

# Pleasure, preference and value

Studies in philosophical aesthetics

EDITED BY EVA SCHAPER

*Professor in Logic  
University of Glasgow*

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

*Cambridge  
London New York New Rochelle  
Melbourne Sydney*

without the idea of the Archimedean point, that tendency stands revealed as nothing but a familiar scientism – which we can recognize as such without that relativistic disrespect for science itself which Williams rightly deploras.

## VI

Nothing I have said in this paper casts any doubt on the thesis that value is not objective in the sense I have attributed to Mackie. The point is, as I suggested earlier (section II), that if we can disconnect the notion of the world (or its fabric or furniture) from that notion of objectivity, then we make it possible to consider different interpretations of the claim that value is part of the world, a claim which the phenomenology of value experience has made attractive to philosophers and ordinary people. Of course this paper is at best a preliminary to that enquiry.<sup>23</sup>

It would be pointless to pretend that the correlation between reality and that notion of objectivity is the only obstacle to taking the phenomenology of value experience at face value. I have already mentioned the difficulties posed by the relation which the experience of moral value apparently bears to the will (section II above). A plausible connection between the experience of aesthetic value and the feeling of (in some sense) pleasure generates a problem about aesthetic value in particular, which might be summed up in this question: how can a mere *feeling* constitute an experience in which the world reveals itself to us? All I have done in this paper is to try to cast doubt on a line of thought which would prevent us from finding this question, and similar questions, so much as worth raising.

<sup>23</sup> In considering these different interpretations, we ought to contemplate the possibility of connecting the notion of the world with *different* notions of objectivity. One different notion of objectivity that might repay examination is one according to which an experience is of an objective reality if what the experience is an experience *of* is independent of the experience itself. This is something we might make out to be true of particular experiences of value, even if not of value experience in general; and we should ask ourselves whether something's being independent of each particular experience might not be enough to secure the truth in this case of the thesis that 'knowledge is of what is there anyway'. Again, we ought to consider David Wiggins's suggestion that convergence need not be Peircean; that a notion of objectivity suitably explained in terms of a different conception of convergence does not, after all, exclude from objective reality all features that are subjective in the sense with which this paper has been concerned. (See 'What Would be a Substantial Theory of Truth?', in Zak van Straaten (ed.), *Philosophical Subjects: Essays Presented to P. F. Strawson* (Oxford, 1980), especially at pp. 218–19.)

## The possibility of aesthetic realism

## PHILIP PETTIT

## I

My concern in this essay is with aesthetic characterisations of works of art, in particular works of pictorial art. I want to raise the question of whether there is any general reason why such characterisations should not be taken in the realist's manner. My personal belief is that there is not and I should like to do something to bear this out: that is, to establish the possibility of aesthetic realism. What I shall do is to consider two objections that have been brought against the realistic view and to provide a sketch account of how the realist can hope to evade these.

What are aesthetic characterisations of works of art? In response I might simply say that they are characterisations with which the objections that we shall be considering engage; that would be to thrust the onus of definition on to my opponent. It would be unhelpful of me, however, to take such a short line and I propose to make three comments which may serve to focus the class of judgments that we shall be discussing.

The first comment is that aesthetic characterisations of pictures are distinct from pictorial ones. Pictorial characterisations are descriptions of the colours displayed by pictures. Nelson Goodman gives a convenient, though avowedly rough, account of them in the following passage.

An elementary pictorial characterisation states what colour a picture has at a given place on its face. Other pictorial characterisations in effect combine many elementary ones by conjunction, alternation, quantification, etc. Thus a pictorial characterisation may name colours at several places, or state that the colour at one place lies within a certain range, or state that the colours at two places are complementary, and so on. Briefly, a pictorial characterisation says more or less specifically what colours the picture has at what places.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Languages of Art*, Oxford University Press, 1969, p. 42. The account is rough; for example in ignoring the three-dimensional properties that a picture may have. Notice that if a painting changes shade of colour at some place it will alter in respect of the pictorial characterisations it sustains, though it may not invite a different colour name: this, because pictorial characterisations include comparisons with colour charts. The fact is important, since if pictorial characterisations were insensitive to such a change, they could not provide a base on which aesthetic characterisations supervene: see below.

My second comment on aesthetic characterisations is that they are ordinarily taken as relatively primitive reports of experience rather than as reports which have been rectified by background information. The distinction in question arises with pictorial characterisations as well as with aesthetic. Taken as primitive, 'It's red' is a report of how something looks here and now; taken as rectified, it is a report of how it would look to a normal eye under normal illumination. Aesthetic characterisations are taken as relatively primitive in so far as the only rectification that is thought to be relevant to them is that which is already assumed for pictorial reports.

In the last section of this essay we shall find ourselves forced to introduce a distinction between primitive – that is, relatively primitive – aesthetic characterisations – and characterisations that have been submitted to a distinctive process of rectification. Until then, however, we shall go along with the common assumption and treat them as primitive reports of experience. Their primitiveness comes to this: that if a characterisation applies to one work, then it applies to any which, subject to rectification for colours, is observationally indistinguishable from that work; there is no possibility of an unobservable difference affecting how the works are respectively characterised.<sup>2</sup>

My third comment spells out something implied in the first two. If aesthetic characterisations are non-pictorial, and if they apply to any two works which are indistinguishable in pictorial profile, then this is to say that they are supervenient on pictorial characterisations. The indiscernibility of any two works with respect to their pictorial characterisations entails their aesthetic indiscernibility; equivalently, there cannot be an aesthetic difference between two works unless there is also a pictorial one.<sup>3</sup> Such supervenience on the pictorial – henceforth, I shall use the term 'pictorial supervenience' – comes to what Nelson Goodman describes as constancy relative to pictorial properties. 'A property is thus constant only if, although it may or may not remain constant where pictorial properties vary, it never varies where the pictorial properties remain constant. In other words, if it occurs anywhere, it also occurs whenever the pictorial properties remain the same.'<sup>4</sup>

The three comments which I have offered are designed to focus the class

<sup>2</sup> My account of primitiveness draws on the account of observational predicates in Crispin Wright, 'Language-Mastery and The Sorites Paradox' in Gareth Evans and John McDowell (eds.), *Truth and Meaning*, Oxford University Press, 1976, pp. 223–47.

<sup>3</sup> For a useful account of supervenience see J. Kim, 'Supervenience and Nomological Incommensurables', *American Philosophical Quarterly* Vol. 15, 1978, 149–58. Like Kim, I leave open the question of whether the necessity involved in supervenience is logical necessity or some weaker variety.

<sup>4</sup> Goodman, p. 86.

of aesthetic characterisations. They culminate in this third remark, that it is at least a necessary condition for such characterisations that they supervene on their pictorial counterparts. In conclusion, I should like to point out that the usual examples given of aesthetic characterisations do seem to meet this condition. For a list of examples we may turn to Roger Scruton, a writer who sponsors the objections which we shall later be considering. He writes as follows about the predicates used in the aesthetic characterisation of art, pictorial and non-pictorial.

Among these predicates we find a great variety. For example, there are predicates whose primary use is in aesthetic judgment, predicates like 'beautiful', 'graceful', 'elegant' and 'ugly'. These terms occur primarily in judgment of aesthetic value. Then there are descriptions referring to the formal or technical accomplishment of a work of art: 'balanced', 'well-made', 'economical', 'rough', 'undisciplined', and so on. Many aesthetic descriptions employ predicates that are normally used to describe the mental and emotional life of human beings. We describe works of art as sad, joyful, melancholy, agitated, erotic, sincere, vulgar, intelligent and mature ... Aesthetic descriptions can also refer to the expressive features of works of art. Works of art are often said to express emotion, thought, attitude, character, in fact, anything that can be expressed at all ... Closely connected with expression terms are the terms known philosophically as 'affective': terms that seem to be used to express or project particular human responses which they also indicate by name – examples include 'moving', 'exciting', 'evocative', 'nauseous', 'tedious', 'enjoyable' and 'adorable'. We must also include among aesthetic descriptions several kinds of comparison. For example, I may describe a writer's style as bloated or masculine, a colour as warm or cold, a piece of music as architectural ... Finally there are various descriptions of a work of art in terms of what it represents, in terms of its truthfulness, or its overall character or genre (whether it is tragic, comic, ironical or what) which cannot easily be fitted into these classes, but which have an important role, despite this, in aesthetic judgment.<sup>5</sup>

Looking at the aesthetic characterisations of pictures towards which Scruton points, we must certainly judge the bulk of them to be pictorially supervenient. Three possible exceptions come to mind but none calls to be taken very seriously. The first is the characterisation of a work by reference to the motive of the artist, as sincere or whatever. Might not such a motive have differed while the work remained pictorially the same? In one sense it might, but not in the sense in which the characterisation which mentions it would really be of aesthetic interest. When we focus on such properties as the sincerity of a work of art we are interested usually in the sort of sincerity that shows through in the painting itself; thus were the work to differ in the sincerity it displays, it would also have to differ pictorially.

A second possible exception is the characterisation of a work by

<sup>5</sup> *Art and Imagination*, Methuen, London, 1974, pp. 30–1.

reference to that which it represents. Whether a picture represents this or that person, this or that scene, would seem to depend on factors other than its colour properties: in particular, it would seem to depend on the painter's intention. Thus any judgment of representational value must fail to be pictorially supervenient. Once again, however, it is not clear that such representational value is aesthetically interesting. What is of more direct aesthetic interest is the characterisation of a picture by reference to the sort of thing it represents: that is, as a child-picture, a landscape-picture, a Christ-picture, or whatever. Such a characterisation, unlike the judgment of particular representational value, must be expected to be pictorially supervenient.

The third possible exception to the pictorial supervenience thesis is the characterisation of a work of art as inventive or creative. Whether a picture has such a property would seem to depend as much on what other pictures are in existence as on the work itself; thus the characterisation of a picture by mention of it would not be pictorially supervenient. Here there is no accommodating response which I can immediately make but I hope to be able to describe one in section iv. In the meantime; it does not seem unreasonable to ask for charity towards the supervenience claim. That claim formulates a necessary condition on aesthetic characterisations and with respect to the utterances which it identifies, we now have to raise the realism versus non-realism issue.

## II

What does it mean to regard aesthetic characterisations realistically? At a first level it means two things: that one believes that under their standard interpretation, under the interpretation which respects speakers' intentions, they come out as assertions; and further that one believes that the standard assertoric interpretation is unobjectionable. For the purposes at hand assertions may be taken as utterances which are capable of being true or false in a manner that distinguishes them from questions, commands and the like.<sup>6</sup> What exactly it is to be true or false is a question which we may for the moment ignore.

Under their standard interpretation, there is little doubt but that aesthetic characterisations generally come out as assertions. Under that

<sup>6</sup> Notice that not every characterisation must be said by the realist to be true or false; he may deny bivalence. See John McDowell, 'Truth Conditions, Bivalence, and Verificationism' in Evans and McDowell, pp. 42-66. Notice too that the following case is assumed not to arise: that of an utterance which is standardly taken as non-assertoric but which the realist wishes none the less to construe as an assertion. Notice finally that the reductivist who tries to fix the truth conditions of the assertions by reference to the truth conditions of certain other statements will be a non-realist only if he sees himself as combating the standard interpretation of the original assertions.

interpretation they have the syntactical form of assertions and they have the distinctively assertoric mark of committing someone who utters them to a particular line of action, linguistic and non-linguistic: this, by contrast with non-assertoric utterances such as questions and commands.<sup>7</sup> There may be some utterances which would pass as aesthetic characterisations and which do not count as assertions, but it seems that they must be less than typical. The obvious examples of non-assertoric aesthetic remarks – 'Think of the painting as a coloured canvas', 'Imagine the line of the shoulder raised' – will not do because they are not examples of characterisations of pictures.

One putative class of non-assertoric aesthetic characterisations which may be mentioned for illustrative purposes is that of metaphorical descriptions of pictures as sad or gay, heavy or light, or whatever. On one theory of metaphor such utterances are not assertions under their standard interpretation, or at least not assertions in the appropriate way. Taken literally, they are assertions, but taken with their proper metaphorical import they are distinguished by the non-assertoric intention to affect the hearer's way of seeing things; the intention is non-assertoric because the effect sought is not to be achieved just through changing the hearer's beliefs.<sup>8</sup> It would take us too far afield to consider this theory here, but, even if it is correct, it does not undermine the claim that generally aesthetic characterisations come out as assertions under their standard interpretation. I do not myself accept the theory, but I cannot set about defending my view here.

But if the standard interpretation casts aesthetic characterisations as assertions, is that interpretation unobjectionable? There may be objections forthcoming in respect of certain sub-classes: for example, it may be said that even if metaphorical characterisations are standardly taken as assertoric in the normal way, the cost of so construing them is for some reason unacceptable.<sup>9</sup> We may overlook such specific objections, on the assumption that they will leave us with some aesthetic characterisations still to discuss. The question is whether there is any general reason why the standard interpretation of such characterisations might be thought to be objectionable.

What may certainly be said is that the consideration which often leads

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of the latter point see Michael Dummett, *Frege: Philosophy of Language*, Duckworth, London, 1973, Chapter 10. An aspect of their having the syntactical form of assertions is that they pass the Geach test discussed by Dummett: the form of words in which an aesthetic characterisation is formulated can occur as the antecedent of a conditional. See Peter Geach, *Logic Matters*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1972, Chapter 8.

<sup>8</sup> Such a view might be drawn from Donald Davidson, 'What Metaphors Mean', *Critical Inquiry* Vol. 5, 1978, 31-47; reprinted in Mark Platts (ed.), *Reference, Truth and Reality*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1980, pp. 238-54.

<sup>9</sup> It is also possible to read Davidson's position in this manner.

anti-realists to seek out non-standard interpretations does not apply in the present case. The consideration is this: that with the body of apparent assertions under examination, the standard interpretation of them would wish us to ascribe truth-conditions to certain utterances when the relevant speakers have no way of telling whether or not the truth-conditions obtain. This consideration certainly applies to statements about other minds and about the distant past: with some such statements we shall have to admit that the relevant speakers have no evidence as to whether or not the truth-conditions realistically ascribed to the utterances actually obtain. With aesthetic characterisations, however, it seems to be irrelevant. Here there is no question of some of the utterances having to be regarded as verification-transcendent, if they are taken realistically; the characterisations are equally subject to the prospect of verification or equally resistant to it.<sup>10</sup>

Let us grant that, so far, the way seems to be open to us to regard at least some aesthetic characterisations realistically: that is, to believe that under their standard interpretation they come out as assertions, and to believe that that interpretation is unobjectionable. There is yet a second level, however, where it may be said that realism has also to establish certain claims. At this level, so it will be held, to regard aesthetic characterisations realistically again means two things: that one believes that under their standard interpretation they come out as assertions of a strict and genuine kind or, probably the same thought, have truth-value in the most substantial sense of that term; and further, that one believes that in this respect too the standard interpretation is unobjectionable.

It is possible to argue that it is unnecessary for the realist to enter debate at this second level. David Wiggins has urged that the notion of truth-value assumed in taking utterances as assertions is already as substantial as we should wish it to be.<sup>11</sup> In that case there is no useful distinction to be made between loose and strict assertions, between assertions which have truth-value in a merely formal sense and assertions which have it in a more substantial one. Although I am sympathetic, I do not propose to adopt Wiggins's strategy of argument. Rather I mean to be charitable to the opponent of aesthetic realism and to assume that he can reasonably hold at once that aesthetic characterisations are assertoric but not genuinely assertoric, capable of having truth-value but not capable of having it in the most substantial sense.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> In this they are like the evaluations discussed in my paper 'Evaluative "Realism" and Interpretation' in Steven H. Holtzmann and Christopher M. Leich (eds.), *Wittgenstein: To Follow a Rule*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1980, pp. 211–45.

<sup>11</sup> 'What Would be a Substantial Theory of Truth?' in Zak van Straaten (ed.), *Philosophical Subjects: Essays Presented to P. F. Strawson*, Oxford University Press, 1980, pp. 189–221.

<sup>12</sup> In the paper mentioned in note 10 I do not consider the possibility of such a position with

Exercising such charity, I need to say that the realist holds at least some aesthetic characterisations not just to be assertions, but to be genuine assertions. And how may we define that class of utterances? Happily, we can help ourselves to a definition constructed in another context by Crispin Wright. According to this, genuine assertions are

statements communally associated with conditions of such a kind that one who is sincerely unwilling to assent to such a statement when, by ordinary criteria, those conditions obtain, can make himself intelligible to us only by betraying a misunderstanding or some sort of misapprehension, or by professing some sort of sceptical attitude.<sup>13</sup>

The idea is that with a genuine assertion appropriate evidence leaves no room for discretion: someone presented with the evidence can sincerely fail to assent only through a failure of understanding or apprehension, or because of adopting some form of philosophical scepticism. By contrast the non-genuine assertion – the quasi-assertion, in Michael Dummett's phrase<sup>14</sup> – is an utterance with all the marks of an assertion except that the conditions with which it is communally associated leave room for discretion as to whether one should assent or not.

The most plausible threat to aesthetic realism comes at this second level of debate and the opponent whom I envisage in this paper takes his stand there. He says that the standard, or at least the proper, interpretation of aesthetic characterisations casts them as quasi-assertions, as assertions which have truth-value only in a weak sense. What might that sense be said to be? This, perhaps: that we can, and probably must, render them in an interpretative language using the formula, for any asserted sentence S, 'S is true if and only if *p*', where '*p*' is a declarative sentence. Our opponent will wish to deny that such interpretability makes S-like utterances assertions in the genuine sense, for he will say that it may yet be the case, both for S and for '*p*', that the appropriate evidence leaves room for the speaker's sincerely failing to assent. What may be required to motivate assent, he will say, is not only a belief that the circumstances associated with the assertion are realised but also a certain logically independent psychological response: say, an act of will or a visitation of feeling.

A denial of aesthetic realism on the lines just sketched can be found in Roger Scruton's *Art and Imagination*. Scruton takes his starting point from the following view about aesthetic characterisations: 'To understand such an aesthetic description involves realising that one can assert it or assent to it sincerely only if one has had a certain "experience", just as one can

respect to evaluations.

<sup>13</sup> *Wittgenstein on the Foundations of Mathematics*, Duckworth, London, 1980, p. 463.

<sup>14</sup> See Dummett, Chapter 10. Wright's distinction is developed from Dummett's notion of the quasi-assertion, as he makes clear on p. 448.

assert or assent to a normal description only if one has the appropriate belief.<sup>15</sup> On the basis of this he constructs an alternative to realism which he describes as an affective theory.

The affective theory of aesthetic description argues that the acceptance condition of an aesthetic description may not be a belief but may rather be some other mental state which more effectively explains the point of aesthetic description. To agree to an aesthetic description is to 'see its point', and this 'seeing the point' is to be elucidated in terms of some response or experience that has yet to be described. Hence aesthetic descriptions need not have truth conditions in the strong sense, and to justify them may be to justify an experience and not a belief.<sup>16</sup>

From what we have already seen it will be clear that there are two possible forms for an affective theory such as Scruton's. The theory may be that the standard interpretation depicts aesthetic characterisations as non-genuine assertions or, in a revisionary spirit, that although the standard interpretation depicts them realistically, aesthetic characterisations ought properly to be taken as non-genuine assertions. From our point of view, it does not really matter which version of the theory is ascribed to the opposition. We shall be looking at two objections to realism and hoping to find a means of rebutting them. The objections might be invoked to support either form of the affective theory and it is no concern of ours to determine which of these is the more plausible.

### III

So much for the delimitation of aesthetic characterisations and the definition of what it is to regard them realistically. We come now to the two objections mentioned: the objections which put in doubt the possibility of aesthetic realism. The objections each point to a problematic feature of aesthetic characterisations: the one is that the characterisations are essentially perceptual, the other that they are perceptually elusive. They are not the only objections imaginable but, among serious contenders, they are the most distinctively aesthetic ones; the others tend to be recast versions of objections more commonly raised against realism about secondary qualities or realism about values. I assume in what follows that such other objections are not overwhelming. The issue is whether there is

<sup>15</sup> Scruton, p. 49.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55. For a denial of realism in respect of ethics which resembles the position characterised here for aesthetics see Simon Blackburn, 'Rule-Following and Moral Realism' in Holtzmann and Leich. Both Blackburn and Scruton indicate that they ascribe truth-value to the utterances which they discuss only in the weak sense that the utterances allow of interpretation by means of the formula described earlier. See Scruton, Chapter 5 for a lengthy discussion.

any distinctive reason why aesthetic characterisations should not be taken realistically.

We may assume, as a matter of definition, that aesthetic characterisations are all essentially perceptual. What this means is that the putatively cognitive state one is in when, perceiving a work of art, one sincerely assents to a given aesthetic characterisation, is not a state to which one can have non-perceptual access. What I seem to know when, having seen a painting, I describe it as graceful or awkward, tightly or loosely organised, dreamy or erotic, inviting or distancing, is not something which you can know, or at least not something which you can know in the same sense, just through relying on my testimony. It may be that common parlance would allow you to say: 'I know that the picture is graceful and inviting; I have expert and reliable testimony on the matter.' The fact remains however that, phenomenologically, we must distinguish between the type of cognitive state I enjoy – we may assume for the moment that the state is properly cognitive – and that to which you have access. The difference is like that between someone who hears a joke, finds it funny and says that it is amusing and someone who says that it is amusing on the ground of having been told as much.

Aesthetic characterisations are essentially perceptual in the sense that perception is the only title to the sort of knowledge which perception yields – let us say, to the full knowledge – of the truths which they express. In this feature they contrast with pictorial characterisations, and sensory reports in general. The cognitive state of someone who sees and reports that an object is red is a type of state accessible to a companion who sees the object and fails to discern its colour, provided that the second person has good reason to trust the report of the first. Here, by contrast with the aesthetic case, one would find the following sort of remark quite reasonable: 'I don't have to look more closely; I know from my friend's testimony that it is red.' The remark signals the fact that the cognitive state of sincerely assenting on the basis of perception to the sentence 'The object is red' is one to which testimony may also give one access. Both perception and testimony may count as titles to the full knowledge of the truth which that sentence expresses.

The essentially perceptual nature of aesthetic characterisations is surprising in view of the contrast it marks with pictorial characterisations: one would have expected the two sorts of judgments to allow of the same titles to knowledge. It constitutes a difficulty for aesthetic realism because it is unclear how the realist is to explain the phenomenon. The affective theorist, on the other hand, can make ready sense of it. He will say that one is fully entitled to assent to an aesthetic characterisation only where one has had a certain non-cognitive experience in response to the work and

that this naturally leads us to deny that there can be a non-perceptual title to full 'knowledge' of what the characterisation expresses. Just as one must be amused before one is fully entitled to describe a joke as funny – the opponent of realism will naturally take amusement as non-cognitive – so it will be said that one must be moved in some non-cognitive fashion, one must enjoy some appropriate non-cognitive flush, before one has a full title to endorse an aesthetic characterisation.

Roger Scruton sketches the affective theorist's explanation in the following passage:

If  $\phi$  is a visual property, say, then it is not true that I *have* to see  $\phi$  for myself in order to know that an object possesses it: there are circumstances where the opinion of others can give me a logically conclusive reason for saying that  $\phi$  is there, as indeed a blind man can have knowledge of colours. In aesthetics you have to see for yourself precisely because what you have to 'see' is not a property: your knowledge that an aesthetic feature is 'in' the object is given by the *same* criteria that show that you 'see' it. To see the sadness in the music and to know that the music is sad are one and the same thing. To agree in the judgement that the music is sad is not to agree in a belief, but in something more like a response or an experience; in a mental state that is – unlike belief – logically tied to the immediate circumstances of its arousal.<sup>17</sup>

The second problematic feature of aesthetic characterisations, and we may also take it as definitional, is that they are perceptually elusive. What this means is that visual scrutiny of a picture, necessary though it may be for aesthetic knowledge, is not always sufficient to guarantee it. One may look and look at a painting and fail to come to a position where one can sincerely assent to the aesthetic characterisations which are true of it. One may look and look and not see its elegance or economy or sadness, for example. This perceptual elusiveness is different from the lack of thoroughness that may affect any form of perception: the lack which may explain why one did not notice the blob of yellow in the bottom left hand corner of the canvas. Assuming a normal eye and normal illumination, pointing is sufficient to put such an oversight right, but there is no exercise which is guaranteed to bring the perceptually elusive into view.

The perceptual elusiveness of aesthetic characterisations can be dramatically illustrated by reference to the ambiguous *Gestalt*. Take the much discussed duck-rabbit drawing. The description of this as a duck-representation is a putative aesthetic characterisation of the drawing. Someone who sees the drawing as a rabbit, however, may not be able, even

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54. I am grateful to John McDowell for drawing my attention to what I describe as the essentially perceptual nature of aesthetic characterisations. I should mention that, unlike Scruton, I would like to leave open the question of whether a congenitally blind person can have a non-perceptual access to knowledge of colours. Some of the data relevant to the question are presented in the next section.

with herculean efforts at visual scrutiny, to come to a position where he can sincerely assert that it represents a duck. Although the characterisation is said to be determined by nothing more than what is seen, all that is seen is insufficient to produce recognition of its truth.

The perceptual elusiveness of aesthetic characterisations is surprising for the same reason as their essentially perceptual nature: it marks an unexpected contrast with pictorial characterisations. The phenomenon may be quoted as a difficulty for aesthetic realism because it is unclear how the realist can explain it. On the other hand, the affective theorist has an explanation ready to hand. He will say that assent to an aesthetic characterisation involves more than seeing that the picture has such and such a quality; it also involves having a certain sort of non-cognitive experience aroused by the picture. Saying this, he can explain the elusiveness in question by the fact that sometimes visual scrutiny of a work fails to arouse the appropriate experience, with the result that the person is not in a position in which he can sincerely assent to the characterisation.<sup>18</sup>

#### IV

The challenge for the aesthetic realist is clear. What has to be shown with aesthetic characterisations is that their being essentially perceptual and perceptually elusive can be explained consistently with a realistic construal: consistently with the view that they are genuine assertions and that the presentation of appropriate evidence leaves no distinctive room for the sincere reservation of assent. The problem, intuitively, is this. If aesthetic characterisations are held to direct us towards real properties of the works they characterise, how then do we account for the rather unusual nature of those properties? Short of making them out to be almost magical, how do we explain why the only general title to full knowledge of the properties is perception and why the most exact perception may yet fail to reveal their presence?

In order to see how such an explanation might go, let us consider the case with regular pictorial properties, i.e. properties of colour. The characterisation of something X as red is associated with an uncontentious, if analytically useless, conditional about how X looks to a normally equipped observer under normal conditions of illumination and the like. 'X is red', we can say, 'if and only if it is such that it looks red under standard presentation.' Granted the association with such a

<sup>18</sup> Roger Scruton makes this point, among others, *ibid.*, Chapter 3. He later exempts representational characterisations from the affective thesis which he argues. 'Although the important facts about both representation and expression must be stated in terms of our reactions to works of art, the logic of these two notions is (or, in the case of expression, can be) a logic of description' (p. 205). However, it seems from Chapter 3 that he will have to treat the duck-rabbit case in the manner suggested.

conditional, we can understand why the colour characterisation is neither essentially perceptual nor perceptually elusive. If the conditional tells us what it is for something to be red, then, given that the notion of standard presentation is appropriately determinate, we can see why the characterisation allows a testimonial title to knowledge and why it admits of ready perceptual adjudication.

Take first the issue of testimony. Given a sentence '*p*', under what conditions might we want to endorse the following: person 1 knows that *p* but person 2, whom he informs of the fact, cannot be said to know in the same sense that *p*, even though person 2 has good reason to trust person 1? If person 1 has good evidence that *p*, so surely has person 2: he has good evidence of the good evidence which person 1 has. What then might make a difference? Presumably just this: that for some reason one can understand properly what is expressed by '*p*' only if one has the non-testimonial relation to it enjoyed by person 1. In such a case, and it seems to be the only candidate, we might well wish to deny that person 2 knows that *p*, or at least that he knows that *p* in the same sense as person 1.

The claim can be borne out by illustration. Take the case where '*p*' involves a demonstrative and where a non-testimonial relation to what '*p*' describes is necessary for properly identifying the referent of the demonstrative. Suppose '*p*' is 'He is fair-haired', that someone whom I trust asserts that sentence in my hearing, and that I am not in a position to see the person to whom he is referring. In such a case I could not be said to have access to the cognitive state enjoyed by my informant. I might be said to know that the assertion 'He is fair-haired', on the lips of my informant, expressed a truth, but knowledge that such an assertion is true may not involve knowledge of the truth expressed. I might be said to know that the person referred to is fair-haired, but knowledge of this kind, not involving a direct relationship with the person in question, is also less than my informant enjoys: it is knowledge *de dicto*, not *de re*.<sup>19</sup> Because testimony does not enable me fully to understand what is expressed by '*p*', as this is asserted by my informant, so it does not give me a title to full knowledge of what is expressed by '*p*'.

If the claim just presented is correct, then we can see why a colour characterisation, barring problems with demonstratives and the like, should allow a testimonial title to full knowledge. What is expressed by 'X is red' is given by the associated conditional and one can understand this properly even if one does not enjoy a non-testimonial relation to the fact reported. One knows what it is for something to look red, and one knows what standard presentation involves, even if one does not see the red object in question. Thus there is no reason why one should not be said to have

<sup>19</sup> See Tyler Burge, 'Belief *de re*' in *Journal of Philosophy* Vol. 74, 1977, 338-62.

knowledge that X is red, in the full and only sense of such knowledge, if one has been given testimony on the matter by someone whom one has good reason to trust.

It is less difficult to show why the colour characterisation should be, not only not essentially perceptual, but also not perceptually elusive. If what it is for something to be red is as the associated conditional says, then we must expect visual scrutiny to reveal the redness in every case. Only if standard presentation were a condition which was problematic in a certain manner could one have any other expectation. Were standard presentation a condition of which one could never be sure that it was fulfilled, for example, then we might reason that visual scrutiny would often fail to reveal the colour of the object scrutinised, even though all appears as normal. Granted that there are independent and relatively straightforward tests as to whether an object is standardly presented, there is no room for colour to be perceptually elusive. In any case where someone looks and fails to see, one must expect to be able to explain the failure by reference to independently checkable factors such as sensory impairment or an insufficiency of light.

Let us turn now from pictorial to aesthetic characterisations. Since these are also reports of experience, at least on a realistic construal, we must expect them to bear an association with parallel conditionals that say how the objects characterised look. Take 'X is sad' as an exemplar of aesthetic characterisations.<sup>20</sup> If we are realists we must expect such a characterisation to be linked with a condition which plays in relation to it the role which standard presentation plays in relation to 'X is red': we must look for a conditional of the form 'X is sad if and only if X is such that it looks sad under circumstance C'. Circumstance C, if it is to support realism, must ensure that not every work of art is sad and that any which is sad is not also at the same time, and in the same way, not sad: we shall return to this issue at the beginning of section v. It will include standard presentation and, in order to explain the difference between the pictorial and the aesthetic cases, some further condition. Thus we must look for a conditional of the form 'X is sad if and only if X is such that it looks sad under standard presentation and —'. The question is, how should the blank clause be filled?

Our discussion of colour characterisations may be of some help to us in dealing with this problem. It suggests two constraints which any filler must meet, if it is to enable us to explain the fact that aesthetic

<sup>20</sup> In taking 'X is sad' as an exemplar of aesthetic characterisations, I assume that its metaphorical character does not make it significantly distinctive. Unlike 'X is sad' other aesthetic characterisations, such as 'X expresses sadness', do not allow of a transformation exactly parallel to 'X is such that it looks sad under a certain circumstance.' I also assume that this does not mean that 'X is sad' is significantly distinctive.



characterisations are essentially perceptual and perceptually elusive. If aesthetic characterisations are to be essentially perceptual, then the filler must describe a condition which can be fully understood only by someone who has a non-testimonial relation to the fact recorded in the characterisation: this, because we saw that the necessity of such a relation for understanding what is expressed by a proposition '*p*' is the only likely explanation for why reliable testimony does not constitute a title for claiming full knowledge that *p*. If aesthetic characterisations are to be perceptually elusive on the other hand, then the filler must describe a condition which is appropriately problematic. The elusiveness could be explained if, for example, the condition were one of which one could never be sure that it had been brought about; in that case, one could explain someone's failure to see the fact recorded in a characterisation by the non-realisation, despite appearances, of the condition.

Where then do we turn for cues as to the nature of the required filler? One promising source is the ambiguous *Gestalt* such as the duck-rabbit, for here the condition that the filler describes must have a different value as the figure is differently seen. What is it that might be said to vary, in a manner consistent with realism, as the figure is seen now as a duck, now as a rabbit? With the particular duck-rabbit example it is not easy to say, but there is another ambiguous *Gestalt* with which an answer readily suggests itself. The figure in question is the central one of the five in this display:

12  
A 13 C  
14

As the figure at the centre of the display shifts from being seen as a letter to being seen as numeral, what varies is the reference class in the background. Positioned in the row class the figure is seen as a letter, positioned in the column class it is seen as a numeral.

In this example, whether one sees the figure as a letter or a numeral depends on one's disposition to identify A and C on the one hand, 12 and 14 on the other, as relevant contrasts. But these contrasts might not have been visually presented or even visualised in fancy. Generalising, then, we can say that if such a figure looks like the second letter of the alphabet, that is because one knows that the other letters supply the relevant contrasts. This knowledge gives one the appropriate reference class and against the background which that class supplies, the figure looks like the letter B.

The generalisation suggests that for any property which an object can

display in perception, the object displays that property only in so far as it is positioned in an appropriate class: that is, only in so far as the perceiver knows what the relevant contrasts are. The pictorial property of redness will be displayed only in so far as the bearer is positioned by reference to the colour paradigms or, allowing for denseness, the colour spectrum. The aesthetic property of sadness will be displayed only in so far as the bearer is positioned by reference to certain parallel contrasts.

There is a crucial difference, however, between the redness and the sadness case. Because the pictorial positioning is by reference to something given once and for all, that positioning can be taken as a further aspect, over and beyond normal sight and normal illumination, of standard presentation. The aesthetic positioning, on the other hand, is by reference to something which may change from case to case. It requires only normal information and memory to position an object appropriately for colour; it requires imagination to position it so that it displays a property like sadness. Henceforth we shall ignore the positioning necessary for something like colour and reserve the term only for the case where imagination is required. Notice that imagination does not seem to be required for the case where a figure appears as a letter or a numeral: the class of letters or numerals by reference to which the figure is positioned is normalised in the same way as the class of colours.

The generalisation from our original example, combined with this observation about the aesthetic property of sadness, points us towards a general hypothesis of the kind that we require. According to the hypothesis, X is sad if and only if X is such that it looks sad under standard presentation and under suitable positioning. The positioning of the work is determined by the reference class against the background of which it is viewed. This class is assumed to be available only on the basis of imagination, not by the introduction of normalised examples.

Leaving aside the complications of raised or round surfaces, a picture can be seen as a mosaic of equal square modules, each module being of just less than perceptually distinguishable area. An elementary pictorial variation on a given picture is a variation in which just one such module differs in its pictorial properties. A compound pictorial variation, on the other hand, is a variation in which more than one module is different. Among the compound pictorial variations many, like elementary variations, will not differ discernibly from the original, but some certainly will: these latter we may refer to as the discernible variations on the picture. It will be clear that for any picture the discernible variations will include all the pictures that can be painted on the surface in question.

The hypothesis put forward is that every picture on which an aesthetic characterisation is fixed is seen against the background of a certain class of

discernible variations: for simplicity, we may ignore the possibility that other sorts of items also play a background role. These variations are made into a reference class for the picture; they are used to determine what we have called its positioning. The reference class may be of any cardinality up to that of the total class of discernible variations. As the class changes in membership, the positioning changes, and as the positioning changes, the property in question may come into, or go out of, view.

Granted that a picture will have many aesthetic properties, our hypothesis means that it will be positioned at once in many different reference classes. Each of these classes can be seen as a dimension and the different dimensions may be taken to describe a space within which the object is seen when the appropriate properties are in view. The concept of a multi-dimensional aesthetic space offers a useful way of thinking about what happens when a picture assumes an overall aesthetic character for an observer. The picture is given coordinates, as it were, and fixed within an appropriate system of reference.

How plausible is the hypothesis which we have put forward? We cannot go into a full assessment of the pro's and con's here, but it may be useful to note one respect in which it is intuitively a very attractive idea. If we are offered a pictorial object and are asked whether it sustains some aesthetic characterisation, it is almost always in place to say that the answer depends on what the object is compared with. Compared with one set of figures, *O* may come out as a facial representation; compared with another, it may not. Compared with one range of alternatives, *O* may exemplify great regularity; compared with another, it may depict the breakdown of form. These remarks are platitudes and the attraction of our hypothesis is that it seems to do nothing more than generalise such points as they make.

Another way of bringing out the plausibility of the hypothesis is this. Given a set of mutually exclusive predicates *F* and *G* (or *F*, *G* and *H*: the number does not matter), it is notorious how often we agree on which member applies to any object, even an object not normally described by either term. We agree that Wednesday is fat and Tuesday thin, that science is hard and art soft, even that soup is pong and ice-cream ping. Such agreement is forthcoming, and the examples make this clear, only when it is obvious, for any object characterised, what objects are meant to contrast with it in resisting application of the term in question. Compared with Tuesday, Wednesday is fat; compared with art, science is hard; compared with ice-cream, soup is pong. What our hypothesis does is to extend the point to works of art, so far as those works lend themselves to characterisation by such sets of predicates as 'elegant–inelegant', 'economical–lavish', 'monumental–delicate', or whatever: the sets may or

may not be normally used to describe pictures. The point is that pictures display themselves as suitable subjects for a given aesthetic characterisation, only so far as they are cast in appropriate contrast: that is, only so far as they are assigned to an appropriate reference class.

In connection with the plausibility of our hypothesis, what may also be mentioned is that it enables us to explain how a characterisation of a picture as inventive or creative can be cast as pictorially supervenient, and not as dependent on the other pictures in existence. We postponed the explanation from section 1 because we were not then in a position to describe it. The explanation is that the sort of creativity that is of aesthetic interest is the creativity which shows through in a picture when that picture is suitably positioned. Creativity is on a par with all of the other aesthetic properties: it is something which displays itself in perception, but only when the perceived object is situated within an appropriate reference class. (But see section v.)

Granted that our hypothesis is not implausible, the telling question is whether it would enable us to explain the two troublesome features of aesthetic characterisations. It offers us the following formula: 'X is sad if and only if X is such that it looks sad under standard presentation and under suitable positioning.' Does the condition described as suitable positioning meet the constraints formulated earlier? Is it fully understandable only from a non-testimonial point of view, so that the essentially perceptual feature of aesthetic characterisations is intelligible? Is it appropriately problematic, so that equally we can make sense of the fact that aesthetic characterisations are perceptually elusive?

To both questions, encouragingly, the answer must be 'yes'. Only someone looking at a picture and putting it imaginatively through various positionings can understand what that positioning is under which the picture looks sad. One fixes the positioning, one finds the appropriate reference class, only in so far as one succeeds in making the picture display the appearance of sadness. There is no access to the positioning parallel to the access which we have to standard presentation. Thus if I learn from a trustworthy and tested informant that the picture is sad, I may claim to know that the sentence 'The picture is sad' expresses a truth on his lips, but I still lack full knowledge of the truth expressed by the sentence. The reason is the same as in our earlier example with the demonstrative-involving report. What is expressed by the sentence is something which can be fully grasped only by someone who identifies the suitable positioning of the picture: that is, only by someone who has a non-testimonial relation to the fact in question.

As for our second question, it transpires that the condition described as suitable positioning is also appropriately problematic. There are tests for

whether a picture is standardly presented, but not for whether it is suitably positioned. This means that we can never be sure, on grounds independent of what aesthetic characterisations are endorsed, whether or not a picture is suitably positioned for a given observer. Thus it is unsurprising that some observers will look and look at a picture and yet fail to come to a point where they can sincerely assent, on the basis of what they see, to an aesthetic characterisation which we find totally compelling.<sup>21</sup>

## V

The preceding is a sketch-theory of aesthetic perception which indicates how a realist might respond to the two objections mentioned earlier. Rather than seek to elaborate the theory, I should like to try, in the remaining paragraphs, to buttress it against an obvious rejoinder. The opponent of aesthetic realism may argue that he can embrace our theory without embarrassment, and I must show why I think that he cannot.

We noted in the last section that the circumstance described as standard presentation plus suitable positioning, if it was to support realism, would have to ensure that not every work of art had an aesthetic property like sadness and that any which had did not, in the same way, have the property of not being sad. An opponent may now argue that this realistic constraint is not after all satisfied. He will say that for any work of art and for any aesthetic property there is likely to be a positioning, however bizarre, under which the work displays that property. Thus every work of art will have every aesthetic property and among the properties possessed by any work will be properties which are directly opposed to one another.

We may wish to cavil at the universality of our opponent's claims, but that would hardly be useful: even if the claims are only true of some works and some properties, they are still inimical to realism. They mean that we cannot generally take aesthetic characterisations as genuine assertions. The purveyor of troublesome characterisations may say that no characterisation rules out any other; in this case they cannot be regarded as assertions at all, not engaging with the notion of truth. Alternatively, and more plausibly, he may say that whether one defends one or another of a set of conflicting characterisations depends on how one positions the work. In this case they cannot be regarded realistically either, for someone appropriately placed may now be sincerely unwilling to assent to our aesthetic characterisation, even though he does not misunderstand, misapprehend, or maintain a philosophical scepticism. The factor which

<sup>21</sup> Notice that properties for which there is a normalised reference class will naturally fail to be essentially perceptual or perceptually elusive. This rules out colours as aesthetic properties and also properties such as that of being a certain letter or numeral. It may also be taken to rule out some apparently aesthetic qualities, such as that of being a landscape picture. One might argue that for such bland properties, there are often normalised reference classes.

will explain such unwillingness is his positioning the work under characterisation in some deviant way. Deviant positioning is not an expression of scepticism and neither is it a product of misapprehension or misunderstanding. So at least it will be said.

The objection raised shows that aesthetic realism must be abandoned, if the positioning of a picture is taken to be unconstrained: if there is assumed to be no right or wrong way of positioning it. As against the objection, I wish to urge that there are at least two different sorts of constraints that must be acknowledged in the positional determination of a picture, and that where these are unsatisfied the positioning is incorrect. The recognition of such constraints, as we shall see, means a serious revision in our conception of aesthetic characterisations.

The first sort of constraints on aesthetic positioning are what might be described as holistic ones. These are the constraints on how we position a picture for one kind of aesthetic property which arise from the fact that we have positioned it in such and such a way for another. The reference classes for different kinds of properties, the different dimensions of aesthetic space, interact. If a picture is so positioned that it presents itself as a representation of a woman, for example, that naturally affects how it may be positioned with a view to displaying economy or lavishness, dreaminess or matter-of-factness, sadness or gaiety. This interactive influence means that for a given kind of property certain reference classes will be inappropriate, certain positionings wrong. The positioning for any one kind is bound by the constraint that it allows such positionings for other kinds of property that the picture presents itself as a coherent unity. A given positioning will be illegitimate if it means that we cannot make unified sense of the picture as a whole: that is, if it gives rise to a certain incoherence, or if it allows us only to make sense of part of the picture.

Holistic constraints may not be taken very seriously on their own, since the standards of what is a perceptual or aesthetic unity have been dramatically altered in modern painting. Among the lessons of the twentieth-century tradition we might number this: that not only is the duck-rabbit a unity when it is seen as a duck or as a rabbit, it is also a unity, although a different non-representational unity, when seen as a duck-rabbit. In order to salvage the force of our holistic constraints, we need to see that they do not operate alone but rather in combination with another set, a set which we may characterise as humanistic ones.

Humanistic constraints spring from the requirement, not that we see a work of art as a unity, but that we see it as something which it is intelligible that a human being should have produced. When we offer a positional account of a work of art, we necessarily suppose that the painter was moved by certain desires, and certain beliefs about how he might fulfil

those desires: even if we invoke unconscious intentions and the like on his part, we must offer an account of the more mundane states of mind in which these are carried. That being so, we are obliged in putting forward our construal not to commit ourselves to the ascription of beliefs or desires which are unintelligible or which it is unintelligible that the painter, granted his milieu, should have had or should have acted upon.<sup>22</sup>

Humanistic constraints can be disregarded only at the cost of ignoring the human origin of pictures, or at a cost of ignoring the humanity of those with whom pictures originate. I assume that such a price is not worth paying. Together with holistic constraints they will have effects such as that of proscribing the construal of Egyptian pictographs as early cubist paintings, or the construal of pictures in the international Gothic style as paintings designed to dismantle perspective. If they seem to spoil sport in so undermining the cult of play, this may only be because art is not taken as a serious matter.

It may be said that if holistic and humanistic constraints are generally respected in the positioning, and consequently the aesthetic characterisation, of pictures, that is only a matter of changeable convention. It is certainly a matter of convention, just as it is a matter of convention that certain constraints define what is meant by standard presentation in ascertaining the colour of things. But might the convention change? Not, I would say, without a barely imaginable transformation in what is meant by artistic production and aesthetic appreciation.

Under our current and traditional conception of these matters, the artist and his ideal audience share a common knowledge in virtue of which each can expect the other to see a distinctive significance in certain painterly choices. Against such a background the artist seeks, and knows that he will be taken to seek, a certain unified effect in every picture he makes: in a sense, he speaks to his audience. This conception would be quite undermined if the holistic and humanistic constraints on aesthetic positioning were put aside. If it does not matter that a positioning makes only partial sense, or makes a sense that the artist could not have consciously or unconsciously sought, then the work of art might as well have been the product of chance. It ceases to be a challenge to enter into a perception sponsored by the artist and degenerates into an occasion for the play of whim and fancy.

The recognition that there are constraints of positioning forces us to recast what we have said in preceding sections about aesthetic

<sup>22</sup> As has often been noticed, holistic and humanistic constraints operate generally in the assignment of intentional characterisations to actions. See, for example, Graham Macdonald and Philip Pettit, *Semantics and Social Science*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1981.

characterisations of works of art. The sort of characterisation we have discussed satisfies the following schema: 'X is  $\phi$  if and only if it is such that it looks  $\phi$  under standard presentation and under suitable positioning.' The introduction of constraints of positioning forces us to recognise that our real interest is in a sub-species of this kind, namely the sort of characterisation which meets this more specific schema: 'X is  $\phi$  if and only if (1) it is such that it looks  $\phi$  under standard presentation and under suitable positioning and (2) it is such that the positioning found suitable, assuming that there is one, is allowed by the appropriate constraints.' The difference between the two classes of judgment is that which we mentioned at the beginning of the paper: the one class is that of primitive aesthetic characterisations, the other that of aesthetic characterisations rectified by appropriate background information.

What appears in this section is that aesthetic realism can only be defended in the last resort for characterisations which are appropriately rectified. We may stave off the two objections considered by recourse to the idea of positioning, but that idea will underpin realism only if we introduce constraints and distinguish rectified from primitive characterisation. We should not be surprised at the result, for it parallels the case with characterisations of colour. The unrectified colour report would have to be taken as less than a genuine assertion, since something other than misapprehension, misunderstanding or scepticism would make intelligible a subject's sincere unwillingness to assent to an appropriate judgment: for example, his wearing coloured contact lenses, his having been in bright sun, his being blinded by an intruding light, or whatever. We can construe colour reports realistically only because they are taken as rectified by the reference to standard presentation; this reference means that factors such as those just mentioned are recast as obstacles to apprehension.

This paper began with the discussion of primitive aesthetic characterisations because aesthetic characterisations are normally assumed to be such. The starting-point is also philosophically justified since rectified aesthetic characterisations can be defined only by reference to primitive. It must be noted, however, that rectified characterisations differ significantly from their primitive counterparts. The main differences spring from the fact that the characterisations depend on background as well as visual information. Thus they are not pictorially supervenient, for example: our background information will prevent us from characterising in the same way as the original a pictorial replica produced by some

chance mechanism.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, the realistic construal of rectified characterisations may be undermined by a non-realism in respect of the utterances, related to other minds and perhaps the distant past, which constitute relevant background information. If we defend aesthetic realism, we must assume that realism is appropriate in those other areas as well.

The theory sketched in the last section shows how one may hope to escape Scruton's objections and espouse aesthetic realism. The amendment constituted by the restriction to rectified aesthetic characterisations keeps open that hope. There is room for the endorsement of the following sort of remarks. In the sense in which it is usually assumed that the colours of a picture are there to be perceived, there to be more or less exactly characterised in pictorial description, so the aesthetic properties are there to be detected and characterised.<sup>24</sup> An aesthetic description of a picture may well fail to capture all that is there to be seen by the informed eye, but what it captures when it is a faithful record is something which properly belongs to the painting and something which is in principle accessible to all. Aesthetic characterisations, or at least those to which no special disqualification attaches, are both standardly and properly taken as assertoric, and as assertoric in the strictest and most genuine sense of that term.<sup>25</sup>

I am grateful for the helpful criticism that I received when an ancestor of this paper was read to the Thyssen Group. I am also grateful for the critical remarks made by the audience when the paper was read to the Philosophy Society, Lancaster University. Finally I must record my debt, and my gratitude, for written comments received from Jeremy Butterfield, Graham Macdonald and Eva Schaper. Peter Lewis has drawn my attention to an excellent article which contains similar ideas: Mark Sagoff, 'Historical Authenticity', *Erkenntnis* Vol. 12, 1978, 83–93.

<sup>23</sup> It may be wondered whether there is room for a distinction between primitive and rectified aesthetic characterisation of such objects as natural scenes. I tend to think that there is. I assume that such characterisation presupposes positioning and I believe that one's general view of nature will supply constraints to distinguish reasonable positionings from wholly artificial ones. Artificial positionings encourage the quaint and the whimsical, reasonable positionings the genuinely revelatory.

<sup>24</sup> The usual assumption may of course be questioned. It is often argued, for example, that colour ascriptions are improperly, if standardly, taken as genuine assertions. See, for instance, Bruce Aune, *Knowledge, Mind and Nature*, Ridgeview Publishing Co., Reseda, California, 1967, Chapter 7.

<sup>25</sup> The clause about special disqualification is meant to cover such possibilities as that raised about metaphorical characterisations in section II.

## The pleasures of taste

EVA SCHAPER

That the notion of taste is central to aesthetics is a well-entrenched idea. Exactly how it is to be understood is less clear. Traditionally, theories of taste have concerned themselves with how – or even whether – personal preferences are related to aesthetic value judgements. Such theories, from the eighteenth century onwards, have become associated with the idea of the beautiful, in line with aesthetics coming to be regarded as the science of the beautiful – an idea, Wittgenstein reminds us, 'almost too ridiculous for words'.<sup>1</sup> It is worth remembering that he would say the same about the good and ethics. Aesthetics, then, has as much or as little to do with the beautiful as ethics has with the good. When traditional philosophers, prominently Kant, hold that taste judgements are about what is beautiful, we could say that they are about *aesthetic* preferences, and that it is the analysis of what qualifies as a genuinely aesthetic judgement that separates personal preferences of a purely idiosyncratic kind from those preferences to which reason-giving is relevant in an appropriate form. This form must exhibit the logical difference of aesthetic judgements from moral, epistemological, economic, social and generally pragmatic judgements and thus confirm or establish the autonomy of aesthetics. We shall not, however, understand what this autonomy amounts to, except through an exploration of issues in the philosophy of mind, epistemology, logic and much besides. To seal off the aesthetic tank hermetically from the wide waters of philosophy is a move that has often brought the very undertaking of aesthetics into disrepute. It is not, I believe, a move of which the great contributors to its growth and understanding have been guilty.

In traditional theories of taste, one of the dominant questions was whether taste judgements – or statements of aesthetic preference – were subjective or objective, and in what sense. In one guise or another, this is still a prominent theme, despite the greater logical sophistication with which the contrast is now treated. Traditionally, also, theories of taste have insisted on a close connection between aesthetic appreciation and the

<sup>1</sup> *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*, ed. C. Barrett, 1966, p. 11.