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**The Life of the Aesthetically Virtuous**

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of

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in

PHILOSOPHY

by

**Alexandra Grundler**

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**Dissertation Abstract:** The Life of the Aesthetically Virtuous by Alexandra Grundler

Philosophers working on aesthetic normativity have focused almost exclusively on individual aesthetic judgments, ignoring the quality of aesthetic lives overall. I argue that in the aesthetic domain, we ought to cultivate virtuous aesthetic characters, and not merely aim to make correct token aesthetic judgments. I develop a theory of virtuous aesthetic character and then use it to address two older debates. The first debate concerns the normative constraints on appreciation. If we are interested in cultivating aesthetic character, ought the objects of aesthetic appreciation be experienced or judged from a disinterested, universal perspective or based on personal interest or idiosyncrasy? I argue that disinterest and idiosyncratic or personal reflection are not mutually exclusive: the virtue of disinterest enables rich aesthetic experiences, supports a flourishing aesthetic life, and actually promotes profound personal (even idiosyncratic) self-reflection.

The second, older debate concerns what kind of objects ought to be sought out for aesthetic experiences. Should we seek out experiences of nature, fine art, or everyday objects if our goal is to cultivate a virtuous aesthetic character? I assert that all of these categories of objects are able to occasion the right kind of aesthetic experience that cultivates a virtuous character. However, the object must be viewed in a way that is most typically reserved for the way that one views the objects of nature

—that is, as empty of determinate purpose, reason, or end. That way, the viewer is able to engage in the process of appreciation without practical constraints. She is thereby more receptive to the indeterminate purposes of the object of appreciation, and able to meet the demands issued by the object. In doing these things, I argue that she cultivates the virtues of receptivity and imagination. By coming to these questions from the perspective of virtue aesthetics, I am able to advance these debates in novel and productive ways. Of course, many of these ideas are recognizably Kantian in origin. I don't intend for this account to be merely a defense of Kant (though a reading and defense is included), but rather an original neo-Kantian account. I am asking a question, however, that Kant never asked: "what reason do we have to prefer one aesthetic life over another?" I will show why my account of cultivating a virtuous aesthetic character is the best answer to this question.

## **Acknowledgments**

Graduate school has been such an amazing journey. The opportunity to spend each day reflecting on the vast beauty of Nature was a blessing in and of itself, and one I intend to keep as a staple of my life. The fact that this reflection occurred mostly while surrounded by the magnificent, ancient redwoods was more than inspiring. On top of that, the people that I have met in this grand, academic forest of UCSC have challenged me, supported me, and encouraged me to a degree I had neither experienced nor expected—I owe so much thanks to my committee and to my cohort for this. I owe special gratitude to my advisor, Abe Stone, for always believing in my ideas. I also could not have done this without the love of my family and my wonderful partner, Devon Hayes. Most importantly, I owe all my life and dedicate all my work to Love and Beauty Himself, to Jesus Christ, the eternal Tao, the Lord my God.

## Overview Chapter One

The first chapter of my dissertation is an argument for why we ought to cultivate good aesthetic characters and a systematic account of what aesthetic virtue entails. Virtue is the reliable disposition to respond appropriately to the world. One who possesses aesthetic virtues is disposed to act well. My account of aesthetic virtue encompasses both cognitive and affective elements. One benefit to an account of aesthetic virtue is that it highlights what other theories often neglect—that is, the dispositions and cultivated habits of the aesthetic appreciator. Debates concerning the structure of aesthetic judgments and the categories of objects to which the term ‘aesthetic’ belongs gain new meaning under this lens. As Dominic McIver Lopes puts it, one good reason to develop an account of aesthetic virtue is “that it helps solve otherwise intractable problems in aesthetics.”<sup>1</sup> The most important question of these, as far as I am concerned, is how to make sense of the quality of one’s life overall. In this chapter, I offer an argument for the importance of motivations in one’s aesthetic life. I also critique the virtue of art account of Peter Goldie, claiming that he appreciates the main claim of virtue aesthetics also in a much different way.<sup>2</sup> In contrast, I argue that aesthetic virtues are necessary for and partially constitutive of a

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<sup>1</sup> Lopes (2008).

<sup>2</sup> I discuss Lopes (2008; 2018) and Goldie (2008) but I also differ with Roberts (2018), and Pouivet (2018) on the kind of engagement we ought to take with the aesthetic object to live a flourishing aesthetic life overall (determinate cognitive tasks versus indeterminate non-cognitive tasks). See also Woodruff (2001) on motivations, and King (2017), Wilson (2020), and Ransom (2019) on specific aesthetic virtues.



flourishing life. Where these thinkers offer neo-Moorean and neo-Aristotlean accounts respectively, I offer a Neo-Kantian account.

I argue that cultivating aesthetic character leads to flourishing across the inter-related domains of one's life. I give an account of how an individual can develop the capacity to recognize and respond to the robust aesthetic dimension of her life. The fully aesthetically virtuous person is absolutely receptive to the aesthetic objects and aesthetic qualities of her experience. Actively, she takes on and responds to the demands of the aesthetic object. The fully aesthetically virtuous is concerned with her growth of self-knowledge and moral cultivation on a global or agential level; however, she is concerned only with the experience itself on a local level of aesthetic appreciation.

Aesthetic character can neither be reduced to nor separated from moral character. Cultivating a habit that strengthens one's moral character will also strengthen one's aesthetic character, and vice versa. For example, part of how we cultivate the ability to be receptive and respond accordingly to the aesthetic object is by utilizing the habits we have built in our moral relationships. We cultivate our sense of how to appreciate an aesthetic object partly by drawing on our sense of how to treat a person—that is, we cultivate our relationship with objects of beauty by cultivating our moral interaction with others. The aesthetically virtuous character cultivates awareness and receptivity by asking first what she might learn about and

from the object of appreciation instead of first asserting her own beliefs, desires, or projects unto that engagement.

As stated earlier, I am interested in the motivations that an aesthetic appreciator has as an attentional focus in local aesthetic judgments as well as the motivations that drive her aesthetic life as a whole. The quality of individual aesthetic judgments is important partly because of how it builds habits in the aesthetic appreciator. We are not able to judge aesthetic character by looking at any one token aesthetic engagement. Instead, we look at the habitual values and motivations that one takes in her aesthetic engagements.

## **Overview Chapter Two**

There have long been tensions surrounding the role of disinterest in aesthetic experience. Proponents of disinterest say that aesthetic appreciation must be from a viewpoint independent of one's own personal needs and desires. Critics of disinterest point to the intuition that aesthetic experience is made meaningful, in part, by the personal needs and desires it, in some way, responds to or fulfills. I hope to establish that many of the tensions that surround the role of disinterest in aesthetic experience or judgment are a result of the conflation of two distinct motivational spheres. We need to look at both the motivations that govern the local acts of appreciation as well as the motivations that inspire such acts at a more global level. Interest *absolutely* has a role in the flourishing of one's aesthetic life at a global level. One ought to seek out experiences of beauty and sublimity and one ought to notice the positive—perhaps

even life-altering—impact it has on the self as a unique individual. Without a doubt, our aesthetic experiences are shaped by our idiosyncratic situations that entail interests. One living in a metropolitan city simply has more access and opportunity to go to museums whereas one living in a rural setting has more access to nature. This is a purposely simple example to serve this demonstration quickly. There are, of course, a myriad of complex ways one's personhood shapes her aesthetic life. These intuitions motivate criticism against the theory of disinterest as a necessary criterion of aesthetic experience or judgment—it seems that disinterest is flying in the face of this intuition. Some of our situation is chosen for us, but many of our choices are intentional. Many believe that we ought to view art in a way that reflects our personal choices instead of neglects them, but, on the other hand, disinterest as a criterion for aesthetic judgment might be compelling in that it seems to remove the biases that can sway the aesthetic appreciator. Even still, many argue that it simply is not worth the cost of forfeiting a genuine (and, perhaps, the greatest) value that aesthetic experience affords us.

I motivate a reading of disinterest that understands it as a kind of aesthetic virtue. I show that disinterest ought to be cultivated habitually in aesthetic engagements whilst recognizing that it is not only compatible with, but actually promotes, the global interest of the aesthetic agent as a unique individual. I do this by first revisiting Kant's discussion of disinterest and motivating his position. I then discuss three objections toward disinterest of three separate natures, as offered by

George Dickie, Hilde Hein and Carolyn Korsmeyer, and Nick Riggle. These objections are, respectively, theoretical, empirical, and normative. Each of these objections, I argue, are unified in that they conflate the problem of motivations on a global level with the problem of motivations on a local level. When we conflate these motivational spheres, I argue that our aesthetic engagements are made disingenuous. Instead, I argue that our aesthetic engagements have self-effacing ends. That is, we ought not pursue, or set our attentional focus on, the global end of self-knowledge in any token aesthetic engagement.<sup>3</sup> I also argue for a different principle of individuation of the mental states that comprise an aesthetic experience. I show that the first moment is that of passivity and reception and the second is that of activity and reflection. Both of these moments are able to be strengthened by the practice of habituation. Once we aptly parse out the separate motivational spheres and separate moments of aesthetic appreciation, we find a richer normative account of aesthetic life—one that gives disinterest its proper place.<sup>4</sup>

### **Overview Chapter Three**

I argue that all objects, despite their conceptual category, are able to be appreciated aesthetically, and are thus able to contribute to the habituation of aesthetic virtues. What is crucial is that one has the right interpretative stance. That is, one

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<sup>3</sup> Stocker (1976), Parfit (1984), Keller (2007), and Nguyen (forthcoming)

<sup>4</sup> Critiques and discussions of disinterestedness that I address in the dissertation: Dickie (1964), Brand and Devereaux (2003), Riggle (2016), Eaton (2010), Hein and Korsmeyer (1990), and van der berg (2019).

must interpret the object as empty of any determinate purpose. What precisely the individual object of appreciation is, or to what conceptual category it belongs, is not at issue. It is the form of judgment or experience that ought to be habituated. The fully virtuous aesthetic character pursues a variety of aesthetic experiences, and thus contributes to her receptivity.

Some see a tension between the disinterested judgment and the judgment of everyday objects. For example, Dowling (2010) argues that interest is precisely what separates judgments of art from the everyday objects of our experience. Otherwise—and this is his contention with Irvin (2008)—the term ‘aesthetic’ becomes a mere equivocation with ‘pleasure.’ I have a unique way of toeing the line between these two thinkers. In my account, I am able to grant Irvin the pervasiveness of aesthetic experiences in the everyday as well as grant Dowling the normative demand that separates aesthetic experiences from merely agreeable ones. That is, I am able to show that even everyday objects can and ought to be met habitually with disinterested attention.

I admit that the virtuous interpretative stance may come more readily in some when they appreciate certain categories of aesthetic objects; however, I show that one ought to habitually cultivate the virtuous interpretative stance toward aesthetic objects of different kinds. My account promotes inclusivity of aesthetic experiences, but also respects individuality. By respecting individuality, I realize that not everyone will be consistently immersed in acts of appreciation regarding the same aesthetic objects. I

am thus also able to answer Riggle's (2015) concern that an account of an aesthetic ideal might jeopardize the individual's aesthetic character. The virtuous aesthetic character appreciates many aesthetic objects, but that is not to say that certain ones do not mean more to her than others do. That is, the fully aesthetically virtuous person is absolutely receptive to the aesthetic objects in her life. She exercises the virtue of imagination when she actively reflects on the objects of appreciation and when she creates objects of beauty herself. Her local motivations are object-directed, no matter what category to which that object belongs. She still has a global or agential reason to seek out additional experiences of the kinds of aesthetic objects she loves most.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> This contributes to the discussion of everyday aesthetics in Irvin (2009) and Saito (2008).

## Chapter One: On Aesthetic Virtue

*“Beauty is the mark God sets upon virtue.”- Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nature*

### Introduction

Just as a good character requires the cultivation of moral virtues, a good character also requires the cultivation of aesthetic virtues. Aesthetic virtues are necessary for and partially constitutive of a flourishing human life. I will develop what I mean by this throughout this chapter and throughout the dissertation overall, but for now, I will say that this theory is purposefully broadly articulated as a theory of aesthetic virtue and not a “virtue of art.” I am offering a theory that is relevant for one’s experiences of art, nature, and everyday objects, but most importantly, it applies to *everyone*, even those that might not think of themselves as particularly artistic. I am not concerned with some excellent *thing* that someone can create. I am not concerned merely with what it means to be an excellent musician or painter. I am truly concerned with virtue—the excellence of *being*. I am concerned with what it means to be an excellent person.

The claim that aesthetic virtues are partially constitutive of a flourishing life is a fairly fundamental assumption in the virtue aesthetics literature. Instead of arguing for this point directly, my first chapter will set my account apart from two other thinkers (Dominic McIver Lopes and Peter Goldie) in virtue aesthetics that assert this claim. Though it is clear that these thinkers care about excellence, I hope to show that they care about excellence in a more focused sense. These thinkers are

concerned with the production and consumption of art, even if broadly construed. They are focused on what it means to be an excellent appreciator of beauty and an excellent creator of beauty. Though they both explicitly claim the relationship between cultivating these virtues of art and well-being, I will explain why their accounts appreciate this commitment in a different way than mine does. As I have said before, their commitment to artistic excellence is undeniable, but they doubt aesthetic virtue's role in one's character overall.

My theory, on the other hand, does commit to aesthetic virtue's role in one's character. I argue for and maintain that aesthetic virtues are essential for one's good life. My demand will be to demonstrate what makes my virtue theory one distinctly about aesthetics, especially considering that I have already stated explicitly that I will not necessarily be privileging artists or art-lovers in my account. My answer, in short, is that my aesthetic virtue theory is not *distinctly* about aesthetics. As we will see, the distinction that is particularly at stake is between the aesthetic and the ethical virtues. The worry is two-fold: on the one hand, if the aesthetic virtues look nothing like moral virtues, then there is pressure to demonstrate that the aesthetic virtues are truly virtues. On the other hand, if the aesthetic virtues are too similar, then the pressure is to demonstrate that we are not just talking about moral virtues, and we are truly talking about aesthetic virtues. Unlike the other thinkers that I will be discussing, I do not think there is a distinct "moral sphere" and an "aesthetic sphere," nor a distinct "moral character" and an "aesthetic character." Each of us leads exactly one life, and



to discuss what makes that life good is to consider that life as a whole, not just a fragment of it. All of life is subsumed under both the moral and the aesthetic, and one's character is developed by cultivating both moral and aesthetic virtues.

That being said, I will be focused on aesthetic virtues that differ from the other (moral and intellectual) virtues in a way that make them distinct. The three aesthetic virtues that I will focus on are disinterest, receptivity, and imagination. Each of these has to do with the agent's dispositional motivations and values. Unlike the more commonly discussed moral virtues that have to do with dispositions towards actions often involving other people (for example, courage and honesty), the aesthetic virtues that I will be focused on are subtler and concerned more with perception than action.<sup>6</sup> The line that I am drawing is thin, and more meant for orientation than for rule. I do not mean to deny the role of courage and honesty in *aesthetic* engagements or the role of disinterest, receptivity, and imagination in *moral* engagements.<sup>7</sup> Again, in my eyes, that is not the right way to draw the distinction between aesthetics and morality. There has been a lot of attention and discussion around ethical consideration in "aesthetic matters" (for example, the moral content of an artwork or the intended audience). Later in this paper, I bring attention to the aesthetic consideration of "moral matters." The way we perceive things influences the way we

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<sup>6</sup> Consider the etymology of the Greek *aisthesthai*. When we are talking about aesthetics, we are always in some way talking about perception by the senses.

<sup>7</sup> See King (2017), Wilson (2020), and Ransom (2019) on other specific aesthetic virtues.

act. I hope to show later that aesthetic virtues are valuable for the cultivation of ethical virtues. Aesthetic virtues are not, however, merely instrumentally valuable.

I will do this, in part, by explaining the philosophical lineage that I am working from and how that provides unique and unprecedented tools for virtue aesthetics. Where others offer virtue aesthetics accounts that are Neo-Aristotelian or Neo-Moorean, I offer an account that is Neo-Kantian.

I will begin with discussing the assumed main claim of virtue aesthetics: one ought to cultivate aesthetic virtues because they are partially constitutive of a flourishing life. This implies that the anaesthete could not live a flourishing life. The acts of aesthetic creation and appreciation are fundamental and necessary components to living well. The exact nature of these aesthetic practices will be the focus of chapter three, but for now, I will repeat that my view of aesthetic creation and appreciation is broadly construed and in no way limited to fine arts. Again, I will take it as an assumption that a life that lacks any aesthetic consideration is not a good one.

### **Section One: On Lopes' Neo-Moorean Virtue Account**

In Dominic McIver Lopes' "Virtues of Art: Good Taste," he offers an alternative to Goldie's Neo-Aristotelian model of good taste. He calls his approach "neo-Moorean."<sup>8</sup> I, like Lopes, think that "one good reason to develop such an

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<sup>8</sup> Lopes (2008) 197.

account is that it helps solve otherwise intractable problems in aesthetics.”<sup>9</sup> I would like to adopt his taxonomy, and his project, and offer another approach to aesthetic virtue. Call my approach “Neo-Kantian.”

Peter Goldie holds that virtues of art are non-instrumentally good, but remains silent as to whether they are intrinsically good. Lopes commits to the position that good taste is intrinsically good. I would like to set the debate between intrinsic and non-instrumental value aside for the time being, and assert that I also at least think aesthetic virtues are non-instrumentally good.

Before I begin my attempt at answering the question at hand, I would like to take a moment to clarify the question. The question that Lopes and Goldie seem to be answering, at least in these particular papers, is “why does art matter?” Answering from a concept of virtue solves intractable problems because, as Lopes puts it, “in the traditional order of explanation, the question does not even get off the ground, since it is taken as basic that art (or beauty) matters.”<sup>10</sup>

I would like to complicate things by suggesting that we pull the concepts of art and beauty apart here. If it is the case that there are beautiful things other than art, the questions are not entirely the same. I call my approach Neo-Kantian, in part, because my answer to the question “what is beautiful?” depends on the subject’s

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<sup>9</sup> Lopes (2008) 197.

<sup>10</sup> Lopes (2008) 209.

response. What I am most interested in, for the time being, is the Kantian subject's characteristic traits of disinterestedness and imagination.

While I would like to offer mine as an alternative approach, it is only fair that I admit that it is actually an approach to a slightly different question. Where Goldie and Lopes are offering "virtues of art," I will be offering an aesthetic virtue theory more broadly construed. Even a "virtue of art" theory has a problem of "fragmentation," as Lopes puts it:

Consider the teeming variety of activities listed above—bringing about, maintaining, saving from destruction, prizing, contemplating, valuing, caring about, accepting, supporting, affirming, encouraging, protecting, guarding, praising, seeking, embracing, serving, adoring, revering, and so forth. These activities target objects of many kinds in many different contexts. People appreciate songs by listening intently for their large-scale structural properties, by singing along, or by dancing; and they appreciate paintings by scrutinizing them visually, copying them, using them as motifs in new paintings, or writing ekphrastic verse.

These activities only become more fragmented when you add in appreciative practices of beauty in nature and the everyday. Then among this list you might add hiking, plating a week-night meal, birding, dressing for an event, braiding a child's hair, and so forth.

Still before attempting answering the question, I would like to look at how Goldie and Lopes answer *their* question (even if the question is different). Goldie writes, "what we have in artistic activity is an intimate awareness of the *permanent possibility* of emotional sharing."<sup>11</sup> Lopes questions whether all art allows for such

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<sup>11</sup> Goldie (2008) 193.

interpersonal emotional sharing and offers an amendment to the Neo-Aristotelian approach. While he asserts that the Neo-Aristotelian approach to this question is bound under an independent conception of human well-being, he thinks the question has multiple answers. He writes, “some art matters just because it figures in emotional sharing, some art matters just because it focuses contemplation of perceptible structures, some art matters just because it embodies profound truths, some art matters just because it is a break from the daily grind, and so on.”<sup>12</sup>

In light of this problem of fragmentation, Lopes offers an alternative answer. For those that question whether a theory of appreciation can be extracted from an account of human well-being, they might opt for Lopes’ neo-Moorean approach that states that “episodes of good taste and the character trait of good taste are intrinsically good because beautiful states of affairs are intrinsically good.”<sup>13</sup> Lopes’ virtue of art theory is not grounded in an independent account of human well-being.

Lopes uses what he calls a “consensus” definition or description of virtue: “a deep and enduring acquired excellence of a person, involving a characteristic motivation to produce a desired end and reliable success in bringing about that end.”<sup>14</sup> So far, Lopes’ taxonomy includes neo-Aristoteleans and neo-Mooreans. As I said before, I would like to offer another account that is neo-Kantian. To be sure, I am a

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<sup>12</sup> Lopes (2008) 209.

<sup>13</sup> Lopes (2008) 210.

<sup>14</sup> Lopes (2008) 200.

Neo-Kantian not in the sense that I agree with any and all interpretations of Kant, but that I endorse at least one specific interpretation and extension of Kantian thought—the one that I put forth. I would like to put my interpretation of neo-Kantian aesthetic virtue on the table by discussing what is involved in the “characteristic motivation to produce a desired end” for Kant.

As I see it, there are two ways to answer this question of motivation for Kantian ethics, and they lead us in very different directions. On one hand, we have a picture of the, perhaps somewhat curmudgeonly, dutiful law-keeper. Acting in some way because you are inclined to act that way or because you desire to act that way does not have the moral content for Kant that an action done from duty does. That action is merely in accordance with duty.<sup>15</sup> It is better, sure, to follow the moral law because it is the moral law (even when you do not *want* to), than it is to follow it based merely on inclinations. But is a life full of this kind of action the *good* life? Is it even the sign of a truly moral life?

If the reading stops there, we are hardly any closer to an account that pulls any weight for virtue aesthetics. I hope to show that a neo-Kantian aesthetic virtue account can still, like a neo-Aristotelean one, be grounded in human well-being. I do not mean to suggest that virtue is the same for Kant as it is for Aristotle, but at least for both of them human well-being involves our moral character in some way.

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<sup>15</sup> Kant (2017) 8.

In *Religion Within the Bounds of Mere Reason*, Kant writes that virtue is the “firmly grounded disposition strictly to fulfill one’s duty.”<sup>16</sup> Of course, this definition or description of virtue does not yet include well-being. I hope to show that the virtue of the imagination is what bridges the gap. The imagination plays a crucial role in one’s virtuous life. When we encounter virtue in the world, we see that “morally oriented reason (through the imagination) calls the sensibilities into play.”<sup>17</sup> Reason relies on the imagination to provide sensible symbols for beneficent consequences. Kant even mentions what the symbol of virtue itself is—the life of joy. We see here that, for Kant, the imagination is not just necessary for a moral life, the imagination is also necessary to reflect on one’s own morality.

We are not able to definitively know our own reasons for actions, let alone the reason of another agent’s actions. However, the imagination symbolically presents our lives in order to better know the state of our moral vocation. The aesthetic character of virtue is “courageous and hence joyous” rather than “fear-ridden and dejected.”<sup>18</sup> The fear-ridden and dejected man harbors a secret hatred for the moral law that show that his actions are disingenuous. On the other hand, “a heart joyous in the *compliance* with its duty (not just complacency in the *recognition* of it) is the sign

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<sup>16</sup> Kant, (2019) 6 : 23 footnote.

<sup>17</sup> Kant, (2019) 6 : 23.

<sup>18</sup> Kant, (2019) 6 : 23.

of genuineness in virtuous disposition”<sup>19</sup> This joyous temperament is a sign that one has truly attained a love for the good, in Kant’s words, that one has “incorporated the good into one’s maxim.”<sup>20</sup>

The point of this discussion is not at all to get into an interpretative debate about Kantian ethics. The point, for me, is to complicate what a characteristic motive is. The characteristic motive of the, perhaps somewhat curmudgeonly, dutiful law-keeper is an explicit or direct motive to fulfill the moral law. The virtuous agent, the joyful but just as dutiful law-keeper, does not strike me this way. Her heart is oriented toward the good in a different way.

And here is where my view becomes neo-Kantian in another way—that is, it borrows from traditions in a lineage of Kantian thought that are perhaps more explicit about the relationship between beauty and goodness. I see the virtuous agent as being oriented toward the beautiful as she is oriented toward the good. For Kant, the relationship is still evident. Beauty is a symbol of morality, and the imagination plays a key role in the relationship between the beautiful and the good.<sup>21</sup> For now, I am concerned with the role that the imagination plays in one’s engagement with beauty and goodness.

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<sup>19</sup> Kant (2019) 6 : 23.

<sup>20</sup> Kant (2019) 6 : 23.

<sup>21</sup> Kant (2009) § 59.



The first picture of Kantian morality that I drew—of total lawfulness—is half of the story. But the other half is the half of freedom. That play relationship between freedom and lawfulness is evident in both moral judgments and aesthetic judgments. It is part of what makes the forms of the beautiful judgment and the moral judgment analogous, and thus what makes beauty a symbol of morality.<sup>22</sup>

In my eyes, complicating the story of the characteristic motive also complicates the question of “why beauty matters?” All the goods that come from aesthetic engagement— emotional sharing, the discovery of profound truths about oneself and the world around you—are good. However, pursuing them directly effaces them. The true curmudgeon is not truly moral. True emotional sharing over an aesthetic engagement comes from a place of vulnerability only possible when the imagination is free. I am not trying to imply that Lopes or Goldie suggest that we do directly pursue things like emotional sharing, but instead offer an account that nuances the problem in a unique way.

Being otherwise oriented toward beauty and toward the good allows you to act from that disposition without such an explicit motivation. The absence of such motivation is what allows the imagination to engage freely. The imagination plays freely when the form of the beautiful is presented as purposive without a purpose.

I solve Lopes’ fragmentation problem in a different way. The account that I offer answers the fragmentation problem (even with the additional activities that I

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<sup>22</sup> Kant (2009) 5 : 354.

introduced) by suggesting that these are all activities of the imagination. Any other answer to why these matter, in my account, needs to be secondary, in order not to self-efface the imaginative play.

A decade after his article of “Virtues of Art,” Lopes released a compelling book, *Being for Beauty*. In it, he details one major problem in aesthetic theory: the misidentification of aesthetic value with hedonic value. Lopes is interested in offering an alternative account of aesthetic value that does not rely on hedonism.

Lopes offers what he terms a “network theory” where “the point of exercising aesthetic agency is to succeed at some aesthetic task out of competence.”<sup>23</sup> Instead of placing aesthetic value in the pleasure of appreciation, Lopes places it in the activity of the expert.<sup>24</sup> He writes, “experts have what it takes to get it right. They do well because they tune in aesthetic value. In their agency, we see the difference aesthetic value makes.”<sup>25</sup> While I certainly agree that the value of aesthetic experience is not simply hedonistic, I differ on the characterization that aesthetic value is evaluated by a measure of the competency of aesthetic acts.

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<sup>23</sup> Lopes (2019) 155.

<sup>24</sup> Lopes (2018) describes “aesthetic hedonism: an aesthetic value is a property of an item that stands in constitutive relation to finally valuable experiences of subjects who correctly understand the item.” 9.

<sup>25</sup> Lopes (2018) 15.

On my account, agents are aesthetically virtuous when they possess dispositions of disinterest, receptivity, and imagination and habitually enact those dispositions. On Lopes' account, agents are aesthetically virtuous when they possess dispositions to achieve and enact those dispositions excellently.<sup>26</sup>

What exactly does this evaluation of excellence look like for Lopes? Lopes holds that we can evaluate aesthetic acts without consideration of the agent's motivation for the act. What matters, according to Lopes, is that the act was done according to aesthetic reasons. A reason is aesthetic if, had the aesthetic features of a work been different, the agent would have acted differently.<sup>27</sup>

Lopes' virtue theory selects a different group of agents out as being virtuous than mine does. If someone has a subjective feeling of fulfillment with their aesthetic life, but they are not "positively engaging in projects that are correctly take[n] to have objective worth," they are not achieving. The bar is not necessarily lower for me, but different. If one never "achieves" on Lopes' standard, I still see how she could be aesthetically virtuous. The point of aesthetic life, in my eyes, is not to meet some

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<sup>26</sup> Lopes hesitantly uses the word "virtue" in "Being for Beauty" because he is aware that there are formulations of virtue theory that would not fit his theory. I will discuss later where he explicitly states that he nonetheless intends his network theory to be a virtue theory.

<sup>27</sup> Lopes (2018) 36

external standard of achievement but to be engaged in something that is meaningful to your life overall. The virtues that I will argue for allow that.<sup>28</sup>

Lopes also includes among his aesthetic experts (a term that for Lopes is roughly synonymous with, but much more commonly used, than ‘aesthetically virtuous’) those that are aesthetically indifferent. Lopes discusses two cases where the aesthetic agents in question are experts in their fields and yet are completely indifferent to their work. “In both cases,” Lopes writes, “aesthetic experts both have and routinely act upon aesthetic reasons. What actually motivates them is a mixture of accurate aesthetic evaluations with non-aesthetic desires.”<sup>29</sup> According to Lopes, these indifferent aesthetic agents have reason to continue acting as they are because they are able to *achieve* aesthetically. It does not matter that the agents lack motivation and value for these acts or that these acts are not contributing to the agents’ flourishing. Lopes writes, “we can sacrifice what we want on the altar of achievement.”<sup>30</sup>

In other words, Lopes suggests that certain individuals have reason to act even if this means that their acts leave them cold and they are completely alienated from

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<sup>28</sup> Matherne (2021) and Nguyen (2019) also think that the meaning of aesthetic life cannot be captured by achievement.

<sup>29</sup> Lopes (2018) 150.

<sup>30</sup> Lopes (2018) 151.

their work.<sup>31</sup> Lopes claims to offer a virtue theory of aesthetics, but he places value in actions rather than the agent. How, then, does Lopes reconcile network theory—a theory that allows for aesthetic indifference—with virtue theory? He explains in his following passage:

A theory of aesthetic value should ultimately help us to make sense of how our aesthetic commitments matter to us as individuals. A theory need not convince someone with no aesthetic commitments to acquire some; it is enough that it makes sense of the specific commitments we have, taking for granted that we live aesthetic lives. The network theory proposes that each of us has reason to acquire the specific commitments that best enable us to achieve, given who we are. Thus our aesthetic commitments matter to us in so far as they express who we are, equip us to live meaningful lives, and promote well-being. The network theory is a virtue theory.<sup>32</sup>

The cases of aesthetic alienation and indifference, by my lights, seem to run contrary to living meaningful lives and promoting well-being. Consider the following case that Lopes gives about an aesthetically indifferent agent that has reason, according to his network theory, to continue to act:

In the last couple of decades of his life, Ernst Gombrich reported that he was able to judge whether a painting was beautiful or graceful, but it left him completely cold (Nanay 2016: 15). Nothing could warm his heart to painting after a lifetime dedicated to its study. His was a case of locked-in aesthetic indifference: he could not be reasoned into caring. According to the network

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<sup>31</sup> Kubala (forthcoming) makes this point in his review of *Being for Beauty*: “If I were a Marxist, I might even comment that Lopes’s theory is a recipe for alienated labour, and precisely in the domain that is supposed to be most free from commercial values and most amenable to the exercise of spontaneous agency.” 261.

<sup>32</sup> Lopes (2018) 202.

theory, Gombrich still had aesthetic reasons to perform many aesthetic acts.

Suppose that he did sometimes advise important galleries on acquisitions. In proffering his advice, he must have been motivated by a mixture of an aesthetic evaluation and some non-aesthetic desire.<sup>33</sup>

For Lopes, a meaningful life and a sense of well-being are not guaranteed in an aesthetic life but often correlated with it. Many think that being good at something is caused by truly loving it, but Lopes believes this to be a mere correlation. Lopes writes that love is correlated with beauty but not constitutive of it:

it does not follow from this [that our aesthetic labours are often labours of love that contribute to the goodness of our lives] that aesthetic agency is constitutively a labour of love. The third lesson is an error theory. Having observed how being good at doing something often goes with loving to do it, we tend to reason that we must love what we are good at doing. But we reason fallaciously.<sup>34</sup>

Lopes does not commit to a Neo-Aristotelean conception of virtue, where well-being plays an even more central part (we will look at a Neo-Aristotelian virtue aesthetic theorist next). Lopes opts instead for a neo-Moorean virtue theory, which means he is more concerned with the good of beauty, than the well-being that results in our relationship with it.<sup>35</sup> He does not deny that it often results in well-being; he

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<sup>33</sup> Lopes (2018) 150.

<sup>34</sup> Lopes (2018) 151.

<sup>35</sup> Lopes develops this position thoroughly in his 2008 article “Virtues of Art: Good Taste” 197-200.

just does not think that is the ultimate significance.<sup>36</sup> For Lopes, the main claim of virtue aesthetics is not precisely that aesthetic virtue is constitutive of a flourishing life. He takes beauty to be intrinsically good. Instead of taking the more trodden route of then concluding that anyone with a “pro-attitude” towards the good is good, he focuses on agency. Those that act towards the good are good. There are two worries that come with this conception that he openly addresses. The first is that his theory only applies to those that “buy-in” to the idea that beauty is intrinsically good. This turns out not to be a serious concern for him because he concludes that true aesthetes are few and far between. The other concern is that his conception of virtue does not seem compatible with our intuitions of what it means to be “good.”

He puts it this way:

Analytic personal worth conceptions of virtue make it a conceptual truth that having a given competence is part of being excellent qua person. Fill in the blank in “A is a ——— but a good person” with an incompetence. If the result calls either for an explanation or an appended “otherwise,” then the incompetence is a vice and the associated competence a virtue (Haack 1998: 15). Since “Allie is a liar but a good person” seems to call for an “otherwise” or some further explanation, honesty is a virtue. By contrast, “Abe is a disaster at chess but a good person” calls for no further explanation and appending an “otherwise” seems positively infelicitous. The same goes for “Axel is uncreative but a good person” and “Aida is a terrible editor but a good person.” Aesthetic competences are not virtues on the analytic personal worth conception. Be that as it may, the trouble with analytic personal worth conception is that it is hostage to the virtue concepts we happen to have, which are overly moralized (Chappell 2013: 151–2).<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Lopes (2018) 151. 210-211

<sup>37</sup> Lopes (2019) 215.

Under Lopes' account, we are not able to attribute goodness to one's being generally just because they have satisfied his goodness criterion of aesthetic agency. His solution to this over-moralization is to provide a set of virtues that are distinct from the moral virtues. I want to offer an account that is not so distinct. In contrast to Lopes, my view is compatible with the analytic personal worth conception.

I do not think that virtues are marked by our competencies but by our dispositions that involve and reveal our basic values and motivations. The aesthetic virtues that I am focused on—receptivity, imagination, and disinterest—are compatible with this conception. To my ears, “Ravi is unreceptive to aesthetic value but a good person” does require some sort of explanation. If Ravi truly had no sense about what in the world was beautiful, sublime, or ugly, I would be hesitant to attribute goodness to him (I would more likely be frightened by him!) However, we would not call Ravi unreceptive if, though he did not understand the appeal of *Finnegan's Wake*, he is generally receptive to the aesthetic features of the world. We can attribute virtue to someone without that virtue being practiced perfectly across all occasions.

Earlier, I promised to bring attention to the way an aesthetic virtue supports moral engagements. Lopes may well maintain that my view of the virtues is over-moralized. However, I hope to highlight the role of one's *aesthetic* virtues in moral engagements. In my view, being receptive to the aesthetic features of the world is, at least at times, *directly* a moral matter. Many of the actions that are required of us as



morally good beings require receptivity, and an aesthetic receptivity at that. To be a good friend, partner, or parent, requires an understanding of another person on the basis of, often subtle, cues. The base acknowledgment that the Other deserves to be treated with worth is not enough. We need to be receptive to her gestures, positions, and tones.

Relatedly, “Kim is unimaginative, but a good person” also would require some sort of explanation. This is a claim that someone might say of themselves in an introduction to creative writing class, meaning that they have failed to fully develop their characters or the narrative arc is less than interesting. This is too narrowly focused to make a claim about someone’s general lack of imagination. This is analogous to Ravi’s lack of receptivity towards *Finnegan’s Wake*, not his lack of receptivity generally. One utilizes the imagination in aesthetic acts far and wide. One need not be an expert novelist to imagine and create beauty in the little actions, like planting flowers or plating their dish, nor in the large, like imagining the sort of life she wants to lead. The virtue of imagination is required for our appreciation of beauty, and our appreciation of other people, too. If Kim genuinely lacked imagination, just like if Ravi lacked receptivity, I would be frightened of her, not willing to attribute goodness to her. Lacking imagination would also mean lacking any ability to sympathize with anyone who had a different life experience than you. Without imagination, one would have no way of even beginning to try to realize the ends of another, except for in a completely cold and mechanical way.

Again, call it over-moralizing, but the imagination, just like receptivity, is necessary for our moral engagements. Like I said before, it is not enough for a moral engagement to merely acknowledge that the Other deserves to be treated with worth. The next step is to be receptive to her cues. Even this is not enough. One must imagine the complex situation of the Other, for which that cue is merely the tip of the iceberg.

William Hazlitt talks about how the imagination ought to play an explicit role in ethical relations. In fact, it is unethical to make ethical decisions merely from a cool-headed reasoning. He writes, “those evils that inflame the imagination and make the heart sick, ought not to leave the head cool.”<sup>38</sup> Consider his following appeal:

Or say that the question were proposed to you, whether, on some occasions, you should thrust your hand into the flames, and were coolly told that you were not at all to consider the pain and anguish it might give you, nor sugar yourself to be led away by any such idle appeals to natural sensibility, but to refer the decision to some abstract, technical ground of propriety, would you not laugh in your advisor’s face? Oh! No; where our own interests are concerned, or where we are sincere in our professions of regard, the pretended distinction between sound judgment and lively imagination is quickly done away with. But I would not wish a better or more philosophical standard of morality, that that we should think and feel toward others as we should, if it were our own case. If we look for a higher standard than this, we shall not find it; but shall lose the substance for the shadow!<sup>39</sup>

Hazlitt’s point here is that one cannot reasonably abstract away from one’s own feelings, perceptions, and sensations. The same ought to apply in our reasoning

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<sup>38</sup> Hazlitt, (1826) 108.

<sup>39</sup> Hazlitt, (1826) 108-109

toward another. An ethical relationship requires us to be mindful of what matters to the Other. We might even think, whether we commit to a broadly Kantian conception of morality or not, that an ethical relationship with another requires us to take on another's ends. Cool-headed reasoning, as Hazlitt puts it, will not get us there. We only begin to see another's perspective by use of the imagination. The demand of our relational engagement with the Other (whether that be another human being or the object of our aesthetic appreciation) via the imagination is limited only insofar as the imagination itself is limited.

Our imagination is limited by our own interests, though. Hazlitt's excerpt is provocative precisely because, if we were ever tempted towards cool-headed reasoning, that temptation would occur only when the hand hitting the flame was not our own. To loosen our grip on self-interest, and to take on the interests of the Other, requires a perspective shift. The third aesthetic virtue that I will be focusing on throughout the dissertation is the virtue of disinterest. Discussing this virtue is the entire focus of the following chapter and may remain muddled until then, but for now, I will say that I hold it as the supreme aesthetic virtue. Without disinterest, receptivity and imagination are, at worst, impossible, and at best, empty. The heart of disinterest is valuing the Other (whether that is another human being or a more canonical object of aesthetic appreciation) on his/her/its own terms. Instead of viewing the world always from your own lens, the virtue of disinterest allows you to set that lens aside. From that position, one is able to be truly receptive and truly

imaginative on the Other's behalf. I would not attribute goodness to a person without the virtue of disinterest any more than I would attribute goodness to the liar.

I have suggested alternatives for aesthetic virtues that are reliably constitutive of well-being and goodness. Now, I will suggest an alternative way to consider aesthetic acts.

This is Lopes' suggestion for why we specialize in aesthetic acts:

Take a case where we differ by competence. We have a 3-metre wall to scale, so one of us boosts and the other lifts. If I am stocky with a strong core and you are light with a strong arm, then we do better if I boost and you lift. Our having to routinely scale the wall means we do better if I do crunches and you do curls and dips. We do better if we develop those individual competences that can be combined to raise our joint chance of achievement. Specialization is a division of labour where each specialist allocates more resources to their specialization and relies on others to cover their self-induced areas of incompetence. I take care of philosophical aesthetics, leaving modal metaphysics and philosophy of biology to others. You do the same in developing your AOS. Collectively, we cover more ground in more depth than could a population of generalists. Individually, we achieve far more by specializing and cooperating than we would as jacks of all trades.<sup>40</sup>

I am happy to grant Lopes the fact that pursuing our aesthetic endeavors because we are in a position to do well at them will, in some cases, lead to more achievement. I just do not think this is the way that we ought to think about our aesthetic lives. What if Joe, the jack of all aesthetic trades, is the happiest, and most vibrant aesthetic being I know? He loves exploring the aesthetic landscape so much, that, though he has some areas he knows better than others, he could hardly be called an expert. I even

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<sup>40</sup> Lopes (2018) 113.

think some people should specialize in something that they know at the start they cannot be experts in, but they really love it. Imagine Regina, she loves to dance ballet, but has naturally inflexible ankles, lacks excellent proprioception, and even gets bouts of vertigo from time to time. She is committed though. She built a home studio and dances daily. She practices pointe-work even though her ankles do not make the graceful line that is hoped for in ballet. She turns across the floor even though, because of her lack of excellent proprioception, she does not travel in a straight line. And sometimes, she takes a break half-through a combination because her vertigo makes her dizzy. Lopes would likely direct Regina to leave ballet to the Misty Copelands of this world, and instead spend her time pursuing something towards which her abilities are more suited. I say, dance! I say Regina should dance even if it is the case that she is actually much better at singing and, given a fraction of the time she spends on dance, she could likely be employed to sing. If singing does not contribute to her life in the profound, ineffable, unquantifiable way that dance does, I say dance.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Samantha Matherne (2021) makes a similar point in favor of what she calls “aesthetic learners and underachievers.”

According to Lopes, aesthetic acts are evaluated based on expertise (which, under his framework, has a lot to do with the act's social utility).<sup>42</sup> This kind of evaluation gives the aesthetic act a price. Placing a price on aesthetic engagement comes with a number of problems. Firstly, if Lopes wants to maintain the claim that his network theory is a virtue theory, then the fact that the evaluation of excellence is so closely tied to the act is already somewhat at tension with this. Agency clearly plays a role for Lopes. If he took a consequentialist view of aesthetic acts, the only thing that would matter for him is the end result of some excellent work of art, no matter how it was created. But Lopes does care how the aesthetic act is undertaken insofar as it needs to be done for aesthetic reasons. This means that it cannot just be an aesthetic accident or fluke. Is this enough to consider the aesthetic agent as possessing an aesthetic virtue? In *Intelligent Virtue* by Julia Annas, she writes that for some feature of a person to be considered a virtue, it needs to be persistent, reliable, and characteristic. Annas writes:

What is it for Jane to be generous? It is not merely that she does a generous action, or has a generous feeling. Either or both could be true without Jane's being generous. She may have done a generous action, suppressing her normal stinginess, in order to impress a friend who really is generous and will respond favourably to her action. She may have had a generous feeling triggered by a sentimental song she has just heard. In neither case is she generous, because the action and feeling neither come from nor lead to anything lasting. For

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<sup>42</sup> Lopes (2018) writes "Having aesthetic reason to act, agents thereby have reason to act in ways that conform to and support social arrangements, and when enough of them often enough act upon the reasons they have, we see regularities that we can explain as products of social practices made up of cognitive schemas and resources." 124.

Jane to be generous, generosity has to be a feature of her—that is, a feature of Jane as a whole, and not just any old feature, but one that is persisting, reliable, and characteristic.<sup>43</sup>

I will grant Lopes that his expert aesthetic agents are more consistent and reliable because they are acting out of aesthetic reasons than they would be if they were acting randomly and their aesthetic actions were mere accidents. We might wonder, however, that since Lopes readily admits that we might attribute aesthetic indifference and non-aesthetic motives to his experts, how persistent and reliable their actions could be. I know Lopes thinks that his experts have reason to continue on in their aesthetic acts, and so they ought to be persisting in them even if they have no motivation to do so. However, I am skeptical that the aesthetically indifferent would really do so, and thus, I am skeptical that the norm of achievement captures the aesthetic virtue correctly. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, we might wonder how *characteristic* a feature is if that feature is considered merely through the lens of achievement, and not of value and motivation. If an aesthetic agent is indifferent to her aesthetic act, I doubt that her aesthetic expertise, while being a feature of her, is truly a *characteristic* feature.

My second issue with placing a price on aesthetic engagement is the kind of engagement that theoretically entails from this. As I will go into more depth later, my theory of aesthetic virtue follows from a broadly Kantian lens. In this framework, aesthetic appreciation and creation is a free play between the imagination and the

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<sup>43</sup> Julia Annas (2011) 8.

understanding.<sup>44</sup> When the aesthetic action has a price, it is no longer free. The kind of engagement Lopes has in mind is one that involves determinate cognitive tasks, or in Kantian terms, involves concepts of the understanding. Otherwise, the idea that one could “succeed at an aesthetic task” or “get the aesthetic task right” would have no meaning. In other words, the object of aesthetic engagement is quantified for Lopes.

I, on the other hand, want to resist this view of aesthetic engagement. I am not suggesting, as some Kantians have, that aesthetic engagement is non-cognitive or that concepts must play no role in aesthetic experience. The important point to stress, in my view, is that concepts are never sufficient for explaining aesthetic experience, and there is no conceptual framework of achievement with which we ought to judge aesthetic lives.

The criteria for a flourishing aesthetic life are subject-dependent and non-limiting. When I say that the criteria for a flourishing aesthetic life are subject-dependent, I mean that what is involved in a flourishing aesthetic life for one person might be different than what is involved in a flourishing aesthetic life for someone

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<sup>44</sup> It is not my intent to exclude any of Lopes’ actions on the basis of their action-type. I agree with him that we need to have an inclusive view of beauty. He hopes to distance himself from what he calls “the appreciation model.” Lopes (2018) writes “According to the appreciation model, all aesthetic acts are acts of aesthetic appreciation.” 33. I agree at least insofar as I think that a wide variety of acts counts as aesthetic, and I care also about aesthetic creators. For simplicity’s sake, I break aesthetic acts into two (not entirely distinct) groups—appreciation and creation—and I mean this to capture the myriad of aesthetic acts that we can perform.



else. Of course, Lopes admits that people have different domains of interest, but I think this is true even within the same domain of interest. When I say that the criteria for a flourishing aesthetic life are non-limiting, I mean that the experience itself always represents a surplus over that criteria.

Classical music might play a significant role in two people's aesthetic lives. One of those aesthetic agents might have great knowledge of classical composition and music theory, while the other may not. The first person may conclude that her experience of appreciation is greatly aided by her knowledge. The second person may consider neither art history nor music theory to be important factors to her aesthetic appreciation of the music. Perhaps her habit is to pop in her headphones and listen to Mozart's requiem as she empties her mind and gazes across the landscape. She might even think that knowledge of composition and theory would actually hinder her reception of the works by abstracting from them. It is clear who the expert is here, but for me, both of these people could be cultivating aesthetic virtues. For the aesthetic agent, the expressions of virtues are personal and idiosyncratic. This is not to say that the virtues are necessarily easy to come by.

When I say that the criteria for a flourishing life are non-limiting, I mean that whatever criteria might be named for the individual aesthetic agent to reflect on her habits of experience, the criteria themselves are never sufficient for the experiences themselves. To think that an aesthetic experience could be fully accounted for by the conceptual criteria that we introduce would always be a limitation. That is, the

criteria that are formulated for the aesthetic virtues will always leave room for more growth. I am not claiming to know what is involved in each individual's expression of virtue.

Again, I think that is a merit to my theory. Take another example: knowledge of art history might greatly enhance someone's aesthetic engagement and contribute to their lives as a whole. Knowing the works of Ovid allows someone to understand the references Milton makes in *Paradise Lost*. Other times, knowledge of art history might actually hinder the act of appreciation. If all one sees or hears is allusions to some other figure or work, then she may fail to be present for the actual work with which she is currently engaged.

Even if someone concludes that knowledge of art history aids her judgment of the work, she understands that aesthetic experience always has a surplus over any concept for it. Although prior knowledge or experience might be significant in the aesthetic experience, the aesthetic experience itself always represents a surplus beyond the agent's pre-existing criteria. The aesthetically virtuous does not allow the conceptual criteria involved in her aesthetic experience to become a limitation to the experience by confining it to her prior concepts. The aesthetic expert runs this risk. There has to be some definite set of criteria for us to judge whether an aesthetic agent is an expert.

The relationship between succeeding at an aesthetic task and expressing a virtue that is somehow characteristic of one's being is not as direct as one might

think. This is what is so peculiar about the role of concepts in aesthetic experience. They do not directly or consistently aid or hinder one's aesthetic experience. Habitually engaging in determinative cognitive tasks, even with excellence, are not directly correlated with the aesthetic dispositions of a good life.

The third issue that I have with placing a price on aesthetic engagement is one that Lopes might not have a problem with. In my view, putting a price on an aesthetic engagement undermines the relationship between aesthetic virtues and moral virtues. When discussing the aesthetic virtues (receptivity, imagination, and disinterest), I began to draw the analogy between the way we ought to treat an aesthetic object and the way we ought to treat a person.<sup>45</sup> If you were to take a strictly utilitarian view, you might not see a problem with calculating your engagement with a person according to a price, but I certainly do! You do not have to be convinced that aesthetic objects are this relevantly similar to persons in order to think that aesthetic virtues and moral virtues are similar. In the following section, I will address three ways that I see these virtues as much more similar than Peter Goldie (our Neo-Aristotlean virtue aesthetician) does.

## **Section Two: On Goldie's Neo-Aristotlean Virtue Account**

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<sup>45</sup> Though, of course, I am not near first in stating this analogy. Cavell (1969) famously wrote: "The answer to the question "What is art?" will in part be an answer which explains why it is we treat certain objects, or how we *can* treat certain objects, in ways normally reserved for treating persons." 158.

Now I will turn to a discussion of Peter Goldie, a virtue aesthetic thinker that, unlike Lopes, *does* place importance in one's motivations. Though Goldie explicitly states what I call the main claim of virtue aesthetics—that aesthetic virtue is necessary for, and partially constitutive of, a flourishing life—he still appreciates this claim in a very different way than I do. Goldie hopes to defend what he terms “virtues of art” (more on why I think that is problematic later) against the accusation that these are not truly virtues because they are unlike ethical virtues. Though he is responding against this objection, he ends up partially siding with it, or biting the bullet, as it were. Because of his position that ethical virtues and virtues of art are somewhat dissimilar, he ends up not suggesting what I think is truly significant about virtue as it relates to our aesthetic endeavors, namely, what it says about a person's character. Note that my aim is not to argue that aesthetic virtue and ethical virtues are entirely alike, but only to suggest that they are much more alike than Goldie suggests. As far as I can see, aesthetic virtue and ethical virtue are analogous, but the most important analogy is that they are necessary for and partly constitutive of a flourishing life.

Even when we look at one's life as a whole, not all (even good) habits are virtues. Peter Goldie goes at length to show that the so-called “virtues of art” are truly virtues and not merely necessities or skills. This distinction is important for Goldie and for me because “artistic activity should be non-instrumentally valuable

and partly constitutive of human well-being.”<sup>46</sup> This Goldie contrasts with certain mere necessities, like a good night’s sleep, and mere skills, such as the ability to make shoes. These are argued to be instrumentally valuable to one’s well-being, but not constitutive of it.

There is a lot at stake for Goldie to demonstrate that virtues of art are not entirely unlike ethical virtues. If the concerns that he hopes to defend himself against are right (if ethical virtues and virtues of art are totally dissimilar), then might these “virtues of art” be better categorized as mere skills than as virtues. Goldie asserts that there are three ways that “virtues of art” are somewhat (but crucially not completely!) dissimilar to ethical virtues. That is, Goldie admits that aesthetic virtues are somewhat unlike ethical virtues, but offers an argument for why they ought to be considered virtues nonetheless. I will show how each of these three ways speaks to a fundamental difference in understanding virtue. I will show that the aesthetic virtues that I have chosen are much closer to ethical virtues than his “virtues of art.”

Again, Goldie attempts to show that ethical virtues and “virtues of art” are not completely dissimilar in hopes of demonstrating that the virtues of art truly are virtues. The first disanalogy that Goldie addresses is **cross-situational consistency**. Goldie thinks virtues of art still possess some cross-situational consistency, but that they lack the same degree of cross-situational consistency as ethical virtues.

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<sup>46</sup> Goldie (2008) 180.

Put another way, Goldie's first concern about the difference between artistic and ethical virtues is that aesthetic virtues are much more localized than ethical virtues. With this, aesthetic virtues do not possess the cross-situational consistency that ethical virtues possess.<sup>47</sup> For example, we would only call a person honest if they were honest in many different situations. The person that is only honest in certain situations (for example, when it benefits her) or with certain people (for instance, with friends or family and not with the IRS) is not considered to have the virtue of honesty.

The artistic virtues, however, are not as clearly cross-situational as far as Goldie is concerned. Goldie asks us to "consider the artist who is an excellent sculptor, or the art appreciator who is a knowledgeable and sensitive appreciator of the works of the impressionists. According to [Goldie], these are virtues of art-making and art appreciation, activities pursued for their own sake, and constitutive of well-being."<sup>48</sup> Goldie ends up biting the bullet with this concern, ultimately agreeing that the kind of cross-situational consistency desired in ethical virtues is not as necessary for art. He states "if the excellent sculptor cannot paint or play music, or if the appreciator of impressionism fails to appreciate baroque music or German expressionism, then this does not detract from our willingness to call them excellent

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<sup>47</sup> Goldie (2008) 181.

<sup>48</sup> Goldie (2008) 184.

at art-making or excellent at art appreciation.”<sup>49</sup> He still insists, however, that these artistic virtues are, in fact, virtues.

Goldie argues for this position in two ways. First, he argues that the discrepancy between cross-situational consistency in artistic and ethical virtues is a matter of degree. “What is required,” Goldie writes, “is that the possessor of a trait, the putative virtue of art has what might be summarized as a certain artistic *receptivity*, sensitivity or openness outside their particular local domain of interest.”<sup>50</sup> This claim is somewhat striking since it seems to be slightly at odds with what was previously stated—that is, it seems that this *would* provide reason to judge the appreciator of impressionism that fails to appreciate baroque music or German expressionism as a lacking in virtue. However, it seems that Goldie is more concerned that the artistic appreciator admits that there is, or at least could be, value outside of her domain of interest, even if she does not value it herself. Either of these formulations (but especially the second) sets the bar much lower than we see in ethical virtues.

If we are going to attribute an aesthetic virtue to someone, such as the virtue of receptivity, this means that she is receptive to and values many of the aesthetic objects that she encounters. As I have said before, a virtue can be attributed to someone without her exercising it perfectly on all occasions. In other words, the bar

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<sup>49</sup> Goldie (2008) 184.

<sup>50</sup> Goldie (2008) 184.

is not so high that for someone to have an aesthetic virtue, they have to be receptive to absolutely every aesthetic object that they encounter. However, the kind of aesthetic agent that has a strict domain of interest and merely admits some value (or worse, some potential value) in other domains has not yet cultivated the virtue of receptivity.

Goldie's response to the concern about cross-situational consistency marks the first difference in his conception of virtues and mine. Although his ultimate goal is to show that artistic virtues are not reducible to skills, the activities that he cites, such as sculpting, seem like they could be understood as mere skills. Goldie even admits that a sculptor could lack the receptivity required to call his activity a virtue. In this case, Goldie imagines that this sculptor would sculpt for instrumental reasons (such as to make a living or merely to pass the time).<sup>51</sup> Why, then, make *sculpting* the virtue? It follows much more consistently that the virtue would be *receptivity* itself.

Goldie goes on to mention traits that he considers to be involved in the virtues of art: Again, I suggest that we read *these* to be the virtues. These are the habits that are partially constitutive of a good life. The sculptor that sculpts merely for instrumental reasons might hate sculpting, and the activity of sculpting might even be constitutive of a poor life for him. To me, this indicates that sculpting could be better understood as a mere skill that has the potential to be enacted virtuously.

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<sup>51</sup> Goldie (2008) 185.



On the other hand, traits like authenticity, integrity, and courage will always be constitutive of a good life. I am choosing to focus on three virtues—receptivity, imagination, and disinterest—but see all of these aforementioned traits as virtues. Additionally, I suggest—and will argue in chapter 3—we read these as *aesthetic* virtues and not merely *artistic* virtues. That way, we are able to capture the diverse experience of aesthetic appreciation and creation that is intrinsically valuable and constitutive of well-being without being limited to merely artistic experience.

Goldie could object to my claim that the “traits such as imagination, insight, sensibility, vision, creativity, wit, authenticity, integrity, intelligence, persistence, open-mindedness, and courage.”<sup>52</sup> are not distinctly artistic or aesthetic. That is an objection to which *I* am willing to bite the bullet. As I have stated before, the domains of the aesthetic and the moral are not distinct in my eyes.

Goldie draws a picture of artistic virtues that are more localized than mine are. My suggestion to expand the domain to all *aesthetic* virtues and locate the virtues in what he calls “traits” allows for an alternative satisfying response to the initial concern posed by Goldie. Just as we expect the honest agent to be honest cross-situationally, we should expect the receptive agent to be receptive cross-situationally. I will go more in-depth on this later, but for now, I will note that this does not just apply to aesthetic appreciation but also to creation. In order for us to attribute the

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<sup>52</sup> Goldie (2008) 185. These traits also reference back to Goldie’s previous work (2007) 383.

virtue of receptivity to someone, she must be receptive to the objects that she encounters, her opportunities to create beauty, and the ways in which she can create.

The second concern that Goldie hopes to defend his “virtues of art” against is the discrepancy between the **level of demand** presented by ethical virtues and “virtues of art.”<sup>53</sup> The concern is formulated like this: we demand that a person be kind even when she does not feel like it, but we do not *demand* that a violinist play the violin even when she does not feel like it.

Goldie offers a similar response as to the first concern. He suggests that “virtues of art” do require a demand just like ethical virtues; however, the demand is a difference of degree. There is not a demand “to play the violin to entertain your fellow guests after a dinner,” but there is a demand to continue “playing during a string quartet performance.”<sup>54</sup>

I agree that we would not demand the violinist to play for his dinner party guests, and we would demand that he finish his performance. I do not think, however, this example demonstrates that there is less of a demand present in aesthetic virtues than ethical ones. In fact, this case does not solely concern “virtues of art.” Even though Goldie seems to want to separate “virtues of art” from ethical virtues, there is clearly some ethical matter at stake here. The reason there is a demand to finish playing the violin in the middle of a performance is, at least partly, because of a

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<sup>53</sup> Goldie (2008) 181.

<sup>54</sup> Goldie (2008) 186-187.

tacit promise to the quartet members and the audience (especially if they are a paying audience). If we look at it that way, the demand remains high even if the case is not one concerning a “virtue of art.”

Take, for example, a mechanic that is half-through fixing a car that they have, at least tacitly, promised to fix. To stop in the middle of a violin performance would be like leaving the car without finishing fixing it. The same violinist does not have the same demand to play for his dinner party guests because, presumably, he has not promised them that. We also would not demand that the same mechanic fix the cars of the guests who attended *his* dinner party.

The fact that Goldie's example is more analogous to fixing a car than to being kind demonstrates Goldie's difference in application of the virtue at stake. In my eyes, the virtue is not playing the violin or even playing the violin *well*, as Goldie sees it. Either of these can amount to a mere skill, and this is why the demand varies. In other words, it follows from this that the demand is not to enact your skill full stop but to enact it when you have said you would.

The virtues that I have chosen need to be enacted for their own sake, not for the sake of a promise that has been made about them. Contrary to Goldie, I do think our aesthetic obligations apply cross-situationally. Also, contrary to Goldie, I think our aesthetic obligations are as demanding as our ethical obligations. That being said, I do not think our aesthetic demands look the same cross-situationally. I also think that is true for our moral demands.

If we think through this case in terms of the virtue of receptivity, we glean a new understanding as to why the demand may differ in the situations without appealing to a reduction in degree, as Goldie does. The broad demand to create beauty is not really lessened in one case over another. Rather, what it looks like to respond to the demand to create beauty is different. This is directly analogous to ethical cases. For example, as stated earlier, there is a demand to be kind in all situations. However, what it looks like to be kind can be very different. To a dear friend, the demand to be kind might mean going out of one's way to spend time with her when she needs you, even if you have had a bad day yourself. On the other hand, to someone who has been emotionally abusive, being kind (to him, but also to oneself) might mean avoiding that person completely, again, even if the agent in question does not *feel* like it.

It follows from this that I think that there are times when our aesthetic demand is such that we continue doing something even when we do not feel like it. How can I say this, even after I have critiqued the potentially alienated labour of Lopes' aesthetic agent? I see our aesthetic actions as analogous to our moral actions involving persons. If we are truly indifferent to our aesthetic acts, as Lopes' case studies suggested, then the aesthetic objects have become like strangers to us. Our demand to a stranger sits somewhere in between that of a close friend and someone we actively avoid, like the emotionally abusive person.

To draw the contrast between my suggestion and the one Lopes has offered another way: I think someone has a reason to carry on with their aesthetic acts because, like a loved one in their life, it contributes to their sense of well-being and their good life. It has nothing to do with the norms of achievements and everything to do with the flourishing of that person's life. Sometimes, frankly, we do not feel like helping out a loved one, especially if they are being difficult. Aesthetic actions, whether in appreciation or creation, will feel like that sometimes as well. When we love someone or something, we persevere, and we know that we are better for it.

The demand to cultivate aesthetic virtues is high, as high even, as the demand to cultivate ethical virtues. Although Goldie tries to resist this claim, he does so at the expense of weakening what it means to cultivate virtue and thus weakening the main claim of virtue aesthetics. One might try to resist *my* claim by appealing to the notion of play that I brought forth earlier. Is not the benefit of play that it is less demanding than the determinate cognitive tasks or mere skills associated with these other thinkers? Not so! Whether one sees this as a pro or con to my view, the kind of play demanded by my aesthetic theory is one that is, in a sense, much more demanding than the mere skills that are evaluated under a normativity of achievement—play demands not just that you *do* something, but that you *be* something. Play demands receptivity—which, in part, entails a state of being empty and ready for the aesthetic encounters in your life. Play demands imagination—which, in part, entails a state of exploration of the aesthetic object. Play demands disinterest—a setting aside of your

own needs and projects so that you can openly encounter and explore the objects that come to you. Play demands your being and your life.

A virtue aesthetic should concern the human being and her life as a whole. Later in his paper, Goldie suggests that certain virtues, such as honesty and integrity, seem to apply “across the whole field of human activity, and not just in the directly ethical sphere.”<sup>55</sup> That is, these virtues seem to apply to the artistic and intellectual domains as well. Goldie does not have a good explanation for this, but I do. Contrasted with the mere skills that Goldie cites, these are the virtues that one must cultivate for character. In my view, there is no crisp distinction between aesthetic virtues and moral virtues because there is no “directly ethical sphere” or “directly aesthetic sphere. The whole of life concerns both the ethical and the aesthetic.

The last discrepancy between “virtues of art” and ethical virtues that Goldie discusses concerns the **overall judgment of a person**. Goldie’s view on this will sound familiar to the one Lopes holds that we discussed in the previous section. Goldie is skeptical that you can make an overall judgment of a person based on his or her aesthetic merit in much the same way that Lopes denies that we can apply the analytic conception of personal worth to aesthetic competencies (what he still wants to call *virtues*). Consider Goldie’s discussion of this:

It is beginning to look as if there are a number of respects—we have seen two so far—in which the virtues of ethics, of the contemplative intellect, and of art should not all be seen as having the same normative or psychological

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<sup>55</sup> Goldie (2008) 190.

structure; and in these respects, the virtues of art seem to be closer to the virtues of the intellect than to the ethical virtues. There is a third respect in which this is the case, and this is in our overall judgment of the character of a person. If someone is lacking in an ethical virtue then we are inclined to make a judgment that he is, at least in this respect, not a good *person*, whereas if someone is lacking in an intellectual virtue that is required for contemplation, or is lacking a virtue of art, we are not inclined to make the same judgment of him as a person. Once again, it seems we should not always take the ethical virtues as the paradigm in our analysis of the notion of virtue, against which all other kinds of virtue must be measured.<sup>56</sup>

Here we find Goldie holding the same critique as Lopes, and for essentially the same reason. Basically, they both hold that the virtues have been overly moralized, and just because we call something a virtue does not mean we should hold it to the standards of ethical virtues.

In my view, aesthetic virtues do not mirror ethical virtues because they have been forced into a paradigm that is overly moralized. Of course, this would be true for Goldie's virtues. One does not need to be an excellent violinist to be a good person. The aesthetic virtues that I have chosen, however, mirror ethical virtues in that you would not lead a good life without them. If what it means to possess a virtue is to possess something that is both necessary for and partly constitutive of a flourishing life, then it seems contradictory to say you can be without it and still be *good*. Take, for example, Goldie's provocative claim that one can lack intellectual virtue necessary for contemplation and yet still be good or live a good life. This seems contradictory to his statement at the beginning of his paper that, "at least for

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<sup>56</sup> Goldie (2008) 187.

Aristotle, leading an ethical and intellectual life is more than just necessity, skill, or operational extra; it is what living well or well-being consists of.”<sup>57</sup>

How do we make sense of these two views together? What could it mean to *be* good and not lead a good life, that is, not flourish? Virtue does not seem like a fitting framework for someone that sees no inherent incompatibility in these statements. If anything, I see thinkers like Goldie and Lopes as the ones who have ventured into the dangers of over-moralizing. Instead of over-moralizing the virtues, they have over-moralized goodness so that morality is both necessary and sufficient for it. Goodness requires not just moral virtues, but aesthetic virtues (and almost undoubtedly intellectual virtues as well, but I will leave this question aside for now). These virtues do not exist on parallel tracks that never intersect, but are always in a constant interplay that is the magnificent harmony of a life well-lived.

I have just walked us through three ways in which Goldie fails to see the similarity between ethical virtues and aesthetic virtues, which he terms as “virtues of art.” This shows that aesthetic virtues and ethical virtues are more similar than Goldie’s gloss suggests. Goldie’s conception of “virtues of art” is lacking in two distinct ways that we can keep in mind moving forward. Firstly, Goldie has identified “virtues of art” with something that one could possess and still not flourish. It is not hard to imagine an excellent concert pianist or a critically acclaimed film director not leading a flourishing life. Secondly, Goldie has identified “virtues of art” (what I

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<sup>57</sup> Goldie (2008) 180.



hope to have shown are not really virtues) instead of *aesthetic* virtues. It is also not hard to imagine someone who is nothing like an excellent pianist or a critically acclaimed film director and yet still leads a rich aesthetic life and flourishes in part because of it (for example, someone who has a rich relationship with natural landscapes and takes to the mountains every chance that she gets). I, however, am building an account that maintains the main claim of virtue aesthetics. The aesthetic virtues that I suggest are truly constitutive of a flourishing life.

### **Section Three: Introducing a Neo-Kantian Virtue Aesthetic**

I have introduced Lopes's neo-Moorean account and Goldie's neo-Aristotelean account of aesthetic virtue. I have promised to provide a Neo-Kantian one. Why a Neo-Kantian account? To be clear, this is not intended as an argument that Kant is or needs to be read as a virtue theorist. Instead, my aim is to argue that Kantian aesthetics (and the tradition it lies within) supplies us with a rich framework for virtue aesthetics that has not yet been developed. Throughout the dissertation, I will be paying particular attention to the way a Kantian framework of three concepts in aesthetics—disinterest, imagination, and receptivity— lends invaluable insights into the idea of human flourishing. Thus, I will argue that each of these should be read as virtues. Instead of approaching these concepts at the level of individual or token judgments, as most Kant scholars do, I look at what the habitual enactment of these virtues means for our lives as a whole. Many normative aesthetic theories supply an account of what constitutes an appropriate aesthetic engagement. A virtue account

goes beyond that. Virtue is the reliable disposition to respond appropriately to the world. Aesthetic virtue is the reliable disposition to respond appropriately to the aesthetic features of the world (while noting, as I have before, that these do not exist in distinct “spheres”). My account of aesthetic virtue encompasses both cognitive and affective elements. One benefit to an account of aesthetic virtue is that it highlights what other theories often neglect— that is, the dispositions and cultivated habits of the aesthetic appreciator that constitute their aesthetic life at large, not just a token judgment. The next chapter will be dedicated to discussing the virtue of disinterest. The third and final chapter will discuss the virtues of imagination and receptivity.

I hope to show that disinterest is a supreme virtue, a virtue that is necessary for the possibility of cultivating other virtues, such as imagination and receptivity (and though I will not discuss them in detail, other virtues including but not limited to the virtues of courage and honesty). I will develop in-depth what exactly I take disinterest to be in the following chapter, but for now, let us entertain a simple interpretation of disinterest as the act of setting aside one’s own interests in order to perceive, judge, or treat someone or something for his/her/its own sake. We need disinterest to be receptive toward the ends of someone or something. This is true, mind you, whether these ends are the *real* ends of another human being or the *fictional* ends of a character in a novel, or the *artistic* ends of a work such as a painting. In much the same way, we need disinterest for us to imagine these ends. It

is not enough for us to recognize the ends of another intellectually; we must imagine them or *take them on*. Again, contrary to Lopes and Goldie, I do not think we can say that someone is unreceptive or unimaginative and yet still a good person without some sort of explanation.

### **Subsection A: A Norm of Process over a Norm of Achievement**

I aim to distance my account from the normativity of achievement that is offered explicitly by Lopes and implicitly by Goldie. Instead, I hold that virtues are exercised in the process of aesthetic engagement, whether or not the agent achieves or not. This is true, at least, if the aesthetic agent engages habitually in a way that allows for the cultivation of these virtues. The characteristic of aesthetic engagement that allows for the cultivation of aesthetic virtues is a free play. The Kantian concept of judgment just is a free play, not some decision or belief that comes subsequently from that free play. I hope to expand this concept to the aesthetic creator as well, showing that the very act of creation is an act of free play, no matter what kind of product is a result of that engagement.

I will briefly discuss another contemporary thinker in aesthetic normativity that offers a process-based normativity over an achievement one. I hope to show how my account is still different from this, and how that is owed in part to its Kantian roots. Though he does not work in virtue theory, Thi Nguyen also thinks that the point of aesthetic engagement is the process rather than the achievement. The main reason Nguyen opts for this view is because, in his eyes, it preserves the autonomy of

the aesthetic judge. To illustrate this point, Nguyen gives an example of a museum-goer that concludes nothing more or less than his audio guide tells him to conclude. Of course, that is not genuine aesthetic engagement. That is, at best, pseudo-engagement. For me, what is important is that, if done habitually, this would not be the kind of life I would say is aesthetically virtuous.

An account that values correct judgments over the activity of engagement has no reason to say that one ought to make the judgment for herself. One might, in this view, conclude that a film is enjoyable not because she enjoyed it *herself* but because it has a high score on *Rotten Tomatoes*. In fact, in this account, one might have reason to defer to experts on aesthetic judgments, since they may be more likely to have correct judgments about art and beauty. Nguyen limits his discussion, at least in this work, to the norm of aesthetic appreciation. Instead of asserting that the point of aesthetic appreciation is the achievement of a correct view, he thinks the process of getting to the correct view is really what matters.

Though I agree that the lack of required autonomy is a serious issue for this account, I want to draw attention to the difference between our process models. I seek to posit that there is no end to an aesthetic engagement, where Nguyen posits that accuracy is the end.<sup>58</sup> Of course, it is much different to think that correct

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<sup>58</sup> It's important to note that Nguyen thinks that certain things—like games and art appreciation—possess an inverted motivational structure. For most things, we take on the means for the sake of the ends, but in these cases, Nguyen thinks that we take on ends for the sake of the means. I am not opting for an account of motivational inversion, but just a different motivation.

judgments are the final and most important end in aesthetic engagement than to think that correct judgments are an end taken on for the sake of the means, the activity of engaging. Still, having the correct aesthetic judgment is not the end I will choose at all. I do not opt for accuracy as the right motivation of aesthetic experience (even in a process-oriented view) because, in my view, it does not encourage the highest attention and care, and relatedly, it does not honor either the intrinsic or extrinsic value of aesthetic engagement.

The kind of process Nguyen has in mind is not as amenable to the expression of the aesthetic virtues I have chosen. Nguyen, like Lopes, considers aesthetic engagement in a way that is comprised of determinate cognitive tasks. This is evidenced by his focus on accuracy. As I stated before, the difference with the kind of aesthetic engagement that is comprised of determinate cognitive tasks is that it does not allow room to play.

Accuracy is not the motivation that I choose because it has a potential resolution. We do not want our motivation to terminate. We want a motivation that encourages illimitable engagement. As I will discuss in detail in chapter three, the best kinds of aesthetic engagements have no “end.” In fact, we need to represent the object of our appreciation or our potential creation as without end in order to exercise and cultivate the virtue of the imagination.

I might think, with good reasons, that I can be, and that I am, correct about some aesthetic judgment. I might feel quite confident in asserting that I know that

Michelangelo's *Pietà* is beautiful. However, I am less sure that I have had the fullest experience possible of *Pietà*. Just one trip to St. Peter's Basilica could not have afforded me that. In fact, I could spend the rest of my life in Vatican City and there are still no number of hours that I could lovingly admire the soft expressions and deep folds of cloth in Carrara marble that would give me the confidence to say that I have achieved that result. If we formulate aesthetic motives in a way that are fully realizable, we necessarily limit the engagement from what it could be. Again, getting to the result is not the point, engaging in the process is.

This example also illustrates one reason the goal of accuracy does not encourage as meaningful engagement as the goal of fullness of experience does. If my goal is merely to be correct, I might know within an instant and a mere glimpse at *Pietà* that this statue is worthy to be declared beautiful. Shall I run through the Basilica and then sprint through the Vatican and over to the Sistine Chapel so that I can make as many correct judgments as possible? Intuitively, this feels absurd. If most of us were to reflect, we would likely agree that our motivations to spend time, attention, and care on an object of beauty are not because we are trying to be right about it. If that really is our motivation, we might question if there is a better one.

Nguyen indicates similarly that the value of aesthetic experience should be placed in the process (what he calls 'striving') and not the result (what he calls

‘achievement’)<sup>59</sup>; however, his emphasis on accuracy as the necessary motivation for aesthetic experience signifies a difference because it is, in my view, not actually necessary and because it has the potential to lead to a much less meaningful engagement. Nguyen discusses why he believes accuracy to be the only goal that can elucidate meaningful engagement: “If my aesthetic activities weren’t oriented towards getting it right, I would be free to imagine and impose as I please. I would have no motivation to stick to the details of the object and thus no reason to study that object with care.” First of all, if we think my last example is correct, and that certain works are so profoundly beautiful that it does not take much attention to detail or care to know they are truly beautiful, we might think that having the motivation to be correct does not actually yield this response, at least as much as another motivation might. Secondly, and much more importantly, we ought to devote ourselves to works of beauty and study them with attention and care for better reasons than trying to be right. We should study the details of the beautiful object in the way we would study a partner’s expressions, habits and mannerisms: we are not motivated to be *right*, say, to correctly psychoanalyze the other. We study them to *know* them more deeply. We study them out of love.

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<sup>59</sup> Nguyen is operating under an account of motivational inversion where the necessary motivation is accuracy and I am operating under a traditional account of means-end motivation where we can have a variety of motivations. In the next chapter, I will discuss the virtuous motivation of appreciating the object for its own sake, or the virtue of disinterest.

Of course we care about knowing the object of our love truthfully, and I by no means mean to deny that. It is important to note that Nguyen is not merely concerned with the overall judgement of something, like *Pieta*. Aesthetic engagement, on his account, amounts to more than the process of deciding whether the work is or is not beautiful. He also strives to be accurate about the details. Nguyen writes, “I mean ‘aesthetic judgments’ here in a broad sense, including both judgments about the presence of a particular aesthetic property in the object, like sensuousness or delicacy, as well as overall evaluative judgments.”<sup>60</sup> I have no problem with thinking of something as sensuous or delicate, as long as you think of it in the way that you might call a flower in nature delicate. We call a flower delicate simply to make sense of our experience of it, but not to assume there is some corresponding purpose that we have correctly tapped into. There, *accuracy* seems not to capture when Nguyen really means. I take it that Nguyen has in mind for the process determinate cognitive tasks much like Lopes does. That kind of engagement keeps us from cultivating the imagination. I will discuss this point in depth in the third chapter.

### **Subsection B: *Acts Like Fair Pictures*, Exploring the Relationship between Aesthetic Virtues and Moral Actions**

My understanding of aesthetic virtue does not rely upon ethical virtue for its paradigm, which we have seen is a concern for the aforementioned virtue aestheticians. My view, in contrast to these thinkers, does understand virtue in the

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<sup>60</sup> Nguyen (2019) 4.



fullest sense of the term. When I say that aesthetic virtue is necessary for and partly constitutive of a flourishing life, I mean it. I mean that it is necessary for one's good life as a whole, not just the flourishing of their aesthetic life. Cultivation of aesthetic character is not a hypothetical imperative, but a categorical one.

That being said, the Kantian tradition establishes a helpful path for understanding the relationship between aesthetic character and moral character. This is not because the notion of aesthetic character is fit into a pre-existing paradigm of moral character, but because there are certain key habits one exercises in a flourishing aesthetic life that mirror the habits one exercises in a flourishing ethical life. Virtues like disinterest, receptivity, and imagination are not just virtues of a good aesthetic life, but of a good life, full stop. Beyond these, many virtues in aesthetic life mirror the virtues in ethical life, and disinterest remains a necessary component to their cultivation. We need disinterest to set down our hold on fear in order to be courageous. We need disinterest in order to pursue truth even when it does not serve us. Throughout the dissertation, I will discuss the connection between beauty and morality, for Kant, as well as for his predecessor Shaftesbury, and for his successors Emerson and Coleridge.

The virtues that I consider *aesthetic*—disinterest, receptivity, and imagination—clearly do not entail any one narrow act of artistic creation or appreciation. My account is unique in the fact that it considers aesthetic virtues much more broadly than Goldie's restriction to "virtues of art," or even Lopes' aesthetic acts. Again, for

me, cultivating aesthetic character is part of what it means to flourish as a human being, not just an aesthetic agent. Given this, it is not surprising that aesthetic character is noticeable beyond the museum or studio doors. The third chapter of the dissertation will focus on the classification of objects of appreciation. I will discuss the pervasive role of beauty in our lives, and how recognizing just how far-reaching it beauty is remains crucial to fully developing aesthetic character. I will show that I agree, in part, with the thinkers in the everyday aesthetics literature that hold a similar claim about the pervasiveness of the aesthetic. With that, I will also address everyday aesthetics accompanying, rather Kantian, critique that their view collapses the distinction between the beautiful and the agreeable. I hope to reconcile these views by showing how the cultivation of aesthetic virtues leads to a profoundly inclusive recognition of beauty, and yet still preserves the understanding of the beautiful as beautiful. I will show that understanding the pervasiveness of the beautiful also helps us understand our relationship to beauty and our moral cultivation.

One might worry that the aesthetic virtue account I hope to provide is an account of instrumental virtues (which would not make them virtues at all) meant to support our moral virtues. When I develop an account of the virtue of disinterest in the following chapter, I discuss how certain interests are and ought to be still present in our aesthetic lives as a whole. For example, self-knowledge and moral education are both results of flourishing aesthetic lives. (These larger ends I call our global motivations.) The fully virtuous aesthetic agent does not habitually pursue these

interests as direct ends in aesthetic engagement. (The direct ends I call local motivations.) Instead, she practices disinterest and pursues the aesthetic object habitually for its own sake. It is with this motivation that the most meaningful moral and self-education comes about. That is to say—somewhat paradoxically—if someone engages in aesthetic appreciation merely for moral development, she may learn less morally than if she appreciated beauty for its own sake.

One reason moral education is not the local motivation to engage with beauty for the aesthetically virtuous is that there are other sources of moral education than beauty that are likely easier to come by. If moral education were one's only motivation to engage with beauty, then she might be better suited to finding her moral education elsewhere. Another reason moral education is not the local motivation for the aesthetically virtuous is that it might encourage a limit on the aesthetic experience. It might encourage someone to 'stop looking' once she has learned some moral lesson. If someone is determined to glean moral insights from her aesthetic engagement, she may think her engagement is finished once she has gleaned that insight. Lastly, formulating moral education as the local motivation for aesthetic experience is not satisfactory because it ignores the fact that aesthetic experience is intrinsically valuable.

Moral education and self-knowledge have their place in our aesthetic lives; we just do not pursue them as direct ends in our habitual aesthetic engagements. Some aesthetic ends, on the other hand, are just bad. They are not the habits that constitute

a flourishing aesthetic or moral life. Kant and Emerson both discuss the ways bad aesthetic ends can hinder a moral process for the viewer. Connoisseurs of art, according to Kant, are often “vain, obstinate, and given to corrupting passions.”<sup>61</sup> They have cultivated taste out of empirical interests. That is, their interest in beauty is motivated by their social status. The value these connoisseurs of art see in aesthetic experience is in the accuracy of their judgments and the fulfillment of their status as virtuosi of taste. Note that, for Lopes, these virtuosi are *virtuous*, so long as they are acting from aesthetic reasons.

Emerson also sees an inherent connection between beauty and morality but, like Kant, often finds those with “knowledge of admired pictures or sculptures” are “selfish and sensual.”<sup>62</sup> Emerson characterizes such *umpires* of taste as possessing merely *local* cultivation. Both parts of this expression are apt. The role of umpires is to study rules and apply them in order to make the correct interpretations. Though they have *achieved* a status by which we consider them to be knowledgeable about art, they lack real autonomy in their judgments. It is not that they lack taste; however, the taste they have cultivated is merely local. They have learned about certain beautiful works and can tell us about them, but they surely are not flourishing in a general way (even a general aesthetic way). In fact, their experience of beauty is

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<sup>61</sup> Kant, 5 : 298.

<sup>62</sup> Emerson, 287.

quite limited—to certain works of beauty and certain ways of seeing these works. Emerson writes, “their knowledge of the fine arts is some study of rules and particulars, or some limited judgment of color or form.”<sup>63</sup> The way that these umpires of taste see beauty is limited, which means the experience and the impact of the experience is also necessarily limited. Again, like Kant, Emerson argues that these connoisseurs are motivated for the wrong reasons. They study the rules and particulars of art merely for show.

We can understand the critiques offered by both Kant and Emerson as critiques of the wrong motivations and values that some people place in beauty. These are the experts that we might be tempted to hold with high esteem—some of the people that have devoted the most time to experiences of beauty, but they have devoted it for the wrong reasons. They are not interested in beauty merely for its own sake but for the sake of what might come out of— that is, the results of taste and status. Their aesthetic acts have a price, and they are willing to pay. It was that view that led them to limit art to rules and particulars. These connoisseurs missed the free play of aesthetic experience. Thus they missed the cultivation of the aesthetic virtues of receptivity, imagination, and disinterest. And they missed that connection to moral virtue.

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<sup>63</sup> Emerson, 288.

Might it be that the moral lacking of connoisseurs of art originates not in their incorrect study of beautiful objects but in their study of the wrong objects altogether? My view of beauty and the things that can prompt profound aesthetic experience is highly inclusive. The moral usefulness of beauty is not limited to certain classifications of beauty, whether that be a strict understanding of nature or art. Instead, the moral usefulness of beauty is limited by the dispositions of the aesthetic agent. There are two important consequences of possessing aesthetic virtues. One is profound engagement with the objects already considered to be beautiful. By this, I mean that you are not limited to determinate cognitive tasks but instead enter into a state of free play. The other is an expansion of what counts as beautiful. That is, if one cultivates the aesthetic virtues, there is more to be found in beauty and more beauty to be found. Aesthetic virtues let us see the breadth and depth of beauty we had not known before. Even this lesson is a moral one. Connoisseurs of taste—despite what they may think—have no better access to beauty. Also, the moral reflection that accompanies experiences of beauty is available to all. We learn more about one's moral character by observing the habitual values and motivation that shape her engagement with beauty, not what objects she considers to be beautiful.

One benefit of this view is that it eliminates the elitism that is often associated with making the correct judgments of beauty. It might, however, pose a problem. Usually, we take “this is beautiful” to be an interesting statement because of its potential exclusivity. We want to know more about the unique objects that prompt

this judgment. A potential problem with the highly inclusive view of beauty is that it might make the once meaningful statement, "this is beautiful," into something trivial. My view is compatible with a view that suggests that there exist correct (and incorrect!) judgments. It is, of course, very interesting to ask what objects ought to be counted among the beautiful. These statements are meaningful in response to the question "what objects ought to be considered beautiful?" or even "how do we define judgments of beauty?" Nevertheless, I am asking, "what characteristic dispositions of aesthetic life constitute a life well-lived?" I will admit that there are a lot of important questions one might ask about the object, but I am concerned with what is at stake for the subject who encounters beauty. The object's beauty is not what determines moral reflection. Moral reflection is found in the subject: it is her aesthetic habits that matter.

Again, moral education is not the local motivation for aesthetic engagement because even that is a motivation that misses the intrinsic value of beauty. Instead, the moral education that comes about when someone is wholly dedicated and wholly motivated by the beauty itself is the most profound. She possesses the virtues of disinterest, imagination, and receptivity. It is her "beautiful soul" whose "own acts are like fair pictures."<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Emerson, 288.

## Chapter Two: The Virtue of Disinterest in Aesthetic Life

### Introduction

There have long been tensions surrounding the role of disinterest in aesthetic experience. Proponents of disinterest say that aesthetic appreciation must be from a viewpoint independent of one's own personal needs and desires. Critics of disinterest point to the intuition that aesthetic experience is made meaningful, in part, by the personal needs and desires it, in some way, responds to or fulfills. The idea of disinterest seems lifeless and cold to many because it seems as though it is asking us not to *care* about the objects of beauty. I hope to show that disinterest is actually the highest form of care. I argue that many of the tensions that surround the role of disinterest in aesthetic experience or judgment are a result of the conflation of two distinct motivational spheres. We need to look at both the motivations that govern the local acts of appreciation as well as the motivations that inspire such acts at a more global level. By one's global motivations, I mean the kind of motivations that drive her life as a whole. People possess different physical, spiritual, relational, and vocational goals. The broader goals of self-knowledge and moral education support these various goals. The local motivation in an aesthetic engagement is the goal that governs that specific encounter.

Interest *absolutely* has a role in the flourishing of one's aesthetic life at a global level. One ought to seek out experiences of beauty and sublimity and one ought to notice the positive—perhaps even life-altering—impact it has on the self as a



unique individual. Without a doubt, our aesthetic experiences are shaped by our idiosyncratic situations that entail interests. To take an admittedly oversimple example, one living in a metropolitan city simply has more access and opportunity to go to museums whereas one living in a rural setting has more access to nature. There are, of course, a myriad of complex ways one's personhood shapes her aesthetic life. These intuitions motivate criticism against the theory of disinterest as a necessary criterion of aesthetic experience or judgment—it seems that disinterest is flying in the face of this intuition. Some of our situation is chosen for us, but many of our choices are intentional. Many believe that we ought to view art in a way that reflects our personal choices instead of neglects them, but, on the other hand, disinterest as a criterion for aesthetic judgment might be compelling in that it seems to remove the biases that can sway the aesthetic appreciator. Even still, many argue that it simply is not worth the cost of forfeiting a genuine (and, perhaps, the greatest) value that aesthetic experience affords us.

I motivate a reading of disinterest that understands it as a kind of aesthetic virtue. I show that disinterest ought to be cultivated habitually in aesthetic engagements whilst recognizing that it is not only compatible with, but actually promotes, the global interest of the aesthetic agent as a unique individual. I do this by first revisiting the historical lineage of disinterest as a virtue and motivating this position. I then discuss three distinct objections toward disinterest, as offered by George Dickie, Nick Riggle, and Hilde Hein and Carolyn Korsmeyer. These

objections are, respectively, theoretical, normative, and empirical-theoretical in nature. Each of these objections, I argue, falls prey to the same problem: it conflates the problem of motivations on a global level with the problem of motivations on a local level.

When an aesthetic theorist conflates these motivational spheres, they draw a picture of aesthetic engagement that is disingenuous. Instead, I argue that our aesthetic engagements have self-effacing ends. That is, we ought not pursue, or set our attentional focus on, the global end of rewards, such as self-knowledge, in any token aesthetic engagement.<sup>65</sup> I also argue for a different principle of individuation of the mental states that comprise an aesthetic experience. I show that the first moment is that of object-directed receptivity and the second is that of self-directed reflection. Both of these moments are able to be strengthened by the practice of habituation. Once one aptly parses out the separate motivational spheres and separate moments of aesthetic appreciation, she finds a richer normative account of aesthetic life—one that gives disinterest its proper place.

### **Section One: Disinterest as a Virtue**

Jerome Stolnitz begins his classic paper, “On the Origins of ‘Aesthetic Disinterestedness,’” with the bold but merited claim, “we cannot understand modern aesthetic theory unless we understand the concept of “disinterestedness.” Though

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<sup>65</sup> Literature on self-effacing ends: Stocker (1976), Parfit, (1984), Keller, (2007), and Nguyen, (2019).

contemporary aestheticians might be more familiar with the notion in Kant, Schopenhauer, Croce, and Bergson, Stolnitz reminds us that the concept has its roots in 18th Century British thought—in Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Burke, Alison, and Addison.<sup>66</sup>

To this same end, I would like to highlight the philosophical context in which disinterestedness as a concept had its genesis. The origin of the concept of aesthetic disinterest is one inherently tied to moral goodness and virtue. All objects, Shaftesbury contends, that are intrinsically worthy of affection, ought to be loved that way—that is, disinterestedly. It is one’s interests, not merely one’s actions, that determine their virtue. It is not sufficient for virtue, Shaftesbury notes, to “be induced to practise virtue and even endeavour to be truly virtuous by a love of what he practises...For though he may intend to be virtuous, he has not become so for having only intended or aimed at it through love of the reward.”<sup>67</sup> Someone has become “in some degree good or virtuous” only when their love for the good is “for its own sake, as good and amiable in itself.”<sup>68</sup>

The modern reader might see more readily in Shaftesbury the call for moral disinterestedness without the implication of aesthetic disinterestedness. However, for Shaftesbury, beauty and worth are intrinsically tied to the good. One must find

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<sup>66</sup> Stolnitz, (1961)

<sup>67</sup> Shaftesbury, (1711/200) 186-187.

<sup>68</sup> Shaftesbury, (1711/200) 186-187.

beauty in “actions, minds and tempers as in figures, sounds or colours.”<sup>69</sup> One must find “a real affection or love towards equity and right for its own sake and on the account of its own natural beauty and worth.”<sup>70</sup> Disinterestedness is not to be mistaken for indifference. In Shaftesbury’s eyes, it is...

impossible to conceive that a rational creature, coming first to be tried by rational objects and receiving into his mind the images or representations of justice, generosity, gratitude or other virtue, should have no liking of these or dislike of their contraries, but be found absolutely indifferent towards whatsoever is presented to him of this sort. A soul, indeed, may as well be without sense as without admiration in the things of which it has any knowledge.<sup>71</sup>

For Shaftesbury, the sense of the beautiful and the good is implicit in what it means to be human. To be disinterested is to promote that sense above all else.

Less than a century later, disinterest earns its (perhaps most famous) place as “a moment” in the Kantian judgment of taste. A first gloss might highlight how the concept has diverged from its Shaftesburian roots. That is, the aspects of love and affection toward the aesthetic object inherent in the Shaftesburian concept seem as though they are replaced with a genuine indifference toward the aesthetic object in the Kantian concept. Kant writes, that for a judgment of taste to be disinterested, it must

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<sup>69</sup> Shaftesbury, (1711) 178.

<sup>70</sup> Shaftesbury, (1711) 178.

<sup>71</sup> Shaftesbury, (1711) 178.

lack “the satisfaction that we combine with the representation of the existence of an object.”<sup>72</sup>

This first gloss is, in part, to blame for the general uneasiness with the concept of disinterest. This uneasiness comes from a view of disinterest that has conflated global and local interests. I hope to highlight and adopt the part of Kantian disinterest that is more in line with its Shaftesburian roots—that is, disinterest as a virtue and an indicator of character. That is the formulation of disinterest that I see as worthy of defense from the critiques against it. I will show why we have good reason to read this view in Kant as well.

Kant defines aesthetic judgments—at least in part—by an appeal to the notion of disinterest. Judgments of taste (that is, judgments of beauty and sublimity) are distinguished from other forms of judgments in virtue of possessing the feature of disinterestedness. In judgments of the agreeable, that is, judgments that might be expressed by the statement “I like this,” involve an interest. Kant often appeals to food and beverages for an example of this kind of judgment. These judgments, importantly, are not only subjective but idiosyncratic. I love some of the most pungent roquefort but I would not expect everyone to love this cheese. I, as an individual, have an interest in the existence of the cheese, and also an interest in acquiring it myself for my benefit and pleasure. This is also how Kant distinguishes judgments of taste from judgments of the good. When I say something like “this is a

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<sup>72</sup> Kant (1790/2000) 5 : 296.

good knife” I am saying that it is useful to me in my purposes, say, for slicing bread to pair with my pungent cheese. I have an interest in the object existing so that I can have my meal.

The notion of disinterestedness is pivotal in Kantian aesthetics; because of disinterest, Kantian aesthetics has a principled claim on universality in judgments of taste. Guyer claims that this is the “central thought of the analysis of aesthetic judgment in the Critique of the Power of Judgment [:] the idea that in a judgment of taste a person can claim intersubjective validity for the feeling of pleasure that she experiences in response to a beautiful object.” If judgments of taste were founded on interest, then we would have only a contingent empirical reason to expect others to come to the same conclusions that we have and not a transcendental *a priori* reason regarding the objects that we find beautiful.

Kant says that one of the best ways to understand disinterest is to contrast it with the interest that is produced in agreeableness. Unlike the pleasure that comes in a pure judgment of taste from the free play of the faculties of the imagination and understanding, “the agreeable is that which pleases the senses in sensation.” The one that plays judge in a matter of taste can, as Guyer puts it, “rightly claim such validity for her feeling because we all share these cognitive faculties and they must work pretty much the same way in all of us.” Sensations, on the other hand, do not work the same way in all of us. They do not even work the same in us at all times. If my state changes, my judgment of the agreeable might change as well. Cravings can only

be indulged when you currently have them. Kant writes “hence one says of the agreeable not merely that it pleases but that it gratifies.”

Instead of the pleasure coming from the judgment of the object like in a judgment of taste, the existence of the agreeable object is pleasing to me in relation to my state. In other words, I directly benefit from the object. Judgments of taste, however, do not benefit us in any way. Guyer explains:

Kant begins his discussion by premising that judgments of taste are disinterested, that is, arise solely from the contemplation of their objects without any regard to any purposes that can be fulfilled or interests that can be served by their existence. In this way, judgments of taste differ from judgments about the mere agreeableness of the sensory stimulation offered by objects and the consumption of them, which do create an empirical interest in the existence of (more) objects of the relevant type.

Beauty does not invite a craving for more consumption in the way indulging in sweets might—that is, it does not produce an interest in viewing more beauty for the sake of our individual desires. However, relevant experiences of beauty do produce a certain kind of interest in us. The kind of interest that beauty produces is a global interest. That is, the aesthetic appreciator is motivated to habitually seek opportunities for experiences of beauty and sublimity in order to cultivate a rich aesthetic and moral life.

For Kant, interests can be held at a global level while the local level of aesthetic judgment is disinterested. This is what Kant means when he says that a judgment of the beautiful must have no interest for its determining ground, but an

interest can be later combined with it. The interests that can be later combined with it do not come from the faculty of taste, however, but either an inclination to society or the will. These are either empirical or intellectual interests, respectively.<sup>73</sup> Empirical interests have to do with attaining beauty for your own social gains, such as beautifying your appearance or home for the acceptance of others. Intellectual interests have to do with your moral interest in the existence of an object. This distinction will be discussed in much greater detail in the following chapter, but what I want to emphasize now is that Kant thinks it is a good thing to take an intellectual interest, at least in nature. Kant writes “that to take an immediate interest in the beauty of nature (not merely to have taste in order to judge it) is always a mark of a good soul, and if this this interest is habitual, it at least indicates a disposition of the mind that is favorable to the moral feeling.”<sup>74</sup> Not only does this suggest that there are divisions of interest into what I am calling a global and local level, it also suggests that our correct delineation of them is connected to our character.

This intellectual interest is, to be sure, still compatible with a pure judgment of taste (and thus with disinterest). In fact, it would not be possible to take an intellectual interest (a global, moral interest) in an object if we were not locally disinterested. One who appreciates natural beauty in this way is interested in the existence of the object for its own sake (and this is ultimately a moral interest) but

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<sup>73</sup> Kant, (1790/2000) 5: 296.

<sup>74</sup> Kant, (1790/2000) 5: 299.



disinterested in the existence of the object for the sake of herself (or what she might get from it). In fact, Kant writes that this kind of interest can be so great that the viewer would still wish the object to exist even if he could foresee some harm coming to him from it.<sup>75</sup>

For Kant, disinterest is a necessary criterion for both aesthetic and moral judgments. Because these judgments have analogous features, practicing one helps to strengthen the other. The beautiful is said to be “a symbol of the morally good.”<sup>76</sup> Here we have reason to think that habitual aesthetic engagement of a particular kind (a kind that necessarily includes disinterest) serves not only to *indicate* character, but to actually *strengthen* it. That is, practicing disinterest in our aesthetic life strengthens that practice in our moral life, and vice versa.

These expositions of disinterest as a virtue merit defense. On my account, this virtue ought to be encouraged in all aesthetic appreciation, despite its conceptual category. I do not limit it, as a certain reading of Kant might, to natural beauty in the strict sense. I have reason to think that Kant would extend this kind of aesthetic appreciation to all aesthetic objects for the fully virtuous aesthetic agent. This is not the purpose of this chapter, and so, I will set that question aside until the next chapter.

The important feature of disinterest, on my account, is the love of the object for its own sake and the absence of self-regard. To possess the virtue of aesthetic

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<sup>75</sup> Kant, (1790/2000) 5: 299.

<sup>76</sup> Kant, (1790/2000) §59.

disinterest just is to be disposed to love aesthetic objects for their own sake. My focus on disinterest is not so much its place in a ‘proper aesthetic judgment’ or even its place in cultivating taste. I am concerned with disinterest’s role in cultivating aesthetic character and thus guiding the flourishing of one’s aesthetic life as a whole. With that, I hope to demonstrate, not that interest has no role in aesthetic lives, but that it mostly ought to govern our lives more generally. Again, some interests (like the global interests of an aesthetic agent as well as the moral interest in the existence of the object) are compatible with token disinterested judgments. I do not think it is wrong to take empirical interests from time to time, for example, to want your home to look nice by putting up your favorite works of art. Instead, I hope to demonstrate that disinterest has a more profound (and largely forgotten) role; one that guides us to a deeper, richer understanding and love of beauty. The virtue of disinterest is good, in part, because the understanding and love of beauty is good. The virtue of disinterest puts us in touch with the object of appreciation in a way we would not have without disinterest. Practicing this virtue still honors the global values of the aesthetic agent (self-knowledge, moral cultivation, etc).<sup>77</sup>

Like any virtue, one’s practice of it will not be perfect. One is, after all, still said to be kind even if they are occasionally mean. The practice of virtue is about growth of character, and building habits within the life one currently leads, not some

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<sup>77</sup> The good of disinterest is not just moral cultivation. As I have said in the previous chapter, there is always an interplay between aesthetic and moral virtues.

ideal life that she does not. Even Shaftesbury recommends aiding the judgment of an object with interest if at first one is unable to judge an object without it. Shaftesbury writes “the excellence of the object, not the reward or punishment, should be our motive, but that where, through the corruption of our nature, the former of these motives is found insufficient to excite to virtue, there the latter should be brought in aid and on no account be undervalued or neglected.”<sup>78</sup> Perhaps sometimes it is our social status that first gets us to attend that opera, but when we are there, are we open to the experience enough that we can judge the work on its own merits?

There are many rewards in aesthetic experience including self-knowledge, pleasure, and community. Understanding an individual’s relationship to these rewards is where I see my account of motivational spheres to be particularly of use. The fully aesthetically virtuous appreciates individual objects for their excellence. She is habituated to be receptive to the aesthetic features of the world around her, and she clearly separates her appreciation of the object from her satisfaction of obtaining any personal reward. Yet, as Shaftesbury notes, if it *is* the reward that first attracts an individual to aesthetic experience, the hope of cultivation of virtue is not lost. One’s global motivations to gain self-knowledge may be her driving force to engage with beauty. Regardless, the local acts of appreciation are the place to build habits—hopefully virtuous ones.

## **Section Two: Dickie’s Critique**

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<sup>78</sup> Shaftesbury, (1711) 269.

George Dickie offers a classic critique of the theory of disinterest. He argues that there is no aesthetic attitude. Though he admits that there are a variety of motives, intentions, and reasons for engaging with art and a variety of ways of being distracted from the works, he argues that none of these matter for the action of actually viewing the work. Dickie's metaphysics of action (at least in the aesthetic case) is such that actions and motives for action are completely separable. Consider the following example he provides:

Suppose Jones listens to a piece of music for the purpose of being able to analyze and describe it on an examination the next day and Smith listens to the same music with no such ulterior purpose. There is certainly a difference between the motives and intentions of the two men: Jones has an ulterior purpose and Smith does not, but this does not mean Jones's listening differs from Smith's. It is possible that both men enjoy the music or that both be bored. The attention of either or both may flag and so on. It is important to note that a person's motive or intention is different from his action (Jones's listening to the music, for example). **There is only one way to listen to (to attend to) music**, although the listening may be more or less attentive and there may be a variety of motives, intentions, and reasons for doing so and a variety of ways of being distracted from the music.<sup>79</sup>

Dickie suggests that the act of listening to music is not determined by one's motivations for listening because there can be a variety of motives and yet only one way to listen. Though I have deep contentions against the idea that there is only one way to listen to music (or attend to other works of art for that matter), I will first address my critique to the broader suggestion that actions and motives are separable.

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<sup>79</sup> Dickie, (1969) 58. Emphasis mine

It is helpful, I believe, to first consider this hypothesis in the field of ethics where the question of the connection between motives and actions is more established. It is true that under certain frameworks, such as a utilitarian framework, we might be able to evaluate the moral worth of an action in a way that is not connected to the agent's motives. For example, it is likely that a utilitarian would evaluate the act of 'giving to charity' as morally good for its beneficent consequences unrelated to the motives behind that act. There is, after all, only one way to write a check and the motivations do not change any evaluation of the check-writing on behalf of the utilitarian. However, this separation between motivations and actions will clearly not be accepted by the Kantian. No matter the beneficent consequences of any action, there is just no way at all for a Kantian to evaluate the worthiness of an action until she knows the motives behind that action. I want to argue for a direct analogy between the evaluation of the moral worth of actions and the aesthetic worth of actions. On my view, there is just no way to evaluate the worth of an aesthetic action without knowing the motives behind it.

Dickie claims that aesthetic attitude is a myth and that it causes many problems in aesthetic theory. When Dickie speaks of attention, he speaks of base perceptual awareness. So, under his view, when you listen to music, you are either aware of it or you are not. At the very end of his article, Dickie writes that the aesthetic attitude may just amount to attending (closely), though he considers this a vacuous version. We might make this formulation significantly less vacuous by

concluding that attention has something to do with awareness of certain properties. The problem here is that *closely* does not seem to be the right modifier. The disinterest theorist would privilege Smith's listening over Jones' because of the lack of ulterior motives. The theorist that held that aesthetic attention was a matter of the closeness of attention, however, might have reason to privilege Jones' listening. While studying for tomorrow's exam, Jones might even memorize the music from close listening, paying attention quite closely to whatever element he expects to be on his exam.

This kind of close listening could come up in contexts of a different motive. Someone could be entertained by certain quirks they find in musical recordings and performances instead of the music itself: take, for example, being entertained by John Bonham's infamous squeaky kick drum pedal instead of paying attention to, and enjoying, the actual music. That kind of listening is arguably closer than that of the average listener, but we still might have reason to suspect that his listening is not directed toward the relevant properties for a rich aesthetic engagement. That is, the motives of the listener in this case would lead him to attend poorly, even if closely.

Dickie is silent when it comes to the normative suggestion of how one ought to attend to certain works of art. As that is my main goal, I would like us to think of what kind of aesthetic lives the subjects might be living in these suggested situations. It is not my intention to critique the motive of wanting to do well on a test or even the motive of enjoying entertaining quirks in works of art. However, I am suggesting that

there are better motivations that ought to be taken more frequently. Even if one has a local motivation to do well on a test in a particular aesthetic engagement, we can understand and evaluate her aesthetic life as a whole by looking at both her global motivations and the habits that are built from other local acts of aesthetic engagement. However, if one's sole, or even primary motivation, for aesthetic experience was to do well on tests, then we might think there is something lacking in her aesthetic character. However, if one is habitually disinterested in the appreciation of aesthetic objects, and occasionally takes an interest in something like this, that is much less of a concern. In the next section, I will discuss an ideal of local aesthetic appreciation in order to illustrate the habit I believe to be worth building.

### **Section Three: Riggle's Critique**

Nick Riggle offers a critique of the theory of disinterest in his paper, "On the Interest in Beauty and Disinterest." Through a series of literary examples that hopefully ring true as experiences of love of beauty, Riggle attempts to show that part of the value of aesthetic experience is how it speaks to our personal sense of self, not just features of our self that are shared universally. Riggle suggests that disinterest theorists cannot count idiosyncratic or personal judgments as aesthetic and, therefore that they cannot account for a genuine value of aesthetic experience.

First, I will discuss the canonical definitions of disinterest that Riggle chooses to critique and what exact challenge he poses for these theories. Then, I will discuss the two different approaches that Riggle offers as potential responses on behalf of the

disinterest theorist. Though Riggle finds these approaches ultimately unsatisfactory, I will motivate one of them with a reinterpretation of one of his literary examples.

Riggle considers three accounts of disinterest. Firstly, Jerrold Levinson proposes that disinterest is “engagement with the object for its own sake.”<sup>80</sup> Secondly, Kant claims that a judgment is disinterested when it lacks “the satisfaction that we combine with the representation of the existence of an object.”<sup>81</sup> Finally, Schopenhauer holds that disinterest consists in “pure contemplation” that lifts us above the object.<sup>82</sup> Each account describes how aesthetic judgments must be made without any ulterior motives—that is, to judge the object for its own sake. In light of these canonical definitions of disinterest, Riggle offers an important question—or as I see it, a *challenge*—to those committed to keeping disinterest as a necessary condition on aesthetic judgment:

This raises the question as to whether, and if so how, aesthetic affect<sup>83</sup> can (1) be due to sympathetic attention to an item, and (2) not be due to the way the item satisfies our “desires, needs, or worldly projects”, yet also (3) answer to features of our sensibility that are personal, idiosyncratic, or otherwise less than universal or shared.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Riggle, (2016). 3.

<sup>81</sup> Riggle, (2016). 4.

<sup>82</sup> Riggle, (2016). 6.

<sup>83</sup> Aesthetic affect is aesthetic judgment that relies on sympathetic attention. There is implicit a debate on whether or not pleasure is the right way to understand aesthetic judgment, but I will set that debate aside for the purposes of this paper.

<sup>84</sup> Riggle, (2016). 5.



Riggle argues that it is not possible for a judgment/affect to satisfy these three criteria together. He argues that because disinterest theories require aesthetic engagement to be the result of disinterested judgment, they dismiss many valuable aesthetic engagements—namely, the engagements that “answer to features of our sensibility that are personal, idiosyncratic, or otherwise less than universal or shared.”<sup>85</sup> I will argue that it is possible to hold these three criteria together and that a particular reading of disinterest provides an account for that kind of personal value in aesthetic engagement. I will show that an aesthetic object can answer to idiosyncratic features of the aesthetic appreciator while still being a result of disinterested judgment.

This approach might sound familiar to Riggle, for he himself attempts to respond to his own disinterest challenge with two possible ways a disinterest theorist might answer this challenge:

One is to argue that self-awareness—especially of the sort that might result in a transformative end of self or life-worth—is a consequence of the experience of beauty vis-a-vis disinterested pleasure. Another is to agree that disinterested pleasure somehow involves the self, but only a self that we all share—a universal, rational, or moral self.<sup>86</sup>

Riggle finds both of these attempts to ultimately be unsatisfactory answers to his disinterest challenge because they do not, in his eyes, adequately live up to the phenomenon of aesthetic experience described in the literary passages he gives. I

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<sup>85</sup> Riggle, (2016). 5.

<sup>86</sup> Riggle, (2016). 11.

accept the basic challenge that Riggle is offering—we need theories of aesthetic appreciation that make sense of the phenomenon that we agree counts as a genuine and valuable aesthetic engagement. I also agree that great works of literature are a good place to look for that phenomenon. I disagree with his interpretation of these passages, however, and will offer an alternative interpretation of one of them in order to show how the three criteria for disinterestedness can be jointly satisfied.

I will argue that the first response that Riggle offers on behalf of the disinterest theorist is in fact a good way to make sense of the literary passage, namely that self-awareness is a consequence of disinterested judgment. I will then offer a three part argument on how this reinterpretation of the literary example illustrates the difference between Riggle’s conception of valuable aesthetic appreciation and mine.

1) I will first assert that Riggle’s conception of aesthetic appreciation neglects the demand of receptivity that the aesthetic object issues. 2) I will propose a different principle of individuation of the mental states that make up an aesthetic judgment. 3) I will suggest that Riggle’s conception of ideal aesthetic appreciation is subject to the critique of self-effacing ends.<sup>87</sup> That is, if one directly seeks out self-knowledge from aesthetic experience, I assert that they are actually less likely to gain that precise thing.

#### **Subsection: Bathilde’s Aesthetic Love**

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<sup>87</sup> This concept was originally put forth by Michael Stocker, (1976) and Derek Parfit, (1984). It also shows up in the recent work of Thi Nguyen, (2019).

The literary examples that Riggle gives are beautiful enough to share for their own sake, but I will share one in particular because it illustrates a profound difference in our interpretations of the phenomenon that is taking place. First, I will discuss what Riggle takes this example to prove. I, like Riggle, will argue that the aesthetic appreciator in question, Bathilde, is an exemplar of how one ought to engage with beauty. Unlike Riggle, however, I will argue that she is in fact disinterested in the relevant sense. Consider the following example that Riggle gives from Marcel Proust's *Swann's Way*:

Without quite knowing why, my grandmother found in the steeple of Saint-Hilaire that absence of vulgarity, pretension, and meanness which made her love — and deem rich in beneficent influences — nature itself.... And certainly every part one saw of the church served to distinguish the whole from any other building by a kind of general feeling which pervaded it, but it was in the steeple that the church seemed to display a consciousness of itself, to affirm its individual and responsible existence....

I think, too, that in a confused way my grandmother found in the steeple of Combray what she prized above anything else in the world, namely, a natural air and an air of distinction. Ignorant of architecture, she would say: “My dears, laugh at me if you like; it is not conventionally beautiful, but there is something in its quaint old face which pleases me. If it could play the piano, I am sure it would really play.” And when she gazed on it, when her eyes followed the gentle tension, the fervent inclination of its stony slopes which drew together as they rose, like hands joined in prayer, she would absorb herself so utterly in the outpouring of the spire that her gaze seemed to leap upwards with it; her lips at the same time curving in a friendly smile for the worn old stones of which the setting sun now illumined no more than the topmost pinnacles, which, at the point where they entered that zone of sunlight and were softened and sweetened by it, seemed to have mounted suddenly far higher, to have become truly remote, like a song whose singer breaks into falsetto, an octave above the accompanying air.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Riggle, (2016) 8. cites this passage from *Swann's Way*, 69.

Riggle takes this example to demonstrate that Bathilde is *interested* in the steeple in a way that speaks to her “desires, needs, and worldly projects.” He concludes this because naturalness and distinction “aren’t just values she appreciates in other people; Proust makes it clear that they are values she loves and seeks out in herself.”<sup>89</sup> While I agree with the assertion of Bathilde’s values, I do not think that suggests that these values imply an interestedness in the steeple in this way. For this reading to be true, we would have to imagine Bathilde walking the streets of Combray with an aesthetic eye pre-directed inward. By this I mean that we would have to imagine Bathilde as looking at aesthetic objects with a clear sense of what she wants out of them: something that speaks to her specific desires and needs. As Riggle describes the phenomenon, Bathilde values naturalness and distinction in herself and that results in her search for an aesthetic object that possesses these fine qualities as well. Again, under this reading, we might imagine Bathilde as scanning the rooftops, seeing many buildings that do not live up to her pre-set standard of aesthetic love, and, finally, viewing the church of Saint-Hilaire with a sense of relief that she found just what she was looking for. For Riggle, this does not generate a principle of aesthetic motivation according to which you must always seek such values in the aesthetic object. It does, however, help us understand the phenomenology of Bathilde’s aesthetic experience through Riggle’s eyes. This is Riggle’s answer to the

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<sup>89</sup> Riggle, (2016) 8.

question of why the aesthetic properties of ‘naturalness’ and ‘distinction’ feature so prominently in her aesthetic love and not others.

I, however, suggest that we read this differently. I imagine Bathilde’s aesthetic eye as directed outward, somewhat surprised at what she keeps finding: vulgarity, pretension, and meanness. Then, suddenly, she finds something far more profound than anything that she could be looking for. It’s crucial that we remember that Proust begins to describe this encounter saying “*without quite knowing why*, my grandmother found in the steeple of Saint-Hilaire...” Far from looking directly for certain personal desires to be fulfilled in her aesthetic appreciation, her immediate encounter with the steeple is one in which she could not even fully articulate what it is about it that speaks to her so meaningfully.

Upon viewing this profound encounter, the narrator, from an outside perspective, suggests that “in a confused way my grandmother found in the steeple of Combray what she prized above anything else in the world, namely, a natural air and an air of distinction.” Again, this suggests that Bathilde was not searching the surrounding buildings with a mind set on locating an object with particular properties. Instead, she found the steeple with a receptive and open mind. When she speaks of it herself, she speaks in metaphor: “My dears, laugh at me if you like; it is not conventionally beautiful, but there is something in its quaint old face which pleases me. If it could play the piano, I am sure it would really play.”

She also acknowledges that others might not understand her love, or might even laugh at her because of it. Clearly, that is not her concern in the moment. Instead she just wants to love the church for its own sake. Far from looking to satisfy her “desires, needs and worldly projects,” Proust describes Bathilde as so present in her aesthetic contemplation of the church that “she would absorb herself so utterly in the outpouring of the spire that her gaze seemed to leap upwards with it...” To my ears, this sounds precisely like what the disinterest theorists are describing when they speak of ‘pure contemplation’ with a momentary suspension of concern for the self.<sup>90</sup>

To this end, I will discuss my first argument against the conception of aesthetic engagement that Riggle offers. Riggle’s ideal aesthetic appreciator fails to meet what I see as as the **demand of receptivity**. The aesthetic appreciator, as I see it, is an agent fundamentally open and willing to receive what comes to her. Riggle’s explanation of Bathilde is one in which Bathilde finds her “desires, needs, and worldly projects” in aesthetic objects and is satisfied when the aesthetic object speaks to those concerns. I, however, see the narrative as suggesting that her aesthetic encounter is one in which she sets down all of these things and nonetheless finds a beautiful object worthy of her love. The idea here is that, though Bathilde’s “desires, needs, and worldly projects” are still important to her on a global level, her local act of aesthetic appreciation is not affected by them.

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<sup>90</sup> This is Schopenhauer’s view that Riggle discusses.

How then, one might ask, is Bathilde able to connect this experience to her own self-understanding? In other words: if she approaches the aesthetic object with an air of receptivity, how is she able to eventually gain any personal reflection from the object?

Here is the second difference that I see between my understanding of aesthetic engagement and the one that Riggle offers. Riggle seems to be operating under the conception that aesthetic engagement is one mental state with a simultaneous judgment of the aesthetic object as well as reflection and application to the self. I, instead, propose an alternative **principle of individuation**: I suggest that the mental states that comprise an aesthetic encounter are differentiated between separate moments. For example, I see Bathilde as being initially receptive and open in her judgment of the church of Saint-Hilaire. Again, she does not look for anything in particular but instead receives the object without imposing her personal desires upon her act of appreciation. She studies the object out of love and then, as the narrator describes her interaction, “in a confused way my grandmother found in the steeple of Combray what she prized above anything else in the world, namely, a natural air and an air of distinction.” I suggest that we understand this location of values and connection to self as a later moment in Bathilde’s aesthetic appreciation. Not only does this speak more truly to the Proustian narrative, it gives us a clear picture of how one can have a disinterested judgment as well as the opportunity to let the object answer to unique features of the self and gain self-knowledge.

This connects to my third and final objection concerning what is missing in Riggle’s conception of aesthetic appreciation. Because Riggle views aesthetic appreciation as one conglomerate mental state, there are only two options when it comes to the question of disinterest and self-knowledge: either the aesthetic appreciator is interested, and looks for some particular quality in a work that speaks to her self-understanding, or she is disinterested and thereby unable to gain such self-knowledge.

I will suggest instead that the highest form of self-knowledge is found in disinterested engagements. Appreciators who are interested in gaining self-knowledge from aesthetic experience are actually less likely to gain it. This I will illustrate using the principle of **self-effacing ends**. Again, I argue that Bathilde is a great exemplar of an aesthetic appreciator who is disinterested with respect to her aesthetic judgments, and not looking to feed her “desires, needs, or worldly projects,” —yet, she is still able to reflect on values “she prized above anything else in the world.”

Riggle argues that interested aesthetic judgments provide the opportunity for self-knowledge, and therefore we also ought to be motivated by self-knowledge in our interactions with beauty. Riggle is right: if gaining self-knowledge is an individual’s motivation, then her aesthetic engagement *must* be interested. The viewer is engaging with beauty not for its own sake, but for what she might get out of it.



Under my account of aesthetic appreciation, one does not have to face this dilemma between disinterest and self-knowledge. An aesthetic experience can both be disinterested and *provide* self-reflection and self-knowledge. That is, one can be indirectly motivated by self-knowledge, or motivated at a more global agential level, while remaining directly or more locally disinterested. The ideal appreciator, I argue, is not motivated by self-knowledge as a direct end of aesthetic engagement. This end of self-knowledge is self-effacing: if she pursues it directly, she is less likely to attain it.

In his “Virtue Ethics is Self-Effacing,” Simon Keller ties the notion of self-effacement back to Michael Stocker’s classic paper on the self-effacement of deontological and utilitarian ethics. Keller hopes to show that self-effacement of two of these leading theories does not give one reason to opt for virtue ethics, because virtue ethics is similarly self-effacing. The idea is that at least certain moral acts that are done for the sake of being moral—whatever that means in relation to its corresponding theory (conforming with duty, maximizing utility, or being virtuous)—are less moral than if they were not done for that reason. The case that is examined in both of these papers is that of a person visiting a sick friend in the hospital. It is better, the argument goes, to visit that sick friend out of genuine care for the friendship rather than out of moral consideration. Though there’s much to say about these arguments within their own contexts, the important upshot for my argument here is that certain ends (such as moral cultivation in these cases or self-knowledge

for aesthetic experience) ought to be pursued at a global level, but when they are pursued at a more local level, they become problematic or even disingenuous.<sup>91</sup>

This motivation to do the “right thing” in moral cases, I hope to show, is analogous to the motivation to gain self-knowledge in cases of aesthetic engagement. One might think that one real benefit of aesthetic engagement is the way the beloved object reveals something about oneself back to oneself. However, if one seeks out self-knowledge directly from an aesthetic experience, one forfeits her genuine engagement. The problem with the interested viewer is not that she wants the aesthetic object to exist, the problem is that she wants it to exist too narrowly for her own purposes.<sup>92</sup> The disinterested appreciator, on the other hand, does not seek self-knowledge to determine her judgments. Instead, she experiences beauty for its own sake, and values beauty above herself. From that place, she is actually given more opportunity for self-knowledge because her aesthetic engagement was more genuine.

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<sup>91</sup> Consider the following discussion of self-effacement in virtue ethics: “Aristotle can be interpreted as saying that one who is learning to be virtuous may find it useful to have the explicit motive emulating the fully virtuous person, but that once true virtue is achieved, the agent will respond immediately to the features of her situation, not to explicit thoughts of virtues. Mengzi says that one whose efforts are overtly directed towards the manifestation of virtues is like a farmer who tries to help his crops grow by pulling on the shoots; in both cases, it is counterproductive to focus too narrowly on a desirable goal.” Keller (2007) 227-228.

<sup>92</sup> This is compatible with both the understanding of disinterest in Shaftesbury and Kant. Again, Kant’s discussion of intellectual interest gives me reason to believe this despite the more familiar gloss.

Riggle suggests that the disinterest theorist might respond with an appeal to self-knowledge as a result of aesthetic experience or an appeal to self-knowledge being limited to the universal self. Riggle does not think either of these moves adequately explains the literary examples he gives. I have suggested otherwise. I have shown that Bathilde's aesthetic appreciation of the church of Saint-Hilaire provided self-knowledge as a result of her engagement and yet she made a disinterested judgment of the church. Furthermore, I have shown that the structure of her aesthetic engagement met the demand of receptivity, had separate moments of judgment and reflection (offered under my differing principle of individuation) and was pursued under self-effacing ends and not under a conflation of the global and local motivational spheres.<sup>93</sup>

#### **Section Four: Critiques of Hein and Korsmeyer/Brand and Devereaux**

Lastly, I will consider the feminist critiques of disinterest offered by Hein and Korsmeyer, and later, Brand and Devereux.<sup>94</sup> Of course, not all of the theorists

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<sup>93</sup> Hilgers (2016) has argued for a similar reading of disinterest as mine:. He writes, "An artwork asks a person to engage with it in such a way that her sensuous, affective, and conceptual capacities enter a play-like state of interaction. This state affects a person in three related ways: it makes her temporarily lose her sense of herself, it makes her gain a sense of the other, and ultimately, it makes her achieve selfhood." 3. Ultimately I think that my view is compatible with this account, but that it diverges to fill in the picture of disinterest in two important ways. Firstly, I hope to suggest that "losing one's sense of self" is not necessarily a total, global ego-death, but a matter of local motivations. I also hope to suggest that, if done habitually, this contributes to the global goals of one's life at large, and thus should be viewed as a virtue.

<sup>94</sup> I later note how Brand diverges from the traditional feminist view.

working in feminist aesthetics offer critiques against disinterest. However, the critique offered by the aforementioned thinkers has become canonical. This position has aptly been termed as “perspectivism.”<sup>95</sup> The critique of disinterest holds two components.

The first component of the disinterest critique is an empirical claim: (1) so called “disinterest” has historically not been the lauded attitude it claims to be. Many have proclaimed the virtues of their ‘universally accessible’ aesthetic attitude. Though these viewers thought their attitudes were disinterested and universally accessible, they have actually been interested and made from a non-accessible particularity. The attitude that has been disguised as disinterest has actually been interest. This interested perspective, they argue, has been shaped by desires and ulterior motives that are typically male.<sup>96</sup>

The second component of the disinterest critique is a theoretical claim somewhat akin to Dickie’s: (2) it is impossible to have truly disinterested judgments of taste. However, this claim is not grounded by Dickie’s commitment that there is no such thing as an aesthetic attitude. Instead, this claim comprises two others: (2a) all judgments are perspectival, and (2b) disinterestedness rules out perspective.

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<sup>95</sup> Eaton, (2020).

<sup>96</sup> See Hein, & Korsmeyer, (1990). and Brand, & Devereaux, (2003). For further references and discussion, see Eaton, Anne, (2020).

I wholly accept (1) the first component of the critique. Here, Hein and Korsmeyer are suggesting that many who proclaim a disinterested attitude are actually interested—that is, they mistake their particular viewpoint with a universal one. By making a male viewpoint appear neutral, they subdue the feminine view. The corrective that is offered by these thinkers, however, is not to reestablish a genuinely disinterested perspective, but to introduce another one. This way, the world sees the interested male view for what it is. Hein and Korsmeyer put it this way:

They demonstrate how the claim to gender neutrality is a covert way of suppressing the feminine, and by painting, writing and singing about it, feminist artists affirm the humanity of that half of the species that is "sexed" or "marked" as Other. In doing so they commit an act of philosophical rebellion against the presumption that to be human is to be male.<sup>97</sup>

I also wholly accept the need for multiple perspectives in artistic creation and appreciation and have no contention with this suggestion. However, before we dispense with the concept of disinterestedness in our understanding of how one ought to engage with beauty, I suggest that we reconsider the issue. The problem, in my view, is not the intention to be disinterested. The problem is the general mistaking of interested judgments for disinterested ones. Part of the solution, as suggested in the block quote above, is to offer the world an alternate perspective which automatically shatters the idea that the 'given' perspective we had seen and heard about before is a universal one.

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<sup>97</sup> Hein, & Korsmeyer, (1990). 3.

The other part of the solution, I would like to add, is consciously separating what it means to be interested or disinterested in the two motivational spheres of global and local. I do not accept (2) the second part of the critique, in its current form. Firstly, (2a) the claim that all judgments are perspectival, needs nuance. Perspective, in my view, looks different in its global and local forms. It is true that on a global level, one cannot be (at least consistently) disinterested. In virtue of people being willing agents, they have motives and desires that matter to them personally and idiosyncratically. That in itself is not a problem and thus needs no solution. The problem emerges when the motivations and desires that are attached to the human agent are conflated into local experiences of beauty. Again, even in matters of aesthetics, the motivations that govern the agent on a global level are perspectival. This is still compatible with the idea that an agent is able to pursue local acts of aesthetic engagement without directly pursuing one's idiosyncratic desires or goals.<sup>98</sup>

An understanding of the separation between global and local motivations helps correct the mistake of interested judgments for disinterested ones. In the paradigm in which there is only one motivational sphere, aesthetic judgments, in virtue of them involving aesthetic objects, are mistaken by aesthetic appreciators as necessarily disinterested. However, my suggestion of two separate motivational

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<sup>98</sup> In one work, Brand (1998) suggests that we might be able to toggle between disinterest and interest for a fuller experience of beauty. Though that is not exactly what I am suggesting, it might give us reason to think that my view is an acceptable answer to the critique put forth.

spheres forces all to acknowledge their interests and biases and to attempt to make judgments that are not directly in pursuit of these.

Thus I also think (2b) the claim that disinterestedness rules out perspective cannot be accepted in its current form and needs nuance. In the previous section, I demonstrated what I believe a token disinterested aesthetic judgment to look like. I argued that disinterested judgments ought to be sought ought habitually and I showed how these are still compatible with the acknowledgement of individual perspective that is at the heart of this critique. Genuine (disinterested) aesthetic engagement is part of what it means to be human. It is both personally revealing and transformative. However, both revelation and transformation occur as a result of aesthetic engagement.

Disinterest allows one to set down personal biases that hinder aesthetic judgments so that she can have a richer engagement with the aesthetic object itself. That being said, it does not erase, but rather supports, subjectivity. The practice of genuine aesthetic engagement informs an individual's perspective of herself and of the world. The individual acts of aesthetic engagement, and the reflective quality it affords, contributes to the cultivation of character. The aesthetic agent whose local acts of appreciation are habitually constituted by disinterest is in a position to lead a flourishing aesthetic life. I take this reconstructed account of the purpose of disinterestedness to be consistent with Hein and Korsmeyer when they write:

But while feminism does insist that other voices, including its own, be heard, it does not endorse relativism or a laissez faire epistemology (Newman). As several of the authors make clear, the elimination of the single (male) centered point of view does not render all subjectivities of equal worth. Coming to recognize and consciously to adopt a point of view involves making political and philosophical choices. The exploration of feminism in aesthetics may help guide us in choosing well.<sup>99</sup>

The separation but purposeful interplay between the locally disinterested aesthetic judgment and the globally interested aesthetic agent is profoundly educative. In this, we see the differences and commonalities amongst aesthetic agents in a way that fosters the cultivation of aesthetic character and growth amongst aesthetic communities.

### **Conclusion**

I hope to have shown that we have good reason to keep disinterest in our understanding of aesthetic engagement. The virtue of disinterest stems from love of the aesthetic object, not indifference. I have argued that the cultivation of this virtue is not only compatible with the global interests of an aesthetic agent (such as self-knowledge), but actually promotes them. Thus, the habitual practice of disinterest contributes to a flourishing life.

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<sup>99</sup> Hein, & Korsmeyer, (1990). 5.



## **Chapter Three: The Virtues of Imagination and Receptivity in Aesthetic Life**

### **Introduction**

I have introduced my Neo-Kantian virtue aesthetic theory. I then suggested that one's approach to beauty, in appreciation and creation, is characterized by her state of interestedness or disinterestedness. I argued that we all have global interests that drive our lives. They are, most notably, moral education and self-knowledge. The fully aesthetically virtuous, however, is disposed to disinterest in her local aesthetic engagements. One might follow-up on this claim and ask: which aesthetic objects ought we engage with in this way?

In this chapter, I hope to show why that question is mis-posed. As I have noted in chapter one, I am not confining my virtue theory to a "virtue of art" as Goldie has. I am not even confining my virtue theory to aesthetic acts in which one can be objectively evaluated as excellent, as Lopes does. Instead, my virtue theory is focused on the subject's response to the world around her.

I am adamant that disinterest is a virtue, even a supreme virtue, and yet I am not restricting the objects of aesthetic appreciation and creation at all. One might doubt that one can truly be disinterested towards any potential object of experience. Some see a tension between the disinterested judgment and the judgment of everyday objects. For example, Dowling (2010) argues that interest is precisely what separates judgments of art from the everyday objects of our experience. Otherwise—and this is

his contention with Irvin (2008)—the term ‘aesthetic’ becomes a mere equivocation with ‘pleasure.’ I have a unique way of toeing the line between these two thinkers. In my account, I am able to grant Irvin (and the other everyday aestheticians) the pervasiveness of aesthetic experiences in the everyday as well as grant Dowling the normative demand that separates aesthetic experiences from merely agreeable ones. That is, I am able to show that even everyday objects and acts can and ought to be met habitually with disinterested attention. What is more, I explain that it is this very action that cultivates the virtues of receptivity and imagination.

In this chapter, I will not spend time discussing Dowling’s position in depth. It is worth noting that Dowling’s critique comes from a familiar Kantian worry about preserving the distinction between the beautiful and the agreeable. In other words, Dowling expresses a general concern about preserving the category of ‘aesthetic’. I hope to respond to this challenge that only certain objects can be considered beautiful and that everyday objects and everyday actions fall under the category ‘agreeable.’ I hope to respond to this challenge even within a Kantian framework. To be clear, I think that everyday objects may be, and often are, judged as agreeable, not beautiful.

I do not, however, think that is the way they *must* be judged.<sup>100</sup> In fact, I consider it a virtue to meet many objects of your experience with receptivity in order to appreciate them as beautiful. I also consider it a virtue to meet your opportunities with receptivity in order to create beauty. What is more, I show that, under a Kantian lens, only the beautiful (not the agreeable) allows one to exercise and develop the virtue of imagination. Seeing the beautiful in the everyday gives us opportunities to cultivate that virtue as well.

When I say, “under a Kantian lens,” I mean, again, that I will be putting forth and adopting one specific interpretation of Kant. The point of this chapter is not to situate this interpretation against the vast Kantian secondary literature. I seek to put forth a view of what Kant might have said in light of the questions that I have asked throughout the dissertation, and develop a theory from there. If this is not your interpretation of Kant, I ask you to simply read the following as an answer to the question, “what are the characteristic habits of the aesthetically virtuous agent?”

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<sup>100</sup> When it is not too awkward to use the word “engage” instead of using the Kantian term “judge,” I will do so for a few reasons. The first reason is that “judge” can lead some people to think that the process of free play is over and there is something final or done. In some cases, I must use the word “judge” or “judgment” so it is important to keep in mind that judgment just is free play for Kant, not some decision that comes after it. The second reason that I opt for the word “engage” or “engagement” when I can is that I am developing an account of aesthetic engagement that is meant to entail both the process of aesthetic appreciation and creation, and judgment certainly suggests appreciation more strongly. This is a relevant difference between my emphasis and Kant’s that is also important to keep in mind.

I will first discuss what the form of an aesthetic judgment looks like for Kant, and why paying critical attention to the form of purposiveness without purpose will help me develop my understanding of the virtues of receptivity and of imagination. If we view an object or an action with an end or purpose, we are not wholly receptive to its beauty and our imagination is limited. If we view an object or an action without an end, we can imagine our own ends. This is a habit, I will argue, of the fully virtuous aesthete. I will show how this virtue contributes to one's moral character and her life as a whole. I will show how the virtues of receptivity and imagination are developed in a Neo-Kantian framework by drawing on Kant's discussion of beauty as a symbol of morality, intellectual interest in nature being a mark of moral character, and the role of nature as the source of the genius' inspiration to create. I argue for a specific reading of Kant that is echoed in his romantic successors—one in which the full expression of virtues is made possible by the agent's view of Nature.

The heart of the critique that I am responding to is that we need conceptual restrictions on objects in order to classify them as beautiful and not agreeable. To fully understand the framework that I am using to respond to this critique, let us turn to Kant's discussion of the four moments in a judgment of taste where Kant distinguishes these two types of judgments from each other.

### **Section One: Four Moments in a Judgment of Taste**

In *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Immanuel Kant sets out to show that another faculty for thinking other than reason and understanding is necessary to

engage with the world. This is, as the project owes its name, the faculty of judgment.<sup>101</sup> Kant claims that this faculty is how we come to conceive of things as purposive: we judge things as though they are made for a purpose without the commitment of theoretical certainty on behalf of the understanding that the things we judge actually possess that purpose. There are two kinds of judgments that are made according to this principle of purposiveness—aesthetic and teleological. Aesthetic judgments are comprised of judgments of beauty and sublimity. For purposes of this project, we will focus on judgments of the beautiful. Kant uniquely describes the characteristics of judgments of the beautiful in four moments.

The first moment he considers concerns the quality of the beautiful.<sup>102</sup> Kant writes, the “satisfaction that determines the judgment of taste is without any interest.” Kant discusses cases where there are reasons to dislike certain objects such as palaces that one thinks are made “merely to be gaped at.” You might even find yourself vilifying “the vanity of the great who waste the sweat of people on such superfluous things,” but a judgment of beauty sets that consideration aside. In this way, although

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<sup>101</sup> Kant delineates the faculty for thinking into a tripartite system: “namely, first, the faculty of cognition of the general (of rules), the understanding; second, the faculty for the subsumption of the particular under the general, the power of judgment; and third, the faculty for the determination of the particular through the general (for the derivation from principles), i.e., reason.” Kant explains that the faculty of judgment is not at all self-sufficient; unlike the understanding, it does not provide concepts and unlike reason, it does not provide ideas. 20: 201.

<sup>102</sup> 5:204

judgments of beauty are determined by subjective feelings of pleasure, they are impartial to the individual's preferences.

This is illustrated by a contrast of the agreeable and the good. Both of these judgments necessarily involve interest. The agreeable "is that which pleases the sense in sensation."<sup>103</sup> Unlike in judgments of beauty which are pleasing only in the judgment based on *a priori* principles, the agreeable belongs only to the individual's experience. I get great enjoyment out of the most pungent roquefort, but I would not expect you to necessarily get the same enjoyment as I do. I have an interest in the acquisition of this magnificently stinky cheese for my own sake. A judgment of the good, Kant discusses, also involves interest. Unlike the agreeable, the good is an objective standard. The judgment of beauty pleases immediately without concept. In order to judge something as good, however, you must necessarily have a concept in mind of what that thing should be. Kant writes, "In order to find something good, I must always know what sort of thing the object is supposed to be, i.e., I must have a concept of it. I do not need that in order to find beauty in something."<sup>104</sup> Someone unfamiliar with ballet may come across a hard pink satin shoe and have no idea that it is meant for dancing on the top of one's foot, and thus have no way of knowing to judge it as a *good* pointe shoe. They would, however, be able to judge a dance as beautiful even lacking the knowledge of ballet.

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<sup>103</sup> 5:205

<sup>104</sup> 5:207

The second moment of taste concerns its quantity. It might seem right to think that everyone has her own taste; however, in the Kantian lens, the things that we can reasonably expect people to dispute about are regarding what is agreeable, not what is beautiful. Kant gives examples that one might prefer the tone of wind over stringed instruments or a certain color over another.<sup>105</sup> What is beautiful is not about these individual preferences, but something beyond them, something we can expect for everyone to love. This second moment relates to the fourth moment where Kant also conceives that this universal assent of a judgment of beauty is necessary. This is not to “say that everyone will concur with our judgment but that everyone should.”<sup>106</sup>

For Kant, judgments of beauty are disinterested, universal and necessary, but we are left wondering ‘if not by concept, what grounds these judgments?’ This brings us to the third moment in the judgment of taste. Kant explains that the “judgment of taste has nothing but the *form of purposiveness* of an object (or of the way of representing it) as its determining ground.” Purposiveness (*forma finalis*) is how we reflect and comprehend an object. It has a form that seems as though it is made with an end or purpose in mind. The end that helps us make sense of the object and gives us a reflection of beauty is not necessarily posited. Purposiveness is the property the object has that seems to be a result of an end/purpose. A purpose is the idea that

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<sup>105</sup> 5:212.

<sup>106</sup> 5:239.

causes an object to exist. Kant writes, “purposiveness can thus exist without an end, insofar as we do not place the causes of this form in a will, but can still make the explanation of its possibility conceivable to ourselves only by deriving it from a will.”<sup>107</sup> Furthermore, to conceive of an object as beautiful is to conceive of it as purposive without an end: “Beauty is the form of the purposiveness of an object, insofar as it is perceived in it without representation of an end.”<sup>108</sup> For example, when we look at the clouds moving across the horizon, we know that these incalculably beautiful wisps of vapor were not made by a finite being with a particular end.

These four moments of taste constitute the judgment of the beautiful for Kant and distinguish it from the merely agreeable. As I have stated throughout the dissertation, I am less interested in what constitutes a token judgment as I am with what aesthetic habits constitute a flourishing life. For that purpose, the first and third moment are particularly crucial. In the last chapter, I discussed how the first moment

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<sup>107</sup> 5:220.

<sup>108</sup> 5:236



ought to be a habit of a flourishing aesthetic life.<sup>109</sup> I hope to show now that the third moment of taste, just like the first, relates to the virtuous agent's habits. I hope to parse out two distinct aesthetic virtues from this moment, and claim that these are also necessary for one's cultivation of aesthetic character. Like disinterest, receptivity and imagination effect the way we perceive the objects of our experience and allow for profound aesthetic engagement and generally meaningful lives.

The third moment of taste, and the virtues that can be developed from this moment, help solve the tension between the judgment of "everyday objects and acts" and the judgment of the beautiful. In other words, the third moment will make sense of how I can say that everyday objects and acts can be appreciated as beautiful and created/performed beautifully (meaning that I am addressing both the acts of aesthetic appreciation and creation). We need these virtues to conclude that anything other

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<sup>109</sup> In my last chapter, I discussed my theoretical account of virtue and how that utilizes the concepts of the first, second, and fourth moments of taste. To remind us, I hold that disinterest is a necessary virtue of aesthetic life, but that it is compatible with an idiosyncratic judge. By stating that aesthetic judgments are universal and necessary, Kant did not intend to say that all aesthetic lives are the same. Kant is largely silent on the normative claims about one's life as a whole, and my aim here is not to develop a theory that never strays from Kant at all, but instead to show where we can find insights that produce an excellent account of virtue aesthetics.

than nature in the strict sense is beautiful.<sup>110</sup> I say “in the strict sense” because, as I will discuss shortly, I will argue that everything (not just things like forests and lakes) ought to be viewed as nature. Nature is the only object of our experience that we can even possibly posit as truly without finite end. Dowling’s critique, of course, is not that only nature can be appreciated as beautiful and that art is merely agreeable.

Dowling instead wants to draw the distinction between art and the everyday. Thus he tacitly admits that certain objects, though they have a finite end or purpose, are still able to be appreciated as beautiful. In my eyes, this is the key to understanding the conceptual categorization of beauty, as well as the nature of aesthetic engagement.

Once one understands that appreciating objects as without an end has more to do with an interpretative stance than it has to do with the object actually possessing that end, potentially anything and everything is fit for exercising aesthetic virtues.

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<sup>110</sup> Though our focus thus far has been on characteristics of the aesthetic judgment of beauty, it is important to note how this form of purposiveness plays an important role in our teleological judgments as well. Kant writes that the aesthetic reflecting judgment “has its determining ground in the power of judgment, unmixed with any other faculty of cognition, while the teleological judgment, although it uses the concept of a natural end in the judgment only as a principle for reflecting, not of the determining power of judgment, nevertheless cannot be made except through the combination of reason with empirical concepts.” Though aesthetic judgments do not directly involve reason, for Kant, reason plays an adjacent role in aesthetic lives, connecting beauty and morality. I will show later how reflection is crucial for cultivating virtues. 20:243.

In the rest of this chapter, I hope to develop the concepts of the virtue of receptivity and the virtue of imagination.<sup>111</sup> I hope to highlight that these are the concepts that bridge aesthetic and moral character in the Neo-Kantian framework.

## **Section Two: The Virtue of Receptivity and The Virtue of Imagination**

*“The most beautiful thing in the world is, of course, the world itself.” - Wallace Stevens*

There are two ways that the fully aesthetically virtuous agent is receptive to the aesthetic features of the world around her. The disposition of receptivity is marked by the interpretative stance with which the agent views the world. She is receptive to the quality of objects in order to appreciate them, and she is receptive to the drive or inspiration to create beauty within her. Keeping with my Neo-Kantian tradition, I will make the case that this quality of purposiveness without a purpose and inspiration to create beauty ought to be known as *Nature*.

As I have said before, to be receptive is not enough, the fully virtuous agent is also imaginative. She imagines the ends of *Nature* in her own end of her existence—the moral vocation. This connects her more deeply to the objects of appreciation and helps her realize her aesthetic creations. Though disinterest and receptivity are both aesthetic virtues that are also necessary in moral life, it is the imagination that

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<sup>111</sup> Can the imagination, a faculty we all have, be considered a virtue? When I speak of the virtue of imagination, it might be helpful to think of imaginativeness—the extent and quality in which one engages the imagination. Emerson writes in *Nature* that “the Imagination may be defined to be the use which the Reason makes of the material world.” 27

connects beauty and morality most clearly. It might be helpful to think of the virtue of receptivity to be the more passive element of the third moment. It is exercised when an agent notices beauty or feels inspired to create. In Kantian terms, she is receptive to the form of purposiveness. It is also exercised when someone is receptive to other features of the world, such as the emotions of other people. The imagination can be thought of as the active element of the third moment. The imagination actively reflects on the objects she appreciates. The imagination creates, and the imagination finds purpose.

The closest that Kant gets to developing something like a virtue aesthetics is when he talks about the relationship between beauty and morality. He makes two claims that in the Third Critique have inspired my entire aesthetic virtue account that I will discuss in detail. The first claim that I will discuss is that beauty is a symbol of morality. The second is that interest in nature is a mark of moral character. In what follows, I will develop a unique and systematic interpretation of these claims. The question of whether this is precisely what Kant meant is interesting, but not the point of my project. Instead, I choose to endorse this framework exactly as I have developed it, and then expand it to a theory of aesthetic virtue. I will argue that neither of these connections between beauty and morality are possible without the cultivation of the virtues of receptivity and imagination.

### **Section Three: Beauty as a Symbol of Morality**

I will begin by discussing Kant's claim that beauty is a symbol of morality. It is important to note that, at least here, Kant is making no restrictions as to what objects should count as beautiful. He is only making a claim about the form of the judgment of the beautiful. In other words, he is saying that what makes beauty a symbol of morality has less to do with the object and more to do with the subject's response.

When we encounter an object that we judge to be beautiful, we—even if without realizing it—are making a judgment similar to that of a moral judgment. In § 59 of Kant's third *Critique*, Kant says that because of this analogy, beauty serves as a symbol of the morally good. In this section, I will first look at what Kant believes are the similarities between judgments of beauty and judgments of morality, then I will explore why the similarity makes the beautiful object a symbol of the morally good, and finally, I will discuss what the function of a symbol is more generally.

The first connection we find between judgments of beauty and judgments of the morally good is that both please immediately. Of course, as Kant himself points out, the pleasures are not exactly the same. When I look out at the sunset and think how beautiful it is, it's prompted by a physical sensation. I take in the sky's evening glow through sight. The beauty I encounter seems to always be this way. I notice then, the engaging crackle of the fire and then the salt-breeze of the sea. The sensible qualities that lend themselves to judgments of beauty are basically image, sound, smell, etc.—what Kant calls an *intuition*. When Kant writes, “The beautiful pleases

immediately (but only in reflecting intuition, not, like morality, in the concept),”<sup>112</sup> he means that we reflect on something tangible in judgments of beauty. This is contrasted with concepts because they are not concretely available in the way intuitions are. Kant believes we are immediately pleased reflecting on concepts of morality, but we have no object to point to in this case to hold as responsible for prompting our pleasure.

The second similarity Kant gives between judgments of beauty and morality is that they are both disinterested, meaning that they are not made out of self-regard. We do not find something to be either beautiful or moral because of its benefit to us. Kant notes that unlike in cases of the beautiful, the morally good will necessarily incite an interest in us, but only after the judgment is made. This means that what we decide is moral is not swayed by an outcome that we want. Instead, after we have judged what is moral in an objective sense, then we have an interest as a moral being to act in accord with that judgment.

The third similarity is that in both judgments of beauty and morality, there is a coming together of what seem to be very disparate faculties of our self. In a judgment of the beautiful, the freedom of the imagination is represented as being in accord with the lawfulness of the understanding, whereas in a moral judgment, the freedom of the will is conceived as being in accord with the universal laws of reason. We will go in to more depth about the nature of each of these faculties so that we

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<sup>112</sup> 5 : 354.

understand what their roles are, but for now, what's important is that there is a play between freedom and lawfulness in us in both of these judgments.

These judgments are analogous in that they are both universal. For example, when I say that the redwood before me is beautiful, I also mean that for anyone that could stand beside me and take in this sight, they ought to also declare the beauty that is before them. In the same vein, moral judgments do not just apply to those that want to take up the moral law, the duty is *categorical*; that is to say, it applies to all of us in virtue of our humanity. These judgments are also necessary. In the case of the redwood, I judge not just that everyone in this era ought to see this sight as beautiful, but that for anyone who ever has or who ever will behold this ancient tree, they ought to revere it just as I do.

Now that Kant may have convinced us that there are striking similarities between judgments of beauty and judgments of morality, we may still wonder why that gives them a symbolic relationship (and still more, what a symbolic relationship really is). For Kant, a concept is never empirically available to us on its own—that is, concepts by themselves are not seen, heard, tasted or touched. That does not mean, however, that we have no way of grasping them. In fact, Kant begins the section at hand with the declaration, “To demonstrate the reality of our concepts, intuitions are always required.”<sup>113</sup> The relationship from concept to intuition, however, differs for schematic and symbolic presentations.

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<sup>113</sup> 5 : 351.

In most cases, concepts have a directly corresponding intuition.<sup>114</sup> In ordinary perception, the phenomenal experience we have of an object (a Kantian *intuition*) is directly mapped on to a concept that we have for that object. For example, when we see a furry animal on a leash in a park, we see it as a dog because of how it corresponds with the larger conceptual genus of dog that we possess. The story is a bit more complicated, for that is also how we come to understand that we are seeing fur, animal, leash, and park. For now, what is important in this explanation is that ordinary perception is direct. However, in certain cases, there are no intuitions that can be presented as to provide a direct presentation of the concept. An example that Kant gives in this section is the concept of God. God can only be cognized symbolically; we run into trouble if we think God is directly related to the intuitions we encounter or if we think God can in no way be found in the sensible world.<sup>115</sup>

Symbols can be incredibly useful for our coming into touch with the concepts that we often feel are simultaneously the most life-altering and the least graspable. Kant makes the case that because of the similarities between beauty and morality, we can take beautiful objects that we encounter in the world to be our unique avenue for a tangible grasp on important moral concepts. Paul Guyer, a commentator on Kant, goes as far as to suggest that this symbolic exercise is a perfect duty:

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<sup>114</sup> These demonstrations are either called examples or schemata. For a detailed look at how the imagination presents the reality of our concepts in intuitions in each case, see Matherne, Samantha. (forthcoming).

<sup>115</sup> 5 : 353.



...because we are finite and embodied rather than pure and holy wills, we cannot let any means for bringing our sensible nature into harmony with the demands of reason escape us, and if the realm of the aesthetic, with its natural hold upon our feelings, offers us any opportunities for the strengthening of our moral feeling, then we must take advantage of these opportunities.<sup>116</sup>

What Guyer is suggesting here, and I think rightfully so, is that to take beauty as a symbol of morality, you are enthusiastically engaging with a concrete thing that has the ability to strengthen your moral character. Although I believe this description to be an eloquent and poignant one, I would like to suggest that the symbolic exercise of the imagination is a habit best understood in terms of the cultivation of aesthetic virtues, instead of as a perfect duty. I also would like to suggest an additional and necessary step for our symbol-taking. The step I add in this discussion is a necessary one. If we leave it here, we only have a recognition that a judgment of beauty bears a very close analogy to a moral judgment. I hope to make sense of how

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<sup>116</sup> Guyer, Paul, (2005). 225.

the object judged to be beautiful becomes a symbol in a way that speaks to and reveals something about one's character.<sup>117</sup>

Though, as we can see, these judgments are analogous in striking ways, and we have good reasons to take the beautiful as a symbol of the moral, we can nonetheless make judgments of either sort without reflecting on the parallels between them. I want us to be wary of the idea that just because the beautiful form offers itself as an invitation to symbolic reflection that the person that encounters that beautiful object really takes it as symbolic. I will argue that the conditions for symbolic reflection are greater than other commentators on Kant have generally presented them. Of course, these commentators aims are different than mine. They are seeking to argue for the interpretation that Kant meant. On the other hand, I am endorsing at least my interpretation of Kant. In my eyes, habitually making these analogous judgments is a mark of the virtue of disinterest (because of course disinterest is a

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<sup>117</sup>I see my view to be complementing Guyer, but adding a much needed nuance. This view is, however, in explicit opposition to Allison. He claims that symbolism is merely a formal analogy that can serve as a preparation for morality but requires no moral commitment. Symbolism “ is itself merely aesthetic and functions only as a preparation for morality. Thus, it does not presuppose any prior moral commitment.” Allison, Henry (2001): 235. I think this is a reasonable account if one were to look at § 59 isolated. However when we take a closer look at § 42, we see examples of how symbols function for those that have moral commitments, e.g., joy and contentment in the bird song. 5 : 302. In Kant's *Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone*, we see how different faiths can be understood as symbols of morality if one interprets them morally. 6:138 - 6:142. The point is not to dispute the formal analogy of judgments of beauty and judgments of morality that make it available to symbolic reflection, it is only to add that one's life and character are important in understanding how an individual interpretation allows one to live better.

necessary criterion for both judgments). It is also a practice of receptivity to some extent because someone has to be receptive to the beauty in objects in order to judge them as beautiful (and the same goes for moral judgments of course). There is also receptivity required in acknowledging the similarities between these judgments. If we leave it at that, we are missing the final point in the symbolic exercise of the imagination. The fully virtuous agent still needs to express her virtue of imagination.

I will argue that the symbolic exercise that truly shapes a moral character is rarer, more complex, and more astonishing than we may notice at first blush. When we take an object of beauty to be a symbol of morality, we first encounter the beautiful object and judge it to be beautiful. We then reflect on that judgment and see that the judgment is pleasing, disinterested, a play between freedom and lawfulness, universal, and necessary. We then can see that moral judgments bear all those same criteria. Again, it is not enough for symbol-taking to merely make a judgment of beauty that is analogous, we must have a meta-reflective moment; that is, we must also see the analogue between the reflections on these two kinds of judgments. Even this is not enough. If the process ends in the meta-reflective cognition, we see that beauty could be a symbol, but we neglect to let it truly be a symbol *for* us.

When beauty is a symbol for us, we come into better touch with our moral vocation because of it. We are actually inspired to reflect on our moral vocation because of the analogous reflection on the beautiful object. Engaging beauty's figurative speech allows us to interpret it in a meaningful way for our life and

character. When I let the redwood tree serve as a symbol of morality, I am understanding the redwood as a beautiful object made for my moral betterment. In that way, I am giving the redwood a purpose for my practical reason. That being said, I know the redwood is too grand and too far beyond me for me to understand and declare any one inherent purpose that it may have. Nature is an infinite expanse, and I am fortunate to have this invaluable finite relationship to it. It is in each particular moment that I engage with it and my practical reason gives a purpose to it, that I build habits of judgment and reflection. That is how the beautiful allows me to understand the moral.

This last step is where I will add to the explication of symbol-taking. I take it that, up until this point, I have agreed with many commentators on this subject about what Kant's symbolic exercise looks like; however, this last assertion of establishing purpose will likely prove controversial because of all the intricate—albeit, on my gloss, *necessary*—commitments it contains. In my eyes, the fully aesthetically virtuous agent necessarily become morally interested in the beautiful object. For that to take place, she must present the object as *nature*. To see it as an object of nature, as we will go into great detail later in the paper, is to present the object in our symbolic engagement as an empty vessel. We can only take something as a symbol that we see as open to interpretation and not in possession of a fixed purpose. The subject, however, that takes this symbol as a meaningful indication of how to live, gives a purpose to the object. I suggest we see a symbol as a genus that contains

more than one species. The interpretation changes depending on the person and the situation (time, place, sociopolitical status, religious ideology, human milieu, etc.) Again, as we will much more thoroughly discuss, this conception of which objects *belong* to nature may be less narrow than we first might think. The emptiness of purpose and openness to interpretation depends not quite as much on the object as on the subject's ability to perceive these things.

I hope to make my case by tying this section back to an earlier section in Kant's third *Critique*, § 42 : On Intellectual Interest in the Beautiful. I take it that though § 59 maps out why the beautiful can be a symbol of the morally good, § 42 shows how the symbol serves the subject in her taking it up. On my account, the subject that seeks opportunities to see beauty in this symbolic way is a unique and important subject for Kant because she is taking an intellectual interest in the beautiful object. In fact, done habitually, the subject is said to be marked with a moral character.

#### **Section Four: Intellectual Interest in Natural Beauty**

*“the world offers itself to your imagination, calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting over and over announcing your place in the family of things.” - Mary Oliver, Wild Geese*

In this section, I hope to show that in order for the symbol to be made into an interpretation that speaks to the unique subject's moral vocation, the subject must give a purpose to the object of beauty they are encountering. I will make the case that according to Kant, this interpretation of beauty is only possible when we understand

the beautiful object to be an object of nature. In § 42 of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant argues that interest in the beautiful in nature is a mark of moral character, whereas interest in the beautiful in art is not. The fact that Kant says that we should be interested in the beautiful at all, or even that we *can* be (that it is not a contradiction) is noteworthy because he spends a lot of time making the argument that pure judgments of taste are to be disinterested.<sup>118</sup> In this section, we find Kant not only allowing interest, but *praising* it. I explore what it means to take an intellectual interest in beautiful objects for Kant, and show that the interest stems from something other than just the judgment of the beautiful. As we discussed earlier, judgments of beauty are disinterested, whereas moral judgments do incite an interest in us.

The symbolic exercise of the imagination plays a significant role in Kantian thought; it is what allows his project goal set forth in the Introduction to the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*—of bridging the great chasm between nature and freedom—to be achieved. For me, the symbolic exercise of the imagination is a habit of a flourishing life, and helps demonstrate the close tie I see between aesthetic and moral virtues. The symbolic exercise of the imagination is a necessary component for our ability to relate beauty and morality. It is a concept unique to the reflective power of judgment (which contains within it the faculty of pure judgments of taste) to judge an object with the concept of purposiveness—that is, seeming to be made for a purpose. Because of an ability to think in this way, the moral being's reason will take an

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<sup>118</sup> See Baxley, Anne Margaret (2005): p. 33

interest in every manifestation of this sort of judgment. This line of thinking is expressed best by Kant's statement: "Beautiful things indicate that the human being fits into the world."<sup>119</sup> Whatever object that sparked reason's interest will be taken as a symbol of morality.<sup>120</sup>

I hope to show a way in which distinctions between natural and artistic beauty are no longer as present for us because we understand art in a way that is not separated from nature. Indeed, we then could see art as Nature's beauty extended through the human channel. This becomes even more convincing when we take to heart the Kantian claim that genius is a "natural gift." Then, artistic beauty too has the ability for symbolic reflection. What is further, I will make the case that Kant leaves open the possibility of taking an interest in the whole of nature as a system, and not just individualized objects, and that I too wish to leave that open for the fully

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<sup>119</sup> A footnote selected by Guyer for § 42, from *Reflections* 1820a (1771-2). 16:127.

<sup>120</sup> Kirk Pillow seeks to distance his view of Kant's reflective judgment from Hannah Ginsborg's—claiming that her understanding of particulars subsumed under empirical concepts is one informed by the first rather than the third *Critique*. Pillow also resists Guyer's view that reflective judgment finds systematically in nature itself, but rather "that reflective judgment ascribes systematically to 'nature' as a *system of subjective experience*." Pillow, Chapter 1 (2000). In line with Pillow's critiques, I hope to add that conceptual determination and attribution of purpose never come from reflective judgment, or more specifically, judgments of taste. Rather, the object in our experience that incites reflection must be considered by practical reason as well in order to be available to a determination. Even still, this determination is individual and found in subjective experience. This echoes my previous distinction from Allison as well—Allison is right that the purposes are not determinate in that they are not pre-determined; however, in order for the symbolic reflection to mean something to us, they must be given purposes. They must be determined.

aesthetically virtuous. I will demonstrate that cognizing nature in this way is to see the whole system as symbol of morality. In that lens, not only does the distinction between art and nature dissolve, but even objects of the everyday are beautiful as they are a part of that great whole.

I am not suggesting that, in order to be considered aesthetically virtuous, the agent must see the world in this radical way. Instead, this is the extension of the virtues of receptivity and imagination. The way I see it, the Kantian framework supplies us with a rough roadmap of the life of the aesthetically virtuous that I have filled in. I understand the aesthetic virtues not as something you either entirely have or you are completely devoid of. The aesthetic virtues are, like any virtues, developed as a process over time, with education and experience.

Here is how I see the development playing out in this framework. We attribute aesthetic virtue to someone that habitually engages with beauty in a way that is disinterested, receptive, and imaginative. This is the base state of the virtuous aesthetic agent. From here, there are additional ways that the agent can express and exercise her virtues. This agent exercises her virtue of receptivity when she notices the analogy in the forms of aesthetic and moral judgment. This agent exercises her virtue of imagination when she takes an intellectual interest in nature and presents it as a symbol based on this analogy (and by this I mean nature in the typical way that we take nature). She exercises additional receptivity by perceiving art as Nature. She exercises additional imagination by taking an intellectual interest in that. She



exercises even more receptivity by perceiving everyday objects as Nature, and even more imagination by taking intellectual interests in those. Lastly, she may be receptive to the beauty of the whole of Nature and take an interest in that.<sup>121</sup> Before we go on, we must talk about how interests can be attached to the beautiful (especially after I have spent an entire chapter arguing that the virtuous aesthetic judge is disinterested).

### **Subsection A: How Interests Can be Attached to Judgments of Beauty**

*“I am certain of nothing but the holiness of the heart's affections and the truth of imagination. What the imagination seizes as beauty must be truth—whether it existed before or not.”- John Keats*

In § 42, Kant makes a claim that an interest in natural beauty marks the interested subject with a moral character. In the preceding section, Kant distinguishes between two kinds of interest that one can take in the beautiful. One could take an empirical interest in the beautiful object, which is an interest aimed at pleasing others. For example, this interest could manifest in someone putting up nice paintings in her living space for guests or planting beautiful flowers in her yard so that neighbors like the looks of her house. The other kind of interest one could take is an intellectual interest in the beautiful object. This interest does not stem from a desire to share the

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<sup>121</sup> I am not meaning to imply that every single object must be judged as beautiful to the aesthetically virtuous. I am saying instead that everything can be potentially judged as beautiful. What actually is judged as beautiful will depend on the aesthetic judge. There will be variations, even amongst the aesthetically virtuous, of what objects are preferred or loved more, and I see no problem with that. The last “stage,” if you will, of the cultivation of aesthetic virtues is one that is beyond individual objects.

beauty, or even the experience of beauty with others. This interest actually holds the object of beauty in ways above the self. Kant writes that this kind of interest can be so great that the viewer would still wish the object to exist even if he could foresee some harm coming to him from it.<sup>122</sup>

Just as in our judgments of morality, our judgments of beauty are made without any self-regard. Our moral interest is solely in the object with no expectation of benefit to the self. This interest has nothing to do with sharing the beauty with others. Both of these kinds of interest mark a felt satisfaction in the existence of the object on behalf of the subject that judged this object to be beautiful. Kant's discussion of interest in matters of taste is striking to his readers who thought that interest was disallowed. In fact, Kant says that if interest plays a role in judgment of the object, the judgment can not properly be called one of the beautiful at all. In these cases, the judgment would be one of the agreeable or the good. Kant clears the empirical interest and the intellectual interest from this concern that he discusses in this section by asserting that they are not made prior to the judgment and do not sacrifice the purity of the judgment; these interests arise only after the judgment. This clarification means that though a judgment of the beautiful must have no interest for its determining ground, an interest can be later combined with it.

The fact that it is not a contradiction to take an interest after the judgment of beauty is made is also quite interesting since Kant states that "the pure judgment of

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<sup>122</sup> 5 : 299.

taste does not in itself even ground any interest.”<sup>123</sup> Kant eases this tension by asserting that the interest does not arise from the pure judgment of taste itself; rather, the interest arises after the judgment is made from something else that was combined with taste before the judgment is made. Kant writes, “[t]his combination, however, can always be only indirect, i.e., taste must first of all be represented as combined with something else in order to be able to connect with the satisfaction of mere reflection on an object.”<sup>124</sup> In order for one to take satisfaction in the object after it is judged to be beautiful, we must first see the faculty itself that made that judgment as combined with something else.

Taste is “the faculty for judging *a priori* the communicability of the feelings that are combined with a given representation.”<sup>125</sup> Taste must first of all be represented as combined with either something empirical or something intellectual to result in these respective interests. For empirical interests, taste must be first combined with “an inclination that is characteristic of human nature.” For intellectual interests, taste must be first combined with something “as a property of the will of being determinable *a priori* through reason.”<sup>126</sup> It is important that we keep clear that these features that are combined with taste do not subsume it. The principle of taste

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<sup>123</sup> 5 : 205. Baxley, 33.

<sup>124</sup> 5 : 296.

<sup>125</sup> 5 : 296.

<sup>126</sup> 5 : 296.

cannot rely on empirical grounds, for then it would not differ from the agreeable. It also cannot rely on rational grounds, for then it would not differ from the good.<sup>127</sup>

Kant writes that if either of these were the case, all the beauty in the world would be denied.

Empirical interests are a little more straightforward: what is combined with the faculty of judging is a human inclination to please society. They are also a bit more fickle; this interest would not appear if you did not have others around you to please. Kant thinks that if someone had a dwelling place that was solely for shelter—and that there was not even a prospect of someone else seeing that place—he would not add any charms. The intellectual interest is a bit more complicated, but also a good deal more rewarding. In fact, as we will later discuss, intellectual interest in natural beauty is thought by Kant to be a mark of moral character. The question is, what feature combined with taste is present as a property of the will that allows beautiful objects to be taken for the beauty but allows us also to take some morally relevant interest in them. To answer this question, we must first look at why Kant believes natural beauty is so significant a case of interest that it marks a moral character in the one who takes it.

When reason takes an interest in what only the power of judgment can conceptualize—that is, manifestations of purposiveness without end—the virtue of imagination is employed. I will argue that what must be combined with taste in order

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<sup>127</sup> 5 : 346.

to take a specific kind of interest in the beautiful—that is, an intellectual interest in natural beauty—is an ability to represent the object as one of natural beauty and as a symbol of morality. This, I believe, will strengthen Kant’s conviction that taking an interest in natural beauty is a mark of moral character.

### **Subsection B: A Mark of Moral Character**

*“Nature never deserts the wise and pure; no plot so narrow, be but nature there; no waste so vacant, but may well employ each faculty of sense, and keep the heart awake to love and beauty.” - Samuel Taylor Coleridge, This Lime Tree Bower my Prison*

Kant is responding to a common debate of his time about whether there is any substantive relation between an interest in beauty in general and a moral character.

Kant is clear that the only kind of interest that suggests the presence of a moral character is interest in natural beauty and not artistic beauty. Kant thinks that you can know just by looking at the so called virtuosi’s of taste that they are not attuned to a moral feeling. In fact, Kant finds them mostly “vain, obstinate, and given to corrupting passions.” People interested in artistic beauty are not seen as reliably good, but people interested in natural beauty definitely are. Kant remarks:

Now I gladly concede that the interest in the beautiful in art (as part of which I also count the artful use of the beauties of nature for decoration, and thus for vanity) provides no proof of a way of thinking that is devoted to the morally good or even merely inclined to it. By contrast, however, I do assert that to take an immediate interest in the beauty of nature (not merely to have taste in order to judge it) is always a mark of a good soul, and that if this interest is habitual, it at least indicates a disposition of the mind that is favorable to the moral feeling, if it is gladly combined with the viewing of nature.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> 5 : 298.

The good soul loves nature for its own sake, not for any benefit that might be brought to him from it.

As discussed earlier, there are two kinds of interest that can be attached to a beautiful object. There is an empirical interest, one concerned with inclinations of human nature and society, and there is an intellectual interest, one concerned with *a priori* properties of the will. For Kant, the mark of the good soul must be this latter form. This means that the interest must be in the form of nature and not its charms. Kant believes that nature's charms are immediately pleasing, but they are not the kind of thing that can be judged with an influence of reason. The form matters greatly in the ability to connect this beauty with a moral message because of its analogue to the form of a moral judgment, and therefore, its invitation to symbolic reflection. Kant seeks to investigate if the moral feeling can be promoted by pure judgments of taste; i.e., that if something that does instill interest can be promoted by a judgment that does not—though the former requires interest and the latter is said to be rid of all interest. The following passage helps us understand—Kant writes:

However, this interest, attached to the beautiful indirectly, through an inclination to society, and thus empirical, is of no importance for us here, for we must find that importance only in what may be related to the judgment of taste *a priori*, even if only indirectly. For even if in this latter form an interest combined with it should be revealed, then taste would reveal in our faculty for judging a transition from sensory enjoyment to moral feeling; and not only would one thereby be better guided in the purposive employment of taste, but also a mediating link in the chain of human faculties *a priori*, on which all legislation must depend, would thereby be exhibited as such.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> 5 : 297

The only interests that are important for us in considering the cultivation of virtues are the ones that relate *a priori* to judgments of taste. Kant's example of inclinations to society are interests that relate *a posteriori* to judgments of taste and thus do not transition to a moral feeling. To connect an otherwise disinterested pure judgment of taste to an interest that relates to moral feeling requires a mediating link in the chain of human faculties. I believe Kant has a captivating story of how the judgment mediates between reason and the understanding. I will argue that the imagination plays a crucial role in this judgment in two ways. First, the imagination presents these beautiful objects as symbols of morality, for it is in this presentation that beauty and morality are shown to be intrinsically related. Second, the imagination presents its own end for the object of intellectual interest, or makes its own symbol, and the viewer of nature gains a powerful new understanding of morality.

In the symbolic exercise of the imagination, the agent must be in the habit of making moral judgments and aesthetic judgments to see the connection between the two. The process of taking an intellectual interest is similar to this. For someone to take an intellectual interest in nature, she must have already possessed a good moral character, or at least be in the habit of cultivating one. In my first chapter, I talked about how aesthetic virtues support the cultivation of moral virtues. Here we see this

the other way around. To cultivate the aesthetic virtue of enacting the imagination, one needs to have some moral virtues.

The ability to take an intellectual interest in nature is also founded upon one's virtue of disinterest. One must view the object for its own sake in order to take an intellectual interest in it. The aesthetic virtues of disinterest, receptivity, and imagination are all always at an interplay. The fully aesthetically virtuous possesses them all, and one way she expresses that is through the habitual acts of loving nature for its own sake. This virtuous expression is rare. This is what Emerson means when he says "few adult persons can see nature."<sup>130</sup> Like for Kant, the problem Emerson sees with those that cannot see nature as something that resides in their way of seeing. Most adults possess a lens of commodification in which they view the world. In Kantian terms, they are habitually taking empirical interest in nature. I think Emerson is right to suggest that "the lover of nature is he whose inward and outward sense are still truly adjusted to each other; who has retained the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood."<sup>131</sup> I hope to suggest that this "spirit of infancy" is the virtue of the active imagination.

Why do products of nature incite the reflections of the imagination that mark moral character, while products of art do not? For Kant, nature's moral purposiveness is not said to be available in what we call products of art because there remains an

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<sup>130</sup> Emerson (1836) 5

<sup>131</sup> Emerson (1836) 6



intention in the artist who created the work. The appreciator may find trouble in truly judging the work as without a purpose because of her awareness of the intention formulated in the artist's mind that was concerned for the direct end or purpose of creating her work of art in such a way. In human-made works of beauty, our interpretation is void when we point to a direct cause that brought this object of beauty into existence—that is, gave it a *purpose*. In natural beauty, on the other hand, though they seem as though they are made *for us* (in Kant's language: they are purposive with respect to our faculties), we cannot point to their finite cause. In this case, our interpretation is freely given.

We can not, of course, point to a finite sensible end that conceived of the purpose of the perfect palette of the sunset, or the delicacy of the hummingbird's wing—therefore, we can contemplate it truly as morally purposive and find the purpose within ourselves. Kant states,

To that is further added the admiration of nature, which in its beautiful products shows itself as art, not merely by chance, but as it were intentionally, in accordance with a lawful arrangement and as purposiveness without an end, which latter, since we never encounter it externally, we naturally seek within ourselves, and indeed in that which constitutes the ultimate end of our existences, namely the moral vocation.<sup>132</sup>

The reason natural beauty lends itself to an interest that signifies our moral vocation is directly because we associate the beauty with our moral vocation. We can only find ends that relate to our moral vocation in things that do not have ends in

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<sup>132</sup> 5 : 301

themselves—that we know of. “The song of the bird proclaims joyfulness and contentment with its existence.” Kant writes, “At least this is how we interpret nature, whether anything of the sort is its intention or not.”<sup>133</sup> We are able to interpret nature as a symbol because of the analogy between beautiful and moral judgments. Once we have made this interpretation because of our awareness of the analogy, reason must take an interest in the object that prompted the reflection on the moral vocation. However, according to Kant, the only object that can incite this moral interest is a natural one.

Kant give amusing examples of artificial flowers that look deceptively natural and a talented flautist that can imitate a nightingale quite convincingly. The flowers and the birdsong interest us until we become aware of the deceit. These two examples are certainly noteworthy because they seem to suggest that, for Kant, what is captivating our interest in certain objects is made possible by the fact that we *treat* these objects as objects of nature and once we cannot see them as objects of nature, our interest in them falls away. Kant is clear that “the satisfaction in beautiful art in the pure judgment of taste is not combined with an immediate interest in the same way as that in the beautiful in nature.” He believes this is explained by two reasons. Kant believes it is either so close to nature that we take it to actually be nature, and thus our interest is actually in natural beauty or it is “an art that is obviously intentionally directed toward our satisfaction, in which case the satisfaction in this

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<sup>133</sup> 5 : 302.

product would, to be sure, occur immediately by means of taste, but would arouse only a mediate interest in the cause on which it is grounded, namely an art that can interest only through its end and never in itself.”<sup>134</sup>

Why does Kant think this connection to nature is so important, and why is it the case that if we realize it is a human artifact we lose interest? In the introduction to the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant draws a clear distinction between the role of the understanding, which “legislates *a priori* for nature, as object of the senses, for a theoretical cognition of it in a possible experience,” and reason, which “legislates *a priori* for freedom and its own causality in the subject, for an unconditioned practical cognition.”<sup>135</sup> The domain of the concept of nature and the domain of the concept of freedom, under their respective legislations, can have no mutual influence on each other. “The great chasm that separates the supersensible from the appearances”<sup>136</sup> poses the problem for the subject to see the world, divided so vastly between the theoretical and the practical, as one world at all.

Kant writes, “the concept of freedom determines nothing in regard to the theoretical cognition of nature; the concept of nature likewise determines nothing in regard to the practical laws of freedom: and it is to this extent not possible to throw a

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<sup>134</sup> 5 : 302.

<sup>135</sup> 5 : 196.

<sup>136</sup> 5 : 196.

bridge from one domain to the other.”<sup>137</sup> We cannot find the determining grounds of causality in accordance with the concept of freedom in nature, and thus, the sensible world has no effect on the supersensible world. It is, on the other hand, possible that the supersensible has an effect on nature.

It is always reason’s hope that the natural world is amenable to its ends.

Again, it is clear that we cannot cognize nature as being determined by these causes.

This is what makes it so much the better if we nonetheless find them in our world.

The reflective power of judgment performs the formidable task of showing that the sensible world with which we encounter and interact, and the supersensible world that is responsible for our freedom in action (with potential effects in the sensible world) are unified.<sup>138</sup>

Kant remarks, “Now here arises the concept of a purposiveness of nature, indeed as a special concept of the reflecting power of judgment, not of reason: for the end is not posited in the object at all, but strictly in the subject and indeed in its mere capacity for reflecting.”<sup>139</sup> The reflective power of judgment in general can represent nature in general as possessing a quality that makes it seem as though it was made for a direct end or purpose, though that is not something the understanding can show to be theoretically true. For an interest to be taken, again, there must be some aspect of

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<sup>137</sup> 5 : 196.

<sup>138</sup> 5 : 196.

<sup>139</sup> 20 : 216.

the will combined with that faculty. Reason looks out for any indication of nature's suitability to our ends.

There are three distinct ways that we can understand nature's purposiveness, and the aesthetically virtuous agent can be receptive to each of them. In judgments of beauty, we find nature to be purposive with respect to our faculties of taste—the imagination and the understanding. We may also judge nature as if it were intentionally arranged to be amenable to our moral ends. This is to see nature as teleologically purposive. Lastly, we may admire nature's lawful arrangement or Nature as a whole. Kant thinks that only a transcendental philosopher might be capable of such admiration.<sup>140</sup> Emerson attributes a similar kind of admiration to the poet. All types of purposiveness are judged with respect to our human faculties. This last type is admired most broadly—this fully aesthetically virtuous agent admires the systematic configuration of Nature. This admiration is made possible by her own faculties' comprehension of this order.

Reason is interested any time it finds an object that is purposive without end. Kant claims that “[r]eason must take an interest in every manifestation in nature of a correspondence similar to this; consequently the mind cannot reflect on the beauty of

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<sup>140</sup> This very rare concept of purposiveness will be discussed in more depth later. Kant calls this person a transcendental philosopher. Emerson calls him a poet. It might even be helpful to think of a theoretical physicist here too that reveres nature's systematic order.

nature without finding itself at the same time to be interested in it.”<sup>141</sup> Every time a moral being happens on a judgment of nature’s purposiveness, she finds the end she is looking for. She is, to be sure, never able to find it outside of herself; moreover, she always seeks it in the final end of her existence, namely the moral vocation.

Returning back to Kant’s example’s of initially conceived natural beauties that turned out to be artificial beauties, the devastation that the interested subject endures is the robbed opportunity to find the end within herself and her moral vocation. When the viewer strolled through the garden or listened to the birdsong and thought that it was nature that was pleasing her, she was able to take an immediate interest—she thought the beautiful form of nature’s purposiveness was aligning with her own ends and she could take immense pleasure in that thought. However, when she finds out that she is being deceived by a gardener who had planted fake flowers or a landlord that hired that flautist, she immediately loses the interest that she had or it changes drastically. Kant says that then she either makes a pure aesthetic judgment with no interest or her interest becomes an empirical one, concerned with pleasing the sensations of society. Once, she realizes it was not really nature that was pleasing her, she found an end in the gardener or flautist rather than herself.

The *object* of art did not change at all. Rather, it was only the thought that the viewer held about the object that changed the interest that she takes in it. Kant writes, “It must be nature, or taken to be nature by us, for us to be able to take such an

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<sup>141</sup> 5 : 300.

immediate interest in the beautiful.”<sup>142</sup> This is precisely what leads me to believe that the interest we take in the object is made possible only by a certain way we are able to represent the object as one of natural beauty. This will become extremely important later as I begin to take a critical lens to with objects we place under the label of *natural* and which objects we place under the label of *artistic*. This is the theoretical framework from which I claim the great receptivity and imaginative capacities of the aesthetically virtuous.

Again, Kant remarks that the “thought that nature has produced that beauty must accompany the intuition and reflection, and on this alone is grounded the immediate interest that one takes in it.”<sup>143</sup> We can understand artistic beauty as a potential effect of the artist’s free action. Though this judgment of beauty in general begins to bridge the chasm between nature and freedom, there is something unique about our judgement of natural beauty. If we can see that nature—something so far from having a source of human freedom—is also purposive with respect to our faculties, we see this great chasm closed even further. The rare and revealing interest that can be attached to a sensible object, namely an object of natural beauty is an interest that comes from the supersensible and reaches out over the divide to the sensible. The sensible has no effect on the supersensible, but we can still be morally

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<sup>142</sup> 5 : 302

<sup>143</sup> 5 : 299.

interested in the sensible and cognize nature in a way that helps us deepen our knowledge of the moral vocation.

I believe the key to this discussion is the importance of our cognition of nature *as Nature*. Kant makes the intriguing proclamation:

Now if nature showed us nothing more than this logical purposiveness, we would indeed already have cause to admire it for this, since we cannot suggest any ground for this in accordance with the general laws of the understanding; only hardly anyone other than a transcendental philosopher would be capable of this admiration, and even he would not be able to name any determinate case where this purposiveness proved itself *in concreto*, but would have to think of it only in general.<sup>144</sup>

The reflecting power of judgment aids in delivering us over the chasm to nature because we have the potential to see it, Nature, beyond what the understanding can show us. Here we find Kant making the bold claim that the theoretically cognized world as a whole could be admired by us if we see not just the purposiveness of individual forms with respect to the imagination, but the purposiveness of the entire relation—not only in the general teleology of nature, but the systematic structure of it. Though it may be rare to find the genuine lover of natural beauty that can see nature as a symbol of morality, it seems even rarer to find the transcendental thinker that can see the entire theoretically cognized world as a symbol of morality. These are the habits and aims of the aesthetically virtuous. Though we find Kant calling this person a “transcendental philosopher” here and often we find Emerson calling a person with a similar outlook a “poet,” it is certainly not a matter of profession. It is the

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<sup>144</sup> 20 : 216.



motivation and values that I am concerned with. Emerson writes, “the true philosopher and the true poet are one, and a beauty, which is truth, and a truth, which is beauty, is the aim of both.”<sup>145</sup> This end is not fulfilled merely in appreciation. This end is also fulfilled in the many ways the true poet or philosopher can create. In the final section of this chapter, I will discuss how the love of Nature inspires the aesthetically virtuous to create.

### **Section Five: Symbols Revisited**

Earlier in the paper, I introduced the Kantian idea of beauty as a symbol of morality. I discussed the way in which the form of the judgment of beauty bears an analogy to the form of the judgment of morality. I suggested that this practice requires the virtue of receptivity and habituation of both judgments. I then suggested that the last step of symbol-taking involves an intellectual interest. In the last section, I showed how an intellectual interest can only be taken in an object that is viewed as nature, and that this requires the virtue of imagination. In this section, I will discuss what it means to see a beautiful object as a symbol, as well as what it might mean to take the world as a whole as a symbol. I will show that, though this process of symbol taking is personal and even idiosyncratic, it is not arbitrary.

We know that, for Kant, cognition requires sensible intuitions and corresponding concepts. In § 59 of the Third Critique, we learn that this presentation is not always done in a direct manner. Kant discusses two ways the reality of our

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<sup>145</sup> Emerson (1836) 29

concepts are presented, schematically and symbolically.<sup>146</sup> In schematic presentations, Kant writes that the corresponding intuition is given *a priori* and can be demonstrated directly. In symbolic presentations, “where to a concept only reason can think, and to which no sensible intuition can be adequate, an intuition is attributed with which the power of judgment proceeds in a way merely analogous to that which it observes in schematization.”<sup>147</sup>

Certain intuitions, though they are also ascribed concepts *a priori*, they are presented symbolically, or in an indirect manner.<sup>148</sup> For these concepts, symbolic presentations follow merely the rule of schematic procedure, “not the intuition itself, and thus merely the form of the reflection, not the content, which corresponds to the concept.”<sup>149</sup> Kant warns us not to confuse schematic or symbolic presentations with “mere characterizations, i.e., designations of the concepts by means of accompanying sensible signs, which contain nothing at all belonging to the intuition of the object, but only serve them, in accordance with the laws of association of the imagination, and hence in a subjective regard.”<sup>150</sup> That is to say, the symbol is not just an arbitrary mark that we associate with the idea. The symbol must truly be informed by the

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<sup>146</sup> 5 : 351.

<sup>147</sup> 5 : 351.

<sup>148</sup> 5 : 352.

<sup>149</sup> 5 : 351.

<sup>150</sup> 5 : 352.

intuition. Kant gives examples of this in the previous sections that we have discussed where one interprets the birdsong as joyful. The person attuned to nature *hears* joy in that song. It is personal, even idiosyncratic, but it is not a matter of arbitrary assignment.

Kant states that “the power of judgment performs a double task, first applying the concept to the object of a sensible intuition, and then, second, applying the mere rule of reflection on that intuition to an entirely different object, of which the first is only a symbol.”<sup>151</sup> The reflection on our moral vocation mirrors and follows the reflection on the intuition of the beautiful. Kant explains in the first introduction to the *The Third Critique* that the power of reflection in general is “to compare and to hold together given representations either with others or with one’s faculty of cognition, in relation to a concept thereby made possible.”<sup>152</sup> The principle of reflection allows us to presuppose that all given objects of nature have empirically determinate concepts that can be found. Otherwise, Kant notes, all reflection would “become arbitrary and blind, and hence would be undertaken without any well-grounded expectation of its agreement with nature.”

Though it seems entirely correct to call objects in nature beautiful, it would be mistaken to locate the morality in the object that symbolizes morality. The wildflower does not have a stake in morality, at least not in the sense that it has a

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<sup>151</sup> 5 : 352.

<sup>152</sup> 20 : 211

rational mind that can intend to act in accord or in disaccord to a moral law. Kant believes that to connect the object of beauty with the moral idea through this symbolic presentation requires the freedom of the imagination:

Taste as it were makes possible the transition from sensible charm to the habitual moral interest without too violent a leap by representing the imagination even in its freedom as purposively determinable for the understanding and teaching us to find a free satisfaction in the objects of the senses even without any sensible charm.<sup>153</sup>

It is our imagination that presents the beautiful object in nature to us as a symbol of our moral vocation; however, we at least owe our gratitude to the wildflower and to the redwood in the sense that it provides an occasion to reflect on our own moral vocation and its situation amongst the beauty of these things. The existence of these beautiful objects in nature teach us about our morality in a way we could not have come to with such clearness without them. Without wildflowers and redwoods, we surely would be less well off. The objects have the wonderful ability to aid in our betterment as beings by offering us an occasion to reflect on them and learn something deeply about ourselves while doing so. The form of the beautiful natural object—seeming to be brought about by an end or purpose, i.e., being purposive—offers itself as a ready invitation to the imagination.

The kind of purposiveness that Kant discusses for the naturally beautiful objects is not the kind of purposiveness we find in natural teleology. In this chapter, Kant is clearly discussing individual beautiful objects that can be represented as

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<sup>153</sup> 5 : 354.

symbols of morality. Additionally, I have suggested that it is possible to represent the whole system of nature this way as well. The form of the beautiful in nature in general seems to be purposive also with respect to our faculties of the imagination and the understanding. Emerson maintains a distinction close to this as well. He says both that “particular natural facts are symbols of particular spiritual facts” and that “Nature is the symbol of the spirit.”<sup>154</sup> By spirit, he means something very close to Kant’s concept of reason’s ideas. Emerson writes, “every natural fact is a symbol of some spiritual fact. Every appearance in nature corresponds to some state of the mind, and that state of the mind can only be described by presenting that natural appearance as its picture.”<sup>155</sup> Emerson expands what can be called a symbol from objects to events or actions (an expansion I would like to carry with me as well). He writes “every natural process is a version of a moral sentence.”<sup>156</sup> The point is, there is no direct representation of the highest goods, whether they be Kantian ideas of God, freedom and immortality, or what Emerson’s Reason, the universal soul, ponders “the natures of Justice, Truth, Love, Freedom.”<sup>157</sup> The imagination is involved every time we find these in the world as a symbol, in the particular and in the general.

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<sup>154</sup> Emerson (1836) 13.

<sup>155</sup> Emerson (1836) 13.

<sup>156</sup> Emerson (1836) 21.

<sup>157</sup> Emerson (1836) 14.

The imagination invites us to symbolize objects (or processes) of nature, or to take these objects (or processes) of nature as metaphors. The aesthetically virtuous take this invitation habitually. The reason I characterize the imagination as offering an invitation rather than a demand is because people are able to come to the moral law through reason alone, without ever taking up this symbolic reflection on beauty. According to Kant, few do take an interest in this symbolic reflection in a habitual way that marks their moral characters.

The way that the imagination is able to present nature as symbol teaches us about our morality in a way that is more illustrative than mere reflection on the concept alone, and because that edifies our soul. The imagination requires actually existent objects in nature to do this symbolizing, otherwise there would be no intuition to guide our reflection to the concept. This is partly why the lover of nature is “unwilling for it [nature’s beautiful object] to be entirely absent from nature.”<sup>158</sup>

The judgment of the beautiful arises because of its purposive form and our pure judgment of taste with respect to that form; however, it is the symbolic presentation that teaches us about our own morality. Imagination’s rendering of this symbolic relationship invites in those trained to the morally good, or especially receptive to that training, an interest in the beautiful object which is made possible by our ability to see the unique intrinsic tie between the two. Finding beauty aids our

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<sup>158</sup> 5 : 299.

reflection on morality. Samantha Matherne writes, “I take Kant’s idea to be that insofar as an analogy compares a symbol, which is often more concrete and familiar, with a concept, which is often more abstract and obscure, it encourages us to parlay our reflective acquaintance with the former into a deeper understanding of the latter.”<sup>159</sup>

After one takes on the symbolic exercise of the imagination and reflects on the object of beauty in this way, one is in deeper touch with the workings of her own moral vocation. Then, she can apply an interest in the natural object through the moral feeling. Cultivation of the imagination is the only way for one to let nature stand for something that intimately and immediately connects her to it. The form of Nature offers itself again and again to each mind that will take it up. I see innocence and tender love in the fawn in Spring precisely because no one intended for me to see just that. Your imagination may allow you to see steady perseverance in the Sahara or rapid resilience in the fire-scorched chaparral. It does this without sacrificing the purity of the beautiful or the judgment that made it. In other words, this interest allows nature to be taken for both its whole beauty and its whole goodness, without either depending on the other.

One needs to be receptive to beauty in the first place in order to see it as a symbol of morality. All judgments of beauty, whether they are of art, nature, or everyday objects, bear the analogy to moral judgments. The risk is that, for objects

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<sup>159</sup> Matherne, Samantha. (forthcoming): p.11.

other than nature, we do not locate that purpose in us, but instead in the mind of the person that created it.<sup>160</sup> What it means, in my eyes, to be truly receptive to beauty, is to see it as without purpose. This gives the imagination the space to make its invitation to metaphor. “The whole of nature is a metaphor of the human mind,” writes Emerson, and we are the ones to see the objects of our experience, even art and the everyday, as part of that whole.<sup>161</sup> Kant even cites examples of “unnatural things” as still being represented as symbols of morality. At least Kant admits that is not foreign to even an ordinary understanding that when we call buildings or trees majestic, the judgment seems to be in some way based on a moral judgment “because they arouse sensations that contain something analogical to the consciousness of a mental state produced by moral judgments.”<sup>162</sup> This kind of understanding requires an intellectual interest in the beautiful object, because any pure aesthetic judgment of taste would not come with this moral sentiment. That is, taste’s leap is not too violent because reason is interested in this analogy.

### **Section Six: The Aesthetically Virtuous Agent's Drive to Create**

*“The world thus exists to the soul to satisfy the desire of beauty. This element I call an ultimate end. No reason can be asked or given why the soul seeks beauty. Beauty, in its largest and profoundest sense, is one expression for the universe. God is the all-fair. Truth, and goodness, and beauty, are but different faces of the same All. But beauty innate is not ultimate. It is the herald of inward and eternal beauty, and is not*

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<sup>160</sup> 5: 302.

<sup>161</sup> Emerson (1836) 17.

<sup>162</sup> 5 : 354.



*alone a solid and satisfactory good. It must stand as a part and not as yet the last or highest expression of the final cause of Nature.”*

*-Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nature*

I hope to have shown that the aesthetically virtuous agent exercises her receptivity and imagination in acts of aesthetic appreciation, symbolic reflection, and intellectual interest. In this section, I hope to show how the aesthetically virtuous agent exercises her virtues in aesthetic creation, and how this is closely tied to the agent's symbolic practice and view of what belongs to Nature. Anne Margaret Baxley makes the point that Kant's "notion that we cannot love and admire artistic beauties for their own sake and that they never interest us in themselves seems implausible."<sup>163</sup> She also observes the seeming inconsistency this has with Kant's discussion of symbols of morality in § 59 and his discussion of genius in § 46.<sup>164</sup> My account has an answer to this implausibility and this tension. As I said, Kant allows things other than nature in the strict sense to be taken as a symbol of morality. We may see it more readily in trees, but according to Kant, buildings too are often called

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<sup>163</sup> Baxley, (2005) 33.

<sup>164</sup> Allison and Guyer have both noted that we can have a symbolic relationship to art through aesthetic ideas. I am focusing on adding what is required to see the artistic object as an object of nature. They both have suggested that the natural/artistic distinction could be collapsed by the notion of genius. This was merely a footnoted idea for Guyer and not something he ends up adopting. Allison thinks it is ultimately problematic because of Kant's distinction in the discussion of interest. As we will discuss, I take Kant's claim about those interested in artistic beauty to be an empirical claim. Practical reason is not usually involved in natural beauty (leading to a very rare soul that is marked with moral character). It is even rarer to find the person that takes an interest in art via practical reason, because in order for them to do so, they must first see it as nature.

magnificent and majestic.<sup>165</sup> This example seems to suggest that for Kant, reason can play a role in a judgment of beauty, even if the object is not nature. This may not be the way that one customarily takes this object in the ordinary understanding. That is, the ordinary remark one makes about the majestic building may not indicate a habitual discovery of ends within their moral vocation the way that the subject interested in nature might. However, I believe that it at least leaves open the possibility that one could take an unnatural object as a symbol in the fullest sense if they saw it correctly, namely as natural. Regardless, this is how I am interpreting it for my theory of aesthetic virtue.

Kant declares that the interest that can be taken in the beautiful in art is not a moral interest. Kant addresses his current contemporaries debating this issue and their appeal to the experience of virtuosi's of taste. Again, Kant believes them to be not without ground in declaring these connoisseurs to be "usually vain, obstinate, and given to corrupting passions."<sup>166</sup> Instead of reading this claim as an absolute declaration that one could never be morally interested in artistic beauty, I take this to be an empirical claim that those that are interested in artistic beauty are almost never actually morally interested.

The appeal to nature as the genius' source of inspiration and direction in the case of beautiful art makes this more plausible. The lines between artistic beauty and

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<sup>165</sup> 5 : 354.

<sup>166</sup> 5 : 298.

natural beauty that seem to be so clear in §42 (On the Intellectual Interest in Nature) begin to deteriorate also in § 46, on genius. Kant's discussion of the genius elucidates what role nature has in one's artistic vision and merit. Kant states, "Genius is the talent (natural gift) that gives the rule to art. Since the talent, as an inborn faculty of the artist, itself belongs to nature, this could also be expressed thus: Genius is the inborn predisposition of the mind (*ingenium*) through which nature gives the rule to art."<sup>167</sup> This function of the genius is pivotal for Kant's theory of aesthetics. In fact, if genius did not owe her talent to nature, and instead to a determinate and knowable rule, one may conclude that no art could truly be seen as beautiful at all for Kant. For judgments of nature, there need not be a concept of what the object one is judging is supposed to be, but for judgments of art, one must have a concept of what the object is supposed to be.<sup>168</sup> However, for Kant, to judge something as beautiful at all, there must be no concept as a determining ground. How then can art be beautiful at all?

The appeal to genius is the only answer:

Thus beautiful art cannot itself think up a rule in accordance with which it is to bring its product into being. Yet since without a preceding rule a product can never be called art, nature in the subject (and by means of the disposition of its faculties) must give the rule to art, i.e., beautiful art is possible only as a product of genius.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> 5 : 307.

<sup>168</sup> 5 : 311

<sup>169</sup> 5 : 307

Since Kant needs the *natural* gift of genius to make sense of how art can be beautiful, what makes natural beauty and artistic beauty so different after all? I believe that these inconsistencies are resolved with my account of Nature as the form of purposiveness without a purpose. We exercise the virtue of receptivity when we notice this form anywhere, but it takes extra practice to notice it in art. It also means that we need to be a little bit more practiced in our acts of imagining to imagine our own ends for art. When we appeal to the artist as the end, we limit our own imaginary response.

This limit of imaginary response is precisely what I think many contemporary theories suggest that we do. As I brought up in chapter one, any suggestion of aesthetic engagement that suggests that it is comprised of determinate cognitive tasks limits the imagination. The normativity of achievement offered by Lopes fills in the ends for the artist. The end is to achieve excellently, and there is some measure of evaluation. In that case, the creator of beauty is not given the opportunity to find her own ends. Not only does this limit her imagination and thus limit her ability to be aesthetically virtuous, it also limits her ability to connect her aesthetic work to her moral life in the way the agent of free play would have.

I have shown what this limit to the imagination looks like in contemporary aesthetic theory, especially when one considers the aim of aesthetic engagement as achievement. Even in Nguyen's normativity of striving there is a limit to the imagination. The "point" of engagement is not the end, but the motivation of

accuracy is prescribed to the process. We interpret nature, absolutely; however, it seems odd to think that we would suggest that we were accurate about our interpretations. Even more so that accuracy was our motivation for those interpretations. That is because, I think, that we see nature as purposive without a purpose much more readily than we do with art. Again, I think the aesthetically virtuous agent extends this lens to art as well, and even the everyday. She has no limit on her imaginative capacities.

Amazing things can happen when the imagination is freed from this conceptual limit. The imagination has the space to posit a purpose or end when aesthetic objects are interpreted as purposive without purpose. This is a way of interpreting many normally reserve for nature alone. There are two ways that I see an opportunity for expansion of the concept of Nature itself within the Kantian framework. If one chooses to disagree with me on the precise reading of Kant, the point still stands as my own neo-Kantian theory. One expansion of the idea of Nature is in the Kantian story of genius and the other is in the concept of Nature as a systematic whole.

The Kantian story of genius is my framework to suggest that receptivity shows up in our drive to create. To be sure, I would not call someone aesthetically virtuous if their aesthetic acts were limited to appreciation. The aesthetically virtuous agent does create. It might not be fine art, but she brings beauty into the world in some way. Realizing that drive enacts the imagination. In both cases, the

imagination posits an end for an otherwise endless purposiveness. In appreciation, this end is posited by the imagination in the act of reflection. In creation, this end is posited by the imagination in the act of *creation* itself, as that is what causes the object to exist.

This idea of Nature is expanded still by my claim that we have the capacity to conceive—however difficult it may be to attain this mindset—of the whole world as Nature. The only way to fully “bridge the gap” from freedom to nature is to not limit one’s understanding of Nature as distinct places in the world—that is, in the forests or the seas. For Kant, there will always be an infinite gap between Nature and freedom in a theoretical understanding. However, under the reflective power of judgment, Nature and freedom are not so violently opposed.

To put it another way, we are free beings, but we are also a part of Nature. The creative force behind Nature is also behind us. Understanding how wide-swept Nature’s incredible influence can be seen is not to say that what we most often consider as a part of nature does not still hold its reverent position in the order of beautiful things. The oceans and the forest are still the birthplace of the morally-inclined viewer’s reflection on symbols. It is not a coincidence that these places are among the most awe-inspiring, and that it is difficult to find places with higher potential for profound aesthetic experiences. However, if we look closely, we can see that Nature’s hand is evident even where we have deemed to be unnatural places. In

fact, Kant's discussion of the genius makes a stand for the idea that really everything we see as beautiful in this world really belongs to Nature in the end.

This gives genius a different role. She still contains the capacity and responsibility to exercise her imagination and posit an end, but she is not the end. Geniuses can get confused; they often think they can give a story to their artistic inspiration or what explicit purpose they give their art. The more reflective and the more humble the artist, though, the more you hear the gratitude for some unknown or holy source. That source is the source of nature itself. The artist is but a conduit for that source. Virtuosi of taste often get confused too, they judge the artwork holding in mind the intention of the artist to please them. The additional purpose they might find in themselves then feels frivolous. Perhaps their purpose is mediated by the intention of the very cultivation of taste itself. This occurs all the time, and Kant is well aware of these instances. Judgment of artistic beauty does not have to look this way, and I think Kant himself admits to it, however subtly. I believe Coleridge puts it in another we may find helpful to understand:

Methinks, it should have been impossible  
Not to love all things in a world so filled;  
Where the breeze warbles, and the mute still air  
Is Music slumbering on her instrument.<sup>170</sup>

Whatever beautiful thing the artist creates is but a result of the infinite end of Nature speaking through her like the breeze through the Eolian Harp. When we are attuned

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<sup>170</sup> Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. Eolian Harp, lines 30-33

to conceiving of the beauty of art this way, we find beauty even more vastly than before. It becomes difficult not to love all things—difficult not to be moved by them, intellectually interested in them, and difficult not to see them all as symbols of our morality.

Emerson alludes to Coleridge's "Eolian Harp" when he suggests that it takes the delicate ear to enter into the space "where the air is music"—it is only there that "we hear those primal warblings."<sup>171</sup> These forces of inspiration are not of human creation and therefore not created from, or best understood by, our rules. For Emerson, it is not that God created some beautiful things of the universe, but that God is Beauty, and God as Beauty itself created the universe. It is our role to be simply aware enough and perceptive enough to see the beauty of nature and write down the poetry "that was written before time was." This act of translation is never perfect. We are always in the process of cultivating these virtues, and of actively bridging this gap. Beauty fosters creativity that fosters more beauty. Emerson writes, "Nothing divine dies. All good is eternally reproductive. The beauty of nature re-forms itself in the mind, and not for barren contemplation, but for new creation."<sup>172</sup> Nature is meant to inspire us, not just for the imaginative exercise of reflection, but also the imagination exercise of creation. When we create beauty, we are speaking the language of symbols. Emerson puts it this way:

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<sup>171</sup> Emerson (1844) 4

<sup>172</sup> Emerson (1836) 12.



The production of a work of art throws a light upon the mystery of humanity. A work of art is an abstract or epitome of the world. It is the result or expression of nature, in miniature. For although the works of nature are innumerable and all different, the result of the expression of them all is similar and single. Nature is a sea of forms radically alike and even unique. A leaf, a sunbeam, a landscape, the ocean, make an analogous impression on the mind. What is common to them all—that perfectness and harmony, is beauty. The standard of beauty is the entire circuit of natural forms—the totality of nature; which the Italians expressed by defining beauty “il più nell’ uno.” Nothing is quite beautiful alone; nothing but is beautiful in the whole. A single object is only so far beautiful as its suggest this universal grace. The poet, the painter, the sculptor, the musician, the architect, seek each to concentrate this radiance of the world on one point, and each in his several work to satisfy the love of beauty which stimulates him to produce. Thus is Art a nature passed through the alembic of man. Thus in art does Nature work through the will of a man filled with the beauty of her first works.<sup>173</sup>

I hope to have shown that the aesthetically virtuous agent is a necessary figure for the romantic, neo-Kantian thought, and that this agent tells us something elucidating about our modern ideas of engagement. She, by exercising her virtues of receptivity and imagination, bridges the gap between Nature and freedom. The kind of aesthetic engagement that she has stands in sharp contrast with the kind of engagement many contemporary theorists have suggested as norms. Determinate cognitive tasks are a result of a specific kind of interpretation of the aesthetic object—one that possesses a finite end. This misconception limits the imagination, and thus part of the moral significance of the aesthetic process. Once one realizes that even

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<sup>173</sup> Emerson (1836) 13.

what gives the rule to art is Nature's ineffable force, one should be able to take an intellectual interest in it. In fact, Kant, Emerson, and Coleridge (and I!) certainly agree on this point: one ought to find it impossible not to. We ultimately have grounds to cultivate an aesthetic admiration for the whole world when we see it as Nature. When we have cultivated that beautiful kind of moral interest, we see clearly that we belong.

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