A Beautiful Piece of Property: Toward a New Definition of Aesthetic Properties

I. PREAMBLE, AND THE VALUIST'S DEFINITION

Assume for the purposes of this paper that aesthetic realism is true—that statements about the presence or absence of aesthetic properties (properties such as elegance, grace, balance, ugliness, and gaudiness that are ascribed when we regard objects or events from an aesthetic point of view) are cognitive, i.e., express propositions that take truth- values. Accordingly, make a related, externalist assumption about aesthetic judgments. Assume that "something about the object is the truth-maker of such judgments: [that] the object has properties in virtue of which what is said about it holds or fails to hold." Finally, take it for granted that there are such things as properties, or take "property" to refer to some uncontroversially existent property-like kind of thing.²

If aesthetic realism is true, it is desirable for us to have a principled means of distinguishing aesthetic properties from nonaesthetic properties. To this end, in two recent articles Rafael DeClercq advances the following definition:³

DEFINITION 1:

For all properties P, P is an aesthetic property iff

- (1) P is, at least in part, a value property.
- (2) For any visual object O, perceiving that O has P involves perceiving the shape and colors of O but not vice versa.

First, a note on the scope of DEFINITION 1: as it stands, this is a definition solely of visual aesthetic properties—it excludes such properties as the somberness of the second movement of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony and the fruity complexity of an Argentine *pinot noir*. But it would be easy to generalize DEFINITION 1 so that it extended to the other sense modalities. Broadening DEFINITION 1 so as to accommodate gustatory aesthetic properties, for instance, would involve selecting appropriate terms to fulfill the roles that the words "shape" and "color" fulfill in DEFINITION 1. This list of structural properties (DeClercq calls them "basic visual features") might be longer and more disjunctive for a definition of gustatory aesthetic properties (sourness or sweetness or saltiness) than it is for visual aesthetic properties, but the basic definitional strategy would be the same. For this reason, we can take DEFINITION 1 to be a stand-in for a definition of aesthetic properties in general. We could call the advocate of definitions that follow the template of DEFINITION 1 an "aesthetic valuist," and her position "aesthetic valuism."

Many philosophers, such as Frank Sibley and Jerrold Levinson, reject aesthetic valuism out of hand, denying that there is an ineradicable evaluative component to aesthetic judgments. Levinson maintains that the evaluative and descriptive elements of an aesthetic judgment are conceptually separable and that it is the latter which are distinctly aesthetic. Even if there were some core of evaluativity to the property of, e.g., gaudiness, thinks Levinson, "there would still remain a purely descriptive, but distinctively aesthetic, content in such attributions, consisting in an emergent, holistic impression...which impression, or look, cannot be identified with the set of structural properties underlying it." Call this stance "anti-valuism." One way to go about resolving the debate between valuism and antivaluism is to give arguments for and against one or the other. (I think that there are many forceful ones to be made against valuism and in favor of antivaluism.) A different, more oblique strategy is to formulate a definition of aesthetic properties that is consistent with antivaluism, and to observe how well it serves us in comparison with the valuist's definition. It is this latter strategy that I shall adopt in this short paper. The fruit of my labor, if fruit it bears, will be an analysis of aesthetic properties that is likely to be more perspicuous than the valuist's, for no one will be able to accuse me of attempting to solve the mystery of aesthetic properties by supplanting it with the even obscurer mystery of value. If we can come up with a workable definition of aesthetic properties that doesn't require us to develop and deploy a sophisticated understanding of value, let's do it: value is a forbiddingly complex thing, and, as Sun Tzu counseled would-be generals in The Art of War, "The rule is, not to besiege walled cities if it can possibly be avoided."9

II. A NEW DEFINITION

This is the definition I propose:

DEFINITION 2

For all properties P, P is an aesthetic property iff

- (1) P is a perceptual property.
- (2) For any two objects A and B, sharing P does not necessarily make for a perceptual resemblance between A and B.

Here is an example of how an aesthetic property matches this new definition. Elegance is a prototypical aesthetic property (it is Sibley's preferred exemplar of this class) that we observe in paintings and other art objects. We see their elegance much as we see their flatness or their greenness or their squareness. And, notably, two paintings can both possess the property of elegance but fail to perceptually resemble one another, in the sense of perceptual resemblance that I favor.

This definition succeeds in specifying wholly nonaesthetic necessary and sufficient conditions for a property to be being considered aesthetic. But it still contains several potential conceptual or definitional pitfalls: the terms "perceptual property," "resemblance," and "perceptual resemblance." Although the conditions of satisfaction for these terms are assuredly less controversial than those for the term "aesthetic" (or, for that matter, the term "value property"), some explication is in order.

1. The pre-theoretical notion of perceptual properties is as follows: perceptual properties are properties we perceive immediately by seeing, smelling, tasting, touching, or hearing an object. In other words, perceptual properties are apparent to us in sensation, and the process by which we

become familiar with them is noninferential. Levinson has used the phrase "ways of appearing" to name these kinds of properties, and glosses them thus: "Ways of appearing are a subclass of being. Alternatively, since appearing is a mode of being, a way of appearing is a way of being. The ways things standardly *appear* are in effect a part of how they *are*. Ways of appearing are roughly equivalent to what others call *manifest* properties, meaning properties that reveal their natures in and through their appearances." If, as Levinson elsewhere suggests, ways of being furnish us with answers to the basic interrogative thought "How is it?" then ways of appearing can be understood to furnish us with answers to a further, narrower question: "How is it *in respect of its looks* (its taste, its smell, etc.)?" We know which properties are perceptual by which gaps in our knowledge about an object they fill in and by which of our sensory capacities they address themselves to. This somewhat cursory characterization suffices for the purpose of getting DEFINITION 2 to do the work it is intended to do (i.e., specifying the conditions for the correct classificatory use of the term "aesthetic property").

There will, as a matter of course, be some examples that seem marginal or uncertain—is kindness a perceptual property because I can see it in my grandmother's face? I don't think I infer that she has a kind face on the basis of other of her objective physiognomic features, such as the color of her cheeks or the circumference of her irises. Her kindness is manifest and open to perception; her face has a kind way of appearing. My own preference is to say that kindness does qualify as a perceptual property of faces. As a rough and ready definition, let's say that if one can see (or hear, etc.) something as having X, X is a perceptual property. So redness is a perceptual property, and kindness can be a perceptual property; but the numerical property of being twice the square root of two isn't a perceptual property (abstract objects like numbers can't be perceived and presumably their properties inherit this aperceptual status¹¹), nor is the property of having a larger Gross Domestic Product than Belgium's, nor is the property of being blue when someone is looking and green when nobody is looking. 12 This may mean that, as a matter of contingent psychological fact, a single property may be perceptual for one person and not another, or perceptual for a single person at some times but not other times, since perceptual abilities can vary over time and across individuals. I'm not sure if this is counterintuitive, because I have no intuitions about whether properties are supposed to be essentially and eternally perceptual or aperceptual. But I doubt that this way of thinking will get us into much trouble at the moment, and if it does, we could always patch things up by saying that a property is perceptual (essentially and eternally) if there is at least one person to whom it is manifest perceptually, or something of that sort.13

- 2. Resemblance *simpliciter* amounts to sheer property sharing. On this bare-bones view of resemblance, all spatiotemporally situated objects stand in at least some sort of minimal resemblance relationship with all others—a view Nelson Goodman espouses, although Goodman has nominalist leanings and hence a generally low opinion of properties as such. ¹⁴ In this sense resemblance is a kind of transcendent, though relational, property. If our universe of discourse has at least two (concrete) things, everything (concrete) will resemble everything else. All things, it has been said, are connected in the Great Chain of Being (the *scala naturae*), ¹⁵ and there is something to this: all concrete objects, for example, share the property of being located at some distance from the sun. (I leave out of consideration, because it seems irrelevant to my modest, this-worldly goals, the modal realist's theory of possible objects, which allows that objects may be spatiotemporally located at their own worlds, yet stand in no spatial relation to our sun.)
- 3. Owing to contingent facts about how we as organisms are constructed, mentally and physically, some dimensions of resemblance are important to us and others are not. Perceptual resemblances are of special importance and salience, and are what we usually refer to when we talk of objects resembling each other. Each of us is fundamentally a perceiver and not solely a

pure thought thinking itself, 16 and perceptual resemblances are resemblances that we are configured to notice as we negotiate the world of sensible things. We report perceptual resemblances when we say things like "Billy is the spitting image of his father" or "crocodiles look a lot like alligators." The concept is once again easily grasped intuitively: we all know what it is for things to look alike (sound alike, etc.). And it isn't difficult to come up with ways of empirically gauging the extent to which perceptual resemblance is present as a feature of percipients' conscious experiences, such as measuring discrimination errors (the more two objects resemble one another perceptually, the more errors people will make in discriminating them) or measuring discrimination reaction time (the more two objects resemble one another perceptually, the longer it takes to tell them apart). But significant discrimination errors and above-average discrimination times are not necessary conditions for the presence of perceptual resemblance. Things can look a lot alike without being in the least bit confusable, and they can look a lot alike even though they are instantaneously discriminable (a G.I. Joe figurine and a real soldier, for instance). Further, it is important to bear in mind that perceptual resemblance does not, contrary to the dictates of common sense, reduce to the sharing of perceptual properties. The holding in common of certain ways of appearing, such as redness, necessarily promotes perceptual resemblance between objects, while the holding in common of certain others, such as elegance, does not.

III. FURTHER THOUGHTS ON PERCEPTUAL RESEMBLANCE

If this last point seems dubious, consider this situation. Richard is describing to me his house, which I have never before seen. My objective is to visualize something that resembles his actual house with as much fidelity as my imaginative powers allow, by allowing his truthful description to guide the construction of my mental image. Will I find it useful at all if Richard tells me that his house is elegant? What exactly am I supposed to visualize when he tells me this? I suppose I might rule out certain appearances, probably even a very great number of them: his house does not look like a dilapidated mobile home, or like the Addams Family residence, or like a ten-story statue of Elvis. But his testimony about the elegance of his house does not in the least help my visualized house to accrue imagined properties (other than negative ones such as not being an Elvis statue). Even if Richard were feeling tight-lipped, and told me only that his house is red or only that it has four windows, this would at least be a step in the right direction: I know how to fill out my imaginary visual field in the right way so that I am (imaginatively) "appeared to" redly or four-windowedly, as Chisholm would put it. 17 But I haven't the faintest idea, and neither do you, of how to do with elegance what I did with red and four-windowed. At best, I could call to mind a particular elegant house I have seen in the past. But this isn't what I set out to do at all: I wanted to visualize a novel house that bore a strong resemblance to Richard's.

Here is a hypothesis about why elegance, unlike redness or four-windowedness, places me at an imaginative impasse and fails to further my project of visualizing a house that resembles Richard's: elegance doesn't reliably program for a specifiable set of lower-order perceptual properties, what we might call line-and-shape-and-color properties. Elegance supervenes on a painting's lines and shapes, but we can't spell out beforehand what untested configurations of lines and shapes would have to be like in order for them to be productive of elegance. Although he didn't have the notion of supervenience at his disposal, Sibley was familiar with this fact. He conjectured that "There is no one set, no group of sets of logically sufficient conditions, no 'defeasible' sets, and no wholly non-aesthetic descriptions which logically entail a certain aesthetic character or in virtue of which to deny such a character would be a linguistic error.... No nonaesthetic conditions or descriptions logically require the application, though some may require

the rejection, of an aesthetic term." ¹⁸ If this is right, it is obvious why I was flummoxed when told only that Richard's house is elegant: "elegant," unlike "red" and "four-windowed," doesn't tell me anything about how the house must look, because there is no way at all that elegant houses must look, other than elegant, *tout court*.

Those properties that I can build into my imagined house in order to make it look like Richard's house, properties like redness and four-windowedness, are, it stands to reason, the selfsame properties on account of which an actual house and Richard's house could be seen to resemble one another. Let's then say that property X is relevant to perceptual resemblance iff the knowledge that Y has X aids me in precisifying a mental image of Y (again I'll qualify this by stipulating that we ignore the negative sense of precisification in which my mental image of Y is made more precise when certain imaginings, such as that of the Elvis statue, are ruled out). Let's call these properties look-alike properties. This thought experiment helps us to see that there really are two species of perceptual property here—look-alike and non-look-alike—and that they are importantly different. And this way of thinking furnishes us with a notion of perceptual resemblance that allows that objects may share non-look-alike perceptual properties, such as elegance, and perhaps even share an infinite number of them, without thereby coming to perceptually resemble one another, in the favored sense of perceptual resemblance.

I want to make one more pass at explaining this idea, in case it still strikes the mind as odd. The thought is this: when two objects are both red, "redness" names, among other things, a way in which the experience of seeing one is subjectively akin to the experience of seeing the other. Connected with this is the idea that if object A is red and object B is blue, and I change object B's color to red, this alteration cannot fail to make object B look more like object A to a normal observer (I'm relying here on an intuitive understanding of higher and lower degrees of perceptual resemblance). But elegance is not like this: if A is elegant and B is not, and I perform some alteration to B so that it acquires elegance, it does not follow that B now looks more like A, in the sense of being less confusable, or more discriminable, or of having sets of look-alike properties that overlap more substantially. Maybe it will, maybe it won't. I conclude that when two paintings are elegant, "elegance" does not name a way in which they perceptually resemble one another. An example helps to underscore this point. Suppose an art-school student paints a study of Titian's Danae. Titian's original possesses (let's agree) the aesthetic property of torpor. The student's copy is less than fully faithful to the original and doesn't manage to capture its torpor—it wholly lacks that aesthetic property—but nevertheless resembles the original to a considerable extent. It has a dog, Danae, a nursemaid, and a shower of gold, all in their appointed places and correct proportions and suchlike. I claim that it is at least in principle possible for the art student to make changes to her copy that would endow it with torpor but which would diminish its perceptual resemblance to the original. Maybe she softens and blurs the lines of her painting so that it takes on a van Gogh-like haze, and it gains torpor along the way. But this change brings it out of perceptual resemblance with Danae, whose lines are not at all blurry in that way. Now, it may be the case that, ceteris paribus, torpid objects will have a tendency to resemble one another. I expect this is so. But, as the example shows, shared torpor does not have to foster perceptual resemblance. So, by DEFINITION 2, torpor is an aesthetic property. Objects that are torpid are not, ipso facto, objects that look alike.

IV. PREEMPTING A COUPLE OF OBJECTIONS

I am partial to DEFINITION 2 because I find no counterexamples to it. It captures all the archetypal aesthetic properties: the properties of being unified, balanced, integrated, lifeless, serene, somber,

dynamic, powerful, vivid, delicate, moving, trite, sentimental, and tragic, ¹⁹ all may be seen in paintings (or heard in compositions, etc.), but none of them necessarily fosters perceptual resemblance.

A question worth considering is whether DEFINITION 2 is just equivalent to the second clause of the definiens of DEFINITION 1. DEFINITION 3 below isolates this clause and uses it as a self-standing definition:

DEFINITION 3

For all properties P, P is an aesthetic property iff

(1) For any visual object O, perceiving that O has P involves perceiving the shape and colors of O but not vice versa.

For the sake of comparison, here is DEFINITION 2 again:

DEFINITION 2

For all properties P, P is an aesthetic property iff

- (1) P is a perceptual property.
- (2) For any two objects A and B, sharing P does not necessarily make for a perceptual resemblance between A and B.

Are DEFINITION 2 and DEFINITION 3 just paraphrases of one another? Or are they perhaps intensionally distinct but (in our world) coextensive? The collections of properties that DEFINITION 2 and DEFINITION 3 pick out do converge considerably, but I don't think they are identical. One key difference lies in how representational and resemblance properties fare. Seeing a representational property R of a painting P involves seeing P's shapes and colors, but seeing P's shapes and colors does not have to involve seeing R (think of the famous duck-rabbit picture discussed by Wittgenstein in the *Philosophical Investigations*: I may miss the duck or the rabbit, or even both, though I see the lines). This means that all representational properties are aesthetic properties according to DEFINITION 3. DEFINITION 2 is not so lax, and here is why. It is perfectly reasonable to think that some representational properties foster resemblances of necessity while others do not. Suppose two paintings both represent a five-inch-by-five-inch, two-dimensional, candy-apple-red square in front of a white background (we might wish to include perspectival considerations as well, such as: seen by a normal observer, head on, in normal light, without distortion, from a specified vantage point, at a given distance, and so forth). I doubt that this representational correspondence can do aught but promote seeing a perceptual resemblance between these paintings. Seeing that painting A has this long, conjunctive, highly deterministic representational property is not going to aid me in telling it from painting B, because the property in question is a look-alike property. I surmise that the same holds true even for some representational properties that are less deterministic than the red square property, such as looking like a realistic photograph of Ronald Reagan. If this is a look-alike property, DEFINITION 2 will instruct us to withhold the honorific "aesthetic" from it (which, incidentally, seems acceptable to me and is certainly in line with Sibley's opinions). On the other end of the spectrum, if two paintings subtly evoke or seem to exhibit the influence of Goya's Saturn Devouring his Son (this would be a kind of resemblance property), it needn't be the case that these two paintings resemble one another as a consequence of that shared property.²⁰ The paintings share the property of subtly evoking the Goya work, but in each case this higher-order, non-look-alike perceptual property programs for the instantiation of lower-order perceptual properties on account of which the paintings visibly differ. One and the same perceptual property supervenes on two very dissimilar sets of structural properties, structural properties which are under no logical compulsion to support discrimination-inhibiting perceptual resemblances. This is akin to how glass and eggshells may both share the property of being fragile, though this fragility is manifested differently at a microstructural level. Elegant things don't have to look alike, just as fragile things, like glass and eggshells, don't have to have the same molecular makeups.

If all this is correct, DEFINITION 2 will classify resembling a red square as nonaesthetic and classify subtly evoking Goya's *Saturn Devouring his Son* as aesthetic. This is a good result, for it is intuitively plausible that some representation and resemblance qualities are aesthetic inasmuch as ascribing them demands superior sensitivity, wide knowledge, diverse experience of many artworks, cultivated discernment, and so forth—the qualities boasted by Hume's true judges. Surely some or all of these extraordinary capabilities—excellences of taste—are required to discern the subtle resemblance to *Saturn Devouring his Son*, and none whatsoever are required to notice that two paintings depict red squares.

Here the valuist may scoff: "Doesn't this mean that the kindness of my grandmother's face is aesthetic? The kindness is seen, and kind faces don't necessarily perceptually resemble one another, in the sense of perceptual resemblance that you adopt, on account of being kind." My answer is an unashamed "Yes!" The processes whereby we come to ascribe kindness to a face and elegance to a painting have much in common, phenomenologically and also, I'll wager, cognitively, and I welcome philosophical conclusions to the effect that some of our seemingly unremarkable manipulation and employment of everyday concepts, such as kindness, sometimes has an aesthetic complexion that we weren't sensible of, and that we can be brought to notice and appreciate. "Ok," sneers the valuist again (she doesn't value manners as much as she should), though now with waning confidence, "If elegance is always uniquely realized, and never programs for identical structural properties, except in the trivial case of visually indistinguishable objects, and if aesthetic properties don't necessarily foster perceptual resemblances, then there is no way of appearing, legitimately so-called, that is held constant and is reidentifiable across visual experiences, and that should be thus identified with an aesthetic property; there is instead, only the sui generis look of each painting. If we are to have a language equipped with aesthetic predicates at all—and probably we shouldn't—it will be a Lagodonian language, one in which each aesthetic predicate corresponds to one and only one object, and in that case it is malarky to speak of multiply realizable universals, or whatever your aesthetic properties are supposed to be."

I might be bothered by this for a moment, before deciding that it is silly to deny that speakers competently use words like "elegant" to label nonidentical objects and events (the valuist denied this, presumably, on the grounds that a predicate cannot be both uniquely realizable and at the same time sharable by nonidenticals). Why suppose that everyone is so deluded, and that their aesthetic conversations are so much empty verbiage? All this attitude adds up to is a brand of skepticism about aesthetic properties, and as such it is no embarrassment to a definition that takes their existence for granted. If the valuist is to be in the business of defining aesthetic properties at all (and it was she who got us into this business in the first place!), she should accept that something awaits clear defining, that we are talking about something when we say that two different pieces of music are both reposeful, or galant, or precious, or whatever, and that something grounds our inclination to assent to or dissent from such claims. If the valuist now wishes to refashion herself as a deflationist or sell us some manner of error theory, she is going to have to explain why we should want to be in the market for an error theory to begin with. Aesthetic predicates, and the aesthetic properties they name, are entrenched items of a tried-andtrue discourse concerning art, and nature, and the human form—indeed, concerning just about any esteemable thing at all—and it would take quite a sales pitch to get us to trade them in for either a barren ontology from which they are rudely excised—Quine's "desert landscape" or for the cumbersome dialect of the Lagodonians. So I simply dismiss, rather than counter, the valuist's last objection.

V. CONCLUSION

It is time to reflect on what DEFINITION 2 teaches us. Does it pinpoint a possible ingress into a more thoroughgoing conceptual analysis of the aesthetic? Have we discovered a way in which the aesthetic is reducible? This essay has little to offer in the way of conclusive answers to these questions. Much hinges on whether we think aestheticness is a primitive, nonnatural property or not. If it isn't primitive, then it might be right to say that DEFINITION 2 breaks down the complex concept of an aesthetic property into its simpler parts and in that way gives necessary and sufficient conditions for the application of the concept. If contrariwise we do take the aesthetic properties to be among "those innumerable objects of thought which are themselves incapable of definition, because they are the ultimate terms of reference to which whatever is capable of definition must be defined."²² then DEFINITION 2 should not be taken as a conceptual analysis but as a contingent claim, subject to revision, about what kinds of attributes the aesthetic properties we know of, and have so far encountered, in fact possess—to wit, the ability to be shared by objects without necessarily causing the objects to perceptually resemble one another. I suspect that the latter alternative is preferable, but I haven't made up my mind. On the one hand, it seems odd to suppose that what "aesthetic" means has fundamentally to do with property sharing and resemblance. And the proposition expressed by the sentence "the aesthetic property was shareable sans the necessary promotion of perceptual resemblance" doesn't have the ring of analyticity to it, to my ear. But on the other hand, it isn't obvious that something essential is lost when we transition from "aesthetic" to "shareable without necessary resemblance" the way something is lost when we move from "good" to "all and only pleasure." Or, at least, whatever loss there is appears to be less ruinous in the former case than in the latter. I leave it as an open question, since I haven't yet settled it to my own satisfaction, whether Moore's Open Question Argument works as effectively against my definition as it works against analytical naturalism in ethics.²³

Analytical naturalism loses grip on the very normativity it sets out to account for, and so is susceptible to Moorean open questioning. Is there something analogous that DEFINITION 2 relinquishes such that it would likewise be vulnerable to Moorean cross-examination? I suspect not, but this is probably just question begging: my view is that DEFINITION 2 does not make any such concessions because aestheticness is fundamentally non-axiological in the first place (though it finds a welcoming home in normative discourse); but this of course is among the prior convictions that the definition was designed to be responsive to.

Is there a way out of this tangle? Perhaps the wisest thing to do (or, maybe, the most cowardly—though these are not contraries) is to profess indifference or agnosticism about whether DEFINITION 2 gives an account of what it is to be analytically equivalent to an aesthetic property. Who cares? Who knows? This may seem like a *volte-face*, given the disputatious tone and analytic aspirations of this essay so far. But there is no penalty for bracketing the conceptual analysis question and focusing instead on the assets of DEFINITION 2. Full-blooded conceptual analysis or not, DEFINITION 2 is intrinsically interesting in that it maps out a special kind of property that seems germane to distinctively aesthetic concerns (whether or not we think DEFINITION 2 fully captures, or care if it fully captures, the concept that corresponds absolutely to what we mean when we say "aesthetic property"). And it is also potentially useful as a heuristic for testing, albeit provisionally and defeasibly, whether the properties we encounter in our art-critical doings are to be nominated as candidates for aesthetic consideration or not, when our

intuitions on this point are confused or inconclusive.

Even if you have a feeling that DEFINITION 2 doesn't get things exactly right or tell the whole story—that is, even if you reject it as a definitive conceptual analysis—you should still acknowledge that the definition does a lot of important theoretical work. The same, admittedly, could be said for DEFINITION 1: it helps us think more rigorously about a certain kind of property. This is not to advocate shoulder-shrugging relativism about these definitions, though. They can do a better or worse job at throwing light on some heretofore shadowy conceptual terrain, or practice, or sentiment, or institution, or whatever. DEFINTION 2's illumination is much brighter than DEFINITION 1's, and this paper has given arguments for why this is the right way to think. But analysts can forswear the goal of perfect matching between word and concept, or between concept and analysis (a goal which may be chimerical anyhow, in a Meno's paradox kind of way, given that we have only a inchoate idea of what it is that we are trying to match with in the first place), and substitute for it the goal of merely heightening the resolution of our mental picture of the categories we use to carve up the world. DEFINITION 2 meets this benchmark. Consider, for example, how it helps to elucidate the centrality of the ideal of "unity within diversity" or "unity of the manifold" to aesthetic objects and experiences by showing that much aesthetic judgment is a special kind unifying perceptual activity, one of whose purpose is to identify sensuous commonalities—shared aesthetic properties—between manifold objects; indeed, between radically manifold objects, objects that don't (or don't have to) appear at all alike.

That such a circumstance is not paradoxical, that objects may share perceptual features without thereby being brought into perceptual resemblances with one another, is one of the central contentions of this paper. This conclusion seems to be in sympathy with Kant's (and others') notion that beauty, and perhaps by extension, other aesthetic properties, is nonconceptual in the sense that we do not possess "a rule—articulable into marks—by which we could prove an object to be beautiful." That we don't possess such a rule, and indeed will not be taught one by further and wider experience or more and more careful empirical inquiry, is owing at least in part to the fact that we cannot carefully scrutinize a sample of beautiful things and discern that they really all do look (sound, taste, etc.) alike in a systematic and specifiable way, for perceptual resemblance is not entailed by the sharing of aesthetic properties. This is not to be understood as a claim about the fallibility of our perceptual apparatus but instead as a claim about the nature of this distinguished breed of property, a claim which DEFINITION 2 helps bring into sharper focus.

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¹ Eddy Zemach, "Aesthetic Properties, Aesthetic Laws, and Aesthetic Principles," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 46, no. 1 (Autumn 1987), 67.

² For a recent criticism of aesthetic realism, see Derek Matravers, "Aesthetic Properties," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplement 79* (2005), 191-210. Matravers eschews property talk and attacks aesthetic realism on the grounds that (1) it cannot accommodate our intuitions about aesthetic autonomy and (2) it is ontologically unparsimonious insofar as aesthetic responses can be completely accounted for without recourse to an explanatorily redundant layer of aesthetic properties.

³ Rafael DeClercq, "Aesthetic Terms, Metaphor, and the Nature of Aesthetic Properties," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 63, no. 1 (Winter 2005), 27-32; and "The Concept of an Aesthetic Property," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 60, no. 2 (Spring 2002), 167-76.

⁴ DeClercq's rationale for the limited scope of his definition is that "if the applicability of aesthetic terms is never restricted to a particular category of objects then *a fortiori* it is never restricted to a category of nonvisual objects; if the applicability of aesthetic terms is never restricted to a category of nonvisual objects, then all aesthetic terms are applicable to visual objects" (DeClercq, "Aesthetic Terms," 27). This is incorrect. The applicability of aesthetic terms in general may not be restricted to nonvisual objects, but particular aesthetic terms may still not apply to any visual object, with the consequence that not all aesthetic terms are applicable to visual objects. Here is an argument that runs parallel to DeClercq's but is more obviously invalid: if the applicability of adjectives beginning with the letter *M* is never restricted to a category of non-bachelors (clearly this premise is true: bachelors can be "male," "muscular," and "manic"), then all adjectives beginning with *M* are applicable to bachelors. But "married" is an obvious counterexample to this conclusion.

⁵Shape and color probably don't exhaust the structural properties that should be included in such a list for paintings. Does a canvas with a completely black corner that shades into complete whiteness in the opposite corner have shapes and colors? If not, we need to know which structural properties we must attend to in order to perceive the canvas's aesthetic properties.

⁶ It is difficult to see how literary aesthetic properties could be captured by any rejiggering of the basic structural properties, since the literary aesthetic properties probably aren't perceptual properties at all. Regrettably, my new definition will not do any better than DEFINITION 1 at accounting for these.

⁷For our purposes, consider an aesthetic judgment to be the same thing as an ascription of an aesthetic property, or the correct use of an aesthetic predicate.

⁸Jerrold Levinson, "Being Realistic about Aesthetic Properties," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 52, no. 3 (Summer 1994), 351-54.

⁹ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, http://www.chinapage.com/sunzi-e.html (accessed November 8, 2010).

¹⁰ Levinson, "Aesthetic Properties," 217.

¹¹ Maybe, though, a property like participating in the form of threeness (to be Platonic for a moment) might be perceptual. For small numbers like three, which can be "subitized," we can see sets of objects as instantiating them. Psychologists use the term "subitizing" to refer to the sudden and accurate visual discrimination of "numerousness." Subitizing is contrasted with deliberate visual counting, in which viewers shift their visual attention from one part of a display to another until all of its components are reckoned. See E.L. Kaufman, M.W. Lord, T.W. Reese, and J. Volkmann, "The discrimination of visual number," *American Journal of Psychology* 62, no. 4 (1949), 498-525.

¹² If someone viewed Earth from a spaceship and saw that France was larger than Belgium, that it had bigger buildings and more gold mines (assume the goldmines and buildings were visible from space), or whatever, I suppose one could see that France had a greater GDP than Belgium's. With practice, one might even be able to rank the two countries' GDPs without consciously noticing their buildings and goldmines, much as the chicken sexer perceives the chick's sex without being consciously mindful of what constellation of properties he pays heed to when making his appraisal—he simply sees this chick as a female. Then maybe one could see France as having a greater GDP than Belgium's, and the property of having a greater GDP than Belgium's would be deemed a perceptual property. What this suggests is that a single property can have a perceptual or a nonperceptual mode of presentation. Without question, the standard mode of presentation for the property of having a larger GDP than Belgium's is a nonperceptual mode.

¹³ Then I suppose we would have to ask what is meant by "person." Humans only? Actual humans only? Any conceivable sentient being? Fortunately my present undertaking does not require me to think very hard about such things.

¹⁴ See Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1976), 39 *et passim*. "With regard to resemblance," notes the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, "*Languages of Art* echoes the claim in *Fact, Fiction, and Forecast* with regard to regularities: resemblances can be found anywhere, for anything resembles anything else in some respect or other." Alessandro Giovanelli, "Goodman's Aesthetics," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (May 2010 edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/goodman-aesthetics/, (accessed November 22, 2010).

¹⁵ The idea of a Great Chain of Being—a hierarchical ordering of all the stuff in the world—arises again and again throughout the history of philosophy from the Greeks to the Early Modern thinkers. The hierarchy has been variously one of proximity to the deity, one of causal primacy, and one of explanatory priority. See Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964).

¹⁶ In chapters seven and nine of the twelfth book of his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle considers that the kind of activity most suited to the Prime Mover is the thinking of thinking, and that God's essence is that of thought thinking itself. See Thomas De Koninck, "Aristotle on God as Thought Thinking Itself," *The Review of Metaphysics* 47, no. 3 (March, 1994), 471-515. By contrast, when a human acts in accordance with her nature—which is that of a rational animal—she will do more than engage in self-reflexive contemplation. She will, for example, do things like cultivate warm and abiding friendships and deep appreciation for beautiful things.

¹⁷ See Roderick Chisholm, "A Version of Foundationalism," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 5, no. 1 (September 1980), 543-564.

¹⁸ Frank Sibley, "Aesthetic and Nonaesthetic," *The Philosophical Review* 74, no. 2 (April 1965), 152.

¹⁹ This list is taken from Frank Sibley, "Aesthetic Concepts," *The Philosophical Review* 68, no. 4 (October 1959), 421.

²⁰ I'll mention, although it is perhaps obvious, that this perceptual resemblance, if it amounts to some kind of selective property sharing, is not transitive: X can perceptually resemble Y, and Z can perceptually resemble Y, and at the same time X can fail to perceptually resemble Z. X may perceptually resemble Y because of sharing with it the look-alike properties a, b, and c; and Y may perceptually resemble Z because of sharing with it the look-alike properties d, e, and f; while X and Z may share no look-alike properties at all and thus fail to perceptually resemble each other. (This, of course, assumes that perceptually resembling Y, a property shared by X and Z, is not itself a look-alike property.)

²¹ W. V. O. Quine, "On What There Is," in *From a Logical Point of View: Nine Logico-Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 4.

²² G.E. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, Fair Use Repository, http://fair-use.org/g-e-moore/principia-ethica/s.10, (accessed March 14, 2010).

This snippet of *Principia Ethica* § 13 is an application of the Open Question Argument: "...whoever will attentively consider with himself what is actually before his mind when he asks the question, Is pleasure (or whatever it may be) after all good? can easily satisfy himself that he is not merely wondering whether pleasure is pleasant. And if he will try this experiment with each suggested definition in succession, he may become expert enough to recognise that in every case he has before his mind a unique object, with regard to the connection of which with any other object, a distinct question may be asked." G.E. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, Fair Use Repository http://fair-use.org/g-e-moore/principia-ethica/s.10, (accessed December 4, 2010). Consider a claim about the analytic equivalence of some natural property N and some moral property M. What the Open Question Argument states is that a competent user of moral language can always say, without opening himself up to charges of conceptual confusion, "I accept that it is N, but is it really M?" Now run the open question argument against my analysis of aesthetic properties. Suppose someone says "I accept that this property is shareable without the necessary promotion of resemblance. But is it aesthetic?" Or, for brevity: "I accept that this is property is N, but is it A?" Does he too have immunity from being charged with

conceptual confusion? I don't think his immunity is as robust. Consider all the things one must do in order to ascertain whether, in this case, a perceptual property is N. One must search for that perceptual property in a wide variety of dissimilar things—searching, in a sense, for some kind of unity of the manifold. One must try to perfect one's senses and one's sensibilities, so that one can be confident of detecting all the relevant properties, and of detecting them veridically. And rather than using perceptual properties instrumentally, as sources of information about objects, one must treat the experience of perceptual properties as an end, and thereby come to better understand the character and merits of a certain distinctive kind of aesthesis. It certainly seems fitting, from the outside, to describe such a person's actions as aesthetic in nature, or aesthetically motivated, and I suspect that a person would be inclined to describe himself this way too, if he were made to notice all the dimensions of what he was doing. But this observation is not a powerful argument in support of my definition: it just says that doing what you need to do to justifiably accept N involves doing things that we already take to be symptomatic of accepting A. But suppose now that someone switches around the Moorean question, and asks, "I see that it is an aesthetic property. But is it really shareable without the necessary promotion of resemblance?" This does look like it begins to betray some level of conceptual confusion. To really know, e.g., elegance, and to be a competent user of the predicate "elegant," requires that one have wide experience of elegant objects, and a reasonable amount of expertise comparing and contrasting elegant objects. And to have this experience just is to see that not all elegant objects look alike. Suppose someone said "I see that all these paintings, which appear nothing alike, share an aesthetic property, elegance. But is this aesthetic property, elegance, really shareable without the necessary promotion of resemblance?" I think I can regard the questioner as conceptually confused, or as insufficiently reflective, or as not really seeing the elegance. There is, of course, much more to be said about this, and I do not take myself to have come anywhere close to settling the issue.

²⁴ Rachel Zuckert, *Kant on Beauty and Biology: An Interpretation of the Critique of Judgment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 198.

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