, and just so happen to have roller-skates and without fear of being caught. Of course, one would skate through the Louvre in such a setting. As you are blazing by the paintings you take notice of them, perhaps are even able to take notice of one to the extent that, as you meet-up with your friends, you are able to describe it in a way so that they would recognize it if they themselves speedily skated by it. Does this direct experience and the ability to re-identify the painting allow for adequate aesthetic judgments? Would ten minutes standing in front of the picture suffice, or would fifteen? Other examples abound: listening to music, then judging the music, while doing taxes, for example. Can I be stressing over my calculations on my tax return while also forming a judgment of it that is adequate?
I believe the answer to this question cannot be exact. Giving an exact answer to such a question, given the complexity of aesthetic experience, seems out of place. Seeing an advisory sign in front of a museum that reads “please allow one hour of acquaintance per aesthetic object you wish to judge” seems more like a new piece of conceptual art than solid advice. Like many questions in value theory, the answer can only be as exact as the subject matter allows. And here in aesthetics, like in ethics, the subject matter is inexact, and so expecting a fine-grained answer seems out of place, at least to the question stated above.

How then are we to understand “acquaintance?” One way of understanding it is to take a cue from the acquaintance principle:

**acquaintance principle:** In order to apprehend x subject S must get to know x through direct experience of x.

This runs into immediate problems however, and I don’t think it can be right because it does not capture what is characteristic of appreciative judgments. This principle, or at least something closely resembling it, has led to vigorous debates in areas of aesthetic epistemology. The leading discussion revolving around the acceptance of the acquaintance principle is its seeming impact on the warrant of aesthetic testimony. Some believe that the acceptance of the acquaintance principle leads to denying that aesthetic testimony from a speaker can ever result in knowledge in the hearer. So, if this is correct, Roger Ebert can tell me that *Valley of the Dolls* is a thrilling movie, but from his testimony alone I cannot form the warranted belief that *Valley of the Dolls* is a thrilling movie, and the acquaintance principle explains why: without having direct experience of *Valley of the Dolls* for myself, I cannot form an adequate appreciative judgment of it.
Much ink has been spilt in working out the issues related to aesthetic testimony. The intuitive appeal and the motivation for the acquaintance principle is clear though: it just seems odd to think that one can have a right to judge and then come to know the aesthetic character of an artwork if that person has never perceived that artwork, if s/he never came into contact with it. However, much of this debate is motivated with these epistemic concerns, and many theorists in this debate are working with a purely epistemic interpretation of aesthetic testimony and the acquaintance principle. For these theorists, the denial of aesthetic testimony revolves around the acquaintance principle and its seeming epistemic commitments: what the conditions of correctly knowing are given someone’s testimony. However, there is another interpretation of the acquaintance principle on offer, once which illuminates what is special about appreciative judgment.

Dominic Lopes has recently suggested an alternative to the purely epistemic reading of the acquaintance principle (2009; unpublished MS). Essentially, Lopes narrows in on what is transmitted from the one giving the testimony to the hearer. The current literature on aesthetic testimony equates this transmission with the forming of a warranted belief through testimony: transmission is successful when these new beliefs are formed and are warranted. Epistemologists have been focusing on the condition in which these new beliefs can be warrantably formed. On the epistemologist’s picture, the medium for transmission is words and so the transmission of belief just is the giving of testimony. But the epistemic understanding of transmission is not the only one on offer. Lopes argues that the equivocation of transmission with testimony is a mistake. If aesthetic appreciative judgments
are transmissible via images, for instance, then there are some cases where aesthetic appreciative judgments are transmissible, but not from testimony.

The reason that appreciative judgments resulting from images are not capable of testimonial transfer is because images do not involve bare assertion regarding the aesthetic qualities of what the images depict, and so cannot be used as vehicles for aesthetic testimony. For example, I show you a picture of Natalie Portman in order to convince you of her beauty. The image will not depict the beauty of Natalie Portman without also depicting the features that are responsible for her beauty (that smile, those eyes, etc.). Similarly, I cannot show you a picture of an elegant vase without also having that picture depict the properties that are responsible for the vase’s elegance. This is not the bare assertion that epistemologists are after. Testimony, as an epistemological concern, is not taken to involve the giving of reasons for the testimonial claim; instead, it involves the bare assertion of the claim “that p” (see Elgin: 2002, Hopkins: 2000, 2006, 2007; Jones: 1999; Lopes 2009; Meskin: 2004, 2006). According to this well–entrenched approach, testimony is contrasted with giving an argument: arguments consist in the adducing of reasons, where those reasons, if good enough, support the conclusion. Justification resulting from arguments arises from the reasons given by the argument. Testimony, on the other hand, consists in someone uttering a single declarative sentence which is unsupported by reasons. Testimonial justification does not arise through reasons, but from the speaker him/herself.  

What epistemologists are

__Catherine Elgin explicates this point: “an argument consists of reasons adduced to support a conclusion. It wears its justification on its sleeve. If the reasons are good enough, the conclusion is credible ... The character and competence of the arguer are irrelevant, for the argument stands (or falls) on its own ... Testimony rests on authority. The testifier provides no reasons to back his claim” (2002: 293).__
concerned with is the question of whether someone can justifiably form new beliefs from a bare assertion “that p” without the giving of supporting reasons for p.

Images cannot be used for aesthetic testimony since they do not involve bare assertion. However, it is certainly the case that images do involve transmission of some kind. I can *appreciate* Natalie Portman’s beauty by seeing her at a cafe, for instance, or from a picture of her. In these cases, her beauty, and all the justification I need for judging her beautiful, is transmitted via my experience of her (in person or through the image). But what type of transmission is involved?

According to Lopes, transmission is not to be understood to be a claim to epistemic entitlement, but instead about the transmission of mental states (MS: 176). Lopes’ major task then is to give an account of the type of content a mental state has as an appreciative judgment and what needs to be preserved to be transmitted as an appreciative judgment.

The type of mental state that is involved in transmission of appreciative judgments is a “content-preserving relation” between transmitter, artifactual representation (such as an image), and receiver (MS: 176). The idea is this: epistemologists have equated transmission with testimony, but there are other ways to transmit appreciative judgments, and one such way is through the use of images. The following example illustrates this point:

Remembering my walk along the Nakasen-do, I judge that it is beautiful, I tell you so, and you grasp the thought expressed by my words, but your thought differs in content from my judgement because the content of my judgement is ‘essentially perceptual’ and the content of your thought is not. Since your thought does not have the same type of content as my judgement, my judgement is not transmitted to you. Yet when I convey what I judge by showing you a photograph of the Nakasen-do, your grasp of the photograph is a state which has the same type of content as my judgement, so aesthetic judgement is transmissible via images (MS: 177).
There is a lesson to draw about the type of content appreciative judgments carry. Why is it that the type of content distinctive to appreciative judgments is carried from transmitter to receiver via an image, but not from words? Lopes draws the conclusion that the distinctive content of appreciative judgments is

**inseparable content:** $R$ represents $x$ as $F$ inseparably from its representing $x$ as $B = R$ represents $x$ as $F$ by and only by representing $x$ as $B$ (MS: 178).

In the above example, perhaps what makes the Nakasen-do beautiful is the twists and turns; that is, the beauty results from the non–aesthetic twist and turn features of the Nakasen-do, and an image represents the beauty by representing the twists and turns. A mere telling that the Nakasen-do is “beautiful because of its twists and turns” both represents the Nakasen-do as beautiful and that it has twists and turns, but a telling does not represent the beauty *through* representing the twists and turns.

The lesson to draw is this: the failure of aesthetic testimony is due to the fact that appreciative judgments cannot be transmitted through words because the type of content the mental state carries is inseparable content. Simply put, aesthetic testimony is incapable of transmitting the distinctive inseparable content of appreciative judgments.

But what of aesthetic belief? Are aesthetic beliefs capable of transmission through testimony? First, notice that while judging “that $p$” implies believing “that $p$,” the converse is not true. You can believe that you would judge the vase elegant from my testimony, but this does not mean that you thereby appreciate the vase’s elegance. What the belief doesn’t have, and what the judgment has, is the inseparable aesthetic content. Beliefs, then, are capable of transmission through testimony. When I say that Natalie Portman is beautiful you can justifiably believe that she is beautiful (ushering in whatever view of what makes something
justified you may hold). After all, in telling you that she is beautiful I have transmitted something to you. What that belief lacks, however, is the inseparable aesthetic content of my judgment, and that inseparable content just is how her beauty is realized through the features that make her beautiful, that is, her specific aesthetic character. From my telling alone then, you would not be able to appreciate Natalie Portman’s beauty. Lopes offers a hypothesis:

We systematically confuse aesthetic belief and aesthetic judgement and hence the non-transmissibility of aesthetic judgement with the weakness of aesthetic testimony. Distinguishing aesthetic judgement and belief might help to sort out the problem of aesthetic testimony, for that problem concerns whether accurate aesthetic descriptions warrant aesthetic belief. (MS: 180. Also see Lopes 2009).

Aesthetic testimony is then perfectly capable of issuing warranted aesthetic beliefs, but where it fails is in issuing warranted appreciative judgments.

We have reason to drop acquaintance principle then, since it does not capture what is characteristic of appreciative judgment. Appreciative judgments are characterized by their having inseparable content. To apprehend an item is then to get to know this inseparable content. The third lesson to draw is:

**apprehension:** In order to apprehend x, subject S must get to know x through direct experience of x or through artificial representations of x, where inseparable content is preserved.

From this we can draw an epistemic lesson about justification of appreciative judgments.

Although Lopes does not wish to draw an epistemic lesson, I do believe what he offers supports

**ground:** In order for subject S to be justified in making an appreciative judgment on artwork x’s aesthetic property q, S must know the non–aesthetic grounds for q.

What is inseparable just is the appreciative judgment and the grounds for it. The grounds just are the features which contribute to the aesthetic property of the artwork (that is, the
favourers and enablers). So, if one makes a warranted appreciative judgment, then one must have the grounds for it.

Combining these lessons we get the following picture of aesthetic properties, appreciation, and judgment:

1) **unique**: Artwork x’s aesthetic property q is particular to x.
2) **appreciation**: In order to appreciate artwork x’s aesthetic property q, subject S must apprehend x.
3) **apprehension**: In order to apprehend x, subject S must get to know x through direct experience of x or through artificial representations of x, where inseparable content is preserved.
4) **ground**: In order for subject S to be justified in making an appreciative judgment on artwork x’s aesthetic property q, S must know the non–aesthetic grounds for q.

The above tells us that in order to appreciate an x’s aesthetic property, we must apprehend x. Further, to apprehend x, we must get to know x through direct experience of x or through artificial representations of x, where inseparable content is preserved. The judgments that result are appreciative judgments. Aesthetic appreciative judgments preserve their inseparable evaluative content through the non–aesthetic grounds of that content.

The above claims are by no means a full explanation of aesthetic appreciation or judgment. They are, however, lessons of why the particular matters in aesthetics. These lessons all draw from the particular nature of aesthetic appreciation. The particular is prior regarding the individual artwork, its artificial representations, and the aesthetic properties of the artwork.

The claim in this dissertation is that aesthetic judgment and moral judgment share important structural features. If this is true, we should then expect the same lessons to be drawn about moral appreciative judgments.
3.2 The Priority of the Particular: Ethics

I have already shown how early intuitionists stressed a bottom-up approach to moral judgment, and how a perceptual intuitionist might stress that the particular is prior. This, of course, does not automatically show that the lessons learned above are applicable to the ethical realm.

First take unique. In the aesthetic sphere this is the claim that an artwork’s aesthetic property is unique to that artwork. This was argued by an appeal to Isenberg’s critic who employs critical communication instead of ordinary communication. The difference was that in ordinary communication, reasons cited are general and self–sufficient, but this is not the case in critical communication which employs critical terms. They are not general, because properties cited in one reason may be found in other reasons where the verdicts differ; and they are not self–sufficient, because in giving reasons the critic is giving his audience a way to perceive the artwork, that is, the critical reason qua reason cannot stand alone. Why? In giving appreciative aesthetic judgments we are giving reasons to appreciate a certain work; however, appreciative judgments have a distinctive content, and that content is inseparable content.

They same holds true for ethics. That is

ethical uniqueness: An evaluable x’s ethical property e is particular to x is true. Ethical reasons are features that favour action or judgment, as the previous chapter claimed. If ethical reasons are not either general nor self-sufficient, then we should expect that the properties (features) that reasons track are not either. And indeed, ethical reasons are neither general nor self–sufficient.
The same consideration of aesthetic reasons in the above discussion of the priority of the particular applies to ethical reasons as well. The metaphysical relation of resultance applies both in aesthetics and ethics. So, giving the same characterization for ethical resultance as I gave to aesthetic resultance the following picture results: the resultant base properties are what are in fact responsible for the resultant ethical property. These non-resultant base properties can, for instance, result in the ethical quality of rightness in a certain ethically evaluable x, and x’s rightness is unique in the sense that it has just those base properties. Those base properties give x that rightness. Now, rightness itself isn’t unique, in the sense that it is an uncommon feature of the world. Lots of things are made right. However, lots of things are right for different reasons, and the difference in reasons tracks the difference in which the way rightness results from interactions of the favourers and enablers.

Ethical reasons are not general, and neither are they self-sufficient. If they were self-sufficient, then we could conceive of them working *in vacuo*. Understanding reasons in this way reflects the “isolationist approach” criticized in chapter two. According to that approach, in order to understand what role a reason is playing we isolate that role from other features that are present in a case. However, this procedure can only get off the ground should atomism in the theory of reasons be correct. Holism denies that the understanding of a reason can be understood in this way. Reasons become reasons *in situ*, their force depends on what other reasons may be present, and the presence of enablers and/or disablers.

For Isenberg, aesthetic reasons are not self–sufficient because critical communication requires an act of perception which fills in the evaluative property cited in the reason. I understood this to be an act of apprehension. **Appreciation** held that in the aesthetic sphere
in order to appreciate artwork x’s aesthetic property q, one must apprehend x. This lesson
draws from that fact that a mere noticing of x is not enough to appreciate x. The same is true
in ethics. When merely noticing a situation I may miss out on important ethically relevant
features that, should I have apprehended them, may have caused me to act in an ethically
relevant way. Remember that for the holist, one’s task in judgment is to “to look really
closely at the case before one ... the crucial question [to ask] is how things are in the case
before us” (Dancy 1993: 63).

Given the complexity of holism, with the inclusion of enablers and disablers along
with the favourers that count towards judgment, ethical apprehension is a natural extension.

**ethical appreciation**: in order to appreciate an evaluable x’s ethical property q, subject S
must apprehend x.

Something like ethical apprehension is implicit in the work of Dancy himself. In explaining
how we come to know reasons, and to recognize an instance of favouring,

more is required than just gazing at it in a receptive frame of mind. We need to bear in
mind the presence of enablers, the absence of possible disablers, the absence of disablers
for enablers, and so on ... We also need to bear in mind that we have to evaluate the role of
this feature in context (Dancy 2004: 142).

What we are after in ethical apprehension is the individual character of the resultance base,
and the presences or absence of enablers/disablers, etc. What we appreciate when we
appreciate x is x’s specific moral character. In order to do that we need to take into
consideration the salient features of the case at hand, we must come to “get to know” the
context of the case.

Although I will have much more to say about this in the final chapter when I take up
the topic of fine discernment, some general remarks about ethical apprehension can be given
now. Ethical apprehension is essentially an awareness of a situation. To borrow the phrase used to explicate this notion in the aesthetic sphere, ethical apprehension is a “getting to know” the situation. This awareness can occur at many different levels, and the extent to which awareness occurs will determine if I am in a position to recognize that there is an ethical situation in which I can act at all. I can be morally oblivious to a case which merits my acting because I don’t recognize that the act merits action. Mere noticing is lower on the scale of awareness of a situation than apprehension, as I understand the term. Apprehension, again, is employed by appreciative judgments where their content is inseparable.

To stall an objection: isn’t this asking too much of an agent? To be able to recognize various features of situations or people which are responsible for the resultant evaluative property is a hard task, and to suggest that one must recognize all the various features which contribute to the evaluative property seems an impossible task. On this approach it could seem as though we are never in a position to determine what evaluative property there is, as the requirements for discerning the evaluative property are too great. Holism should be given up because it makes too much of a demand. Dancy has this to say about this possibility:

competent moral judges do not need to be aware of everything that just might make a difference in order to determine whether it does or not; they don’t even, I would claim, need to be aware of everything that does make a difference, any more than the competent chess player needs to be aware of all the indefinitely ramifying contributions of the different aspects of the position in front of her in order to reach a responsible judgment about what move there is most reason to make. We don’t have to know everything before we can make a start at all (Dancy 2004: 142).

This has to be the right response. It would be too much if, in order to make a responsible judgment, there were a requirement that the judge know all. Indeed, while “getting to know”
an object is required to reveal its evaluative property, this “getting to know” is a process where no upper limit must first be met in order to make a responsible judgment.

What does it mean to ethically apprehend—to get to know—a situation though? Here are two examples to help draw that out. The first example is drawn from Lawrence Blum’s book *Moral Perception and Particularity* (1994). Here he argues that moral perception is an often overlooked stage in ability to make moral judgment. Much of what he says about moral perception I agree with, though I dislike the term “perception,” because it is important not to confuse perception with a gazing at the situation (though, I do not think Blum thinks perception in such a way). The term “apprehension” attempts to make clear that I am not speaking of a mere noticing, something stronger is demanded.

**Example 1:** John and Joan are riding on a subway train, seated. There are no empty seats and some people are standing; yet the subway car is not packed so tightly as to be uncomfortable for everyone. One of the passengers standing is a woman in her thirties holding two relatively full shopping bags. John is not particularly paying attention to the woman, but he is cognizant of her. Joan, by contrast, is distinctively aware that the woman is uncomfortable (Blum 1994: 31-32).

As Blum goes on to say, “the difference between what is salient for John and Joan is of moral significance. Joan saliently perceives ... the standing woman’s good ... as a stake in way that John does not. Joan perceives a morally relevant value in the situation that John does not” (ibid.:32). The ethically relevant property in this situation — the woman’s good — is not revealed to John because he is merely noticing and not apprehending the situation. Joan, in contrast, apprehends the woman’s good, and it is because she is apprehending the case that the woman’s good that she can recognize action is called for (giving up her seat).

This is not to say that John and Joan have radically different moral characters. John may be just as moral as Joan, but in this case he is “tuned out” for some reason. Should the
woman’s good be brought to his attention, he, like Joan, may offer the seat to the woman. However, what is stopping him from recognizing the situation as having ethical content is his deficiency in apprehension at the time.

What is most likely the *locus classicus* of this view comes from the work of Iris Murdoch (1970). Murdoch was interested in changing the root metaphor of ethical activity from the rational objectivity of the behaviourist, who claimed that only external action matters, to the creative vision of the artist. For Murdoch the metaphor of vision played an integral role in her moral philosophy, and with vision comes what she calls “attention.” In the *Sovereignty of the Good* she uses the famous M and D example to draw this out:

**Example 2:** A mother, whom I shall call M, feels hostility to her daughter-in-law, whom I shall call D. M finds D quite a good-hearted girl, but while not exactly common yet certainly unpolished and lacking in dignity and refinement. D is inclined to be pert and familiar, insufficiently ceremonious, brusque, sometimes positively rude, always tiresomely juvenile. M does not like D’s accent or the way D dresses. M feels that her son has married beneath him. Let us assume for purposes of the example that the mother, who is a very ‘correct’ person, behaves beautifully to the girl throughout, not allowing her real opinion to appear in any way. We might underline this aspect of the example by supposing that the young couple have emigrated or that D is now dead: the point being to ensure that whatever is in question as happening happens entirely in M’s mind (1970: 17).

Further

[T]ime passes, and it could be that M settles down with a hardened sense of grievance and a fixed picture of D, imprisoned [...] by the cliché: my poor son has married a silly vulgar girl. However, the M of the example is an intelligent and well-intentioned person, capable of self-criticism, capable of giving careful and just attention to an object which confronts her. M tells herself: ‘I am old-fashioned and conventional. I may be prejudiced and narrow-minded. I may be snobbish. I am certainly jealous. Let me look again.’

Here I assume that M observes D or at least reflects deliberately about D, until gradually her vision of D alters. If we take D to be now absent or dead this can make it clear that the change is not in D’s behaviour but in M’s mind. D is discovered to be not vulgar but refreshingly simple, not undignified but spontaneous, not noisy but gay, not tiresomely
juvenile but delightfully youthful, and so on. And as I say, ex hypothesi, M’s outward
behaviour, beautiful from the start, in no way alters (1970: 17–18).

According to the behaviorist, nothing of any moral significance has taken place. Murdoch
argues against this behaviourist understanding of meaning which relied on public contexts
and outwardly manifested conversations by stressing the importance of the internal, which is
not publicly available (on this see Antonaccio 2000: chp 3). If the behaviourist is right, only
what is public has any moral significance. However, surely something of moral significance
has taken place, M has changed her view of D, and this change has moral significance. What
has happened is that M has become an active moral agent, and this, according to Murdoch, is
accomplished by her attending to D, or in my terms, M has apprehended D such that D’s
ethical qualities were revealed to M. Thus, we can see that without apprehension, Murdoch’s
“just attention,” M would not appreciate the ethical qualities D in fact has.

We next come to apprehension. Aesthetic apprehension holds that in order to
apprehend x, we must get to know x through direct experience of x or through artificial
representations of x, where inseparable content is preserved. Could the following hold true
for ethics?

**Ethical apprehension:** In order to apprehend x, subject S must get to know x through
direct experience of x or through artificial representations of x, where inseparable content
is preserved.

I think it is safe to say that apprehension of an ethical situation can be achieved through a
direct experience of an ethical situation. Directly experiencing ethical situations no doubt
accounts for a large swath of our ethical lives. We see things that are right or wrong,
courageous or cowardly, and so on. Direct experience of situations with ethical content is one
way in which apprehension takes place because directly experiencing a situation allows one
to discern the ethically relevant base properties for the ethical property and how the ethical property is realized through these base properties.

However, what about content preservation? Do ethical judgments mirror aesthetic judgments in so far as they have inseparable ethical content? Here is what Lopes has to say about inseparable aesthetic content again:

An image depicts a line as graceful by and only by depicting it as having certain non-aesthetic features. In general, aesthetic features are depicted by and only by depicting certain non-aesthetic features. The aesthetic content of depictions is inseparable (MS: 178).

Now, the ethical equivalent would be the following, with the support of an example:

*Friday the 13th* depicts the murderous acts of Jason as morally wanton, evil, and wrong by and only by depicting Jason (and his acts) as having certain non-ethical features. In general, ethical features are depicted by and only by depicting certain non-ethical features. The ethical content of depictions is inseparable.

Another example can be drawn from Berys Gaut’s book *Art, Emotion, and Ethics*. In a particularly revealing example, Gaut employs Caravaggio’s *Taking of Christ* as an example to show that there are cognitive gains—particularly moral insights—to be had by the appreciation of art. According to Gaut, this painting informs us of the moral character of guilt and betrayal. The painting depicts Christ being taken by armed soldiers shortly after Judas has betrayed him. What is striking about this painting are the faces and body positions of both Judas and Christ: “the expression of Christ’s face is that of intense, deeply felt suffering: his fingers are nervously interleaved, as if in a gesture of prayer that has become compressed and flattened by the force of his grief” (Gaut 2007: 133). Further, Judas’ body and face portray his guilt: “Judas grips Christ to him, as much holding onto him for support as securing him for identification; the betrayer’s face is worried and worn, deep lines etched
over pursed brow … [with a look that] … is one that almost beseeches Christ for help” (ibid.: 134–35). The grief that is represented in this painting is depicted by and only by depicting Judas and Christ in just that way. To appreciate the grief of the painting, one must apprehend not only that there is grief, but it is just those features that are responsible for it. The moral content of the grief is inseparable from those features, since without those features there would be no property of grief.

The above two examples are artistic works which, though representing the base properties, also represent the resultant moral property. Thus, artistic works like these are suitable artificial representations which preserve ethical content. However, appreciation of the moral content is preserved when we directly experience situations as well. Just imagine you were seeing the taking of Christ in real time, seeing the scene with your own eyes. The grief would still be there, and it would still be there because that situation has the resultant base properties it does: the basic features of the painting would be the basic features that are apparent in real life. Further, the specific moral character would also be the same: Christ still has that look and Judas still has his.

We can rely on resultance to anchor the idea that ethical content, like aesthetic content, is inseparable from ethical appreciative judgment. An act is made right only because there are features that make it right at the level of the resultance base. Rightness doesn’t free float, rightness is made right by certain features of a particular situation. Given ethical uniqueness, the ethical quality of an evaluable x is particular to that x. So, an act’s particular ethical property (its specific moral character) is going to be inseparable from the particular base properties that are responsible for it.
Aesthetic apprehension impacted aesthetic testimony. Does a similar result occur with ethical testimony? I think so: judgments of ethical appreciation are not capable of transfer through testimony, if testimony is considered to be the bare assertion of “that p.”

Suppose I am a reliable and sincere speaker and were to say that an act is morally wrong. Are you justified in believing that the act is wrong? This belief seems perfectly capable of transfer via testimony. You, knowing what you know about me, can be justified in believing that you would also judge the act to be wrong. However, moral appreciative judgments are judgments with inseparable moral content, content that is responsible for the specific moral character. Because of this moral appreciative judgments are not capable of transfer through testimony. Believing that it is wrong and appreciating the wrongness are mental states with different contents. The same thoughts given for the failure of aesthetic testimony when it comes to appreciative aesthetic judgment also apply to appreciative moral judgment.

The point about moral testimony is made more robust given

**ethical ground:** In order for subject S to be justified in making an appreciative judgment on an evaluable x’s ethical property q, S must know the non-ethical grounds for q. If testimony is just focused on single declarative utterances—the “bare assertion” claim—then appreciative moral judgments cannot be transferred through testimony, since bare assertion is not the giving of the non-ethical grounds for the ethical property, thus the ethical property is incapable of being realized through those grounds. The appreciable specific moral character of the case is missing in moral testimony.

This chapter has been concerned with drawing lessons from the priority of the particular and how these lessons effect our moral and aesthetic appreciate judgment. Our
judgments in these two domains are particular judgments, sharing unique, appreciation, apprehension, and ground in common.
Chapter Four: Emotions and Appreciative Judgment

The priority of the particular taught us four lessons, one of which was appreciation: in order to appreciate x’s moral or aesthetic property q, one must apprehend x. Further, apprehension holds that in order to apprehend x, we must get to know x through direct experience of x or through artificial representations of x, where inseparable content is preserved. The judgments that result are appreciative judgments, and these judgments are characterized by having inseparable evaluative (moral or aesthetic) content of the specific (moral or aesthetic) character of x. The content was inseparable due to the fact that resultance is true: a particular evaluative property results from a particular resultance base, and as unique shows, it is just those resultance base properties that are responsible for just that evaluative property.

In this chapter I would like to suggest another structural similarity shared by both moral and appreciative judgments: that the concepts employed by them are essentially related to the emotions. As as D’arms and Jacobson point out, “in order to see an object as having certain evaluative features, it is (or may be) necessary to feel some way about it” (2010: 594).

4.1 Moral Emotionism

To begin, Jesse Prinz (2007) has argued for the following claim:

Moral Emotionism: Moral concepts are essentially related to emotions.

By “essentially related to” Prinz means that emotions co–occur, influence, and are necessary for the mastery of moral concepts. Prinz argues from a sentimentalist tradition in ethics which prizes emotions over reason, especially in regard to moral judgment. This
sentimentalist view is by no means a new theory in the history of philosophy, and was defended in the 18th century by David Hume.

The current revival of the sentimentalist tradition in ethics may be a result of the revival of empiricism in philosophy, at least as empiricism is currently understood. Many philosophers today appeal to empirical findings from other disciplines — most notably psychology — to support their theses of how judgment works, or what the folk intuitions in fact are regarding philosophical speculations. The revival of sentimentalism has been defended, both from a philosophical and psychological viewpoint, most notably (for the purposes of my project) in the work of Jonathan Haidt, Shaun Nichols, and Jesse Prinz.

Historically, though, David Hume argued that our ethical judgments arise from our sentiments of approval and disapproval. For him, praise is grounded in feelings of approbation while blame is grounded in feelings of disapprobation. Today, “neo-sentimentalists” (and here I am thinking of Justin D’Arms and Daniel Jacobson, along with Alan Gibbard, Simon Blackburn, and John McDowell) have grounded morality in the sentiments as well, and many neo-sentimentalists look to empirical data to support their theoretical claims.

Michael Gill and Shaun Nichols have argued that “emotions play a crucial role in generating ordinary moral judgments” (Gill and Nichols 2008: 143). One of his empirical sources for the claim comes from psychological work on the moral/conventional distinction in judgments made by children. Developmental psychologists (see Blair 1995, 1997; Turiel 1983) tested children’s reactions to violations of moral and conventional norms (hitting another as a violation of a moral norm not to cause another harm, talking out of turn as a
violation of conventional classroom etiquette). What these researchers found was that children took violations of moral norms to be more wrong than violations of conventional norms. Although this conclusion is not too surprising, what is surprising for Nichols is that “emotions apparently play an important role in generating these distinctions” (Gill and Nichols 2008: 144). Taking from the work of Blair (1995, 1997), Nichols argues that children with psychopathic tendencies and who therefore have diminished other-regarding emotional tendencies “perform atypically on the moral/conventional task ... this suggests that emotional responsiveness plays an important causal role in generating normal moral judgments” (Gill and Nichols 2008: 2). Much more about psychopaths later though.

Jesse Prinz, like Gill and Nichols, argues from a philosophical and psychological standpoint that the moral emotions are essentially related to the moral concepts we employ in moral judgment. Prinz’s starting point is our intuitions on the distinction between killing and letting die. Intuitively, we think killing is morally worse than letting die, and he thinks this is a result of the connection between our stronger emotions towards killing and our judgment that killing cases are wrong. We disapprove of cases of killing more than cases of letting die precisely because we feel—at least intuitively—more strongly about them.

Further, Prinz (2006) argues for three theses in support of the claim that emotions are essentially related to moral concepts. The first thesis is that emotions co-occur with moral judgments. Upon reflection this seems uncontroversial: we feel anger towards acts of racist violence, contempt towards the arrogant and disrespectful, and so on. Despite the uncontroversial nature of the thesis, there is empirical support for the thesis. In one study, Moll, de Oliveira-Souza, and Eslinger (2003) found that areas of the brain associated with
the emotions were active when subjects answered either “right” or “wrong” to moral questions (e.g., “you should break the law when necessary”). The same subjects were also confronted with factual questions (“stones are made of water”) which they also had to answer with either “right” or “wrong.” The factual questions, in contrast to the moral questions, did not elicit activity from emotional centers of the brain. In another study, Sanfey et al. (2003) had subjects divide a share of money between themselves, and when the distribution was judged as unfair the emotional regions of the brain were active. Empirical research confirms what we already know: emotions co–occur with moral judgments.

A second thesis is that emotions influence moral judgments. Prinz’s claim here is that “a negative emotion can lead us to make a more negative moral appraisal than we would otherwise have” (Prinz 2006: 31). To support this Prinz takes psychological work on two famous trolley cases (Thomson 1976). In the bystander case you are standing on a trolley track that splits into two. One track has one person tied down and on the other there are five people tied down. A trolley is coming which cannot stop and will surely kill the five people. However, you are able to pull a lever which will switch the trolley to the track which has just the one person. The typical answer of what to do given by most people is that they would pull the switch in this case, thereby killing the one but saving the five. In another case there are five people tied to a track and a trolley which will kill all five people if not stopped. In this case you are standing over the track on a footbridge alongside a fat man. You can push the fat man off the bridge and onto the track, which will stop the trolley and save the five people, but will most surely kill the fat man. Although this case has the same final outcome of the bystander case — the death of one to save five — most people answer that they would
not push the fat man off the bridge. Intuitively the action performed in this case (pushing the fat man) seems much worse than the action in the bystander case, even though the result is the same.

Regarding the above thought experiments, Prinz strengthens the thought that emotions influence moral judgments with psychological data from Green et al. (2001). The experiments ran by Green et. al. found that subjects showed significant activation in the emotional areas of the brain when deliberating on the fat man scenario and lesser emotional activation in the lever scenario. Prinz suggests that the higher activation of emotions is a result of our vivid imagination of pushing the fat man off the bridge, essentially killing him. In the lever case however, our imagination is less vivid, since in that case all we need imagine is pulling a lever. In the lever case we can “cooly calculate” that the numbers matter more in this case, that it is better to save the five and let the one die (Prinz 2007: 24–25).

Prinz’s point here is that “our moral intuitions about such cases are influenced by emotions” (Prinz 2007: 26). What explains our differing intuitions on what is to be done in these cases is explained by our emotional reactions to them, especially the more negative feeling that results when considering the footbridge case, where you are actively pushing someone to their death and “we don’t want to push anyone into the trolley tracks because doing so fills us with horror, and the negative feeling causes us to think that the action is wrong” (Prinz 2007: 24).

The case is made stronger by research on emotional induction. A study by Wheatley and Haidt (2005) had subjects who were primed to respond “with a pang of disgust” when the neutral keywords “take” and “often” were presented to them. The researches presented
the subjects with stories that contained these keywords, and these stories contained either morally admirable characters or morally reprehensible characters. The result that Wheatley and Haidt found was that when subjects were presented with the story about the morally admirable character in it, but also with the keywords present, they would judge the character to be morally wrong. “Such findings,” according to Prinz, “suggest that we can form the belief that something is morally wrong by simply having a negative emotion directed towards it” (Prinz 2006: 31). If the findings are accurate, then this is a clear case showing that an emotion can influence moral judgment.

Prinz’s third thesis is that emotions are necessary for moral judgment and moral development. I’ll concentrate on this a bit more than the other two theses, since I think this is the core of the moral emotionist approach.

To begin, if moral emotionism is correct, then moral emotions are “essentially related” to moral concepts. In the above “essentially related to” was cashed out in the psychological findings that emotions co–occur with moral judgment and that emotions influence moral judgment. Now, however, a much stronger claim is being made: that moral concepts are necessarily related to the emotions. What might this necessity relation amount to? “Necessary” could suggest a few different relations: “necessary” could mean causally necessary, which would be analogous to it being necessary to have a boat to get to some secluded island; or constitutively necessary, which would be analogous to the necessity of x being coloured to x having some hue. Still another way to understand “necessary” is as a dispositional thesis, and, indeed, this is the way Prinz understands it (see Prinz 2007: 21; also chp 3). On this construal, in order to “sincerely attest to” an act being morally wrong one
must be disposed to have negative emotions towards that act (Prinz 2006: 32). In other words, the disposition to feel the emotions of approbation/disapprobation in suitable subjects under normal conditions is a possession condition on the concept of RIGHT/WRONG (Prinz 2007: 20–21).

The idea of “sincerely attesting to” needs some unpacking. First, the dispositional thesis above is cast in epistemic and emotional terms. The “sincerely,” I take it, refers to an agent’s right to make a judgment. In order to have the right to make the judgment that killing is wrong, it is not only important that I sincerely believe that someone was killed and this is wrong (I am not merely pretending for example), but I also have to feel the right sort of way about the act of killing.

This illuminates a lesson learned from the previous chapter. In the previous chapter grounded held that in order for subject S to be justified in making an appreciative judgment on x’s property q, S must know the non–aesthetic or non–ethical grounds for q of x. Now, if “sincerely attesting to” is part of what it is to be justified in making an appreciative judgment, then grounded requires the addition of a dispositional element as well. It would then not only be important to know the non–aesthetic or non–ethical grounds for q, but also to have the right sort of emotions towards q as well (to view an act of killing which was wrong as something repugnant, as something awful, something worthy of anger, etc).

The force of the dispositional necessity claim can be best seen through the thought experiment of Prinz’s which he dubs “Moral Mary” (see his 2007: 38-42). Imagine that Mary is a person who never received any moral education as she was growing up. The paradigmatic moral judgments we make every day, (e.g., judging actions as right or wrong,
or judging upon a person’s character) were never employed by the young Mary. Further, Mary has no innate moral attitudes herself: guilt and remorse just never occur to her. Later in life she eventually comes to realize that she is in a peculiar position in society, and wants to learn how to make the common moral judgments we make. She picks up the works of Mill (or Kant if you’d like), and eventually knows everything there is to know about Mill. She now correctly knows the utilitarian position and further she is able to determine that if an act is right then it is one that, above all others, best maximizes utility. When confronted with two possible actions, she is able to determine which act will best maximize utility and thus, according to Mill, be moral. However, even though she has learned that doing x will maximize utility in some case, there is question of whether Mary can sincerely attest to x being the right thing to do. Prinz believes that more is needed in order for her to be sure, for Mary “can wonder whether x is morally required even though she knows that it will maximize utility … she may be unsure about whether x is an action that morality demands” (ibid.: 38). Her uncertainty is explained by the fact that she has only theoretical knowledge of morality. What would make Mary sure is if she felt that it was right to do x. Thus, so the example goes, emotions are necessary in having the right to make moral appreciative judgments (because those judgments contain moral concepts).

As Prinz points out, the Moral Mary case is really a version of G.E. Moore’s open-question argument (see Moore 1903). Moore’s argument was intended to show that any reductive analysis of a moral concept to non-moral properties would lead to an open-question. So, for example, if we were to reduce our concept of “good” to the natural property of “pleASURE” we could always ask: “is pleasure good?” and so on for any natural property we
choose. This led Moore to claim that goodness was a non-natural property and as such not reducible to a natural property. The Moral Mary case is supposed to work in a similar fashion: our ordinary concepts of right and wrong are not learned through reading about them in normative ethical theory textbooks, that is, they are not reducible to the properties described in those theories. Note that this is a conceptual and not a metaphysical point. The properties that our ordinary moral concepts pick out may turn out to be those properties that Mill picked out (but I highly doubt that given holism), but it is not a conceptual truth that moral rightness is that which maximizes utility. If it were a conceptual truth then we would expect Moral Mary not to wonder if, in virtue of maximizing utility, she is doing the morally right thing. But we do not have such expectations, and we can understand her puzzlement.

The Moral Mary case, along with the empirical research surveyed above, gives evidence for the thesis that the emotions are necessary for moral judgment. However, in so far as Moral Mary relied on a thought experiment, doubts and objections to the nature of the thought experiment may result. In order to assuage these potential concerns, we can return to the empirical sciences. The clearest case in support of the necessity thesis arises out of empirical research on psychopaths.

Work on psychopathy has informed philosophical discussions on the role of emotions in moral judgment by showing the necessary link between them. Psychopaths are characterized by showing a utter lack of indifference to the harm that they cause (see Hare 1991 and Cleckley 1976). They are “noted for their failure to regulate inappropriate behaviors, to experience a range and depth of emotion, and to form meaningful interpersonal attachments” (Sutton et. al. 2002). Cleckley characterizes the psychopath as having a sort of
moral blindness, similar to that of colourblindness. They are able to recognize that there are things that people refer as “moral value” but are unable to know what it is or appreciate it.

Cleckley characterizes one of his psychopathic subjects as follows:

[He] is unfamiliar with the primary facts or data of what might be called personal values ... Beauty and ugliness, except in a very superficial sense, goodness, evil, love, horror, and humor have no actual meaning, no power to move him ... It is as though he were colorblind, despite his sharp intelligence, to this aspect of human existence. It cannot be explained to him because there is nothing in his orbit of awareness that can bridge the gap with comparison. He can repeat all the words and say glibly that he understands, and there is no way for him to realize that he does not understand (Cleckley 1941: 40; also quoted in Prinz: 2007: 43).

In short, psychopaths are characterized in part by “emotional traits such as callousness, a diminished capacity for remorse, and superficial charm as well as impulsive and poor behavioral controls ... [these] emotional difficulties associated with psychopathy interfere with moral socialization and put the individual at risk for developing high levels of antisocial behavior” (Blair et al 2002: 682).

Psychopaths have such a poverty of affective responses that they are unable to recognize the outward manifestations of these emotions in others’ faces and speech sounds (Blair et. al. 2001, 2002). These studies show that, in comparison to a non–psychopathic control group, psychopaths are “more likely to misclassify fear as one of the other five basic emotions [and were] significantly less sensitive to sad expressions than the comparison group” (Blair et al 2001: 496). Further, psychopathic men are unable to determine why non-psychopaths are unsettled when looking at disturbing photographs (Blair et al 1997). This finding was further confirmed by Sutton et. al, who ran a version of the picture test on psychopathic women. The findings support that “male and female psychopaths expressing antisocial behavior and
emotional detachment have exhibited abnormal, attenuated startle reflex magnitudes during the presentation of unpleasant pictures” (Sutton et. al. 2002: 617).

The area of the brain in which psychopaths and normal functioning individuals have the greatest divergence is in the frontal cortex, specifically the prefrontal cortex, as shown by positron emission topography scans and a reduction of metabolic activity in the area (see Raine et. al. 1997; Raine and Yang 2006; Glenn et. al. 2009). Picking up on this, Antonio Damasio (1994) has explored the effect of abnormal prefrontal cortex functioning in individuals. As Jonathan Haidt, whose own research ties moral judgment to emotional judgment, characterizes Damasio’s findings

Patients with damage restricted to the VMPFC [ventromedial area of the prefrontal cortex] show no reduction in their reasoning abilities. They retain full knowledge of moral rules and social conventions, and they show normal abilities to solve logic problems, financial problems, and even hypothetical moral dilemmas [...] When faced with real decisions, however, they perform disastrously, showing poor judgment, indecisiveness, and what appears to be irrational behavior (Haidt 2001: 824).

Damasio’s (1994) work suggests that a loss of the VMPFC, or severe damage to it, is responsible for a loss of emotional responsiveness to real-world situations. People who have had a normal moral upbringing and who, prior to a loss of function in the VMPFC, responded to moral situations appropriately, lost this ability to do so upon the onset of abnormal VMPFC functioning. When compared to a control group of undamaged people, those who had VMPFC damage reported that they felt nothing in response to images that resulted in an affectively high response in the control group (measured by skin conductive responses to pictures of nudity, mutilation, and people dying) (Damasio et. al. 1990). Haidt suggests that these findings make the characterization of Creckley’s psychopaths at least
comprehensible: “with no moral sentiments to motivate and constrain them, they simply do not care about the pain they cause and the lives they ruin” (Haidt 2001: 824).

Moral emotionism claims that emotions are essentially related to moral judgment. Empirical evidence makes good on this claim. Emotions co-occur, influence, and are necessary for moral judgment. Might the same be true in aesthetics?

4.2 Aesthetic Emotionism

The above presented a defense for moral emotionism, the moral concepts are essentially related to the emotions. This defense largely consisted in relying on findings in empirical science. In this section I will make a case for the analogous aesthetic claim

* aesthetic emotionism: Aesthetic concepts are essentially related to the emotions. 

We are at a bit of a disadvantage when we turn to aesthetic judgment and the concepts employed by it. Unlike in the moral sphere, the aesthetic sphere does not have a great deal of philosophical literature on the relation between aesthetics and psychology, although recent research in aesthetics is changing this, as more aestheticians are working to incorporate empirical research into their work. It is a promising new field in analytic aesthetics, and recent publications confirm this: *Aesthetic Science: Connecting Minds, Brains, and Experience* (Shimamura and Palmer, 2012) and *The Aesthetic Mind: Philosophy and Psychology* (Schellekens and Goldie, 2011) for instance. This turn is a good one, as empirical work on aesthetic attitudes and judgments can only inform a correct approach to aesthetics.

Despite the renewed interest in aesthetic psychology by philosophers, psychologists have long been interested in our aesthetic reactions and appreciative judgments. This area of psychological research, often dubbed “experimental aesthetics,” dates back to the work of
Gustav Fechner in 1876, but really got off the ground in the 1960’s with work on the psychological underpinnings of our emotional experience.

The shared work between aesthetics and psychology can be informative. However, this approach still lacks the gusto that is apparent in moral psychology. So, while I think that the claim that I will be making — that aesthetic concepts are essentially related to the emotions — is relatively straightforward and can be empirically grounded, I am also aware that in burgeoning new fields of research these claims are constantly being tested. But, should in the future empirical science go one way, and I another, then it would be no doubt surprising: that aesthetic concepts are essentially related to the emotions just seems foundational to our aesthetic experiences.

First, the intuitive support for the claim that emotions are essentially related to concepts and judgment seems overwhelming. In fact, Berys Gaut just assumes that our experience of art is in part emotional: “that our response to art centrally involves emotions is a commonplace, albeit a true and very important one” (2007: 203). Gaut isn’t the only one working in this field to make such claims. Noël Carroll, for example, argues that some art that is immoral is also aesthetically defective in so far as the moral demerit in the work discourages/does not allow for aesthetic uptake, and this uptake is (at least a great majority of the time) an emotional uptake. A horror film, for example, succeeds as art in so far as it encourages the audience to feel fear. However, should fear not be capable of being felt in a morally sensitive audience because the fear elicited arises from immoral content, then the work fails as a work of art. For Carroll, narrative art should encourage interest and attention, and this interest and attention is “intimately bound up” with our emotions and judgments
(Carroll 1996: 235). Many philosophers of art working at the intersection of ethics and aesthetics just take it for granted that emotions are essentially related to aesthetic concepts.

However, we can do better than relying on mere assumption. Jesse Prinz, who as we have seen argues that emotions are necessary for moral judgment, unsurprisingly also argues that emotions are intimately bound up with aesthetic judgment as well. Prinz does better than Gaut and Carroll though by tying his claim about aesthetic emotionism to empirical science (Prinz 2007, and 2011). Relying on neuroimaging, fMRI studies have shown that areas of the brain associated with the emotions “light up” when we are having positive aesthetic experiences. Kawabata and Zeki (2004) found that when subjects were looking at beautiful pictures some areas of the brain which are associated with emotion were activated. Similarly, fMRI studies done by Vartanian and Goel (2004) also show that brain areas were activated upon making aesthetic judgment, and these areas are linked with the having of emotions.

Further, Cela-Conde et al. (2004), using MEG (magnetoencephalography), “studied the localization of brain areas activated during the visual perception of aesthetic objects. Visual stimuli (pictures) consisting of (i) artworks of very different styles and (ii) natural photographs were presented to participants, who were asked to perform an aesthetic judgment task (they should decide whether each picture was beautiful or not beautiful) by raising a finger” (Cela-Conde et al. 2004: 6321). They too found that areas of the brain typically associated with emotion were activated.

Tsukiura and Cabeza (2011) found that judgments of moral goodness and judgments of facial attractiveness share the same neural mechanisms. During an fMRI study, both the medial OFC and the insular cortex areas of the brain were activated when subjects were
asked to rate the attractiveness of an image of a person’s face and then asked to rate that same person’s moral behavior when presented with an action goodness judgment such as “he rescued an abandoned dog.” Both of these brain areas are traditionally linked to the emotions.

A further study clearly supports that emotion and aesthetic experience and judgment are connected. Cupchick et. al. (2009) found that the way in which we engage with pictures changes the emotional experience of seeing the picture. In the study participants looked at pictures in one of two orientations, the first was a “pragmatic orientation” and the second was an “aesthetic orientation.” The pragmatic orientation was characterized by having the subjects apply “an everyday informational criterion for viewing the paintings, and to approach the images in an objective and detached manner to obtain information about the content of the painting and visual narrative” (Cuchick et. al.: 86). In contrast to this, in the aesthetic orientation the subjects approach the paintings in an engaged manner, focusing on its formal properties. They concluded that “the results revealed activation in bilateral insula ... we attribute this activation to the experience of emotion while viewing paintings, consistent with the role of the insula in the feeling of emotion (Critchley et al., 2004, 2005; Damasio et al., 2000)” (ibid.: 88). This study also confirms the findings of Di Dio et. al (2007), who found that the insula was activated when looking at beautiful sculptures. This study belies an entrenched view in aesthetics: that aesthetic judgment is only warranted when we take on an objective disinterested and contemplative view of the artwork. Instead, what is found is that when we approach artworks, it is very much not the cool dictates of aesthetic reason that ground aesthetic judgment, but rather our hot affective responses.
The above research just shows that emotional responses co–occur with aesthetic responses. I want to now argue for the stronger claim, that emotions are necessary for aesthetic judgment. This is all much more speculative than the above, but I think support can be ushered in.

First, the same type of necessity claim will be made in the aesthetic sphere. On this view, to “sincerely assert” that something is beautiful or ugly is to be disposed to feel a certain way about it (pleasure or disgust). Further, the disposition to feel the emotions appropriate to instances of x in suitable subjects under normal conditions is a possession condition on the concept of x, where “x” is some aesthetic concept.

Take aesthetic instances of humour for example.7 A non–dispositionalist view would characterize instances of humour apart from our sensitivity to find something humourous. It may claim that an instance of something being humourous is fully characterized by an appeal to incongruity between that thing and something else, for example. This would be a non–dispositionalist thesis where there are descriptive facts as to what is and is not incongruous, and in order to figure out if something is humourous we map these facts onto the instance of the humourous thing in question and check for incongruity. If it is incongruous then it is humourous, if not, then not. The non–dispositionalist view is suspicious however. By leaving out an appeal to the emotions—how people respond to the humourous—it misses an

7 I leave to the side the possible distinction between non–aesthetic and aesthetic instances of humour. This distinction may be drawn many different ways, perhaps non-aesthetic instances of humour are explained by the motivations or intentions of the performer or how an instance of humour impacts the viewer (on this see Gordon 2012). What I want to draw attention to is that, when humour is aesthetic, it will be (at least partly) explained by the way in which we are disposed to feel about it. One could run this example with BEAUTY and the emotion of pleasure, should they wish.
important aspect of what it is to be humourous: the having of a particular emotion in response to things that are humourous. A characterization of humour that leaves out the emotion of being amused, say, cannot possibly be a full characterization of what it is to be humourous. Further to this, in order for a suitable subject under normal conditions to “sincerely attest” to something being humourous, it seems natural to suspect that they enjoyed that thing—found amusement in it and the like. If someone constantly said they found a joke humourous but never had an emotional reaction to it, we would suspect that their concept HUMOUR is not what we mean by our concept HUMOUR.

To show the dispositional necessity thesis as it is applied to the aesthetic sphere, I’ll employ a similar example to that of Moral Mary. Moral Mary’s childhood gets even more bizarre when we find out that Moral Mary had a sister, Aesthetic Amy. Aesthetic Amy is someone who never received any aesthetic education as she was growing up. The appreciative judgments that we make every day—judging objects as beautiful or ugly—were never employed by the young Amy. Further, Amy has no innate aesthetic attitudes herself: the aesthetic pleasure that we receive by looking at beautiful people, or the interest we take in attending to a Pollock, just never occurred to her. However, later in life she eventually comes to realize that she is in a peculiar position in society, and wants to learn how to make the common aesthetic judgments we make. She picks up the works of Monroe Beardsley, and eventually comes to know everything there is to know about Beardsley’s position. She now knows that aesthetic merit and the aesthetic pleasure that results is grounded in three aesthetically-relevant features an object can possess: unity, complexity, and intensity of regional quality (I’m assuming holism is not relevant for this example). So, when confronted
with two objects, she is able to determine which object is beautiful, which object is not.

However, even though she has learned that some object x has these qualities, does this suffice to ground her appreciative judgment that x is beautiful — after all, she felt no pleasure. Can Aesthetic Amy sincerely attest to finding the object beautiful?

Similarly to the Moral Mary case, Aesthetic Amy’s uncertainty that her judgment is grounded in the right way is explained by the fact that she has only theoretical knowledge. What would ground Amy’s judgment is if she felt that x was aesthetically pleasing. Thus, so the example goes, emotions are necessary in having the right to make appreciative judgments.

Aesthetic Amy does not have the right to make the appreciative aesthetic judgment that x is beautiful, but does she have the right to say something about the object? I think so. Nothing in my approach denies that she can have the belief that the object is beautiful, just that she will be unable to appreciate that beauty.

This point is backed up by claims made in the last chapter concerning testimony. There we saw that while aesthetic belief is capable of transfer via testimony, appreciative judgment is not. Further to this point Malcolm Budd holds

Now appreciation of a work is not a matter of knowing what its aesthetic properties are, but of perceiving them as realized in the work. So you do not appreciate a work even if you know at second hand as full a characterization of its aesthetic properties as might be given by one who is perceiving the work. And attitudes and reactions linked to appreciation — liking or disliking, admiration, contempt, revulsion, and so on — are denied to you: you cannot like a work’s gracefulfulness if you are unacquainted with the work. In terms of transmission, we might put the point by saying that an item’s gracefulfulness, in contrast to its being graceful — likewise, an item’s beauty, unlike its being beautiful — cannot be transmitted from person to person through testimony (Budd 2003: 392).
If Budd’s view is correct, then the Aesthetic Amy case is a case which pumps the correct type of intuition: that she is not fully appreciating the work, even though she may know all of the work’s aesthetic properties and further form aesthetic beliefs that these aesthetic properties count towards aesthetic merit. By distinguishing between appreciative judgment and belief, we can see that Aesthetic Amy is at the most capable of aesthetic belief but not appreciative judgment.

Perhaps, though, the most compelling support for the idea that concepts are grounded in emotional responses comes from the above discussion of psychopaths. One can object to my claim that the warranted use of aesthetic concepts requires affective responses by claiming that there is no analogous case of an “aesthetic psychopath.” After all, Dr. Hannibal Lecter was surely a psychopath, but at least he was a psychopath with taste. Admittedly, aesthetics is at a loss here. There is hardly any work done on the relation of psychopathic individuals and their ability to judge/appreciate aesthetically. This would be an interesting area of research to explore, no doubt, and certainly more empirical research can be done to support or deny the claim that psychopathy also effects ones aesthetic judgment, but there is some support that Hannibal Lecter’s delightful aesthetic taste is a fictional construct through–and–through.

Heidi Maibom and James Harold have argued in a recent paper that “there is no evidence that psychopaths are capable of real aesthetic appreciation, and some evidence that they are not” (2010: 1). The denial that psychopaths are capable of aesthetic appreciation comes from the work of Cleckley. Referring to one of his psychopathic patients, he wrote that the patient had
no interest, as contrasted with knowledge, in any matter that could be called philosophic or poetic. He liked to rattle off his little round of fragmentary quotations, the connections and the connotations of which he realized only in the most superficial sense, to contribute a few pat and shallow saws of his own believed by him to be highly original, iconoclastic, and profound, to boast generally of his wisdom, and then to go on to descriptions of his other attainments and experiences [...] It is impossible for him to take even a slight interest in the tragedy or joy or the striving of humanity as presented in serious literature or art. He is also indifferent to all these matters in life itself. Beauty and ugliness [...] have no actual meaning, no power to move him (1976: 26-7).

Another of Cleckley’s patients exhibited a lack of aesthetic sensitivity as well. After reading King Lear and True Confessions her responses to these two works was in “no fundamental way different” (ibid.: 61). Maibom and Harold conclude from this that “this lack of differentiation between what others would take to be deeply significant art and senseless pulp indicates a profound lack of understanding of what distinguishes art from other artifacts or, if you like, good art from bad” (2010: 2).

However, some may suggest that unlike in the moral case, the artistic genus is somehow “mad.” This is a common line of pop-cultural thinking. The artistic genus is unpredictable, strange, and otherwise nutty. So, imagine that a psychopath did produce an artwork, if so, wouldn’t this count against the idea that psychopaths can not appreciate art? Cleckley comments on this

Are some of those established by tradition as high priests of truth, beauty, and inspiration really members of the clinical group we call psychopaths? Although some of their works convey reactions and evaluations as inadequate as those of the typical psychopath and as incompatible with even minimum standards of human feeling and behavior, we should not necessarily identify their disorder with that of the patients presented in this book. ... In contrast with them, the typical psychopath does not labor consistently to express in art pathologic reactions or distorted appraisals of life. ... If the sort of patient described here should have sufficient talent and industry to produce works accepted as valuable literature or art, I do not think it likely he would in them try to express nihilistic or perverse attitudes. Whatever he might express would probably be as spurious, as little representative of authentic human experience, as his convincing
but empty promises, his eloquent protestations of a love he does not feel. His production, however brilliant technically, would be a valid rendering of neither health nor disease but a counterfeit (1976 : 305).

The idea that artistic geniuses are mad may to some extent be true. But, whatever madness they do have, it’s very unlikely that it is psychopathy.

I have argued in this section that aesthetic concepts employed in appreciate judgment are essentially related to emotional responses. Thus, the aesthetic domain and moral domain share a further structural similarity: aesthetic emotionism and moral emotionism are true.

4.3 On Emotions

I’ve been speaking about the emotions but have yet to say what an emotion is and what type of psychological theory can best explain our emotional experience. A leading view in emotion theory is appraisal theory (Arnold 1960; Lazarus 1991; Roseman and Smith 2001; Scherer 2001; Silvia 2012). The early work in appraisal theory arose as a reaction against the then popular arousal theories of emotion. These theories viewed emotions as “undifferentiated, a dimension of behaviour (emotionality) corresponding to its degree of energy or activity, which might reflect an underlying dimension of physiological arousal” (Roseman and Smith: 3). These unidimensional theories were then replaced with a two-dimensional model of emotional reaction which added a positive affect and a negative affect as the only two dimensions of emotional experience (Russell, 1980).

The core of appraisal theories is that emotions are elicited not from events or situations themselves, but rather from our appraisals of them. Appraisal theorists are better able to account for our phenomenology of emotional experience and can solve problems that
a one or two dimensional approach to emotions cannot. In order to give an explication of appraisal theory I will go over a few of the key themes of this theory.\(^8\)

First, since appraisal theories hold that our appraisals of a situation elicit an emotion, they reject the idea that it is the features of the objective stimulus itself that cause the emotion. This should not come as a surprise. If it were the objective stimulus itself that caused emotions, then it would be hard to explain individual and temporal variability in emotions to the same object or event. I may have become saddened at the death of Bambi’s mother when watching the movie at an earlier age, but I do not become sad anymore. The object itself has not changed, but my emotional experiences have, and this is due to a change in how I appraise the object. Recalling Hume’s remarks in “The Standard of Taste” here: “A young man, whose passions are warm, will be more sensibly touched with amorous and tender images, than a man more advanced in years, who take pleasure in wise, philosophical reflections concerning the conduct of life and moderation of the passions.” (1777/1984: 244). So, while Ovid may please me at twenty, it will no longer please me at fifty, and not because the work’s of Ovid have changed, but because I have changed.

There is further empirical support for the claim that appraisals cause emotions. Roseman and Evdokas found that manipulating test subject’s appraisals to a stimulus event changed their emotional reaction to that stimulus event, leading to their conclusion that how we appraise an event is the cause of how we feel towards that event (Roseman and Evdokas 2004). This is easily supported by intuition as well. A partner in a relationship may feel grief towards the break-up of that relationship, while the other partner may be quite relieved.

\(^8\) The following points I take from Roseman and Smith (2001).
Second, contrary to the one and two dimensional approach, appraisal theories see emotions as being distinct, and not always reducible to a mere positive or negative valence. This is easily explained by appraisal theorists, who just claim that the differentiated emotions are caused by different evaluations. Thus, emotions are individuated by their “appraisal structures.” Anger, for example, can be characterized by the appraisal structure of a) appraising an event as incongruent with some goal or motive, b) appraising an agent as blameworthy, and c) appraising the event to be one which can be dealt with through self-assertion or aggression (Silvia 2005: 346). Some emotions involve a more difficult appraisal structure. So, for an emotion like shame, the appraisal structure may involve appraising the situation as (a) relevant, (b) caused by the self, (c) urgent, (d) involving bad outcomes, (e) committed through negligence, and (f) inconsistent with one’s personal standards (ibid.). It is not important if these appraisal structures are in fact the correct ones. That work can be left for the psychologists. I do think, though, that they are on the right track. By individuating the emotions in this way, appraisal theory gives a fuller explanation for particular emotions than a flat two-dimensional model. All we could say about anger and shame on that approach is that they involve negative affect. Sure, that’s partially true, but there is much more to these individual emotions than that, as evidenced by their different appraisal structures.

Third, appraisal theory and the idea of appraisal structures give a more informed account of why different situations can evoke the same emotion and why similar emotions can be evoked in the same situation. I may feel anger across a wide variety of cases, but these cases may not share any features in common. I may be angry at my computer crashing and later be angry at the person who cut me off in traffic. On the surface the objective features of
these two cases have nothing in common. However, by looking at the appraisal structure of anger, we can find that both cases are at least incongruent with some goal I have, be it saving a document file or driving safely. Having appraisal states mediate between the objective features and the subjective emotion gives us a fuller explanation of why different objective states cause the same emotion than a theory that did without this mediation. Also, appraisal theory can explain, when my friend and I observe a situation which causes anger in me and contempt in him, why our emotions are similar but different. And this is just because anger and contempt as emotions will share similar, but not exact, appraisal structures. So, while I may be appraising the situation as eliciting anger, he will be appraising the situation as eliciting contempt, but the similarity of what we feel will be due to the fact that we are both appraising the situation as relevant to the appraisal structural feature(s) that contempt and anger share in common.

Fourth, and specifically related to our emotional reactions to artworks, appraisal theory offers an intriguing account of how expertise affects aesthetic appreciation, or, more generally, how knowledge affects experience. Appraisal theory is becoming more dominant in the domain of empirical aesthetics, and one prominent defender of it is Paul Silvia. Some recent psychological studies have shown that there is a difference in emotional response depending on whether the viewer was an expert or a novice, and the typical finding and conclusion drawn is that these experts are able to enjoy complex pieces of art where novices are not. Some conclude that it is the higher complexity alone that is eliciting the positive affect in the expert. If this were true then it would be a challenge to appraisal theory, since it is the objective features alone that are responsible for the emotion. Silvia, however, denies
this. In one study (Silvia, 2006) he found that the emotions the experts felt were caused not only by the objective features, but also by the interest they took in the artwork: “If people with training in art find some kinds of art more interesting, then it must be because they are more likely to appraise the art in ways that generate interest. Knowledge about art will affect the emotional experience of art” (Silvia 2005: 349). What he found was that experts were more interested in the complex art than were the novices, and this interest corresponded with a higher appraisal of understanding the art. Experts have different emotions than novices because they appraise the artwork as eliciting more interest.

Fifth, there is a question of what starts the emotional process. Behaviourists, along with other purely physiological theories, have an easy answer to this question: it is the external stimulus events that start the emotional process. However, as the points above intended to show, this comes at the cost of denying that emotions are as individuated and differentiated across individuals and time as we commonly hold, and that appraisal theories seek to justify. However, appraisal theories have an equally easy answer: it is the cognitive appraisal that starts the emotional process (Arnold 1960). Further, emotions are “presumed to be elicited by current appraisals” and this appraising “generates emotions automatically” (Roseman and Smith: 7). However this need not always be so. Like other cognitive processes, appraisals “can be directed effortfully in controlled processing ... as when one searches for evidence that one has been responsible for a positive event in order to feel pride” (ibid.). So, although appraisals can occur automatically, they can also undergo controlled processing.
The fifth point above is where most of the objections of appraisal theory is directed, especially the idea that appraisals cause emotions. As Roseman and Smith suggest, the anger you feel towards someone may be elicited by the appraisal that blame is appropriate, and so, based on this appraisal, you feel angry, “but could it not also be true that other-blame [for example] is part of the experience of anger? or that people who get angry are then likely to blame others for negative events — that other-blame is caused by anger?” (15). They reject the notion that causal chain between appraisals and emotions is only one way. They suggest that

Appraisals may be causes of emotions, components of emotions, and consequences of emotions. The perception that another person is to blame for a motive-incongruent event produces anger, and the same perception is typically (though perhaps not necessarily) a part of the phenomenology of anger, and it is also often (though not always) an effect of anger (see, e.g., Keltner, Ellsworth, & Edwards, 1993). For example, an employee's perception that she has received an unfair negative evaluation from a supervisor is likely to elicit anger; other-blame is likely to be a salient aspect of the anger experience, fading from attentional awareness as anger diminishes; and when feeling anger, the employee is likely to think of other injustices for which the supervisor is responsible (Roseman and Smith: 15).

More experimental evidence is needed to confirm their thoughts however, but, as stated above, what at least seems certain is that appraisals can cause emotions.

Finally, sixth: appraisal theory can explain the appropriateness of emotional reaction to situations. Behavioural theories have a hard time explaining when and how an emotion is situationally appropriate. Anger, for example, seems an appropriate emotion to have when someone is doing you a harm, in so far as that anger can motivate you to act. Behavioural theories, given that they focus on internal processes only, can explain that an emotion happened, but not why it was appropriate that it happened. Appraisal theories, in contrast, can give an account of the appropriateness of emotion. Appraisal theorists maintain that “the
appraisal system has evolved to process information that predicts when particular emotional responses are likely to provide effective coping ... Appraisals then guide coping by selecting the emotional responses from an organism’s repertoire that are most likely to help attain important needs and goals under those conditions” (ibid.: 8). Thus, “emotions can then be conceptualized as organized and organizing responses that, because they are fine-tuned to particular external and internal conditions by the appraisal process, tend to be adaptive” (ibid.).

This chapter was concerned with the connection between emotions and the moral and aesthetic concepts we employ in appreciative judgment. I showed that there was good empirical evidence supporting the claim that moral and aesthetic concepts are essentially related to the emotions. This chapter completes the “structural similarities” portion of this dissertation. In the next chapter I take up the topic of fine discernment, a skill required by moral and aesthetic appreciative judgment.
Chapter Five: Fine Discernment

The previous chapters have stressed three structural similarities between moral and aesthetic judgment. The first claim was that moral and aesthetic reasons are holistic. The second claim was that moral and aesthetic judgments should reflect the priority of the particular. The third claim was that moral and aesthetic emotionism is true.

This chapter has a different task than finding another structural similarity. In this chapter I would like to argue that given these structural similarities, a skill is required by the moral and aesthetic judge in order to make warranted moral and aesthetic appreciative judgments. That skill is fine discernment.

5.1 The Need for Fine Discernment

Before going into the details of how I understand fine discernment, I would like to clear the space for the need of fine discernment. The priority of the particular in moral and aesthetic appreciative judgment can be cashed out in a requirement for moral and aesthetic deliberation. Before forming appreciative judgments, we deliberate on the item that calls for judgment. We deliberate over what the right thing to do in a situation is, or we deliberate about what sort of specific aesthetic character a painting has. Deliberation here is an act that is conscious, we often know when we are deliberating over a thing. Of course, not all judgments have this deliberative process though. After all, we do make “snap judgments,” and those judgments are snap precisely because the deliberative process is either shortened (perhaps deliberately, perhaps not) or they are altogether missing a deliberative dimension. One can, of course, make “seeming judgments,” where one just remarks on the way something seems to them. These seeming judgments do not require a deliberative process.
However, not all of our judgments are these snap judgments. In many instances we take the time to “mull over” or “ruminate on” the situation in order to form a judgment we think is a good one, a judgment we can stand behind and think warranted. This “mulling over” just is the deliberative process of forming a judgment.

Philosophers have different ideas on how this deliberative process goes. In ethics, consequentialist philosophers think that the deliberative process requires a calculation on what action would bring the most amount of good in the world. According to them, we see a situation that calls for action, and there may be a number of actions one can perform. To take the well–treaded example: we can either kill some random innocent stranger which would save five other innocent people, or we can elect to let that stranger live, knowing full well that in so doing we would be condemning the lives of the five others. In this situation the moral agent has two actions available to him or her, and they must deliberate over which is the right thing to do. Of course, if you are an act consequentialist, then you would kill the one to save the five because as such a consequentialist, you are committed to the principle that the action which produces the most amount of good in the world is the right action. Deliberation here is seen as a process of calculation towards the good.

Other philosophers have taken a different approach. For them moral deliberation is a process whereby, of the options available to you, you do that action which would fit a maxim which you could will to be a universal law. If you are a Kantian of this stripe, then when you deliberate upon which action would be the right one to do, you use the test provided by the categorical imperative. If it can be willed to be a universal law then it passes, if it does not,
then it isn’t the right thing to do. Deliberation here is seen as a process of what can and can
not be willed as a universal law.

Admittedly I have greatly oversimplified the deliberative process in consequentialist
and deontological approaches to moral deliberation and judgment. What I want these
examples to illustrate is not an explication of a full account of their respective deliberative
processes, but rather their commitment to a top–down approach to deliberation. What both
these accounts share in common is a particular view of what deliberation requires: it is
subsumption of a case under a principle. What moral deliberation amounts to is figuring out,
of the available actions, which best fits the principle and is therefore right.

Both of the deliberative processes sketched were informed by a rule or principle of
morality. Consequentialist and deontologists alike think that somehow rules are an important
part of the deliberative process, and we’ve already noted Sidgwick’s introduction of his
“philosophical intuitionism” in order to make ethics more like a science. One can, in general,
think that rules are required for moral deliberation. According to this conception, moral
deliberation amounts to the application of moral rules to cases in order to come to a
conclusion on what one should do. However, there has been a challenge to the idea that
morality must, as of a necessity, be rule–bound.

The view that moral deliberation requires rules has come under fire lately. For one,
Jonathan Dancy has argued that holism in the theory of reasons entails that morality need not
be rule based. He defends a view he calls ethical particularism, and this theory suggests that
the search for such principles, rules, and other attempts to codify the moral landscape for the
use of principles are misguided (Dancy 1993, 2004). According to particularism, morality
does not depend upon the existence of moral principles. Versions of particularism can be seen in many philosophical camps, neo–Aristotelianism (see McDowell 1998) and British intuitionism (see Baldwin 2002) being the most prominent. However, Dancy’s thesis that holism entails particularism has been shown to be invalid (most notably McKeever and Ridge 2006; also see Väyrynen 2006, 2009).

The basic approach that McKeever and Ridge have against particularism is that in discriminating a feature as a moral reason, given the complexity that features can have under holism, is “implicitly to identify a corresponding default principle. To spell out the specific defeating and enabling conditions relevant to that reason and to assess its comparative weight relative to other potential reasons in various circumstances is to articulate unhedged principles” (McKeever and Ridge 2006: 179). McKeever and Ridge then go onto argue that practical wisdom is partially constituted by “one’s having a set of unhedged moral principles (which go from descriptive antecedents to moral consequents) which codifies all of morality save those parts (if any) of morality which transcend possible knowledge available to one” (ibid. 169–70). What is compelling about McKeever and Ridge’s position is that they take much that particularism has argued for, namely holism, and then make holism compatible with the delivering of principles which characterizes the practically wise person (although their approach remains neutral to the truth of holism, they just wish to make room for it). The approach I take in this dissertation can run alongside McKeever and Ridge here. I wish to remain silent on the truth or falsity of particularism, of whether or not practical wisdom requires principles. What is important here is the fundamental point that both McKeever and Ridge and I agree on: that the practically wise person has the sensitivity to
recognize reasons, to identify what enablers and defeaters are present, and to identify what to do (see their 2006: 140). This chapter is aimed at giving an explanation of what it is to recognize a reason.

One motivation ethical particularists have however, and one I am certainly agree with, is their insistence on attending to the detail of the particular situation. This, in part, explains their motivation for rejecting rule–based moral theories. According to particularists, some friends of rule–based moral theories do not give enough consideration to the evaluative changes these particulars can undergo—many have something like atomism as their theory of reasons—nor do they stress the priority of the particular (however, given McKeever and Ridge’s holist but rule–based approach, they would reject this conception of moral theories).

Margaret Little, in outlining a theory of particularist moral justification which is non–inferential and not rule–based, stresses the priority of the particular in the following:

... we can come to discern or interpret the moral nature of specific actions or individuals by exercising a sensitivity—a sensitivity that is perhaps analogous to a perceptual capacity, but is perhaps just a species of the more familiar ‘faculty’ we use to apprehend that something is a table, namely the capacity or skill to apply concepts correctly. On this view ... we can apprehend that something falls under the classification cruel by attending to the complexities of the case, discerning what is salient, making appropriate discriminations, and employing a matured understanding of the concept (Little 2000: 292).

On this picture of moral justification, no generalizations are required to come to the conclusion that something is cruel. It does not involve “reaching a belief by invoking some generalization linking premises to conclusion” (ibid.). Instead of relying on rules, moral justification is accomplished by a sensitivity to how the evaluative concept can be applied to the case before one, and recognizing that the case merits the application of the evaluative concept to it.
To restate: my purpose in this dissertation is not to defend particularism, but rather to assume holism and leave the question of whether there are useful, informative, and action-guiding general rules for moral judgment to the side. However, holists who are not particularists can certainly take advantage of the idea of what it is to be competent with a concept. According to holism, what is required of a competent user of evaluative concepts is “to understand their practical purport, and this is to understand the difference that their applicability can make to the [evaluative] shape of the situation and thereby to the nature of the appropriate response” (Dancy 2004: 191). One would not be a competent user of the concept of LEWD if they only understood that acts of lewdness are appropriate in all situations. Given holism, lewdness can be a good-making feature of a joke told in a pub, whereas it can be a bad-making feature of a joke told at your grandmother’s funeral. The competent user knows what sorts of evaluative differences the concept of LEWD makes in these two situations. Moreover, a skill at discerning that “being in a pub” and “being at your grandmother’s funeral” are features which are evaluatively relevant for the good or bad-making aspect for acts of lewdness is required.

Along with Little, Lawrence Blum criticizes conceptions of moral deliberation which rely too heavily on principles and rules in moral judgment (1994: chp 3). According to Blum, some rule-based approaches suffer a deficiency by being too overly focused on moral judgment at the sacrifice of moral perception (a similar approach will be taken by Barbara Herman below). For Blum, moral perception is a recognition of the morally salient features of the case before one and “comes to the scene before moral judgment” (ibid.: 31) By stressing moral judgment without including moral perception a faulty view of moral activity
results. Such an approach would limit moral activity by restricting it to first, figuring out which of the available actions best conforms to some rule/principle; and second, acting in accordance with what the rule/principle dictates given the action chosen. What Blum stresses is “the gap between an intellectual adherence to and grasp of principles of justice on one hand, and the recognition of particular situations confronting one as violating those principles” (ibid: 51). This gap is filled by perception. My reading of Blum is one where he is not committing himself one way or the other to the truth of particularism. The theory of particularism could be true, or it could not. Whatever the case may be however, the priority should be given to the particular.

Before judgment takes place, there must be a prior conceptualization of the particulars, a grasping them, a getting to know them. The judgment as to the evaluative nature of the object is a result of this conceptualization, and the particulars which are responsible for the evaluative property the judgment tracks—the resultance base properties for the resultant property—must be organized into a whole before judgment can proceed. The process by which we “get to know” an object, in the way relevant for judgment, I will call fine discernment. By discernment I mean to say that it is a process of delicate discrimination; it is a grasping, an understanding of the nature of something; it is recognition, of coming to understanding something distinctly. Fine discernment is also fine grained. The process is one where fine-grained distinctions, as opposed to rough distinctions, are made or realized.

If holism is true, then this skill is required of an evaluative agent. If a reason is capable of changing its evaluative salience from case to case, and if reasons are used in support of judgment, then there must be a requirement on the agent making judgments. That
requirement was earlier mentioned as being a duty to pay close attention to the case before one. It is being careful to recognize and determine what is a favourer and what is an enabler in a given situation or artwork, and more is required than gazing at a situation in a receptive frame of mind.

The particular is complex: there are different relations features can have, and given the non-condition governance of moral and aesthetic concepts, a skill to pinpoint what is and is not salient, to determine what the evaluative relevance the salient features do have is required. While this general demand of a sensitivity to context is not a unique demand for holism (other theories may require such a skill, a virtue theoretic approach comes immediately to mind), holism does make the demand salient.

In fact, unlikely support for the need of fine discernment comes from Kantian theory. Some philosophers may think that a moral theory like Kant’s should have nothing to do with the messy business of particulars, since what is of greatest moral importance is the categorical imperative and potential universal nature of moral actions. However, Barbara Herman has argued that a Kantian account of moral judgment and deliberation should take into account a moral agent’s conception of what is present in the case at hand before the categorical imperative can be used. Moral knowledge is not just knowing what the categorical imperative demands, but also when to know that the use of the categorical imperative is demanded. As she explains:

We might think of the problem this way. Indefinitely many descriptions of an action are possible, most of which omit the aspects of the action that raise moral questions. Suppose you wanted to construct a machine capable of rendering the most primitive moral judgments using a system that required maxims as the objects of assessment. Let us suppose the machine already has a natural descriptive language. Just to recognize that it should present the event "A punching B in the nose" for moral judgment, the
machine would also have to know, for example, that such actions involve injuries and that injuries are morally salient features of human events. (Imagine how much more complex its information would have to be to pick up the harm of an insult or demeaning remark.) So we must imagine the machine equipped with a list of morally salient characteristics and some kind of mapping instructions that indicate appropriate correlations between moral features and the terms of natural descriptions. In general, judgment is possible only when the material to be judged is presented in a manner that fits the form of judgment. Moral judgment is not the first step in moral deliberation (Herman 1985: 416-17).

Herman calls the type of knowledge needed by moral agents before they apply the categorical imperative to a case “rules of moral salience” which are “acquired as elements in a moral education, they structure an agent's perception of his situation so that what he perceives is a world with moral features. They enable him to pick out those elements of his circumstances or of his proposed actions which require moral attention” (ibid.: 417).

Despite not having holist sympathies, Herman’s passage above is evidence that the requirement of something like a sensitivity to the relevant features of a particular case is something that a moral theory must deal with (in other words, the “gap” Blum mentions above between the particular situation and the general principle is a gap that must be filled by any robust moral theory). As Herman says, the making of a judgment is not the first step. The truth of holism would complicate her picture no doubt, but it would not reduce the need for fine discernment. If her example of a machine is supposed to replicate the most primitive moral agent, then her primitive moral agent is in a certain sense better positioned than the holist agent. For example, it seems in the quoted passage that it is taken for granted that injuries are morally salient features of human events. No doubt they can be. But, given the distinction between favouring and enabling, that someone was injured could be relevant as a (dis)favourer or a enabler/disabler. That Herman thinks a computer can be provided with
mapping instructions for the correlations between moral features and our descriptive terms is something the holist would be very suspicious about, given the evaluative variability of moral features along with what it is to be competent with an evaluative concept.  

5.2. Fine Discernment and the Priority of the Particular

Chapter three stressed the priority of the particular in making moral and aesthetic judgments. If I am correct, then moral and aesthetic deliberation is a bottom–up process where the particular is prior. Fine discernment is also required given those claims. In chapter three I laid out four claims about the relation of the priority of the particular to judgment. Two of those claims are relevant to this discussion: unique stated that an item’s evaluative property is unique to that item and apprehension stated that in order to reveal an item’s evaluative property we apprehend that item. In that chapter I briefly characterized apprehension as a process of “getting to know” the item of evaluative interest. This process occurs over time and is realized in various degrees where no upper limit of fully knowing an item need be achieved.

The skill of fine discernment is required in order to get to know and apprehend the item of evaluative interest. In order to show this, I am going to make particular demands on how one should understand the act of discerning. In the literature discernment usually signals some activity the evaluative judge engages in before his/her judgment is given; however, it has never been clear to me what exactly is meant by “discernment” or what the activity of discerning consists in. In the below I try to better explicate this concept and its

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9 For a further critique of Herman’s position see (Dancy 2004: 67–71).
role in evaluative deliberation. In short, discerning is an act which, when done with care, will reveal the evaluative property.

5.2.1 The Act of Discernment: Quests and Tasks

To discern is an act of observation, namely the ability to perceive or recognize. While this act is often perceptual in nature, it need not be: one can discern the lighthouse in the fog, but also discern that an idea is fitting to some subject. It is also associated with the ability to distinguish: in picking fruit from a fruit stand, we want to be able to discern that the fruit that is ripe but not spoiled.

Taking a cue from the observational relevance of discernment, and in order to get a better grip on what is involved in discerning, the below will associate discerning as an act likened to a “looking at” and not a “looking for.” The main difference I wish to emphasize between “looking at” and “looking for” is that “looking for” culminates in a success, whereas “looking at” need not. Discerning is not an act which necessarily culminates in a success because, like with other acts associated with a “looking at” (“seeking” for instance), when one is engaged in the act of discerning, one is not precisely aware of what one is looking for. Indeed, one may not be looking for anything, but carefully inspecting an object, looking at its features, and seeing how these features relate to one another. The same applies to situations as well, we can discern a situation, to look at the features of it, and then to decide upon it. This way of talking about situations is reflected in the phrase “situational appreciation,” a phrase used by some moral philosophers. Fine discernment is a way of cashing out the meaning of “situational appreciation.”
The subject matter for evaluative judgment are those qualities that are revealed through an apprehension of an object or situation, and through apprehending a situation or object we come to know that situation or object. Apprehension, when employed to make a judgment, is an activity that precedes the actual forming of the judgment. To put the point in the terms above, apprehending is a “looking at” and not a “looking for.” In this regard I slightly disagree with Mary Mothersill, whom I take the notion of apprehension from, when she says that apprehension is “an offspring of an achievement verb: one may have a weak grasp of something or be mistaken in thinking that one has a good grasp, but where there is a grasp, something is grasped” (1984: 324). While apprehension is concerned with getting a grasp of the evaluative property and with ultimately being able to say “it is beautiful” or “that was courageous,” it is, I think, better not to conceive of it solely as an achievement verb (though, my disagreement is slight due to the fact that she says apprehension is “an offspring” of an achievement verb).

As stated above, the acts of apprehending and discerning can be perceptual acts. We can apprehend that the smoke is a sign for fire, and we can discern the shape of the rabbit in the clouds. It is, therefore, useful in examining these acts that we take what we can from their perceptual meaning. Frank Sibley (1959) has drawn a helpful contrast between different acts related to the distinction between “looking for” and “looking at.” For Sibley, “looking at” and “looking for,” and the acts associated with them, connote different logical categories, and their difference is not a matter of degree, as some may think, but rather a difference in kind. “Looking at,” and its associated acts, are tasks or scrutinies. “Looking for,” and its associated acts, are quests. This is because acts of “looking for,” as quests, are goal–oriented in the
sense that they conclude in either successes or failures. For example, one looks for a needle in a haystack. The quest here is to find a needle, and the quest is successful should the needle be found, or unsuccessful should the needle not be found. Unlike “looking for,” “looking at” signifies an activity where a successful end to such an activity seems out of place and unnecessary. Take Sibley’s example of the act of watching:

[task verbs] have no typical corresponding successes (or failures) in the way quests have. Looking for necessarily has an aim, for 'looking for' means 'trying to find'; watching need not have any aim. When I am engaged in examining the photograph, the quest for it is behind me and I am not necessarily engaged in any further quest ... compare the verbs in 'I went out to look for the children, saw them in the field, sat down and watched them playing.' The looking for culminated in a success, seeing or finding them, but the watching was not another bit of seeking or looking for, and met with neither success nor failure (Sibley 1959: 458).

The importance of of this is that if the act of discerning were a quest, associated with “looking for,” then it would be the result of an activity which was either a success or a failure.

To discern a thing is to “get to know” that thing, and we can get to know a thing in many ways. Some ways of getting to know involve quests, as in when we are searching it out, seeking it, or perceiving it, and one can either successfully or unsuccessfully engage in these activities. However, other actions associated with “getting to know” an object do not have an achievement as an outcome, but are nonetheless important in getting to know it. Here are some of the acts associated with discernment which count as ways of getting to know an object: we can scrutinize it; pour over it; observe it; savour it; examine it; and probe it. These acts, and others associated with them, are activities where the idea of a successful outcome seems out of place.
Perhaps that’s too quick though. Successful outcomes are often associated with tasks; for example, take the act of examining. When we examine a thing, we often do so in order to find something. When examining the pocket watch for scratches, we are certainly trying to find something, namely scratches. Perhaps then, the distinction between quests and tasks is not really a distinction between two types of actions at all, and it really is more a matter of degree than of kind. Perhaps, should there be any distinction, the distinction lies in the context of use, what we do and how we go about examining, for example, rather than any more fundamental logical distinction.

So an objection which could be levelled at this sort of approach is that I am drawing distinctions where there are none. To continue with the example of the act of examining: a doctor often examines a patient with the hopes of finding something, for example, the doctor examines the patient for signs of disease. Further, this examination certainly seems to have a goal attached to it, that of finding signs of disease. Sibley takes this objection to have the following quite natural meaning: “our examinations, like our quests, sometimes succeed in discovering and sometimes fail to discover what we set out to find. Thus it might be concluded that, both in point of having a particular aim or being for something, and, what is a consequence thereof, in being either successful or not, scrutinies are identical with quests, or at least sufficiently like them to be grouped with them” (Sibley 1952: 459).

One response to this sort of objection is first to not deny that we often talk of examinations, scans, scrutinies, and so forth as being associated with an end. However, this does not entail that all examinations or scrutinies necessarily are done with an end in mind. I can quite easily examine the mug that is in front of me, and in so doing I need not, as a
matter of necessity, have some purpose in mind. I pick the mug up. Turn it over. Examine the
colour and weight of it, and through so doing, I may get to know certain aspects of the cup
that I haven’t noticed in prior examinations of the mug. I can come to know that it has a
crack on the inside handle, and that due to multiple trips through the washing machine the
colour is starting to fade. In this exercise I am not looking for anything, instead I am looking
at it, and through this process things about the cup that I haven’t seen before are revealed to
me.

Secondly, as Sibley remarks, the success associated with seeking an object and
examining an object are of different kinds: “the success involved in seeking x is concerned
with the same object; it is finding x. But the kind of success that attends examining x is
concerned with a different object, y. You examine the photograph to find the likeness, not to
find the photograph” (ibid: 459). Related to this point, which brings the contrast out even
more, is that there is a logic and grammar to the usage of “examine for y” versus “seek y,”
and this is that task verbs are more complex, logically and grammatically, than quest verbs
(ibid: 460). “Examine for y” takes both an indirect object and a direct object since it is
transitive, and also presupposes that there is something being sought and something being
examined (examine x for y). Quest verbs do not have this structure (we do not seek X for Y,
we either seek X or seek Y).

Third, the objector may wish to press the point further, and insist that every task is
really, at heart, a quest. This is because every act associated with apprehension above
produces some information about the object. If I have not gained any information from my
examination, then I have not really examined at all.
In response, of course it will be admitted that the result of examinations may produce results. In my mug example above, I examined and found things that I had not seen before, and thus the result was an increase in knowledge of the mug. However, these results do not constitute a success: “a doctor giving a patient a routine general examination will notice and be able to report many things, a number of them being negative reactions. We may ask him afterwards if the findings of the examination were satisfactory; but it would sound most odd to ask him ‘was it a successful examination?’” (1952: 461). However, perhaps the doctor was specifically examining the patient for a very specific example of some scarring. Wouldn’t this then entail a successfully examination? It seems so. However, to further clarify the distinction between tasks and quests, take notice also that any sufficiently careful examination will produce some results, but this is not the case with quests. I can fail at my task completely, I can fail to find the needle in the haystack, I can fail to complete the course when trying to win the race. Total failure in an examination is not possible, where it is possible with quests.

The above was meant to establish that quests and tasks, and their associated verbs, are different logical categories. Quests are characterized by either their success or failure, whereas tasks are characterized by their open-ended nature, and that they are always—to some extent and if done carefully—successful (in so far as they reveal things object the object with we did not know of beforehand).

Does the above entail that there are no standards of completion for tasks? Are there no achievements at all associated with discerning an object? The type of completion and success that the sort of tasks I am interested in will have is that of judgment. An examination,
for instance, is successful once the doctor is able to make a judgment on their patient’s health.

Sibley puts this point nicely when saying “what is found by an examination is found in the course of the examination. What is found by a successful quest, on the other hand, is found not in the course of the quest, but at the end of it” (ibid. 463). In making evaluative judgments, it is not the case that we “find” them at the end of a process as quests would have it. It is not as though the process of coming to a judgment is a quest for a judgment. The doctor’s report at the end of the patient’s examination is a byproduct (in the sense of a secondary outcome, not in the sense of an unexpected outcome) of the careful examination. The judgment on the patient’s health is produced through, perhaps results from, what was found through the process of examining the patient. It is in this sense that tasks are capable of generating evaluative judgment.

The above is the first attempt to better understand tasks generally. Discernment, as a task, is such that it neither ends in a total success nor total failure like quests do: when one discerns a thing one is successful in so far as one better “gets to know” that thing, and what is found comes through the act of discerning and not as a result. Discerning ends with appreciative judgment, but this judgment is not “found” as though it were a needle in a haystack. Rather, the act of discerning is constitutive of the act of appreciatively judging.

5.2.2 Fine Discernment

But what, specifically, is involved in fine discernment? What are the components, and what is the process? Fine discernment—or something like it—would be much more readily
associated with aesthetic judgment than with moral judgment. We talk of people having “good taste,” and in “the Standard of Taste” Hume famously claimed that one of the essential characteristics of a good judge was that he/she had “delicacy of taste.” Aestheticians, then, should provide some clues as to fine discernment’s nature.

John Dewey, in his chapter on criticism and perception in his book *Art as Experience*, remarks, “judgment has to evoke a clearer consciousness of constituent parts and to discover how consistently these parts are related to form a whole” (1934/1980: 310). For him, aesthetic judgment is characterized by two distinctive features: discrimination and unification. These two aspects, to my mind, are the best ways of characterizing the components of fine discernment.

The role played by discrimination is the pointing out of the favourers and enablers at the base level for the resultant evaluative property. For example, in discerning Kandinsky’s *Black Lines #189*, discrimination serves the role of determining which features not only are aesthetically relevant and in doing so are responsible for the paintings specific aesthetic character of joyfulness (for example, the use of primary colours, shapes, and their position on the canvas).

Dewey is careful to explain that judgment is the combination of both discrimination and unification. For this reason, the act of discrimination—what he also calls “analysis”—is not to be confused with an activity similar to dissection, where one takes from the whole and pins up the parts. According to Dewey, the two distinctive features of judgment “cannot be separated from each other, because analysis is disclosure of parts as parts of a whole; of details and particulars as belonging to total situation, a universe of discourse. This operation
is the opposite of picking to pieces or dissection, even when something of the latter sort is required in order to make judgment possible. No rules can be laid for the performance of so delicate an act of determination of the significant parts of a whole, and of their respective places and weights in the whole” (ibid.).

Discrimination is aided by unification, which is responsible for putting the non-aesthetic features into a coherent whole. What one has when discrimination has done its work are, as Wittgenstein says in the aesthetic realm, “further descriptions:” “Aesthetics is descriptive. What it does is to draw one’s attention to certain features, to place these things side by side so as to exhibit these features ... Our attention is drawn to a certain feature, and from that point forward we see that feature” (1979: 38-9).

However, discrimination isn’t the whole story for judgment. In so far as Wittgenstein stresses the role of discrimination in the above passage, I think he is right to do so, but that can’t be the whole story for fine discernment. Discrimination alone cannot get us to judgment because unification is also needed. For once the properties are found, the judge needs to wrap them together into a coherent whole, into a story which is capable of explaining and justifying why the judge thinks the evaluative term applies. It would not be enough merely to list the resultance base features in any such way, as, for example, a shopping list might. This is because the features may interact with one another, and a mere list would miss these interaction effects.

For example, take the example of criticism which appeared in a previous chapter:

Like the contour of a violently rising and falling wave is the outline of the four illuminated figures in the foreground: steeply upwards and downwards about the grey monk on the left, in mutually inclined curves about the yellow of the two saints, and again steeply upwards and downwards about...the priest on the right. The depth of the wave
indicates the optical center; the double curve of the saint’s yellow garments is carried by the greyish white of the shroud down still further, in this lowest depth rests the bluish-grey armor of the knight (quoted in Isenberg 1973: 335).

Here Goldscheider is attempting to draw our attention to a particular feature of the painting: namely, a violently rising and falling curve, which is there to be seen in the painting, but isn’t among the non-aesthetic properties. He does this by pointing out the painting’s non-aesthetic features, and through a telling, unifies them all together, in the hopes that you will begin to see the shape of the evaluative property Goldscheider thinks the painting has.

Dewey goes on explicate the unification aspect of critical judgment in the following way:

This unifying phase, even more than the analytic, is a function of the creative response of the individual who judges. It is insight. There are no rules that can be laid down for its performance. It is at this point that criticism becomes itself an art—or else a mechanism worked by precept according to ready-made blue print. Analysis, discrimination, must result in unification. For to be a manifestation of judgment it must distinguish particulars and parts with respect to their weight and function in formation of an integral experience. Without a unifying point of view ... criticism ends in enumeration of details (1934/1980: 313–14).

Should criticism end with a enumeration of details it would fail as criticism. Should one just gather all the distinct particulars together, viewing particulars as mere parts, and not parts of a whole, then one ends up with a laundry list. As Dewey explains, this would make judgment analogous to “Robinson Crusoe when he sat down and made a credit and debit list of his blessings and troubles. The critic points out so many blemishes and so many merits, and strikes a balance. [But] since the object is an integral whole ... such a method is boring as it is irrelevant” to appreciative judgment (ibid.: 314).

A reason why this laundry list method fails is due to holism of reasons. What this method suggests as appropriate for judgment is an “isolation test” for the features present in
the case. As we saw in chapter two, the isolationist approach fails if reasons are holistic. While an isolationist approach characterizes features, it does so at the cost of reference to the other features in the case. It is, as Dancy puts it “trying to characterize something that a feature can do in concert with others by appeal to something that can only be done in isolation, and this is a peculiar procedure” (Dancy 2004:19). A mere list can only give you the features present, and not how they interact with one another, and it is this, the interaction between features, the evaluative shape of the situation, that unification is after.

5.2.3 The Need for Fine Discernment and the Particular

What of the priority of the particular? Why is fine discernment required when we give priority to the particular in judgment? A cue can be taken from Aristotle and the neo–Aristotelians in showing the importance of fine discernment given the priority of the particular. According to Aristotle, ethical thought and deliberation begins with what is most familiar to us, and those are the particular facts about us and our situation. Given this, it makes sense to think of Aristotle as a bottom–up theorist mentioned in previous chapters. Aristotle is famous for his scepticism of techne in ethical judgment, that is, the use of principles in coming to a decision of how to act. Instead of relying on subsumption of a case under a principle in order to determine moral judgment and action, Aristotle opts for a much more perceptually informed paradigm. The following passage from the second book of the Nicomachean Ethics points this out nicely:

For it is not easy to define how we must be angry, and towards whom, and in what circumstances and for how long. For sometimes we praise those who are deficient and call them gentle, but sometimes we praise those who are contentious and call them brave ... But up to what point and to what extent one can deviate before one becomes blameworthy is not easily determined by reasoning. Nor is any other matter of
perception. For these sorts of things are particular, and the discernment or judgment rests with perception (1109b15-23).

Of course, for Aristotle what our actions should be tantamount to is hitting the mean between excess and deficiency. However, figuring out where the mean lies between an act which is excessive in these particular circumstances and an act with is deficient in these particular circumstances is something that requires the use of practical wisdom. Scientific rationality—*techne*—breaks down at the level of practical rationality. Instead of *techne* we are left with discernment, and, as the passage indicates, discernment rests with perception.

But why the stress on perception? Why must discernment rest with perception, as Aristotle is famous for saying? Nancy Sherman defends an Aristotelian picture of practical rationality, one which stresses moral perception. She responds to this question as follows: “an ethical theory that begins with the justification of a decision to act begins too far down the road. Preliminary to deciding how to act, one must acknowledge that the situation requires action. The decision must arise from a reading of the circumstances [...] accordingly, much of the work of virtue will rest in knowing how to construe the case, how to describe and classify what is before one” (Sherman 1991: 30). Aristotle’s stress on perception comes from his insight into this often overlooked matter in moral theory (a point Herman above would agree with). Aristotle would object to any ethical theory which began justification at the point of decision, or judgment. What is prior to judgment is the particular, and it is through seeing the particular as ethically salient that we see the situation calling for ethical judgment.

Martha Nussbaum has further insight into why, on an Aristotelian conception of ethics, discernment is required. Nussbaum takes Aristotle to propound the thought that ethics
is not a science, but also that it shouldn’t attempt to be one. For a subject matter to be a science, it must be codifiable, and Aristotle does not think that the subject matter of ethics is capable of such codifiability. For Aristotle, the domain of ethics is the practical, and the practical has three standout characteristics: practical matters are mutable; the practical is indeterminate and indefinable; and finally the practical may contain non-repeatable elements.

Regarding the mutability of practical matters, Nussbaum quite rightly says that the world is such that “change confronts us with ever new configurations, ever new situations for the determining of the virtuous course” (1990: 71). The changing circumstances we find ourselves in puts a demand on the person of practical wisdom, for he/she must “meet the new with responsiveness and imagination, cultivating the sort of flexibility and perceptiveness that will permit them, in the words of Thucydides ... to ‘improvise what is required’. ” (ibid.). Perception and discernment is stressed here because it is capable of aiding the improvisor (qua moral judge) in coming to a judgment.

Regarding the practical as indeterminate, Nussbaum relies on an example to prove her point. Take good joke-telling, for example, is there a definition (an interesting and revealing one) such that one can learn good joke-telling from the definition? Likely not, and the same can be said for good choice in a situation: “[good choice] is a matter of fitting one’s choice to the complex requirement of a concrete situation, taking all of its contextual features into account” (ibid., my emphasis). While I certainly like the tenor of what Nussbaum is saying here, I think she oversteps a bit when she says that one must take into account all the contextual features. If Nussbaum is committed to a view in which (1) we can fully get to
know an object of evaluative interest, and (2) that this full knowledge is necessary condition on “good choice,” where (presumably) good choice is a feature of responsible judgment, then the conjunction of (1) and (2) is too demanding. For my purposes, “getting to know” an object is a process where the upper limit of the knowledge of x is not required in order to make a responsible judgment. And, second, as was stated in section 3.2, one need not apprehend all the contextual features of the case in order to start forming a responsible judgment.

Third is the claim that the practical contains non-repeatable elements. Nussbaum states that while “complexity and variety already yield a high degree of situational particularity, for the occurrence of properties that are, taken singly, instantiated elsewhere in an endless variety of combinations can make the whole context a unique particular it is also important to note that the practical may have features that are simply non-repeatable in other contexts” (1990: 72). Nussbaum takes friendship as the revealing example here. I have friendships with people, and these friendships have a unique history and relationship attached to each one of them. If what is important is to treat a friend as a unique non–replaceable entity, then “an agent’s own historical singularity enter[s] into moral deliberation in a way that could not even in principle give rise to a universal principle” (ibid.).

I accept all three of Nussbaum’s points above. In fact, the first and second point (given the proviso) must be taken true by the holist. The first point just reiterates the fact that reasons can change evaluative valence from case to case, while the second point is really an outcome of the first point: should reasons be capable of such evaluative shifts, then the indeterminate nature of “goodness” (when considered abstractly) will result. These points are
applied to the aesthetic realm as well: regarding the first point, of course the mutability of
aesthetic matters should now be taken for granted. Artworks confront us in different ways,
with different configurations. Regarding the second point, “good choice” can be replaced
with “good judgment,” where the aesthetic judge must take into account the particular nature
of the case at hand. The third point is captured by unique. The example I used when
presenting this idea was that the beauty of Mona Lisa is instantiated by a different result base
than the beauty of work by Kandinsky. The only way to repeat the particular beauty of the
Mona Lisa is to recreate the painting.

It is worth noting that given the priority of the particular, the need to clarify acts
associated with “looking for” and the acts associated with “looking at” becomes a bit more
forceful. This is why I believe discerning is best thought of along the lines of a “looking at,“
for it does not require a search for something, certainly not something known, but rather a
reading and a construal of the case with the result of apprehending the evaluative property.

If evaluative deliberation were associated with acts associated with “looking for,” I
worry that the following mistaken picture of deliberation would follow from it: when we go
about evaluative judgment we are confronted with an item that requires evaluative
deliberation. We then “switch on” our evaluative skills of detecting the salient features—we
search for them. We then reach a judgment as to the evaluative nature of the item. We then
“switch off” these evaluative skills. This picture cannot be right. If instead “apprehension”
and “discern” are akin to the verbs associated with “looking at,” a quite different picture
results. This picture has been mentioned in chapter three when speaking of the work of Iris
Murdoch and the stress she puts on moral vision.
According to Murdoch, what is important for moral life is moral vision, which she characterizes as an “attention.” For her, the work of attention goes on continually throughout our lives, and “builds up structures of value around us” such that “we shall not be surprised that at crucial moments of choice most of the business of choosing is already over” (Murdoch 1970: 37). Freedom, for her, “is not strictly the exercise of the will, but rather the experience of accurate vision which, when this becomes appropriate, occasions action. It is what lies behind and in between actions and prompts them that is important ... by the time the moment of choice has arrived the quality of attention has probably determined the nature of the act” (ibid.: 67).

What I take from Murdoch’s thoughts above is that one cannot judge an evaluative item differently than how they can conceive it, and how they conceive of an item is determined by how they attend to it. And given the priority of the particular and holism of reasons, there is no knowing in advance what contribution a feature may have for an evaluative judgment. This requires that fine discernment, or Murdochian attentiveness, be a background condition required for good judgment, it is “a mode of vision and a good quality of consciousness” since it is “a task to come to see the world as it is,” a task fulfilled by attention (ibid.: 91). As Margaret Little puts the thought, the good evaluative agent “is not someone who approaches each situation with a grocery list of things to check for. The required attentiveness is a background disposition for relevant details to come into your consciousness–for them to emerge for you as salient, to come to the forefront of your attention ... what one is attentive to is largely a function of ... one’s affect” (Little 1995: 122). Talk of affect leads me to the next section.
5.3 Fine Discernment and the Emotions

In chapter four I argued that moral and aesthetic emotionism is true, that moral and aesthetic concepts are essentially related to the emotions. In this section I will argue that fine discernment is also related to the emotions, and that the emotions help discriminate what is evaluatively salient.

This claim can be supported by work in feminist moral epistemology, and specifically work done in the ethics of care (for the locus classicus of this view see Gilligan 1982 and Noddings 1984). Margaret Little, for example, argues against a “bureaucratic model” of morality. This model takes moral agency to involve a clear distinction between reason and emotion, where the importance of reason is stressed over the emotions and “how good a person is at rendering accurate moral verdicts is quite independent of how responsive she tends to be to those verdicts. It is possible ... for people to combine tremendous amounts of moral acumen with completely atrophied affect” (Little 1995: 118). However, as I argued in chapter four, the emotions are dispositionally necessary for the possession and use of moral and aesthetic concepts, and the findings in moral psychology would cast doubt on the validity of the bureaucratic model of morality. This is one way in which emotions affect moral and aesthetic judgment and casts doubt on the bureaucratic model. However, emotions, specifically the emotions associated with care, also affect the way in which we make judgments.

Instead of this bureaucratic model, Little opts for the following thesis (1995):

(1) Caring for recognizably moral ends is crucial to being attentive to the morally salient details of the situation we face.

I think this is right, and a similar thesis can be applied to the aesthetic as well:
Caring for recognizably aesthetic ends is crucial to being attentive to the aesthetically salient details of the artwork (or aesthetic object) we face.

Regarding (1), desires and emotions help us discern what is morally salient in a case because, according to Little, “what one is attentive to reflects one’s interests, desires, in brief, what one cares about” (ibid.: 122). Essentially, when one cares for a thing, one is “prepared to respond on its behalf, and preparedness to respond is intimately linked with awareness of opportunities to do so” (ibid.). In the moral case, the type of care that one should have in order to be prepared to act on its behalf is a care towards moral ends.

I will speak of care generally, instead of opting for a specific way of understanding it. It is worth noting that care can be associated with a range of virtues and emotions: empathy, compassion, kindness, thoughtfulness, and “feel sorry for, commiserate with, or feel sympathy for another person’s irritation, discomfort, inconvenience, displeasure” (Blum 1994: 174). For my purposes I can speak of “care” generally to include all of these features, and I do not need to take a stand on what particular aspect of caring holds the greatest explanatory and philosophic weight (for example Lawrence Blum (1994) holds that it is compassion, while Michael Slote (2007) argues that it is empathy).

An example of the importance of care for moral deliberation is drawn from Lawrence Blum, one which we have come across in chapter three:

**Example 1**: John and Joan are riding on a subway train, seated. There are no empty seats and some people are standing; yet the subway car is not packed so tightly as to be uncomfortable for everyone. One of the passengers standing is a woman in her thirties holding two relatively full shopping bags. John is not particularly paying attention to the woman, but he is cognizant of her. Joan, by contrast, is distinctively aware that the woman is uncomfortable (Blum 1994: 31-32).
As Blum goes on to say, “Joan saliently perceives ... the standing woman’s good ... as a stake in way that John does not. Joan perceives a morally relevant value in the situation that John does not” (ibid.: 32). Now John’s inability to see and act in virtue of the woman’s uncomfortableness could be explained by his being “tuned out” of the situation. Perhaps John is thinking hard on some important life choice he must make, like whether or not to become a philosopher. However, John’s inability to see the case as one requiring moral action could also be explained by John’s lack of care towards moral ends. John doesn’t care about the good of others, so features of situations in which the good of others is salient for caring Joan, are not salient for uncaring John.

Little not only associates care with moral ideals—recognizing instances of fairness, justice, and so forth—but also to people (Little 1995: 123). Caring for people, and not just caring for impersonal moral ends, equips the moral agent with an epistemic advantage in the moral deliberative process. Caring for people, so argues Little, makes one more sensitive to what I have been calling the priority of the particular. Being more sensitive to the priority of the particular will then lead the agent to make better informed moral judgments. According to Little’s account,

Because the features relevant to determining what one ought to do are often complex, one must be receptive to the particulars of cases, to what is different and novel in a case, and not just notice what, at a lower level of resolution, appear as broad similarities. As these important particularities often have to do with the details known only to the people whose interests are at issue—their fears, hopes, worries, how they conceptualize the situation—we will gain important information by listening to their narratives (Little 1995: 124).

These features would not be available to us should we take up a stance which is disengaged from the person concerned. Little classifies the disengaged stance as one which resists the
unique and novel aspects of situations, where one only understands the other’s experience under the template of their own, where we generically and generally label others’ experiences to fit our own agenda. In contrast to this stance is the engaged stance, one that is characterized by actually caring for the person him/herself, “in a way that welcomes novelty and uniqueness, is slow to apply templates and open to changing them, is ready to reconceptualize what the agenda itself might end up being” (ibid.: 124; see also Blum 1994: 52). Above Murdoch mentioned that her conception of moral vision is a task, and now we are better able to see why: it is a task to be aware of one’s surroundings enough to notice and properly attend to the morally relevant features.

Not only will caring about moral ends help one recognize what is present in a case, it will also help one discern what is not present in a case. As Little remarks, “think of what is really involved in seeing what is morally relevant. Often it means noticing what is not present: noticing that a student is not in class; spotting in a busy crowd that a child, though surrounded by adults, is not accompanied by any of them” (Little 1995: 121). The lost child example is particularly telling: if one did not care about moral ends, specifically the young child’s good, then the morally salient fact that she is in a crowd of adults but not accompanied by any of them would go unnoticed. One would not see the need the child is in.

However, one could say of the lost child example that a potential kidnapper would also recognize the same fact that despite being in a crowd, the child is not with any one person. Seeing this the kidnapper recognizes that he could easily get away with the child. If caring for moral ends makes this fact salient for one who sees the child as lost, does this also mean that the potential kidnapper also cares about the moral good of the child? But this
doesn’t seem right: he is a kidnapper after all, and as such does not (presumably) care about
the moral good of the child. Similarly, a sadistic torturer can be quite good at recognizing
pain, perhaps even so finely discerning that the torturer will be able to discriminate between
different types of pain (should there be different types of pain). Surely the torturer does not
have the moral ends of the impersonal or personal sort in mind.

The above are examples of people who have no nonmoral interests, but are capable of
recognizing features which turn out to have moral significance. But they only have moral
significance if they are recognized as morally relevant. What the kidnapper and torturer lack
is an ability to see the moral relevance of the lost child or the moral relevance of pain. They
do not know what morality requires of these feature (or they do and just don’t morally care).
They can recognize this feature because they do care, but this care is not one concerned with
moral ends. The kidnapper cares in so far as the lost child signals to him that money can be
made off the kidnap, and the torturer cares for the self-delight caused by the victim’s pain. It
is not as though fine discernment is a skill only applicable to the moral sphere. To be a
distinctly moral skill however, to recognize features as morally relevant, then the agent must
care for moral ends.

Sabine Roeser (2011) recently argues that emotions are necessary for moral judgment
as well, but with the distinct advantage that she takes a bottom-up holist perspective towards
reasons as I do. Her position, which she calls “affectual intuitionism,” takes intuitions to be
paradigmatically moral emotions. She argues (rightly, I think) that Dancy is mistaken to
exclude talk of emotions when moral judgment is in play. Dancy argues that there is no need
for a special moral sense, since “moral reasons are not relevantly different from other
reasons” (since moral reasons, along with other reasons, are contributory) (2004: 143).

According to Dancy, “though we can indeed discern reasons across the board, our ability to
do it is not sensory; it is not sensibility that issues in the recognition of reasons (though
sensibility may be required along the way). It is rather our capacity to judge that is at
issue” (2004: 144).

Dancy takes the recognition of reasons to be a purely cognitive one, and this is where
Roeser objects. Roeser believes that emotions do play a role in recognizing reasons, and
supplements Dancy’s view of recognizing reasons with a cognitive view of the emotions,
where emotions are states that have affective, conative, and cognitive states to them. Roeser
believes that Dancy’s unnecessary compartmentalization of the affective from the cognitive
is a mistake, and drives him to the conclusion that it is a purely cognitive requirement of
recognizing reasons. If cognitivism in the theory of emotion is right, emotions are states
which have both affective and cognitive aspects to them.

According to Roeser, emotions play a role at detecting reasons at both the
contributory and the overall level (2011: 135). Regarding the contributory level, she ushers
considerations Blum and Little find important: that care is essential to recognizing the moral
landscape of the situation. Regarding the overall, Roeser quotes Nussbaum, “most of the time
emotions link us to items that we regard as important for our well being, but do not fully
control. The emotion records that sense of vulnerability and imperfect control” (Nussbaum
2001: 43). The idea here, I take it, is that in order to act morally one not only has to care, but
care for moral ends. These moral ends will be intimately bound up with our conception of
well being.
Obviously I think Roeser is quite right to point out the need for emotions in moral judgment, especially given our shared holist commitments. I expand this view to include the aesthetic dimension as well though. Holism is not only true in ethics, but aesthetics as well.

Applied to the aesthetic realm thesis (2) states that caring for recognizably aesthetic ends is crucial to being attentive to the aesthetically salient details of the artwork (or the aesthetic object) we face. In speaking of moral care in the above, it was said that caring for personal or impersonal moral ends helps one to recognize the ethically salient features of ethically evaluable items. That people care for moral ends is, of course, a commonplace. And while at first the idea that people care for aesthetic ends may seem odd, it is just as common for people to care aesthetically as it is for people to care morally.

People care for aesthetic ends in a multitude of ways. For one, people can care about their having “good taste” in music, in film, or whatever combination of art forms they enjoy. Some people pride themselves on their ability to understand and appreciate jazz improvisation, a cantata, French New Wave cinema, and the like. And good taste is not just found in the major and popular art forms, it is also found in the more everyday aspects of our lives: some pride their taste in home decor, in plotting their gardens, and their own personal style of clothing. Our aesthetic decisions surround us, we literally wear them on our backs. They are found in our homes and what we choose to enjoy in our free time. It is a mistake to only think that caring for aesthetic ends means only caring for painting, sculpture, literature, architecture, or music. The importance of our choice in everyday aesthetic decisions, what sort of environment we like and what sort of tea we drink, should not be overlooked (on the importance of everyday aesthetics, see Saito 2007).
There is reason to think that we should care about aesthetic ends as well, for they may contribute to the good life. Peter Goldie recently argued that aesthetic activity—both production and appreciation—is constitutive to the Aristotelian idea of *eudaimonia*, the life well lived (Goldie 2007; 2008). Along these same lines, Dominic Lopes has argued that good taste is in fact a virtue (Lopes 2008). If Goldie and Lopes are right, then we have reason to care about aesthetic ends even if we do not currently.

The idea of caring for aesthetic ends then turns out to be commonplace. We enjoy watching movies together for the shared emotional experience that the movie brings, and we enjoy talking about our favorite television shows together. And more often than not, we do not leave the house without seeing what we look like.

This caring, I suggest, helps one discern the aesthetically salient features of the object up for judgment. When we aesthetically care about an object, we will likely spend more time with it, looking at it, scrutinizing it, pouring over it. The more we do, the more we will “get to know” the specific aesthetic character of it. Associating “discern” with task verbs makes special sense in the aesthetic case: oftentimes we discern artworks with no particular ends in mind, we enjoy the act of discerning for what it is, and no success or failure results except for the success of coming to know an artwork in a new or deeper way through the act of discernment.

There is a disanalogy between moral care and aesthetic care however. Caring for impersonal or personal moral ends seems much more general and widely applicable than caring for aesthetic ends. I can aesthetically care about film, for example, but that doesn’t mean that I aesthetically care about conceptual art. Aesthetic care seems to be much more
localized around the art forms and pockets of everyday aesthetic interests, whereas moral care seems to be care for all the moral virtues. It would be odd, at least, to say that one morally cares about courage and not compassion. If someone did say that they would be accused of not really understanding what caring for moral ends actually means, at least their conception of morality would be called into question.

This disanalogy is not damaging though, in fact it makes sense that there would be this disanalogy. The disanalogy reflects the fact that fine discernment is much more localized in the aesthetic sphere than in the moral sphere. One can be a better judge of the aesthetic merit of a piece of film, for instance, than they are at a piece of music. In a sense, one can be much more selective in their judgments in aesthetics than in morals. We can decide to be someone who enjoys film and consciously make decisions to go out and see film. It seems that in morality there is not this freedom of selection: moral situations happen to us, and we are often dropped into positions of having to make moral decisions whether we would like to or not. And it is certainly not the case that to act morally is to take up a stance where one only cares about those decisions where courage is involved and does not care about the other virtues involved in being a good moral agent.\[10\]

Apart from (1) and (2), there is another way to show that fine discernment and emotional responses are important for the making of appreciative judgment. This approach takes its start from the idea that ethical and aesthetic items are responsible for many possible emotional and judgmental responses to them. For example, I can see a homeless person requesting money and discern that sympathy and charity is required, or I could see this same

\[10\] There is some reason to believe that in ethics the virtues are unified, whereas in aesthetics, should there be aesthetic virtues, they will not be unified. On this see Goldie (2007).
situation as one which requires mocking distain. Likewise in the aesthetic, I can watch *The Room*, directed and written by Tommy Wiseau, and see it as requiring the greatest aesthetic praise possible, or I can see it as requiring ridicule and a head-scratching befuddlement.

In the previous chapter I noted that moral and aesthetic concepts are essentially related to the emotions, and one way of understanding this was through dispositional necessity. On this view, that an act is one of killing causes contempt, fear, anger (etc.) in a suitable subject. There is, however, a normative way of casting dispositional necessity as well: that an act of killing merits contempt, fear, anger (etc.) It is, in short, to see the situation in a way that is essentially evaluative: one who becomes morally aware has to come acknowledge the salient features of a situation as constituting a reason or a justification for some response. Thus the difference, for instance, between someone who discerns the painfulness of torture and someone who sees the evil of it is that the latter person has come to see the painfulness as a reason not to torture, to understand torture as meriting revulsion (1995: 126).

If we take this normative notion, fine discernment is still required. In order to see that a response is merited to some evaluable item requires that one finely discern the situation. It is to discriminate and unify the various aspects into a coherent whole such that the result of the act of discerning can explain and justify one’s response. Without discerning the particular features of the case at hand we would be unable to have the right response.
Aesthetic items also merit responses as well. Berys Gaut puts the point as follows:

Though a work may prescribe a response, it does not follow that it succeeds in making this response merited: horror fictions may be unfrightening, comedies unamusing, thrillers unthrilling. This is not to say that fear, amusement and thrills are not produced in the audience: for people may respond in a way that is inappropriate. Rather, the question is whether the prescribed response is merited: whether it is appropriate or inappropriate to respond in the way the work prescribes (2007: 231).

In order to determine whether or not an aesthetic response is merited or not, one must be able to discern the relevant features correctly. So, for example, one may initially aesthetically exult and take great pleasure in the unique design of a curtain. However, when it is pointed out that the design is not really unique and moreover really resembles a design one would find on pajamas, then one will come to realize that great aesthetic exultation is not merited.\(^{11}\)

### 5.4 Fine Discernment and Justification

In this last section I would like to take up the relation between fine discernment and justification. In section 5.2.2 I stated that fine discernment is a process of discrimination and unification. The unification aspect of fine discernment is necessary because after we discriminate the salient features it is important that we unify these aspects together in order to reveal the evaluative shape of the situation or artwork. Further, ground holds that in order for subject S to be justified in making an appreciative judgment on artwork x’s aesthetic property q, S must know the non–aesthetic grounds for q of x. In chapter four ground was supplemented with a dispositional aspect: in order to have the right to make appreciative judgments one must also be disposed to feel the right sort of way as well. What does fine discernment tell us about justification? What form might justification take?

\(^{11}\) This example is credited to Dominic McIver Lopes.
When we are involved in the process of finely discerning an evaluable item we are doing something akin to forming a narrative. These reconstructed narratives are vehicles for evaluative knowledge and help to reveal the evaluative property because they allow full expression of the grounds and emotional uptake of the evaluative property. Narratives are artful ways of describing how one apprehends a situation, and can be used to justify why one judges the situation as they do.

This is reflected in Arnold Isenberg’s notion of critical communication. Critical communication attempts to capture the evaluative shape of whatever is being evaluated. It is not enough just to give a list of reasons cited in the evaluative judgment (a similar thought taken by Dewey above). A certain painting may have some properties x, y, z such that the these result in the beauty of the painting. However, the reasons why that painting is beautiful are not self-sufficient, that is, in citing them one cannot merely rely on the statement “painting p is beautiful because x, y, and z.” Something is missing here. It misses what the critic is trying to accomplish, and that is the achievement of “sameness of vision” which the critic achieves by the “means of the idea he imparts to us, which narrows down the field of possible visual orientations and guides us in the discrimination of details, the organization of parts, the grouping of discrete objects into patterns” (Isenberg 1973: 162).

The critic may give us such instructions which have the function of narrowing down the field of possible visual orientations by telling us something akin to a story; that is, by narrating how x, y, and z not only are responsible for beauty, but how their interaction with each other is also a constitutive part of that beauty. She might tell us to “look here at this red blotch, notice how it highlights the blue of the gown” or “notice how the position of the
earring gives the viewer a focal point in which the eyes are immediately drawn downward from the center of the painting which has the effect of a looking away as a bashful boy may look away from a beautiful woman’s face” or similar critical remarks. The critic here is trying to capture the shape of the resultance base, and that is not accomplished by just giving a mere list of reasons responsible for the resultant property, but by also highlighting how the resultant base properties interact.

What the critic is doing to justify their judgment is telling a narrative. This conception of what a narrative is need not be robust for my purposes. Narratives, for my use, are just frameworks which help the hearer to “notice and respond to the network of associations that make up the mood or emotional tone” of the evaluable item (Currie 2007: 18). Narratives explicate the specific moral/aesthetic character of the situation or artwork, the resultant base properties of it, and how all these features come together to form an evaluative shape.

In describing a moral situation Dancy often refers to it as having an evaluative shape, where that is understood “as the demands it makes of us, demands that are built out of the various favourings to be found in it, in non–additive ways” (Dancy 2004: 143). The discernment of the shape in ethics requires the moral agent to put together all the different features that make a case for action and see it as a whole, as an answer for the practical question of what to do in this situation. The competent moral agent is able to tell what features are playing what roles, what features are interacting with each other and what sort of normative polarity each has, and “in tracking these matters, [they] track interlocking saliences on the way to overall judgment” (ibid.). Those interlocking saliences help to produce the evaluative shape of the situation. The competent moral judge’s skills are much
like the competent critic’s skills. In putting together the shape of the situation, they are putting together a narrative. This is characterized by the unification aspect of fine discernment.

Dancy supports this narrative interpretation, and uses it to explicate his notion of moral description and justification. For him the nature of the rationality of judgment is narrative in form: “rationality here is not to be seen as essentially related to the ability to construct or respond to arguments. It is more like the ability to listen to and appreciate a story” (1993: 114). The analogy he draws upon to flesh this idea out, and not surprising given the aims of this dissertation, is from aesthetics:

A good analogy for the case of the moral description of a situation is found in the aesthetic description of a building. Suppose that I want to explain to someone how I see a particular building; we are both standing in front of it. No description worth the name would simply start from the left, as it were, and work its way along until it reached the last feature on the right. First, this would not be a description but a list of properties, which is quite another thing. The properties do not have a flat profile in the way that a mere list of them would lead us to suppose. They have a shape the order in which they are mentioned (the narrative structure of the description) is intended to reveal. So the sort of description I am talking about is a form of narrative, and it can have the vices and virtues of narrative; features can be mentioned in the wrong order, and important relations without which the story does not make sense can be omitted, distorted or misplaced. In the case of describing a building, one might start with that feature which one takes to be central of the buildings architectural structure…Perhaps this building should be seen as a basically flat rectangle, against which certain other features stand but to which they are complimentary… (1993: 112-13).

The point Dancy is driving at is that a narrative of a situation should aim to mirror the evaluative structure that the situation has. In so doing, the evaluative shape is revealed through the relevant features, attempting to keep the inseparable content intact. In forming the narrative I am trying to recreate the situation as I apprehend it, in all its evaluative detail.

Now certainly there are worse and better ways of doing this. However, when we have
finished giving our narrative account we have done all that we can do to inform others of our own understanding of what the situation demanded. Once this is done there is really nothing more to tell. In giving the narrative the narrator aims at getting one to judge the situation as he/she did. That is, the ethical critic succeeds when “sameness of vision” has been achieved, just as the aesthetic critic succeeds.

Other philosophers have relied on something like narrative justification in their work as well (e.g., Eaton 2001: chp 6). The conception of the practical advanced by Nussbaum above is supplemented by an account of moral vision. Looking at her account of moral vision will give us a clearer insight into the work of fine discernment.

Nussbaum takes her cue regarding moral vision from Henry James, who she thinks gives the best characterization of moral imagination and moral vision which can be associated with the Aristotelian view of the practical importance of the particular in judgment. Nussbaum interprets James to be claiming that “moral knowledge […] is not simply intellectual grasp of propositions; it is not even simply an intellectual grasp of particular facts; it is perception. It is seeing a complex, concrete reality in a highly lucid and richly responsive way; it is taking in what is there, with imagination and feeling” (1990: 152). This lucid and responsive way of seeing is required because it is the best way to come to know the situation you find yourself in. The example Nussbaum uses to illustrate this is drawn from James’ *The Golden Bowl*. Part of the book explores the relationship between Maggie and her father Adam. In one part of the story Maggie and Adam have reached a point where the father and daughter relationship/bond must change: Maggie is getting married and Adam must realize that his daughter is an autonomous being with a mature sexuality. The
result of this scene is that Adam comes to see his daughter in a new way. According to Nussbaum, the forming of this new image is expressive of Adam’s moral imagination:

Adam sees his daughter’s sexuality in a way that can be captured linguistically only in language of lyrical splendor. This tells us a great deal about the quality of his moral imagination—that it is subtle and high rather than simple and coarse; precise rather than gross; richly colored rather than monochromatic; exuberant rather than reluctant; generous rather than stingy; suffused with loving emotion rather than mired in depression (ibid.: 152).

Putting the point in my terms now, in forming the image that Adam does form, he finely discerns the situation, and through discrimination and unification, comes up with an image that is expressive of how he sees his daughter and how he morally interprets the situation. This image can be reflective of an individual’s moral imagination, in so far as it can have more or less specificity. Fine discernment is the necessary process by which this image is formed.

Instead of understanding these moral achievements as images, I prefer to think of them as narrative reconstructions spoken of above. Essentially, what one is doing when one is constructing an image is telling oneself a story, and this story is a reconstruction of how one discerns the evaluative shape of the situation. I spoke above of how these narratives are developed, and they are developed in the process of unifying the particulars of the situation into a coherent whole, and it is from this whole that the evaluative property is revealed.

For all her stress on images, Nussbaum is still aware of the importance of these narrative reconstructions. The way in which she stresses their importance is to point out that any summation of this image does not do it justice, for “first, that no description less specific than [the original text] could convey the rightness of this action; second, that any change in the description, even at the same level of specificity, seems to risk producing a different act
—or at least requires us to question the sameness of the act” (ibid. 154). Above I mentioned that these narrative reconstructions should attempt to capture the evaluative shape of the situation, and in so far as the evaluative shape of the situation depends upon the particulars present, along with their interaction with each other, one can see why Nussbaum allows for the possibility that “any change in the description ... seems to risk producing a different act” (ibid. 154). Thus, the resulting moral ideal that James leaves us with, and that Nussbaum seems to think is appropriate given the characterization of the practical above, is “a respect for the irreducibly particular character of a concrete moral context and the agents who are its components; a determination to scrutinize all aspects of this particular with intensely focused perception; a determination to care for it as a whole” (ibid. 162).

While I certainly agree with the spirit of James’ moral ideal, I do think that the level of specificity these Jamesian images reach, at least for the purposes Nussbaum raises, is far too high. These Jamesian moral images certainly do show the reader that the characters have a high degree of moral imagination, and do possess the virtues arising from out of such an imagination (precision, generosity, etc), but it comes at the cost of excluding most of us. We, at least the great majority of us I should think, are not Jamesian characters equipped with such a masterful moral imagination. To be fair, however, Nussbaum admits as much. These characters are akin to “Aristotle’s tragic heroes, they are high but possible and available” (ibid. 164).

My account of fine discernment and justification does not require the Jamesian level of acute sensitivity. While I am not denying that the imaginative level of the Jamesian character is essentially denied to us, I will agree that it is a very high level to achieve, and
most likely too high for most of us to achieve. Fine discernment is a process of “getting to know” an object, and, as was suggested in chapter three, I believe that getting to know an evaluative situation is a process that has no realizable upper limit (where one can confidently say of some evaluative situation s: “I know everything there is to know about s”).

The point of telling a story, like the point of getting one to “fill-in” the criticism with acts of perception, is to get one to understand the interactions between the base features of the situation. Just as there is “always something more to describing a line’s grace than listing the non-aesthetic features that seem to make it graceful” so too is there something more to describing an act’s rightness (Lopes MS: 178). Moral and aesthetic description should not be a mere listing of features, rather it should take the form of a narrative with an internal coherence that justifies and explains appreciative judgment.
Chapter Six: Conclusion

This dissertation has been concerned with answering the structural question: what, if any, structural features are shared between moral and aesthetic judgment? I have argued that there are three. The first feature, holism of reasons, informs the second feature, that the particular should have priority in moral and aesthetic appreciative judgment and deliberation. The third feature informs us that the emotions are essential to making moral and aesthetic judgment. These three structural features add up to a requirement on moral and aesthetic appreciative judgment: fine discernment is required in order to appreciate the specific moral or aesthetic character of an evaluable item.

By way of concluding, I would like to mention three ways in which the work done in this dissertation can direct future research projects.

First, as I have shown, given the three structural similarities between moral and aesthetic judgment, the skill of fine discernment is required in order to make appreciative judgments. I have not, however, told a story about how fine discernment can be improved. After all, surely some people are better at finely discerning evaluable items than others. How might one go about improving one’s skill in appreciating the specific moral and aesthetic character of evaluable items?

The start of such an approach can be helped by Frank Sibley and David Hume. Sibley, focusing on the aesthetic sphere, suggests that we first start with recognizing general evaluative terms like “beautiful” and “pretty” and then make our way towards more specific instances of these more general terms, like “elegant” and “delicate” for instance. The more general aesthetic terms “serve as a beginning from which we extend our aesthetic interests to
wider and less obvious fields, mastering as we go the more subtle and specific vocabulary of
taste” (Sibley 2001: 22). We should also take advantage of the art critic, whose writing on
artworks displays not only the narrative style mentioned in the last chapter, but also other
techniques available to their profession. Sibley mentions some of the methods they employ in
criticism: 1) simply pointing out the non-aesthetic features, “notice those flecks of colour;”
2) simply pointing out the aesthetic feature, “see the delicacy;” 3) linking remarks between
the non–aesthetic and the aesthetic; 4) employment of smilies and metaphors, “dancing
lines;” 5) making contrasts, comparisons, and reminiscences; 6) repeating and reiterating
points already made (2001: 18-19). Apart from providing examples of fine discriminators
whom we may learn from, critics can also serve to make us care about art and specific
artworks. As the last chapter showed, caring for aesthetic ends is important for fine
discernment, since when we care about something we are in a position to better evaluative
that thing.

David Hume provides another avenue which can be taken up in regards to improving
fine discernment. In his famous essay “On the Standard of Taste,” Hume mentions five
characteristics of the good aesthetic judge: delicacy of taste, practice with the chosen art
form, comparison of the different exemplars in the art form, freedom from prejudice, and
good sense (1985). Improving fine discernment will most likely be a result of practice and
comparison. The more judgments we make in an art form the better off we will be in the long
run, especially when these judgments are checked against already established judgments
from critics. A good way to develop fine discernment would be to judge some masterpiece,
and then check to see what the critics have said. Likewise for comparison, not only is it
important to compare one’s judgment with that of another whose judgment you admire or trust, but it is important to become aware not only of what the “particularly good” works are in a given art form, but to compare them against each other and against new work in that art form.

Regarding fine discernment of the moral, the findings in this dissertation pay off in so far as they set the stage for arguments for moral improvement. The claim would be that one way in which we can become better discerners of the moral is through the appreciation of art. If it turns out that practice is something which improves fine discernment, then practice making moral judgments can serve to improve fine discernment of moral properties. However, making moral judgments in “real life” is risky in the sense that there may be weighty consequences to ourself or others and moral judgments affect our character in either a positive or negative fashion. However, art—particularly narrative art—provides a safe harbour to try out moral judgment. When reading a novel, for instance, we can make moral judgments of the characters, or we can imagine what we would do if we were in their shoes. Thus, reading literature can sharpen our moral imagination and can teach us about our own moral character.\footnote{Another start to the improvement of fine discernment would be to look at skill acquisition and development in general. On this see Herbert and Stuart Dreyfus (1990).}

Secondly, I have left out discussion of the interaction between moral and aesthetic judgment in this dissertation. Do moral judgments influence/effect/determine aesthetic judgments? Do aesthetic judgments influence/effect/determine moral judgments? As was mentioned in the introduction, most of the work at the intersection between ethics and aesthetics is found in this debate. One particular debate focusses on the interaction between
moral and aesthetic value and whether or not moral (de)merits can be aesthetic (de)merits in
the context of an artwork. Some argue the ethicist position: that aesthetically relevant moral
merits can be aesthetic merits, and aesthetically relevant moral demerits can be aesthetic
demerits (Gaut 2007). Others argue the autonomist position: that the moral and aesthetic
spheres are distinct from each other (Harold 2011). The findings in my dissertation stand at a
distance from the interaction debate, as I am more concerned with the structural similarities
held in common between moral and aesthetic judgment. As far as this dissertation is
concerned, all I am committed to saying is that, in certain respects, moral and aesthetic
judgment run parallel to each other.

I understand the above debate to be essentially about how moral and aesthetic reasons
work and function in judgment. My commitment to holism of reasons and the priority of the
particular does inform the approach I would take in this debate though. Holism views reasons
as context dependent and capable of changing their evaluative valence, and because of this it
would be hard to align my view of reasons alongside Gaut’s ethicism. Gaut’s view of
ethicism is unidirectional: moral merits (when aesthetically relevant) can count as aesthetic
merits and moral defects (when aesthetically relevant) can count as aesthetic demerits. Given
holism, it seems a view can be developed that is multidirectional: that moral merits or
demerits can count as aesthetic merits or demerits in an artwork depending on the context
(this view has found already found footing in the work of Jacobson (2006) and Kieran
(2003)). However, my approach would stress the distinction between favourers and enablers,
which the views of Jacobson and Kieran do not. It could turn out that a moral (de)merit
enables an aesthetic (de)merit to be a reason to judge the artwork positively or negatively
(and vice versa). Given that features of an artwork can take different forms of relevance, my view would be a more precise account of what is a reason and why.

Finally, third, my research can extend to the burgeoning area of virtue aesthetics. Virtue aesthetics completes virtue theory in ethics and epistemology by offering a third perspective that may overcome obstacles in those fields. A goal of virtue aesthetics should be to pave a way for practical steps at improved art education, which may also impact our theories of moral development. In order for virtue aesthetics to get off the ground, though, an account is needed of the individual aesthetic virtues and vices and also how our engagement with art is affected by those virtues and vices. In short, knowledge of how we engage well and poorly with works of art must be examined.

A condition on good engagement with a work of art is fine discernment. In the above I spoke of the skill of fine discernment; it may, however, turn out to be a virtue. The most common distinction between skills and virtues is that skills are only conditionally good—have only instrumental value—whereas virtues are intrinsically good (see Lopes 2008; Goldie 2008). However, fine discernment may be intrinsically good in so far as it is constitutive of the good life. If appreciating art is considered to be partly constitutive of the good life, and if fine discernment is necessary in order to appreciate art, then it can be argued that it is a virtue. While this approach connects fine discernment with an independent account of human good, other options of what a virtue requires are available (see Lopes 2008). Methodologically, though, that fine discernment is required in both aesthetic appreciative judgment and moral appreciative judgment is a theoretical good, since it ties the
moral realm and the aesthetic realm together, which could strengthen an account of a unified virtue theory.
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