Aesthetic Reasons and Aesthetic Causes: Wittgenstein and Hume on Aesthetic Reactions

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When we identify certain features in an aesthetic object as the reasons for our aesthetic satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the object, how should we think of these reasons? Are they being claimed as the cause, or an important part of the cause, of our aesthetic reaction or should we understand them in some other, non-causal, way?

In his *Lectures on Aesthetics*[1], Ludwig Wittgenstein argues forcefully that when features of an aesthetic object are identified as the reasons for a spectator's aesthetic reaction, it is a mistake to regard these reasons as implying that they are the cause, or an important part of the cause, of this reaction. On the other hand, David Hume, in his well-known essay 'Of the Standard of Taste'[2], claims that such reasons do indeed attempt to locate the cause of the spectator's reaction.

I shall argue that Wittgenstein's denial of the causal thesis – the thesis that aesthetic reasons are being offered as an important part of the cause of the spectator's reaction – is not justified, and that the opposing Humean position can, in this regard, be shown to be correct. But I shall also argue that, in the course of his attack on the causal thesis, Wittgenstein does highlight two central elements in aesthetic reason-giving that advocates of the causal thesis have failed clearly (if at all) to bring out. In my view, both positions, the Wittgensteinian and the Humean, have made significant – though complementary – contributions to our understanding of what is involved in the giving and accepting of reasons for our aesthetic reactions.

I

We need, first, to clarify what Wittgenstein understands by what he calls 'aesthetic reactions'. He is referring to such comments as: 'I am dissatisfied with the height of that door in relation to its surroundings'; or to such question-and-answer examples as: 'Why am I so dissatisfied with the facade of this building?'– 'Because the central door is too high' – 'Yes, you're right, that's what is dissatisfying me'. In other words, Wittgenstein is concerned with those reactions that are expressive of a spectator's aesthetic satisfaction or dissatisfaction with an object. He regards such reactions as playing a leading role in aesthetics. Thus, he says: 'Perhaps the most important thing in connection with aesthetics is what may be called aesthetic reactions, e.g. discomfort, disgust, discontent...The expression of discontent says: 'Make it higher...too low!...do something to this' (Lecture II, Section 10).

On the face of it, these reactions do look as though they are making a causal claim. In the case of a spectator expressing aesthetic dissatisfaction by exclaiming, 'The door in that facade is too high!', her reaction, expressed more prosaically, would seem to amount to: 'I feel dissatisfied with the design of this facade, and the cause, as I conjecture, is the door's height'. Similarly, when you are puzzled as to why an object is aesthetically satisfying or dissatisfying you, it would appear that if you admit that a critic has managed to articulate the specific reason for your puzzlement, you are supposing that the

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critic has, at least in part, located the *cause* of your feelings. Moreover, it would not seem inappropriate to maintain that one rewarding motive for studying the views of critics is to help us identify more fully, more perspicuously, the reasons for our aesthetic reactions. Admittedly, it might well be held that critics have another, and even more noteworthy, role, *viz.* showing us what we *ought* to be aesthetically satisfied or dissatisfied with, not helping to explain why we are *in fact* moved by certain aesthetic objects. However, as I shall argue later, these two roles – one explanatory and the other evaluative – are not as disparate as they may initially appear.

Many philosophers have held that such critical procedures – whether explanatory or evaluative – *do* make a causal claim. Hume, for instance, maintains that those features of an object that we term its 'beauties' or 'deformities' are so denominated because, or partly because, they are believed to be the cause of a true judge's feelings of (respectively) pleasure or displeasure. He notes that were we to discover that what we now call the 'faults' or 'deformities' of a poem were really the features that were producing the judge's pleasure at the poem, we would need to *change* our beliefs about which features are its beauties and which its deformities: 'Did our pleasure really arise from those parts of his [Ariosto's] poem, which we denominate faults, this would be no objection to criticism in general: It would only be an objection to those particular rules of criticism, which would establish such circumstances to be faults, and would represent them as universally blameable. If they are found to please, they cannot be faults; let the pleasure, which they produce, be ever so unexpected and unaccountable'[3].

Yet, Wittgenstein sets his face against supposing that our expressions of aesthetic satisfaction or dissatisfaction can be seen as implying a causal claim or requesting to know the cause of our feelings: 'I wish to make it clear that the important problems in aesthetics are not settled by psychological research' (Lecture II, Section 36)[4]. And he stresses that the attempt by experimental psychologists to locate, in aesthetic objects, the causes of people's satisfaction or dissatisfaction is simply irrelevant to a genuinely aesthetic or critical enquiry. But why did Wittgenstein seek to deny that our aesthetic reactions, and the reasons we offer for them, carry a causal implication?

To answer this question, we need to understand how, as Wittgenstein sees it, the concept of *cause* figures in scientific investigations. Essentially, it is the same concept as Hume identified. There are two conditions that must be satisfied for its application. First, the supposed cause (A) and effect (B) must be *separately identifiable*, otherwise A cannot be said to 'bring about' or 'cause' B in the scientific sense. Second, if A really is the cause of B, then A must be *constantly conjoined* with B under similar circumstances. Hence, if an example is discovered where, under these circumstances, A occurred but B did not follow, we should conclude that A cannot be the cause of B in any instance where these same circumstances obtain. This point is sometimes put by saying that a genuine causal claim must be vulnerable to parallel negative instances[5].

As I understand him, Wittgenstein holds that *both* these conditions for making a genuine causal claim, *viz.* separate identification, on the one hand, and the implication of a constant conjunction, on the other, are inapplicable when we are concerned with giving aesthetic reasons for a spectator's reaction. If he is right, it must follow that aesthetic reasons cannot be making causal claims, at least in Hume's sense (henceforth, the qualification, 'at least in Hume's sense', will be dropped but always implied).

II

Let us begin by restricting the discussion to the merely explanatory (non-evaluative) role of aesthetic reason-giving. In the case of the separate identification condition for a causal claim, Wittgenstein contrasts somebody expressing aesthetic discomfort by saying 'That door is too high!' with somebody expressing bodily discomfort, *e.g.* stomach-ache, by saying, 'I think I had too many tomatoes, today!'. With the bodily discomfort example, Wittgenstein accepts that there really are two separately identifiable events going on: there is the (present) stomach-ache *and* there is the (earlier) eating of the tomatoes. There is no necessity for the person to mention what she believes to be the cause of her stomach-ache in order to express her particular bodily discomfort. She could, instead,

simply have said in a pained way (perhaps while rubbing his stomach), 'I have an awful stomach-ache!'. In short, with the expression of bodily discomfort, Wittgenstein accepts that the alleged cause and effect do meet the separate identification condition.

Moreover, the claim that it was the eating of the tomatoes that caused the person's stomach-ache is a perfectly respectable scientific hypothesis with regard to the *second* condition for making a genuine causal claim, *viz.* the implication that there exists a constant conjunction between these two events – and the consequent vulnerability to parallel negative instances. If we can find another occasion where that person ate a similar number of tomatoes (and this other occasion is the same in relevant respects) and yet she did not then experience stomach-ache, this will justify us in claiming that the tomatoes were not (alone) responsible for the stomach-ache even on the present occasion. And however much the person in question may protest that it was the tomatoes that have caused her present bodily discomfort, the fact that this hypothesis has been subject to a parallel negative instance shows that the person is mistaken. She is the final authority on whether she has stomach-ache, but she is *not* the final authority on what was responsible for, what brought about, her discomfort.

Wittgenstein contrasts this bodily discomfort case with a person expressing aesthetic discomfort by exclaiming, 'This door is too high!'. Note the great verbal similarity between this latter expression of discomfort and the expression of bodily discomfort in the tomatoes example. Yet, Wittgenstein maintains, this similarity masks what he calls a 'grammatical' difference – or, in fact, two such differences.

The most obvious difference is this. In the aesthetic case, there do not seem to be two separable events: first, aesthetic discomfort; second, a hypothesis as to the cause of this reaction, namely, the height of the door. Rather – as Wittgenstein himself emphasises – the very expression of discomfort, insofar as it is a genuinely aesthetic reaction, mentions something about the object reacted to. An aesthetic reaction is necessarily *directed onto* features of the object, in the sense that there must be something about the object of which the person is aware and which, as she takes it, is satisfying or, as in this instance, dissatisfying her. That is why Wittgenstein says: 'We have here [*i.e.* in aesthetics] a kind of discomfort that you may call "directed"' (Lecture II, Section 18) and 'The expression of [aesthetic] discomfort takes the form of a criticism, and not "my mind is not at rest" or something' (Lecture II, Section 19).

So, in the case of an aesthetic feeling, Wittgenstein contends that a spectator must be aware of *what* is satisfying or dissatisfying her. It is no good looking at *e.g.* an Impressionist painting and simply exclaiming 'Oh, how marvellous!'. That does not sufficiently express an *aesthetic* delight (this is not, of course, to deny that the person is experiencing a pleasurable sensation). For an expression of feeling to count as genuinely aesthetic, the spectator must be able to identify, perhaps only in an unspecific way, what is moving her in the very articulation of her feeling. In other words, her feeling must have an object that is identified in the actual expression of the feeling. Consequently, with the aesthetic case, there are not two completely separable events, as there are with the bodily discomfort case. There is not the aesthetic reaction, on the one hand, and the spectator's awareness of its object, on the other. As Wittgenstein insists, with respect to aesthetic discomfort, 'To say "I feel discomfort and know the cause", is entirely misleading because…[this] makes it sound as though there were two things going on in my soul – discomfort and knowing the cause' (Lecture II, Section 16)[6]. Far from there being two wholly separable events 'going on in my soul', the spectator can only justify her feeling as an aesthetic one, if its very expression mentions what the feeling is directed onto or what it is about. Contrast this with the bodily discomfort case, where, as we have seen, a person's expression of a stomach-ache need mention nothing whatever about *what* is discomforting her in order to count as a genuine expression of stomach-ache.

This distinction between the expression of genuine aesthetic reactions and that of many causal claims seems to me correct and important. It contrasts, or at least appears to contrast, with a number of those occasions where Hume discusses our reaction to aesthetic objects. In such contexts, he often writes of 'sentiments' (or feelings) of pleasure or displeasure being aroused in the spectator, and he

couples this with the suggestion that there are certain forms or qualities in objects, some of which 'are calculated to please, and others to displease'. This way of describing our encounters with aesthetic objects can encourage the idea that Hume regards our aesthetic feelings as wholly distinct from our consciousness of the objects, and of those forms or qualities in objects, to which we are responding. So understood, there is the spectator's perception of the object, on the one hand, and there are the aesthetic sentiments (or feelings), on the other: the latter identifiable without any recourse to the object perceived. It is, I submit, one of the very real merits of Wittgenstein's account that he shows that such a portrayal of our aesthetic reactions is mistaken, and that there is a far closer relationship between our perception of the object and any genuine aesthetic feelings. Most conspicuously, that the very expression of aesthetic feelings requires awareness of the object reacted to; and, hence, that the separate identification requirement for a causal relationship between an aesthetic reaction and its object cannot be *straightforwardly* met, *i.e.*, because the expression of an aesthetic reaction includes consciousness of its object.[7]

III

Can we explain why there should be this difference between the expression of an aesthetic reaction (which requires consciousness of the object of one's satisfaction or dissatisfaction) and the expression of bodily feelings (which does not)?

A remarkable feature of the aesthetic case is that the very thought of the object is imbued or suffused with the feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. These feelings come about *as* one is perceiving the object and, so it seems, *arise from* that act of awareness. They do not manifest themselves independently of the thought of an object but only exist melded or blended with it. No such sense of combination obtains with purely bodily feelings: it is immaterial to their occurrence whether one is then aware of anything else and, even if one is, that the feelings should seem to arise from that consciousness and suffuse or tone it.

Aesthetic feelings, like directed feelings in general, have an intellectual component to them (*viz.* the thought of the object): they are dependent on a grasp of what one is perceiving and exist *through* that understanding (which they permeate). No wonder then that the awareness of the object has become integral to the expression of an aesthetic reaction. For it is this awareness which shows that the feelings one is experiencing are suffusing one's contemplation of the object and seeming to arise from it.

However, although the expression of directed and, more particularly, aesthetic feelings do incorporate the object of those feelings within it, there are nonetheless two distinguishable features to an aesthetic reaction. On the one hand, the consciousness of the object and, on the other, the attendant feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction suffusing that consciousness. For although the feelings arise with and permeate the consciousness of the object, one can conceive of the consciousness of the object *without* the attendant feelings (as, in fact, can happen when, in certain moods, one may listen to a piece of music or look at a painting which, on other occasions, one finds deeply satisfying but now leaves one unmoved). Accordingly, although an aesthetic reaction necessarily contains within it both a consciousness of the object and the attendant feelings suffusing this consciousness, there are, for all that, two distinguishable experiential features within an aesthetic reaction. And no reason has been given – so far - for ruling out the claim that, in expressing an aesthetic reaction through the identification of its object, it is one's awareness of that object that is being conjectured as the cause of the attendant feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

IV

The separability, within an aesthetic reaction, of the spectator's feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction, on the one hand, and her thought of their object, on the other, is particularly striking in those

familiar situations where we seek to identify more precisely the features in the object that are satisfying or dissatisfying us. Wittgenstein himself devotes considerable attention to the occasions where we are only able, anyway at the outset, to identify the object of our aesthetic reaction very unspecifically. For instance, we might listen to a piece of music and display our dissatisfaction by exclaiming, 'What's wrong with this?'. Wittgenstein acknowledges that this would still be a case where we are expressing a *directed* response to an aesthetic object (see Lecture II, Section 19). Yet, *ex hypothesi*, we do not know what the precise reasons for our aesthetic reaction are: that is just what we want to identify. Consequently, it might seem tempting to criticise Wittgenstein's denial of the relevance of causal connections to aesthetics in the following way: 'Surely, what we are asking for here are the detailed features in the aesthetic object that are *causing* our dissatisfaction. Hence, the fact that, in those cases where we are puzzled about what in the object is aesthetically moving us, the expression of our aesthetic reaction must already mention, albeit unspecifically, the object of our feelings does not rule out a causal analysis. It does not, since the alleged *specific* cause (detailed features in the object) and the alleged effect (our aesthetic satisfaction or dissatisfaction) are here separately identifiable. They are separately identifiable because we have expressed our aesthetic reaction to the object without the awareness of the specific reasons for our response, *viz.* the particular features in the object that our feelings are directed onto. It cannot be that, in these cases, the spectator's expression of satisfaction or dissatisfaction is inseparable from the consciousness of its precise object since the spectator has expressed her feelings *without* the knowledge of its precise object. Wittgenstein acknowledges that seeking to discover the precise object in such a case does form part of what he calls "aesthetics". Yet this investigation certainly *looks* like an appeal to discovering the specific cause of the spectator's aesthetic feelings; and if it is, this must undermine Wittgenstein's repeated assertions to the effect that questions in aesthetics have nothing to do with causal explanations "but are answered in an entirely different way" (Lecture II, Section 36)'.[8]

Wittgenstein, however, seeks to repudiate this objection on the ground that, in the case of aesthetic explanations, the spectator is always the *final authority* on what she is moved by. Consider the following example. A spectator complains, 'There's something wrong with the proportions of the side of this building. What is it that is dissatisfying me?', and somebody suggests that the reason is that the door is too high in relation to the rest of the facade. Now, Wittgenstein claims, this suggested reason can *only* be the specific ground of the spectator's dissatisfaction with its object if the spectator is willing to accept that it is. In other words, identified features of an object can only constitute the reason for a spectator's aesthetic reaction, if that spectator is prepared willingly to accept their identification as the explanation of her response. This, I take it, is what Wittgenstein is driving at in Lecture III, Section 10: 'Suppose someone heard syncopated music of Brahms played and asked: "What is the queer rhythm that makes me wobble [feel wobbly – R]?" "It is the 3 against 4". One could play certain phrases and he would say: "Yes. It's this peculiar rhythm I meant". On the other hand, if he didn't agree, this wouldn't be the explanation'[9].

If Wittgenstein is right that, in the case of aesthetic explanations, the spectator is the final authority on the grounds of her feeling, this does mark a real difference with many normal causal cases, like the bodily discomfort case. In these latter cases, we saw that there is absolutely no necessity to gain the acceptance of the person with stomach-ache for the explanation - the eating of a certain number of tomatoes - to be the correct one. This is because, here, the person is *not* in any privileged position with regard to deciding whether it was her eating of the tomatoes that explains her stomach-ache. Whereas, in the aesthetic case, Wittgenstein's contention is that any proffered explanation of a spectator's directed feeling can only be correct, if that spectator is herself willing to accept that explanation as the right one. For what the spectator wants is a description (or other mode of identification) of features of the aesthetic object which she can *recognize* as the ground of her directed feeling: a way of looking at the object which captures for the spectator the reason(s) for her delight or dissatisfaction (though she could not herself put her finger on the reason(s)). So, in the aesthetic

case, the spectator *is* in a privileged position to decide whether any proffered explanation identifies the reason for her reaction. From this difference, Wittgenstein concludes that aesthetic explanations do not carry a causal implication.

But why does he suppose that a difference of this nature shows that aesthetic explanations are not making causal claims? The fact that, with such an explanation, the spectator is looking for a response to her puzzlement that she can willingly accept does not entail that the answer that does satisfy her cannot be the cause of her dissatisfaction. That is true; the crucial issue, however, is not whether an acceptable answer *could* be the cause of her dissatisfaction but whether it *must* be. Wittgenstein's denial that aesthetic explanations are, at least in part, being offered as causal explanations hinges on the idea that where we are the final authority on the ground of our response (as with an aesthetic reaction), it cannot be the case that we are implying a *constant conjunction* between that ground and our response. On the other hand, in judging that something is the cause of a certain phenomenon, we *are* implying that the putative cause is constantly conjoined with that phenomenon (under the same circumstances). For, as we saw earlier, unless there is this constant conjunction, there cannot be a genuine causal relationship between the two.

Take the bodily discomfort case. If it is true that eating x number of tomatoes is the cause of a particular person's stomach-ache, it follows that whenever a person of the same constitution eats x number of tomatoes (under relevantly similar circumstances), stomach-ache will ensue. And, of course, we frequently come to formulate a causal hypothesis on the basis of having observed a constant conjunction between two events. Indeed, Wittgenstein himself says about psychological experiments: 'One of the curious [characteristic - R] things about psychological experiments is that they have to be made on a number of subjects. It is the agreements of Smith, Jones and Robinson which allows you to give an explanation - in this sense of explanation, e.g. you can try out a piece of music in a psychological laboratory and get the result that the music acts in such and such a way' (Lecture III, Section 11).

Turn now to a request for an aesthetic explanation: for instance, where a person is unhappy about the aesthetic effect of a building's facade and is puzzled about the specific reason for her dissatisfaction. If, as Wittgenstein maintains, that person is not only the final authority on what exactly is dissatisfying her, but can also come to know the specific object of her dissatisfaction (here: the height of the door) without having to carry out any experiments to establish a constant conjunction between, on the one hand, her (and, perhaps, others') awareness of the height of doors in relation to the facade of buildings, and, on the other, her (and, perhaps, others') feelings of dissatisfaction then, it would seem, the type of explanation that we are looking for in aesthetics cannot be a causal one. For – the argument goes – we establish a causal claim by discovering the existence of a relevant constant conjunction while, in the case of an aesthetic explanation, the spectator can know the ground of her response *independently* of establishing whether there is (or is not) a constant conjunction between that ground and her response. Aesthetic explanations, therefore, cannot be implying a causal connection between a spectator's feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction and features of the object.

If this answer is correct, it will also explain why, even in those examples where the expression of the aesthetic reaction already includes what the spectator identifies as the precise object of her feelings, a causal analysis is inappropriate. For although, in such examples, there are, as we saw, two distinguishable features to the aesthetic reaction – the feelings of pleasure or displeasure, on the one hand, and the thought of the object of those feelings, on the other – it will still be the case that the spectator is the final authority on the object of her feelings and, hence, it cannot be that the thought of the object is being conjectured by the spectator as the cause of her feelings.

V

I believe that Wittgenstein has drawn attention to some notable differences between aesthetic explanations and many typical causal ones. At the same time, I am not convinced that his arguments

succeed in showing that aesthetic explanations are not a *species* of causal explanation. For, as we have seen and as Wittgenstein himself acknowledges, in those cases (at least) where the spectator is puzzled as to the specific reason for her aesthetic reaction, that reaction can be expressed separately from her identification of its precise reason (thereby explaining how she can feel satisfied or dissatisfied with an aesthetic object while still wondering why). Moreover, we think of any acceptance by the spectator of certain features as the precise reason for her aesthetic reaction as subject to a familiar form of causal falsification, *viz.* where we point to a parallel instance in which those same features were identified by her as present while the feeling was absent. For example, we question whether, on a given occasion, certain features can really be the reason for a spectator's dissatisfaction with an aesthetic object – even though she identified them as the precise ground – if, on another similar occasion, their identified presence did not dissatisfy her. And this doubt will be reinforced if we can discover another set of features in the present situation that have regularly dissatisfied her on other occasions.

Thus, suppose that a spectator expresses herself dissatisfied with the appearance of a cathedral vault; and, following the suggestion from another, accepts as her specific reason for dissatisfaction 'the star-shaped design of the crossing ribs'. But suppose that there have been earlier occasions where the same, or a very similar, rib design had been observed by her on other church vaults, and she had felt no dissatisfaction at their design. Suppose, too, that on this present occasion the bosses on the vault are highly coloured, and that she had always expressed dissatisfaction at this sort of colouring of bosses (though there had never been a past case where she had experienced vaults of the present rib design with coloured bosses). In this kind of situation, we say things like: 'The feature she identified as the reason for her dissatisfaction – 'the star-shaped rib design' – cannot really be the reason for her dissatisfaction. The real reason probably arises from the vibrant colouring of the roof bosses'. In other words, we proceed here in the same way as we would in any indisputably causal claim, where the production of a parallel negative instance (sometimes together with the discovery of some other factor in the circumstances which, on other occasions, has been regularly accompanied with the same end result), leads us to say that the proffered ground cannot, after all, have been the real reason why the given result occurred in the present instance (and that what was probably responsible for it was the presence of the other discovered factor). It turns out, then, that in locating certain features, under a given description, as the precise reason for a spectator's aesthetic reaction, these features, so identified, are being a hypothesised as an important part of the cause of her feelings.

Despite, therefore, certain marked differences with many typical causal explanations, aesthetic explanations (of the kind Wittgenstein is considering) do make a causal claim. Agreed, the spectator's reason for asserting that *e.g.* it is the door's height that is dissatisfying her need not be *based* on experiments – on consciously noticing a past constant conjunction between, on the one hand, certain door heights in relation to the facades and, on the other, ensuing dissatisfaction – but it does *imply* that the two are constantly conjoined, however that claim may have been originally arrived at. That is why we are prepared to back down in the face of parallel negative instances, with remarks like: 'It can't, after all, be the height of the door that is really dissatisfying me'. Wittgenstein appears to think that it is part of the very analysis of a causal claim that it must be based on the observation of a constant conjunction (see Lecture III Section 11 [quoted above]). But while causal claims are, as a matter of fact, often formulated on such a basis, this is not an essential part of their analysis. What is essential is the implication of a constant conjunction and, thereby, vulnerability to parallel negative instances.

'Hold on', someone might object, 'are you suggesting that a spectator may be mistaken in those cases where she has herself confidently identified, or accepted from another, certain features in the aesthetic object as precisely what she is satisfied or dissatisfied about? Surely, that spectator must be in the best possible position to know what is satisfying or dissatisfying her!'

Of course, we might not always be prepared to back down in the face of a claimed negative instance: if, that is, we honestly believe that our aesthetic tastes have changed since the earlier instance (so that what looks like a parallel negative instance is not, in our opinion, really one). But, on

pain of self-contradiction, we cannot simply refuse to admit the relevance of a prima facie parallel negative example or continue to claim that our tastes have changed if we discover that that earlier example continues to satisfy us, *i.e.*, if we now study it again. In such an eventuality, if we are still inclined to hold onto our original identification, the one remaining course open would be to claim that, despite appearances, the present case is *not* relevantly similar to the earlier one, albeit in some respect that we have not currently spotted. And if that should be correct, it will allow us to hold onto our original position. But it will not call into question the causal implication of our identifications of any precise object of our aesthetic feelings. It will, instead, reinforce the point that even our own strong belief as to what precisely in an aesthetic object is grounding our reaction can be overridden by evidence that shows that our identification is not a significant part of the cause of our feelings.

Nonetheless, it would not be satisfactory to leave the matter there. For while a spectator's claim to have successfully identified the precise object of her aesthetic feeling is vulnerable to parallel negative instances, it would be implausible to contend that locating the cause of a spectator's reaction under *any* description is enough to have located what the spectator herself should acknowledge as its precise object. For (laying aside self-deception) even those features which are the cause of a spectator's feelings cannot be considered their precise object unless the spectator can recognize the description offered of the cause as capturing what is moving her. In sum, while it is necessary that the object of a spectator's feeling must be a significant part of the cause of her response, it is implausible to suggest that it can be sufficient. It is also necessary that the spectator can recognise these features, under the given description, as what is moving her. That, in my opinion, is the important residue of Wittgenstein's claim that the spectator is the final authority on what is the precise object of her aesthetic reaction. Wittgenstein himself took the claim as showing that there is no implication that the precise object of a spectator's aesthetic reaction must be its cause. In reality, what it shows is that before features in the object can be identified as its precise object, it is necessary not only that these features are a significant part of the cause of the spectator's reaction, but that she can, also, *recognize* them, under a given description, as the specific reason for her reaction.

But what if the spectator cannot recognise any description of what would be agreed are the underlying causes making possible her aesthetic reaction? It is undoubtedly conceivable that certain aesthetic devices that are the underlying causes of a spectator's reaction cannot plausibly be taken as part of the precise object of her response. This will be so where these phenomena could not have formed part of that spectator's awareness of the aesthetic object. Such cases are especially prevalent in the more technical arts, like architecture and music. For example, someone may take pleasure at the appearance of a building, marvelling, in particular, at its bold modernist design, yet without having any understanding of how that effect has been made possible. On the other hand, an architect (with a grasp of the method of construction) may also marvel at the building's bold modernist design but recognize that this results from certain ingenious architectural devices. Both spectators, the amateur and the professional, take pleasure in the boldness of the design; but only the professional will be able to recognize that her pleasure arises from the underlying causes and to regard these as forming part of the precise object of her delight. For the amateur, these causes could not form part of her reason for delight at the building, even though they are the underlying causes of what is its precise object (the bold modernist contours of the design). Here, it is true, the underlying aesthetic causes of her enjoyment cannot be said to form even part of the precise object of her delight. But this is not because the precise object is distinct from the cause of her delight. It is, rather, her thought of the boldness of the design alone which acts as the cause as well as the precise object of her delight. The underlying causes making possible that modernist design play no part in the object of her aesthetic pleasure as they do for the professional.

In conclusion, I have argued that although a spectator can reasonably rule out suggestions as to how an object of her aesthetic reaction is to be described, she cannot reasonably affirm that certain features are the object of her reaction if they can be shown not to be a significant part of its cause. For,

as we have seen, the claim to have located the object of an aesthetic reaction carries a causal implication. Indeed, if it did not, the claim to have identified the object would mean nothing more than the spectator's thought of the object and her feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction just *happened* to be experienced at the same time – and not that her feelings were grounded in, or were a response to, her consciousness of that object.[10]

VI

So far, I have been discussing the explanations that our expressions of what Wittgenstein calls 'aesthetic reactions' give rise to. How is this related to the question of aesthetic value? Granting that a chief aim of an art critic is to tell us what *ought* aesthetically to move us (and why), how can answering a given person's puzzlement as to why *in fact* a given aesthetic object is satisfying or dissatisfying her be relevant to aesthetic value? Of course, by itself, it cannot be. At the same time, it does seem right to hold that, in seeking to appraise an aesthetic object, one of an art critic's central tasks is the identification of those features in the object that are the specific reasons for her *own* considered reaction to it. And, given the argument above that the claimed object of an aesthetic reaction carries a causal implication, such an identification by the art critic must equally carry the implication that these features are the cause, or an important part of the cause, of her response. Further, on the assumption that the critic is what Hume calls a 'true judge', it follows that in locating these reasons for her own directed reaction, she will be locating the specific features - or, at least, some of those features - which *ought*, correspondingly, to ground any spectator's aesthetic reaction to the given object insofar as it can be a warranted one.

This evaluative consequence results from Hume's analysis of a 'true judge'. On that analysis, a true judge or critic is someone who, in studying an aesthetic object, is able both to feel very fully its effects upon her and, correspondingly, to identify those features which are, as she supposes, the reasons for her reaction. Indeed, it is just the joint verdict of the true judges' identifications that initially determines what are to *count* as the aesthetic value features, the beauties and the deformities, of an object - and, thereby, the detailed reasons for a *justifiable* aesthetic reaction. For, Hume argues, the qualities of a true judge – especially, 'delicacy of taste' and 'good sense' – are those which we acknowledge to be requisite as well as desirable for making justified aesthetic appraisals[11].

However, if it were discovered that these features, as the true judges identified them, were not, after all, the *cause* of their own directed responses, they must cease to be regarded as the beauties or deformities of the object. They must cease to be so regarded because, as we have noted, it is necessary that they should be an important part of the cause of the true judges' aesthetic reactions.

Both in his *Lectures on Aesthetics* and his earlier *Cambridge Lectures 1930-33*, Wittgenstein is sensitive to the existence of standards or rules for making a justified aesthetic judgment. And he accepts that there will be a causal story as to how or why these rules were *originally* laid down. Speaking, in particular, about music (although it is clear he thinks analogous considerations go for the other arts), he says: 'The rules of harmony you can say expressed the way people wanted chords to follow – their wishes crystallised in these rules. [But it is just a fact that people have laid down such and such rules. We say "people" but in fact it was a particular class…When we say "people" these were *some* people. – R]' (Lecture I, Section 16)[12]. Crucially, however, he does not accept that, in our evaluative aesthetic reactions, we are implying that the features that fall under these rules (in the case of justified aesthetic satisfaction) or that fail to do so (in the case of justified aesthetic dissatisfaction) are being hypothesised by us as the cause of our feelings. Whether he is concerned with merely seeking an explanation for a spectator's own puzzlement about why an aesthetic object is moving her or seeking to locate what, in an aesthetic object, would be an evaluative justification for a given aesthetic reaction, Wittgenstein denies that the reaction itself carries a causal implication. But, as I have sought to show, in neither case can this denial be sustained - with the consequence that what

features, and so what rules, can ground a correct evaluative claim must be the cause, or an important part of the cause, of a true critic's aesthetic response.

It transpires, then, that Hume's claim that an object's beauties or deformities must be the cause of a true judge's feelings can be defended against Wittgenstein's objection that aesthetic reactions do not carry, or importantly carry, a causal implication. Contrary to this objection, I have argued that the true judge's identification of certain features as the specific ground of her aesthetic reaction is partly a causal hypothesis. In fact, the very conception of what is aesthetically valuable depends, in part, on this causal implication. That is why, as Hume claims, we should *alter* our view of what features count as the beauties or deformities of an object, if those features, so denominated, were found not to be the cause of the true judges' reactions.

VII

Nonetheless, it must not be forgotten that locating those features of objects that are the causes of our aesthetic reactions will not be enough to solve aesthetic puzzlements. As Wittgenstein has shown, what is also required is a description (or other mode of expression) that the spectator can herself recognize as a *fitting* one. It is unclear to what extent Hume, and contemporary thinkers who support Hume's position, have grasped the significance of discovering descriptions of the object that satisfy the spectator. In the matter of aesthetic appreciation, finding the right mode of *describing*, of *identifying*, the cause – *viz.* one that satisfies the spectator – is as significant as finding the cause itself. At one place, Wittgenstein remarks that aesthetic reasons should not be thought of as the cause of a spectator's reaction, but as offering 'further descriptions' of the aesthetic object[13].

I have argued, contra Wittgenstein, that aesthetic reasons should be understood as implying that they are the cause, or an important part of the cause, of the spectator's reaction; but I have also argued that he is quite correct to insist that it is the way of describing and, hence, of experiencing these reasons that can bring home to the spectator why the object is satisfying or dissatisfying her.

When it comes to providing reasons for *evaluating* an aesthetic object, parallel points apply. While these reasons must be an important part of the cause of a true judge's directed feeling, it is also necessary that they can be identified in such a way that she is able to recognize them as the ground, or part of the ground, of her directed response. Reasons that justify an aesthetic evaluation must be more than a cause in the object of a true judge's aesthetic reaction; they must, as so identified, convince her that they elucidate the detailed grounds of her satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

Although Wittgenstein was mistaken to claim that aesthetic explanations are a species of causal explanation, he has, in the process of this very denial, succeeded in bringing out two key features of aesthetic appreciation. First, he has convincingly shown that aesthetic reactions are a form of directed feeling or emotion. They are not to be characterised as mere pleasant or unpleasant sensations. An aesthetic reaction involves the thought of the object in its very occurrence - with the feelings suffusing the thought, not as merely accompanying it in the way a bodily sensation is found to be associated with its physical cause. Second, by stressing that aesthetic explanations and justifications require the acceptance of the relevant spectators, Wittgenstein has highlighted the central role that is played by the way in which the causal properties of the object are identified. Let us acknowledge that the detailed reasons for our aesthetic feelings must be their causes; but let us not forget that it is how these causes are described and experienced that truly enriches our aesthetic appreciation.

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Notes

[1] Ludwig Wittgenstein *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*, edited by Cyril Barrett (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966). The *Lectures on Aesthetics* took place in 1938. G. E. Moore made notes on an earlier, more wide-ranging, series of lectures by Wittgenstein; these were given between 1930 and 1933 and included some dealing with aesthetics. See *Wittgenstein: Lectures, Cambridge 1930-3*, edited by David G. Stern, Brian Rogers, and Gabriel Citron (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016). The lectures in this series that were delivered in May Term 1933 also discuss questions concerning reasons and causes in aesthetics. But they do not explicitly discuss what Wittgenstein later called 'aesthetic reactions' (to which, with respect to aesthetics, he was inclined to assign supreme importance). However, where these 1933 lectures seem to me to illustrate or enforce Wittgenstein's later claims about aesthetic reactions, they are noted in the following pages.

[2] David Hume 'Of the Standard of Taste' in *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary*, edited by Eugene F. Miller (Indianopolis: Liberty Classics, 1987), 226-249.

[3] Hume *op. cit*. 232.

[4] C.f. *Wittgenstein: Lectures, Cambridge 1930-33*: 'In Aesthetic investigations the one thing we are not interested in is causal connections; whereas the one thing we are interested in Psychology is causal connections' (May Term 1933 – Lecture 5a (9:22-23)).

[5] For an incisive investigation into the relationship between objects and causes of feelings, see D. F. Pears 'Causes and Objects of some Feelings and Psychological Reactions' in *Philosophy of Mind*, edited by Stuart Hampshire (New York: Harper & Row 1966), 143-169. I am indebted to this paper.

[6] C.f. *Wittgenstein: Lectures, Cambridge 1930-33* (May Term 1933 – Lecture 4b (9:14). See also the editors' informative footnote to this passage.

[7] In fairness to Hume, it should be noted that he does distinguish between those feelings arising from 'the bodily senses' (as with the pleasant or unpleasant tastes of food) and those feelings where 'the mind operates alone' (leading *e.g.* to the sentiments of beauty or deformity). But it is not clear he thinks this distinction might give rise to any difference in respect to causation. See his essay 'The Sceptic' *op. cit.* 162-166.

[8] Analogous considerations apply when we seek to solve our aesthetic puzzlements by what Wittgenstein calls 'peculiar kinds of comparison' (Lecture III, Section 9; see also Lecture IV, Section II) *between* the object arousing our puzzlement and other objects where the aesthetic character of the puzzling objects is more evident. The arguments designed to prove that aesthetic reactions carry a causal implication will equally apply (or fail to apply) to both methods for solving aesthetic puzzlements. But partly for ease of exposition and partly because Wittgenstein himself concentrates on those cases where we solve our puzzlements by means of more detailed descriptions of the given aesthetic object, I will confine the ensuing discussion to these cases.

[9] C.f. *Wittgenstein: Lectures, Cambridge 1930-1933*: 'Criterion of correctness of an aesthetic analysis must be agreement of person to whom I make it' (May Term 1933 - Lecture 7 (9:46)).

[10] C. f. Pears, *op. cit.* 160.

[11] See Hume, *op. cit.* especially 234-241 for his discussion of 'delicacy of taste [or imagination]', 'good [or strong] sense', and a 'true judge'.

[12] See also *Wittgenstein: Lectures, Cambridge 1930-33*: Lecture 5a and Lecture 6a, especially 9:34.

[13] See *Wittgenstein: Lectures, Cambridge 1930-1933* (May Term 1933 – Lecture 6a (9:31)).