TRUTH AND OBJECTIVITY IN AESTHETICS

AND ETHICS

Thesis for the examination of MPhil in Philosophy

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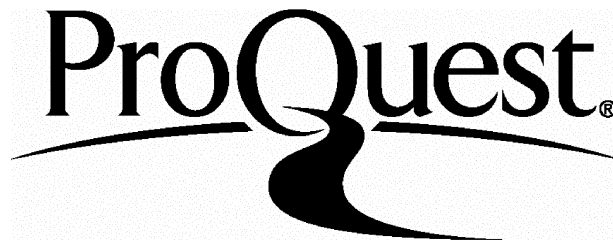
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THESIS ABSTRACT

The central aim of the thesis is to assess whether secondary quality accounts of values explain and thereby justify the objective character of aesthetic and ethical discourse. A second concern is to clarify the notion of truth presupposed in these discourses. A further concern is whether the apparently strong objective presuppositions are mistaken or misleading.

The assessment involves a consideration of two accounts, one aesthetic and one ethical. Each appeals to a secondary quality model to explain the idea of values understood as detectable properties in the world as represented. F.N. Sibley's account of aesthetic discourse is specially well worked out, and, for this reason, forms the primary basis for discussion. A relevant abstract from John McDowell's account provides an ethical counterpart, and helps to identify relevant differences between aesthetic and ethical discourse. The assessment is made in the context of a framework consisting of three notions of correctness and error. The framework is compared with some of Crispin Wright's notions in his work on truth and objectivity.

The main results are, firstly, that a precise analogy between value and colour (understood as a secondary quality) faces difficulties due to essential differences between the character of colour and the phenomena to be explained by the analogy (particularly ethical phenomena). And secondly, that the notion of correctness (truth) explained by the secondary quality model does not adequately account for the notion of correctness presupposed in value discourse. The argument here is that the secondary quality model does not explain a non-relative notion of correctness. But the notion of correctness presupposed in value discourse *is* non-relative. Therefore, the secondary quality model fails to adequately explain aesthetic and ethical truth. The central conclusion is thus that secondary quality accounts of values fail to explain truth in ordinary value discourse, and therefore fail to justify this aspect of the objective character of value discourse.

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INTRODUCTION

1.0   Justifying Objectivity

Aesthetic and ethical discourse appears to be objective: We talk as if it is *true*, and something that can be known, that some things *are* graceful, honest etc; that someone denying these claims could be *mistaken*; and that one person's assertion might *contradict* another's. But how can there be genuine aesthetic and ethical *beliefs*, *truths*, *facts* and *knowledge*?

How statements can be true or false in paradigm factual discourse is explained, roughly, in terms of a *mind-independent realm* of facts which determines the correctness of claims. This explanation, however, seems inappropriate for aesthetics and ethics. A mind-independent realm of facts need have no relevance to our lives, and, in principle, may involve matters beyond our understanding; but truths in aesthetics and ethics do not (as Nagel puts it) appear to extend radically beyond any capacity we might have to discover them, or beyond concerns connected with our lives.   There needs to be a different explanation, therefore, for how aesthetic and ethical claims can be genuinely true.

The proper response to this difficulty is to attempt to explain truth in these discourses in a plausible way. If successful, we will provide a justification for

this central aspect of objectivity in values, and confirm to those who adopt an ethical system or engage in aesthetic debate that the discourse in question has objective foundations. This is the project of justifying objectivity; it constitutes an attempt to understand how there can be bona fide claims to truth in apparently objective discourse, and it proceeds on the assumption that an explanation is possible. If the attempt to explain objectivity fails, it may *then* be judged that the objective character of the discourse has no justification because there is no plausible explanation for it. If that were the case, the objective appearance would be shown to be misleading.

It is important that we clarify what is to qualify as an adequate explanatory account. I take it that an adequate justification will be given by a convincing linguistic, metaphysical and epistemological explanation for how there can be aesthetic and ethical truths, and how they can be known. A "convincing" account will be one that is plausible and explanatory, given our knowledge of the phenomena concerned, and our accounts of other types of phenomena (there needs to be some conceptual continuity between our accepted theories so that phenomena are properly understood in relation to other phenomena).

It will also be important to establish precisely what requires explanation and justification, i.e. exactly what the objective character of aesthetic and ethical discourse amounts to. In particular, to clarify what is ordinarily meant by "true" and "knowledge" in these discourses, since the application of these notions in the discourses in question needs to be explained and justified.

2.0   Aim and Method of this Thesis

The central aim of this thesis is to assess whether secondary quality accounts

of values explain and thereby justify the objective character of value discourse

(I take aesthetics and ethics to be central examples of values).   A second

concern is to clarify the notion of truth presupposed in these discourses. A

further concern is whether the apparently strong objective presuppositions are

mistaken or misleading.

The assessment involves a consideration of two accounts, one aesthetic and

one ethical. Each appeals to a secondary quality model to explain the idea of

values understood as detectable properties in the world as represented. F.N.

Sibley's account of aesthetic discourse is specially well worked out, and, for

this reason, forms the primary basis for discussion.   A relevant abstract from

John McDowell's account provides an ethical counterpart, and helps to

identify relevant differences between aesthetic and ethical discourse.

The thesis is divided into three chapters. The first is devoted to setting out

and elaborating F.N. Sibley's account of aesthetic discourse. The second

chapter gives an abstract from John McDowell's metaethical position. The

final chapter is devoted to the assessment of the secondary quality model for

justifying objectivity. The assessment is made with reference to a framework

of contrasting notions of correctness. The notions described in the framework
are compared with some of Crispin Wright's notions in his work on truth and
objectivity. The assessment also involves consideration of an analogy with
mathematics for explaining "absolute correctness".

The reason for the focus upon secondary quality rather than primary quality
accounts is as follows: In the Lockean tradition[1], secondary qualities are
defined as those whose instantiation in an object consists in a power or
disposition of the object to produce sensory experiences of a certain
phenomenological character in perceivers. Colours are amongst the
perceptible qualities of objects that are traditionally assigned to the category
of secondary qualities. Primary qualities, on the other hand, do not consist in
dispositions to produce experiences. Shape, weight and size are held to belong
to the category of primary qualities. Thus, for an object to be yellow is for it
to present a certain kind of sensory appearance to perceivers. For it to be
round is for it to consist, not in a disposition, but in some *intrinsic* feature of
the object.

There are insurmountable problems in understanding value properties as
primary qualities.[2] For instance, understood as primary qualities, value
properties would be brutely in the world, or in John Mackie's terms: part of
the "fabric of the world". By "brutely" I mean roughly that the *intrinsic*
character of the quality in question has a mind-independent causal base (e.g.
something's being circular is caused by something, independent of our

perception, being a certain way). Thus, our perceiving something circular merely fixes the reference of the predicate; it does not enter, constitutively, into the analysis of the predicate. But, moral and aesthetic properties are *not* plausibly understood as being brutely there, since something's *being* graceful or honest etc., is not plausibly caused by something, independent of the perception of sentient beings, being a certain way; psychological states of moral and aesthetic experience essentially enter the analysis of moral and aesthetic predicates. Moreover, moral and aesthetic properties do not have the role in causal explanatory theories of physical science characteristic of primary qualities like shape and weight.

For the above reasons, I reject, as implausible, conceptions of values as primary qualities (i.e. I take it that our *pre*theoretical conception of values is such that a Lockean categorisation of values as primary qualities is inappropriate). In one sense, this is to concur with Hume (moral value "lies in yourself, not in the object"),[3] to the extent that there is an essential involvement with the psychological. However, we need not conclude with Hume that, in moral and aesthetic thought for instance, the mind merely "spreads itself on the world". An alternative position is promised by the secondary quality model - one that, according to the accounts I will consider, more closely matches our common sense conception of value. This is the idea that moral and aesthetic phenomena, rather than merely reflecting facts about ourselves, reflect facts about the world as it is represented or perceived. The secondary quality model promises to explain, not how aesthetic and

moral facts are part of a mind-independent realm, but how they are part of a mind-*dependent* realm of facts about the world as represented.

It should be noted that a "perceptual"-type account is just one approach to justifying objectivity. In ethics, traditional "principle-based" theories suppose that objectivity comes from the fact that ethical judgments reduce to a set of fundamental, specifiable ethical principles which are true in a superior and non-relative sense. Correct answers to moral questions are provided when these principles are applied to the facts in deductive argument. The status of these principles, however, is difficult to justify, and this is one reason why a perceptual approach seems attractive (the idea being that what is correct can be found out by detection). There is a greater tradition of perceptual-type accounts in aesthetics, a consequence of the often held view that rules and general principles have little or no role in this area; it is usually denied that there are specifiable "principles of taste" i.e. generalisations that, if valid, would provide deductive support for aesthetic judgments.[4]

CHAPTER ONE:

AESTHETICS: F.N. SIBLEY'S ACCOUNT

1.0 Introduction

In this chapter I consider F.N. Sibley's descriptive and explanatory account of aesthetic discourse. The account aims to justify objectivity in aesthetics by explaining how there can be conclusive proofs of correctness in aesthetic discourse.

2.0 Types of Aesthetic Expression

After Sibley, I shall distinguish three kinds of remarks we make about works of art.[5]

2.1 *Remarks Using Non-aesthetic Concepts*

The first type are remarks that are made up of words ordinarily characterised in this context as *"non-aesthetic"*. Non-aesthetic concepts are concepts that do not require the exercise of "aesthetic taste"[6] for their correct application. An example of these remarks is: "The novel has many characters and deals with unrequited love".

2.2   *Aesthetic Descriptions*

"*Aesthetic descriptions*" make up the second group of remarks. They include

a broad category of remarks, whose subjects may be works of art or other

types of things discussed in an aesthetic way.   Examples of aesthetic

descriptions include a variety of assertions about whether things are "graceful,

dainty, moving, plaintive, lacking in unity etc.", whether it be about a

masterpiece of sculpture, a Mini-Cooper, a panoramic view, a dog etc. For

instance, "The poem is deeply *moving*", and "The horse lacks *balance"* are

aesthetic descriptions on Sibley's view.

For a description to be "aesthetic" in Sibley's sense, it must include at least

one "*aesthetic term or concept*" (at least one word in an aesthetic use).

Examples of aesthetic terms or concepts include single term adjectives like:

"unified", "balanced", "integrated", "dynamic", "vivid"; together with

lengthier expressions as italicised in: "The strong contrast between light and

dark in this area of the canvass *sets up a tension* between the two figures and

vividly conveys the sense of tragedy". Aesthetic concepts may employ words

that, in addition to their aesthetic meaning and use, have a literal or non-

aesthetic meaning when used in other contexts (for example, "dynamic",

"balance"); they may employ words which are metaphorical in their aesthetic

use; and they may employ words that have come to have an aesthetic use

(become aesthetic concepts) by a process of "metaphorical transference" (for

example, the expression "tightly-knit", used in an aesthetic context, has a

powerful, metaphorical or quasi-metaphorical meaning which is now standard in aesthetic vocabulary). Other aesthetic concepts employ words that function only or predominantly in aesthetic contexts, for example "beautiful", "graceful", "elegant".

A*esthetic* concepts are distinguishable from *non-aesthetic* concepts in virtue of requiring *"aesthetic taste or sensitivity"* for their correct application. The notion of aesthetic taste/perceptiveness/sensitivity is integral to Sibley's central distinction between aesthetic and non-aesthetic, whether concerning concepts, qualities, descriptions or judgments. It is worth pausing, therefore, to consider what is meant by aesthetic taste.

Broadly speaking, Sibley's view of aesthetics is that it deals with a kind of perception:

> People have to *see* the grace or unity of a work, *hear* the plaintiveness or frenzy in the music...*feel* the power of a novel... They may be struck by these qualities at once, or they may come to perceive them only after repeated viewings...with the help of critics. But unless they do perceive them for themselves, aesthetic enjoyment, appreciation, and judgment are beyond them... To suppose...that one can make aesthetic judgments without aesthetic perception, say, by following rules of some kind, is to misunderstand aesthetic judgment.[7]

"Aesthetic taste" is something like a sensitivity or ability to notice or discern the aesthetic features of things (call these the P-features of an object). On

Sibley's view, P-features depend upon ordinarily perceptible features of things

- call these the Q-features), and perceiving P-features presupposes perceiving

the Q-features upon which the P-features depend. (The Q-features require no

special aesthetic sense in order to perceive them, only the normal senses of

eyesight, hearing, etc.) Thus, on Sibley's view, an aesthetic object can be

expected to have certain ordinarily perceptible Q-features and certain aesthetic

P-features which depend upon them.[8] And an ability to discern the P-

features (the having of aesthetic taste or perceptiveness) presupposes an

ability to discern the Q-features.

Sibley claims that the sensitivity involved in discerning P-features is more

"rare" than other human capacities of ordinary sight etc. By this he means

that even though we might perceive all the Q-features of an object, lack of

training or attentiveness might result in our failing to perceive the P-features.

For example, the Q-features might be seen but their (aesthetic) significance

not properly understood. It is the job of the critic to mention or point out the

P- and Q- features of an object, and if he is successful he will get sufficiently

sensitive and experientially-mature people to discern these features.

2.3 Aesthetic Verdicts

The third category of remarks distinguished by Sibley is the category of

evaluations or "*aesthetic verdicts*". Aesthetic verdicts are of the form: "The

picture is an (aesthetically) *good*/bad/excellent/mediocre/superior to

others/inferior...one of its kind". The distinction between aesthetic

descriptions and aesthetic verdicts is explained by Sibley on the basis of a

difference in types of relationship of dependence. In the case of aesthetic

descriptions, the relation of dependence is between the P-features of the

object (which are referred to in the aesthetic description) and the Q-features

of the object. In the case of aesthetic verdicts, it is between the verdict and

the P-features of the object. This account reflects two types of

justification ordinarily given for aesthetic claims. For aesthetic descriptions,

the application of an aesthetic term, P, to an object, X, is supported by

referring to *non*-aesthetic (and other aesthetic) features of objects (for

example, "the painting is delicate because of its pastel shades and curving

lines"). Aesthetic verdicts, on the other hand, are supported by pointing to

the aesthetic qualities and noting that they are "aesthetically good, or bad etc".

Sibley's account of aesthetic verdicts is intentionally brief. He claims that

aesthetic descriptions are "perhaps the most important of aesthetic judgments"

because making, supporting and explaining them occupies much of a critic's

time.[9] This is why his account focuses upon aesthetic descriptions and the

notion of aesthetic taste. The negative consequences of Sibley's emphasis are

firstly, a tendency to over-emphasise the descriptive aspect and under-

emphasise the evaluative aspect of aesthetic expressions and judgment; and

secondly, an incomplete account of the distinction between aesthetic

descriptions and aesthetic verdicts. I shall attempt to address the first point

by developing the distinction noted in the second.

3.0 The Distinction Between Aesthetic Descriptions and Aesthetic Verdicts

3.1 *The Need for Elaboration*

Sibley distinguishes between aesthetic descriptions and aesthetic verdicts on the basis of the following:

Aesthetic Descriptions (AD):

* a relation of dependence between P-qualities and Q-qualities of a thing;[10]

Aesthetic Verdicts (AV):

* a relation of dependence between an aesthetic verdict and the P-qualities of a thing.

Based on this account, the distinction between aesthetic descriptions and aesthetic verdicts collapses for the following reason. Sibley's underlying idea concerning aesthetic descriptions seems to be that with the aid of a special perceptual mechanism (aesthetic taste) we somehow "read off" an aesthetic description from what is ordinarily perceived (Q-qualities). But since all we are told of aesthetic verdicts is that they are dependent upon P-qualities, the account does not rule out the possibility that we could also "read off" an

aesthetic verdict from the Q-qualities upon which the P-qualities and the aesthetic verdict depend. But if the possibility of our "reading off" *both* an aesthetic description and an aesthetic verdict from the same set of Q- and P-qualities is not ruled out, then aesthetic descriptions and aesthetic verdicts may share the same correctness conditions. On the account as it stands, therefore, there is no interesting distinction between aesthetic descriptions and aesthetic verdicts (what makes an aesthetic description correct would be precisely what makes an aesthetic verdict correct).

Elaboration of Sibley's notions of aesthetic description (AD) and aesthetic verdict (AV) must satisfy the following requirements if a genuine distinction is to be achieved: *(i)* The two types of expression must be shown to have distinct correctness conditions; otherwise ADs and AVs could be applied correctly interchangeably, and thereby fail to be distinguished. *(ii)* A correct AV must not be *deducible* from an AD.[11] For if AV1 was deducible from AD1, then the correctness conditions for AV1 would be fully contained within the correctness conditions for AD1, and the very same factors which determine the correctness of AD1 would also determine the correctness of AV1. *(iii)* The corresponding account of aesthetic taste must be one that allows the discernment of P-qualities belonging to an object without it being utterly clear from this what the aesthetic verdict is. That is, one must be able to perceive aesthetic P-qualities without "discerning" evaluations.

3.2 *Elaboration: Aesthetic Descriptions*

Sibley notes that the category of aesthetic descriptions is quite probably

made up of many types, some with significant differences. The implication of

this for an elaboration of Sibley's account is that we cannot expect our

elaboration to be generally applicable to *all* members of the class of aesthetic

descriptions. However, it leaves open the possibility that our elaboration may

be applicable to a significant set within the class of aesthetic descriptions,

and, therefore, of use in characterising aesthetic descriptions in a way that

will contrast them with aesthetic verdicts.

Clarifying the characterisation of aesthetic descriptions essentially involves

clarifying the notion Sibley uses to define them: aesthetic taste. There are at

least two plausible (though not general) conditions that may be applied that

elaborate the notion of aesthetic taste. The first is that, in order to discern

certain P-qualities, one must be aware of *"additional objective information"*

(information that is not directly derivable from perceiving Q-qualities of an

object, but is nevertheless potentially available in common to perceivers).

The condition works as follows. Suppose that A has aesthetic taste and

correctly (appropriately) describes a particular wrought-iron stove as

"decorative" or "ornate". Suppose that B lacks aesthetic taste and uses

incorrect (less appropriate) words such as "pretty" or "dainty" to describe the

stove. Suppose also that A and B perceive *all* the Q-qualities of the stove and each of them have all the relevant concepts to choose from. Then the difference between the cases is explained by Sibley in terms of A's having aesthetic taste and perceiving certain P-qualities belonging to the stove, and B's not having aesthetic taste and failing to see those P-qualities. But why does B fail to perceive the P-qualities? It is not because he fails to perceive any Q-qualities, since *ex hypothesi* he sees all the Q-qualities. One explanation is that B does not know about certain relevant additional objective information. He does not know that, for example, the stove was constructed in a French factory and decorated using original enamelling techniques (or is similar to one that was); that the ironwork emblem symbolises a well-known figure; that the enamel colour is traditional "majollica green"; that the stove contrasts with the plain style of many other traditional stoves, etc. It is thus a condition of one's having aesthetic taste and discerning P-qualities in this case that one is in possession of these sorts of objective facts not obtainable by "ordinary" perception of Q-qualities, and that these facts are brought to bear in one's perception.

The condition of additional objective information seems plausible if we reflect on how our "perceiving" things aesthetically often seems to be influenced by associated knowledge we possess or experiences we have had. For instance, one's aesthetic experience in general may become more discriminating as one gains relevant knowledge throughout one's life.

The second condition is that the perceiver must have an *appropriate emotional, affective response* in order to discern a thing under a certain aesthetic description. Given this condition, the operation of purely *perceptual* powers is insufficient to discern P-qualities in certain cases; having aesthetic taste in these cases also involves having an appropriate *emotional and affective response*. Aesthetic concepts which are plausibly dependent upon response for their correct application include certain *evaluative concepts* (i.e. concepts that are associated with positive or negative value), for instance "beauty". (Note that it would be implausible to say that aesthetic taste *always* involves an affective response [that all P-qualities are response-dependent], for it seems to be a fact that one can correctly apply many aesthetic concepts so long as one can make some basic discriminations. For example, no affective response seems to be *necessary* in order to discern the gracefulness of a ballet dancer.)

This second condition has two merits. Firstly, it has plausibility. Consider, for instance, how we might expect someone who states that something is "beautiful" to have been affected in a positive and not a negative way by that thing. Secondly, the condition presupposes that certain aesthetic descriptions have (in part) an "evaluative" character i.e. they are not merely "descriptive". Sibley generally avoids discussing the traditional "evaluative-descriptive" antithesis, but states that if he did adopt the traditional terminology, he would reject the view that all aesthetic concepts are "evaluative", and incline towards calling many of them "descriptive".[12] This, and his distinguishing between

AVs and ADs, gives the unfortunate impression that Sibley views aesthetic

descriptions as purely descriptive (lacking evaluative force). It is unfortunate,

because I take it that it is implausible to say that there is *no* evaluative force

belonging to aesthetic descriptions or aesthetic concepts. It would imply, for

example, that concepts like "ugly" and "bland" have no negative evaluative

association, and concepts such as "beautiful" and "imaginative" have no

positive evaluative associations (the former are naturally associated with a

negative response, and the latter with a positive response). The proposed

condition thus supports a more plausible interpretation of Sibley's notion of

aesthetic descriptions, by explaining some of them in terms of response-

dependent *evaluative* concepts.

3.3 *Elaboration: Aesthetic Verdicts*

We have found that *some* aesthetic descriptions are plausibly understood as

having some specific evaluative force. We now need to clarify and

distinguish the evaluative force involved in aesthetic verdicts.

An *aesthetic verdict* is of the form "X is an aesthetically good one of its

kind". One way to explain the notion of an aesthetic verdict is in terms of its

being *a judgment* on the totality of true aesthetic descriptions of a thing (a

judgment on "X is P1, P2, P3...Pn").[13] The advantages of this account are (i)

it distinguishes the overall evaluative force involved in AVs from the specific

positive or negative evaluative force associated with a particular feature - as

is involved in (some) ADs. And (ii), it helps to explain, given a reasonable assumption, why an aesthetic verdict cannot be read off from (deduced from) an aesthetic description (from the set of true descriptions of a thing). This is because it would involve our adding up the positive evaluative associations and subtracting the negative associations connected with the set of true descriptions, which would require there to be a determinate weighting of a thing's positive and negative evaluative characteristics. But it is clearly evident that our aesthetic practice involves nothing that corresponds to such a determinate weighting system (aesthetic value is not a measurable quality).[14] (For example, there is nothing in our practice to the effect that a certain amount of evaluative character of beauty scores 10 points, whilst the same amount of *imaginative* character only scores 8; and the same amount of *ugly* character scores -13 etc.)[15] Thus, given the plausible (and minimal) assumption of the incommensurability of evaluative characteristics, a correct aesthetic verdict cannot be deduced from a true aesthetic description.

The elaborated account of AVs and ADs thus properly distinguishes these notions (they represent two types of expression which do not share the same conditions for their correct application). It also describes and explains certain aspects of aesthetic practice. For instance, the expectation that aesthetic experts might disagree over their evaluations of something, even though they agree on its description.

4.0 <u>Aesthetic, Non-Aesthetic and Colour</u>

4.1 *Introduction*

The distinction between non-aesthetic and aesthetic (and the relations between these realms) is central to Sibley's view. In this section I consider Sibley's account of the metaphysical relationships between aesthetic and non-aesthetic realms. The account is plausible to the extent that it helps to explain some obvious differences between aesthetic and colour judgment. In Section 5.0 I consider Sibley's claims about **conceptual relationships** between non-aesthetic and aesthetic terms, and the implications that follow for the application of aesthetic concepts.

On the basis of an analysis of aesthetic statements, Sibley claims that there are **"relationships of dependence"** between aesthetic and non-aesthetic realms.[16] He describes three types. The first, "emergence", has already been introduced as holding between ordinarily perceptible non-aesthetic qualities of things (Q-qualities) and aesthetic qualities of things (P-qualities); emergence is common to *all types* of aesthetic qualities. The second and third types of relationship are more complex; they hold between *specific* P and Q qualities in individual instances.

4.2 *P-Qualities are Emergent*

Sibley takes it to be a general truth that P-qualities depend upon Q-qualities

(P-qualities are *emergent* properties). He states:

> Any aesthetic character a thing has depends upon the character of the [ordinarily
>
> perceptible] non-aesthetic qualities it has or appears to have, and changes in its aesthetic
>
> character result from changes in its non-aesthetic qualities.[17]

This general relationship of dependence helps to explain an apparent

difference between aesthetics and colour, that is: whether a thing is graceful

depends on such matters as its lines or movements etc., but whether a thing is

red does not, in a similar way, depend on any of its other *perceptible* qualities

(colour properties are "simple").

This general relation of dependence needs further explanation. In particular,

it is unclear what a P-quality is and how it comes to emerge from Q-qualities.

The question therefore arises as to whether there is anything in Sibley's

account which provides the required explanation. There are three possible

candidates, all of which can be discounted. Firstly, the disanalogy with

colour noted above indicates that Sibley (if he intended to) cannot rely upon

the phenomenon of colour to explain, by analogy, notions of emergence and

P-quality (colour qualities are simple, not emergent, and so an analogy with

them will not explain the emergent character of aesthetic qualities).

Secondly, Sibley avoids claiming that Q-qualities and the relevant perceptual processing mechanism are somehow *constitutive* of aesthetic P-qualities (that P-qualities *reduce to* [or are made up of] Q-qualities etc.). And thirdly, Sibley also avoids the weaker claim that the transition the critic gets us to make is from seeing certain Q-qualities to seeing the Q-qualities *"in a new way"*. Sibley talks, instead, of a transition from being able to see only Q-qualities to seeing *"other additional qualities"* - *"a new range of characteristics"* - and he is interested in "how talk [by the critic] can get us to do this".[18] P-qualities, therefore, on Sibley's view are genuine qualities, and they are not reducible to something else.

There appears to be nothing more on Sibley's account to further explain P-qualities, understood as other additional qualities. We must therefore introduce explanatory material. One possibility is to understand P-qualities (in particular those response-dependent qualities associated with "evaluative" aesthetic concepts) as dispositional properties of objects i.e. "capacities" of objects to elicit a response in particular observers in particular conditions. Emergence would then be explained in the dual terms of the exercising of this capacity and the corresponding response in the observer. The idea of value properties as dispositional properties is developed by John McDowell in his notion of a *"subjective property"*. A subjective property is a property such that no adequate conception of what it is for a thing to possess it is available except in terms of how the thing would, in suitable circumstances, *affect* a

subject - a sentient being.[19] This sort of property is *objective** in the sense that it is there independently of any actual experience of any subject on any particular occasion. The objectivity* of subjective properties, however, is distinguishable from that associated with paradigm *objective*** properties, which are features that can be said to be independently and *brutely there* in the world and that can be understood without essential reference to their effects on sentient beings.   I shall return to these notions in Chapter 2.

It is relevant to the final assessment[20] that a dispositional account of P-qualities (involving the idea of their eliciting an affective response) is less adequate for explaining the perceptual and intellectual, as opposed to emotional and affective aspects of aesthetic taste (or, indeed, moral sensibility). For example, perceiving that a gazelle is graceful does not necessarily involve having an *affective response*.

4.3 *Specific P-Quality Relationships*

Sibley identifies two specific relationships of dependence peculiar to aesthetics. The relationships in question hold between *specific* P- and Q-qualities in individual instances. Taken together, both relations are said to account for true statements of the form: Certain particular Q-qualities (x,y,z) give an object *balance* [as opposed to *gaudiness* or no P-quality at all]. The first relation, *"total specific dependence"*, is the dependence of a P-quality upon the *totality* of the Q-qualities responsible for the P-quality. This holistic

relation accounts for two features of aesthetic judgment: First, that it is always conceivable that, by some relatively small change in line or colour, a word in a poem etc, the aesthetic quality *may be* changed, transformed or lost altogether. And second, that non-aesthetic features of all kinds contribute to the object's having the P-quality it has, that is, apparently significant kinds (an expression on a face ...), *and* apparently less significant (the texture of brush strokes ...). In Sibley's words:

> One might say that [an object's having the aesthetic character it has] is because everything about the work is exactly as it is - this colour here, that line there, and so on indefinitely.[21]

The second specific relationship, *"notable specific dependence"*, is the particularly strong dependence of P-qualities upon those non-aesthetic features that are *notable* (some Q-features are more responsible for a P-feature than others). This relation accounts for another characteristic of critical practice: A critic, in explaining for instance why a picture has the aesthetic quality of being melancholy, usually selects from the work a *notable* or significantly responsible feature(s), instead of pointing to *all* the responsible non-aesthetic features that would be included in the relation of *total specific dependence*. In terms of P- and Q-features, the expert critic is valued for his ability to select those peculiarly important or salient Q-features (for example, a broken line) responsible for a particular P-quality (for example, the quality of restlessness). Thus, although all the Q-features included in the relation of

total specific dependence are jointly responsible for the P-quality, it is only

those Q-features included in the relation of *notable specific dependence* which

are especially responsible for the P-quality and which the good critic singles

out.

4.4 *Comparison with Colour Qualities*

It will be helpful for the assessment later to summarise some plausible

differences between aesthetic and colour practice that are described and

explained by Sibley's account of P-qualities and relationships of dependence.

Firstly, aesthetic perceptiveness and expertise is more difficult to come by

than colour perceptiveness and expertise. On Sibley's (elaborated) account,

this is explained in terms of the fact that the ability to perceive aesthetic

qualities presupposes having an awareness of Q-qualities, additional objective

information, and emotional responses (in some cases); whereas, the ability to

perceive colour qualities does not depend upon such complex conditions (only

such things as adequate lighting conditions etc.).

Secondly, in aesthetics one expects to develop one's tastes and appreciation.

This is explained in terms of improving one's perception of salient Q-features,

acquiring additional objective information, and having relevant experiences, so

that one discerns the relevant P-qualities. To see colour, no equivalent

training or learning process is necessary; we can plausibly imagine that even

a baby can see colours (it is plausible that colour concepts are not required in

order to distinguish different colours).

Thirdly, in making aesthetic judgments, we generally support or explain our application of an aesthetic term by referring to the discernible non-aesthetic (Q-) features of a thing, usually those that are notable.[22] In making colour judgments, however, we generally do not support them with any sort of explanation, reason or justification.

Some similarities with colour are also explained by Sibley's (elaborated) account. In order to make a colour judgment (and come to know) that something is red, we just look and see if it has the quality of redness (in much the same way that we would look and see if something is large or oval). In a similar way, in order to make an aesthetic judgment that a particular painting is melancholy, the process is essentially *perceptual* in that we must look and see for ourselves whether it is. Also, colour properties are plausibly treated as *objective**, in the sense that they are there independently of any actual experience of any subject on any particular occasion (we would not say that grass is colourless when it is not perceived). This *objective** character is plausibly applicable to aesthetic P-qualities (we would not say that the Venus de Milo is not graceful when it is not perceived).

Sibley, as we shall see, uses an analogy between colour and aesthetics, which implies that he takes the similarities between aesthetic and colour judgment to be sufficient to support the analogy, despite the obvious differences. The

analogy is described in Section 6.0 of this Chapter, and is assessed in Chapter three.

5.0   Characteristics of Aesthetic Concepts

5.1 *Introduction*

In this section I consider Sibley's analysis of aesthetic concepts. An implicit aim of the analysis is to show why a perceptual account of aesthetics is appropriate.

5.2   Aesthetic Concepts and How We Apply Them

Sibley makes the negative claim that it is "an essential characteristic of aesthetic concepts" that they are not and cannot be governed by rules or "conditions".[23] He means by this that, in general, no non-aesthetic features of things provide general conditions for correctly applying aesthetic terms - conditions from which it *logically follows* that something is P (the sense of entailment here is: given the truth of the conditions, it is logically impossible for the assertion to be false [for the term not to apply]).

By "conditions" Sibley means two things. Firstly, a strict set of necessary and sufficient conditions; for instance the term "square" is applied in

accordance with a set of necessary and sufficient conditions which include

having four equal sides and four right angles. Secondly, a weaker set of

sufficient conditions (as identified by H.L.A. Hart) applicable to "defeasible

concepts". Defeasible concepts have conditions for application that are

together sufficient (given that there are no voiding conditions), but no set of

necessary and sufficient conditions as in the case of "square". A number of

relevant features (A, B, C, D, E) govern the correct application of a

defeasible concept, to the extent that the presence of certain groups or

combinations of these features is sufficient for a correct application. The list

of features might be open-ended so that decisions might be needed for new

applications (e.g. a decision as to how the list is to be extended). Although

the correctness of the application and the status of the conditions cannot be

guaranteed in advance in a new case (there may be other features present

which would override or void the set of conditions), it will always be possible

to extract a set of sufficient conditions in a case that has already been

decided. A possible example of a defeasible concept is "intelligent".

On Sibley's view, aesthetic concepts are not condition-governed even in the

way defeasible concepts are. He claims that there is no set of sufficient

conditions (set of non-aesthetic features) such that the presence of some

(open-ended) set will (given that there are no "voiding" features) *beyond*

question justify or warrant the application of an aesthetic term (even in

retrospect) - we cannot make any general statement of the form "If the vase is

pale pink, somewhat curving, lightly mottled...(and there are no other

features that would be incompatible with these), then it will be *delicate*

(guaranteed)". Thus, Sibley is claiming that no Q-features by themselves

provide conditions in the entailment sense, for however full the correct *non-*

aesthetic description, it cannot be beyond logical doubt that X is "*graceful*",

and *not* "weakly" or "delicate" or something else.

A comparison at this point with ethics is relevant to our final assessment. In

ethical discourse there is often a connection of meaning (perhaps approaching

an entailment) between a description of Q-properties *responsible for* an ethical

merit or dismerit term being applicable, and the ethical term itself ("M").[24]

For example, there is a conceptual connection between "courageous" and the

non-moral description "Tom held his thumb steady in the hole in the dyke

wall despite realising the great danger to himself...", on the basis that it would

be possible to fill out this non-moral description in a sufficiently complex

way such that (given there are no voiding factors) the non-moral description

would provide a set of sufficient conditions which would entail that Tom is

"courageous". In the aesthetic case, however, there are (according to Sibley)

no conceptual connections, in the order of entailment, between non-aesthetic

descriptions (either general or specific) and aesthetic terms. For instance,

between the term "graceful" and the *specific* description (however complex)

of a particular curve: "the figure has co-ordinates (x,y,z), is coloured

yellow..."; or between the term "dull" and the *general* description (again,

however complex) of a poem: "it is monosyllabic, deals with winter

weather...". Thus the key difference between the ethical and aesthetic cases

is the absence of strict entailment in the aesthetic case: In the aesthetic case, it is because of certain particular properties of X that X is P (there is an explanatory but not a logical connection). In certain moral cases, however, it is because of certain general and/or specific true ascriptions of properties to X that it *logically follows* (barring disclaimers for special contexts) that X is M (where M is a moral property). Thus, there appears to be a significant difference between aesthetic and ethical discourse to the extent that conceptual connections are strong enough for entailment (and therefore a priori knowledge) in the latter and not the former.

This conceptual difference between many aesthetic claims and certain ethical claims would explain certain differences in our aesthetic and ethical practices. For instance, we would expect others to *go and see* a film themselves in order to *judge* it, rather than make a judgment on the basis of someone else's description of the film. On the other hand, we often feel confident in applying moral terms on the basis of a *description* containing non-moral terms. For example, on the basis of a detailed (non-moral) description in *The Times* of an IRA bombing, we might conclude that a certain moral description *follows* from the non-moral one (in the sense of: cannot but apply), and we might write an article setting this out, asking our readers to sympathise with our claims, even though neither we nor our readers were there to see the event with our own eyes.

Sibley makes two exceptions to his general claim about the lack of general

conditions in aesthetics. Plausibly, aesthetic terms are governed in some way by *negative conditions*, for some non-aesthetic descriptions are simply incompatible with aesthetic descriptions. An error of this sort may be involved in the following assertion: "The pale, gentle lines and colour, and the quiet repose of the depicted figures make for a *garish* composition". Thus there are conceptual *in*correctness conditions operating in aesthetic discourse that may be known a priori, given that one understands the meanings of the concepts involved.

A second exception to any general non-condition rule is that a description employing *aesthetic* terms, rather than solely non-aesthetic terms, may provide a *sufficient condition* as there is for defeasible concepts. The satisfaction of the sufficient condition would result in our being unable to deny that the aesthetic term was correctly applied.

It should be noted that Sibley's view is that, apart from the two exceptions above, there are no entailment conditions for correct application; and not the view that there are no conceptual connections whatsoever between *non-*aesthetic and aesthetic concepts. Although there are no entailment conditions between aesthetic and non-aesthetic, Sibley admits that there are weaker, conceptual associations and conditions that count towards the correct application of a term. For example, certain non-aesthetic qualities seem to be *logically necessary* for aesthetic qualities - bright (or apparently bright) colours would seem necessary for there to be an instance of "gaudiness" or

"garishness". "Were such relationships merely contingent, it would be conceivable that we might find occasional exceptions ... some garish pastels (for instance)".[25] And weaker still are conceptual connections based upon weak empirical generalisations. For example, a conceptual connection between sad music and slowness based upon an empirical generalisation of the sort "sad music is usually slow". So, although there is no strict entailment to guide the application of aesthetic concepts on the basis of non-aesthetic features, there are, nevertheless, certain logical affinities and oppositions that may show that certain applications are appropriate, inappropriate or absurd.

Sibley goes on to admit to overstating his initial claim, since it is an oversimplification to suggest that all non-aesthetic language is *mechanically* applied according to specifiable conditions or rules. But then, what exactly is the significant difference between aesthetic concepts and non-aesthetic concepts that Sibley is concerned to point out? In the absence of a strict mechanical rule-following model for guiding the application of non-aesthetic concepts, and given the (albeit weak) conceptual relationships between non-aesthetic and aesthetic, the way we learn and apply aesthetic concepts will have some similarities with the way we learn and apply, non-aesthetic concepts. Sibley claims, however, that there is still a considerable difference in the procedures for applying these different types of concepts. The difference is perhaps best shown by contrasting the procedures used to apply terms belonging to different discourses in new (previously

unencountered) cases: In applying non-aesthetic concepts to new cases, we need to exercise judgment (we do not merely follow a mechanical rule) to weigh the applicability of samples and precedents; the latter embody a complex web of governing conditions for paradigm cases, and to profit from them we must argue consistently from the sample case to the new case. In *this* sense (and not the mechanical sense), the discourse is condition governed. In the application of aesthetic terms to new cases, however, rather than exercising "judgment" to determine which samples (and therefore which governing rules) apply, Sibley says that we exercise "*taste*". It is thus implied that exercising taste is a procedure less to do with conscious deliberations over similarities and differences between old and new cases, and more to do with looking and seeing all the particularities of the new case, and *then* looking for supporting reasons for one's perception/response by consciously picking out similarities and differences between old and new cases.

The crux of Sibley's descriptive point must be that although samples are crucial in the aesthetic procedure for giving us a grasp of the concepts involved, they are not crucial in the same way that "condition-governed" discourse depends upon them. In the aesthetic case, we cannot derive from the samples *specifiable* conditions and principles to guide us in applying concepts consistently to new cases. It follows that, even if we are given a full and detailed description of a new aesthetic case, X, and we say, based on this, that "X *must* be very beautiful", we mean no more than "it *surely* must be"

and "it is only remotely possible that it is not".

It must now be explained *why* specifiable conditions cannot be derived in the aesthetic case. The reason why may seem to be connected with the immense variety of both new and old cases and a corresponding deficiency in determinate (as opposed to general) descriptive language to accurately describe these cases. Perhaps if we had precise names or descriptive terms for minute differences in samples, for example, names for particular shades of colour, co-ordinates of curves etc., then specific (albeit, complex) conditions could be formed of the sort "Anything which has the determinate (particular) non-aesthetic character Q will have the aesthetic quality P". If this were so, aesthetic assertions could be governed by a procedure of *judgment* in the way that other concepts are, and the lack of general conditions in aesthetics could not be said to be an *essential* feature of aesthetic judgments.

Sibley, however, denies that detailed and specific criteria for application of aesthetic terms would be of any use, even if we had them. Instead, he explains the non condition-governed feature of aesthetic concepts in terms of the essential perceptual nature of aesthetic judgment; and the latter in terms of an essential feature of aesthetic phenomena (I shall refer to this as *holism*). The essentially holistic nature of aesthetic phenomena underlies the lack of conditions (general or specific) in aesthetic discourse. Holism in terms of qualities means that aesthetic qualities of things are strictly dependent upon all the other features of those things. Holism is involved in the idea that the

very same non-aesthetic Q-feature (for example a particular colour shade, or curve) may help to make one artwork, and yet spoil another; this is because the aesthetic quality is dependent upon this unique combination of colours and shapes, so that a relatively small difference in the Q-features of an object can result in a relatively large difference in aesthetic qualities. It is conceivable, for instance, that a change of just one word in a poem could alter the aesthetic qualities of the poem. Holism is explained in Section 4.3 in terms of a relation of *"total specific dependence"* between P- and Q-qualities.

Some theorists respond to holism in the extreme by saying that nothing is to be achieved in trying to individuate or separate non-aesthetic features and generalise about them or the aesthetic features associated with them. They may claim, for instance, that there is only one non-aesthetic feature of aesthetic relevance to each aesthetic object, i.e. the total character of the object as it is represented in ordinary perception. For example, the idea that it is not *a* curve that a particular aesthetic quality of gracefulness depends upon, but *this particular* curve *in this particular context*. Take the curve away from this context and place it in another and it will neither appear in the same way, nor *be the same* non-aesthetic feature which the quality of gracefulness depended upon in the former context. On the most extreme view, two objects may only share the same aesthetic qualities if they are qualitatively identical in all non-aesthetic respects.

Whether we take Sibley's or a more extreme view, the consequences of

holism for concept application in aesthetics should now be clear. Firstly, if criteria for application are to be of any use, then they must be applicable to objects or phenomena that are qualitatively different in at least some non-aesthetic respects (otherwise we merely have criteria for applying a concept when a new case is qualitatively identical in all respects with an old case). Secondly, the problem presented by holism is that even if there was only one difference in the Q-features between two objects, there is no way of *guaranteeing* in advance that that difference is irrelevant to the P-character in question (it may be the one word in the poem that makes all the difference). And thirdly, the consequence of the first and second points means that there can be no specifiable criteria that guarantee future applications. Hence, the role for perception: the need to perceive an aesthetic object first hand in order to make a correct application of an aesthetic concept to a new case. The holistic nature of aesthetic phenomena is, therefore, essentially why an emphasis on perception in accounts of aesthetic discourse seems plausible.

5.3 *How We Support Aesthetic Judgments*

Given that most applications of aesthetic concepts are not condition governed in the sense that applies to paradigm condition governed discourse, how does the critic *support* her aesthetic judgments? More specifically: **(i)** What kind of support for aesthetic judgment is ordinarily given in our aesthetic practice? And **(ii)** is this type of support sufficient to "underpin" this practice as the bona fide rational activity it apparently claims to be? (Some theorists, for

instance, believe that there must be a special kind of *"rational"* support "if

criticism is to be a respectable enterprise at all".)[26]

Sibley distinguishes between *two critical activities*. The first concerns

explaining why something has the P-quality it has (why it has the effects it

has). Here, the good critic provides an explanation by pointing to notable,

responsible Q-qualities.[27] The second activity involves bringing people to

see aesthetic qualities they have missed. To answer the questions (i) and (ii)

above, Sibley then considers where, if at all, "supporting or justifying"

aesthetic judgments fits into these critical activities.

Concerning the second activity - getting people to see what you see - Sibley

accepts that this may be regarded as a way of supporting or justifying

aesthetic judgments (he refers to it as providing *"perceptual proof")*.

However, we must be clear about what sort of support this kind is: The critic

cannot (without confusion) be said to have provided *reasons* to support his

judgment, since trying to get someone to agree by *reasoning* implies that the

critic offers statements which, if true, render it certain or reasonable to

suppose that his judgment is correct. On Sibley's view, a critic cannot

genuinely get people to agree that X is graceful simply by presenting reasons

in this sense, however good, since it will not (in general) follow from what is

said that something has a particular aesthetic property. To properly agree that

X is graceful, the critic's audience must *see* the object in question for

themselves. Thus, a "perceptual proof" (getting people to *see* what you see)

provides proof via an essentially perceptual process, and it cannot, without

confusion, be construed as a matter of giving reasons.

This provokes the question whether there are any other ways of supporting

the truth of one's aesthetic judgment by presenting reasons. Sibley in fact

considers a narrower question: whether the critical activity of *"explanation"*

(identified above) could in any way be construed as "providing reasons".

More specifically, he asks: could any statements about a thing's non-aesthetic

qualities alone serve as reasons for agreeing or concluding that it has a certain

aesthetic property? Sibley's answer is that such statements can be construed

as supporting reasons, but only in an unusual sense. In the usual sense, a

trustworthy judgment is made *because* one has certain reasons. But, as Sibley

has pointed out, aesthetic judgment cannot be the *outcome* of specifiable

reasons (it is essentially perceptual). So if there are to be supporting reasons

at all in aesthetic judgment, then they are not reasons in the sense that

judgments are made *because* of reasons, but reasons in the sense that

judgments are explained *by* reasons.

The two senses of "reason" distinguished by Sibley are: a *reason** (I shall

call it a *"deliberative reason"*), as in a true statement or a fact such that, on

the basis of knowing it, it would be reasonable, right, or plausible to infer,

suppose, or judge that something is so;   and a *reason*** (which I shall call

an *"explanatory reason"*), as in a statement of why things are as they are.

In the case of a deliberative reason, on the basis of certain facts (facts later to

be one's *explanatory reasons*) one might infer that X is Q. In the case of an explanatory reason, one might discern that X is P, without yet knowing the *explanatory reason* (being able to say why). Or, one may know that A is the *explanatory reason* why something is *Q*, and yet knowledge of A may provide no *deliberative reason* for supposing that it is Q (for instance, the *explanatory reason* for a dog looking funny may be because it holds its paw at a certain angle; but knowledge that a dog holds its paw in this way would provide a poor *deliberative reason* for believing or inferring that the dog is amusing rather than pitiful...).

Sibley suggests that these notions (deliberative and explanatory reasons) are often confused, and that:

> people insist that aesthetic judgments should be based on, in the sense of rationally derivable from, supporting reasons [*deliberative reasons*]; but all they can sensibly insist upon is that the critic, having realized why the thing is or is not graceful, should be able to say so [i.e. give *explanatory reasons*].[28]

Beardsley, in his account of what it is for a critic to give reasons for an aesthetic *verdict* states that a reason is a proposition which cites some property of the work, and that "if one proposition is a reason for another in the sense of actually supporting it, then there must be a logical connection of some sort between them. And, being a logical connection, it must relate general concepts in an abstract way." "*Generality* ... appears to be essential to reasons in the logical sense"..."some form of generality is essential to

reason-giving".[29] Contrasting with this, Sibley claims that explanatory reasons are ordinarily used to support aesthetic judgments; these sorts of reasons may *lack* logical connections between reason-statement and judgment, yet they legitimately support those judgments. Furthermore, the practice of giving such reasons shows that aesthetic practice is a bona fide rational activity.

Sibley's descriptive account of aesthetic reason-giving is consistent with his view that aesthetic discourse is not condition-governed. For if the discourse is not condition-governed, then the reasons that we ordinarily give in aesthetics are not logically connected (in a strong sense) with the propositions they support (otherwise, we could deduce a correct aesthetic description from a set of reasons, which would mean that the discourse *was* condition-governed). The adequacy of Sibley's account of aesthetic reason-giving thus rests upon the plausibility of his view that aesthetic discourse is not condition-governed. This view (at least its denial of strong entailment conditions) gains its plausibility from the *implausibility* of the idea that entailment and deductions are the norm in aesthetics, and the obvious difference between the reliance on perception in aesthetic practice as compared with the reliance on written-down proofs in, say, mathematics. Thus, the Beardsley-style account of reason-giving, which implies that reasons must be strongly logically connected with the propositions they support, lacks plausibility as an account of reason-giving in aesthetic practice.

It remains for Sibley to argue that explanatory reason-giving, as occurs in

aesthetics, is not inferior to any other kind of reason-giving; that aesthetics can be a bona fide rational activity even though there are no deliberative reasons. Sibley's response is that the project to provide "rational" justification - in the sense of demonstrating how there can be an activity of *deliberative reason-giving* for all aesthetic judgments - is misconceived. His reasons seem to be because: **(i)** there could be no "general [and exhaustive] underpinning" for aesthetics even if there were deliberative reasons, since the first aesthetic judgments used to establish any such justifying generalisations could themselves have no "justification by means of generalisations"; **(ii)** the project presupposes that there is only one sort of reason-giving (deliberative reason-giving), but Sibley has shown there to be another sort (explanatory reasons); **(iii)** the promoter of a requirement for deliberative reason-giving for rational discourse provides no good grounds to suppose that deliberative reasons, as opposed to explanatory reasons are required for rational and consistent concept application; and **(iv)** the promoter of deliberative reasons fails to recognise that explanatory reasons (as well as perceptual proofs) are given in aesthetics. In the absence of grounds to suppose that explanatory reasons fail to qualify aesthetics as rational, and in the absence of grounds to suppose that there must be exhaustive, *specifiable* deliberative reasons (proofs) for consistent and rational concept application, aesthetics thus qualifies as a bona fide rational activity on the basis that it involves giving explanatory reasons and perceptual proofs.

Sibley's account of reason-giving in aesthetics is clarified if we ask a further

question: Can it *ever* legitimately be argued, solely from statements about the Q-qualities of things, that certain aesthetic judgments must be true? In the deductive sense, Sibley's answer is "no", given his claim that there are no logical connections of the strength of entailment between non-aesthetic statements and aesthetic judgments. But Sibley would allow a weaker thesis i.e. that some non-aesthetic statements could by themselves provide a reasonable measure of *inductive* support for the truth of an aesthetic judgment. For example, a statement about certain Q-qualities of a kind that always or generally make a work graceful or lively may give reasonably strong support for inferring that this new case will also be graceful or lively because it has qualitatively similar Q-qualities.

However, even if there are inductive generalisations, and they become more widespread, support of this sort will always be inferior to "perceptual proof" for applying aesthetic terms to new cases, because of the holistic nature of aesthetic judgments (the chance of large P-differences despite small Q-differences). We could only expect inductive support to provide a guide as to what is *likely* to be an appropriate application of an aesthetic term. And a qualification of the following sort would be needed: *given that there are no voiding characteristics whose presence has the effect of transforming the aesthetic effect previously encountered in this type of case.*

6.0 Justifying Objectivity (Aesthetic Descriptions)

6.1 *How Can Aesthetic Claims be Objective?*

Given Sibley's account of non condition governed concept application in aesthetics, we now need an explanation for how aesthetic concepts, applied by the "exercising of taste" as opposed to "judgment", can result in genuinely objective claims. In particular, how can there be true or false aesthetic judgments, and how do we come to know what is true or false in aesthetics? The reasons for thinking that aesthetic claims are objective include: firstly, the fact that it is not built into the content of an aesthetic judgment or claim that one's own subjective experience settles that something *is* beautiful or graceful, since we can make sense of "my experiencing X as graceful does not settle that X *is* graceful". And secondly, aesthetic discourse has the form of a paradigm language of attribution; we speak as though aesthetic terms connote objective "properties" to objects, and as though the truth or falsity of such ascriptions depends upon whether the objects in fact have those properties.

6.2 *Sibley's Approach: An Analogy with Colour*

Sibley proposes to explain the objectivity and epistemology of aesthetics, by analogy. He suggests that we might better understand how we manage to

apply aesthetic concepts if we can point to other, non-condition governed

concepts whose objectivity is well understood, and which are connected with

a phenomenon that is relevantly similar to aesthetic phenomena. Sibley takes

it to be natural to compare aesthetic with colour concepts. The latter are not

ordinarily applied by following rules or principles, but by looking and seeing

(or failing to see) that things *are* red etc. Moreover, they are not subjective,

since we can make sense of "my experiencing x as red does not settle that x

is red". Further, the phenomenon of colour perception is perhaps better

understood than the phenomenon of aesthetic taste and so is potentially

suitable for conferring understanding upon the latter by analogy.

Sibley defines the objectivity under consideration as concerning whether it is

true, a *fact*, that some works *are* graceful ...; that someone denying it could

be mistaken; and that one man's assertion might contradict another's. He

remarks on the obscurity of philosophical uses of terms such as "property",

"inherence"... to explain why he approaches the project of justifying

objectivity in aesthetics in terms of truth, rather than in terms of aesthetic

properties "*being genuine*" properties of objects despite their being organism-

related etc. (the obscurity of the latter tends to invite traditional intuitionist

criticisms).[30] Sibley's strategy is, therefore, to take colour as a case where we

accept that things *can be* coloured in the objective sense of its being *true* that

they are. The relevant question is then whether things can *be* (say) graceful

in the way that things can *be,* say, red. If they can, Sibley takes it that,

unless someone can show good reason otherwise, aesthetic remarks, like

remarks about colour, are justifiably said to be true or false. This in turn

provides foundation for talk about aesthetic properties in the way that there is

legitimate talk about colour properties. He states that:

> if people deny an objectivity, a possibility of truth and error, to aesthetic descriptions
>
> which they allow to colour judgments, it is worth trying to see whether the differences
>
> warrant drawing such a sharp and crucial line. [31]

What is needed then is an account of something being coloured, and to show

that the sceptic concerning objectivity in aesthetics is wrong in thinking that

in some *vital* respect the correct aesthetic account will be essentially

different. Before considering Sibley's account, I will set out the sceptical

challenge he aims to defeat.

6.3 *Scepticism concerning Objectivity in Aesthetics*

A challenge to objectivity in aesthetics is given as follows (I shall refer to it

as the "sceptic's" challenge):

Aesthetic discourse cannot satisfy the following requirements for objectivity

and it is therefore not an objective area of discourse:

(a) *Requirement of the possibility of proof for objectivity:* "With objective

matters, there must be proofs, decision procedures, ways of establishing truth

and falsity. Where proof is impossible, there is no objectivity";

"Where *unresolved disputes* are endemic and widespread (as they are said to be in the aesthetic realm)"... this <u>indicates</u> that "decision procedures are lacking" (i.e. proofs) which means that there is no "way of settling who is right and who wrong"... which means that "matters are not objective";

... Plus the stronger necessary condition that is sometimes made:

(b) *Requirement of widespread agreement for objectivity:* "The very possibility of objectivity *requires* a kind of widespread agreement" (for example, Nowell-Smith, *Ethics*, states that:

> General agreement is not a test of truth; but is a necessary condition of the use of
>
> objective language ... We could not treat roundness as an objective property, we could
>
> not talk about things being round or say that statements about roundness were
>
> objectively true or false unless two conditions were fulfilled (a) we must agree about
>
> the tests ... (b) the tests used must be such as to give a high degree of agreement in
>
> their application over a wide field).

6.4 *Sibley's Criteria and Argument for Objectivity*

Sibley's criteria for objectivity are derived from what he takes to be essential to the objective concept of something *being* coloured. If established and satisfied for the case of aesthetics, Sibley supposes that objectivity in

aesthetics will be justified. The criteria are as follows:

(1) *Universal agreement is not necessary for objectivity* (Rejection of the sceptic's strong condition.)

(2) *Proofs are necessary for objectivity (in principle)* (Acceptance of the first requirement of the sceptic)

(3) *Property terms must be applied to more or less the same cases (they must be successfully treated as objective)*

(4) *There must be non-empty explanations of disagreement and incorrect application.*

The aim of Sibley's argument is two-fold: (i) to establish the validity of *Sibley's* criteria for objectivity over the sceptic's, and (ii) to demonstrate how aesthetics satisfies each requirement and is therefore as objective as colour. I shall state first Sibley's conclusions, and then what I take to be his argument.

Having shown that his criteria for objectivity are satisfied, Sibley concludes that:

> some aesthetic judgments may be characterized as right, wrong, true, false, undeniable, or by similar strong vocabulary.

However,

> this realm may not be rigidly objective [and that] with some judgments (perhaps a
> sizeable number), we cannot demand or justify a clear "Yes", "No", "True" or "False".

In spite of this:

> the fact that there is insufficient reason to endorse one judgment as right against the
> other [in certain cases] (since *ex hypothesi* no recourse to anything else could show this)
> by no means plunges us into subjectivity... If the proportion of cases in which there is
> no sharp right and wrong about such judgments ... is large in relation to cases which,
> whether in fact settled or not, might have a clear answer, this is only an enlargement of
> a kind of in-principle undecidable area which already characterizes other objective
> concepts. It does not and could not erase all right-wrong distinctions...since these
> indeterminable cases exist only in relation to the others.

In other words, indeterminacy in the application of some aesthetic concepts
need not remove objectivity from other areas of this discourse.

Sibley further concludes that there is a case for aesthetic properties, if only in
the weak sense "that some aesthetic characterizations are true or false, apt or
inappropriate, etc". This "weaker" sense of "property" seems of no
consequence to Sibley. He says:

If we can sketch a continuum of cases, with "properties" merging into "non-properties",
it will matter little whether the jargon of "properties" is enlarged to include aesthetic
properties too, in order to indicate important similarities, or whether the line is drawn to
include, say, at most, colours.[32]

The following is what I take to be Sibley's argument:

(1) Universal agreement is not necessary for objectivity

Sibley first analyses which agreements settle whether something is coloured.
He concludes that it is the agreements of those who make the most
discriminations - the elite. In the case of colour, the elite includes normal
colour perceivers rather than the colour blind, and it happens to be the case
that the elite is made up of a majority of our population. However, Sibley
notes that there is no necessary reason why the elite must be a majority rather
than a minority; it is conceivable that it could have been the other way
around for colour without affecting the objective status of colour judgments.
And Sibley objects to the idea that a mere *contingent* fact about the amount
of disagreement could form the basis for determining whether or not the
essential characteristic of objectivity is present or not. Moreover, the
sceptic's requirement involves arbitrarily judging how much agreement is
consistent with there being properties in a given case. For these reasons, the
sceptic's requirement of *widespread* agreement (in effect, a requirement for a
majority elite) cannot be a necessary condition for objectivity. Sibley notes:

It is not the *majority* being colour-sighted that permits a property language for colours, but the existence of a nucleus (large *or* small) making regular, detailed and closely identical distinctions. And as the "opinions" of the colour blind can be ignored, so, in aesthetics, we can concentrate on the perceptive "elite" group, even if it is a minority.[33]

(2) *Proofs are necessary for objectivity*

Sibley distinguishes objectivity concepts from pure response (subjective) concepts on the basis that the former, and not the latter, require conclusive proofs in principle. Agreeing with the sceptic, he says: "No doubt some test or decision procedure is requisite for objectivity...". However, Sibley is careful to emphasise the *"in principle"* qualification by stating that, from within the perspective of a practice, "at no point can we say that *everything* has been done" to prove that something is the case.

We should note that the requirement for objectivity that proofs be possible in principle is not a trivial claim. For instance, Thomas Nagel[34] has argued that it is not clear that "the world" is such that, in principle, it is possible for "us" to find out about it, for "there is no reason to think our mental capacities mirror reality completely". Concerning claims about the physical world, therefore, the requirement is at least controversial. Certain matters may be beyond our capacities to prove (it may not be *possible* for us to prove them), and yet it is clearly unreasonable to conclude from this that those matters are not *objective* matters about "reality". For example, Colin McGinn has

suggested that our cognitive capabilities are such that we cannot solve the mind-body problem, but that this does not mean that the relation in question is not an objective matter concerning reality, or that some different type of cognitive capability would be capable of understanding it.[35]

It does not follow from these reflections, however, that all subject matter for discourse is potentially epistemically transcendent in relation to our own epistemic system. Nagel admits a connection between truth in ethics that is "closer" to us than in potentially evidentially-transcendent discourses. He states:

> I do not believe that the truth about how we should live could extend radically beyond any capacity we might have to discover it (apart from its dependence on nonevaluative facts we might be unable to discover).[36]

Sibley's requirement of proofs, though controversial as a condition for objectivity in general, is therefore consistent with Nagel's position with respect to ethics. This view reflects the plausible idea that there is no wholly "external" source of correctness for aesthetics and ethics; ultimately, such matters are determined in relation to minds. The idea seems plausible because, unlike paradigm scientific discourse, it is *im*plausible to suppose that aesthetic and ethical truths could retain any substance or relevance if they were forever beyond our understanding. Facts about aesthetics and morals are understood as being *essentially* potentially relevant to our lives in some way.

It might be argued that an evidential constraint on aesthetic truth brings

aesthetics closer to subjective matters, and supports Humean subjectivism i.e.

the explanation of values in terms of projections of pre-existing motives and

thought *onto* the world. Humean subjectivism, however, does not *follow*

from the evidential constraint, for there is an alternative position: the idea

that values have a place *in* the world as represented. This position has the

advantage of corresponding more closely to the attributive character of

aesthetic discourse.

Given that a requirement of proofs is reasonable for some discourses, the

question arises as to what *kind* of proof is needed. Sibley makes the

following relevant points: (i) A proof of the sort that requires us to cite

truths about the properties of a thing (Q-properties) from which it *follows*

that that thing has, for instance, the property of gracefulness, would mean

that, given the view about the non-condition governed nature of aesthetic

concepts, there could be no proofs and no objectivity in aesthetics. However,

it is question-begging to claim, without independent grounds, that the proof

must be of that kind.[37] (ii) It is not a plausible condition of there being a

proof that *all* cases can *in fact* be settled in accordance with the proof, for it

may be a very complex procedure such that, although it is in principle

possible to follow, there are reasons why it cannot be followed completely in

an actual instance. (iii) It is not a reasonable condition of there *being* a proof

that one must know when the procedure for the proof has been completely

followed, since it is reasonable that a procedure for a proof can be followed without ever knowing whether the procedure has been fully completed.

These points open the way for Sibley to argue that the kind of proofs in aesthetics are essentially similar to the kind of proofs in colour judgment.

The kind of proof of correctness that settles whether something has a certain colour property is one that makes no intermediate appeal to other properties of the object X; there is nothing about the non-coloured way X *looks* that makes it look red - we discriminate redness directly and not via the way a thing looks in other respects. Thus, the kind of proof of correctness governing colour judgments essentially appeals to *agreement in reaction or discrimination*. Are there similar proofs in aesthetics? One apparently relevant difference between aesthetic qualities and colour qualities is that the latter are simple properties, but aesthetic properties are plausibly understood as being emergent.[38] Furthermore, explanations are given in aesthetics for why something has the aesthetic character it has by citing salient Q-properties, whereas explanations are not generally given to support colour judgments. Despite these differences, however, Sibley maintains that our proofs for aesthetic and colour judgments are essentially similar. He argues that aesthetic proofs *ultimately* do not appeal to Q-properties, because aesthetic properties are not *entailed* by Q-properties. Like colour proofs, aesthetic proofs are ultimately perceptual and rest upon agreement in discrimination.[39]

Sibley notes, however, that it is not just *agreement in discrimination* that

settles whether something is graceful or, indeed, red. There are two further

conditions that need to be satisfied. The first may be termed *"appropriately*

ideal conditions". "Appropriately ideal conditions" for aesthetic judgments

are expected to be more complex than those for colour judgment. In the

latter case, our practice implies that the ideal conditions are good colour

perceptual mechanisms, lighting etc. In the former case, the conditions will

be connected with suitable conditions for discerning both Q- and P-features

(i.e. good lighting etc., and having additional objective information etc.).[40]

The complexities of the conditions in aesthetics are such that we may give up

before we have discerned the P-qualities in question.

The second additional condition is a requirement that it is by reference to the

agreements of the elite that we can treat *agreement* as conclusive for

something *being* red or graceful, i.e. by those who make the greatest number

of discriminations in a given case and who agree upon a particular attribution.

Incidently, this condition further distinguishes objectivity-concepts from pure,

subjective response concepts (such as "nice"), for in order to settle what is

nice we do not need to appeal to the judgments of an elite.

Agreement in discrimination by the elite in appropriately ideal conditions is

the essential characteristic shared by proofs for colour and aesthetic judgment.

The proofs are essentially similar, to the extent that they "ramify beyond the

present moment and... settle that a thing is really red [graceful etc.]". Thus,

Sibley claims that the second requirement for objectivity is satisfied.

More specifically, we can characterise *"ultimate proofs"* in aesthetics as
follows:

*** A proof that X is P will consist in a convergence of judgments made in
appropriately ideal conditions by the elite** (where *"elite"* refers to the group
where there is the most agreement and most detail in discrimination in a
given case i.e. a "nucleus" of judgers, which may be large or small, making
"regular, detailed and closely identical distinctions").

* The convergence may require time to establish   (time over generations
may be needed for detailed agreement to emerge from temporary fashions).

*** The convergence of the judgments of the elite provides conclusive proof
of correctness**   (in order to know beyond doubt that X is P, "a thing would
need to exist unchanged over a long period and be regularly scrutinized with
care by many people").

It is relevant to the discussion in Chapter 3 to clarify what Sibley means by
the claim that ultimate proofs in aesthetics conclusively settle, over time, the
"is" of attribution, for this implies that the correctness in question is *logically*

absolute.[41] Sibley's view is that whether or not one chooses to talk in terms

of absolutes and conclusiveness depends upon one's view of what it is to

know something in aesthetics and colour discourse. He suggests, to avoid

argument, that "conclusive" here is understood to refer to cases of long-lasting

convergence, where *possibilities* of error are reduced, and where supposing

there to be an error seems "absurd" (e.g. we could not sensibly reject a

centuries-spanning consensus about *Homer's Odyssey* as being the result of a

passing fad. Thus, Sibley's "conclusive" proofs should be understood in the

(statistical) sense that e.g. certain masterpieces have been proved to be *moving*

or *eloquent* because they have consistently been found to be moving or

eloquent etc.

(3) Property terms must be applied to more or less the same cases (they
must be successfully treated as objective)

Sibley states: "For us to be using a word as a property term, it is required

that, to be using it correctly, people *must* (not merely *may*) in certain

circumstances apply it to more or less the same cases". This vague statement

seems to say that at least some agreement in application is required for a term

to be a property concept. If this is right, it is a much weaker version of the

sceptic's condition of universal agreement for objectivity. The problem it

presents is that it is open to objections of the following sort: The identity of

the group to which the "is" of attribution is linked will be arbitrary, so the

attempt to explain and justify objectivity in aesthetics fails, since it is

implausible to suppose that the correct application of property terms reflects nothing other than the opinions of an arbitrarily chosen group (correct attributions of properties must reflect something about the world).

Sibley argues against the premise that the reference-group for the "is" of attribution of colour or aesthetic qualities is chosen arbitrarily. He claims that analysis of colour and aesthetic concepts shows that the "is" of attribution is tied to the group (not necessarily a majority) able to agree regularly on the greatest number of discriminations (e.g. normal colour perceivers). The only difference for aesthetic terms is that the group to which the "is" of attribution is linked is generally a small rather than a large nucleus or elite because fewer people are capable of making detailed discriminations in aesthetics. There is a correspondingly large rather than small "varied penumbra" consisting of aesthetic groups making less detailed discriminations and agreements upon the use of less sophisticated aesthetic terms (perhaps, terms like "lovely" and "pretty" rather than "elegant" and "decorative"). Sometimes, where the elite fail to agree upon a particularly detailed discrimination (for example, that X is *ominous*), a more widely held but more generic opinion that has survived over a long period of time (that X is *exciting*) as agreed amongst the less discriminating group (the *penumbra*) may be taken as determining the property of X (the correct attribution). The main point is that the reference group is not chosen arbitrarily, but by performance. It is the one that makes the greatest number of discriminations *in* a given case, *and* that can come to agree on a particular application.

(4) **There must be non-empty explanations of disagreement and incorrect**

application

Sibley states: "Where a person does not apply [a word] as others do, there

must be some range of explanations available" i.e. there must be enough in

the nature of things that fits with and permits our attempt to use a concept as

a property concept, such that when the concept is misused, or when there is

disagreement, there are actual, non-empty explanations available.

The requirement is satisfied in colour discourse. For instance, we might

explain why a colour word has been misapplied in terms of someone being

unable to see that something is red because "the light was poor", "he is

colour-blind" or "he doesn't understand colour language"; and the

explanation has foundation because the item in question really does have a

colour property, say of redness, as is shown by the fact that, in appropriately

ideal conditions, normal colour perceivers would recognise it. Sibley argues

that there are also legitimate, non-empty explanations in aesthetics which

appeal to genuine properties (aesthetic properties, in this case). His strategy

is to imagine what kind of explanations would be given for the misapplication

of aesthetic concepts if there were genuine aesthetic properties; and then to

show that these sorts of explanations are, in fact, given in aesthetic practice.

It is then a relatively small step to the claim that the explanations in fact

given have foundation (they are non-empty in the sense that they appeal to

genuine aesthetic properties). The "small step" incorporates two points: first,

if we manage to use and explain our use of aesthetic concepts as though there were aesthetic properties, then there must be enough in the nature of things to constrain our concept use and explanations; and, second, if there is enough in the nature of things to constrain our discourse in this way, then what more is needed for us to conclude that there *are* genuine aesthetic properties? The onus is on someone who denies that there are aesthetic properties, to provide a substantial reason why there are none.

Concerning the first (hypothetical) thesis, Sibley thinks that if there were genuine aesthetic properties, they would be emergent properties.[42] Misapplication of concepts, if there (genuinely) were such properties, would be explained in terms of "perceivers" failing to satisfy the complex conditions required in order to recognise aesthetic P-qualities. For example, the conditions for perceiving ordinary Q-qualities may have been inadequate, or the perceiver may not have had "additional objective information" necessary in order to perceive the P-qualities (or perhaps she lacked relevant experience, training or ability, or she was simply inattentive). Because of the complexity of ideal conditions for perceiving the imagined P-qualities, we should expect there to be greater disagreement in aesthetic judgment than in colour judgment.

The second thesis is that the explanations for misapplication of aesthetic concepts and disagreements in actual practice are in fact just like the above. The thesis is supported by noting that, in actual practice, we sometimes

explain a *failure to agree* in terms of someone lacking the ability, knowledge or training to correctly apply a particular concept. And *conflict disagreements* are also explained, in practice, in terms consistent with there being aesthetic properties. For example, a case where two people or groups have the ability to apply the same concepts and yet make conflicting claims is sometimes explained in terms of levels of discrimination e.g. A, who makes less discriminations because of lack of interest and training, perceives that Bach is monotonous; and B, who makes more discriminations, perceives that Bach is subtly varied and exciting. Where the ascriptions given by A and B conflict (as they appear to in this case), we generally would accept B's claim in preference to A's (i.e. the claim of the person who makes the most discriminations). Thus, explanations given in ordinary practice appear to have the character of explanations we should expect if there were genuine properties; facts about our ordinary aesthetic practice support Sibley's second thesis.

Sibley's second thesis, however, needs careful formulation (as Sibley is aware). It must not be implied, for instance, that aesthetic disagreements are in fact always resolved in practice such that one party is always shown to be wrong and that there is always an explanation for why he is wrong. This is implausible since (unlike ethical practice) it is often considered unimportant that we should find out who is right or wrong over aesthetic matters. Moreover, there seem to be cases in ordinary practice where disagreement, even in principle, is irresolvable. But, the fact that there appear to be such

irresolvable cases should not jeopardise Sibley's programme. Firstly, because where disagreements exist and *are* resolved in practice, there is a plausible explanation and justification in terms of properties for that resolution (this is all Sibley needs to satisfy his fourth requirement for objectivity). And secondly, because where there are notorious disagreements which seem impossible to resolve, an explanation for that *impossibility* can also be given in terms of discrimination as follows: To elaborate Sibley's example, this might happen where people, usually constituting the elite ("nucleus"), and whose specific judgments agree elsewhere (so we can expect their levels of discrimination to be the same), now form two nuclei: they divide equally over the assertion of two claims which conflict. Clearly, the conflict is not resolvable in terms of a differential in the *number* of discriminations due to experience, ability etc., for the number of discriminations are, *ex hypothesi*, equal. Instead, the parties appear to be making different *types* of discrimination (equally discriminating people are in fact discerning different properties in X), which is why pointing to certain features that the other party might have missed will not help.

Sibley appears to accept the relativistic result that there may be no ultimate resolution, even in principle, for entrenched disagreements such as these; for example, no explanation and justification for claiming (if we were to) that one party is correct and the other, incorrect, on the basis that the type of discrimination in the first case is more aesthetically appropriate than in the second. In accepting this result, Sibley rejects a rigidly objectivist view that

insists that, in *all* cases, one party or group must be mistaken - that there is a non-empty explanation, *in principle*, for disagreement in all cases - all we have to do is to find out what it is. In spite of this, Sibley maintains the objectivist view (in the sense that one party is mistaken) for other areas of aesthetics. In these areas he claims that there *are* (in principle) proofs and non-empty explanations for disagreement, and therefore justification for talk about one party being correct and the other incorrect. This claim presupposes Sibley's additional claim: that the fact that not all disputes in aesthetics are settleable as between certain alternatives does not mean, without a good reason to say otherwise, that aesthetics is not objective in the unproblematic areas i.e. in those areas where cases *are* resolvable in principle.

In summary, Sibley's position is that, although there are parts of aesthetics where objectivity is lacking (in the sense of there being no true or correct determination), there are other areas which are genuinely objective in the way colour claims are (there are bona fide proofs, in principle, for one claim being correct over an opposite one, and there are non-empty explanations, in principle, for disagreements). An example of an objective area is the way certain natural kinds are consistently celebrated for various properties (e.g. the way gazelles and horses have, since early times, been thought to be graceful). Here, long-term, widespread agreement and explanations in terms of properties are sufficient, on Sibley's view, to justify the objective character of these kinds of aesthetic judgment.

Significant in Sibley's argument is the view that we should not withhold from

saying that there are "aesthetic properties" if we *talk as if there are* aesthetic

properties. In other words, if we treat aesthetic concepts as objective then

these concepts must be reasonably enough accommodated to the way things

are to justify the property-talk. He states:

> To admit that we use concepts as if objective with reasonable success, and yet suggest
>
> that it is only a matter of as-if and that there are really no such properties is, I think, to
>
> invite a request for illumination of the intended contrast and of its relevance to
>
> traditional debates.[43]

A traditional objection appears to undermine Sibley's claim about aesthetic

properties. This is the contention that the notion of *discrimination* is more

objective in the colour case. For, in order to convince a colour blind person

that two objects differ in their colour properties, a person with normal colour

perception could consistently distinguish one object from the other by

discriminating between them on the basis of their colour properties alone,

thereby showing the blind person that there is an objective difference based

upon colour, which the blind person lacks the ability to perceive. In

aesthetics, however, discriminations by someone with aesthetic taste between

aesthetically distinguishable objects can equally be made by someone lacking

aesthetic taste on the basis of differences in ordinarily perceptible Q-qualities

(if P-qualities depend upon Q-qualities, then changes/differences in the former

will be evident from changes/differences in the latter). So where the

discriminations in the colour case are clearly directed at something that a

colour-blind person cannot perceive, it is not clear, in the aesthetic case, that they are directed at anything apart from the differences in ordinarily perceptible Q-qualities which those lacking aesthetic taste *can* discern. Thus, there is room in the aesthetic case to be sceptical about there being aesthetic qualities (in particular, about there being "additional qualities" besides Q-qualities). The sceptic would argue that the onus is in the opposite direction from Sibley's suggestion, for why should we believe that there is a further *objective* difference (in the sense of there being genuine properties) other than what can be seen with normal perceptual faculties? Why not take aesthetic response to be something like the usually strong and varied (subjective) responses humans have to food? Without good reason otherwise, we unnecessarily complicate our ontology with an unjustified multiplication of properties if we accept that there are aesthetic properties.

On behalf of the case for aesthetic properties we can say: First, the sceptic's claim about the differences in discrimination is weakened by the fact that it is not true without qualification: Some Q-property differences make no difference to P-qualities (e.g. a difference in a non-important word in a poem). Also, it is at least arguable that some P-quality differences are discernible without there being Q-property differences, for example, when a difference in relevant additional objective information affects how something appears aesthetically (affects the conditions for P-quality emergence) and, therefore, affects the correct aesthetic description.

Second, the psychological nature of aesthetic appreciation does not, by itself,

make the latter *subjective* ("subjective" in the sense of not involving the

appreciation of genuine properties). Although it is reasonable to say that there

is more complexity in the psychological input in aesthetic appreciation than in

colour appreciation, it does not follow that this additional psychological input

must necessarily involve subjective preferences (likes and dislikes), because

the additional input could be explained in non-subjective terms, for instance

in terms of "objective" [public] knowledge, abilities and experience that

others, in principle, may share. Furthermore, the subjective result would be

implausible. Firstly, because it does not make sense to say that Martha's

opinion that X is graceful *settles* that X is graceful (i.e. the logic of this

statement indicates that we do not consider that subjective opinions settle

aesthetic matters). And secondly, aesthetic concept application is

distinguishable from paradigm subjective concept application. For example,

in the case of the word "nice", one's finding that something is nice is

sufficient for one to correctly describe it as nice; notions of correctness and

consistency are generally relativised to one's own applications; theoretical

notions such as "correctness as determined by the consensus of an elite group

of discriminators" have no characteristic role here. "Niceness" is not

generally treated as a *publicly* scrutinisable property in the world, or the

world as represented (its normal use is akin to saying "I like it").

Thus, since there is independent evidence for the existence of P-qualities in

addition to the ordinary Q-qualities of things, the objection lacks force. Also,

both colour and aesthetic discourse are reasonably characterised as being

about publicly scrutinisable properties, whereas subjective concepts do not

plausibly refer to publicly scrutinisable properties. The traditional objector

has therefore provided insufficient reason to undermine the view that our talk

as if there are aesthetic properties is talk about *genuine* aesthetic properties.

CHAPTER TWO: ETHICS - ABSTRACT FROM JOHN McDOWELL'S ACCOUNT

1.0 Introduction

In this section, I set out John McDowell's account of the phenomenon of value experience being such that values are detectable properties in the world as represented. First I shall clarify the notion of "moral value" and identify a similarity between areas in ethics and aesthetics.

2.0 Types of Moral Judgment

David Wiggins in "Truth, Invention, and the Meaning of Life"[44] makes a primary distinction between (i) judgments arising from initial (or unweighted) appreciation ("*valuations*"), and (ii) moral judgments arising from practical decision ("*deliberative judgments*"). Examples of the former, when confined to moral concepts in the predicate position, include "x is good", "bad", "just", "worthy", "honest" etc.[45] I shall refer to these expressions as "*moral valuations*". Examples of deliberative judgments include "I must k", "I ought to k", "It would be best, all things considered, for me to k", etc. Ethical judgments concerning particular situations may be expressed in either of these forms, for instance, "Bernard Shaw is a just man" (moral valuation); and "I ought to help Mr. Arnold who is drowning" (deliberative judgment). Many

general claims, however, are deliberative, for instance, "Abortion is right in certain circumstances", "It is wrong to maliciously maim children".

From this (non-exhaustive) summary of types of moral judgment we can identify an expected point of similarity between aesthetics and ethics. This is between moral valuations and (Sibley's) aesthetic descriptions, for both types of judgment are the outcome of an *unweighted* appreciation involving a process of *discerning* the aesthetic or moral features of a situation. *Less* similarity may be expected between aesthetics and that part of ethics which is essentially connected with practical guidance (i.e. deliberative judgments).

If Sibley is right and the most appropriate account of aesthetic descriptions is a perceptual one, then, given the above point of similarity, we could expect moral valuations to be similarly accounted for in perceptual terms. Deliberative judgments, on the other hand, are less obviously explainable in perceptual terms; the idea of *discerning* moral requirements or "oughts" in situations is less natural than the idea of discerning moral *features* of situations. It is worth noting that, where Sibley restricts his account to so-called descriptive aspects of aesthetics, McDowell's perceptual-type account appears to apply to all types of moral judgment. This implies that McDowell places heavier demands upon the perceptual model than Sibley.

3.0 Abstract from McDowell's Metaethical Account

3.1 *Introduction*

McDowell understands moral judgments to be the outcome of a certain kind of "appreciation" ("a sort of perceptual capacity") of particular features of a situation. The "features" are certain *requirements* which situations impose on behaviour (a "requirement" guides behaviour by demanding satisfaction of the requirement). These requirements are perceived by the virtuous man. The "virtuous man" is someone who arrives at the right answers concerning questions about how to behave. The deliverances of the reliable sensitivity of the virtuous man are cases of knowledge. This knowledge is identified with virtue.[46]

The theses and arguments included in the abstract from McDowell's account fall naturally into two groups: the first (Sections 3.2-3.4) approaches the issue of objectivity from considerations concerning moral concepts, the second (Sections 3.5-3.8) approaches the issue from considerations more directly applicable to the idea of moral properties. McDowell's motivations for giving a perceptual account of moral judgment also come from two directions, one in the form of the Thesis of Uncodifiability, and a second in the form of a certain view on the phenomenology of ethical thought (Sections 3.5, 3.8). The abstract also naturally divides into positive and

negative claims. The mainly negative claims can be interpreted as making

logical room in existing theoretical frameworks for McDowell's positive

claim that ethics is objective.

3.2 *Hard Cases and The Thesis of Uncodifiability*

McDowell notes that "hard cases" occur in moral discourse.[47] By "hard

cases" he means "disagreements which resist resolution by argument, as to

whether or not the concept applies" - cases where the arguments "tail off" and

one is left saying something like "Well don't you see...". Resolving such

issues depends upon the parties concerned seeing things in the same

distinctively moral way.

Hard cases are a result of a special characteristic of morality to do with the

impossibility of providing general principles governing virtuous action. The

proper starting point for metaethics, in McDowell's view, is thus a

commitment to the Thesis of Uncodifiability. This is the thesis that how one

should live is not codifiable i.e. it is impossible to reduce the content of a

virtuous person's morality to specifiable general principles - principles with

which any rational agent (including non-virtuous agents) could determine that

something is morally right or wrong, good or bad, just or unjust etc. The

Thesis of Uncodifiability is derived from an Aristotelian belief that:

The best generalisations about how one should behave hold only for the most part. If

one attempted to reduce one's conception of what virtue requires to a set of rules, then, however subtle and thoughtful one was in drawing up the code, cases would inevitably turn up in which a mechanical application of the rules would strike one as wrong - and not necessarily because one had changed one's mind; rather, one's mind on the matter was not susceptible of capture in any universal formula.[48]

It is unclear whether McDowell intends it to follow from his Thesis of Uncodifiability that *no* questions about right conduct in ethics can be answered by appealing to *specifiable* generalisations. I take this strong thesis to be implausible for ethics (though less so for aesthetics), since there clearly are cases where generalisations can be specified and knowable in advance. For instance, in Chapter 1[49], I noted that, in certain moral cases, certain moral descriptions *logically follow* (barring disclaimers for special contexts) from certain non-moral or moral general and/or specific true descriptions. That is, in ethical discourse, conceptual connections are sometimes strong enough for entailment, and therefore a priori knowledge, which means that certain ethical generalisations will be true, codifiable, and knowable without exercising a perceptual faculty in a particular situation (rational beings that lack ethical sense, yet who understand the concepts involved, could tell that certain ethical statements were correct). In those cases, the logical structure of moral and non-moral discourse provides constraints on concept application. Thus, whether or not McDowell intends it to be the case, the Thesis of Uncodifiability does not have a plausible global application in ethics.

3.3 *Consequence of The Thesis of Uncodifiability*

A consequence of the Thesis of Uncodifiability is that objectivity (at least in part of ethics) cannot be explained in terms of the application of a set of true, general principles to particular facts about situations. McDowell's response is to explain objectivity in perceptual terms; in particular, in terms of a notion of *appreciation* enjoyed by a certain kind of person - the virtuous man.

McDowell's use of a notion of perception in ethics, as a consequence of his commitment to the Thesis of Uncodifiability, is indicated in this extract from "Virtue and Reason":

> If the question "How should one live?" could be given a direct answer in universal terms, the concept of virtue would have only a secondary place in moral philosophy. But the thesis of uncodifiability excludes a head-on approach to the question whose urgency gives ethics its interest. Occasion by occasion, one knows what to do, if one does, not by applying universal principles but by being a certain kind of person: *one who sees situations in a certain distinctive way.* [my italics]

The motivation for McDowell's perceptual account interestingly parallels Sibley's approach. In Sibley's account, a feature of aesthetic concepts - that they are not and cannot be governed by rules and conditions - was explained in terms of the essential perceptual nature of aesthetic judgment.[50]

3.4 *Argument Against the Traditional Notion of Objectivity in Concept Application*

Hard cases lead some people to say that morality is not an objective area of discourse. Their claim presupposes a traditional notion of objectivity: the view that, in objective discourse, there is a decision procedure for determining the correct application of a concept. McDowell elaborates the traditional view. He claims that it involves the idea of a "deductive paradigm" i.e. (i) the application of a concept must be demonstrated to have been guided by a formulable universal principle and a deductive proof; and (ii) the procedure must be endorsed by "the practice" and "externally justified" by a standard specifiable *independently* of the practice. The deductive paradigm, McDowell claims, implies that to maintain objectivity: (a) there must be a grasp of rules in the form of a psychological mechanism guaranteeing future correct applications, and (b) there must be an "externally intelligible" guarantee of rationality - one that is intelligible from outside the practice and which provides an external foundation for that practice. The external standard as it were provides "rails" objectively there, and along which all future concept application is guided. Because hard cases in ethics have no *specifiable* proof (i.e. no proof that can be written down), even *in principle*, they do not satisfy the traditional requirement for objectivity in concept application. This is why some are led to conclude that moral discourse is not objective.

McDowell accepts that rationality and consistency are needed for genuine (objective) concept application, but he takes it to be mere prejudice to suppose that the rationality and consistency required must be such that the application can be demonstrated to have been guided by a formulable universal principle and a deductive proof. Moreover, he thinks that the pictured state of a psychological mechanism and an external justification is mistaken. Given a correct notion of objectivity, he claims, moral discourse (including hard cases) qualifies as objective.

To support his claim, McDowell firstly shows that a deductive proof and external justification is not necessary for objective concept application. He does this by showing why the traditional requirement of a deductive proof exists, and then undermining the reasoning that leads us to hold that requirement, so there remains only prejudice in maintaining the traditional requirement for objectivity. Secondly, McDowell shows how the traditional notions incorporated in the traditional requirement are mistaken. And thirdly, McDowell gives a positive account to explain how concepts can be applied objectively (consistently) in ethics despite there being no deductive necessitation. The positive account includes the idea of a "common dependency" (see below), and an account of the metaphysical and epistemological characteristics of ethical phenomena on the model of secondary qualities.[51]

The reason why the traditional requirement exists, on McDowell's view,

stems from the idea that where there are no deductive explanations for

concept applications (as in hard cases), then our competent use of concepts

in further contexts (merely) depends upon ...

> ...our sharing routes of interest and feeling, modes of response, senses of humour and of
>
> significance and of fulfilment, of what is outrageous, of what is similar to what else,
>
> what a rebuke, what forgiveness, of when an utterance is an assertion, when an appeal,
>
> when an explanation - all the whirl of organism Wittgenstein calls "forms of life".
>
> Human speech and activity, sanity and community, rest upon nothing more, but nothing
>
> less, than this. It is a vision as simple as it is difficult, and as difficult as it is (and
>
> because it is) terrifying. (Stanley Cavell "Must We Mean What We Say?")

This dependence upon deliverances of a shared sense is thought to be

precarious and insufficient to account for our confidence in applying concepts

consistently in new cases. *There must be something more*, it is thought, to

constitute the rails on which a genuine series of consistent applications of a

concept must run - to account for our conviction that when we, say, extend a

number series, we really are doing the same thing as before. The something

more, it is held, is provided by a deductive proof and an external justification.

So where there is no possibility of a deductive proof, it is claimed that there

is no genuine concept application.

McDowell makes two points to undermine the idea that underlies the

traditional requirement for objectivity. The first is that dependency upon a

shared sense (a "whirl of organism") underlies *all* genuine concept

application, whether or not it is additionally possible to construct a deductive proof. Thus, the dependency itself should not lead one to think that something more (i.e. a deductive proof) is needed for genuine concept application. In support of this first point, McDowell constructs an argument that he attributes to Wittgenstein's discussion in *Philosophical Investigations* on the concept of following a rule (in particular, the discussion on extending a number series on the basis of a rule "Add 2").[52] McDowell argues that the dependence on "shared forms of life" can be shown to apply to the case of mathematical applications (i.e. a case where there *does* seem to be a formulable rule of which each successive action can be regarded as an application). And since the dependency is evident in mathematics - a case, perhaps, where following a rule seems at its most mechanical - then it is reasonable to assume that the dependency is essential to *all* cases of genuine concept application.

To show that the dependency is there in mathematical cases, McDowell, elaborating Wittgenstein's example, first notes that:

> We tend to picture the understanding of the instruction "Add 2" as a psychological mechanism which, aside from lapses of attention and so forth, churns out the appropriate behaviour with the sort of reliability which a physical mechanism, say a piece of clockwork, might have.[53]

But, McDowell argues, the pictured state of a mechanical mechanism is suspect, since the understanding involved, even in mathematics, always

transcends the grounds on which it is allegedly postulated. This is because

the ground on which it is postulated is merely the past behaviour of

continuing the series correctly and this past behaviour cannot provide a

conclusive, guaranteed ground for knowing that one is continuing the series

correctly in new cases. There is no justification, therefore, for the idea that

there must be a grasp of rules in the form of a mechanical mechanism

churning out correct applications - a psychological mechanism conceived as

rails objectively there and guaranteeing (apart from mechanical failure) future

correct applications.

These reflections, McDowell claims, show that the application of

mathematical concepts and our understanding of mathematical proofs

ultimately depends upon our participating in a shared form of life. Our

realising this, however, should not undermine the confident expectation that a

person will carry on the mathematical series in the same way. Instead, it

should make us realise that the nature of the confidence in our competent

application of mathematical concepts is in virtue of a shared involvement in

our whirl of organism, and not because of some mechanical process. Since

the mathematical case is one that appears mechanical, and yet, ultimately, is

found not to depend upon a mechanical process, then it is reasonable to infer

that this involvement and dependency upon shared forms of life underlies

consistent application of concepts in *all* cases. And if the dependency

underlies all rational and consistent application of concepts, then the

dependency on shared forms of life for concept application in ethical hard

cases cannot be said to demonstrate that there is no consistent application of concepts in such cases.

Whether or not it is Wittgenstein's point, McDowell's argument is consistent and plausible. He replaces the explanation for consistent concept application in terms of deductive proofs and mechanical psychological mechanisms by an explanation in terms of a common dependency upon shared forms of life. The common dependency explanation makes at least three useful contributions. First, it ensures that we need not suppose a "leap of divination" is needed in order to apply concepts to new situations. Second, it serves to provide a foundation for our ordinary idea that we are applying concepts consistently in such diverse cases as ethics and mathematics. And third, it helps to *distinguish* ethical from mathematical and other cases. On this latter point, McDowell notes that we can characterise each of these cases in terms of the extent to which the dependency is evident:

> In the ethical case, the dependence is out in the open in an especially perturbing form, in that the occasional failure of the appeal to appreciation brings out how the "whirl of organism" is only partly shared; whereas there are no hard cases in mathematics...".[54]

Thus, the presence of hard cases in ethics, and the resultant heavy involvement of appreciation, more seriously exposes the reliance upon a shared sense, since it is precisely that sense which must be appealed to in the "proof" (there is nothing else to appeal to in such cases).[55] The dependence

in ethics seems particularly perturbing since, if the appeal to appreciation fails, then it is particularly evident that the forms of life which the appreciation depends upon are not shared - this is why the appeal to them has failed. Whereas, in mathematics (where there are no hard cases), a proof that does not belong to a certain form of life ordinarily supporting mathematical practice is simply rejected. This indicates a difference between how ethical and mathematical practices are delineated: mathematical practice is more clearly delineated than ethical practice in terms of forms of life.[56]

McDowell's second point against the traditional requirement for objective concept application is that the idea of an external justification from outside the practice is incoherent. McDowell argues firstly, that to demand an *external* justification is to succumb to a platonistic conception of rails independently there governing the correct application of concepts in a given practice. This conception is misguided: it is mere illusion to suppose that our paradigm of reason, deductive argument, follows rails that transcend the sharing of forms of life. Secondly, and in support of the first point, if we accept a notion of a practice that is dependent upon shared forms of life, then the idea that deductive rationality is comprehensible from an external standpoint (a point outside our practices and independent from shared forms of life) is incoherent. Deductive rationality is an integral part of many of our practices and therefore is, itself, dependent upon shared forms of life. It follows that it is comprehensible only from the perspective *of* those shared forms of life. It also follows that "outsiders" to a practice may not be able to follow proofs

given in a particular practice (in something like the way that people with low mathematical ability may not be capable of following a mathematical proof). McDowell concludes that there is nothing more to objectivity than the standards *of* a practice.

McDowell thus claims to have shown that a deductive proof is not a necessary requirement for objective concept application, and that it involves mistaken ideas concerning external justification and rule following. McDowell's conclusion concerning deductive proofs is plausible, since we appear to consistently and successfully apply many concepts without needing deductive proofs. However, one ambiguity concerning his inference that there is nothing more to objectivity than the standards of a practice will be addressed in Chapter three.

3.5 The Phenomenological Thesis

McDowell aims to give a positive account of ethics that "pays careful attention to the lived character of evaluative thought and discourse" as opposed to one that attempts to correct the phenomenology of value in the way he claims the "non-cognitivist" does. In pursuance of this aim, he accepts John Mackie's phenomenological thesis: that ordinary evaluative thought presents itself as a matter of sensitivity to aspects of the world,[57] that is, an awareness of value as something residing in an object ("properties genuinely possessed") and available to be encountered. McDowell's account thus proceeds on two

assumptions: the first is that it is possible to give a convincing account of the "appearances" of evaluative thought, and the second is that Mackie's phenomenological thesis is correct.

3.6 *The Thesis that Value is Part of the World*

McDowell's acceptance of Mackie's phenomenological thesis involves a commitment to an account of the experience of value as an experience of properties genuinely possessed by the objects that confront one; a case of being presented with a property that is there "in the world". But, unlike Mackie, McDowell rejects the claim that our experience is of values *brutely* part of the "fabric of the world", for this would be to saddle common sense with a conception that is incoherent.[58] The correct account of our experience of value is, on McDowell's view, a secondary quality, and not a primary quality account. On the secondary quality model, value experience can be explained in terms of the "world as represented" (as opposed to the brute "external world").

Thus, like Sibley, McDowell assumes no pre-theoretical grounds for accusing the appearances of value experience to be misleading. Like Sibley, McDowell is interested in *explaining* and *understanding* the attributive character of value discourse.

3.7 *Argument Against the Traditional Notion of Objective Properties*

A traditional philosophical notion of objectivity, and one perhaps that leads

Mackie to make his claim about value properties being primary qualities, is

that **objective properties** are the only properties there are, and the world is

fully describable in terms of these "genuine" properties. "Objective properties"

are those features that can be said to be independently and *"brutely there"* in

the world, such that they can be understood without essential reference to their

effects on sentient beings.

Given this traditional notion, there can be no *genuine* value properties, for it is

clear that value properties, if there are any, are not properly understood

without reference to their effects on sentient beings (as wholly "independent"

phenomena). But McDowell is committed to there being *genuine* (objective)

value properties. Thus, to remove the conflict with the traditional notion of

objectivity, McDowell must argue that the traditional account needs changing.

McDowell suggests that we accept, within the category of genuine properties, a

new category of *subjective* properties. A "subjective property" is a property

such that no adequate conception of what it is for a thing to possess it is

available except in terms of how the thing would, in suitable circumstances,

affect a subject - a sentient being. Subjective properties are objective, though

in a weaker sense than "brute" properties; they are objective in the sense that

they are there independently of any actual experience of any subject on any

particular occasion. This additional category plausibly allows, for example,

colour properties (which, on the Lockean tradition are not brutely in the world)

to be genuine properties. McDowell's claim is thus that value properties, like

colour properties, are genuine properties; they are objective in the sense that

subjective properties are objective.

3.8 The Secondary Quality Model

Given Mackie's phenomenological thesis, it is perhaps unsurprising that

McDowell finds a perceptual model "virtually irresistible" for his account of

the epistemology of subjective properties. McDowell holds that the model that

most closely fits our pre-theoretical experience of value is a perceptual

awareness of qualities of objects such as colours, tastes and sounds etc.; and

that the relevant understanding of these phenomena is as secondary qualities.[59]

McDowell's account of secondary qualities is as follows:

> A *secondary quality* is a property the ascription of which to an object is not adequately
>
> understood except as true, if it is true, in virtue of the object's disposition to present a
>
> certain sort of perceptual appearance: specifically, an appearance characterizable by
>
> using a word for the property itself to say how the object perceptually appears...
>
> *[The dispositional thesis:]* ..Thus an object's being red is understood as obtaining in
>
> virtue of the object's being such as (in certain circumstances) to look, precisely, red...
>
> *[Secondary quality experience:]* ..presents itself as perceptual awareness of properties
>
> genuinely possessed by the objects that confront one
>
> *[Secondary quality experience taken at face value:]* An object's being such as to look
>
> red is independent of its actually looking red to anyone on any particular occasion; so,

notwithstanding the conceptual connection between being red and being experienced as

red, an experience of something as red can count as a case of being presented with a

property that is there anyway - there independently of the experience itself.[60]

The dispositional thesis helps to explain colour: being red consists in looking

red to some perceiver(s). An analogous thesis about value properties will

hold, for example, that being good consists in a propensity on the part of good

things to elicit reactions of moral approval in observers (in the virtuous

person). Thus the concept "good", on this view, applies to something if and

only if it produces certain sentiments in certain people.

CHAPTER THREE:

ASSESSMENT OF THE SECONDARY QUALITY MODEL FOR JUSTIFYING OBJECTIVITY IN AESTHETICS AND ETHICS

1.0   Framework for Discussion

1.1   *Introduction*

I propose to discuss objectivity in aesthetics and ethics with reference to a framework of distinguishable notions of correctness (truth). The aim of the framework is to draw attention to different logical features belonging to distinguishable notions of truth or correctness. The framework consists in three possibilities of error and three corresponding types of correctness.

1.2   *Grammatical Correctness*

The first error involves failing to grasp or understand a concept(s) belonging to a particular discourse. By "*discourse*" I mean a set of concepts that are naturally grouped according to a common subject matter - for example, all concepts concerned with ethical matters make up the discourse known as ethical discourse. The sort of error in question is clear merely from the meanings of the combination of words used by the speaker (or thinker). An

ethical example would be "It is *(morally) right* to maliciously maim children".

An aesthetic example would be "The awkward, large dancer with oversize feet

is *graceful*". In both cases, the error in the use of the words "right" and

"graceful" is clear from the meanings of the words contained in the sentence

in which each appear. The claim that "It is *right* to maliciously maim

children" simply cannot be correct in the sense in question, because what is

said to be "right" is clearly *not* "right" given its sentential context and the

meanings of "right", "malicious", "maim" and "children"; the speaker's error

in the application of the word "right" (and in his overall claim) is due to his

failure to grasp the meaning of the words in the sentence. Similarly, in the

aesthetic example, the speaker has failed to grasp the meaning of a word(s) in

his sentence if a claim is made of the sort "The awkward, large dancer with

oversize feet is *graceful*". Note that in each case the speaker may have only

failed to grasp one concept, that is, the meaning of the pivotal words "right"

and "graceful". The sentence or claim in each case may be corrected by

replacing these pivotal words with other more appropriate words. If this were

done, the correctness that would ensue would be what I shall call

"*grammatical* correctness" or **correct[g].**

Certain ethical claims that meet the grammatically correct standard seem also

to be treated as *a priori*, *true* (no further proof or argument appears to be

needed in order to establish their truth). For example, "It is wrong to

maliciously maim children". In explaining how there can be truths in ethical

discourse we need to explain how there can be these sorts of claim that appear

true without needing to check any particular facts about the world. However, not all correct[g] sentences are constrained such that they would ordinarily be accepted as expressing indefeasible claims; there are many correct[g] sentences which are taken to be incorrect in a different sense, which brings me to the second possibility of error.

1.3 *Correctness in a Practice*

The second error occurs when a judgment in the discourse in question is deemed incorrect by the standards of the practice within which it is made. This possibility of error presupposes a set of correct moral and aesthetic judgments which provide the constitutive standards for that practice. By *"practice"* I mean something akin to a Wittgensteinian language game, in the sense of an area of discourse (a particular set of concepts e.g. ethical concepts) that is connected with, part of, and whose application is governed by, a particular communal non-linguistic activity (for example, behaving altruistically). In order to participate in a practice, or language game, one must participate in a certain way of living or "form of life".

The logical character of this correctness constraint will be better understood once we have considered certain characteristic features of assertoric discourses. Firstly, *within* any assertoric practice (a practice in which assertions or claims to truth are made) there must be a distinction between proper and improper assertions if the discourse and practice is to be

recognisable as "assertoric". Secondly, it is plausible to expect that it is partly constitutive of such a practice for there to be another: that of giving back-up or justifying reasons for thinking that one judgment and not another is a proper and not an improper assertion.[61] I will refer to the norm governing which assertions are taken to be "proper" within a practice as the **norm of warranted assertibility**. Thus, what is warranted assertible within a practice are judgments or assertions that are justified or properly grounded by (defeasible) evidence or reasons. All other assertions made within the practice are "improper" or unwarranted.

Internal criticism constitutes a third feature of assertoric practices (at least, in practices where grounding reasons for assertions being warranted are treated as defeasible). Internal criticism typically proceeds as follows: *(i)* at time t1, judgment J1 is warranted assertible within practice P1, not because the majority accept it but because it is properly grounded (the reasons supporting it - based on information whose own justification does not depend upon the correctness of J1 - are fully supporting in that they observe the canons of evidence recognised in P1); *(ii)* at time t2, the same reasons supporting J1 are found to be based on false information; and consequently *(iii)* J1 is no longer supported, given that there is no other supporting evidence that is not false. Thus J1 at t2 is no longer a warranted assertion within practice P1. Internal criticism ensures that a practice, in the face of newly acquired knowledge relevant to that practice, either becomes obsolete or is refined in tandem with related and supporting practices (but note that there may be some

delay before it is accepted that a judgment previously warranted is no longer so).

A consequence of the possibility of internal criticism is that two *conflicting* judgments (in the sense that both cannot be true) may both be warranted by the *same* practice at different times. This occurs where "p" and "not p" are warranted by P1 on the basis of *different* information. We might expect the subsequently warranted judgment to be more refined, in the sense that its supporting evidence is true, or more likely to be true (though this may not be the case). An example of the operation of internal criticism is given in the way slavery was at one time accepted, and later rejected by certain practices. A typical explanation might be as follows: an important reason for accepting slavery in Practice P1 was a belief that it did not psychologically damage humans; later, it was discovered that, in fact, slavery *was* psychologically detrimental to humans; and without that particular basis for supporting slavery in Practice P1, judgments supporting slavery were no longer warranted in P1.

Returning to the second type of error in our framework, the error in question is not an error in virtue of failing to satisfy the norm of warranted assertibility (which only finds judgments to be in error on the basis of *defeasible* information); rather, it is an error in virtue of a standard based on *indefeasible* information. *"Correctness in a practice"* or **correctness[p]** refers to the status of a set of judgments made in accord with a practice, given

that all possible internal criticism has occurred. Thus, correct[p] judgments

are made in accord with the canons of evidence belonging to the practice, and

on the basis of perfect (indefeasible) information. The error in question is

therefore revealed by an ideal standard provided by the most refined

judgments possible in a given practice.

The notion of correctness[p] is usefully compared with Crispin Wright's

notions of "minimal truth" and "superassertibility". A discourse that qualifies

for a minimal truth predicate, Wright claims, is one that satisfies some basic

platitudinous constraints concerning the connection between truth, assertion,

and correspondence etc., and one that qualifies, without requiring any

metaphysical justification, for a non-metaphysical notion of truth (truth not

characterisable in traditionally "realist" terms). Satisfying the minimal truth

platitudes is, on Wright's view, neutral ground between realist and anti-realist

and the onus is then on the realist to show that a particular discourse possesses

some additional, substantial realist characteristics such that the discourse in

question qualifies not merely for a minimal truth predicate but for a

substantial one. Minimal truth and correctness[p] are not equivalent, for

minimal truth describes a truth predicate for which any assertoric discourse

that satisfies the basic platitudinous constraints qualifies; correctness[p], on

the other hand, describes the truth status of particular statements after all

relevant internal criticism is complete. However, correctness[p] has

characteristics in common with Crispin Wright's notion of superassertibility.

For instance, Wright states:

A statement is superassertible ... if and only if it is, or can be, warranted and some

warrant for it would survive arbitrarily close scrutiny of its pedigree and arbitrarily

extensive increments to or other forms of improvement of our information.[62]

He also states that the property of superassertibility is "absolute" and "so it is

plausible to think, may not be lost".   Superassertibility guarantees correctness

in the sense that no further information could show that the claim is incorrect.

Wright argues that superassertibility is a model for truth in certain

epistemically constrained discourses (i.e. assertoric discourses that satisfy the

principle: "If p is true, then evidence is available that it is so").

Correctness[p], like superassertibility, is based on indefeasible information,

and, in the same sense, is *guaranteed* correct by the practice. But "guarantee"

here needs to be qualified.   Despite the indefeasibility of a correct[p]

judgment (it is not based on any false non-p information), it is still open for

the standards of the practice (upon which the correct[p] claim depends) to,

themselves, come under criticism. For this *not* to be a possibility, it would

need to be impossible for there to be alternative, equally appropriate, or even

superior canons of evidence. However, the status of correctness[p] does not

rule out such possibilities: it is conceivable, for instance, that a different

practice, operating with the same discourse (with the same set of concepts),

might endorse a conflicting judgment (e.g. not-k as opposed to k) which is

correct[p] in virtue of a different set of standards. (These different standards

might, for instance, count different things as appropriate evidence for a given

case.) And without any reason to suppose otherwise, why should we hold

that one set of standards is superior to another? Therefore, given this

possibility (the possibility that there are alternative practices, and alternative,

potentially conflicting ways to apply a set of concepts according to basic

differences in the standards of practices), we can only conclude that the status

of correct[p] is a guarantee of correctness that is *relativised* to the standards

of a particular practice; it is not a guarantee of unique or absolute correctness

(correct in all practices). This brings me to the third and final type of error.

1.4 *Absolute Correctness*

As we have seen, it is conceivable that there could be more than one practice

(more than one way of life) operating with the same discourse. For example,

suppose that, within ethical discourse, it is possible for Practice A to

correctly[p] claim "Abortion is morally wrong" (J1), and for Practice B to

correctly[p] claim "Abortion is not morally wrong" (J2), and that the concepts

employed in each sentence mean the same (i.e. the judgments clearly

conflict). Then, J1 and J2 are the outcome of the operation of *different*

standards for correctness[p], which, on this schema, is to individuate two

distinguishable practices operating "within" the same discourse (i.e. two

ethical practices/distinguishable ways of ethical life using the same set of

concepts). In such a case, in order for the matter at issue (the morality of

abortion) to be *objective* in the sense that either J1 or J2 is true, and the other

is false, there is a need for a further standard, independent of correct[p] standards, to decide between them. The standard of correctness that would decide between these two judgments is what I shall call **"absolute correctness"** (**correct[a]**). The third type of error is thus an error in virtue of a standard of absolute correctness. Whether or not a standard of correctness is absolute depends upon whether it guarantees that something is *uniquely* correct. Unique correctness occurs when there is only one possible correct application of concepts in a particular case (there is unique decidability).

Correctness[a] should be distinguished from the traditional notion of "substantial truth". Correctness[a] describes a standard of correctness that is logically absolute; in principle, the source of that correctness may be epistemically-constrained and mind-*dependent*. "Substantial truth", on the other hand, normally describes a standard of correctness that is logically absolute *and* whose source of correctness satisfies certain metaphysical and epistemological constraints. For instance, scientific claims that correspond with the "actual world" have the status of absolute correctness, since there is only one actual world and so there cannot be conflicting sets of true claims concerning it; *but they also have the status* of being substantially true, since the source of that correctness satisfies certain metaphysical and epistemic conditions, for example, it is "external" to particular practices, mind-independent, potentially evidentially-transcendent etc.

Correctness[a] is particularly useful for describing non-relative correctness (a

non-relative sense of true) in discourses which are plausibly understood as being epistemically constrained. For example, in mathematics 2 + 2 = 4 is correct[a] since, within mathematics (mathematical discourse), there is no other answer that could be correct. Some ethical statements that are correct[g] are also correct[a].[63] For instance, the statement "It is wrong to maliciously maim children"; within ethics (ethical discourse), this statement could not be denied without calling into question one's grasp of the concepts involved, for there is no possibility, relative to these concepts, for this proposition to be incorrect. But in ethical practice, ethical claims which are *not* knowable a priori are often expressed with similar force (we do not ordinarily distinguish - e.g. by varying the force with which ethical claims are given or our commitment to them - between claims whose correctness is knowable a priori and those which are knowable contingently). This suggests that the correctness or truth *presupposed* in much ethical discourse is absolute correctness, which is to say that we expect many ethical claims ordinarily considered to be correct, to be correct uniquely; ethical truths are expected to apply to all sentient beings/ethical practices. The task in the project of justifying the objectivity of ethical discourse will involve attempting to explain and justify a notion of absolute correctness in ethics.[64] It should be noted that the logical framework is neutral with respect to the outcome of the project of justifying objectivity. For instance, it may turn out that the correctness presupposed in ethical discourse, although most like an *absolute* (correct[a]) notion of correctness, has no plausible explanation or justification, whereas a standard of correctness that is *relative* to a particular ethical

practice (correct[p]) is readily justified.

I take it that the applicability of more general, theoretical concepts, such as "truth", "realist", "knowledge" and "fact", to ethical and aesthetic discourse involves further decision and judgment (their application is not determined by the logical framework). Thus, whether or not a discourse, governed by a standard of correctness relativised to a practice (correctness[p]), qualifies for a traditional philosophical notion of *truth* will be a matter for decision and judgment. Likewise, whether a discourse, governed by an absolute standard (correctness[a]), whose correctness is evidentially constrained, is *realist* will depend upon how we decide it is most useful for us to categorise discourse using the notion of "realist". If we decide that it best refers to claims whose unique correctness is guaranteed within a certain discourse, then mathematics would qualify; if we decide that it more usefully refers to claims about phenomena with metaphysical and epistemological characteristics associated with a mind-independent "external" world, then mathematics would be excluded. Similarly, colour discourse may or may not be deemed "realist", depending upon where the boundary is drawn.

Concerning notions of fact and *propositional knowledge*, classical logic and our concept of knowledge require that the correctness involved must be guaranteed and unique (a proposition must be *either* true or false, and for it to be "known" it must be true). This may seem to present a problem for ordinary talk about knowledge and facts where a "relativistic" correctness[p]

standard applies. However, the apparent logical problem disappears if we explain *knowledge relative to a practice* in terms of *correctness relative to a practice*. Any justification for talk of knowledge in these discourses must then be understood as a justification for knowledge relative to a particular practice, as opposed to knowledge applicable to all relevant practices. If, on the other hand, a correctness[a] standard is justified for a particular discourse, our explanation for talk of "knowledge" and "fact" need not be relativised to a practice: it could be explained in terms of knowledge of uniquely (absolutely) correct propositions that are correct in all practices operating within the discourse. Note, however, that the knowledge in question, although not relativised to a particular practice, is still relative to the implicit constraints provided by the set of concepts/discourse; for although absolute correctness guarantees unique correctness *within* a discourse, there is always the option of rejecting the discourse altogether.

Concerning the notion of "justifying objectivity", the discussion has revealed that truth claims can involve very different types of notion, for instance, minimal truth, substantial truth, correctness[p] or correctness[a]. Each notion requires different sorts of justification. In the project of justifying objectivity in aesthetics and ethics it will be important to determine exactly what we are trying to explain i.e. what is meant by truth in each of these discourses. It will be necessary to identify the logical characteristics of the notion of correctness or truth that is ordinarily presupposed in these discourses. I have already suggested that ethical truth presupposes correctness that is unique in a

strong (absolute) sense i.e. relevant to all ethical practices. If, ultimately,

only a correctness[p] constraint is justifiable in either ethics or aesthetics, the

logical framework is helpful in showing that we should not conclude that the

discourse is subjective - only that the truths or knowledge it refers to are

true/known relative to a particular practice (a particular, shared way of life).

2.0 Assessment: The Analogy with Colour

2.1 *Introduction*

Both Sibley and McDowell attempt to explain values in terms of the detection

of properties in the world as represented, where the relevant properties are

compared to colour properties (understood as secondary qualities). In this and

the next section I assess, broadly, the advantages and disadvantages of using a

secondary quality model for understanding values, and, specifically, for

justifying objectivity in aesthetics and ethics.

2.2 *Advantages: The Analogy with Colour*

(i)   Although colour properties, understood as secondary qualities, are

analysed in terms of psychological reactions, they are ordinarily treated as

genuine perceptible features of the world as represented ("genuine" in that

they are "independent" of particular experiences of them). A successful

analogy between colour and value would explain how value properties can be

genuine in this sense.[65]

(ii)   The analogy with colour helps value theorists to resist the objection that value properties fail a test of reality and are pseudo-properties because they are causally irrelevant to the scientific world. This is in virtue of the fact that colour, understood as a secondary quality, would also fail that test, and yet is not ordinarily considered to be a pseudo-property.[66]

(iii)   The analogy with colour helps explain why we discern value when it has no role in a theory of how the world works. Despite having no role in how the world works, colour nevertheless has a role in human life (human life is not just concerned with how the world works). Colour is important in our lives because we have the ability to see it, and there are many reasons why this ability is useful for us. Similarly, there are many reasons why our ability to discern value is important and useful in our lives, even though it has no plausible role in how the world works.

(iv)   An analogy with colour provides an alternative to giving a reductionist account of values; for the dispositional analysis of colour preserves an irreducible aspect of experience by defining a red object in virtue of its *looking red*. The circularity in the dispositional equation is not obviously undesirable, since the account does not lack explanatory power.[67] An exhaustive reduction of values is avoided by some, given a general concern about reduction of subjective first-person "inner" aspects of experience (e.g.

value experience) to third-person physicalist or naturalistic terms.[68] And a more specific concern about the reduction of evaluative to non-evaluative (this would appear to leave, unexplained, certain essential characteristics of values, for example, normativity).

2.3 Disadvantages: The Analogy with Colour

An analogy with colour, understood as an example of a secondary quality, might take one of two forms, both of which have draw-backs for understanding values. The first is for the *dispositional account* to apply directly to values in the way it does to colours. If this were right, we could, for example, say that someone's being honest obtains in virtue of their being such as (in certain circumstances) to look honest. However, whether X is honest is *not* settled merely by the way things appear to our senses, since honesty is not simply a matter of how someone looks to us; there are many other factors, besides *appearance*, that influence whether or not someone is honest (for example, their integrity).

In aesthetics, however, the dispositional account is more plausible. It seems reasonable to say, for instance, that an object's being graceful obtains in virtue of the object's being such as (in certain circumstances) to look graceful. A gazelle's gracefulness seems to be something that is determined by the way it looks, in the way that the look of a thing settles whether or not it is red. However, a more sophisticated view of aesthetics reveals that a

condition for discerning some aesthetic qualities is that one has additional

objective information.[69] The involvement of more intellectual faculties is

unexplained by the simple dispositional account, and so detracts from the

plausibility of the account in aesthetics.[70]

The second form an analogy with colour might take is for there to be some

perceptual capacity, equivalent to colour perception, that must operate in

order to make a value judgment. To be equivalent to colour perception, the

perceptual capacity must be such that the properties in question are

perceivable by just this one sense, and not by several (as is the case with

primary qualities). Sibley might have this sort of idea in mind with respect to

his notion of aesthetic taste. McDowell, too, talks in terms of a type of

perceptual capacity. I shall describe two main reasons why it is implausible

to conceive of aesthetic or moral sense as being *just like* a colour sense.

Firstly, there are many differences between colour and value phenomena

which make the strict analogy with a colour perceptual mechanism

inappropriate. For instance, colour, unlike value, is not an emergent

property; we do not need to discern other things, bring to bear appropriate

additional information, or have an appropriate emotional response, in order to

perceive colour.[71] Also, colours do not require training to discern - they are

plausibly distinguishable even prior to gaining colour concepts. Such

characteristics are reflected in our colour practice: we do not provide

supporting reasons for thinking that something is red in terms of other

perceptible features of an object; and deciding on the colour of something is generally a simple matter we can all agree upon.

Aesthetic and ethical properties, on the other hand, are plausibly conceived as emergent, rather than simple properties; they are more difficult to "discern" and, consequently, to agree upon; and many are understood as having evaluative character (positive and negative value).[72] These aspects are reflected in aesthetic and ethical practices which are relevantly distinguished from colour practice. For instance, we expect to give supporting reasons for our ethical and aesthetic judgments; and make better judgments with improved knowledge and wider experience etc.[73] The differences between our conceptions of colour and value practices and properties suggest why, in the case of aesthetics and ethics, it seems implausible to suppose that we use a perceptual faculty just like colour perception for discerning or coming to know about aesthetic or moral phenomena. For instance, in both ethical and aesthetic cases, it is reasonable to expect involvement with intellectual faculties (including the imagination) and emotions.[74]

A second reason for rejecting the precise analogy with a colour perceptual mechanism is that, if values were like colour in this way, then we should expect there to be a similarity between the phenomenon of colour-blindness and the lacking of aesthetic or moral sense. However, there is an important difference. The causal base for colours is codifiable in terms of light wavelengths etc. So, with the help of scientific instruments and a translation

of a physical code by a colour-sighted person, a colour-blind person could make colour attributions that reliably accord with the judgments of colour-sighted persons. But the same could not be said for the identification of values. And if Sibley and McDowell are right, this uncodifiability is intrinsic: no code could be adequate to predict new attributions with certainty, because the smallest variation, physical or psychological, between a previous and a new case may have an unexpected effect on the associated aesthetic or moral character. This disanalogy between the codifiability of colour and value and the phenomenon of colour-blindness again suggests that the analogy with a colour perceptual mechanism is mistaken.

McDowell's reflections indicate that his use of the notion of a perceptual capacity might be misleading, since he states:

> The perceptual model is no more than a model: perception, strictly so called, does not mirror the role of reason in evaluative thinking, which seems to require us to regard the apprehension of value as an intellectual rather than a sensory matter.[75]

The elaboration of Sibley's account of aesthetic taste in Chapter 1 was intended to improve upon the basic perceptual claim, by specifying more "intellectual" aspects of our apprehension of value.

Moving away from the extreme perceptual analogy is surely right for another reason. We do not always need to perceive a situation in order to make a

moral judgment, or to know that someone's aesthetic claim is false. In ethics, in particular, conceptual connections in the order of entailment between moral descriptions and moral and non-moral descriptions play a considerable role in constraining the content and correctness of moral discourse.[76] Certain correct moral descriptions *follow* from correct moral and non-moral descriptions, and the correctness can be known without perceiving the situation. Although, there are fewer connections of meaning in aesthetics, we can still know, *a priori*, that some aesthetic claims are *incorrect*, for example "The awkward large dancer with oversize feet is graceful". Conceptually constrained correctness (or incorrectness) is a form of *absolute* correctness (incorrectness), since it guarantees unique correctness relative to a set of concepts (the judgments in question cannot be denied without stepping outside aesthetic and moral discourse altogether, or showing that one has misunderstood the concepts). Because of these conceptual constraints, a *global* explanation of correctness in value discourse in terms of a perceptual capacity is inappropriate.

3.0 Assessment: Explaining Truth (Correctness) with the Secondary Quality Model

The discussion of the previous section presents problems for explaining objectivity in values using a precise analogy with colour. In general, there are considerable disadvantages (and dubious coherence) in applying analogies

to explain phenomena that are significantly different. Sibley's and McDowell's accounts, however, need more careful consideration since neither claim that aesthetics or ethics are to be modelled *precisely* on the basis of colour. In this section, I consider an objection concerning the use of the secondary quality model for explaining *truth* in aesthetic and ethical discourse. The objection is that the secondary quality model does not explain and justify the notion of truth or correctness that is presupposed in ordinary aesthetic and ethical discourse.

3.1 *The Sense in Which our Colour Attributions are "True" (The Notions of Error and Correctness Explained by the Secondary Quality Model)*

Colour, on the traditional Lockean account, is an example of a secondary property. In order to reveal the logical characteristics of the notion of correctness explained by the secondary quality model it is relevant to ask what sense of "true" is presupposed in colour discourse.

There is a sense in which it is straightforwardly true that grass is green. But then, more reflectively, we may add that what is meant here by "true" is a standard that is relative to normal *human* observers i.e. the truth of colour ascriptions is relative to the colour perception of humans. An actual case demonstrates this relativistic notion of truth.[77] The example involves a comparison between the colour perceptions of humans and honey bees. It shows that there is no basis for preferring the findings of our colour sense

over the bees, and so the correctness of our colour ascriptions is *relative* to

our type of colour sense.

Karl von Frisch, in his book <u>The Dancing Bees</u>,[78] describes the results of

various experiments that show that honey bees see colours in a way which is

different from the way we see colours. Moreover, there is no basis for saying

that our colour sight is superior to that of bees. The experiments involve

"training" bees to fly to coloured objects by rewarding them with honey

initially, but eventually without any reward, ensuring that it is the sight of the

colour alone that determines the action of the bee. Varying the colour of

objects in the experiments demonstrates that bees can distinguish a variety of

colours, for example, blue, blue-green, yellow. However, where *we* perceive

a great variety of colours at the red end of the colour spectrum, *bees* are red-

blind; yet where ultra-violet rays present in sunlight cause no visual

sensation to normal humans (we see only white), bees can see ultra-violet

rays as a separate colour, different from all other colours. Thus the red-

blindness of the bee is compensated by its UV vision, so that, overall, we can

say that bees are equally discriminating with respect to colour, on the basis

that they make the same total number of discriminations.

Physical optics explains the differences in colour perception. Sunlight is

made up of various light rays of different wavelengths which, if separated by

means of a prism, can be made visible as separate colours to our eyes. By

mixing the colours again with a second prism, we can make the light appear

white again. However, if we cut out one of the colours before reuniting all the different rays by using a filter, then the mixture of the remaining rays will no longer appear white to us but as a colour which is complementary to the colour of the removed light beam. The experiments show that this law holds for the vision of bees. Nearly all our white flowers act as filters, cutting out the short-wave UV rays from the sunlight. This effect, which our eyes cannot perceive, results in these flowers appearing to the bees in a colour which is "complementary" to UV.

But if von Frisch's results are correct, how should we explain the plausible supposition that natural flower colours are such as to impress the eyes of their pollinators. For there are many red flowers, and if bees are red-blind, they would fail to see them. The explanation is that many flowers that appear "red" to us do not in fact show "pure red" but purple. This purple appears as blue to the bees, and so attracts them to the flowers. Thus, the results support the supposition that nature attracts pollinators by presenting them with colours that attract them.

It might be argued that von Frisch's method is flawed since we can have no conception of the nature of the bee's sensation at the sight of colour. But this objection fails since the same applies to our fellow humans - we do not know the inner experience of fellow humans when they call a colour by the same name as we do, since no person's eye has ever looked into another's mind. And yet we accept that we can *know* whether or not a human has colour sight

on the basis of questioning or experiment. Therefore, the fact that we cannot

know the nature of the bee's sensation is no basis for denying that it is

possible for us to find out about their colour sight.

Nor is there a case for arguing that we cannot talk of bees seeing *colour*.

The experiments show that the bee can see colour by means of sight because

they distinguish what we see as red from blue (these are two different shades

of blue to the bee), and they distinguish other colours that we see. Moreover,

the bee distinguishes the blue *colour* from the *scent* or *taste* of honey. Thus,

the bee can see colours.

Philosophically, Von Frisch's results are significant because they show that

honey bees see colours in a way which is different from the way we see

colours. Moreover, that there is no basis for saying that our normal colour

sight is superior to the colour sight of bees, since, where the bees lack our

red-colour sight, they make up for it with UV-colour sight (we are equally

discriminating with respect to colour since the overall number of colour

discriminations we each make is the same). An error in our ascribing red to

an object must therefore be explained as an error *relative to normal human*

colour perception; it is a failure to conform to the reactions of normal

human colour-perceivers, as opposed to normal *bee* colour-perceivers, or any

other colour-perceivers. And there is no case for saying that the colour

ascriptions that humans make are more correct than those of the bees, since

there is no case for saying that our way of seeing colours (type of colour

perception) is better than the bees.

The case is generalisable. For instance, Michael Tanner[79] conceives of the possibility that mankind was divided into two fairly equal groups, A and B, and that they agreed in their colour-judgments over most things (they shared the same concepts), but that there was some class of objects (BY) which the A group saw as blue, and the B group saw as yellow. Both groups, A and B, make equal *numbers* of colour discriminations in each case (the groups are equally discerning or colour perceptive), but in the BY case the discriminations are systematically different in quality in the way indicated. In such a case, we would need a different criterion to discover that those discriminations made by one group are superior (i.e. correspond more closely to the actual features of the world) than those made by the other. Tanner concludes that there is no such criterion, presumably because, on our secondary quality view of colour, there is no standard other than the character of experience which decides what is correct or incorrect. Therefore it makes no sense to ask "What actually *is* the colour of those objects?" and there is no point in trying to say that one of the groups A and B must be mistaken. Rather, we should admit that to say that a class of objects BY are coloured is to say no more than that one group of people see them as yellow, and another group see them as blue.

To summarise, because we cannot exclude the possibility that there will be an equally discriminating group whose judgments conflict, the notions of error

and correctness in colour discourse (and therefore secondary quality accounts that take colour as an example of a secondary quality) are *relativistic*. Relativism with respect to the notion of error means, for example, that an error in our colour practice is a failure to conform to the normal colour perceptions of *humans*. With respect to correctness it means that "correctness" in our colour practice is successful conformity to the normal colour perceptions of *humans*. This relativistic sense of error and correctness is distinguishable from an absolute sense associated with unique correctness. In this latter sense, were an error corrected then the resulting claim would be correct absolutely, not merely correct relative to *humans*.

3.2 *Explaining Truth in Aesthetics*

Our starting point in the project of justifying objectivity was that value discourse presupposes truths, since there are cases where we say that a particular value claim is correct and a conflicting claim is incorrect. The argument in 3.1 shows that an analogy with colour fails to explain and justify an absolute notion of correctness, since the sense in which colour ascriptions are true is merely relative to human sensibilities. To assess whether the secondary quality model can be used to explain correctness in aesthetics, we need to consider whether correctness (the sense of "true") in aesthetics is absolute or relative. Before I do this, I will consider what Sibley aims to explain with his version of the colour analogy, and whether his version overcomes the problem of relativism.

Sibley says of aesthetic descriptions that a conclusive proof is given by convergence in judgments of the elite over [long] periods of time.[80] He acknowledges that there may be problem cases where aesthetics is not objective i.e. where a disagreement is, in principle, undecidable as between two conflicting judgments. However, he claims, given his account of conclusive proofs in principle, to have explained how other cases are in principle provable and therefore decidable (the explanation is given on the basis of differentials between the numbers of discriminations made by each party). Sibley is therefore claiming to have explained how the application of aesthetic concepts, in some particular cases, can be said to be uniquely correct.

But Sibley's account does not explain the unique correctness he aims to explain, because his account does not alleviate the relativism evident in the straightforward colour case. Firstly, his notions of "elite", "convergence" and "conclusive proofs in principle" do nothing to alleviate the relativism. For we can conceive of there being two elites (each equally discriminating i.e. each making the same *number* of discriminations) from two different practices, but each converging onto conflicting judgments ("p" and "not p"). Sibley's account provides no further ground for saying that there is a standard that would decide between their judgments i.e. that the judgments of one aesthetic elite are superior to another (one convergence is upon a correct judgment, the other upon an incorrect one). And, so, a unique application is not

theoretically determined via convergence in judgments over time.

Secondly, Sibley's notion of there being only one type of aesthetic taste does not alleviate the relativism, since, without an argument demonstrating why we should think there is just one type of aesthetic taste, there is nothing to stop our conceiving of more than one type of response in a given circumstance, each equally aesthetic - just as there is more than one way to perceive colours.

Sibley's other relevant requirements are the "test of time" and that there are non-empty explanations for disagreement. However, these, also, fail to provide the relevant constraint. Concerning the "test of time", Sibley writes that "If any cases are utterly beyond question ... they will be, in art, predominantly the older works...whether masterpieces that have consistently been found moving...or minor pieces that have emerged as "paradigms" of lesser qualities."[81]   But, as Michael Tanner has pointed out, this traditional guide to quality is not a formal but a substantive requirement i.e. it is a requirement to take those P-qualities responsible for the value of X to be those that express or find response in certain permanent tendencies of human nature, as opposed to the P-qualities that are responsible for temporary responses in humans. This is to *decide* that aesthetic effects connected with permanent tendencies of human nature are of higher value than those that are not.   This may be how we value things in our practice, but then our theory should explain this, and why there could be other practices operating in

equally valid, but different ways; or else it should explain how our way (or theirs) is superior. Sibley's account does not fully address these issues.

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Concerning Sibley's requirement for non-empty explanations, it is true that in the colour case, the cause of a conflict in judgments may be *explainable* in terms of a difference in physiological structure as between As and Bs. But this does not alleviate the intrinsic relativism of truth for colour ascription, for the fact that such an explanation can be given provides no ground for saying that one physiological structure is superior to the other when both parties make an equal number of discriminations. Sibley's requirement for non-empty explanations in aesthetics will likewise fail to justify the claim that one type of aesthetic discrimination is superior to another. Sibley's account thus fails to explain how aesthetic statements can be uniquely (absolutely) correct.

The consequence of there being no explanation for a non-relativistic notion of truth is particularly serious on Sibley's account, given his criteria for objectivity. On Sibley's account, there is nothing to stop the whole of aesthetics failing to satisfy Sibley's second condition for objectivity (the requirement that there be conclusive proofs in principle). This is because, for every case where Sibley expects there to be a proof in principle which would show that one group is wrong and the other right, we can conceive of there being two, *equally* discriminating groups making conflicting judgments. Thus, on Sibley's account, there is no reason why *every* aesthetic matter could not turn out to be like the "notorious" problem cases Sibley sets aside as in

principle, undecidable. And since there are no conclusive proofs that will decide these cases, and conclusive proofs in principle are a necessary condition for objectivity on Sibley's account, then, on Sibley's account, all aesthetic cases potentially fail Sibley's condition for objectivity.

I take it that this implausible consequence stems from an internal difficulty with Sibley's account, and is not intrinsic to secondary quality accounts generally. Sibley's account needs to be formulated more carefully, in particular, his requirement for objectivity that there be conclusive proofs in principle, and its implicit claim, that there is no objectivity where a dispute is irresolvable on the basis of the number of discriminations (i.e. cases like bee/human colour "disagreements"). A more plausible condition for objectivity in evidentially constrained discourse is for there to be, in principle, proofs of correctness *relative* to a particular type of response (e.g. a bee response). This weaker condition supports talk of truth, facts and knowledge in colour discourse; and the condition is plausible, since it would be satisfied by colour, which is ordinarily taken to be objective even though it fails to satisfy the stronger requirement. Given the weaker formulation of Sibley's requirement for objectivity, aesthetics could be objective on his account.

I now want to consider whether there is anything more to truth in aesthetics than is explained by the secondary quality account (or the amended version of Sibley's account). As we have seen, the notion of truth that is explained by the secondary quality model is one that is relativised to a *type* of response;

the model provides no basis for holding that one type of response is superior to another. The question now is whether truth in aesthetics requires explanation that the secondary quality model cannot give.

Although I think the answer is "yes", there is clearly a case for saying that we ordinarily view *some* aesthetic statements as true or correct in a culturally-relative sense - i.e. a sense of true which would not be beyond the scope of the secondary quality model to explain. Cultural relativism is plausible in some areas of aesthetic discourse, since we can easily imagine a distinguishable, equally discriminating group using the same aesthetic concepts as us, yet making some conflicting judgments (because their *type* of aesthetic response is different from ours in certain respects), and yet our being inclined to say that neither judgment is superior. In such cases, it seems inappropriate to insist that there is one correct aesthetic response. We simply regard the different types of response as incommensurable. Sibley's (amended) account thus potentially explains the truth status of these sorts of claims; and how criticism between groups could legitimately proceed on the basis of discrepancies in the *number* of discriminations, though not on the basis of superiority in the *type* of discrimination.[82] (I am saying that Sibley's amended account potentially explains this logical characteristic of truth in aesthetics, and not that the analogy with colour is adequate for understanding other characteristics of values, including other objective characteristics.)

Other areas of aesthetics, however, are ordinarily understood to be objective in

a stronger sense than this, for in some cases we clearly expect to criticise not only the *number* of discriminations but the *quality* or type of response. This is evident if we compare colour: it seems not to matter much whether it turned out that we perceive grass as green, yellow or orange...but it *does* seem to matter that we find the Venus de Milo beautiful and graceful, rather than ugly or bland. In such cases, it is not merely the *number* of discriminations that determines correctness, but the *type*; and we would criticise a group that made the same number of discriminations, but held that the appropriate type of response was to find the statue ugly and distasteful. Other examples include cases where the judgment of one person/practice is ordinarily disregarded on the basis of an aesthetically inappropriate *type* of discrimination (e.g. elements that are not salient have been prioritized, or the response is simply inappropriate). Furthermore, as individuals we criticise our own practice for similar reasons; we do not assume that the *type* or quality of response of our most discriminating "experts" at the present time is the most aesthetically appropriate. Instead, we identify figures in history or members of clearly distinguishable aesthetic practices, as having particularly appropriate aesthetic responses. In other words, we accept a kind of "realism" - the thesis that aesthetic reality might not be just as we (our aesthetic elite), at this time, suppose it to be. The notion of correctness, therefore, that is presupposed in some of ordinary aesthetic thought and discourse *does* seem to have the character of unique decidability (absolute correctness) i.e. a sense in which there is an aesthetically correct or appropriate *type* of response.

As we have seen, there is no basis on Sibley's or other secondary quality

accounts for describing how one *type* of discrimination in one practice might

be superior to another's (that our seeing red is superior to bees seeing a UV-

colour). Thus, Sibley's account inadequately explains all aspects of aesthetic

truth and knowledge. But what could explain the assumed absolute constraints

in aesthetic discourse? In Chapter 1, I considered various *a priori* constraints

on the application of aesthetic concepts. According to Sibley, there are no

conceptual connections, in the order of entailment, from which it would follow

from a non-aesthetic description that an aesthetic description is correct.

However, Sibley allows that there are conceptual incorrectness conditions

between non-aesthetic and aesthetic, and conceptual correctness conditions

between aesthetic and aesthetic. Moreover, it is likely that there are important

ethical constraints operating on aesthetic truth, where aesthetics deals with

ethical subject matter.[83] In such cases, ethical conceptual constraints and

paradigms may entail the correct application of certain aesthetic concepts in

particular cases (e.g. in the case of the Venus de Milo). These reflections

suggest how there could be some *absolute* constraints governing aesthetic

discourse, and therefore some ultimately uniquely correct aesthetic claims.

Whether or not there is any interesting philosophical explanation and

justification for aesthetic and ethical discourse having such conceptual

constraints, that does not ultimately appeal to inevitable though arbitrarily

contingent psychological facts concerning human biology, is beyond the scope

of this discussion.

Apart from cases where there is some form of *a priori* conceptual constraint provided by the discourse itself, it seems unlikely that we should find a plausible explanation and justification for an absolute notion of correctness in aesthetics (I take it that positing a mind-independent realm of aesthetic facts is implausible). Sibley's analysis suggests that the area of aesthetics which is not strongly conceptually constrained is likely to be large (in comparison with ethics), and so we perhaps should expect that many cases of correctness in aesthetics will more plausibly be explained in terms of truth relative to an aesthetic practice, as on the amended Sibley account. Since we are not utterly averse to the idea of some cultural-relativism in aesthetics, there is some credence in this result (even though it is not proved). There remains the task, however, to give an account of absolute correctness for the part of aesthetics which is conceptually constrained.

3.3 *Explaining Truth in Ethics*

Like Sibley, McDowell assumes that there is an elite of some sort that determines correctness in ethics in a given case. McDowell's elite is in the form of the virtuous man whose moral judgments are always correct. McDowell's account appears to be concerned with (amongst other things) giving an account of correctness in ethics and how we come to acquire or know about it.

I shall address three questions in assessing McDowell's attempt to explain and

justify objectivity in ethics. Firstly, what does McDowell aim to explain with respect to truth in ethics? Secondly, what is the notion of truth that is presupposed in ordinary ethical discourse? And thirdly, does McDowell succeed in explaining and justifying the latter?

With reference to the first question (the notion of correctness in ethics that McDowell's account is aimed at), McDowell, as we have seen, is committed to giving an account that pays close attention to the lived character of evaluative thought and discourse. His views on truth in ordinary ethical thought and discourse are perhaps indicated in his notion of the virtuous man. Concerning the latter, McDowell states that: "the question of right conduct is necessarily approached via the notion of a virtuous person", that the virtuous person "arrives at the right answers to a certain range of questions about how to behave [and] is not likely to be queried", that the deliverances of the reliable sensitivity of the virtuous man are cases of knowledge, that "virtue is knowledge", and that "knowledge implies that he gets things right". He also suggests as appropriate an Aristotelian view of virtues that distinguishes virtue and continence - virtue, which is the reliable sensitivity of the virtuous man - silences all other reasons for acting. He states: "this view of virtue obviously involves a high degree of idealisation, the best we usually encounter is to some degree tainted with continence. But in a view of what genuine virtue is, idealisation is not something to be avoided or apologized for".[84]

These extracts suggest that McDowell's conception of ethical truth in ordinary

ethical thought and discourse is the ideal one of unique (absolute) correctness.

It seems reasonable to suppose, therefore, that his account (amongst other

things) aims to explain and justify this conception of ethical truth.

Concerning the second question (a clarification of the notion of ethical truth as

presupposed in ordinary ethical thought), there is evidence to suggest that our

conception of objectivity in ethical discourse involves a non-relative notion of

correctness (absolute correctness). For instance, we do not ordinarily expect

the truth in ethical claims to depend upon how *humans* happen to be, or how

they happen to perceive the world; ethical truth is understood as applying

equally to rational beings living somewhere in the universe that we may never

meet. We expect ethical truth to be something towards which our own

practice might progress, and something that our own practice may not

currently reflect very well. And we expect there to be ethical truths in the

sense of unique answers to important ethical questions, so that one practice

might legitimately criticise another's on the basis that theirs is not true or

correct. Like aesthetics, ethical truth involves a kind of "realism". An

intuitive case helps to illustrate these expectations. Suppose that there are two

practices, our own ethical practice and a Nazi practice. If it were shown that

Nazis made equal *numbers* of discriminations as us in deciding on the

appropriateness of their actions, we would still want to criticise the *quality* or

type of discriminations they were making. We would say that the Nazi way

of responding is morally wrong or inappropriate i.e. we assume that there is

just one correct answer to ethical questions in such cases, and in this case, the

Nazis are wrong.

Given that ordinary ethical discourse presupposes absolute correctness, we may now address the third question and consider whether McDowell succeeds in explaining it. McDowell uses a secondary quality model to justify correctness, taking colours as a paradigm example of secondary qualities. From the discussion in Section 3.1, we may conclude that the secondary quality model does not explain absolute correctness in the sense of there being just one right answer and correct way of seeing things. The secondary quality model does not explain how there is a basis for saying that our way of seeing things is ethically better than the Nazi's; that our best judgments are better than the Nazi's best judgments. Therefore, McDowell's account, which relies upon the secondary quality model, does not explain absolute correctness in ethics.

A consequence of McDowell's failure to explain absolute correctness, is that there is no reason why we cannot suppose, on his account, that there is more than one equally virtuous man (more than one ethical practice), and more than one equally virtuous set of moral requirements. And since there is no explanation for an absolute standard of correctness to decide between the best judgments of different practices, then we can further conclude that McDowell's account supports only a notion of ethical truth and knowledge that is relativised to a particular practice. Thus, whether or not McDowell was aiming to explain absolute correctness in ethics, McDowell's account is

an unsatisfactory account of ethical truth because ethical truth in ordinary

thought, is generally most plausibly understood as involving absolute rather

than relative correctness.

It might be thought that McDowell avoids the criticism by ruling out the

possibility of there being an absolute notion of correctness. If there is no

possibility of a standard that could decide between the standards of two

practices, then we might conclude that there is no sense in talking of one

practice's standard being *equal* to another's - there would just be different and

incommensurable standards employed by different practices. This, rather than

satisfying the intuition about the Nazis, would undermine the assumptions that

lie behind it (i.e. the assumption that there is an absolute standard which

would show that the Nazis are wrong). It might be thought, in this

connection, that McDowell's discussion on rule-following is intended to show

that the notion of an absolute standard is incoherent. In response, however,

absolute correctness as defined in Section 1.4 (a standard that is independent

of particular practices) is not incoherent, since it is not "external" to ethical

discourse, only to *particular* ethical practices. Admittedly, the idea of a

standard of correctness that is independent of ethical *discourse* seems

incoherent, since it would need both to *reflect* ways of life in order to provide

relevant subject matter, yet be *independent* of ways of life in order to be

independent of ethical concepts and discourse. But the sense of "external"

that is relevant here is not "external to ethical discourse", only "external to any

particular practice". This way, it governs the disputes between ethical

practices, yet is itself constrained by ethical concepts. Thus, I conclude that there is at least the logical possibility of an absolute standard of correctness in ethics.

Furthermore, there is a legitimate possibility of there being more than one practice. This idea was discussed in Section 1 of this chapter, but we might expand the thought. Each practice would operate with its own standards of correctness, as well as the conceptual standards given by the discourse they share. Admittedly, to share ethical concepts is itself to share a way of life, but this is consistent with there being considerable diversity in concept application, since ethical conceptual constraints govern the application of only *some* ethical concepts in only *some* cases. The resulting possibility of diversity reflects a possibility of different ways of ethical life operating within the limit of ethical discourse, which is to individuate different practices on this schema. Thus, even though the resulting practices share ethical concepts, we can logically conceive of their issuing conflicting judgments. For instance, conflicting judgments about abortion, each of which are correct *relative* to the respective practices.[85]

The possibilities of there being an absolute notion of correctness and more than one practice operating with the same discourse, present a challenge for the objectivist who insists that there are uniquely (absolutely) correct claims in ethics. This objectivist must explain how ethical claims can be absolutely correct. Otherwise, he must admit that there *could* be more than one ethical

practice operating with different, yet equally virtuous standards. In McDowell's case, given that he wants to uphold the claim that there is just one virtuous man and one set of moral requirements [i.e. one ethical standard - an absolute one], he would need to explain why this is the case [why there cannot be any alternative standards].

I want to consider, finally, an alternative (though perhaps more speculative) way of interpreting McDowell which might lead to an explanation for absolute correctness. The interpretation stems from the perhaps plausible idea of taking McDowell's use of "perceptual" as metaphorical i.e. meaning, roughly "Either you see it this way or you do not" in something like the way that you see that a mathematical answer is correct when you understand the proof. This interpretation would explain, to some degree, his use of a mathematical example to discuss what counts for there to be an objective carrying on in the same way, and his rejection of the objectivity principle - of there being universal principles and an externally ratified decision procedure. For, in mathematics, despite the fact that there is no external point of view from which to evaluate mathematical statements, there is nothing lacking in mathematical statements with regard to objectivity, as the rule-following considerations show. Even though outsiders to mathematical practice may not be able to follow the proof (e.g. they are too unintelligent and so fall outside the practice), correctness is still demonstrable given the criteria internal to the practice.

Following up the suggestion that McDowell was impressed by similarities between mathematics and ethics, it is relevant to consider whether a justification for an absolute notion of moral truth might be found in an analogy with mathematics. An absolute notion of mathematical truth seems obvious, so it might be thought that we could justify a similar notion in ethics by analogy. There are two relevant mathematical cases to consider. The first involves the use of mathematical concepts which contain conceptual constraints constitutive of one's grasp of those concepts, for example "add 2". The "constraint" in question is absolute, since there is only one way the concept can be applied correctly in different circumstances. Corresponding ethical cases have already been discussed e.g. concepts, such as "fair", "just", "malicious" etc., which involve implicit grammatical constraints governing how we use them. As in the mathematical case, the constraints are constitutive of one's possession of the concepts, and they form absolute constraints on correctness in certain cases (e.g. "It is wrong to maliciously maim children"). In such cases, we could not deny the statement without rejecting the concepts. Conceptual constraints also fix the subject matter for ethical systems (if they are to be recognisable as *ethical*). This feature is shared by mathematical concepts, although, as noted in Section 3.4 (Chapter 2), the practice of ethics is less clearly delineated than mathematics.

The second relevant type of mathematical case involves concepts that do not contain constraints constitutive of one's grasp of those concepts (for example, it is not constitutive of one's grasp of the concept of a right-angled triangle

that one understands that a right-angled triangle is used to define the sine,
cosine and tangent of one of the angles of the triangle, in terms of the ratios
of the lengths of the sides of the triangle). In the relevant mathematical cases,
we can be brought to agree with a statement which constitutes a proof (e.g. a
proof of the sine of an angle in terms of a right angled triangle), or we may
simply fail to understand the proof. But even though some cannot follow a
proof of this sort, the proof for the unique right answer is, nevertheless,
demonstrable based on criteria internal to mathematical practice.

The equivalent ethical case would involve judgments whose correctness is not
governed by conceptual constraints. To maintain the analogy with
mathematics for these types of judgments we would need to claim that such
judgments can be disputed about but that unique correctness is demonstrable,
nevertheless, based on criteria internal to the practice of ethics. This would
enable us to say, as in the mathematical case, that those who dispute this
standard are wrong; if they cannot be brought to agree, then it is because they
fail to understand the proof. I shall call this a Kantian ethical view.

An alternative view would be that the presupposed strong notion of absolute
correctness in non-conceptually constrained ethical discourse is mistaken. For,
unlike mathematics, there is nothing like a *demonstration* of a proof to
everyone who participates in ethical discourse. There are no proofs in this
region of ethics, which, if people cannot understand, exclude them from the
practice of ethics. The disanalogy is explained, contrary to the assumptions of

the Kantian objectivist, in terms of the practice of ethics incorporating more than one *kind* of ethical response or way of life. And the notion of ethical truth in these areas of ethics is explained as being *relativised* to a particular type of response, in something like the way that the sense of "true" in colour judgment is relative to a human-type colour response.

McDowell's account appears to side with the Kantian objectivist, since it implies that a demonstration in ethics would involve showing how the virtuous man would respond (i.e. as if there is just one virtuous way to respond). Whether or not this is McDowell's intention, I want to suggest that the strongly Kantian objectivist position for non-conceptually constrained ethics is inappropriate; that our correct account should allow more diversity than this. And further, that the mathematical analogy supports this conclusion. The issue turns on cases where qualitative responses vary and the number of discriminations are the same, and there is no conceptual guidance. The question is whether there is anything left in ethics to fix the right answer in such cases. If the analogy with mathematics was good, this is precisely where we should expect there to be proofs that would fix a unique answer in ethics as there are in mathematics. However, this is where the analogy breaks down, for in the equivalent ethical cases, there is nothing like the mathematical kind of proof; deciding ethical cases relies upon much less rigid procedures, and involves judgment on many complex contingencies perhaps that have never been considered in this sort of context before. Moreover, a variety of responses/judgments are sometimes morally acceptable. The most plausible

interpretation of the mathematical analogy is therefore: (a) the mathematical analogy does not establish a justification for the absolute correctness of non-conceptually constrained ethical claims, (b) that it in fact shows ethical practice to be relevantly different from mathematics at precisely the point where we should expect it to be the same if there was a genuine absolute constraint in this region of ethics, and (c) the disanalogy with mathematics provides a reason (though not a conclusive one) for thinking that a non-Kantian approach in this area of ethics is plausible.

This is to say that we should resist the idea, whether or not it is presupposed in ethical discourse, that there is such a thing as demonstrating the truth in *all* cases in ethics. One explanation for there being such an idea, is that the force attached to claims where there *is* a conceptual proof is sometimes misleadingly carried over to claims where there is not.[86] In the latter cases, the standard of correctness is plausibly understood as being relative to a type of ethical response (a particular practice). This does not mean there can be no legitimate criticism between ethical practices in such cases, for there may be legitimate grounds for criticism concerning the *number* (as opposed to *type*) of discriminations in a given case. For instance, it is possible and at least plausible that two groups, on the basis of perfect information, may yet make conflicting judgments about abortion as a result of their different qualities of response. On the preferred view there would be no way of deciding between these judgments. Whereas, on the Kantian objectivist view, we would need to insist that there was, *still,* a way to decide between the judgments - and we

would need to explain how one judgment is in error, but without appealing to a standard provided by numbers of discriminations, meanings of ethical and non-ethical concepts, or a mind-independent realm of ethical facts. The case against Kantian objectivism here is not conclusive, but looks promising.

The preferred view is thus, contrary to the assumption of Kantian objectivists, not all of ethics is legitimately constrained to just one *kind* of ethical response or way of life. The notion of ethical truth in these areas of ethics is *relative* to a particular qualitative response, in something like the way that the sense of "true" in colour judgment is relative to a human-type colour response. Although our ordinary ethical discourse appears to presuppose absolute constraints in cases where concepts do not fix a uniquely correct use, it is suggested that this "decidability" aspect of objectivity may ultimately not be justifiable in such cases. I do not claim, however, to have proved that this is the case; I am merely aligning, on the basis of the accounts and discussion considered here, with philosophers such as Mrs. Foot.

For conceptually-constrained ethical discourse, however, conceptual proofs for absolute correctness seem to be possible, and it is implausible to account for a relative notion of "true" in this area of ethics. McDowell's account does not explain absolute correctness, but an adequate account of ethical discourse would. Moreover, we can expect the conceptually-constrained area of ethical discourse to be considerably larger than that of aesthetic discourse. An explanation for absolute correctness here would need to show how and why

conceptual constraints (grammatical constraints) in certain cases determine absolute correctness/incorrectness and *a priori* ethical knowledge. Such an account would justify criticism of *types* of response in certain cases. For example, it could be used to justify an ethical criticism of the Nazi who claims that it is morally right to gas Jews, for once the full logical implications of his statement are made explicit by describing it in detail, it would be shown to be both grammatically and absolutely incorrect; he would be shown to have failed to grasp the meaning of the word "right", and to have abandoned *ethical* discourse altogether.

4.0   Conclusion

In explaining (and thereby justifying) the objective character of ordinary aesthetic and ethical discourse, it is necessary to clarify what this objectivity involves. I have focussed upon two aspects of objectivity. The first is the idea of values as properties in the world as represented. The second concerns the notion of truth that is presupposed in aesthetic and moral discourse.

Concerning the first aspect, although a secondary quality model promises to explain how value properties, detectable by a certain type of perceptual capacity, can be "there" independently of particular experiences, there are general difficulties with an analogy between value and colour (understood as a secondary quality). The difficulties stem from the considerable differences

between essential characteristics of value properties (in particular, ethical values) and colour properties.

Concerning the second aspect, the notion of correctness or truth presupposed in ordinary ethical and aesthetic discourse appears to be non-relative (absolute): the way *we* happen to perceive the world seems irrelevant to the correctness of claims. The standard in question is external to any *particular* aesthetic or ethical practice, or *particular* type of response. It is a standard towards which our own practice may be imagined to be progressing, and one that is *absolute* in the sense that it is unique and admits of no conflicting alternatives.

Explaining absolute correctness in aesthetics and ethics seems most problematic in those areas of each discourse where there is no such thing as calling one's use of the concepts into question (a relatively large area in aesthetics). Sibley and McDowell, who attempt to explain and justify objectivity by employing a secondary quality model, fail to explain *absolute* correctness because the notion of correctness explained by the secondary quality model is relative to a response-type, and is not absolute. Thus, they fail to explain this aspect of objectivity in aesthetics and ethics.

A further issue, considered, though not conclusively resolved, concerns whether or not our ordinary notions of aesthetic and ethical truth are explainable on any account. It was noted that in cases where there is no such

thing as calling one's competent use of aesthetic or moral language into question, there are special difficulties for justifying the absolute sense of "true" i.e. for claiming that there is, in such cases, a uniquely and absolutely correct judgment. The preferred view on this matter is that, where an absolute notion of correctness is presupposed in *non*-conceptually constrained parts of ordinary aesthetic and ethical discourse, it is unlikely to be justified (because there is no plausible explanation for it). A disanalogy with mathematics goes some way towards supporting this view. If it is correct, then our ordinary discourse is mistaken if and when it presupposes a notion of absolute correctness in non-conceptually constrained value discourse. In these "problematic" areas, an account such as Sibley's may have a qualified role for explaining how e.g. aesthetic claims can be true relative to the standards of a practice. However, the inadequacies of the secondary quality model remain with respect to explaining metaphysical and epistemological characteristics of values.

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NOTES

1.Locke's account is in: <u>Essay Concerning Human Understanding</u>, 1694.

2.J. Mackie thinks that values, in ordinary experience, are primary qualities (part of the "fabric of the world") <u>Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong</u>, Penguin Books, 1977. McDowell, on the other hand, thinks that values, in ordinary experience, are secondary qualities. "Values and Secondary Qualities", <u>Morality and Objectivity</u>, ed. Ted Honderich, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985. The Mackie-McDowell disagreement is considered again in Chapter 2.

3.Hume, D., <u>A Treatise of Human Nature</u>, Bk III, Part i.

4.Someone holding this view might argue as follows: In explaining why I find a face beautiful I might point to the shape of the eyes or nose; but I cannot in doing so be meaning to adduce features from which it follows that the face is beautiful.

5.F.N. Sibley, "Aesthetic Concepts", <u>Philosophical Review</u>, 1959.

6.This notion is explained in Sections 2.2 and 3.2 (Chapter 1).

7.F.N. Sibley, "Aesthetic Concepts".

8.This relation of dependency is discussed further in Section 4.2 below.

9."Aesthetic and Nonaesthetic", <u>Philosophical Review</u>, 74, 1965.

10.See Section 4.2.(Chapter 1) for further details.

11.Clearly, the account should also show how it is not possible to deduce an AD from an AV. Why? Because it is implausible to suppose that, given a correct AV that "X is an aesthetically good picture of its kind" we could deduce a correct AD. The more onerous explanatory work, however, is to explain why an <u>AV</u> is not deducible from an AD, since this idea is not so obviously implausible (e.g. deducing a verdict that Mary is a beautiful girl, from the description of Mary's aesthetic features).

12."Aesthetic Concepts: A Rejoinder", <u>Philosophical Review</u>, LXXII, 1963.

13.This is a tough claim since, presumably, the totality of true descriptions which determine the overall value of thing is an infinite number. A more plausible claim would be to confine the overall value-determining descriptions to those which are "salient" or especially responsible for certain aesthetic effects (P-qualities); and we could identify such descriptions using Sibley's own term - "notable specific dependence" (this term is explained in Section 4.3 [Chapter 1]). Nothing hangs on making this finer adjustment, however.

14.Our aesthetic practice is such that if there are two distinguishable works of art, it is not true to say they have exactly the same aesthetic value (we allow only that they might be "roughly" of the same order of merit). And although our practice allows for it to be true that one work has more value than another, there are no truths concerning exactly how much more value this involves.

15.One might argue that, although there is no objective weighting of evaluative properties in our practice, we could imagine a practice in which the aesthetic "elite" agreed to confer determinate weights to aesthetic values. However, although this might be possible, the practice it describes is something very different from the aesthetic practice and discourse we aimed to explain. In the latter, there is no reason why two members of the elite, who agree in the totality of aesthetic descriptions of a thing, should necessarily agree on the aesthetic verdict.

16."Aesthetic and Nonaesthetic", <u>Philosophical Review</u>, 74, 1965.

17."Aesthetic and Nonaesthetic"

18."Aesthetic Concepts: A Rejoinder"

19.J. McDowell, "Aesthetic value, objectivity, and the fabric of the world", <u>Pleasure, Preference and Value: Studies in Philosophical Aesthetics</u>, Schaper, Eva (ed.), 1983.

20.In particular, see Section 2.3 (Chapter 3).

21."Aesthetic and Nonaesthetic"

22.The practice of reason-giving is described in more detail in Section 5.3 (Chapter 1).

23."Aesthetic Concepts".

24.This feature of ethical discourse is not addressed by McDowell's account in Chapter 2.

25."Aesthetic and Nonaesthetic"

26.H.R.G. Schwyzer, "Sibley's "Aesthetic Concepts", <u>Philosophical Review</u>, LXXII, 74, 1963

27.See Section 3.4.4.

28."Aesthetic and Nonaesthetic".

29.Monroe C. Beardsley, "On the Generality of Critical Reasons," <u>Journal of Philosophy</u>, 59, 477-480, 1962.

30."Objectivity and Aesthetics", <u>Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society</u>, 42, Supp. Vol., 1968.

31."Objectivity and Aesthetics"

32. "Objectivity and Aesthetics".

33. F.N. Sibley, "Objectivity and Aesthetics".

34. Thomas Nagel, <u>The View from Nowhere</u>, Oxford University Press, 1986.

35. See Colin McGinn, "Can We Solve the Mind-Body Problem?", in <u>The Mind-Body Problem, A Guide to the Current Debate</u>, ed. by R. Warner and T. Szubka, 1994.

36. <u>The View from Nowhere</u>

37. See the argument in Section 5.3 below.

38. See Section 4.0 (Chapter 1).

39. Perceptual proofs are discussed in Section 5.3 (Chapter 1).

40. "Additional objective information" is explained in Section 3.2 (Chapter 1).

41. "Absolute correctness" is discussed in Section 1.4 (Chapter 3).

42. This conception of aesthetic properties is relatively well accepted. It is described in Section 4.2 (Chapter 1).

43. "Objectivity and Aesthetics"

44. <u>Proceedings of the British Academy</u>, 1976

45. "Moral valuations" thus make up a sub-category within Wiggins' broader category of "valuations".

46. John McDowell, "Virtue and Reason", <u>Monist</u>, 1979.

47. "Virtue and Reason"

48. "Virtue and Reason". John McDowell's references to Aristotle are NE 1.3; NE V10, especially 1137b 19-24

49. Section 5.2.

50. Sibley, however, goes on to explain the essential perceptual nature in terms of "holism" - See Section 5.0.

51. The account based on the secondary quality model is described in Section 3.8 below.

52. I will not consider here whether McDowell's interpretation of Wittgenstein's discussion on the concept of following a rule is correct, since McDowell's point stands whether or not it is Wittgenstein's point.

53."Virtue and Reason", p337.

54."Virtue and Reason", Note 18.

55.The relevant proofs will be something like the "perceptual proofs" which Sibley talks about in aesthetics (Section 5.3, Chapter 1).

56.This point is relevant to the discussion on mathematical practice in Chapter 3.

57.J.L. Mackie, Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong, and John McDowell "Values and Secondary Qualities"

58.See the difficulties concerning a conception of values as primary qualities, discussed in my intial introduction, and McDowell's discussion in "Values and Secondary Qualities".

59.J.L. Mackie (Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong and Hume's Moral Theory) thinks that our pre-theoretical conception of secondary properties is as primary qualities.

60."Values and Secondary Qualities".

61.This is plausible on any view according to which knowledge requires back-up reasons. I accept that the view I am discussing will not fit extreme reliabilist conceptions of knowledge which revoke all connections between knowledge and the possession of reasons to believe.

62.Truth and Objectivity, Harvard University Press, 1992, pp47-48.

63.See Section 1.2 (Chapter 3).

64.There is a case, also, for absolute correctness in aesthetic discourse - See Section 2.4.2 below.

65.Note that Hume's account of moral value ("It lies in yourself, not in the object ...", A Treatise of Human Nature, Bk III, Pt i, sec. i,) involves a more introspectionist account of moral sense than, say, McDowell's, and yet may also be supported by an analogy with secondary quality experience. The difference in Hume's account would be reflected in how the analogy is presented: secondary qualities would be assumed to be instantiated by mental items, rather than by external objects as represented.

66.An analogy with primary qualities in the Lockean sense would fail at this point, since primary qualities pass this test of reality and therefore have a role in causal-explanatory theories which is not characteristic of value properties.

67.See C. McGinn's discussion in The Subjective View, p6

68.For general debates about physicalism and subjectivity, see T. Nagel, "What is it like to be a Bat?", <u>Philosophical Review</u>, 1974, F. Jackson, "What Mary did not Know", <u>Journal of Philosophy</u>, 1986, D. Lewis, "What Experience Teaches", <u>Mind and Cognition</u>, W. Lycan, ed.

69.See Section 3.2 (Chapter 1).

70.See Section 4.2 (Chapter 1).

71.See Section 4.2 (Chapter 1).

72.See Section 3.2 (Chapter 1) for discussion on the evaluative character of aesthetic concepts.

73.See Sections 2.2, 3.2, 4.2, 6.0 (Chapter 1).

74.Sections 3.2, 4.2 (Chapter 1).

75."Values and Secondary Qualities", 1985, in T. Honderich, ed., <u>Morality and Objectivity</u>

76.See Section 5.2 (Chapter 1), Section 3.2 (Chapter 2), and Sections 1.2, 1.4 (Chapter 3).

77.This example was suggested to me by Malcolm Budd.

78.Readers' Union, Methuen, London 1955

79.Michael Tanner, "Objectivity and Aesthetics", Part II, 1968.

80.See Section 3.6.5: convergence of judgments may require considerable time to establish; convergence of judgments of the elite provides conclusive proof of correctness.

81.F.N. Sibley, "Objectivity and Aesthetics", Part I, 1968.

82.See the discussion on "internal criticism" in Section 2.3.

83.Conceptual constraints in aesthetics and ethics are compared in Section 5.2 (Chapter 1).

84."Virtue and Reason" and "Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?"

85.See Section 2.3.

86.This is similar to Philippa Foot's view in "Morality and Art", Henrietta Hertz Lecture, <u>Proceedings of the British Academy</u>, LV1 (1970.)