

Irene Martínez Marín

# Aesthetic Valuing and the Self



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### **Abstract**

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This thesis concerns the relation between aesthetically valuable objects and the agents that aesthetically value them. An investigation is undertaken into the psychology and rationality of such agents. I argue that self-related elements such as emotions and standing value commitments play an irreducible role in successful aesthetic engagement. I further demonstrate that these psychological elements of aesthetic engagement are *both* self-related and subject to rational constraints. In this connection, I propose a revisionary account according to which valuing agents are subject to a coherence requirement pertaining to their aesthetic judgments and aesthetic likings.

The first essay, “Aesthetic Autonomy: *Acquaintance, Competence and Authenticity*”, addresses the nature of aesthetic autonomy. What it means to be autonomous and its normative significance is generally considered to be ambiguous in the aesthetic domain. In this essay, I propose a way to disambiguate this elusive concept by distinguishing three varieties of autonomy: experiential autonomy, competency-based autonomy, and personal autonomy. Some important issues concerning the nature of aesthetic agency and appreciation are discussed in the course of this critical discussion.

The second essay, “Non-Standard Emotions and Aesthetic Understanding”, discusses the role of our emotional responses in the context of aesthetic appreciation. My main argument will reveal that the non-standard or ‘intellectual’ emotions, the emotions which are in fact most important to appreciation, can play a significant epistemic role in our reason-giving aesthetic practices.

The third essay, “The Aesthetic Enkratic Principle”, examines what it means to be aesthetically rational. Although some philosophers claim that aesthetics falls within the scope of rationality, a non-akrasia constraint prohibiting certain akratic combinations of attitudes is yet to be developed in this domain. This essay is concerned with the question of whether or not such a requirement is plausible and, if so, whether it is a true requirement of *aesthetic* rationality.

The fourth essay, “Aesthetic Self-Transformation: *A Guide for Aesthetic Aspirants*”, investigates the nature of aesthetic self-transformation. Two problems arise in this context. First, aesthetic transformative experiences can lead to cases of local irrationality in the form of a mismatch between what is aesthetically judged and what is aesthetically liked. Second, in attempting to resolve this conflict, we encounter two opposing principles that appear to guide aesthetic appreciation with equal force: *self-cultivation* and *aesthetic improvement*. I explain the first issue by invoking a coherence requirement (as defended in the previous essay) and resolve the second by outlining a hybrid view of what constitutes good aesthetic reasoning.

*Keywords:* Aesthetic Judgement, Personal Autonomy, Emotions, Aesthetic Agency, Akrasia, Rational Requirements, Transformative Experiences

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*To my family*

*A window to a park and into the world  
A heart full of engraved drawings  
Her hand holding the umbrella that covered our heads  
And the kindest boy alive*



# List of Papers

This thesis is based on the following papers.

- I. Martínez Marín, I. (manuscript). Aesthetic Autonomy: *Acquaintance, Competence and Authenticity*.
- II. Martínez Marín, I. (2020). Non-Standard Emotions and Aesthetic understanding. *Estetika: The European Journal of Aesthetics*, 2 (57): 135–49.
- III. Martínez Marín, I. (forthcoming). The Aesthetic Enkratic Principle. *British Journal of Aesthetics*.
- IV. Martínez Marín, I. (manuscript). Aesthetic Self-Transformation: *A Guide for Aesthetic Aspirants*.

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# Introduction

*It is thus in a beautiful soul, that sensuousness and reason, duty and inclination harmonize, and grace is its epiphany.*

—F. Schiller, *On Grace and Dignity* (1793).

We are valuing beings. The ability to come to value what matters to us, both as individuals and as members of a particular community, is an important part of our human nature. While many of our appreciative judgements have a clear moral dimension, the aesthetic also occupies an important place among the things we regard as valuable. Apart from the obvious examples in the realms of art and nature, acts of aesthetic appreciation occur more often than one might think. We are surrounded by beauty in its many and diverse instances. What is it exactly that we do when we *value* something? Moreover, what is distinctive about *aesthetic* valuing?

This thesis concerns the relation between aesthetically valuable objects and the agents that aesthetically value them. It consists of four different essays which aim to develop a new account of aesthetic appreciation: *The Alignment View*. According to this view, it is ideal for a subject's aesthetic value judgements and aesthetic likings to be aligned in their appreciation of an item's aesthetic value. In this sense, I take the theory to be both *conjunctive* and *relational*. It is a conjunctive view, in that appreciation involves two distinct elements: an aesthetic judgement about an object's aesthetic merit, based on an autonomous engagement with it, *and* an affective pro-attitude towards that same object. It is relational in that appreciation itself is understood as a form of seeking alignment between one's valuing responses.

The first two essays (I, II) are primarily concerned with clarifying the nature of the different elements involved in aesthetic valuing. Here I focus on the nature of aesthetic judgement, aesthetic perception and aesthetic emotion. Essays III and IV deal with the relationships and requirements that determine these different states. The last two essays also explain how, thanks to a better understanding of the cognitive-affective relations that underlie our aesthetic engagements, we should conceive two hitherto under-explored phenomena: aesthetic *akrasia* and aesthetic self-transformation. Although the essays are part of a broader narrative, they have been written as free-standing articles and can be read independently from one another. In this general introduction, I present the main questions this doctoral project deals with (section one), show

how the essays are connected by locating them in a wider philosophical context (section two), clarify some key terms (section three) and underscore the significance of these issues and concerns (section four).

## 1. A Theory of Aesthetic Valuing

Let me start by identifying what kind of theory a theory of aesthetic appreciation is. Roughly speaking, we can divide our aesthetic theories into two camps. On the one side, we have those which aim to establish what makes something aesthetically valuable. We can call these *aesthetic value theories*. A theory of aesthetic value is one that attempts to answer questions such as: what makes aesthetic value *aesthetic*? or what makes aesthetic value *value*?<sup>1</sup> On the other side, we find those accounts which seek to establish how we engage with aesthetic value and why. I call these aesthetic *valuing* theories. This dissertation concerns the second kind of project. More specifically, it investigates the psychology and rationality characteristic of the subject engaged with aesthetic value. Put another way, while aesthetic value theories place emphasis on the object of appreciation or on the resulting aesthetic experience afforded by the object in question, this thesis is oriented towards the subject performing these appreciative acts.

In light of this distinction, my project is guided by two lines of enquiry. The first is primarily concerned with identifying the various elements involved in appreciative engagement. The second is concerned with how best to connect the *object-oriented* dimension of aesthetic judgements with the *self-related* dimension that is characteristic of valuing activities. In what follows, I expand on these two questions and explain how my proposed theory of aesthetic appreciation tries to provide an answer to them.

The debate concerning what it means to value or come to appreciate something has become fairly technical.<sup>2</sup> Traditionally, much of the discussion about valuing, especially in the practical domain, has revolved around the kind of mental state that valuing can be identified with.<sup>3</sup> Belief, desire, emotion and intention are some of the mental states that have been considered as candidates for fulfilling this role. However, most contemporary accounts agree that it is a mistake to reduce valuing to a single kind of state, and instead defend a hybrid model of valuing (Velleman, 1999; Kolodny, 2003; Seidman, 2009; Scheffler, 2011; Wallace, 2013; Callard, 2018). Valuing is thus defined as a

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<sup>1</sup> The first question is sometimes referred to in contemporary aesthetics literature as the “aesthetic question” (Lopes, 2018, pp. 41–43; Shelley, 2019), and sometimes as the “demarcation question” (Van der berg, 2020, p. 2; Matherne, 2020, p. 315; Peacocke, 2021, p. 165). The second question is also known as the “normative question”.

<sup>2</sup> I will use ‘aesthetic valuing’ and the ‘practice of aesthetic appreciation’ interchangeably.

<sup>3</sup> For instance, for a long time the debate was centered around the relation between valuing and desiring. See Lewis (2000) for a desiring account of valuing. For a critique on the basis that not everything that is desired is valued, and on some desires being despised, see Frankfurt (1971).

process directed towards an object of value which involves various cognitive, motivational, and affective elements of one's agency. In the case of aesthetic appreciation, the notions of aesthetic judgement, first-hand experience, emotion and reasoning are some of the elements typically invoked.

According to my proposed view, aesthetic appreciation mainly involves two appreciative elements. The first is an *aesthetic judgement*—by this I mean those value-ascribing judgements by which we determine the overall presence or absence of aesthetic merit or demerit in an object (e.g., “*x* is beautiful”, “*x* is aesthetically unworthy”). The second is an *aesthetic (dis)liking*. ‘Aesthetic (dis)liking’ refers to a positive or negative affective orientation towards those features of the object of experience for which the question of whether or not *x* is aesthetically valuable is relevant. As I show in several of the essays, one's aesthetic likings constitute one's aesthetic personality by being expressive of one's taste.

Hybrid accounts can be conceptually difficult to navigate given the different nature of the elements involved. The main challenge is how to accommodate, in a balanced manner, those cognitive elements that have a clearer object-oriented dimension with those affective states that are more self-related. In other words, what we value aesthetically says something about the aesthetic character of a certain object and why it merits appreciation (by oneself and by others), but also it expresses something personal about oneself. It communicates how an object relates to one's wider valuing system and signals an “emotional vulnerability” to the object cared for (Siedman, 2016). A careful analysis of how we should understand the relationship between these two dimensions is largely absent from contemporary valuing accounts, including those addressing aesthetic value. While for some authors valuing is about a “distinctive fusion of reason and emotion” (Scheffler, 2011, p. 32), others ignore the relational question altogether. The task I have set myself is precisely to give an inclusive account of what it means to value something aesthetically. I aim to do this in a way that pays attention to the importance of precisely the relationships between the different elements involved. The proposed strategy, then, is not to find unity by ‘fusing’ the distinct elements, but to acknowledge and respect their differences and to find ways of connecting them.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Here I find inspiration in Nagel (2012), for whom the appropriate method when trying to make sense of the objective and subjective elements of a theory is one that respects the differences between them. As he puts it: “The task of accepting the polarity without allowing either of its terms to swallow the other should be a creative one. It is the aim of eventual unification that I think is misplaced, both in our thoughts about how to live and in our conception of what there is. The coexistence of conflicting points of view, varying in detachment from the contingent self, is not just a practically necessary illusion but an irreducible fact of life” (p. 214).

## 2. Aesthetic Valuing and the Self

There is a particular theme that connects several of the essays presented in this dissertation: the relation between the self and aesthetic valuing. Anyone familiar with philosophical aesthetics will have noticed that this relationship is under-theorised, ignored, or even considered to be suspect.<sup>5</sup> Why have we divorced aesthetic matters from self-related questions? I believe we can begin to explain this dismissal by noting the tendency in the aesthetic domain to treat our attitude or evaluative standpoint towards objects of aesthetic value as disinterested. To pay disinterested attention to an object is to be indifferent to its utility, free from the desires it might satisfy and open to all the impressions it might evoke. Jerrold Levinson (2016) describes ‘aesthetic attitude’ as follows:

The aesthetic attitude might be characterized in terms of the ignoring or suppressing of certain other mental attitudes or frames of mind, such as practical, anxious, or desirous ones, such attitudes being understood to preclude, or at least to render difficult, the sustaining of the aesthetic one. Alternatively, the aesthetic attitude might be characterized as a condition of openness, receptivity, and generosity toward an object’s perceivable form and qualities, in which one’s perception of them is not controlled or dominated by an ulterior purpose (p. 28).

This idea that aesthetic appreciation is independent of one’s desires, needs, or any relation to practical ends, gained primary status in 18th-century aesthetics.<sup>6</sup> Famously Kant, in *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (2000 [1790]), observes that there are feelings that are defined independently of their relationship to the faculty of desire and their motivational capacity. The feeling of the beautiful is an example of a pleasant feeling that is not necessarily connected with a desire for the object of appreciation. For a judgement to be a genuine judgement of taste, it must be grounded on a disinterested feeling of pleasure. It is the disinterestedness of the feeling, and a purported claim to objectivity (or inter-subjectivity) that goes along with it, that characterizes our aesthetic relation to the world. Kant recognises, however, that there are other appraisals that are linked to the satisfaction of one’s desires. The agreeable belongs to this second class of lower feelings. This distinction Kant makes between judgements of taste and judgements of the agreeable in terms of their relation to the faculty of desire is still influential today.

As Levinson notes, the disinterested character of the aesthetic attitude can also be defined in terms of the ability to respond to the aesthetic character of

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<sup>5</sup> For a valuable discussion of how this tendency to treat the aesthetic in impersonal terms has had a negative impact on the recognition of aesthetics as a core philosophical area, see Wiltsher (2017).

<sup>6</sup> See Jerome Stolnitz (1961) for a historical overview of the notion of disinterest and an analysis of how the way in which self-related considerations were rendered suspect in 18th-century aesthetics has had profound implications for modern aesthetic theories.

objects in an impersonal manner. We find this idea reflected in the characterisation of true judges by David Hume (1985 [1757]), for whom a “[s]trong sense, united to delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by comparison, and cleared of all prejudice, can alone entitle critics to this valuable character” (p. 278) The key thought here is that we can only truly aesthetically appreciate an object once we have set aside our personal interests in it. True judges are thought to be ideal, partly because they embody this impersonal attitude in their critical evaluations. As Hume puts it, “it is plainly an error in a critic, to confuse his approbation to one species or style of writing, and condemn all the rest” (p. 244).

There is yet a third sense in which the self appears to be disconnected from the aesthetic. The aesthetic attitude is also commonly characterised as an attitude of self-denial or self-forgetfulness (Mäcklin, 2021). We find this view represented in Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy* (2000 [1872]) and Arthur Schopenhauer’s *The World as Will and Representation* (1966 [1819]), for whom aesthetic contemplation is an experience in which the subject loses herself entirely to the object of aesthetic experience by surrendering to it completely.<sup>7</sup> There is another less explored gloss on the aesthetic attitude, connected to the idea of self-denial, that presents this attitude as resulting not from absorption in the object or experience, but rather from a deliberate process of decentering (Clifton, 2017). This is something that we find in the aesthetic views defended by authors such as Simone Weil and Iris Murdoch. For Weil (1951), the appreciation of aesthetic value is defined as involving a radical decentering since beauty demands that we give up our imaginary position at the center: “The love of our neighbor, the love of the beauty of the world, and the love of religion are in a sense quite impersonal” (p. 199).<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Murdoch (1976) sees beauty as an occasion for “unselfing” (p. 10) given that what we expect from the self involved in valuing is to be an open and vulnerable, taking aesthetic objects for what they are.

In recent years we have seen a number of contemporary aestheticians dissatisfied with this association of the aesthetic attitude with the abandonment of the self. By addressing the relevance of “aesthetic uniqueness” (Levinson, 2010), “aesthetic love” (Riggle, 2013, 2016) or “aesthetic attachments” (Moran, 2012; Kubala, 2018; Cross, 2017), these theorists argue that there is an important relation between aesthetic valuing and the self. I call views of this kind *self-cultivation* views. According to self-cultivation views we need to be able to make sense of the idea that we experience certain aesthetic objects as claiming *our* attention as the individual selves we are. Preserving and privileging aesthetic experiences and objects that in some way express who we are

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<sup>7</sup> For a discussion on the relation between Nietzsche’s conception of aesthetic experience to the Kantian-Schopenhauerian notion of aesthetic disinterest, see Came (2009).

<sup>8</sup> This contrasts with the love of friendship which Weil takes to be personal (1951, pp. 200–208).

has important benefits. For example, it can help agents structure and understand the temporal dimension of their aesthetic agency, develop a distinctive aesthetic identity, and explain the enduring relationships they form with particular aesthetic objects (Cross, forthcoming). On this basis, some have argued that we have reason to cultivate our engagement with those aesthetic objects that are related to (or reflect) our current aesthetic interests. Some even go so far as to suggest that we have “obligations of attention” (Moran, 2012; Kubala, 2018) and “duties of love” (Cross, 2017) in relation to our favourite artworks, bands or novels.

Following Levinson, we can understand the relationship between one’s self and one’s aesthetic interests, preferences or loves, by appealing to the term ‘aesthetic personality’.

One’s taste, in the sense of personal preferences in matters aesthetic, arguably not only partly reveals who one is or what sort of person one is, but also partly constitutes who one is or what sort of person one is. Let us term the totality of such aesthetic preferences an aesthetic personality. It seems fair to say that one’s aesthetic personality is a proper part of who one is and of what defines and distinguishes one as an individual. As such, it is something that contributes to one’s integrity and enters into one’s identity, in the familiar loose, if not metaphysically strict, sense of the term (2010, p. 228).

Aesthetic personality is linked to what we can call one’s ‘deeper values’. These are the values that guide and inspire us in how we live our aesthetic lives. They do so by providing reasons for living our lives one way or the other. Agnes Callard (2018), when arguing about the ethical self, makes a similar point when she says that there is a connection between one’s values and one’s valued objects. In Callard’s words,

[w]hen we identify someone’s values, we identify objects around which her ethical self is organized: the valued objects elicits from the agent a response that is the product of the cooperation of the various cognitive, motivational, and affective elements of her agency. Values are, therefore, a nexus of the person’s values, we know what objects out in the world she is, as we say, “all about” (p. 35).

The problem is that our aesthetic preferences do not always coincide with the set of objects that are considered to be aesthetically superior. In those cases, a tension arises. Should we strive to develop our taste in relation to what is aesthetically superior or should we keep cultivating our current aesthetic personality?<sup>9</sup> One might worry that in self-cultivation accounts no meaningful role for the object of aesthetic value is reserved. Richard Moran offers an example that illustrates the kind of relation between the self and the aesthetic in an early

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<sup>9</sup> Levinson (2013, p. 228) calls this the paradox of aesthetic perfectionism.

passage of Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*. In the passage Marcel recalls the following scene:

On the morning of our departure, (...) after looking for me everywhere, my mother found me in tears on the steep little path beside Tansonville, saying good-bye to the hawthorns, putting my arms around the prickly branches ... 'Oh, my poor little hawthorns,' I said, weeping, 'you're not the ones trying to make me unhappy, you aren't forcing me to leave. You've never hurt me! So I will always love you.' And drying my eyes, I promised them that when I was grown up I would not let my life be like the senseless lives of other men and that even in Paris, on spring days, instead of paying calls and listening to silly talk, I would go out into the countryside to see the first hawthorns (2012, pp. 306-307).

This fragment which is commonly used by self-cultivation views to promote the relation between the aesthetic and the self is one in which the aesthetic features of the object under appreciation seem to play a minimal role.<sup>10</sup> What is it about the hawthorns' aesthetic character that makes Marcel commit to them? As Richard Moran remarks, Marcel's commitment "is a kind of imperative addressed to himself, but it is something different from a demand for universal agreement" (p. 327). This commitment is personal in that it is importantly connected to the "self that he presently is and cares about". (p. 327). The worry is that these connections between aesthetic value and the self can be aesthetically minimal or purely coincidental (we can imagine there are other things that can remind Marcel of the senselessness of "paying calls and listening to silly talk").

Another worry for contemporary self-cultivation views is the set of difficulties they encounter in trying to explain the transformative possibilities of aesthetic value. By focusing on the importance of preserving those aesthetic objects that are expressive of who we *presently* are they argue for a very limited picture of our aesthetic selves. One might think that our aesthetic preferences and ideals are not set in stone; aesthetic identities have a diachronic character. In this sense, change is also part of who we are. As appreciators, why stipulate that we are only committed to maintaining the aesthetic valuing relationships and preferences that constitute our *current* aesthetic personality? How are we to make sense of our future relations to objects of aesthetic value?

In this thesis I attempt to theorise the relation between the self and aesthetic value by addressing the particular aesthetic features that account for our appreciative relationships with certain objects and practises. I also suggest that we acknowledge the diachronic and changing nature of our aesthetic personalities in our understanding of this relationship. Questions about the ways in which interactions with objects of aesthetic value shape our lives and identities

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<sup>10</sup> This example has more recently been referenced in Kubala (2018) and Cross (forthcoming).

are framed in different ways in the various essays. In what follows, I explain in more detail how this general theme connects to each of the essays.

In the first paper, “Aesthetic Autonomy: *Acquaintance, Competence and Authenticity*”, I bring out a sense of autonomy important to aesthetic appreciation and which, in contrast to disinterest theories, involves a substantial reference to the self. The notion of aesthetic autonomy is often used to mark both a normative requirement for proper aesthetic evaluation and a condition for aesthetic agency. However, what it means to be autonomous and the normative significance of autonomy is ambiguous in the literature. Most interpret this term as referring either (i) to the kind of experience that grounds our aesthetic judgements, or (ii) to the abilities we exercise in the process of rationally supporting our aesthetic judgements. I suggest that autonomy also refers to (iii) the capacity to identify oneself with what one judges as aesthetically valuable. With this in mind, I distinguish three different varieties of aesthetic autonomy: experiential autonomy, competency-based autonomy and personal autonomy. This third variant of autonomy has considerable similarities with notions of personal autonomy in the practical domain, according to which autonomous agents are those who act in accordance with the values, beliefs, commitments and norms they have set for themselves.<sup>11</sup> Autonomy in this sense has a special relationship to authenticity, which is commonly understood as the capacity to reflectively endorse one’s standing value commitments. Autonomous agents are those who live their aesthetic lives in accordance with their authentic aesthetic selves. In other words, aesthetic autonomy is in an important sense a matter of being coherent.

The second paper, “Non-Standard Emotions and Aesthetic Understanding”, discusses the epistemic value of our emotional responses in a context of aesthetic appreciation. Against Kant’s influential claim that a pure judgement of beauty is one on which charm and emotion have no influence (2000, §13, p. 107), this essay proposes that aesthetic understanding is inseparable from emotional understanding. Whilst aesthetic emotions have traditionally been confined to the level of aesthetic perception and excluded from the process of reason-giving, my plan is to show how this exclusion is due, firstly, to a questionable perceptual reading of the connection between emotional experience and value, and, secondly, to a narrow focus on the basic emotions. My argument will reveal that aesthetic emotions behave similarly to ‘intellectual’ emotions. They can play a significant epistemic role in our appreciative practices because of their characteristic motivational profile (which is similar to that of intellectual attention) and their capacity to place the appreciator in a state of second-order awareness of their mental states. I conclude by showing how these two epistemic tools can help the appreciator to rationally support their aesthetic judgements.

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<sup>11</sup> For an overview of recent work on personal autonomy, see Christman (2020).

In the third paper, “The Aesthetic Enkratic Principle”, I offer a principle governing the two central mental states of aesthetic life: aesthetic judgement and aesthetic liking. The former is typically associated with the discernment of an object’s aesthetic character and the latter with one’s subjectivity. On the basis of introducing this principle, I develop a view of aesthetic appreciation (The Alignment View which I mentioned in Section One) that respects the separateness of judging and liking but also connects these attitudes in an important way. Ultimately, this paper defends the view that aesthetic rationality is similar to other domains in that it requires coherence between one’s attitudinal mental states (in the aesthetic case between what is aesthetically judged and what is aesthetically liked). Importantly, this mental alignment connects with the notion of personal autonomy discussed in the first paper.

In the fourth paper, “Aesthetic Self-Transformation: *A Guide for Aesthetic Aspirants*”, I explore how aesthetic value can transform us aesthetically. How can it be rational for us to want to become someone with new aesthetic values? And when do we genuinely have reason to do this? Inspired by similar questions concerning the nature of transformative experiences, this essay explores the process through which one acts upon oneself to modify one’s aesthetic sensibility. I begin by showing how aesthetic self-transformation involves a change in one’s perceptual and emotional sensibility. I then focus on two problems that arise in this context. First, how this revision can lead to an akratic-like mismatch between what is judged as aesthetically valuable and what is aesthetically liked. Second, how in attempting to resolve this conflict, we encounter two opposing aesthetic considerations that seem to guide aspirants with equal force: self-cultivation and aesthetic improvement. I propose that we explain the first issue by invoking a coherence requirement (as defended in the third essay) and resolve the second by outlining a hybrid view of what constitutes good aesthetic reasoning which takes into account considerations that have to do both with preserving one’s aesthetic identity and expanding one’s aesthetic horizon.

### 3. Relation to Emotions and Rationality

This thesis has important connections to the philosophy of emotions and theories of rationality. Having identified one of the main themes that links the various essays, I will now explore some key concepts that I see as central to the various essays and that relate to debates in these other areas. In this section, I will also offer some methodological considerations.

In the dissertation, I identify two kinds of affective components as central to aesthetic valuing. These are, *aesthetic* or *appreciative emotions* and *aesthetic liking*.

Firstly, by aesthetic or appreciative emotions, I mean the particular emotions we experience in the process of aesthetic judgement-making. These are the kind of affective states discussed in Essay II. Now, even if one is to

acknowledge that affective experiences are importantly connected to our aesthetic evaluations, it is important to get clear about their influence and their specific role in this domain. Inspired by recent critiques of the perceptual theory of emotions<sup>12</sup> (Dokic and Lemaire, 2013; Brady, 2013; Mueller, 2018), I argue that appreciative emotions are better understood in connection to intellectual or non-standard emotions. By intellectual emotions I mean the set of higher cognitive emotions that characterize our inquisitive activities (Stocker, 2009; Goldie, 2011). An appreciator's affective responses are sometimes held to constitute reasons or evidence for their aesthetic judgements, just as perceptions are standardly held to constitute reasons for empirical beliefs (Tappolet, 2016). Central to my view is the denial of this claim.<sup>13</sup> A better account of the role aesthetic emotions play is that they non-instrumentally motivate one to seek the reasons that support one's aesthetic judgement. Aesthetic emotions act as 'mediators' between aesthetic perception and aesthetic reasoning. The novelty of this analysis is that the affective experiences we undergo in our aesthetic engagements do not only influence what is aesthetically perceived and how, but are considered as contributing to the process of aesthetic reasoning in their own right.

Secondly, aesthetic appreciation does not only involve responding emotionally to particular features of the object in question. There is another affective element involved in this activity that has as part of its content an evaluation of the value's object as a whole. I use the term 'aesthetic liking' to describe this second response. Aesthetic liking aims to make sense of the thought that valuing, in general, involves a kind of overall caring for what is deemed valuable. Peter Goldie (2007) makes reference to this when he notes that:

[...] having your heart in the right place matters too in art—in production and appreciation. We think less of the highly skilled sculptor if we know that she lacks all passion in and for her work; and we think less of the highly discriminatory literary critic if we know that he cares little or nothing for what he so ably pronounces on (p. 383).

Aesthetic liking is affective in that it involves a positive or negative valence that signals approval or disapproval of the object of experience. Furthermore, I take it that our aesthetic likings are also expressions of our aesthetic personality. For example, when we say that Natalia Ginzburg's writing style in her novel *Family Lexicon* is witty, elegant, direct, and able to speak of the deepest sorrows and the smallest pleasures of everyday life, we are not only reacting

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<sup>12</sup> The argument in favor of the Perceptual Theory is an argument by analogy: emotions and perceptual experiences share many important features, such as phenomenal qualities, absence of direct control by the agent, automaticity, world-guidedness, correctness conditions, and informational encapsulation (Tappolet 2016, pp. 29–30).

<sup>13</sup> This is a response to the *direct access thesis* (Dokic and Lemaire, 2013) and the *tracking thesis* (Tappolet 2016, pp. 163–167). According to these theses, emotions can provide direct access to evaluative properties and afford us access to practical reasons.

to certain aesthetic qualities but also taking a stand on its beauty. Others understand the positive attitude that accompanies aesthetic valuing in a more practical sense. For someone like Elaine Scarry (1999), for example, appreciation is a form of “stewardship in which one acts to protect or perpetuate a fragment of beauty already in the world” (p. 114). I do not deny that the actions that result from appreciation are connected to one’s emotions. As explained in Essay III, it is our preferences that motivate us to take certain actions, for example, by prompting us to protect and share what is judged as valuable (pp. 13–14).

A problem in this vicinity is that it is not always easy to establish such a relationship between what one judges to have aesthetic merit and what one aesthetically likes. It is common for these two attitudes to come apart. One of the main claims of the dissertation is that a misalignment between one’s aesthetic judgement and one’s aesthetic liking for an object prevents one from appreciating that same object. I characterise this disunity as an instance of aesthetic akrasia and thus as an instance of aesthetic irrationality.

But why exactly is the discrepancy between what one judges and what one likes aesthetically irrational? Part of what it is to be rational is to avoid incoherent combinations of attitudes. This form of rationality, known as structural rationality, construes the norms of rationality as codified by rational requirements (Broome 2013a). Structural rationality is sometimes defined in opposition to substantive rationality (Fogal and Worsnip, 2021). Substantive rationality is a matter of responding correctly to the reasons one has. Structural rationality, on the other hand, is a matter of having the right relations hold between one’s mental states, independently of the reasons for having those states.<sup>14</sup>

In light of this distinction, instead of identifying aesthetic akrasia as a form of weakness of will, as it is commonly argued (Silvers, 1972; Herzog, 2000; Strohl, 2018), I show that aesthetic akrasia is problematic in that it involves the violation of a particular rational requirement. I call this requirement the Aesthetic Enkratic Principle.

**Aesthetic Enkratic Principle (Aesthetic EP):** One is rationally required to aesthetically like what one judges to be aesthetically valuable.

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<sup>14</sup> It is important to mention that this dissertation assumes a distinction between aesthetic normativity and aesthetic rationality. I distinguish the question of what reasons there are for appreciating something from the question of what it means to be aesthetically rational. This is a distinction that has not yet been explored in, or exported to, aesthetics. How to understand the relationship between normative aesthetic reasons and rationality is a contentious issue. I do not advance or advocate a complete picture of this relationship. However, one might think that the work I do in the last two essays has the potential to lay the foundations for an account of it. This is a project worth exploring in future research.

Aesthetic EP<sub>formal</sub> [(if you judge x is beautiful) → you aesthetically like x]

The Aesthetic EP parallels other Enkratic Principles in the practical and theoretical domains.

**Practical EP:** One is rationally required to intend to  $\phi$  whenever one believes that one ought to  $\phi$  (Broome, 2013b).

**Theoretical EP:** One is rationally required not to believe something that one believes to be unsupported by the evidence one possesses (Horowitz, 2014).

The reader should also note that to claim that aesthetic judgement and aesthetic liking are two distinct appreciative states constrained by some kind of matching attitude requirement is controversial. A theory of appreciation that takes into account this requirement distances itself from two prevailing and opposing accounts. On one side of the spectrum, affectivists accounts of appreciation hold that aesthetic value judgements and aesthetic liking go hand in hand (e.g., Gorodeisky and Marcus, 2018, 2022; Gorodeisky, 2019; Ginsborg, 2014). On such views, aesthetic value is revealed through affect, so that what is judged and what is liked cannot diverge. If one properly judges something to be beautiful, one likes it. This view denies any constraint between these two states such as the Aesthetic EP because they do not concede that the two states can come apart. Against the affectivist, I question the idea that affect can disclose or reveal an object's aesthetic value in experience. As mentioned above, the analogy between emotions and perceptions is philosophically problematic in that emotional responses are not direct evidence of an object's value. Instead of revealing evaluative properties, I suggest that our aesthetic likings are expressive of our carings and attachments. Aesthetic liking communicates how we affectively relate to objects of aesthetic worth.

In contrast to affectivist accounts, perceptualist or theoretical views go on to suggest that to value an aesthetic object is to epistemically track its relevant aesthetic properties. Perceptualists hold that aesthetic value judgements are epistemic exercises that can be detached from aesthetic liking. Valuing, on this kind of view, involves an objective attitude akin to the theoretical judgement of nonevaluative facts and thus is only contingently linked to aesthetic liking (e.g., Danto, 1997; Gilmore, 2011; Carroll, 2016, 2022). Hence aesthetic akrasia is not a problem since one can legitimately maintain a positive aesthetic judgement of an object that is not aesthetically liked (or vice versa). The perceptualist's claim that judging and liking can come apart is plausible. However, I argue that the perceptualist over-intellectualizes the process of aesthetic valuing by reducing aesthetic appreciation to aesthetic evaluation.

But even if we find that there are two distinct states operating in our appreciative engagements, why should we try to be aesthetically coherent? This is a question about the normativity of coherence. Although I point towards

relevant considerations in the various essays, I do not give a complete answer to this question.<sup>15</sup> For this reason, I would like to briefly present some thoughts on my position here.

First, one might think that the realm of aesthetics, especially when it comes to our relationship with works of art, is not subject to any rational limitation. In support of this line of thought, we might point out that some artworks are intricate artefacts that evoke a variety of responses in us, thus it is unclear exactly which reactions we should try to make cohere. For instance, if I judge something to be camp or sublime, does that mean I am rationally required to have a corresponding affect? If so, which one? Secondly, certain artworks are epistemically and morally challenging and one might think that the value of our aesthetic engagement lies precisely in the fact that it puts us in a state of constant exploration or even of confusion and mental disharmony. Given that this is the case, why assume coherence in our mental states is required or valuable? Thirdly, if we compare the aesthetic to the practical and theoretical realms, one might think that the lack of significant real world consequences of a mismatch between judgement and liking renders the pursuit of coherence unimportant. Further, it is not obviously the case that incoherent aesthetic beings are legitimately criticisable in virtue of being incoherent. If these points are correct, then the Aesthetic Enkratic Principle may not have significance after all.

As to the first point, I do not deny that our aesthetic responses to works of art are varied and that determining which of a long list of states should be reconciled is difficult. However, it is plausible that the two states I focus on, aesthetic value judgements (or verdicts) and aesthetic liking, are states that we have reason to make coherent. As mentioned earlier, these are responses that aim to make sense of the object of appreciation as a whole. The Aesthetic Enkratic Principle does not focus on combinations of substantive judgements (e.g. J.D. Salinger's short story *A Perfect Day for Banana Fish* is a study of purity, vulnerability and the loss of innocence) with particular appreciative emotions (e.g. sadness or sorrow). So I am not suggesting that one is rationally required to experience a feeling of sadness if one is to judge *A Perfect Day for Banana Fish* as a study of what it means to be pure and vulnerable. The Aesthetic Enkratic Principle is not concerned with judgements of particular aesthetic merits or with establishing corresponding affects to these kinds of judgements. The reason for this is that the principle is sensitive to the idea that there are no general principles that connect particular aesthetic attributions to certain affective responses.

Second, coherence does not aim to get rid of the feeling of freedom, curiosity and pleasure that comes with complex artworks. However, even if there

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<sup>15</sup> In Essays III and IV, I refer to Worsnip (2002) for whom structural rationality is best understood as promoting good reasoning in a context of personal deliberation and for whom structurally irrational combinations of attitudes should be treated as off-limits.

are certain benefits flowing from the conflict and struggle experienced in working out one's relationship to the value of a work, it is better that we understand incoherence as a means rather than an end in our aesthetic engagements. We do not value the struggle in itself. As I show in the final essay of the dissertation, "Aesthetic Self-Transformation: *A Guide for Aesthetic Aspirants*", incoherence can be part of the process of coming to value new aesthetic objects. Especially when it involves objects that are substantially different from those we currently value.

Is it really true that being aesthetically incoherent has no significant consequences? Imagine someone who does not like anything which they judge to be valuable, or someone who only likes what they judge to be unworthy. We would think that there is something sub-optimal or wrong about this person and that they can be criticised for the way they live their aesthetic life. One explanation for this, as I try to show throughout the thesis, is that holding on to incoherent states for long periods of time can be aesthetically self-undermining by hindering the autonomy of the subject. A structurally irrational aesthetic agent is, in this way, someone who is denied a central feature of their own agency, namely their valuing capacities. This occurs when incoherence prevents one from properly relating to values and from acting accordingly to one's considered judgements. Based on these considerations, this dissertation argues that aesthetics is no different from other domains in that it requires mental coherence between a subject's mental states. I will say more about the importance of exercising one's valuing capacities in the last section.

#### 4. The Value of Valuing Activities

It is by attending to discussions about the nature of valuing activities and their meaningfulness to a subject's life that we can see the philosophical significance of aesthetic coherence.

When discussing the nature of certain valuing activities, including aesthetic ones, Susan Wolf (1997) observes that:

[...] it would be a mistake to think that the objective good (...) is one that is wholly independent of the subject's experience or preferences, (...) Indeed, as we will see, the very idea that activities can make a life meaningful without the subject's endorsement is a dubious one (p. 208).

For Wolf, a subject's endorsement is a fundamental element of what it means to value something. This endorsement does not amount to a mere enjoyment or hedonic response to what is acknowledged as worthy, neither to an obligation with the object in question. For Wolf, valuing or meaningful activities "fall outside the categories both of duty and of fun". To endorse a worthy object or project is to like it or love it, for Wolf (p. 227). This liking is one that is inseparable from one's self-interest, but also connected to the reasons that

make something worthwhile. In a slogan, valuing, “occur(s) where subjective attraction meets objective attractiveness” (p. 224).

A similar point is made by Joseph Raz (2010) when arguing that our personal attachments are to be based on the value of the object itself, since:

The personal meaning of objects, causes, and pursuits depends on their impersonal value, and is conditional on it. But things of value have to be appropriated by us to endow our lives with meaning, meaning which is a precondition for life being either a success or a failure (p. 20).

Raz, like Wolf, advocates for a balance between “preexisting value and self-created value” (Raz 2010, p. 40). That is, valuing involves both being attuned to the ‘impersonal value of things’ (that which makes the object worthy of being appreciated) and a liking of it. This liking is what explains our endorsement or attachment to objects and projects of value. For Raz, our personal attachments also have an important relation to our identities. It is in that sense that valuing is a meaningful activity. By identity, Raz explains: “I do not mean the term in the sense in which it fixes the limits to the continuity of an object (...). [I] mean the identity revealed in answers to the question who am I? I am a man, an academic, a father, etc. These make me who I am” (p. 33). Raz’s point is that our attachment to objects of value determines parts of one’s identity. Those parts that can be freely chosen. This thought resonates with the aesthetic self-cultivation views mentioned in section two. However, Raz’s view also explains how one’s personal attachments are to be grounded in the worth of the object in question. Whilst the relation between self-interest and aesthetic value in self-cultivation views is not as balanced, as I argue in Essay IV.

There is another sense in which valuing is thought to be meaningful. For Stephen Darwall (1999), recognizing oneself as being in a relation with a valuable object is an important part of what it means to meaningfully engage with objects of worth. Darwall (1999) describes this phenomenon of appreciating one’s appreciation with the following artistic example:

When I look at the photograph of David Golub, I don’t question that he appreciates the fineness of his playing, but I doubt that this is the main object of his delight. Rather, I imagine that what his smile primarily reveals is an appreciation of values that make music-making a noble pursuit—values like the beauty and power of the music he and his colleagues are creating, values that give music significance or worth. And I imagine that the benefit he derives from his playing comes, in large measure, through his appreciation of this worth and his relation to it (p. 178).

The above philosophers all acknowledge the importance not only of properly judging objects of worth but also of our individual valuing relation with such objects. However, in aesthetics we are yet to develop a framework within

which the nature of this activity can be adequately theorized. In this dissertation I hope to offer such a framework.

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