

OBJECTIVITY AND SENSITIVITY IN AESTHETICS

*by*

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## ABSTRACT

This essay is a discussion of two related topics in contemporary aesthetics: the notion of aesthetic sensitivity, and the question of the objectivity of aesthetic judgements. Its point of departure is the work of Frank Sibley on "aesthetic concepts".

In Chapter I intuitionism is rejected both as providing an answer to the question, "Are aesthetic judgements objective?" and as providing the basis for an account of aesthetic sensitivity.

In Chapter II an account of aesthetic sensitivity based on the seeing-as notion is explored and ultimately abandoned.

In Chapter III the issue of objectivity for aesthetic judgements is developed in detail, as turning on the availability of some decision procedure or other for the resolution of disputes. It is argued that relativism, the position that no such decision procedures for aesthetic judgements are available, cannot be adequately defended. An analogy between aesthetic judgement and color attribution emerges as basic to a promising strategy for a defense of aesthetic objectivism. The strategy involves the demand for an articulation of decision procedures relevant to color

attribution. The promise of the strategy is defended when it is argued that standard anti-intuitionist criticisms need not undermine it. Finally, the theses and arguments of one relativist, Isabel C. Hungerland, are criticized. Part of her defense of relativism is traced to her acceptance of an analogy between aesthetic judgement and seeing-as. The results of Chapter II, in which the limits of that analogy are exposed, are employed against her.

Chapter IV is an outline of a set of decision procedures for color attribution. Color decision procedures involve the selection of a reference group of observers, whose visual experiences are taken to be authoritative. Members of the reference group are selected on the basis of two principles of selection: one which selects statistically normal observers, and one which selects observers of demonstrably higher discriminatory capacity. A system of subsidiary principles, which operates when the two main are at odds in their selections, is illustrated.

In Chapter V the plausibility of an aesthetic analogue of the theory of color objectivity developed in Chapter IV is defended against two major objections. The first objection is based on a point of disanalogy between colors and aesthetic features: the "emergence" of aesthetic features. It is argued, in effect, that this is not a relevant point of dis-

analogy. The second objection is based on the view that the meanings of terms used to express aesthetic judgements are never twice the same. This view is criticized, and a more plausible one, which does not pose difficulties for the colors/aesthetics analogy, is considered.

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## CHAPTER I

J. L. Austin once remarked that aesthetics would begin to prosper as a branch of philosophy, if only aestheticians would divert their attention from the beautiful to the dainty and the dumpy.<sup>1</sup> The field work Austin envisaged for aesthetics has been well stimulated by Frank Sibley, whose work on "aesthetic concepts"<sup>2</sup> has been the focus of much recent discussion. Among the somewhat controversial pieces of philosophical apparatus that Sibley introduces are the following two: i) a distinction between aesthetic and nonaesthetic concepts (or perhaps properties, judgements, terms, uses of terms); and ii) the notion of aesthetic sensitivity.

About the first, the aesthetic/nonaesthetic distinction, there is a good deal of confusion; numerous attempts have been made to give a clear account of it,<sup>3</sup> the results of

<sup>1</sup> J.L. Austin, "A Plea for Excuses," in *Philosophical Papers*, by J.L. Austin, ed. J.O. Urmson and G.J. Warnock (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 131.

<sup>2</sup> Frank Sibley, "Aesthetic Concepts," *The Philosophical Review*, 68 (1959), 421-450, reprinted in *Philosophy Looks at the Arts*, ed. Joseph Margolis (N.Y.: Scribner's, 1962), pp. 68-87, references to this article will be to the Margolis volume; Frank Sibley, "Aesthetic and Nonaesthetic," *The Philosophical Review*, 74 (1965), 135-159.

<sup>3</sup> Isabel C. Hungerland, "The Logic of Aesthetic Concepts," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Assn.*, 36 (1962-1963), 43-66, reprinted in *Philosophy of Art and Aesthetics From Plato to Wittgenstein*, ed. Frank A. Tillman and Steven M. Cahn (N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1969), pp. 595-

which have been so inconclusive as to cause some philosophers to despair of ever producing such an account.<sup>4</sup> For his own part, Sibley has been content with a rough, intuitive distinction, generated by sorting sample remarks. He says:

I make this broad distinction by means of *examples* of judgements, qualities, and expressions. There is, it seems to me, no need to defend the distinction. Once examples have been given to illustrate it, I believe almost anyone could continue to place further examples - barring of course the expected debatable, ambiguous, or borderline cases - in one category or the other. . . . Those who in their theoretical moments deny any such distinction usually show in their practice that they can make it quite adequately.<sup>5</sup>

And he illustrates it thus:

I wish to indicate two broad groups. I shall do this by examples. We say that a novel has a great number of characters and deals with life in a manufacturing town; that a painting uses pale colors, predominantly blues and greens, and has kneeling figures in the foreground, that the theme in a fugue is inverted at such a point and that there is a stretto at the close; that the action of a play takes place in the span of

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617; Isabel C. Hungerland, "Once Again: Aesthetic and Non-Aesthetic," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 26 (Spring, 1968), 285-295, reprinted in *Aesthetics*, ed. Harold Osborne (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 106-120; Ruby Meager, "Aesthetic Concepts," *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 10 (1970), 303-322; and Dorothy Walsh, "Aesthetic Descriptions," *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 10 (1970), 237-247.

<sup>4</sup> Allen Casebier, "The Alleged Special Logic of Aesthetic Terms," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 31 (Spring, 1973), 357-364; and Ted Cohen, "Aesthetic/Non-aesthetic and the Concept of Taste: a Critique of Sibley's Position," *Theoria*, 39 (1973), 113-152.

<sup>5</sup> Sibley, "Aesthetic and Nonaesthetic," p. 135.

one day and that there is a reconciliation scene in the fifth act. . . . On the other hand, we also say that a poem is tightly-knit or deeply moving; that a picture lacks balance, or has a certain serenity and repose, or that the grouping of the figures sets up an exciting tension; that the characters in a novel never really come to life, or that a certain episode strikes a false note.<sup>6</sup>

In connection with the second, the notion of aesthetic sensitivity, there has been as much controversy over what Sibley might have *meant* by "aesthetic sensitivity" or "taste" as over what the notion itself comes to. The often quoted and puzzled over passage in Sibley is:

When I speak of taste in this paper. . . it is with an ability to *notice* or *see* or *tell* that things have certain qualities that I am concerned.<sup>7</sup>

The relationship between these two pieces of philosophical apparatus is itself a subject of some interest. H. R. G. Schwyzer, in a response to Sibley's pioneering work, points to a possible strategy for drawing a sharp aesthetic/nonaesthetic distinction, a strategy perhaps to be distilled from Sibley.

The distinction between aesthetic and nonaesthetic discourse is clearly to be located in the area of what we can and cannot say given normal eyesight, normal hearing, normal intelligence (where "what we cannot say" is due to a lack in taste or perceptiveness, and not, for instance, to a lack in erudition). Initially, Sibley makes precisely the same point.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Sibley, "Aesthetic Concepts," p. 63.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* p. 65.

<sup>8</sup> H.R.G. Schwyzer, "Sibley's 'Aesthetic Concepts'," *The Philosophical Review*, 72 (1963), 72-78; Cf. Morris Weitz, "Open Concepts," *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, 26 (1972), 106.

In introducing the notion of aesthetic sensitivity or taste, Sibley does draw attention to the superficially obvious thing that some of us are better than others at viewing and discussing works of art. It would seem that even among those of us with a normal endowment of intelligence and normally functioning senses, some are able to make observations about and give descriptions of works of art that seem at once to be remarkable, and just the right things to say, where others, while likewise having 20/20 vision, unimpaired hearing and so on, are incapable of saying anything at all appropriate about a work of art, and are apparently incapable of grasping any of the incisive remarks of their more talented fellows. For example, anyone with normal color vision can tell an object's color, provided that he is not drugged, that the conditions of observation (viz. lighting) are standard, and so on. But not everyone of us, even with normal senses and in the most normal situations, can tell that a painting is delicate, or that a landscape is austere, or that a melody is lyrical, or bouyant, or darkly reflective. Some people, it seems, have a knack for this sort of thing. How do they do it, these people with their knack?

Schwyzer suggests that we connect this last question, about the nature of aesthetic sensitivity, up with the question about the difference between aesthetic and nonaesthetic discourse. Accordingly, we might begin to characterize the aesthetic/nonaesthetic distinction roughly as follows: (Except in

certain non-standard circumstances) nonaesthetic judgements can be made by anyone with normal eyesight, hearing, touch, intelligence, and so on, whereas for aesthetic judgements, something else in addition is required. We might hope further for an account of this something else, an answer to the question, "How do they do it?" to generate or complete the aesthetic/nonaesthetic distinction.

Ted Cohen suspects that the connection between the aesthetic/nonaesthetic distinction and the notion of aesthetic sensitivity is even closer and more inextricable than does Schwyzer, indeed that the notion of aesthetic sensitivity is nothing but the aesthetic/nonaesthetic distinction in another guise.

Suppose in discussing a painting someone refers to one of its lines, saying, "That line is curved", and later adds, "That line is graceful". The latter is an aesthetic judgement, the former is not. . . which is to say that taste is required to apply "graceful" but no more than normal eyes and intelligence is required to apply "curved". [But] That is the aesthetic/nonaesthetic distinction at work. . .<sup>9</sup>

And Sibley gives away as much when he says on the one hand,

When I speak of taste in this paper. . . it is with an ability to *notice* or *see* or *tell* that things have certain qualities that I am concerned.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Cohen, "Aesthetic/Non-aesthetic and the Concept of Taste," p. 124; Cf. Monroe Beardsley, "What is an Aesthetic Quality?" *Theoria*, 39 (1973), p. 54.

<sup>10</sup> Sibley, "Aesthetic Concepts," p. 65.

- Presumably these are *aesthetic* qualities, ones mentioned in *aesthetic* judgements - and when he subsequently distinguishes aesthetic judgements and qualities in terms of the exercise of aesthetic sensitivity.

Many judgements about the shape, color, sound, wording, subject matter, or composition of things, including works of art, are such that it would be ludicrous to suggest that aesthetic sensitivity, perceptiveness, or taste had been exhibited in making them. Similarly, it would be ridiculous to suggest that aesthetic sensitivity was required to *see* or *notice* or otherwise *perceive* that something is, say, large, circular, green, slow, or monosyllabic. Accordingly, I speak of nonaesthetic judgements, qualities, descriptions, and concepts. By contrast, there are other judgements the making of which could clearly be said to exhibit an exercise of aesthetic sensitivity or perceptiveness. Similarly, it would be natural to say that aesthetic sensitivity was required to see, notice, or otherwise perceive, for instance, that something is graceful, dainty, or garish, or that a work of art is balanced, moving, or powerful. Accordingly, I speak of aesthetic judgements, qualities, descriptions, and concepts.<sup>11</sup>

Cohen goes further to suggest that the interplay between the notion of aesthetic sensitivity and the aesthetic/nonaesthetic distinction helps to expose that distinction as a phantom.

There is no sensible and important way of dividing terms in line with Sibley's aesthetic/nonaesthetic distinction.<sup>12</sup>

What Sibley does after invoking the distinction is ignorable: the distinction itself is all the philosophy Sibley has, and it is the ultimate cause of whatever uneasiness one feels with Sibley's position.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Sibley, "Aesthetic and Nonaesthetic," p. 135.

<sup>12</sup> Cohen, "Aesthetic/Non-aesthetic and the Concept of Taste," p. 139.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* p. 124.

Though I am not terribly concerned to shore up the aesthetic/nonaesthetic distinction, or to defend any particular sorting of examples, and though the intimacy of the connection between aesthetic sensitivity and the aesthetic/nonaesthetic distinction is plain, I think it is also plain that these items *can* function interdependently (with the aid of a few examples) at least to pick out phenomena for philosophical inspection, without thereby reducing that philosophical inspection to empty triviality. Moreover, though we must admit that defining aesthetic sensitivity in terms of the aesthetic/nonaesthetic distinction while defining that distinction in terms of aesthetic sensitivity reduces the whole affair to circularity, we needn't at the same time foreclose on the possibility of an independent account of either.

In this essay I try to do two things: i) I try to get clear about the nature of aesthetic sensitivity. And indeed, I offer this excursion into the notion of aesthetic sensitivity as something that ought to interest even such a detractor of Sibley's enterprise as Cohen, since Cohen's critique of the aesthetic/nonaesthetic distinction turns itself so frequently on asking in effect, "Does the correct application of these terms really require the exercise of aesthetic sensitivity?" and then either supplying or inviting the answer, "No, it does not". ii) I try to clarify and move toward an answer to such questions as "Is aesthetic judgement objective?" or "Is the delicacy of a sculpture a matter of fact?"

As a first step in the inquiry into the notion of aesthetic sensitivity, I want to dispose, at least tentatively, of a common view of what Sibley meant by "aesthetic sensitivity".

There is often a temptation in philosophical discussions of areas of discourse in which disagreement abounds (art criticism being such an area) to introduce talk of special sorts of simple properties and corresponding special sorts of perception for which some of us are equipped and some not. So Sibley, who talks of a special ability exhibited when aesthetic judgments are made, is often taken to have meant by this a special quasi-sense or intuition for the direct apprehension of certain simple and experience-independent properties.<sup>14</sup> We could call such a position "intuitionism", and though numerous commentators on Sibley have taxed him for what they take to be his "intuitionism", it amounts, I think, to a crude parody of any position Sibley actually holds.

Cursory reference to passages in Sibley's work is sometimes taken as sufficient to establish him as an intuitionist, and Sibley's vocabulary is admittedly suggestive in several places.

<sup>14</sup> R. David Broiles, "Frank Sibley's 'Aesthetic Concepts'," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 23 (Winter, 1964), 218-225; Joseph Margolis, "Sibley on Aesthetic Perception," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 25 (Winter, 1966), 155-158; Joseph Margolis, "Recent Work in Aesthetics," *The American Philosophical Quarterly*, 2 (1965), 182-192; David Pole, "Presentational Objects and Their Interpretation," *Philosophy and the Arts: Royal Institute of Philosophy Lectures*, VI, (London: Macmillan, 1973), pp. 153-154; John Casey, "The Autonomy of Art," in *Philosophy and the Arts*, p. 66.

We see that the book is red by looking, just as we tell that the tea is sweet by tasting it. So too, it might be said, we just see (or fail to see) that things are delicate, balanced, and the like.<sup>15</sup>

Aesthetics deals with a kind of perception. People have to *see* the grace or unity of a work, *hear* the plaintiveness or frenzy in the music, *notice* the gaudiness of a color scheme.<sup>16</sup>

However, the intuitionist interpretation of Sibley has seldom been argued for, and never conclusively argued for. Those who point so accusingly at passages such as the above, usually overlook such passages as the below.

. . . puzzlement over the "esoteric" character of aesthetic qualities arises from bearing in mind inappropriate philosophical models. When someone is unable to see that the book on the table is brown we cannot get him to see that it is by talking; consequently it seems puzzling that we might get someone to see that the vase is graceful by talking. If we are to dispel this puzzlement and recognize aesthetic concepts and qualities for what they are, we must abandon unsuitable models. . .<sup>17</sup>

My dismissal of the intuitionist interpretation of Sibley will only be complete in Chapter III below, where I argue in effect that this interpretation can *only* be conclusively argued for on the basis of controversial, and groundless, assumptions concerning the metaphysical and ontological implications of the view that aesthetic judgements are "objective", a view to which Sibley

<sup>15</sup> Sibley, "Aesthetic Concepts," p. 77.

<sup>16</sup> Sibley, "Aesthetic and Nonaesthetic," p. 137.

<sup>17</sup> Sibley, "Aesthetic Concepts," p. 79.

subscribes. But for now, as regards Sibley's suspicious terminology, suffice it to say that Sibley is as suspicious about that terminology as anyone might be and has said that in connection with issues of "objectivity" there is a need

to examine, if not abandon, the inadequately investigated notion of a property, both inside and outside aesthetics.<sup>18</sup>

Even more recently, Sibley has explicitly backed away from the intuitionist position that Margolis, Broiles, and others have tried to pin on him. His use of the term "property" in connection with aesthetics, he instructs, is to be understood in a quite metaphysically neutral way, and to be taken to indicate only that in virtue of which certain aesthetic judgements may properly be regarded as "objective", where that in virtue of which the "objectivity" of aesthetic judgements is secured needn't be anything like for instance a simple, experience-independent property. This move, as we shall later see, connects with a clarification of the notion of objectivity by means of distinguishing between certain issues ostensibly concerning objectivity. This clarification in turn allows for the elucidation of various of pieces of Sibley's apparatus, including his use of the term "property", his use of perception terminology, and his emphasis on an analogy between aesthetic judge-

<sup>18</sup> Eva Schaper and Frank Sibley, "Symposium: About Taste," *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 6 (1966), 69.

ment and color attribution.

For present purposes let us note that in backing away from the intuitionist position, Sibley also backs away from the question about the nature of aesthetic sensitivity. In clarifying his use of the term "property" he also exposes the limits of his concern as excluding any very deep or direct inquiry into the nature of aesthetic sensitivity.

There remains then the question as to what sort of a knack aesthetic sensitivity is. Sibley rejects intuitionism and so the intuitionist's notion of a perceptual or quasi-perceptual faculty as basic to an account of aesthetic sensitivity. But we may examine the strengths and weaknesses of such an account on our own.

Part of the attraction of an intuitionist based account of aesthetic sensitivity comes from the fact that perception terminology is so frequently used to indicate the ways in which aesthetic terms come to be applied in particular situations. As Sibley notes, we have to *see* that the painting is graceful, and *hear* that the music is frenzied. The danger is that the words "see" and "hear" be taken too literally. (Sibley gives a clue when in the same breath he says "notice".<sup>19</sup>) There might after all be a difference between seeing that X is delicate and seeing X's delicacy, especially where "X's delicacy"

<sup>19</sup> Sibley, "Aesthetic and Nonaesthetic," p. 137.

is construed to indicate some simple or unanalyzable property which inheres in or is had by X independently of experience.

One has to be a bit delicate about the word "see". In the first place, not every occurrence of the word "see" is an occurrence of a perception term. There is nothing essentially visual or perceptual, for instance, about "seeing someone off". Nor is there anything irremediably odd about a blind man's receptionist ushering you in with "Mr. Smith will see you now."

Moreover, even where "seeing" centrally involves the eyes, where the word "see" is used to indicate some perceptual event or activity, there is wide variety. In some employments, the verb "to see" is a verb of accomplishment, in some not. In some cases, say, if I've gone to see a mime performance, seeing is like watching: it takes time. In cases of other sorts one sees in an instant. Equally important, not all seen and seeable things are of the same order, and to assume otherwise is to invite (bad) jokes:

Do you see the difference between the pillar and the post?

Well, I see the pillar. . . and I see the post. . . but I can't yet see the difference. Maybe if the pillar and the post were removed from the line of sight. . .

Here, in spite of the grammatical similarities between the substantive "the difference" and substantives like "the pillar" and "the post", we realize the nonsense in regarding differences

as "things to be seen" in the way in which pillars and posts are "to be seen". But neither differences nor pillars are very much like simple or unanalyzable properties. The observation that we say we *see* the delicacy of paintings begins to look somewhat harmless, for the use of perception terminology to indicate the employment of a perceptual faculty appropriate for simple properties turns out to be a fairly esoteric use. At the very least, more will have to be said to move us toward an intuitionist account of aesthetic sensitivity than that we use apparent perception terminology in connection with aesthetic judgements.

Another apparent attraction of the intuitionist account of aesthetic sensitivity is that it provides, or perhaps constitutes, a response to certain readily offered anti-critical views. I think that in the community of people who are enthusiastic about the arts and who engage in and seriously read criticism of the arts, it is almost universally agreed that critical discourse is, in some sense, "objective". We agree that even if criticism is neither systematic nor systematizable, it is at any rate an area of endeavor in which terms like "insight" and "acumen" have a real application.<sup>20</sup> We distinguish between critics and laymen, and we defer, in the main, to the critic, in

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Arnold Isenberg, "Critical Communication;" *The Philosophical Review*, 58 (1949), reprinted in *Aesthetics and Language*, ed. William Elton, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1954), at p. 136n.

view of his acknowledged expertise. We say, in other words, that some of us are better than others at viewing and discussing works of art. But, as seemingly obvious as this position is, it is nonetheless quite controversial, at least outside the community of practitioners and serious readers of art criticism. Consequently, it is a view thought by some to be worthy of defense.

The anti-critical attack comes normally in the form of a rhetorical challenge to produce the bases on which art-critical pronouncements are founded, and the decision procedures by which art-critical controversies might be arbitrated. This challenge, which is meant to undermine the authority of the critic, must either be met or rejected, if our esteem for the enterprise of art criticism is to be vindicated.

Now, the intuitionist account of aesthetic sensitivity provides a sort of response to the anti-critical position: Naturally the anti-critic will find criticism obscure and baseless, if he himself lacks the requisite faculty for making aesthetic judgements. It is just this, the possession of aesthetic intuition, a special quasi-sense concerned with simple aesthetic properties, that distinguishes the sensitive art viewer from the tasteless pedestrian. The authority of the sensitive critic rests in his ability to grasp, via his aesthetic intuition, the true nature of the work of art before

him, to see just what aesthetic properties it really does have.

Suppose we are committed to the view that aesthetic judgements are in some sense "objective", and that the distinction between the sensitive and the insensitive aesthetic observer is worthy and capable of defense. What it wants then is a worthy defense; but the intuitionist defense is both inadequate and overly costly (as I hope to show shortly). *Something*, whatever it is, we can call it "aesthetic sensitivity", distinguishes the sensitive from the insensitive aesthetic observer; it is not necessarily the possession of a special quasi-sense.

Apart from problems with intuitionism generally, there are special problems in applying an intuitionist-based analysis to aesthetic sensitivity.

Suppose we were to say that seeing that a painting is delicate (or garish or balanced) is not so much like seeing that the house is red, and that hearing that the overture is unified is not so much like tasting the sweetness of the dessert<sup>21</sup> as they are both like seeing that the colors of your wife's coordinates don't match, or seeing that John and his grandfather resemble each other facially. Aesthetic sensitivity might be an ability to see or notice or tell that certain

<sup>21</sup> For the present and for convenience I am taking redness and sweetness as properties in the sense relevant to intuitionism, that is, as simple properties which inhere in objects independently of experience. But see below pp. 58-61.

experience-independent relational properties<sup>22</sup> are had by certain objects, or complexes of objects, (I'll call this the "Relational Properties", or RP account), rather than a perceptual ability to pick out simple ones. The RP account has certain advantages over the intuitionist one, which I will note after I note some of the RP account's independent attractions.

i) Situations involving art and aesthetic judgement are not the only situations in which we distinguish between the sensitive and the insensitive observer. There are a few people whose descriptions and analyses of, say, political situations are uncanny in very much the same way in which the aesthetic judgements of the man with aesthetic sensitivity are uncanny. We readily distinguish in many areas (not just in the arts) between the sensitive or perceptive commentator and the insensitive observer. Occasionally we give names to the abilities and shortcomings of the sensitive and the insensitive observer respectively. "Taste" (as Sibley uses the term) is only one such example. There is, for instance, the fellow who cannot carry a tune: his shortcoming is called a "tin-ear" or "tone-deafness". There are others who, listening briefly while

<sup>22</sup> Again for expository convenience I am taking color harmony, color dischord, and facial resemblance to be alike, relational, *and* experience-independent. But see below pp. 58-61.

one is tuning up, can tell just which string is out of tune, and whether it is sharp or flat, thus demonstrating their "relative pitch". The special ability that someone with relative pitch has, but that someone without relative pitch lacks, consists in hearing intervals, or relational properties of certain combinations of sounds. That is to say, people with relative pitch can do what they do in virtue of being able to perceive certain relational properties of certain combinations of sounds, just as the judgement that the colors of your wife's outfit don't match depends upon seeing a certain relational property of your wife's outfit. That we take these and many other types of sensitivity to consist in perceiving relational properties (if in fact we *do*) is not *proof* that aesthetic sensitivity also consists in perceiving relational properties, but it does add something to the plausibility of that view.

ii) In addition, the RP account of aesthetic sensitivity seems to be on a par with intuitionism, as far as providing a response to an anti-critical aesthetic relativism is concerned. Here, as with the intuitionist account, the challenge of the anti-critic against the critic's aesthetic sensitivity would be disallowed in virtue of what is alleged to constitute the distinction between the critic and his challenger, in this case, the ability to discern certain relational properties had by objects.

In what ways is this account preferable to the intuitionist one?

i) One consideration has to do with the well known phenomenon of uneven expertise in criticism and appreciation of the arts. It is a commonplace that a sensitive observer of works of art in one area should be quite thick about works of art in other areas. A person might be razor-sharp when it comes to paintings; he might never miss a subtlety, as he time and again zeroes in unerringly on those judgements that just capture the spirit (so to speak) of the painting. He might for all that be rather hit-and-miss about the dance.

This observation is unfortunate for an account of aesthetic sensitivity which depends on simple properties and a faculty of aesthetic perception, and where one is given to expect aesthetic properties to abound in all artistic areas, that is, where one can expect to find, not only delicate *paintings*, but delicate verse, delicate music, delicate sculpture, and so on. Thus a point of disanalogy between aesthetic sensitivity on the one hand, and for example, color vision on the other, a point which is damaging to an intuitionist account of aesthetic sensitivity: It is difficult to imagine someone's having uneven or intermittant color vision in the way in which one can easily, as above, have uneven or intermittant aesthetic sensitivity. If a person can see the redness of

blood, he is not likely (under normal viewing conditions) to miss the redness of sunsets or fire-engines or baseball caps. But in order to accomodate the facts about observers of works of art, while yet holding onto an intuitionist-based account of aesthetic sensitivity, a philosopher would have to begin to multiply perceptual faculties to correspond to the various sorts of properties that would take on individual importance in the case of aesthetics: painting-aesthetic properties, sculpture-aesthetic properties, drama-aesthetic properties; and cubist-aesthetic properties, surrealist-aesthetic properties, baroque-aesthetic properties, and so on *ad indefinitum*.

On the other hand, there would be nothing particularly odd in saying that someone is sensitive in one area but insensitive in another, where aesthetic sensitivity consists in discerning relational properties in complex objects. A person might easily be good at seeing certain relationships and bad at seeing others. This could even help to explain the phenomenon of uneven expertise, if it could be shown that aesthetically relevant relational properties vary significantly from artistic area to artistic area. To take a simple example (which may or may not be the case): suppose the plastic arts give prominence to spatial relations, and music to temporal ones.

The first difficulty with intuitionism in connection

with aesthetics, a difficulty avoided by the RP account, is that it leads to an unwarranted proliferation of perceptual faculties.

ii) A second difficulty with intuitionism in aesthetics has to do with the *simplicity* of the alleged properties. The practice of art criticism would seem to support the thesis that, if there are aesthetic properties, they must be relatively complex, and they must certainly be capable of analysis. Intuitionism in aesthetics would, in short, make much of the practice of art critics and viewers unintelligible.

There is, for example, a high-strung hustle and bustle, a near-frenzy about certain of Mondrian's paintings, or say, some of Albert Ammons' boogie woogie piano solo's, or say, a certain reading of the first Prelude in *The Well Tempered Clavier*. But there is in each case much more to be said. A great deal of the activity of critics is given over to the unpacking, the articulation, or the analysis of observations just like these. A critic draws attention to specific areas of a canvas. He points out various passages in the music, a recurring rhythm, a motif here, a phrase there. A critic directs or guides our attention from feature to feature. This activity, which recognizes the inherent complexity of aesthetic objects, seems also to indicate a degree of sophistication and complexity about aesthetic judgements which would be incommensurable with an

intuitionist-based account of aesthetic sensitivity. It is more strongly suggestive of the RP account.

Though the RP account of aesthetic sensitivity is in some ways an improvement over intuitionism, it is not a very illuminating view either.

i) First, there is the matter of distinguishing aesthetic from nonaesthetic sensitivities, the matter of getting at what is distinctive about aesthetic sensitivity. Certainly many nonaesthetic judgements require the perception of relations, (The cat is on the mat. The piano is out of tune.). It *may* be possible to distinguish in some independent way the aesthetic from the nonaesthetic, and so, derivatively, to isolate aesthetic sensitivity; on the other hand, it may turn out that the aesthetic/nonaesthetic distinction is a phantom, or at least one for which no hard and fast criteria can be stated. In any case, saying merely that aesthetic sensitivity involves seeing relations, even if true, represents no great advance either toward a clarification of the aesthetic/nonaesthetic distinction, or toward a definitive account of aesthetic sensitivity.

ii) A second, and more important, liability of the RP account of aesthetic sensitivity is one that it shares with the intuitionist account. I said that, in providing a response to a certain anti-critical challenge, both views had apparent attractions. But in each case, and for similar reasons, the

response is of a very *unattractive* sort. In each case, the response is both inconclusive and needlessly arbitrary. And this is because in each case the response is at once deeply confused and superficial. Both accounts respond to the anti-critic by positing a special range of experience-independent *properties* and corresponding modes of access to them. But to respond so is to confuse legitimate epistemological questions with questionable ontological ones. This confusion is the product of (and equally the support of) a superficial reading of the anti-critical challenge, amounting to the refusal to take seriously the anti-critic's legitimate and fundamental demand for a display of critical decision procedures. Of course, the anti-critical challenge is quite often confusedly put in such a way as to obscure its legitimate epistemological motivations and invite instead the taking of dogmatic ontological stands. Responses of the intuitionist and RP sort are, while confused, nonetheless understandable.

But the confused and misleading form in which the anti-critical challenge often appears is no more grounds for the rejection of the challenge than it is for an ontological response to it. Rather, the anti-critic's challenge ought to be accepted, taken seriously, understood, and then, if possible, met. This is what I attempt beginning in Chapter III. It is only through the attempt to take aesthetic relativism seriously and to expose the husks of confusion that surround it for what

they are, that I hope to make my doubts about the two above accounts of aesthetic sensitivity any clearer.

## CHAPTER II

An interesting suggestion, and one that has not yet received its due attention, is that aesthetic sensitivity be understood as a kind of aspect-perception, a kind of "seeing-as".<sup>23</sup> Sensitive attention to the phenomena of aspect-perception and aspect-change *may* deepen our understanding of aesthetic judgements, aesthetic sensitivity, and their surrounding phenomena. I will first indicate where I think one philosopher may have been too quick to dismiss aspect-perception from the discussion of aesthetic concepts. Despite this, I'm convinced that aesthetic sensitivity is *not* a kind or variety of aspect-perception. I shall continue to indicate then a point at which the analogy between aesthetic sensitivity and aspect-perception really does break down.

Peter Kivy, in an attempt to scotch an analogy between aesthetic sensitivity and aspect-perception,<sup>24</sup> tries to

<sup>23</sup> See Virgil C. Aldrich, *Philosophy of Art*, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963), esp. pp. 20-ff.; David Micheal Levin, 'More Aspects to the Concept of 'Aesthetic Aspects'', *The Journal of Philosophy*, 65 (August, 1968), 483-489; K. Mitchells, 'Aesthetic Perception and Aesthetic Qualities,' *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 67 (1966-1967), 53-72; B.R. Tilghman, *The Expression of Emotion in the Visual Arts: A Philosophical Inquiry*, (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970), p.77.

<sup>24</sup> Peter Kivy, 'Aesthetic Aspects and Aesthetic Qualities,' *The Journal of Philosophy*, 65 (February, 1968), 85-93.

separate the two just at the point where aesthetic judgements have been said to be grounded in the nonaesthetic features of things. He notes a particular kind of support that he claims must underpin every instance of aspect-perception, but which he finds conspicuously lacking in many cases of aesthetic judgement. He recalls the duck-rabbit of Wittgenstein.<sup>25</sup>

How might I go about "revealing" the rabbit aspect of the figure? Well, I would doubtless point to some crucial feature, (say) the two long protrusions on the left. . . The duck-rabbit can be seen as a duck because (in part) the long protrusions can be seen as a duck bill. It can be seen as a rabbit because (in part) they can be seen as rabbit ears.<sup>26</sup>

while on the other hand,

we are often at a complete loss to say just what it is that does constitute the unity of a particular (eg.) musical composition.<sup>27</sup>

David Micheal Levin, in his reply to Kivy, talks about the *justification* of (aspect-) perceptual claims, by reference to these crucial features.<sup>28</sup> But talk of "justification" in a straightforward sense would seem to imply in this case that seeing the protrusions as a duck's bill can be done indepen-

<sup>25</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, (N.Y.: Macmillan, 1953), pp. 193-ff.

<sup>26</sup> Kivy, "Aesthetic Aspects and Aesthetic Qualities", p. 90.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Levin, 'More Aspects to the Concept of 'Aesthetic Aspects','' p. 484.

dently of seeing the figure as a duck, not just in principle, but in fact.<sup>29</sup>

This seems to me unlikely. (Perhaps it would seem so to Kivy as well.) Can you see the protrusions as a duck's bill while seeing the figure as a rabbit? Do you see it as a rabbit with a duck's bill attached to the back of its head? Consider the phenomenon of aspect-change. The "dawning" of an aspect - what is this like? Suppose I am told, "Try to see these protrusions as a duck's bill". So I try very hard . . . and . . . suddenly I succeed. But in the very same instant the duck aspect dawns on me. I see the duck's bill, and *immediately* it is the bill of a duck. That is the dawning; or it might be, for seeing the protrusions as a duck's bill is no less an achievement than seeing the duck-rabbit as a duck. And since, in actual practice, seeing the protrusions as a duck's bill normally involves and is inseparable from seeing the figure as a duck, one's success in getting someone to see the protrusions as a duck's bill turns the trick, one just gets him to see the duck.

It should be stressed too that pointing to crucial features and saying, "Try to see these as . . ." is only *one* way of "revealing" an aspect. There are other means quite

<sup>29</sup> See eg. Micheal Scriven, *Primary Philosophy*, (N.Y.:McGraw-Hill, 1966), p. 57.

well suited to the same aims. I might say, "Turn the figure this way", or "Turn your head so". This should help to bring out the perlocutionary nature of the desired effect: I want to get you to see the duck aspect - I can go about it any number of ways. In stressing that there are many ways to help someone achieve an aspect-change, I am in no way challenging the centrality of pointing out crucial features to the notion of aspect-perception. For a figure to have aspects, it must have features which are themselves ambiguous, features which are therefore crucial to the noticing of the aspects, and can be employed in an attempt to "reveal" an aspect. But the necessity of there being these ambiguous crucial features only emphasises the intimacy with which seeing the protrusions as a duck's bill and seeing the figure as a duck are bound up with each other.

If seeing the protrusions as a duck's bill is just one of those things that comprises seeing the figure as a duck, or that seeing the duck aspect consists in, the pointing out and interpreting of crucial features of the figure may perhaps be understood as a partial articulation or clarification of what it is to see one of the figure's aspects. Furthermore, this might provide a clue to the situation in aesthetics.

What keeps Kivy from seeing this as a possibility,

(and it *is* that), is his fascination with what is in fact an entirely gratuitous feature of some aesthetic encounters. Kivy observes that we are often at a loss as to how to direct someone to see the unity or delicacy or frenzy in a work of art. But he believes that this discloses an important logical distinction between aesthetic sensitivity and aspect-perception. It is true enough that we are often stymied when challenged to "justify" or "explain" a particular aesthetic judgement we have made. The unity or grace may relatively often turn out to be opaque or ineffable for us. We needn't assume from this, as Kivy must if he is to drive his wedge, that we are stymied for good and proper, or for good reason. Kivy is prepared to tolerate ineffability in aesthetics; he seems indeed to regard it as a sometimes inexpurgable feature of some aesthetic situations. But it doesn't follow from the fact that "support for" or the "explanation of" an aesthetic judgement in nonaesthetic terms is in some cases difficult to give that the request for such "support" or "explanation" is not always legitimate. Kivy *might* have noted that we are similarly stymied sometimes when asked to pinpoint certain similarities, say, between faces.<sup>30</sup> Whatever difficulties

<sup>30</sup> See E.H. Gombrich, "The Mask and the Face: The Perception of Physiognomic Likeness in Life and in Art," in *Art, Perception, and Reality*, by E.H. Gombrich, Julian Hochberg, and Max Black (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972), pp. 1-46.

we may experience, it certainly doesn't follow that there is *nothing* that a given similarity consists in.

Moreover, aesthetic features are, so it is said, "emergent". That is, the logic of aesthetic concepts is distinct from that of, say, "covered" or "autographed", in the following way: two photographs may sensibly be said to be identical save that the one is autographed and the other not. Two chairs may sensibly be said to be identical save that the one is covered and the other not. But it never makes sense to say of two things that they are identical save the one's being graceful, or dainty, or balanced, or dumpy, or . . . and the other's not. If two objects can be differentiated aesthetically, then they must be differentiable in other ways as well, and so, where requests for "support" or "explanations" amount to requests that non-aesthetic differences be pointed out, such requests are always and of necessity sensible.<sup>31</sup> So, if the thesis that aesthetic features are emergent is correct, Kivy seems not just premature in suggesting that aesthetic judgements are (sometimes) "unsupportable"; he seems wrong.

<sup>31</sup> Sibley, "Aesthetic Concepts," p. 66; Also see Micheal Tanner, "Objectivity and Aesthetics," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplement*, 42 (1968), p. 61; Cf. R.M. Hare, *The Language of Morals*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), p. 81, on the logic of "good"; but see also Gary M. Stahl, "Sibley's 'Aesthetic Concepts': an Ontological Mistake," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 29 (Spring, 1971), 385-389.

With these remarks in view, and also in view of the intimacy with which the pointing out of crucial ambiguous features of a figure is related to the actual noticing of its aspects, we may tentatively explore the possibility of an analogy between aspect-perception and aesthetic judgement further. Let us examine two particular activities that come under the heading "art criticism" and see how closely *they* are related. One such activity is the making of aesthetic judgements. Suppose an art critic has judged that a work of art is unified and tightly-knit. Now he refers to the mono-thematic structure of the work, enumerating recurrences of some important element, and telling how that thematic element is reinforced in various ways at various points in the work. This latter activity is supposed to have some bearing on or relation to the original aesthetic judgement that the work of art is unified and tightly-knit. But just how this latter activity stands to the original judgement is not so easy to say.

We are prone, perhaps, to view these two activities and the relations between them from the standpoint of the art enthusiast and reader of art criticism. Our understanding of what the critic is doing here is likely, therefore, to vary as our interests and concerns as aesthetic viewers and readers of criticism change, which they frequently do. Here are some not uncommon situations:

i) I have read the original judgement. I agree with it. That the work is unified and tightly-knit is just what I would have said. But I do not yet understand what it is about the work that accounts for this. The critic points out the various passages, making clear the mono-thematic structure. Now I understand better; he has "explained" the judgement.

ii) I have read the original judgement. I can't fathom it. It would never have occurred to me to call the work unified. The critic points out the various passages, making clear the mono-thematic structure, and now I see it (that the work is unified). Here we might regard the critic's activity as more "instructive" than "explanatory".

iii) I have read the original judgement. I am in disagreement with it. "A mistake!" I say. I am struck not by any unity in the work, but by its diversity or variety, or perhaps by confusion and chaos. Now the critic points out the various passages, and so on. Here, since the original judgement is challenged, we might regard the critic's activity as an anticipatory response to a possible challenge, or as an argumentative buttress for the original judgement. We might say that the critic is "supporting" or "defending" his judgement.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>32</sup> This ties in with the view that aesthetic judgements are

This is one way to approach the question at hand. Accordingly it might be said that the relationships between the aesthetic judgement and what the critic says following it are not one but several, that there are several critical activities, perhaps going on simultaneously, and that these are to be distinguished by reference to what the critic is able to or can hope to accomplish in his readers, given the particular interests and concerns of his readers. But we have still not said what the critic is *doing*; we have only said what some of the various things are that he can hope to achieve by doing it. It is important to see that, with respect to these various ends, there are numerous means available to the critic. Art criticism is notoriously flexible in this regard.<sup>33</sup> Here we should be reminded of a parallel flexibility about "revealing" aspects of trick figures.

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claims; claims are of the sort of thing that one *supports*. But support for claims comes normally in the form of further (in this case nonaesthetic) claims which, if true, make the controversial claim certain, or probable, or a good bet. Sibley argues that this kind of support is not available for aesthetic judgements. Accordingly, he cautions that should we choose to use "support" for what the critic does in these situations, we should take care not to construe "support" in the normal way, ("Aesthetic and Nonaesthetic," p. 143). Nevertheless, it does not follow from this that aesthetic judgements are not claims, or that support, in some perfectly acceptable sense of "support", for them is not available. See Chapters III and IV, below.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Sibley, "Aesthetic and Nonaesthetic," pp. 142-143.

In addition, by approaching the question at hand from the standpoint of the reader of criticism, we perhaps overlook one very important item - the effect that the activity of pointing out crucial features often has upon the *agent*, (in this case the critic). The critic, in citing and documenting the monothematic structure of a work of art, though he may seek by this activity to enlighten or persuade his readers, or deepen their understanding and appreciations with respect to a particular aesthetic judgement, can discover things himself, and deepen his own understanding. It is tempting therefore to see the critic's activity in part at least as the spelling-out of an aesthetic judgement, of articulating it, an activity in which he explores the judgement and makes it explicit (as far as he can) in detail.

One is reminded of the popular and misguided complaint against critics that in their zeal to analyze or "dissect" a work of art, they succeed only in ruining something of the experience of it.<sup>34</sup> But as a rule, the critic ruins nothing in guiding the viewer's attention (and his own) from important feature to important feature. On the contrary, the appreciation of a work of art is by and large enhanced, both for the critic and his reader, by just the sort of

<sup>34</sup> Cf. James K. Feibleman, *Aesthetics*, (N.Y.: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1949), p. 202.

"dissection" that figures in this anti-intellectual complaint. Often the aesthetic judgement, say, that the work of art is unified, is itself sharpened, deepened, and enriched in process of its articulation, by the specification of patterns of stress or emphasis in critical attention, and by the pursuant discovery of crucial features and further crucial features.

At the same time, the aesthetic judgement itself contributes to the direction of critical attention and helps to determine the pattern of focus. This is especially obvious in the case of judgements involving such terms as "balanced", "unbalanced", "coherent", "diffuse", and "unified". And again, if this seems mysterious or paradoxical, it is at least no more so than is the case of the duck-rabbit, where noticing the rabbit aspect both *brings into prominence*, and *consists* (in part) *in seeing as prominent* an otherwise insignificant spot on the back of the duck's head.

Whatever the strength and instructiveness of the seeing-as analogy in this regard, it is equally important to see where the analogy fails. I want now to expose a point of disanalogy between matters of aesthetic judgement and matters of aspect-perception by considering the phenomenon of aspect-change. I now see the figure as a duck. But I can still, with a little effort, see the rabbit. I can look

for the other reading. Most important, there is another reading to look for. I will suggest that this is not always so with aesthetic judgements.

Let us note two important features of the duck-rabbit case:

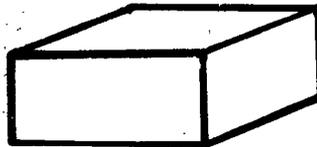
i) There is an *exclusive disjunction* of alternative readings of the figure. The figure can be seen either as a duck or as a rabbit, but not both. Simultaneous grasp of both aspects is an impossibility. To recognize a figure as a duck-rabbit is, of course, not to grasp both duck and rabbit aspects in an instant; it is rather to recognize that it is true of that figure that it can be seen either as a duck or as a rabbit, but not both.

ii) Each disjunct *persists*. That is, neither the duck nor the rabbit is in any immediate or straightforward way preferable to the other as a reading of the figure. Or, to put it another way, one can go from duck to rabbit with equal ease as from rabbit to duck.

Now there may be cases from time to time in art criticism where both of the above features appear to be present. For instance, there may be cases where a plurality of alternative aesthetic judgements of a given work of art are equally fitting, each "supportable" by the specification for each of a particular pattern of critical attention, a

particular pattern of stresses and emphases on nonaesthetic features which seem to emerge for each as crucial. Thus we get the interesting sort of dispute which can sometimes occur between recognized critical authorities, where each can see what it is the other is talking about, where each can understand or "appreciate" the other's aesthetic "perspective", and where each "aesthetic reading" seems to persist.<sup>35</sup>

But this is not always so, and it is due, I suggest, when it does occur, to a peculiarity you have *sometimes* with works of art, just as you have it *sometimes* with line drawings: a sort of in-built ambiguity. That occasionally we have a situation in art criticism such as the above is not the manifestation of some part of the nature of aesthetic *judgements*; it is not an element of *their* logic. This might easily be true even if all the *objects of* aesthetic judgement were systematically ambiguous, but anyway they're not. Some figures have aspects: the duck-rabbit does; the figure below does,



<sup>35</sup> And yet there is even a difference here. Each of the disputing critics can grasp the other's critical position without having to abandon his own. But in order to see the duck, you have to give up the rabbit.

but some do not. Likewise, some objects of aesthetic judgement, some works of art, for instance, will support art-critical disagreement of the above sort, and so may be said to have "aesthetic aspects", but many will not.

Then too, there seem to be features of some of our art-related experience that make a seeing-as analysis of aesthetic judgement awkward. Suppose someone has come to see that a particular work of art is unified and tightly-knit, where he had previously judged it to be diffuse and chaotic. Kivy discusses a hypothetical case in which someone listening to Weber's *Invitation to the Dance* is told

[T]his is not merely a string of waltzes. It is a *rondo* in which one of the waltzes recurs, setting up a pattern of repetition. . . Further, the work is introduced by a seemingly diffuse section, which however, has a definite program. . . And it ends with a coda, also programmatic, which utilizes the same thematic material as the introduction.<sup>36</sup>

upon which he comes to see that the piece is unified. In many cases of this sort there is no turning back, no looking for the previous reading. There is about such a change a sense of progress, enrichment, or improvement, which derives from the attainment of a plateau, and the acquisition of hindsight. From the new vantage point one sees that his

<sup>36</sup> Peter Kivy, *Speaking of Art*, (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), p. 90.

former position no longer lives as a seriously tenable option. So, where aspect-change is essentially and necessarily reversible, many cases of shifts with respect to aesthetic judgement are one-directional and irreversible, and hence "progressive".

Harold Osborne makes a similar-sounding point concerning what he claims as an essential feature of art appreciation generally:

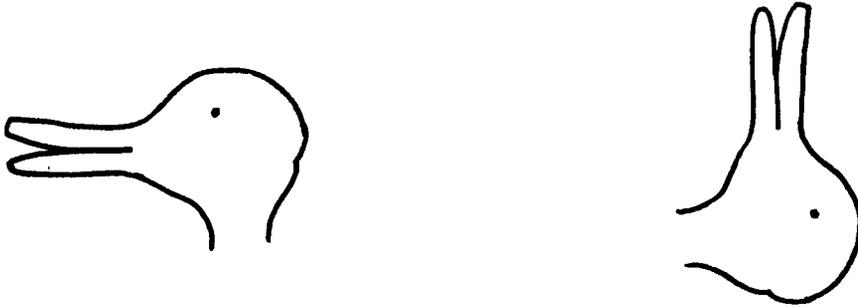
When we look at an ambiguous drawing which may be seen either as a duck or a rabbit, both perceptual objects are at the same level of complexity. . . . Neither object is a development or enrichment of the other *and the process is reversible*. In appreciation, on the contrary, the aesthetic object which is actualized is an object of a different category. It will be better articulated, more fully determinate and more unified than that which preceded it. . . . *And the process is irreversible; once the aesthetic object is actualized there is no switching back.*<sup>37</sup>

It is in virtue of this sense of progress perhaps, in this sense of "progress", that we distinguish between the sophisticated and the naive, as well as between the insightful and the misguided, in criticism. In addition, the sense of progress about aesthetic judgements hints that there might be an honest (i.e. not "metaphorical") analogue for aesthetic judgements of the really-is/only-seems dichotomy.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Harold Osborne, *The Art of Appreciation*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 174-175, my emphasis.

<sup>38</sup> See Hungerland, "The Logic of Aesthetic Concepts," p. 602, references to this article are to its reprinting in *Philosophy of Art and Aesthetics*, ed. Tillman and Cahn; and see below Chapter III.

Note a like difference between coming to see the duck aspect and coming to see that certain relations obtain. What is involved in coming to see that the two figures below are congruent?



Here is one thing about coming to see the congruency: once seen, the congruency can't be made to disappear, like the rabbit can. Missing the congruency, or forgetting about it on an occasion, these are not the same as making it disappear. To make the rabbit disappear you look for the duck. What would one look for in order to make the congruency disappear? Incongruency? It is just as silly to think of beating a retreat from one's own critical sophistication.

Here then is a crucial point at which the analyses of aspect-perception or seeing-as and of aesthetic judgement and sensitivity must diverge. The persistence of exclusively disjoined readings, which is of the essence of phenomena associated with figures like the duck-rabbit, is not in the same way tolerable in many central and relatively simple cases of the exercise of aesthetic sensitivity, I will have

occasion to apply this result in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER III

In her attempt to clarify the aesthetic/nonaesthetic distinction, Isabel Hungerland takes the view that expressions of aesthetic judgement lie between statements like "I am in pain" and such expressions of nonaesthetic judgement as "The book is red." They are distinguished from the former in that they, like the latter, concern features which are experienced as phenomenally objective, (i.e. experienced as "out there" rather than "in here"). But they are distinguished from the latter by being, like the former, not "logically objective". They have not, in Hungerland's words, got the "logical force of claims", since they are not subject to "intersubjective verification".<sup>39</sup> I will return to consider some of Hungerland's claims specifically at the end of this chapter, but it is convenient for me first to approach the issue about the "logical objectivity" (hereafter "objectivity") of aesthetic judgement by outlining and criticizing one major position with respect to it. In so doing, I hope additionally i) to tie up some loose ends left in Chapter I, and ii) to develop a strategy for the continuation of the inquiry into the nature of aesthetic sensitivity.

<sup>39</sup> Hungerland, "Once Again, Aesthetic and Non-Aesthetic," p. 107, references to this article are to its reprinting in *Aesthetics*, ed. Osborne.

I have often overheard and more often participated in sometimes heated debates over works of art. Debate often concerns the merits of a work of art, say whether a work is good or great. But just as often, the controversy concerns another sort of remark. For instance, we might wonder whether a particular passage of music is imposing, towering, or majestic; we might dispute whether certain shapes or lines are brittle, fragile, or delicate. In these latter cases it is an aesthetic judgement that is the focus of discussion.<sup>40</sup> An aesthetic judgement is challenged, and, if not given up, becomes controversial. But quite frequently there is a shift, and the controversy, which began as an aesthetic or critical one, is either transformed into or replaced by a philosophical one. Parties whose concern at the beginning of an aesthetic controversy is over what the resolution to it will be, find themselves later embroiled over whether the controversy is of a sort that is to be resolved at all.

A position which I will call "aesthetic relativism", and abbreviate "relativism" arises. At first the position

<sup>40</sup> Sibley characterizes this difference as one between purely evaluative remarks, which he calls "verdicts", and aesthetic *judgements*, which are at least not *purely* evaluative. (See "Aesthetic Concepts," p. 68n.; and "Aesthetic and Nonaesthetic," p. 136.) Perhaps the intrusion of the fact/value distinction at this point is misleading and unnecessary. See Alan Tormey, "Critical Judgements," *Theoria*, 39 (1973), esp. pp. 46-49.

may appear to be a non-position. The relativist initially issues a challenge to produce the rational bases of criticism, the decision procedures whereby critical disputes may be settled. So the relativist may appear to be doing no more than *asking*, "But is this not simply a difference of opinion? What would settle such an argument anyway?" But the relativist challenge is rarely entirely innocent. More often it is rhetorical. It invites us to consider the possibility that no decision procedures are forthcoming to settle controversies in art criticism, such matters being essentially irresoluble. Implicit in much relativist rhetoric is the view that a remark like "The waltz is lilting" is not a claim. Its logical force is different from that of "The book is red." We are deceived (by the grammar?) into thinking that we contradict one another about the waltz, when, in actuality, issues of this sort, about waltzes, concern matters of opinion, not matters of fact, and in any case, matters not to be settled by rational debate. So let us admit to a difference of opinion; let us agree to disagree, and quickly pass on to more promising topics.

This is roughly the view of Hungerland (though she does think that some relatively large measure of critical agreement can be expected within a given cultural coterie), and she is not unique in subscribing to it; the view is al-

most vulgar.

The relativist position (taken by Hungerland and others) is a regional one (though it might have been otherwise). That is, it is based on a *contrast* between so-called matters of opinion and matters of fact. It is assumed by the aesthetic relativist that there *are* controversies which are amenable to final settlement, but that aesthetic controversies are not among those.

I have already taken note of one of the important consequences of aesthetic relativism. Aesthetic relativism provides an apparent ground for a challenge against the authority or expertise of the so-called aesthetically sensitive observer, a challenge against the distinction between the critic and the pedestrian, and against the notion that some of us are better than others at viewing and discussing works of art. The effect of aesthetic relativism if it can be maintained, is to reduce the critic's proclamations to the rank of mere expressions of opinion, thereby putting him on the same footing as the pedestrian; talking (listening) to the critic is no better than talking (listening) to oneself.

The core of the philosophical issue, of which aesthetic relativism is one side, and so the core of the concept "objectivity" in this connection, concerns the resolubility

of controversy. I shall continue to use "objectivity" and its relatives to indicate what the relativist denies about aesthetic judgements; the resolubility of controversy.

There is a danger of misunderstanding here since two distinct things might be understood by "The controversy is resolved." One might say a controversy had been resolved where the parties to it have ceased debating and reached agreement. Alternatively, one would say a controversy had been resolved where it had been established which among the controversial positions was right and which wrong. The difference between these two is essentially similar to that between persuasion and proof. I may prove a point without thereby or at the same time persuading you; on the other hand, if I am a clever sophist, I may persuade you, and yet fail to give proof. When I tie objectivity to the resolubility of controversy, I shall be concerned with proof, not persuasion.

I shall now attempt to persuade, if not to prove, that the thesis against aesthetic objectivity is too firm and final to be tenable.

It is easy to understand how it is that aesthetic relativism is so readily offered and so well received. Though the grammatical similarities between expressions of aesthetic judgement and some paradigms of objective expressions

are quite obvious, the notion that the logic of "The waltz is lilting" differs from that of "The book is red" comes alive as soon as attention is drawn to the amount of long-lived and supposedly unresolved disagreement that attends judgments of the first type in particular, that is, when it is pointed out that debate concerning *aesthetic* disagreements has proven so inconclusive and critical accord so elusive.

However, while persistent disagreement is indeed a notable feature of the aesthetic situation, a feature that needs both to be taken into account and accounted for, it is not enough by itself to secure the relativist conclusion. It is one thing to show that certain matters are not agreed on; it is much more difficult to show such matters to be irresoluble. It certainly doesn't follow from some critical issue's remaining controversial, even over ages, that it remains so of necessity. So relativism, which is easily motivated, is not so easily established. In fact, with only this much offered in support of it, the relativist's position seems to be a mere expression of despair, and premature despair at that.

If aesthetic relativism is to be adequately defended, it first needs to be clarified considerably. In particular, the requisites of resolubility need to be filled in, and this is no small order. Indeed, I suspect, though I can't prove,

that it cannot be filled. Since the relativist is concerned to restrict the range of the objective by excluding from it matters that have to do with aesthetic judgement, he is required to specify tests, particularly the necessary conditions, for objectivity. He will want tests that aesthetic judgement fails. I suspect that he will find it difficult to specify such tests as these which do not in addition violate certain of our intuitions about objectivity. I know of no way to specify the necessary conditions for resolubility such as will include the intuitively obvious cases of settleable issues and yet fill the restrictive needs of the relativist. But until the necessary conditions are specified in detail, it is not entirely clear what is meant by denying that aesthetic controversy is resolvable.

Let us see how the relativist might proceed toward a specification of the necessary conditions for objectivity. He might begin with the (ultimately empty) truism that a controversy is resolvable if and only if there is at least one way to resolve it. Suppose there is an analytic connection between objectivity (resolubility) and decision procedures (ways of resolving controversies).<sup>41</sup> From this

<sup>41</sup> The connection might be synthetic; it might be the case that the availability of a decision procedure is just the best *evidence* for the objectivity of a kind of judgement. Little is lost however in allowing the assumption of an analytic connection.

follows the beginning, but *only* the beginning, of a test for objectivity: a controversy is not resolvable if there is no way to resolve it. There must be some established or discoverable decision procedure for a given issue or it remains up for grabs. For a range of judgements there must be established or discoverable procedures for deciding among rival judgements which is right and which wrong, if the judgements in that range are to be regarded as objective. The questions are then, what will count as a decision procedure? and when can we conclude that there are none? At this point the relativist's position may come unstuck! Let me illustrate what I take to be the relativist's difficulty with the following example.

The first mate says the mainsail's rigged. I say it's not. How do we settle this dispute? There is a clear and rigorous means to go about checking whether or not the mainsail is in fact rigged. I check that the halyard is both knotted at the head of the sail, and securely cleated to the mast, that the luff is properly threaded into the slot, that the mainsheet is properly threaded through blocks and safety knotted. I check the tension at the outhall, the downhall, the inhall, and so on. If all the conditions on my list are fulfilled, then the sail is rigged; if one batten is left out of place, or one line left unsecured,

then it's not rigged. What it means quite simply for the sail to be "rigged" is for all the conditions on such a list to be met. Here we have an example of a decision procedure, one that is in fact used to settle a certain sort of question or dispute. Will this example serve the needs of the relativist?

At first glance, the relativist position for aesthetics seems to gain force through this example, for this sort of checklist-and-inference procedure does seem to be lacking for aesthetic judgements. There is no set of non-aesthetic features such that their presence in a work of art either logically guarantees or is logically required for any particular aesthetic judgement about that work of art. There are no canons of criticism in that sense. The fact that some critics have mistakenly supposed themselves to be employing or formulating or distilling the canons of criticism serves apparently to bolster the relativist position. Critics (and philosophers) who have supposed this have been, after all, mistaken.<sup>42</sup>

Yet on closer inspection, this example yields a criterion for resolubility too restrictive even for the relativist. While admittedly no such checklist-and-inference procedure is available for aesthetic judgements, no

<sup>42</sup> Just why they have supposed this, and why they are mistaken are interesting matters, but ones I will not take up in detail here.

such checklist-and-inference procedure is available for color attribution (for example) either. I know how to check and *prove* that the sail is rigged; how do I go about proving that the sail is white?<sup>43</sup>

The same goes for other so-called secondary qualities. One cannot go about checking, in ways strictly analogous to my dockside procedure, whether or not the meat is salty, while one can so check whether it has spoiled, or whether there is salt in it. In short, if the relativist's position is filled out in terms of the above example, then it extends, not only to aesthetic judgement, but also to color attribution and other supposed paradigms of objectivity, where someone with a regional relativism might be expected to balk.

Nor is the relativist's trouble here owing simply to *my choice* of a sample decision procedure. My sample was not chosen at random, but neither was it chosen maliciously. My strategy here is designed to point up the fact that the selection of some paradigm or other of objectivity cannot serve as a basis for disqualifying any candidate for objectivity. Nor

<sup>43</sup> Here *my* challenge to produce decision procedures for colors *is* entirely innocent. I do not mean that color decision procedures are not available. But they *do* need to be spelled out. Chapter IV below is devoted to the task of spelling them out.

can a simple survey of any finite number of such paradigms so serve. And yet, in almost every relativistic discussion of the matter that I have seen, the relativist's argument proceeds by selecting, as I have done, some paradigm or other of objectivity, but then by treating the paradigm more or less as the basis for a criterion of objectivity, such that departure from the paradigm disqualifies a candidate from the realm of the objective.

Note here how much tougher is the lot of the relativist than is that of his opponent, the objectivist. The aesthetic objectivist needs only to specify a sufficient condition for resolubility, and show aesthetic judgement to meet it, in order to secure his case; so paradigms, of which there are a fair number, can figure prominently in the objectivist's arsenal. Different sorts of controversy, after all, are to be settled in different sorts of ways. This is ultimately how the notion of objectivity must be handled, I believe. Since the range of objective matters is wide and various, decision procedures relevant to certain matters will not decide certain others, and yet those matters may all be objective enough. Think of such various tests or decision procedures as the litmus test, comparison with a standard, counting, deduction, induction. The list is certainly not complete; but why should we even think it completable? The relativist, however, as soon as he has fully specified what

condition (or finite, disjunctive set of conditions) it is that aesthetic judgement, in his view, fails to meet, is saddled with the more general problem of squaring the notion of objectivity with the lack of decision procedures of some kind, or set of kinds, for some perfectly likely candidates for objectivity. Specifying the requirements for objectivity in terms of the above or any other limited array of sample decision procedures invites at least the Platonic response, "What are offered are examples, now give the essence", and finally perhaps the Wittgenstinian critique of the enterprise of searching for a finite set of defining characteristics. The problem for the relativist is simply this: While the relativist's intended conclusion requires that "objectivity" be treated as a closed concept, it might well be an open one.

I cannot take the position that "objectivity" *is* an open concept, or that a list of possible types of decision procedure cannot be completed. I have no argument for that position. In fact, I suspect that that position, like aesthetic relativism, is too firm and final to be tenable. If I cannot show "objectivity" to be an open concept, then perhaps I cannot *show* that aesthetic relativism is too firm and final to be tenable. But I can at least hope to persuade that it is. It is conceivable, though unlikely, that someone might produce an exhaustive list of types of decision

procedure, which could then serve to close the concept "objectivity". But no such compendium has yet been produced, and certainly not by aesthetic relativists. I countenance the position that "objectivity" is an open concept partly to dramatize the superficiality of our understanding of objectivity, and to caution against the premature assumption that all decision procedures are of a piece. My flirtation with the notion of an open concept in this connection is meant to invite a deeper inquiry into the notion of objectivity than has been made on behalf of aesthetic relativism.

On the other hand, where defensibility (as opposed to tenability) is concerned, it is enough of an embarrassment to relativism to note that, since we can never be sure of a given list of decision procedures that it is exhaustive, the concept *might be* open. But as long as the concept might be open, it is difficult to see how the relativist can defend his position. This ought to prompt the alteration, if not the abandonment, of relativism, even as an hypothesis. Let us see how the relativist might try to obviate these difficulties.

A first move might be to resign to a very pervasive relativism on which many sorts of judgement, among them aesthetic judgement and color attribution, fail the test for objectivity. Here it would be taken that the establishment

or discovery of decision procedures is centrally bound up with the notion of objectivity, and further concluded that there can be no decision procedures relevant to the sorts of judgement in question.

To say that the first strategy involves an extensive relativism, and that it results in the abandonment of some of the supposed paradigms of objectivity, is to say enough against it already. By such a move the relativist is able to buy consistency, but at the exorbitant cost of all plausibility. I am not here offering a variant of the so-called Paradigm Case Argument. The fact that color attribution is almost surely objective does not cinch the case against general relativism. What it does do is to make it necessary for the relativist to bring strong arguments in support of his case, or failing that, to retreat into a less radical and more tentative position. In taking the heroic line against paradigms, the relativist assumes a substantial burden of proof, which he can only shift by tempering his position.

Furthermore, the conclusion that there can be no decision procedures relevant to the sorts of judgement in question is premature and ill-founded if it is based, as it seems to be in the case of aesthetic relativism, on an insufficiently deep analysis of "objectivity". That is to say,

even if the consistency of the relativist's position is purchased at this point by denying objectivity to color attribution, the fundamental weakness of the position remains in its refusal to search for and consider alternative varieties of decision procedure.

A second move would be to attempt to pull objectivity apart from decision procedures, and to say, in effect, that objectivity is possible even where there can be no decision procedures. A careless relativist might see this as a way out, thinking that the difficulty in reconciling the notion of objectivity with the lack of decision procedures for some paradigms of objectivity would be overcome, if objectivity did not require decision procedures.

Such a move, however, undercuts the very basis on which the relativist grounds his attack on the objectivity of aesthetic judgement. Indeed, it amounts to a departure from the philosophical issue with which we began, and so too, the abandonment, or at least the alteration, of relativism. Let us keep in mind the origins of the position I've called relativism. Relativism arises specifically out of, and is a reaction to, frustration at the persistence of aesthetic disagreement. The relativist's attack on the enterprise of aesthetic debate polarizes some parties to such debate, who come to the defense of the activity in which they are, and wish to remain, engaged; thus it generates a

philosophical issue. But the issue clearly concerns the resolubility of controversy and the possibility of proofs in aesthetics; the relativist's contribution to the issue is precisely the inarticulate demand for proofs and decision procedures in aesthetics. When it is suggested that decision procedures are no easier to find for color attribution than they are for aesthetic judgements, it is not open for the relativist to simply soften or withdraw the demand in the case of color attribution, unless he is prepared to similarly soften or withdraw the demand in aesthetics, or unless he can show the two to be relevantly different.

In this chapter I have so far maintained that the relativist's thesis that decision procedures are not forthcoming in aesthetics is premature. I argued also that the relativist's major contention would require a kind of support which would be quite difficult to provide, and which the objectivist's major contention would not require. I have also mentioned a difficulty for the relativist from which the objectivist can take positive encouragement: the fact that the relativist's epistemological challenge applies outside the region of aesthetics, and indeed to some of those very paradigms of objectivity against which aesthetic judgement is thought to be contrastable. I will have more to say about this shortly. I want first to dispose of a possible

objection on the relativist's behalf to what I have so far done in this chapter.

I have represented the relativist as having a more burdensome thesis to defend than does the objectivist, and it might be claimed, quite the contrary, that the relativist has much less to defend than the objectivist. It is not uncommon for relativists to represent the objectivist thesis in aesthetics as involving a substantial ontological commitment to "aesthetic properties". The relativist might read the objectivist as claiming:

Aesthetic judgements are objective, even though there are no criteria for them, because of the aesthetic *properties* of things. Works of art have aesthetic properties, just as they have non-aesthetic properties. But an object has whatever aesthetic properties (and non-aesthetic properties) it has regardless of what you or I or anyone else would say or think about the matter. Now if you want to tell whether the work is graceful you just do the same as you would do if you wanted to tell whether the book is red: you look. You need to look because there are no conditions governing aesthetic concepts. But you must in addition use your aesthetic sensitivity, because of the special aesthetic nature of the properties, which though they are like colors, in that they are *there* to be perceived, they are not, like colors, accessible

simply through the normal channels.<sup>44</sup>

The objectivist is presumed to have a substantial ontological commitment owing to his conviction that aesthetic judgement is objective, while the relativist, dubious about any ontological multiplication, argues on that basis against aesthetic objectivity.<sup>45</sup> Thus the relativist would see his own burden of proof as rather slight by comparison with that of the objectivist.

I maintain, against this, that the objectivist can defend the objectivity of aesthetic judgement without committing himself to anything which would be an ontological extravagance.

In connection with kinds of judgement claimed as objective, we may wish to indicate that the features we judge things to have enjoy a kind of experience-independence. We want to be able to countenance cases of a person's experience being out of tune with what is the case. One way to do this is to invoke property locutions. But the invocation of property locutions does not, in and of itself, imply an extravagant ontology, for there are a number of senses of "experience-independence".

<sup>44</sup> Something like this is involved in much of the off-hand criticism of Sibley as an intuitionist.

<sup>45</sup> See Broiles; and Margolis, "Sibley on Aesthetic Perception."

In the weakest sense, experience-independence amounts just to the possibility of countenancing cases of a person's experience being out of tune with what is the case. Colors have at least this sort of experience-independence. The visual experiences of color-blind people are fairly regularly at variance with what is the case, and even a fully color-sighted person may for instance have a phenomenally red visual experience when what he is looking at is in fact green.

The primary qualities might be said to be experience-independent in a somewhat stronger sense in respect of which they would be distinguished from the secondary qualities like colors.

Finally, a feature might be said to be experience-independent in a third and still stronger sense, where things which have such features have them regardless of all actual or possible experiences of observers.<sup>46</sup> It is only in this last sense of "experience-independence" that one clearly runs a risk of ontological inflation. The relevant difference between properties which have experience independence in the

<sup>46</sup> Someone might hold that it is just possession of this very strong kind of experience-independence that distinguishes the primary from the secondary qualities. But holding this, one is likely to beg a crucial question against phenomenalism and idealism.

former two senses and properties which have this very strong kind of experience-independence is that the former will, but the latter will not, admit of certain sorts of metaphysical reduction. For instance, it is logically possible to reduce all talk of properties, with experience-independence of either of the first two kinds, to statements about the actual or possible experiences of observers; but talk of properties with strong experience-independence is incompatible with any such analysis. Therefore, the former sorts of properties are at least potentially less of an ontological burden than are properties with strong experience-independence. Put briefly, talk of properties, where what is implied is strong experience-independence, necessarily involves a commitment to ontological realism with respect to those properties, but talk of properties, where either of the two weaker sorts of experience-independence is implied, need involve no such commitment. (Thus for instance, Thomas Reid is a realist with respect to all sensible properties, where Locke adopts realism with respect to primary, but not secondary qualities.<sup>47</sup>)

The point with reference to aesthetics is this: while both the intuitionist and RP accounts of aesthetic sensitivity discussed in Chapter I arguably involve commitments to onto-

<sup>47</sup> See eg. Peter Kivy, *Thomas Reid's Lectures on the Fine Arts*, (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), pp. 4-8.

logical realism, one *can* be an aesthetic objectivist, and further one can express one's aesthetic objectivism in terms of aesthetic properties, without being committed to the ontological realism of those properties. Thus, if one takes the position of the objectivist, but not that of the realist, one's burden of proof is considerably smaller than that of the relativist.

Earlier I suggest that the objectivist may take encouragement from the fact that the relativist's epistemological challenge applies as well to certain supposed paradigms of objectivity (eg. to color attribution) as it does to aesthetic judgement. A surprising number of both objectivists and relativists have overlooked the significance of the generalizability to which relativism is liable. One way to illustrate this oversight is to consider the way in which Sibley's thesis about governing conditions for aesthetic concepts has been handled.

Sibley argues to the effect that there are no conditions governing the application of aesthetic terms. There are those who would claim that in view of these arguments, Sibley's commitment to the objectivity of aesthetic judgement commits him also to the existence of certain bits of non-inferential knowledge, and so to an intuitionism. And there are those who claim or imply that Sibley's thesis about

governing conditions is incompatible with the view that aesthetic judgement is objective. The reasons for making such claims are fairly plain; they are also quite plainly insufficient.

Theorists of criticism have fixed too firmly on the "reasons" which critics give why a particular work of art is, for example, graceful, the assumption being that the *reasoning* of criticism is to be found in the critic's "reasons" - if anywhere at all.<sup>48</sup> One is tempted to look for a particular kind of decision procedure in criticism, one that allows us to understand the critic's "reasons" on an analogy with those of the geometrician. In geometry criteria of certain sorts are employed, a certain paradigms of proof are exemplified: among them one in which the presence of feature  $\phi$  in an object is established by the presence in it of certain other " $\phi$ -making" features,  $\psi$ ,  $\theta$ , . . . . If it is correct, as Sibley maintains, that the critic's "reasons" are not supported by criteria of this sort, (i.e. that judgements about the presence in works of art of aesthetic features are not

<sup>48</sup> Eg. Margaret Macdonald, "Some Distinctive Features of Arguments Used in Criticism of the Arts," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplement*, 23 (1949), 183-194, reprinted in *Aesthetics and Language*, ed. Elton, see esp. p. 129; Stuart Hampshire, "Logic and Appreciation," *The World Review*, NS No. 44 (October, 1952), pp. 36-40, reprinted in Elton, see esp. p. 166; Albert Tzugawa, "The Objectivity of Aesthetic Judgements," *The Philosophical Review*, 70 (1966), at p. 12; and Morris Weitz, "Criticism Without Evaluation," *The Philosophical Review*, 61 (1952), at p. 61.

to be inferred from the presence in works of art of non-aesthetic features), the inclination might be to jump in either of two directions: i) aesthetic judgements are not objective; or ii) their objectivity depends on non-inferential knowledge, an inflated ontology, and in any case on something other than decision procedures. What we have here, though, is a false trichotomy, founded again on the elevation of one paradigm of objectivity (this time from the exact sciences) to the status of a standard for objectivity.

If there are no criteria for, say, grace, then if one is to *see* that a thing is graceful, one must grasp it without an inference. One must do something intuitive. And in citing the nonaesthetic features on which the grace of a particular thing notably depends, one calls ultimately on an immediate or intuitive grasping as well. Still it does not follow that one cannot demonstrate by an inference, using an inference procedure available, in theory, to anyone, that a given thing is (or is not) graceful (or dainty, dumpy, . . .). In concluding, from the lack of a particular sort of criterion in criticism, that aesthetic objectivity requires non-inferential knowledge, etc. the possibility of there being decision procedures which do not involve or amount to the employment of criteria for grace *which hinge on the presence in graceful things*

of "grace-making" features is overlooked. But some such procedure may nonetheless be adequate to the task of settling aesthetic controversy, and capable therefore of securing the objectivity of aesthetic judgement. Until this possibility has been eliminated, it is at least not the *objectivity* that requires the non-inferential knowledge. Until this possibility has been eliminated, aesthetic objectivity need require only decision procedures.<sup>49</sup>

This suggests again what a further step in this inquiry must be. It is a step in which we stick, at least provisionally, by our paradigms of objectivity, and suspend

<sup>49</sup> In *Speaking of Art*, Peter Kivy mounts an energetic argument against Sibley to the effect that aesthetic concepts may, for all Sibley says, be quite condition-governed after all. Kivy's strategy consists basically in the attempt to defuse various of Sibley's arguments meant to establish that aesthetic discourse is non-condition-governed, and to neutralize the observations of Sibley, Hungerland, and others, which are taken to indicate that aesthetic discourse is non-condition-governed. I have been assuming that Sibley is right about the lack of governing conditions, of a certain sort, for aesthetic terms. Nor shall I undertake to examine in detail Kivy's contentions against Sibley on this point. I am, however, unsatisfied with Kivy's general approach to Sibley, inasmuch as Kivy seems insensitive to the distinction I am just now trying to urge. Kivy seems convinced that for there to be objectivity in art criticism is for there to be the possibility of art critical proofs of a certain kind: for there to be the kind of governing conditions for grace, unity, and so on, which hinge on the presence in graceful and unified things of grace- and unity-making features. It is just this that I want to deny. I take my point here to be similar to one made by Maurice Mandelbaum about family resemblances. See Maurice Mandelbaum, "Family Resemblances and Generalization Concerning the Arts," *The American Philosophical Quarterly*, 2 (1965), 219-228, reprinted in *Problems in Aesthetics*, 2nd ed., ed. Morris Weitz (N.Y.: Macmillan, 196 ), pp. 181-198, esp. pp. 183-186.

judgement about aesthetic judgement. It involves further the initiation of the search for such decision procedures as might secure objectivity both for color attribution (for example) and aesthetic judgement.

This worthwhile search is pursued by Sibley,<sup>50</sup> although his results are not entirely conclusive. Sibley's reasons for searching involve his recognition that in connection with aesthetics, the philosophical issue of objectivity is basically an epistemological issue about the availability of decision procedures.

One reason for denying objectivity to aesthetic descriptive remarks has been the supposed need of a special quasi-sense or intuition to explain how we come by the knowledge they express. I prefer to put the matter another way. . . . With objective matters there must be proofs, decision procedures, ways of establishing truth and falsity. Where proof is impossible there is no objectivity. . . . Proof is a way of settling who is right and who is wrong.<sup>51</sup>

But in addition we have some reason to hope for success in the search, and at least for a break in the epistemological issue. Sibley's, for instance, is no pessimistic undertaking, concerned only to eliminate a pesky alternative to relativism, nor is it merely an experimental un-

<sup>50</sup> Sibley, "Colours," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 68 (1967-1968), 145-166; Sibley, "Objectivity and Aesthetics," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplement*, 42 (1968), 31-54.

<sup>51</sup> Sibley, "Objectivity and Aesthetics," p. 34.

dertaking. From the outset Sibley's pursuit of this strategy is an optimistic and confident one. The optimism is grounded in the analogy which Sibley stresses, and which I have been following, between aesthetic judgement and color attribution.<sup>52</sup>

There is a somewhat understandable urge to tire of such analogies in aesthetics, if not of the whole field of aesthetics. The issue of aesthetic objectivity is likely to seem particularly tedious at this stage. It, like some art-critical issues, may seem to be going nowhere, about as slowly as it can. Here, for instance, is W. B. Gallie on the dreariness of the history of aesthetics:

The main cause of the unsatisfactory state of . . . philosophical aesthetics is the one-sided, almost exclusively epistemo-centered approach which philosophers adopt towards [it]. . .

To give some examples. Common to, and central to, both Kant's and Wittgenstein's contributions to aesthetics, is the question: are aesthetic judgements genuine judgements . . . in contrast to mere expressions or affirmations of personal likes and dislikes? Both philosophers begin by pointing to certain usually recognized expectations and ways of speaking which suggest that aesthetic judgements are intended to be accepted as *correct*; yet both acknowledge that, in contrast to the situation with scientific judgements, there are no public and systematically applicable tests of their correctness. But to the question how these seemingly irreconcilable facts are to be explained, these leading philosophers offer surprisingly feeble and even half-hearted answers.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>52</sup> For another employment of the colors/aesthetics analogy, see Oliver A. Johnson, "Aesthetic Objectivity and the Analogy With Ethics," in *Philosophy and the Arts*, 165-181, esp. p. 179.

<sup>53</sup> W.B. Gallie, "Art and Politics," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplement*, 46 (1972), pp. 103-104.

Gallie's remark (and the "half-hearted" responses he laments) is an example of the profound despair of many aestheticians; it may point as well to a source of the disinterest in, and even contempt for, aesthetics had by some philosophers. Aestheticians, in their despair, may be prone to view the analogy between aesthetic judgement and color attribution as very boringly old-hat, and so, to entirely miss its liberating significance for the aesthetic objectivity endure.

I am disappointed to find little evidence of Kivy's appreciation of the importance of the colors/aesthetics analogy in his *Speaking of Art*. His discussion there of aspect-perception includes a passage which provides some evidence that the importance of the analogy entirely escapes him. Here is that passage more or less in its entirety.

Imagine a dab of black paint on an otherwise blank canvas. It can be seen as a black dot either in front of or behind a white expanse; the figure will accommodate either perceptual interpretation. This seems to me a clear case of aspect-perceiving even more disarmingly simple than, yet in the same family as, the Duck-Rabbit.

Suppose now that Mr. A sees the figure as black in front of white and Mr. B sees it as black behind white. What crucial feature could Mr. A adduce. . . to defend the black-on-white ascription? He could say: "The white can be seen as behind the black," or urge: "See the white as behind the black,". . . But to say "The white can be seen as behind the black," is to say nothing more than "The black can be seen as in front of the white," which is exactly the ascription to be defended. . . The figure is so simple that whichever aspect we grasp is grasped as a whole with no really distinguishable parts to constitute crucial features and provide the basis for a defense.

The species of aspect-perceiving represented by Duck-Rabbit can be thought of as a series of figures of ascending complexity, from the absolute simplicity of the White-Canvas-with-Black-Spot to such intricate figures as the Skull-Lady, with Duck-Rabbit somewhere in the middle range. At some point along this series we pass from aspect-ascriptions that are not to aspect-ascriptions that are *defensible*. . . Thus, to say that the canvas has a black-before-white aspect is to make a purely personal remark about how the figure appears to the one who makes the remark. . .<sup>54</sup>

We should be troubled initially by Kivy's conclusion, for it seems to deny what is asserted in his hypothesis. We are first asked to suppose a very simple case of visual ambiguity, a figure which "can be seen as a black dot either in front of or behind a white expanse". What comes most readily to mind in answer to these specifications is a figure such that

- i) it can be seen as a black dot in front of a white expanse,
- ii) it can be seen as a black dot behind a white expanse,
- iii) it cannot be seen as the Parthenon against a field of lillies.

There are, in other words, certain readings of the figure which, though they are mutually incompatible, are its legitimate readings; there are other conceivable readings of the figure which are not legitimate. And yet Kivy's conclusion

<sup>54</sup> Kivy, *Speaking of Art*, pp. 100-101.

amounts to the suggestion that aspect-perceptual claims about the figure are indefensible and incorrigible, much as a statement of the form "X seems *p* to me". This is, I submit, to deny, and in quite paradoxical fashion, the sense of legitimacy that naturally attaches to the various aspects or readings of our hypothetical figure.

But to return to the importance of colors: what is most interesting is the mistake that underlies this paradoxical suggestion. Kivy quite correctly observes that there is a hierarchy of complexity among ambiguous figures, with the duck-rabbit somewhere between the most simple and the more complex such figures. But he mistakenly asserts that there is a distinction between defensible and indefensible aspect-ascriptions which reflects or parallels the hierarchy of complexity, such that at the lower extremity of the hierarchy, even if nowhere above it, aspect-perceptual claims are indefensible and incorrigible, much as a statement of the form "X seems *p* to me". Kivy's grounds for this assertion are apparently just that at the lower extremity of the hierarchy what we have is a figure of such extreme simplicity that it cannot be *analyzed* or broken down into a plurality of discreet "crucial features", so that, *owing to the simplicity* (read "unanalyzability") of the figure, any attempted "defense" of an aspect-perceptual claim collapses into the aspect-perceptual claim.

But the argument is unconvincing, for by these same reasonings we should have to conclude that color attributions, owing to the (supposedly paradigmatic) simplicity and unanalyzability of colors, are indefensible and incorrigible, much as a statement of the form, "X seems *p* to me", and this conclusion would be as unwarranted as it is unwelcome. I think it unfortunate that the case of color attribution did not occur to Kivy at this juncture; his curiosity about how color attributions *are* to be defended might otherwise have been stimulated, and such curiosity, it seems to me, is quite crucial to advancing the issue of objectivity in aesthetics.

I therefore think it worth re-emphasizing now that the point of an analogy between aesthetic judgement and color attribution is not to establish the existence of a range of simple aesthetic properties, understood to attach to objects independent of the actual or possible experience of any observer, of faculties for the apprehension of such properties, or of certain bits of non-inferential knowledge, as might be mistaken. The point of such an analogy is, so far, only to show that, with respect to proofs, decision procedures, and the resolubility of controversy, issues strictly parallel to those raised by the relativist in aesthetics can also be raised about color attribution, and other paradigms of objectivity, at least initially.

Indeed the [relativist], whose first move, when there are disputes, is to demand proofs in aesthetics, is likely to accept other matters as objective enough without making any such demand there. Nor is it *prima facie* obvious in detail what a conclusive proof even in some of these areas would come to: what would be involved in a *proof* that something is red. . . ?<sup>55</sup>

But since color attribution is not only almost surely objective, but an area of paradigmatic settlability as well, there is good (even if not thoroughly conclusive) reason to suppose that there *are* decision procedures relevant to color attribution. We would be, at the very least, surprised to be shown that there are none. But if parallel epistemological issues can be raised with respect to both color attribution and aesthetic judgement, then perhaps these issues can be similarly put to rest. Surely there must be decision procedures for color attribution, so why not decision procedures for aesthetic judgement as well?

This is not to say that I think there is little confusion about decision procedures for colors. There is a good deal, and Sibley, of all people, shares in it. Indeed the continued underappreciation of the colors/aesthetics analogy owes as much to the confusion that there is about color decision procedures as does the state of the debate about aesthetic objectivity. Thus the colors/aesthetics analogy is

<sup>55</sup> Sibley, "Objectivity and Aesthetics," p. 35.

important also as an invitation to inquiry into the nature of color decision procedures. In Chapter IV below, I investigate the case of color attribution and sketch an account of its objective basis. In the remainder of the present chapter I return to consider some of the theses of Isabel Hungerland.

That Hungerland is a relativist, as I have characterized that position, is indicated in the following passages:

For purposes of making a *prima facie* basis of distinction between A's aesthetic features and N's nonaesthetic features I shall reject the requirement, proposed by Sibley, that a special sort of training or sensitivity is always required. That leaves me with the following sort of rough basis for a distinction. A-ascriptions are not intersubjectively verifiable. . . . A room that looks cheerful to you may look garish to me - though we can agree on what colors and shapes and so on the furnishings have. We can always agree in principle on a store's identifying description of a garment, but not so on whether it is dowdy or elegant.<sup>56</sup>

The lack of verifiability for A-ascriptions delights rather than distresses me. In moral matters, we must achieve some large measure of agreement or be annihilated. In science, we must require agreement or abandon the project - intersubjectivity here is of the essence. In art, we can be out of step with the rest of the world without endangering a single soul or abandoning the enterprise. How delightful!<sup>57</sup>

Hungerland's main thesis is that aesthetic judgements are not intersubjectively verifiable. I take her to mean by this that there are not any decision procedures, available

<sup>56</sup> Hungerland, "Once Again, Aesthetic and Non-Aesthetic," p. 107

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 110-111.

in principle to any subject, whereby to check the correctness or incorrectness of a given aesthetic judgement. If there were-not and could not be such decision procedures, then I would agree with her that aesthetic judgements were not objective, that their logic differed from that of claims. But I have yet to see it demonstrated even that there *are* no such procedures. I have already argued that an analogy between aesthetic judgement and color attribution, coupled with a lack of specificity and clarity about the nature of color decision procedures, provides *some* reason to suppose that there might after all be decision procedures in aesthetics. I think therefore that it is too early to assent to this thesis of Hungerland's.

Hungerland claims as a related point that there is no proper analogue for aesthetic judgements of the really-is/only-seems dichotomy, a dichotomy which presumably *does* apply with colors. But her meaning here is not entirely clear. At first she says that the terminology for aesthetic judgements was "invented just for the purposes of describing how things look".<sup>58</sup> She seems to have in mind the view that since an aesthetic judgement like "The painting is garish" is elliptical for "The painting is garish-looking", sentences of the

<sup>58</sup> Hungerland, "The Logic of Aesthetic Concepts," p. 602.

form "The painting (only) looks garish-looking" are faulty, or redundant, or useless, hence no dichotomy. Of course she qualifies this as an indicator of really-is/only-seems areas. Color words, she allows, were "invented just for the purpose of describing how things look".

But qualified or no, this is sophistry. First of all, not all aesthetic judgements are about the looks of things. And if music presents no problem for Hungerland, prose certainly should. But more important is that Hungerland is here obscuring the very point of application for the really-is/only-seems dichotomy. Even if aesthetic judgements one and all concerned the looks of things, there might still be good use in distinguishing between a thing's *really being* garish-looking, and its *only seeming* so. Part of Hungerland's problem here lies, I suspect, in her having put the appearance/reality dichotomy, for which I, in order to approximate her, use "really-is/only-seems", in terms of really being  $\Phi$  and only *looking*  $\Phi$ .

I would say that the really-is/only-seems dichotomy applies where i) matters are objective, and ii) some acceptable explanation for a thing's seeming  $\Phi$  to someone, while not really being  $\Phi$  can in principle be found. But the case for aesthetic objectivity is as yet far from lost. Furthermore, we do offer such explanations as "This only seems to

you to be vigorous because it is surrounded by so many flaccid things", or "This only seems chaotic to you because you are unfamiliar with cubist paintings". On this point Hungerland offers a distinction between explanations which "call our attention to the presence of absence of physical defects in sense organs" and those which instead call attention to "the presence or absence of common sympathies, snobberies, outlooks. . ." <sup>59</sup> She claims that explanations of the latter kind alone are forthcoming in connection with aesthetic judgements, and that this makes the extension of the really-is/only-seems dichotomy to aesthetics a "metaphor".

What is wrong with an explanation that makes reference to, say, lack of training? Hungerland seems to think that there is something special about an explanation which makes reference to a physical defect, say one associated with color blindness, as if one could be tested for the presence of such a *defect* without looking at things and making judgements about them. What is explained on either side of Hungerland's alleged distinction if not simply the inability to make certain discriminations? I fail to see the relevance in this connection of the point that, while we think that *by talking* we can sometimes "refine" a person's aesthetic sensitivity, we cannot talk a person out of color-blindness.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* p. 604.

There remains only Hungerland's fascination with so-called gestalt properties.<sup>60</sup> The features of gestalt situations most intriguing for Hungerland and others are those illustrated so well by trick figures like the duck-rabbit, and the phenomena known as "figure-ground", namely the persistence of exclusively disjointed readings.<sup>61</sup> Seeing-as is here seen, I think, as the basis on which to establish the theoretical legitimacy of aesthetic relativism. If particular works of art can be seen-as X, Y, Z, P, Q, and R, then it is senseless to expect agreement in aesthetic judgements - let alone intersubjective decision procedures. How delightful!

Interesting note: B. R. Tilghman thinks that the seeing-as analysis of aesthetic sensitivity provides a basis for aesthetic objectivism, since the duck-rabbit cannot "also be seen as a kangaroo".<sup>62</sup> The duck and the rabbit are the duck-rabbit's only (legitimate) aspects. But though the duck-rabbit has only two aspects, there is nothing in principle barring ambiguous objects' having more than two. And as between any of the legitimate readings of a given ambi-

<sup>60</sup> Hungerland, "The Logic of Aesthetic Concepts," pp. 610-612; Hungerland, "Once Again: Aesthetic and Non-Aesthetic," pp. 109-ff.

<sup>61</sup> See above, Chapter II.

<sup>62</sup> B.R. Tilghman, *The Expression of Emotion in the Visual Arts*, p. 79.

guous object, there is no preferability; each reading persists. But *this* is the particular seeing-as phenomenon that seems to arrest Hungerland, and she is absolutely correct about what the effect of its introduction, by way of the seeing-as analysis of aesthetic sensitivity, into the objectivity issue will be. Her mistake, however, is in glibly and uncritically assuming the aesthetic-gestalt connection.

A zoo director can return the animal if he orders a zebra but what is delivered turns out to be a pony. But he will get nowhere if he claims that he ordered a horse-like black animal with white stripes (this is the way he sees zebras) and what he got was a horse-like white animal with white stripes. A museum director who purchases a Rothko identified as having a certain size and shape and having broad horizontal bands of blue, white, and green, can return it if the canvas is a larger one, uniformly yellow, except for a narrow red band across the middle. There is no point however in his arguing that though the identifying description fits the picture ordered, it does not have the dynamic visual tensions that some critics have found.<sup>63</sup>

Now, as it turns out, one *can* sensibly distinguish between varieties of zebra according to whether the stripes are black on a white background or white on black. But supposing zebras *not* to be sortable in this way, Hungerland is right about zebras: one could not legitimately feel cheated about a zebra on figure-ground grounds. But here is precisely the point at which the zebra case and the Rothko case might be

<sup>63</sup> Hungerland, "Once Again: Aesthetic and Non-Aesthetic," p. 109.

disanalogous. For if aesthetic judgement is an objective matter, then if one were sold a painting on the understanding that certain visual tensions were among its aesthetic properties, and it turned out that they weren't, one could perfectly legitimately feel cheated - especially if one found oneself stuck with the painting.

But even if aesthetic judgement ultimately turns out *not* to be an objective matter, there is an important difference between seeing-as and aesthetic sensitivity which Hungerland misses, a point I developed in Chapter II. The difference I point out, that the persistence of exclusively disjoined readings, which is essential to seeing-as, is not in the same way tolerable with aesthetic sensitivity, is in fact just the difference Hungerland wants to deny. If the results of my Chapter II are correct, and Hungerland's assertion of an analogy gives no substantial evidence to the contrary, then *at least* Hungerland has no basis for relativism in the comparison between aesthetic judgement and aspect-perception.

## CHAPTER IV

In the preceding chapter I considered the aesthetic relativist's anti-critical challenge and discovered that its applicability is initially somewhat wider than the relativist lets on. I suggest that this discovery ought to prompt a re-opening of the search for the rational bases of art criticism, that is, for decision procedures for aesthetic judgements. I discussed what is perhaps Sibley's most significant, if most widely misunderstood, contribution to the issue of aesthetic objectivity: his insistence on an analogy between aesthetic judgement and color attribution, and his related strategy of searching for the foundations of aesthetic objectivity along lines to be discovered in analyzing the objectivity of color attribution. The strategy is, I think, both sound and promising, whether or not it will lead to the conclusion that aesthetic judgement is objective. What is left wanting in Sibley's treatment of the objectivity issue, however, is an adequate analysis of the objectivity of color attribution. What is it to say that colors are objective, or that the attribution of colors to things is an objective business? It is to this matter, interesting enough on its own, that I address myself in this chapter. I am convinced that the results of philosophers' inquiries into it have not been en-

tirely conclusive, and that the prevailing confusion about colors, coupled with the widely acknowledged centrality of color attribution as an area of objectivity, has both retarded our understanding of objectivity generally and severely hampered most of the discussion concerning aesthetic objectivity in particular. As a preliminary to the discussion of color decision procedures, it is convenient to develop a terminology for distinguishing among various types of property that a thing might be said to have.

Where the decision procedures relevant to establishing the truth of judgements of a certain kind involve hypothetical or conditional propositions we may speak of dispositional properties. Thus fragility (solubility, elasticity) is a dispositional property. The truth conditions for judgements like "X is fragile" involve conditionals of the form "Under certain physical conditions, X would undergo certain physical changes."

When the hypothetical for a dispositional property makes crucial reference to the experience of an observer, I will speak of "expositional properties". An expositional property will be one where the truth conditions for judgements attributing it to things involve hypotheticals of the form, "If an object X stood in relation R to an observer O, O would have an experience of such and such a kind."

On this terminology, fragility is dispositional but non-expositional; triangularity is both non-dispositional and non-expositional; smoothness is expositional; redness (see below) is expositional; all expositional properties are dispositional.

Colors, though they are expositional, are not *simply* expositional. Determining that an object has an expositional property is a matter of establishing that there are or could be observers for whom the object has the capacity to occasion a certain kind of experience; but establishing this does not establish an object's color, for the following sort of situation can arise: A blue object, like color chip I



has an expositional property (A) which manifests itself in for instance my finding it different from color chip II.



But it may also have an expositional property (B) which manifests itself in some color-blind observers' finding it identical to II. It has but one color: blue. Thus establishing I's color involves not only establishing that there are some

observers for whom I has the capacity to occasion a certain sort of visual experience; it involves establishing some such observers as also having pre-eminent or authoritative status. Accordingly I shall speak of "pre-eminent expositional properties". An object may have, as above, numerous expositional properties in an area such as color, of which only one will be pre-eminent. It is even possible for an object which has a number of expositional properties, to have no pre-eminent expositional properties at all.<sup>64</sup>

I assume that color attribution is objective. I assume, in other words, that there are decision procedures available for settling disputes about the colors of things. If this assumption stands in need of support, let that support come in the form of an account of what those decision procedures are. I propose the following account.

Color attribution lies in one of those areas whose objectivity is tied to a reference group of observers. In such areas, the members of reference groups, or "referees" as I shall call them, function as potential final arbiters for disputes. Disputes within any of these areas may be settled with finality by appeal to the experiences of the referees.

<sup>64</sup> I discuss examples which indicate this possibility at the end of this chapter.

With colors and other similar matters, the practice of settling disputes involves selecting referees. So we are concerned with principles of selection. There are two basic principles for the selection of members of reference groups: one corresponding to a majoritarian bias or inclination we have in matters of objectivity in general; the other corresponding to a bias or inclination we have in favor of discriminations and sensitivity. I will call the first principle the "majoritarian principle", and the second the "sensitivity principle". Each principle may be understood initially as a systematic inclination, on the one hand, to count heads, and on the other, discriminations. We are inclined to take the statistically normal, the members of the agreed majority or plurality as referees; and we are inclined to take the maximally sensitive observers, those capable of the most discriminations, as referees. By "maximally sensitive" and so on, I do not mean "capable of all possible discriminations", but rather "capable of more discriminations than any competitor". Also, for the sake of convenience, I ignore cases of radically divergent sets of discriminations and limit consideration to cases where the sensitive observers make all the discriminations other people do, plus a few more.

The two considerations, statistical normality, and

relative discriminatory capacity, seem to be fairly equal in weight. Neither statistical normality nor maximum discriminatory capacity is by itself a necessary condition for qualification as a referee. Neither statistical normality nor maximum discriminatory capacity is by itself sufficient to establish the reference group. A necessary condition for a given group's selection to refereeship is that that group shall be either statistically normal or capable of more relevant discriminations than any competing group. That is, I repeat, not capable simply of a greater number of discriminations, but capable of all the discriminations made by any competitor, plus a few more. Of course, if the maximally sensitive are also statistically normal, that is sufficient to establish them as referees.

I have used the terms "bias" and "inclination". I do not mean by these to derogate either of the two principles of selection. But because of their place and role in a complex and delicate selection procedure, neither the majoritarian nor the sensitivity principle can be formulated either as a necessary or as a sufficient condition for qualification as a referee. This is why "bias" and "inclination" suggest themselves. It is well to call both principles "principles" because our selection of referees is in any case guided by them. But it is also well to be reminded that each of the

two principles can be overridden, under certain circumstances, by the other. What happens, for instance, when the sensitive people make up a tiny minority?

The case of color attribution is an important one to explore, first because it illustrates the centrality of selecting referees to the objectivity of a certain kind of judgment, and second because it brings the above two principles of selection into focus. The observers to whose judgements the objectivity of color attribution is tied are both statistically normal and color sensitive, that is, capable of more color discriminations than rival groups. But this fact, that color sensitivity is statistically normal, has made the case of colors an occasion for some controversy and confusion about the conceptual basis of objectivity.

Competing theories have been suggested: i) to the effect that the objectivity of color attribution is grounded in the experiences of the statistically normal observer;<sup>65</sup> ii) to the effect that the objectivity of color attribution is tied to the experiences of those making the most detailed

<sup>65</sup> This view, often attributed to Locke, appears more recently eg. in Jonathan Bennett, *Locke, Berkeley, Hume - Central Themes*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), at p. 94; George Pitcher, *A Theory of Perception*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), at p. 223; Johnson, "Aesthetic Objectivity and the Analogy With Ethics," pp. 179-181; and Hungerland, "The Logic of Aesthetic Concepts," at p. 51; Kivy, at pp. 67-68 of *Speaking of Art*, in examining Hungerland's position, accepts normality as the basis of color objectivity.

and extensive set of discriminations.<sup>66</sup> The two theories are manifestly opposed in answer to the question, "Who would decide the colors of things if the color sensitive numbered a small minority?" (Again for the sake of expository simplicity I limit consideration to cases where the population divides fairly neatly into two groups, one larger than the other, the smaller of the two being the more sensitive.) On the first account, the colors that things *are* would be the colors that things looked to be to the majority. On the second account, the colors that things *are* would be the colors that things looked to be to the sensitive minority. On the account I propose, it is not yet clear to whose experiences the objectivity of color attribution would be tied, the hypothetical situation being at this stage underdescribed.

Room is made, as I say, for the two competing theories by the convergence, in the case of colors, of sensitivity and normality, and each of the two theories has its measure of plausibility owing to the centrality of sensitivity and of normality respectively to the business of selecting referees. But in each case something has gone wrong. It is as if the philosopher, in trying to see clearly, holds the object very

<sup>66</sup> Sibley, "Colours," p. 149; An irony: Sibley's well known emphasis on the *normality* of sight, hearing, touch. . . as that than which something more is needed in order to make aesthetic judgements documents the grip that our majoritarian bias has even on him.

close and squints, closing one or the other of his eyes. I am suggesting that we open both eyes and stand a bit further back.

I want now to discredit the two above theories of the selection of color referees, and to motivate my own, by exposing four possible sources of confusion.

i) It is a matter of contingent fact that people sensitive to color differences vastly outnumber the color-blind, that color sensitivity is statistically normal. This is not to say that the normality of color sensitivity is an accident. I expect there is a pretty good explanation for the convergence of color sensitivity and normality, which would involve observed regularities in the behavior of light, and in the physiology of the perceiving organism, some reproductive genetics, and so on. Nevertheless, we can easily imagine color sensitivity's being or becoming statistically rare, and this just means that the connection between color sensitivity and normality is a contingent one. But this fact is itself subject to a misapplication through philosophical squinting. Accordingly a word of caution: It does not follow from the contingency of sensitivity's connection with normality *either* that sensitivity is incidental to objectivity while normality is germane *or* that normality is incidental to objectivity while sensitivity is germane.

ii) Secondly, a word about the words "normal" and "sensitive". Each of these words wears its heart, so to speak, on its sleeve. Each is in a way like the word "gringo", which is not fully or adequately understood except as conveying a measure of disapprobation. "Normal" and "sensitive", in connection with color perception and attribution at any rate, each carry a clear, but *not*, I emphasize, overwhelming measure of approbation. That there should be a measure of approbation is only to be expected, since the words reflect our majoritarian and sensitivity biases respectively. But our being biased in favor of the majority is not equivalent to, nor does it entail, our being bound to select normal observers as referees. Our inclinations to receive the majority report and to treat normal people as referees are not irresistible. It is open to us to decline to so treat them, even against our inclinations; similarly for our sensitivity bias.

iii) Thirdly, we must carefully distinguish between decision procedures (for disputes) and selection procedures (for referees). Color disputes are settled ultimately by appeal to the color reference group, however that group is selected. Now, generally, it takes a majority report from an overwhelming majority of a reference group to bring a dispute to ultimate settlement. I won't go into the reasons for this - some of them are quite obvious; others have to do with such vagaries of the perceptual encounter as the effects

of disease, vitamin intake, temperature of the surrounding air, etc. on our perceptions. In any case, a color dispute is settled by an impressive majority of the color reference group, which happens to be an impressive majority of the population. In this case, an impressive majority of the impressive majority is, itself, an impressive majority. But the fact that decision procedures call for impressive majorities does not require that reference groups be impressive majorities.

iv) Finally, we must bear in mind that the means of determining the normality of an observer are different from the means of determining his sensitivity. Statistical normality is determined by a process of counting heads, sensitivity by a process of counting and comparing discriminations. Now, in the ordinary course of things, if we were to call someone a "normal observer", we would mean, among other things, that he had a certain level of color-discriminatory capacity. So we might be inclined to construe the standard color discrimination test as a test for the normality of color vision. One might think thereby to collapse sensitivity and normality. But tests for any particular level of color-discriminatory capacity can function as tests for the normality of color vision only so long as that level of color-discriminatory capacity is in fact normal. So, unless the statistical abnormality of color sensitivity is inconceivable, which it is

not, the two cannot be collapsed.

I hope now to have given some motivation for the view that the notions of statistical normality and of sensitivity can neither be collapsed one to the other nor diminished relative to one another in their importance to the business of selecting referees. I hope, in other words, to have done something toward establishing the question, "Who would decide the colors of things if the color sensitive were not in the majority?" as a matter of philosophical importance. We are, I think, left with our two main principles of selection, which in the case of colors happen to pick out the same as reference group, (thus establishing the color reference group without further ado), but with a need as well to consider cases in which they do not, or would not, or might not pick out the same. In such cases we have a battery of subsidiary adjudicating principles, which help us to decide between the majority and the sensitive, when the two main principles leave us in tension.

Let us suppose that a fellow in London claims to notice a difference between objects which we see as identical. We may suppose this to concern a difference of a wide variety of sorts, but let us for simplicity's sake suppose that what the fellow claims to notice is a difference in color. We can satisfy ourselves rather straightforwardly

as to whether or not he does discriminate, by administering tests to him. One such test would involve placing before him objects which we cannot distinguish and getting him to order them or pick out the odd ones. We then label the objects and record his ordering. We scramble the objects, and ask him to re-order them as before, all the while keeping the labels hidden from him. After several successful re-orderings, the plausibility of supposing the fellow to be guessing, or lucky, etc. begins to decrease rapidly until we are just rigid and silly not to be satisfied that he does, after all, distinguish between objects where we do not. Now suppose that a fairly widely distributed group of observers, still though a tiny minority, have demonstrated, in some such way, the ability to make certain agreed discriminations where the majority do not, thus establishing their sensitivity relative to the majority. What considerations would count either in favor of or against treating such a group as the reference group?

i) One consideration concerns the degree of subtlety of the difference that distinguishes these objects for these observers.<sup>67</sup> Suppose we ask the sensitive observers how big or drastic is the difference they notice. Would they say it

<sup>67</sup> I am following a suggestion of Jonathan Bennett's.

is a very big difference, and liken it to that between red and blue? Or would they call it a subtle nuance, likening it to some of the more minute differences in shade to which we in the insensitive majority are alive? The more subtle the difference, the stronger the case becomes in favor of the sensitive minority; the more gross or radical the difference, the stronger the case becomes against. This may sound a bit arbitrary in its bald form, but there are reasons why the subtlety of a difference tends to make it acceptable. Here are two:

a) Subtle differences, slight differences, are quite rightly thought hard to detect, whereas gross or radical differences are thought hard to miss. Hence there will be a good measure of initial implausibility and subsequent dazzle about any supposition to the effect that there is noticed some radical, hard-to-miss difference, which is nevertheless regularly and uniformly missed by nearly everyone. But there is nothing so extraordinary in supposing that there is noticed some subtle, hard-to-detect nuance, which goes regularly, uniformly, and widely unnoticed.

Now, we are not at this stage entertaining any doubts about the ability of the sensitive few to distinguish where the vast majority do not. That ability of theirs we may suppose has been amply demonstrated, whether the difference

in question is tiny or tremendous. What *is* at issue here is whether we shall or shan't allow the language to conform to their judgements. I am suggesting that the uncomfortable curiosity of their sensitivity to a gross, hard-to-miss difference, which curiosity remains even after their sensitivity has been established, presents a not negligible obstacle to treating them as referees.

b) There is a natural ease about regarding sensitivity to subtle, hard-to-detect differences as nonetheless within the range of improvability of those who lack it, while it is difficult to regard sensitivity to gross differences as something one might improve toward and acquire. One's threshold of sensitivity needs only to be coaxed a bit for one to be enabled to see a very subtle nuance, say between color samples of the same hue, differing only by a few increments in saturation or intensity. So we tend to think, with subtle differences, that if we got more sleep, or more practice, or more vitamin A, we too could see them. But with gross differences it is much more difficult to imagine what an improvement in one's sensitivity would be like, much less what might effect such an improvement.

ii) Another important consideration concerns the presence or absence of other measureable differences which correspond to those noticed by the sensitive few. Suppose

the sensitive few divide the test samples into two color categories, A and B. Now suppose we discover uniform measureable differences between the A objects and the B objects. Suppose that the A's always reflect light waves of one length and the B's of another; or that the A's, when placed in water, regularly dissolve, while the B's, when placed in water, precipitate sugar; or suppose we discover a uniform age difference between the A's and B's by carbon dating. At one level, such discoveries can function to corroborate an initial claim to be sensitive. They can be used to help establish what can otherwise be established by a hidden-labels test. At another level, they can help to determine what kind of sensitivity is established - whether we are dealing with color, as opposed to say temperature, sensitivity. But once sensitivity has been established, and where it has been established in a minority, any impressive discovery of this sort will tend also to weigh in favor of the sensitive minority. A failed heroic attempt to discover any uniform measureable correlate of the minority's basis of discrimination will tend to count against treating the minority as reference group. Of course, the more numerous, and various, these correlative discoveries are, the more impressive they each become in favor of the sensitive.

iii) Then too, there is the dimension of utility. How useful or desirable would it be to have the discriminatory capacity of the sensitive few? There are many imaginable alternatives here, ranging from sensitivities with no useful applications whatever, to sensitivities with trivial applications (imagine a man who had become unbeatable at poker, so long as he could see the backs of cards), to sensitivities with vital uses (imagine a man who could accurately forecast earthquakes, based on a sensitivity to color differences in rocks). There might even be sensitivities which are positively to be avoided if at all possible. Here I think of extreme temperature sensitivity, accompanied perhaps by a low discomfort threshold. Of course, the more attractive, useful, or important the discriminatory capacity of the sensitive, the higher its positive utility value, the greater the tendency to select the sensitive to refereeship; the lower the utility value, the greater the tendency in the opposite direction.

I said that a sufficient qualification for a reference group is both maximum discriminatory capacity and statistical normality. Where no single group is both sensitive and normal, a sufficient condition for a given group's qualification as reference group will be either that group's sensitivity or its normality, plus whatever additional subsidiary

evidence is impressive enough to cause us to select that group as reference group. I have illustrated some ways in which evidence might be obtained either in support of the sensitive or of the majority. There are other considerations that can count: the size of the majority relative to the minority; the relative statistical diversities of the two groups, that is, whether the sensitive minority would, apart from performance on discrimination tests, constitute a random sample; and so on. There are also certain interdependencies between various of the subsidiary principles. For instance, the relative sizes of minority and majority will affect the weighting of other subsidiary principles in a given deliberation, i.e. will determine in part how much subsidiary evidence of one or another kind it will take to sway the selection in either direction.

I have touched on principles which seem to me likely to have a special bearing on the issue of objectivity in aesthetics. For instance, supposing for the moment that the colors/aesthetics analogy can be pressed to yield a criterion for aesthetic sensitivity, and supposing what is likely that the membership of the class thus delineated is a minority, then a fairly strong case could be made for their selection to refereeship based on the subsidiary principles I've mentioned. The subtlety and richness of the vocabulary of

criticism indicates that the distinctions it is used to make are themselves of a high degree of subtlety. Secondly, part of the logic of aesthetic judgments: the emergence of aesthetic features, logically guarantees correlative sets of differences. And thirdly, the behavior of those individuals who we (in the absence of a clear account of aesthetic sensitivity) *call* sensitive in the arts indicates quite strongly that they derive a greater measure of enjoyment from contact with the arts than do those we call insensitive; and if we are to believe their words, their art-related pleasure is as a rule increased and intensified by their having and exercising sensitivity, which would make aesthetic sensitivity *prima facie* desirable.

Often the prescribed order of inquiry in philosophy is to first get clear about fundamental notions, like the notion of objectivity, by considering standard, central cases, like color attribution, and only then to proceed to consider the more controversial, less central cases, such as aesthetic judgement. It has been suggested to me that, epistemology being fundamental and basic to any particularized or "applied" philosophizing, if you want to do good aesthetics, you must first do sound epistemology. It will no doubt raise a few eyebrows to suggest that aesthetics has something to offer epistemology. I think, though, that there is something to be said for proceeding, as I have done,

in "reverse order" with respect to objectivity, colors, and aesthetics. In approaching the question of objectivity via its aesthetic particularization, one has an unparalleled opportunity for getting the question into clear focus. For, unlike color attribution, art criticism is notoriously an area in which the persistence of disagreement is notable, alarming, and of considerable practical concern; and it is disagreement that gets the philosophical issue about objectivity off the ground. So it is *here*, in connection with (an area such as) art criticism, that the motivations for scepticism can be most vividly and dramatically exposed. With the sceptics motives in full view, we have been able to explore color objectivity in a way which might otherwise have been ignored.

Earlier I complained at the running together of certain epistemological and ontological issues, to the detriment of the (important) epistemological ones. It may perhaps be objected, in view of my heavy emphasis in this and the preceding chapter, on the epistemological issue of decision procedures, that I myself have run epistemology into ontology, that I have drawn certain (mainly negative) ontological conclusions from essentially epistemological considerations. I think not.

I argued that the supposition that there are aes-

thetic properties with strong experience-independence is more extravagant than is required for the task of defeating aesthetic relativism. It may seem that I purport to eliminate such properties by an application of Occam's razor. But most carefully put, I believe Occam's razor amounts to the thesis that any ontological multiplication is *prima facie* extravagant, and stands therefore in need of justification. It fixes therefore the burden of proof on whoever would add to ontology; but it is cutting only in the absence of such proof. I have not examined all extant arguments in favor of realism for aesthetic properties;<sup>68</sup> that is outside the scope of this essay. I have not ruled out realism in this way.

I have given an account of the decision procedures relevant to establishing judgements of a certain kind (of which color attributions are exemplary) as true or false, and I have suggested the account as plausible for aesthetic judgements. The account I have given is similar in form to what a phenomenalist would give as an analysis of what judgements like "X is red" *mean* (or *should mean*). But what I have given is still only an account of a procedure for telling when it is correct to say of an object (for instance) that

<sup>68</sup> See Göran Hermerén, "The Existence of Aesthetic Qualities", in *Modality, Morality and Other Problems of Sense and Nonsense: Essays Dedicated to Sören Halldén*, (Lund: C.W.K. Gleerup, 1973), pp. 64-76.

it is red. As such, it is as compatible with realist analyses of the meaning of "X is red" as it is with phenomenalist ones; and it is compatible with realist as well as phenomenalist ontologies. It follows from the appropriateness of a particular decision procedure for color attribution neither that the meaning of "X is red" must be analyzed solely in terms of experience, nor that it cannot be so analyzed. It follows from the appropriateness of a particular decision procedure for color attribution neither that colors are, nor that they are not, properties with strong experience-independence.<sup>69</sup>

Finally, I want to consider an example of Micheal Tanner's, because it illuminates a feature, worth bringing out, of the account I have outlined of an area of objectivity: namely that on that account, objectivity is perfectly compatible with a *limited* relativism. Tanner asks us to suppose the entire population divided into two fairly equal groups, making equally many color discriminations, and whose judgements coincide everywhere, but for a systematic disa-

<sup>69</sup> Because I believe i) that realist analyses of the meaning of "X is graceful" will not do, and ii) that there are in fact no aesthetic properties with strong experience-independence, I have been concerned to show that aesthetic objectivism does not entail ontological realism with respect to aesthetic properties. Apart from that, my views about realism, phenomenism, and so on, are tangential to the present essay.

greement about the color of some specific thing or sort of thing, say crude oil. Group A calls this sort of thing blue, and cannot distinguish its color from that of the deep sea, while Group B calls this sort of thing yellow, and cannot distinguish its color from that of a ripe banana. Tanner suggests this as a case in which there would be no reference group, and so presumably, no objectivity, or at least none of the kind I have been discussing.<sup>70</sup> My inclination is to handle the example quite differently. I would say i) that there *is* a reference group in this case, namely the color reference group, which is (*ex hypothesi*) the entire population; and ii) that it is precisely because the reference group is divided as to the color of crude oil that it makes no sense to talk of "the" color of crude oil. In other words, here is a case of a thing having a number of expositional properties in the area of color, none of which is pre-eminent. (This is not to say that crude oil is "colorless".)

It is interesting to note an actual case which is very close to Tanner's hypothetical one: the case of phenolthio-urea, which tastes intensely bitter to a fairly sizable proportion of the normal and sensitive human tasters, but tastes "tasteless" (like water) to the rest. Jonathan

<sup>70</sup> Tanner, "Objectivity and Aesthetics," p. 57.

Bennett has said that in this case we cannot sensibly talk of "the" taste of the substance.<sup>71</sup> This is, of course, not to say that the substance is tasteless. (Water is tasteless. "Tasteless" is what "the" taste of water is called). It is rather to assert relativism. It is to say that the substance phenol-thio-urea has a number of expositional properties in the area of taste, none of which is pre-eminent. And that is to assert a limited relativism. But there is nothing in the assertion of relativism here that implies that the tasting of tastes is not an objective business. There is nothing implicit in the assertion of relativism here that denies the availability of a decision procedure or a reference group of observers, *even* for phenol-thio-urea. Similarly, in Tanner's hypothetical case I would suggest that the failure of the appropriate decision procedure to yield settlements in some specific and limited range of cases would not show that we hadn't any decision procedures, or even that we hadn't any referees. We assent to relativism in such isolated cases precisely because the decision procedures we *do* have fail to do their jobs.

<sup>71</sup> Jonathan Bennett, "Substance, Reality, and Primary Qualities," *The American Philosophical Quarterly*, 2 (1965), 9.

## CHAPTER V

The results of Chapter IV, and the analysis of color objectivity, move us somewhat closer to a settlement of the issue of objectivity in aesthetics. We can at least see what the implications of the colors/aesthetics analogy would be for aesthetics. We can at least see what sort of aesthetic analogue we are looking for. If the colors/aesthetics analogy has anything further to offer toward aesthetic objectivity, then what we are looking for is a reference group of observers to whose experiences we might appeal for the settlement of aesthetic disputes; and we know what some of the considerations are that will be relevant to our selection of such a group. If, as would seem likely, the aesthetically sensitive are few and far between, we will want to know how subtle the discriminations they make are, whether or not there are correlative nonaesthetic differences between objects they distinguish aesthetically, and how important or valuable their ability to make aesthetic discriminations is.

Having selected an aesthetic reference group, we would be able to identify, by reference to its members' aesthetic experiences, certain expositional aesthetic properties of an object as pre-eminent. By reference to the

aesthetic experiences of members of groups other than the reference group, we could establish objects to have additional expositional aesthetic properties, but these would have a status analogous to the dispositions that colored things have to occasion the visual experiences of the color-blind: they would be non-pre-eminent expositional aesthetic properties of the object.

When a dispute arises about an object as to whether or not a certain feature (say a color or an aesthetic feature) is among "its properties", it is with what I have called the pre-eminent expositional property that we would be concerned. Thus, where the color of an object is the one of its expositional color properties which is pre-eminent, and not any of its non-pre-eminent expositional color properties, likewise in the case of aesthetics: An object's "aesthetic properties" would be those of its expositional aesthetic properties which are pre-eminent. The non-pre-eminent expositional aesthetic properties of an object would not be among its "aesthetic properties", though they would be properties of the object in the perfectly good sense that the object would genuinely have the dispositions in question, and though they would be aesthetic in the sense that the experiences they manifest themselves in would be aesthetic, rather than

color, or olfactory, or texture ones.<sup>72</sup>

All of this depends on the relevant viability of the colors/aesthetic analogy. Because I am sympathetic to aesthetic objectivism, and also because I feel that the analogy has been traduced, I have tried so far to develop the analogy sympathetically, and to protect it against attack. In so doing, I do not present a knock-down argument for aesthetic objectivism, since I leave it open for relativists to continue to probe the colors/aesthetics analogy for fatal flaws. However, should the analogy fail, we have seen that relativism would still not be inevitable. This being so, I

<sup>72</sup> There is an interesting difference between the colors case and the aesthetic case, as regards the ways in which we might *talk about* non-pre-eminent expositional properties: Owing partly to some of the received central functions of art works, it would be much more important generally to know about and talk about the capacity of a given work to occasion aesthetic experiences in observers who are not aesthetic referees, than it is to know about or talk about the analogous capacities of objects in the area of color. We care little what non-pre-eminent expositional color properties a thing has, but we might care a great deal about the non-pre-eminent expositional aesthetic properties of a novel or a symphony. Suppose the reference group of listeners turned out not to include those who find Beethoven's music profound, but rather those who find it repititious, finding Shoënberg or Webern profound instead. Now, where we readily say of an object that it *is* red, but *only seems* grey to the color-blind observer, we might prefer to say of Beethoven's *9th*, not that it *only seems* profound to non-reference-group listeners, but that it *really is* profound *for them*. This need not disrupt the colors/aesthetics analogy: To say that the red object *only seems* grey to the color-blind observer should not be construed as denying the object's capacity to occasion a phenomenally grey experience in the color-blind observer, a capacity genuinely had by the red object; and to say that Beethoven's *9th* really is profound for some non-reference-group listeners would be consistent with denying that profundity is among its "aesthetic properties".

am content to devote this chapter to the modest task of defending the plausibility of the analogy against two sorts of objection.

One interesting outcome of Chapter IV is the notion of discriminatory capacity. This notion seems a find, for as it turns out, color sensitivity, sensitivity to smells, sensitivity to tastes, sensitivity to temperatures, relative pitch, and so on, can *all* be analyzed in terms of it. It is a bit embarrassing that discriminatory capacity did not present itself straightaway as the way to begin an analysis of *aesthetic* sensitivity. The very word "sensitivity" seems to suggest an ability, not universally shared, to differentiate. But it is also understandable that the notion of discriminatory capacity should emerge as an important one as the discussion of aesthetic sensitivity reaches advanced stages, because the notion of aesthetic sensitivity comes initially tied to the objectivity issue, which comes itself initially in rather confused shape.

It has been argued though that problems exist even for a discriminatory capacity analysis of aesthetic sensitivity, and so, problems for the further pursuit of the colors/aesthetics analogy.

One supposed problem has to do with an assymetry between colors and aesthetic features as regards discrimi-

nation tests. In the case of colors, the notion of discriminatory capacity is informed by certain straightforward and persuasive testing procedures, such as the colored-dots tests used by optometrists and hidden-labels tests such as I described above in Chapter IV. Micheal Tanner suggests that similarly straightforward testing procedures would, in aesthetics, be much less persuasive, owing to the emergence of aesthetic features.

. . . it is sensible to say that two objects differ only in respect of their colours, but not to say that two objects differ only in respect of their aesthetic properties. . . Since this is so, the ways in which we tell whether a person has acute color discrimination, and the ways in which we tell whether he has acute aesthetic perception, are markedly different in their logical character. For the best way of testing a person's colour discriminations would be e.g. to present him with a set of cards, identical in appearance except for their colouring, and get him to sort them, and then after shuffling, to re-sort them, as often and as much as we felt necessary for ruling out chance, coincidence, or whatever. This procedure is simple, straightforward, unproblematic. But unfortunately there is nothing at all like it that we can do in the aesthetic case. It is impossible to test a person's aesthetic discriminations without also testing some of his non-aesthetic discriminations. And this means that whereas the colour-tester might himself be colour-blind, and have to rely on numbers on the reverse side of the cards to see that they had been properly sorted, yet he would have no grounds for scepticism as to the objectivity of colours, the aesthetic tester, if he was himself lacking in any capacity for aesthetic discrimination, might say, "There's nothing more to all this aesthetic-properties talk than the fact that some people like some shapes, and call them 'graceful', while disliking others, which they call 'meandering'. I can see as well as they can that the shapes are *different*; but there is no further *objective* difference between them than that which anyone with normal eyesight could perceive. . .73

<sup>73</sup> Tanner, "Objectivity and Aesthetics," pp. 61-62.

The sceptical move Tanner deploys here sounds at first both plausible and devastating. However I have a measure of suspicion about the caution of Tanner's sceptic. It may be no more than a general, and (despite the appearance of astute care) uncritical fear of being taken in by a sort of "emperor's tailor". Tanner's move is not as simple as it at first appears, and I want to show how by disassembling it one may be able to divest it of some of its appeal.

i) First of all, if the scepticism goes through here, it only works initially against testing procedures as straightforward as those we in fact use for color sensitivity. It does not show that less straightforward aesthetic sensitivity tests could not be formulated which would be as persuasive as the quite straightforward color ones.

ii) But before retreating even this far, it is worth noting that while the current color-discrimination tests are both relatively simple and straightforward, they are not nearly so unproblematic as Tanner suggests. To show this I offer two thought experiments, (whose very possibility makes the straightforward simplicity of persuasive color-discrimination tests problematic).

a) Suppose every discriminable difference in color corresponded to a discriminable difference in shape, so that

a thing could not undergo a noticeable change in color without suffering in addition a noticeable change in shape. On this supposition it would be impossible to display to anyone a set of testing samples identical in every discriminable respect save color, like the below,



but only one like the below, in which both color and shape were varied.



Thus it would be impossible, on this supposition, to test a person's capacity to discriminate colors without also testing his capacity to discriminate shapes, so that a totally achromatic color-sensitivity-tester might say, "There's no more to this colors talk than the fact that some people react in one way to one shape and call it 'red', while reacting in other ways to other shapes, calling them 'yellow' or 'orange'. I can see as well as they can that the shapes are *different*, but there is no further *objective* difference between them."

The first thought experiment is intended to show that the persuasiveness of simple and straightforward tests for

color sensitivity is *not* unproblematic. On a certain, not inconceivable hypothesis, the asymmetry Tanner claims between aesthetic judgement and color attribution *vis a vis* sensitivity tests can be eliminated. Color sensitivity is left open to the same sceptical challenge as Tanner's sceptic levels against aesthetic sensitivity.

"But", it might be protested, "even though the asymmetry can be eliminated, as you say, on a certain conceivable hypothesis, the elimination of it requires, in any case, an hypothesis, and a wildly far-fetched one at that. Color differences and differences in shape are not connected as in the first hypothesis, and if they were, the world would be, to say the least, a rather different sort of place than it is. So, while you *may* have established that in a certain possible world scepticism with respect to color sensitivity would be supportable alongside scepticism with respect to aesthetic sensitivity, such scepticism with respect to color sensitivity is not in fact supportable in this world, while scepticism with respect to aesthetic sensitivity just *is*." This brings me to the second thought experiment.

b) Let us not forget that there are, if we are to believe current theories about the behavior of light, differences which correspond to and always accompany discriminable differences in color. We needn't posit a far-fetched

correspondence between color and shape differences in order to challenge Tanner's asymmetry. Since any discriminable difference in color is, so we think, necessarily accompanied by a difference in the wave lengths of reflected light, we cannot (*mutatis mutandis* from Tanner) test a person's capacity to discriminate colors, without also testing his capacity to discriminate wave lengths of light. We are nowhere near as good at discriminating wave lengths as we are at discriminating colors - and shapes. But suppose we were all physiologically so equipped as to be able to see light waves and to discriminate their lengths in Angstrom units with the naked eye. Then a totally achromatic color-sensitivity-tester, nonetheless perfectly "normal" in his ability to discriminate wave lengths, might say, "There's nothing more to this colors talk than that some people react on way to objects reflecting light of certain wave lengths and call them 'red', while reacting in other ways to objects reflecting other wave lengths, calling them 'yellow' or 'orange'. I can see as well as they can that the objects are *different* in respect of the light waves they reflect, but there is no further *objective* difference between them."

All I can so far have shown by entertaining the above hypotheses is that the persuasiveness of simple and straightforward color sensitivity tests is problematic. It

is open for Tanner, or someone following Tanner, now to suggest that *were* we so equipped as to be able to tell wave length differences with the naked eye, scepticism would be appropriate for color sensitivity *as well as* aesthetic sensitivity. This takes for granted the sense and force of Tanner's sceptic's initial move against aesthetic sensitivity, and it seems to me still that there is something odd about it.

iii) We speak of doubt (and of scepticism) as of the sort of thing that one sometimes has room for - (eg. of certainty as a condition in which there is not any room for doubt). What I want to explore now is what it is that makes room for the doubt of Tanner's sceptic about simple and straightforward sensitivity tests, and then what it is that prompts or occasions his doubt, once there is room for it. Tanner's sceptic takes, as his ostensible beginning point, a *logical* assymetry between colors and aesthetic properties: the emergence of aesthetic features. Tanner suggests that it is this *logical* assymetry that makes for the further assymetry between sensitivity test persuasivenesses. Since I suppose there *is* the logical assymetry to which Tanner refers, I wonder how it is that my thought experiments work, how it is that, on certain hypotheses, strictly symmetrical sceptical challenges can be levelled

against color sensitivity tests. I suggest that what makes the doubt in the aesthetic case possible is not the emergence of aesthetic features at all, but something which is equally present in the colors case, something which makes the doubt dubious.

Suppose we are testing for color sensitivity. A precondition for doubt about *color* sensitivity is that there be possible an alternative or correlative set of differences between test samples, a set of differences other than or additional to those the sensitivity to which we are testing for. The precondition is necessary for the doubt. The color-blind color-sensitivity-tester would have no room to doubt the performance of his subject at discriminating the test samples *by color* but for the possibility of alternative differences (shape differences, for instance) by means of which the subject *might* have been discriminating. But we can also see that the precondition is sufficient for the sceptical opening. Wherever such a possibility exists, there is room for the kind of doubt Tanner's sceptic expresses. But then we are well on the way to trivializing Tanner's sceptical move. He is not, initial appearances to the contrary, probing a *special* sceptical opening at all. Aesthetic sensitivity, so far from being a special case of vulnerability to scepticism, is on a par, not only with

color sensitivity, but with any other sort of sensitivity you care to name, as far as room for doubt goes. Tanner finds the sceptical opening an impressive feature of the aesthetic case; what impresses me is how *unimpressive* that opening in aesthetics really is. The sceptical opening is ubiquitous, mundane; in fact, it cannot in principle be closed. There is always the possibility of alternative sets of differences, so there is always room for doubt.

iv) Why is it then that Tanner probes sceptically at aesthetic sensitivity and not at color sensitivity? Perhaps it is because the sceptical opening in the aesthetic case seems an especially gaping one. Perhaps the aesthetic case seems an especially good occasion for doubt. Why should this be?

Each of my hypotheses involves, over and above the possibility of correlative sets of differences, a supposition that the possibility is actualized. The supposition that there are actual correlative differences prompts the doubt that their possibility makes room for. But as the second hypothesis makes clear, this supposition is not enough to explain Tanner's taxing aesthetics while exempting colors.

Of course there is also the logical assymetry between color talk and aesthetic talk, which highlights the sceptical opening in aesthetics. A correlation between sets of

differences is logically guaranteed in the aesthetic case, (by the emergence of aesthetic features), where it is in other cases a matter of empirical fact, and where in still other cases we have to imagine it. These logical gradations do not, however, make the sceptical move any more or less appropriate in a given case; a correlation which is certain is more possible than one which is (merely) possible.

Another part of the story involves the sensitivity-tester's supposed *direct* awareness of the alternative or correlative differences as something which occasions the doubt that there is room for. The color-blind color-sensitivity-tester would have no less room, but less *occasion*, or so it might seem, for doubt if he were not himself able *with the unaided eye* to discriminate between the test samples by shape or by wave length differences. Cf. Tanner's sceptic: "I can see as well as they can that the shapes are different. . ." In each of my hypotheses, over and above the actuality of correlative differences, it is supposed that the color-sensitivity-tester is directly aware of the correlative differences, and can pick them out with the unaided eye. But to assume a sceptical pose in such an instance is to assume quite a bit besides, for notice that the very same wave length differences, when discovered by the use of spectrometric instruments, serve to support, not to challenge, the positive findings of simple color sensi-

tivity tests.

I am tempted rather cynically to add to all this that in Tanner's passage, as in my two hypotheses, the sceptic is assumed to have a certain *insensitivity*. Tanner's sensitivity tester is supposed to be aesthetically insensitive; in my examples the color tester is supposed to be color-blind. It is interesting in this connection that scepticism seems most easily raised against a *kind*, as opposed to a heightened degree, of sensitivity. One's insensitivity might *incline* one toward scepticism about sensitivity, but it would not warrant it. I don't think we would support an analogous sort of scepticism where taste and smell differences coincide. It might be difficult to *convince* a smell-defective person, with normal taste buds, that we can smell differences between objects as well as taste them. This would provide no compelling evidence for the view that objects which differ in taste do not also differ in smell.

If Tanner's objection is generalizable and so loses force, there is a second obstacle which has its roots specifically in theory of art criticism. Numerous writers on the theory of criticism have suggested that art criticism may be logically peculiar, that it may not share certain logical features of the behavior of color talk. The peculiarities, which have occasioned reactions ranging from

Northrop Frye's attempt to rescue the cognitivity of art criticism by systematizing the art critical vocabulary, to Henri Bergson's doctrines of the absolute ineffability of the art work, and the profound futility of all verbalizing about art, are thought to involve the impossibility of saying the same art critical thing about two distinct aesthetic objects. This seems to have been behind §10 of Wittgenstein's *Lectures on Aesthetics*:

If I were a good draughtsman, I could convey an innumerable number of expressions with four strokes.



Such words as 'pompous' and 'stately' could be expressed by faces. Doing this our descriptions would be much more flexible and various than they are as expressed by adjectives. If I say of a piece of Schubert's that it is melancholy, that is like giving it a face. . . I could instead use gestures or dancing. In fact, *if we want to be exact*, we do use a gesture or a facial expression.<sup>74</sup>

And it seems to have influenced Arnold Isenberg when he noticed that

Reading criticism, otherwise than in the presence, or the direct recollection, of the objects discussed is a blank and senseless employment.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*, ed. Cyril Barrett (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), p. 10, my emphasis; for a somewhat different reading of Wittgenstein, see Micheal Tanner, "Wittgenstein and Aesthetics," *The Oxford Review*, No. 3 (Michealmas, 1966), pp. 15-16.

<sup>75</sup> Isenberg, p. 139.

and then went on somewhat gingerly to speculate that

the meaning of [even] a word like 'assonance'. . . is in critical usage never twice the same. . .<sup>76</sup>

I may be stretching usages 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.<sup>77</sup>

These speculations seem in a way natural. But taken literally they lead to the implausible position that there are no aesthetic concepts, or (what is the same thing) that description is impossible in art criticism. (I'll call this the Non-Descriptive, or ND thesis, for short). A concept, by its nature, must be multiply instantiable. But to describe something is to bring it under a universal, to say that it instantiates a concept. Therefore the use of a term as descriptive requires that it be possible to apply the term truly and without change in meaning in a plurality of cases. This may be put in terms of properties: to describe a thing as having a certain property requires that the property be shareable. Thus if one is logically barred in an area of discourse, from applying any term truly and without change in meaning in a plurality of cases, then that

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.* p. 140.

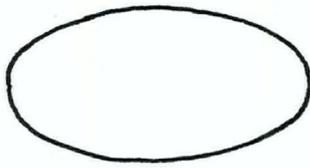
<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.* p. 137.

area involves no concepts, no shareable properties, and logically excludes description.

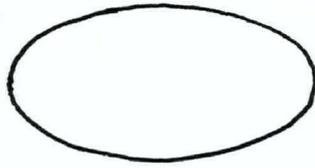
The ND thesis would have unfortunate consequences for my pursuit of objectivity in aesthetics. Though it is not *prima facie* logically impossible for there to be decision procedures for settling disputes in an area which logically excludes description, it is unlikely that such decision procedures could be much like color decision procedures. Color sensitivity may be understood as a measure of the number of color concepts at one's command. But if there are no aesthetic concepts, the analogous construal of aesthetic sensitivity seems blocked.

However, it *is prima facie* implausible to suppose a whole area of discourse, even art criticism, to exclude description. It seems that there *are* aesthetic concepts, that there are several gaudy things, several graceful things, and so on. How does such an implausible position arise?

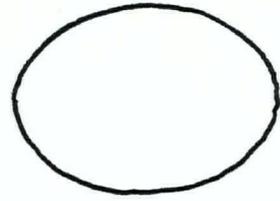
Let us distinguish between determinate and (sub-)determinable properties as follows: A determinate property is such that two objects which have it are in that respect qualitatively indistinguishable. A (sub-)determinable property is such that two objects which have it need not be in that respect qualitatively indistinguishable. Thus ellipses A, B, and C



A



B



C

share the determinable property of being shaped (non amorphous) and the sub-determinable property of being elliptical, while A and B share a determinate property different from that had by C. Thus also blueness is a sub-determinable property shared by a number of things:



a sub-set of the things which share the determinable property of being colored, and each of which has a determinate color shared only by things from which it cannot be distinguished by color.<sup>78</sup>

An object's determinate color (even if the object can be distinguished by color from everything else in the universe) is shareable. Thus in color attribution, one *describes* an object whether one is talking about its sub-

<sup>78</sup> I am following the usage of C.W.K. Mundle in his *Perception: Facts and Theories*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 133. The difference between determinable and sub-determinable properties (both on the same side of the main distinction), may be construed in a number of ways, but it involves at least a difference in level of generality.

determinable *or* its determinate color; and there are both sub-determinable *and* determinate color concepts. But there seems to be reason to suppose this might not be the case in art criticism. There seems to be reason to suppose that an object's determinate aesthetic properties might not be shareable. Isenberg believes at least this much. But when he claims that the meaning of a word like "assonance" is in critical usage "never twice the same", he apparently moves from the assumed non-shareability of determinate aesthetic properties to the non-shareability of aesthetic properties full stop. But it does not follow from there being no determinate aesthetic concepts that there are no aesthetic concepts. There might for all that be sub-determinable aesthetic concepts.

There is perhaps an explanation for this *non sequitur*. If one held that the goal of art criticism was specifically not to point out similarities between objects which share sub-determinable aesthetic properties, but rather to point out the determinate aesthetic properties of each (a supposition supported to an extent by the proliferation of metaphor in art criticism), and if one held in addition that determinate aesthetic properties were non-shareable, one might be inclined to re-interpret all reference to an object's sub-determinable aesthetic properties as part of a neces-

sarily round-about way of indicating what the object's non-shareable determinate aesthetic properties are.<sup>79</sup> However one cannot conclude from this that the logic of art criticism excludes description, for one might well say that as part of the necessarily round-about way of indicating an object's non-shareable determinate aesthetic properties, one finds oneself *describing* it in terms of its shareable sub-determinable ones.

It should be noticed that, though the ND thesis is implausible, and so far as I can see, without foundation, it is not, as some might think, incoherent. It is somewhat entrenched that all meaning and communication are essentially linguistic and therefore conventional. So it might seem that for art criticism to be meaningful (i.e. conventional) it would have to involve concepts. It would have to be possible to employ a critical expression truly and without change in meaning in a plurality of cases. So it would sound paradoxical to talk of art critical communication and of meaning in art criticism if one held that there were

<sup>79</sup> I am not terribly concerned to second guess Isenberg's train of thought. Nevertheless there is evidence to support this reading of him: eg. his treatment of Goldschieder's critical remarks on *The Burial of Count Orgaz*, "Critical Communication," p. 137; Cf. Hampshire, "Logic and Appreciation," p. 166; John Wisdom, "Things and Persons," in *Philosophy and Psychoanalysis*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953), p. 222; J.A. Passmore, "The Dreariness of Aesthetics," *Mind*, 60 (1951), 318-335.

no aesthetic concepts. One would want to know how art criticism can be written, read, and understood if objects cannot be described aesthetically.

The explanation, if it is to be had, requires a rather lengthy excursion through the theory of meaning, which cannot be undertaken here. I will only sketch the lines along which an explanation might be pursued.

A first step would be to adopt a "meaning-nominalist strategy"<sup>80</sup>, i) in which meaning in language, which *is* conventional, is treated as a species of meaning in general, ii) in which it is taken that not *all* meaning is conventional, and iii) in which an account of the notion of meaning in general is sought without appeal to either the concepts of language or convention, but rather as a function of the utterer's intentions.<sup>81</sup> The strategy, if successful, enables us to regard certain extra-linguistic performances, and even certain performances which have no conventional basis as meaningful.

<sup>80</sup> A term taken from Jonathan Bennett, "The Meaning-Nominalist Strategy," *Foundations of Language*, 10 (May, 1973), 141-168. There are of course reasons independent of my current predicament for adopting such an approach to meaning. The approach is attractive for example in that it can deal with a problem faced by more conventional theories of meaning: how to explain the origin of meaning conventions.

<sup>81</sup> See H.P. Grice, "Meaning," *The Philosophical Review*, 66 (1957), 377-388, reprinted in *Philosophical Logic*, ed. P.F. Strawson (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 39-48.

Cases of meaning need not in any way involve conventional meaning: someone who utters something giving it a certain meaning need not be conforming to any convention for utterances of that kind, nor need he be flouting or extending or launching or trying to conform to a convention.<sup>82</sup>

The next stage would involve arguing that not all linguistic meaning need be through and through linguistic, more precisely, that not all meaning in language need be through and through conventional: someone may utter words, giving them a certain meaning, yet he need not be conforming to or launching or trying to conform to any conventions for those words.

The thesis that it is possible for an expression in a language to be used on an occasion non-conventionally yet meaningfully is connected with a defense against a certain well known objection to meaning-nominalism, to the effect that meaning in language cannot be a function of utterers' intentions. The objection: If the utterer's intentions determined meaning, then an utterer could mean anything by any expression in any set of circumstances, which is absurd. In other words, it is contested that meaning-nominalism violates a certain regularity-guaranteeing principle of meaning in language.

<sup>82</sup> Bennett, "The Meaning-Nominalist Strategy," p. 141; "utterance" is here construed broadly *a la* Grice, *loc. cit.* I shall follow this usage.

[T]he principle. . . is that the conventions of one's language dictate the meaning of one's words, and intentions are powerless to intervene. . . [T]heories of meaning that take the intentions of speakers as primitive. . . must either deny the principle or show how they avoid running afoul of it.<sup>83</sup>

The defense: The objection takes it that one cannot mean just anything by any expression in any set of circumstances, and of course this is true. But this fact about language becomes forceful against meaning-nominalism *only* if one can, by contrast, *intend* to mean just anything by any expression in any set of circumstances. But this too is impossible,<sup>84</sup> because language *is* conventional, because of what a convention is (a behavioral regularity founded on a network of mutual knowledge<sup>85</sup>), and because of the following connection between intentions and beliefs: In order for a man to intend to X he must believe it to be possible for him to X. Specifically, in the meaning-nominalist program, in order for a man to intend to mean by S that P, he would have to believe it to be possible for him to produce in his audience, through the Gricean mechanism, the acquisition . . .

<sup>83</sup> Keith S. Donnellan, "Putting Humpty Dumpty Together Again," *The Philosophical Review*, 77 (1968), p. 203.

<sup>84</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 212; Bennett, "The Meaning-Nominalist Strategy," p. 166.

<sup>85</sup> Steven R. Schiffer, *Meaning*, (London; Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 30-32.

of the belief that P by uttering S. But since one cannot generally believe contrary to what one knows, it will no more be possible for a man (who knows the relevant meaning conventions) to simply intend to mean "condominium" by the word "stove" than it will be for a man (who knows about the birds and the bees) to intend to metamorphose into a butterfly.

This then is how the general intractability of language is *compatible* with meaning-nominalism. But the meaning-nominalist program is not trivialized by virtue of this compatibility, because the fact that what one can intend to mean is partly a function of what meaning conventions there are does not entail that one cannot on an occasion use an expression in a language in a non-conventional, yet meaningful way. One has to believe it to be possible for the expression to mean what it does not conventionally mean, but this requires only that one make it possible for an audience to acquire, through the utterance of the expression, a belief not conventionally associated with it.

[O]ne cannot simply choose to mean by S that P, yet that does not imply that there is any S and P such that one could not mean by S that P in some circumstances. That any sentence *could* carry any meaning, if the conditions were right, is essential to the service that convention renders; for what a meaning convention does is just to make the conditions right for S to mean that P. One might make the general point by saying that for any given S and P it would be possible,

after suitable 'stage-setting' to utter S and mean by it that P.<sup>86</sup>

There might be a number of ways of clearing away otherwise operative meaning conventions. Some might themselves be conventional: one might just *say* that in what he is about to say, certain normal meaning conventions are to be disregarded. Other indicators, gestures, winks, vocal intonations, might be employed in a Gricean way to suspend conventions. (Of course, gestures, etc. can be conventional too,) The suspension of a meaning convention can make way either for the substitution of another convention or for a Gricean act of communication.

I see nothing logically incoherent in the idea of a whole area of discourse, in which every predicate, say, had to be understood by Gricean means. This is apparently what would be involved in art criticism, on the ND thesis. But though it doesn't seem to me *logically* impossible to suspend meaning conventions on such a grand scale, the stage-setting process which would be necessary would be a gargantuan undertaking, an obstacle to art critical communication which, for all practical purposes, might as well be insurmountable. Thus a second way in which the ND thesis is implausible.

<sup>86</sup> Bennett, "The Meaning-Nominalist Strategy," p. 167.

The more restricted claim, that determinate aesthetic properties are not shareable, or that there are no determinate aesthetic concepts, is free of all the liabilities I have charged to the ND thesis, and meaning nominalism may well illuminate the role of describing an object's shareable sub-determinable aesthetic properties in indicating its non-shareable determinate ones, if in fact that is how art criticism proceeds. However, even the restricted claim stands in need of defense. A defense might be based on the supposed radical uniqueness of individual works of art, but we would need to satisfy a complaint like Strawson's.

[R]emarks. . . by writers who stress the individuality of the work of art, and the non-conceptual character of aesthetic appreciation, have this in common: that they seem true but mysterious. One wants to ask *why* we can have no general principles of art. . . One wants also to ask in what special sense the work of art is unique, individual, unrepeatable.<sup>87</sup>

It may be possible to hold (perhaps as an explanation for the emergence of aesthetic properties) what could be called an "organic theory of determinate aesthetic properties", to the effect roughly that any determinate aesthetic property of a thing depends on the totality of its aesthetically relevant nonaesthetic properties, so that a change in any of the aesthetically relevant nonaesthetic properties would

<sup>87</sup> P.F. Strawson, "Aesthetic Appraisal and Works of Art," *The Oxford Review*, No. 3, (Michealmas, 1966), pp. 8-9.

necessarily result in a change in the determinate aesthetic property. Then if the criteria for identity among aesthetic objects were tied directly to the totality of the aesthetically relevant non-aesthetic properties of a thing, it would follow that no two aesthetic objects could have the same determinate aesthetic property:

1. Suppose two aesthetic objects have the same determinate aesthetic property.
2. They would, on the organic theory, have exactly the same bunch of aesthetically relevant nonaesthetic properties.
3. But then they would meet the criteria for identity among aesthetic objects.
4. They would therefore be one and the same aesthetic object.
5. Therefore we may not, on pain of contradiction, suppose two aesthetic objects to have the same determinate aesthetic property. We may not, in other words, suppose determinate aesthetic properties to be shareable.

Whether this defense will stand up depends upon the viability of the organic theory, and also on the basis of numerical identity among aesthetic objects. The connection, supposed in the above argument, between identity and the totality of aesthetically relevant nonaesthetic properties is attractive mainly for seeming to shed light on the idea of a *special* uniqueness had by aesthetic objects,<sup>88</sup>

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

But it has certain awkward consequences as well, not the least of which is the need to detach the aesthetic object as a separate ontological item from the physical object, and to countenance cases of multiple physical objects' being "associated with" a single aesthetic object.

These are matters I will not explore further however, since I have already reached the modest goal of this concluding chapter. I set out to defend the colors/aesthetics analogy against two kinds of objection, one of which involves what I have called the ND thesis. Having argued that the ND thesis is implausible, it is enough for me to note that the more restricted view outlined above, that there are no determinate aesthetic concepts, *and* its negation, that there *are* determinate aesthetic concepts, are compatible, where the ND thesis was not, with what has been *my* thesis: that the colors/aesthetics analogy plausibly suggests both an account of aesthetic sensitivity and an answer to aesthetic relativism.

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