

Non-Inferentialism about the Justification of Aesthetic Judgements

Aesthetic judgements – that is, judgements about the aesthetic qualities of objects, such as their gracefulness, balance, garishness or harmony – are characterised by two important features. First, they are – on the conscious level – often *motivated in a non-inferential manner*, that is, formed in some way other than by rationally responding to the consideration of reasons for or against forming them. We need not engage in a conscious inference or another form of reasoning or deliberation in order to recognise that, say, a painting is gaudy, a set of pieces of furniture unified, or a line in a poem elegant. Second, we have an intelligible and reasonable *practice of backing up* our aesthetic judgements when they are challenged. More precisely, we may support our judgements by pointing to certain lower-level properties that realise the aesthetic qualities concerned. Indeed, when someone casts some doubt on our aesthetic opinions, we are normally expected to be able to defend them by referring to some of their relevant underlying features. Accordingly, if someone questions whether the painting is gaudy, we draw his attention to the colour scheme of the work; if he disagrees with us about the unity of the furniture, we point out to him its relative proportionality and similarity in design; and if he rejects our statement about the elegance of the poem, we ask him to listen (really or imaginatively) to its recital and notice its sound qualities. As a matter of fact, if we fail to satisfy this demand of backing up our aesthetic judgements, their standing – and possibly also our status as a critic in aesthetic matters – is likely to suffer.

Now, there is a certain tension between these two aspects of aesthetic judgements, which becomes apparent once we consider their relation to justification. If we take aesthetic judgements to be justified *inferentially*, we owe an explanation of how our actual recognition of aesthetic qualities can none the less be motivationally non-inferential on the personal level. This may require the – not uncontroversial – postulation of respective processes of habituation or internalisation, or of some sub-personal or implicit form of reasoning. But if, on the other hand, we assume that our justification is *non-inferential*, the availability of – and need for – additional support in the shape of the reference to relevant lower-level features becomes problematic. When we judge something to be red on the basis of visual perception, it is usually unreasonable to demand from us to back up our judgement by pointing to the responsible

lower-level features of the object, such as its surface reflectances. In fact, we may have no reason for our colour judgements other than the fact that the object concerned perceptually strikes us as having a certain colour (and perhaps also the fact that nothing is unusual or wrong with our mind and our environment during our experience of the object). By contrast, it is appropriate to ask us to support our aesthetic judgements by reference to some of their lower-level realisers.

In this essay, I aim to explore and question the prospects of the non-inferential strategy, which – following the tradition of Hume and Kant – seems to be still the predominant position in contemporary aesthetics.¹ This approach has no difficulties to capture the non-inferential motivation of our ascriptions of higher-order properties: we simply form our judgements in a non-inferential way. But, as I aim to highlight, it has problems to accommodate our practice of pointing to lower-level features in support of our opinions. Its best strategy seems to be to interpret this support in non-evidential terms. However, important aspects of this practice – notably the limits of our aesthetic curiosity – resist this interpretation. My contention is therefore that the second noted aspect of our recognition of higher-level features – that it may be backed up by picking out suitable lower-level properties – cannot be properly explained if our justification in such matters is understood as being non-inferential in nature. Whether, and how, non-inferential motivation can be squared with inferential justification is another issue, and to be addressed elsewhere.

One of the most sophisticated and influential defenders of non-inferentialism with respect to the epistemology of aesthetic qualities has been Frank Sibley. Because of this, and because of the comprehensiveness and detailedness of his defense which exhausts the main options available to a proponent of non-inferential justification, I let my discussion be largely guided by his writings. But my concern is with the prospects of non-inferentialism about aesthetic judgements in general, and not only with Sibley's particular version of it.

Similarly, although my focus in what follows is exclusively on aesthetic qualities, I surmise that much of what I have to say applies equally to the epistemology of other kinds of higher-level features, such as moral or other

¹ Among the many proponents of non-inferentialism about aesthetic judgements are – apart from Frank Sibley – Walton, 1970, J. McDowell, 1983, Budd, 1999, Zemach, 2001 and, to some extent, Schellekens, 2006.

values, affordances, natural or artificial kinds, dispositions, meanings, necessary truths, or the expressiveness of behaviour and artworks. The idea that the justification of our opinions about them is non-inferential should just as well be problematic, at least to the extent to which they are inseparably linked to the practice to point to lower-level features in support of the respective judgements.

In the first section of this essay, I spell out in a bit more detail what the commitments of the non-inferentialist strategy are and contrast experientially based aesthetic judgements with testimonially and inferentially based ones. The second section discusses the tension between non-inferentialism and an evidential understanding of the support for our ascriptions of aesthetic qualities that is provided by our reference to the underlying lower-level features. It also introduces four different suggestions – put forward by Sibley – of how instead to understand this element of support in non-evidential terms.

The third section contains the two main arguments of this paper. First of all, I argue that none of Sibley’s proposals can account for the supportive character of our practice of backing up our aesthetic judgements in terms of the objects’ lower-level features. In addition, I introduce a further objection against non-inferentialism, according to which this view cannot explain why our curiosity in aesthetic matters is limited to certain metaphysical facts about the aesthetic qualities of the objects concerned. In the final section, I discuss a more recent attempt to improve on Sibley’s account by adopting a hybrid view, which tries – but fails – to combine non-inferentialism with the idea of understanding the lower-level features as partial or incomplete evidence for aesthetic judgements, which does not suffice to ground aesthetic judgements inferentially.

My conclusion is that non-inferentialism can explain neither the limitations to our aesthetic curiosity, nor our practice of bolstering our aesthetic judgements by pointing to relevant lower-level features. By contrast, an evidential and inferential understanding of this kind of support for aesthetic judgements has the resources to account for both aspects of aesthetic appreciation.

I.

Non-inferentialism about aesthetic judgements is the view that their basic or canonical justification is non-inferential. Our justification for forming a certain

judgement (or for having the corresponding belief) is non-inferential just in case it does not depend on, or come from, our justification to form some other judgement (or to have some other belief).² When we are enticed to judge that some street is wet in response to seeing the wetness of the street, our justification for forming this justification is non-inferential: it does not matter which other judgements we are justified to form. By contrast, our justification is inferential when our judgement about the street – or even, more directly, our underlying perception – moves us to judge that it has rained. For we are justified to judge that it has rained only if – and partly because – we are justified to judge that the street is wet (cf. Pryor (2005)).

This way of distinguishing non-inferential and inferential justification is neutral on whether non-inferential justification is a matter of epistemic reasons – and, more specifically, on whether perceptions and similar mental states provide us with (access to) such reasons.³ Sibley, for instance, thinks that only inferential justification is a matter of (our intellectual access to) reasons; and that non-inferential justification is, instead, a matter of not reason-involving perceptual justification (or ‘perceptual proof’).⁴ Other non-inferentialists about aesthetic judgements, by contrast, assume all forms of justification to be a matter of reasons and distinguish between non-inferential and inferential reasons (cf. John McDowell (1998)). In particular, they may point out that, while our awareness of a certain fact (e.g., the wetness of a street) gives us non-inferential reason for believing in its *own* obtainment (i.e., that the street is wet), it gives us inferential reason for believing in the obtainment of *other* facts (e.g., that it has rained).

There is no need here to settle the debate between these two approaches to perceptual and other non-inferential forms of justification. Instead, it suffices to point out two facts on which both agree. First, the formation – and typi-

² See, for instance, Martin (1992) or Pryor (2005). I discuss the contrast between non-inferentialism and inferentialism about judgemental ascriptions of higher-level features in more detail in Author (2011). Note that, for the purposes of this paper, it does not matter whether we are concerned with propositional or doxastic justification: whether non-inferentialism is true or not has no bearing on the nature of the basing relation distinguishing the two forms of justification.

³See, for instance, Martin (1992). It is also neutral on the related debate about whether basic perception and perceptual knowledge is a matter of evidence (cf. Austin (1962)).

⁴See, for instance, Sibley, 1959/2001, p. 15 and Sibley, 1965/2001, 39f., 42ff.). See also Schellekens, 2006, p. 174 for discussion.

cally also the justification – of a judgement is inferential if it is the outcome of reasoning, that is, of the consideration of epistemic reasons for or against forming it (cf. Sibley, 1965/2001, 39f. and John McDowell, 1998). Second, the debate on whether perception is reason-giving has no bearing on the issue of how to best make sense of our practise of defending our aesthetic judgements by reference to lower-level features, given that the (possibly perceptual) recognition of those features can at best provide inferential, but no perceptual support for the ascription of aesthetic qualities – just like the perception of wetness cannot perceptually ground the judgement that it has rained.

Now, although there are potentially other sources of non-inferential justification (e.g., testimony), non-inferentialism in aesthetic matters is best and most naturally supplemented by the claim that what is central to the formation and justification of judgements about the aesthetic qualities of objects is our aesthetic experience of them – what Sibley has called *aesthetic perception*. Our opinions about aesthetic qualities are, accordingly, the result of experience, rather than that of reasoning (cf. Sibley, 1965/2001: 34; 40). Indeed, it is common to take aesthetic perception to be essential to the occurrence not only of the judgemental, but also of the emotional and evaluative elements involved in aesthetic appreciation: it is essential to our aesthetic engagement with artworks and other aesthetic objects in a very comprehensive way (cf. Sibley, 1965/2001: 34; Budd, 2003). This is partly a consequence of the fact that all aesthetic appreciation starts with the recognition of aesthetic qualities, before it can then develop into some richer form of aesthetic engagement.

What non-inferentialists mean by aesthetic perception is a kind of experiential awareness of the aesthetic qualities of objects, which provides us with non-inferential justification for aesthetic judgement (cf. Sibley, 1965/2001 and Schellekens, 2006). But they rightly do not assume aesthetic perception to be an instance of ordinary perception and is very clear on the fact that our ability to recognise aesthetic qualities goes beyond our normal perceptual and recognitional capacities (cf. Sibley, 1965/2001: 135ff.). What is instead central to, and distinctive of, aesthetic perception is – at least for Sibley – that it involves the exercise of ‘aesthetic sensitivity, perceptiveness, or taste’ (Sibley, 1965/2001: 135). He does not really say anything more about this special kind of sensitivity (cf. Budd, 1999). But it seems fair to assume that he understands aesthetic sensitivity as a largely acquired ability that is open to further training and education – perhaps, again, in contrast to our basic perceptual ca-

pacities. In fact, it may very well be questioned whether aesthetic perception in the non-inferentialist's sense is really closer to ordinary perception than, say, to what others have identified as intellectual feelings or seemings, or as (empirical) intuitions (cf. Bealer, 2002, Bodrozic, 2004, or Mulligan, 2010).

Endorsing non-inferentialism by treating our recognition of aesthetic qualities as experiential has the advantage of providing us with a simple explanation of the frequent non-inferentiality of the formation of our aesthetic judgements. As already suggested, it does not seem to require any conscious reasoning on our side to recognise the elegance of a gait, or the expression of sadness in a piece of music. We do not start off with certain premisses about the gait or the music and infer from there that they are elegant or expressive of sadness. Instead, we just form the respective judgement in direct response to our experience of the movement or the piece of music. The assumption that our access to elegance or expressed sadness is experiential enables us to explain this non-inferential motivation of our judgement.

But it is important to keep in mind that there may be alternative ways of accounting for it, notably in terms of implicit or internalised reasoning. Consider the example of a good chess-player or mathematician. She may be able to immediately spot the quality of a move, or how to proceed in a proof. But she had to engage in extensive reasoning in order to acquire and develop this skill. She had to get used to make the right rational connections within her field between a certain type of position or problem and the best response to it. She may now be able to form some of her judgements without the reliance on any explicit inferences. But she was not able to do so in the past; and some other of her current judgements about which steps to pursue in a game of chess or a mathematical proof are still likely to require extensive conscious calculation. However, what is important to note is that her motivationally non-inferential judgements are not just mere causal responses, like a feeling of pain or hunger. They are still rational responses to the situation before her, and to be justified by reference to an argument which may be rehearsed by her in an explicit way. That is, they are grounded in some implicit line of reasoning, which is the result of some process of internalisation or habituation during her conscious engagement in similar inferences in the past.

Despite their common non-inferential formation, judgements grounded in implicit inferences differ from experientially grounded judgements in at least

two respects. First, our capacity to form them depends on our past engagement in explicit inferences of a closely related kind. By contrast, we do not learn to experientially recognise something through the internalisation of patterns of inferential reasoning. Second, the justification of implicitly inferred judgements is, of course, inferential: it stays the same independently of whether the inferences involved are rendered explicit or not. By contrast, experience provides us with non-inferential justification, which cannot be stated by reference to some inferential pattern (cf., e.g., Martin, 1992). Inferentialism and non-inferentialism about some type of judgements therefore typically differ not only in whether they take the judgements' justification to be non-inferential, but also in whether acquiring the capacity to form them requires engagement in some related form of explicit reasoning.

Now, can non-inferentialism accept that an experientially grounded judgement may also be open to inferential justification? The answer – at least in the case of basic perceptual judgements – should be both yes and no. It should be yes in so far as we can form legitimate perceptual judgements on the basis of reasoning. But it should be no in so far as the justification involved is, ultimately, non-inferential in nature. We can infer that something is red, for instance, once we know the wavelength spectrum of the light emitted by its surface in broad daylight (cf. Author (2009): ch. 2.6). Hence, if challenged, we can support our perceptually based colour judgement in an inferential manner, namely by pointing to the underlying reflectance properties of the red object. But this presupposes that we have knowledge of the correlation between colours – or, more directly, colour experiences – and wavelength spectra. And discovering the correlation requires, ultimately, consciously experiencing colours and matching them up with reflectance properties (cf. Author (2010)). What this illustrates is that the justification of a colour judgement by reference to the light reflected by the object concerned is, in the end, non-inferential. So, while colour judgements may to some extent be inferentially justified, the inferential justification involved has to derive its force from some prior non-inferential justification. This is part of what it means that perceptual experience is our canonical access to colours: any other form of access depends on it.

The situation does not seem to be different in the case of aesthetic qualities, assuming that they are open to experiential access in the first place. Sibley has convincingly argued that we cannot deduce, or infer by means of aesthetic principles, the presence of aesthetic qualities on the basis of knowledge about the

object's lower-level features, even though the former metaphysically depend in one way or another on the latter (cf. Sibley, 1959/2001). There is only one general exception to his conclusion: if we have full knowledge of the most determinate non-aesthetic properties and all the aesthetic qualities of an object, we can reason that the same qualities are present in another object simply on the basis of learning that it possesses exactly the same lower-level properties. Any more specific knowledge – say, just of the less determinate non-aesthetic properties, or of the fact that only some of the most determinate non-aesthetic properties are responsible for the realisation of a particular aesthetic quality – does not allow for a similar kind of inference. For non-aesthetic properties matter for the instantiation of aesthetic qualities on the level of their highest specificity, and relative to their wider context. A slight change in the shape of a vase, or the addition of a certain pattern of colours, may undermine its initially elegant appearance (cf. Budd, 1999: 301f.). Now, for a non-inferentialist like Sibley, the inference from the non-aesthetic to the aesthetic features of an object is justified only to the extent to which it is based on a prior experience of the object's aesthetic qualities, combined with the recognition that they occur in correlation with the object's non-aesthetic properties. That is, any inferential support for experientially grounded aesthetic judgements is, ultimately, dependent on some prior experience. We first have to discover experientially which lower-level properties are responsible for which aesthetic qualities before we can infer the presence of the latter by recognising the presence of the former.

That non-inferentialism about aesthetic judgements takes experience to be our canonical way of recognising aesthetic qualities, on which all other forms of access ultimately depend, becomes also manifest in its treatment of testimony as not being on a par with experience in aesthetic matters. Sibley, for example, acknowledges that we sometimes ascribe aesthetic qualities to objects just on the basis of testimony (cf. Sibley, 1965/2001: 34; 40). But he also stresses that such ascriptions still have to rely on the experiences of others, or on our own past experiences. In this respect, aesthetic qualities are just like colours or the funniness of a joke because they all allow for the difference between people possessing the required sensitivity or expertise to recognise certain properties at first hand and people lacking this capacity (cf. Sibley, 1965/2001: 35). The blind are not acquainted with colours, and the humourless not with funniness. Instead, they have to rely on testimony to come to know

about the presence of these features. If no one could see the colour of an object, the blind would be unable to come to know about it. Similarly, if no one could experience the funniness of a joke, the humourless would not be able to recognise it either. Now, non-inferentialism assumes that something very similar is true of aesthetic qualities. It maintains that experience is our canonical access to such qualities; and that other potential forms of access – such as testimony or, perhaps, inference – are dependent on it. People, who ascribe aesthetic qualities without having experienced their instantiation themselves, have ultimately to rely on the experiences of others.

Indeed, non-inferentialist should – and do – not deny that testimony may lead to knowledge about the presence of aesthetic qualities. Sibley is right in that we can ‘learn from others’ and, moreover, ‘on good authority’ (Sibley, 1965/2001: 34) which objects possess which aesthetic qualities. If you tell me about a smooth and relaxed piece of music, and if I also know that you are trustworthy in such matters, then there is no good reason to deny that my resulting belief concerning those aesthetic qualities may count as justified and, possibly, also as constituting knowledge (see Budd, 2003). Moreover, both experience and testimony may provide us with non-inferential justification – at least if the latter directly communicates to us the experience of someone else. If we judge that something is red or symmetrical because someone else, who is looking at the object, tells us that it is red or symmetrical, our judgement is ultimately justified in an experiential and, hence, non-inferential way. None the less, non-inferentialists – and others – have been skeptical about the epistemic value of testimony in aesthetic matters. For instance, Sibley (1965/2001, 34f.) denies that testimonially (or inferentially) based ascriptions of aesthetic qualities are judgements of the same kind as experientially-based genuine aesthetic judgements; while Hopkins (2010) defends the Kantian norm – sometimes called ‘the Principle of Acquaintance’ – that we should experience artworks and aesthetic objects ourselves, rather than rely on the experiences and testimony of others.

This raises the question of how this skepticism might be reconciled with the noted observation that testimony may still lead to knowledge in aesthetic matters. The most promising answer is perhaps one given by Malcolm Budd (cf. Budd, 2003).⁵ His suggestion is that what matters for aesthetic appre-

⁵Hopkins (2010) offers a different explanation by understanding the mentioned norm not in epistemic, but in pragmatic terms.

ciation is not merely that we recognise which aesthetic qualities are realised in a given object, but also how they are realised by the respective underlying features. What is interesting about *Hamlet* is not so much that it is a masterpiece (we learn this very quickly and early on), but the unique and complex way in which it acquires this high status – and in which it differs, say, from *Faust*. Now, testimony may inform us about the exemplification of aesthetic qualities and non-aesthetic properties. But it cannot (or at least not normally) give us a sufficient idea of how the two sets of features are linked. In order to identify the particular way in which some aesthetic quality is realised in an object, we need to experience the object and its various higher- and lower-level features; or so the line of reasoning may go. The mentioned norm or ‘Principle of Acquaintance’ is therefore perhaps best understood as specifying a condition on full aesthetic assessment and enjoyment, rather than on the acquisition of mere knowledge about aesthetic qualities.

II.

As already noted at the beginning, aesthetic qualities depend for their instantiation on certain lower-level features of the objects concerned. This means that the latter are responsible for the exemplification of the former and determine which particular aesthetic qualities are instantiated (see Sibley, 1965/2001: 35f.). Moreover, we should be able to supplement our aesthetic judgements by reference to these lower-level features. It is an important aspect of our critical engagement with bearers of aesthetic qualities that we are expected to be able to identify some of the relevant underlying properties and their significance for the exemplification of the aesthetic qualities in question (cf. Sibley, 1965/2001: 37ff.; 41f.). We do not simply tell others, say, that we find a given painting balanced or pale, but draw their attention to the underlying symmetry of the design or the unsaturatedness of the colours in support of our opinion. If we are unable to follow the request of others to back up our judgements in this way, the quality of our judgements and, more generally, our status as a judge of aesthetic matters are diminished. Again, Budd’s idea that what matters is not merely the presence of aesthetic qualities, but also the particular way in which they are realised by the lower-level features of the objects concerned can explain why it is important and required to be able to identify the latter and their link to the aesthetic qualities.

This highlights an important difference between aesthetic cognition (as well as other forms of higher-level cognition) and our basic perception of colours, smells, sounds, and so on. For it is unreasonable to demand of us to supplement our colour or similar judgements by referring to more fundamental features of the objects at issue. At best, we may be asked to elucidate why we take our respective perceptual experiences to be in order. This difference is perhaps best explained by reference to the fact that colours and similar properties – in contrast to aesthetic qualities – are not dependent on more basic *perceivable* (or otherwise easily accessible) features of their bearers. Given that seeing the redness of an object does not require noticing any of the unperceivable features responsible for that instance of redness, it is unreasonable to demand that the perceiver is able to identify those unperceivable features. By contrast – as Sibley has repeatedly noted (cf. Sibley, 1965/2001: 38; 41) – we recognise aesthetic qualities by recognising the accessible underlying features on which they depend.

The question is now what kind of support – and therefore also what kind of quality or value of aesthetic judgement – is at issue here. It may seem natural, from a pre-theoretical point of view, to maintain that our awareness of the lower-level features provides us with *evidence* for judging or believing that the object concerned possesses certain aesthetic qualities. But a non-inferentialist cannot accommodate this interpretation of our practice. In the last section, I noted cases in which an experientially grounded judgement may actually receive further epistemic support. But, with respect to aesthetic cognition, these cases are rather rare and exceptional, while our practice of providing further support for our opinions applies to all instances of aesthetic judgement. So, the justificatory power of recognising relevant lower-level features cannot derive from some prior experiential engagement with objects very similar to the one at issue. Instead, the non-inferentialist has to assume the evidential force in question to be independent of experience. But, now, the problem for the non-inferentialist is to avoid the possibility of acquiring knowledge about the exemplification of aesthetic qualities simply in response to the evidence provided by the recognition of the lower-level features, and without any experience of the aesthetic qualities in question. If the presence of some lower-level features speaks in favour of the presence of some aesthetic quality, the recognition of the former should – everything else being equal – be sufficient for the recog-

dition of the latter. Given that the justificatory power of our awareness of the lower-level features is experience-independent, it should also not matter whether we enjoy or refer to it before or after experiencing the object and ascribing aesthetic qualities to it. In other words, if the reference to lower-level features has the power to provide support for our aesthetic judgements retrospectively, it should also have the power to do this prospectively.⁶

Not surprisingly, Sibley maintains that reference to the underlying properties cannot supplement the epistemic justification of our aesthetic judgments. Instead of treating the lower-level features as *reasons for* ascribing aesthetic qualities, he proposes to identify them as *reasons why* something possesses certain aesthetic qualities (cf. Sibley, 1965/2001: 41f.; 43; 44). The distinction appealed to here is that between *epistemic* reasons and what Sibley sometimes identifies as *explanatory* reasons (cf. Sibley, 1959/2001: 12; Sibley, 1965/2001: 38; cf. also Schellekens, 2006). The first are reasons for forming a judgement or belief and are cited in the justification of the latter. The second, by contrast, are reasons (or facts) that are responsible for something being a certain way and thus may be used to explain why it is that way – in this case, why something possesses certain aesthetic qualities, and possibly also why it causes us to have certain responses.

Now, the non-inferentialist proposal is that pointing to the lower-level features has no evidential, but just explanatory force: it helps us to understand how the aesthetic qualities are realised in the object concerned, and perhaps also what is causally responsible for our awareness of those qualities. It is important to note that the explanation concerned is not of a rational – and epistemic – nature: it does not answer the question of why – that is, for which epistemic reasons – we have formed our judgement. Rather, he insists that it is an answer to the question of why – that is, because of which features – the object possesses the aesthetic qualities ascribed in the judgement (cf. Sibley, 1965/2001: 36, 43). What we are concerned with here are therefore metaphysical explanations that single out the lower-level features responsible for the presence of aesthetic qualities, as well as possibly for our recognition of the latter. To use some of Sibley's examples, the concentration of the blues

⁶ I present another objection to the idea of merely retrospective evidential justification in section IV. There, I also discuss the possibility of treating the justificatory power of our awareness of the lower-level features to be independent of experience, while denying that it is by itself sufficient to justify (or motivate) an aesthetic judgement.

and greys of a painting gives rise to and determines its unity of tone; and the sombre or indecisive character of a musical passage is due to a prominent change in key (cf. Sibley, 1965/2001: 36). Moreover, the lower-level features are part of what causes us to recognise them and, subsequently, the aesthetic qualities which they determine or realise. The corresponding explanations do not rationalise our aesthetic responses, but instead highlight certain constitutional, causal or otherwise metaphysical connections in the world. That is, they cite (what may be called) *metaphysical* – instead of epistemic – explanatory reasons.⁷

The main task for the non-inferentialist is therefore to elucidate how reference to metaphysical connections or reasons may help us to back up our aesthetic judgements in a non-evidential manner; and moreover may do so in such a way that we can reasonably demand such a kind of defense from good critics. If the non-inferential approach fails to come up with a satisfactory answer, our practice of asking for additional support in aesthetic matters would remain completely unexplained. But how can highlighting metaphysical facts and formulating corresponding metaphysical explanations contribute to the nor-

⁷ With this interpretation of Sibley's position, I seem to be in disagreement with Elisabeth Schellekens, who appears to read his distinction as being one between justifying and rationalising epistemic reasons. For, according to her, recognising the lower-level features '[explains] why one might think that some thing has a certain property' or 'why one has made the judgement' (Schellekens, 2006: 174, 170); and the resulting 'process of rational reflection about features of the object of appreciation plays a part in the process by which the aesthetic judgements are held to be explained' (Schellekens, 2006: 175). Only one passage suggests that she may mean metaphysical explanation, rather than psychological rationalisation. There, she says that '[t]he features responsible for a thing's aesthetic character can only be viewed as explaining reasons for the phenomenal impression produced' (Schellekens, 2006: 175). Assuming that 'impression' stands in for 'experience', what she takes to be explained here is the – presumably non-rational – causal occurrence of our experiential awareness of aesthetic qualities.

In any case, Sibley makes it clear that his own contrast is one between epistemic and metaphysical reasons, and not between justifying and rationalising epistemic reasons (cf. Sibley, 1965/2001: 41f.; 43; 44). For him, reference to the lower-level features does not provide any form of rational support for aesthetic judgements, not even one that is capable of explaining the formation of the latter – or rendering it reasonable – from the subject's perspective. Instead, Sibley is concerned with the realisation of aesthetic qualities by some underlying non-aesthetic properties: the latter are the reasons why the former are present – and possibly also the reasons why the objects cause us to recognise the aesthetic qualities.

mative standing of aesthetic judgement? Sibley identifies four different ways in which the reference to the realisation of aesthetic qualities by lower-level features may add some kind of non-evidential support to our judgemental ascriptions of the former qualities (cf. Sibley, 1965/2001: 37f.): (i) it may enable or help us – and others – to actually experience the aesthetic qualities; (ii) it may increase our confidence – and the confidence of others – in our aesthetic judgements; (iii) it may enrich our aesthetic appreciation and render it more intelligible; and (iv) it may satisfy a curiosity of ours which is distinctive of our aesthetic engagement with objects. The challenge for non-inferentialism is hence to make sense of how one (or more) of these four potential effects of noting the metaphysical connection between the two sets of properties can count as supporting or supplementing aesthetic judgement in a non-evidential manner. More concretely, the non-inferential approach needs to elucidate the impact of these factors on the standing of aesthetic judgements independently of any evidential considerations. And it needs to account for the normative dimension of the reference to the lower-level features – namely that good critics should be able, when challenged, to identify these features and their impact on the aesthetic qualities. Whether the non-inferentialist can satisfactorily address these issues is the topic of the next section.

III.

Let me begin with (i), Sibley’s observation that pointing out the relevant lower-level features and their aesthetic significance may help people to recognise for themselves the aesthetic qualities realised by the former. As far as it goes, this observation seems to be accurate. But it is compatible with a denial of the experientiality of the recognition of aesthetic qualities, as well as with the postulation of an inferential link between our awareness of the lower-level features and our judgemental ascriptions of the aesthetic qualities. Indeed, recognising the lower-level features and their contribution to the realisation of the aesthetic qualities may help us to notice the latter precisely because it provides us with further evidence for ascribing the latter.

Furthermore, the observation cannot elucidate why we take the identification of the features realising the aesthetic qualities to add something to the defense of the ascription of the latter. It has been explained how this identification may lead to the formation of aesthetic judgements (namely of others),

but not how it may support or supplement them. In particular, our demand of good critics to be able to back up their own judgements by pointing to the responsible lower-level features when challenged is distinct from our expectation of good critics to be able to make other people recognise aesthetic properties. The former concerns the task of convincing a sceptic about the aesthetic qualities ascribed, while the latter concerns the task of educating people and of improving their aesthetic sensibility.

It is true that one efficient way of convincing a sceptic is to get him to recognise the disputed aesthetic quality for himself (cf. Brady, 2001: 14f.). But it is not the only way and can neither be required, nor hoped for in response to a challenge to an aesthetic judgement. This is reflected by the fact that the educational function of the reference to the lower-level features is of no interest to someone who is already able to recognise the aesthetic quality concerned. By contrast, the explanatory and supportive function of that reference may still be very important for that person. For instance, she may be unsure about her own aesthetic judgement and may therefore feel the need to supplement it further by identifying the relevant lower-level features. Or she may disagree with the other person about which such underlying features in fact realise the aesthetic quality and support its ascription.

Perhaps Sibley's idea (ii) – that pointing to certain lower-level features in order to explain the presence of a particular aesthetic quality may increase our trust or confidence in our corresponding aesthetic judgement – can better account for this supportive role. The situation envisaged is like this: we experience, and judge, a passage of music to have a sombre character; we independently notice a change in key in the passage and link its presence to the presence of the sombre character; and noticing this link leads us – as well as others – to feel more confident about our judgement, and perhaps also more inclined to rely on our experience. But why does our recognition of the lower-level features and their contribution to the realisation of the aesthetic qualities render our aesthetic judgement more trustworthy in our own eyes and the eyes of others?

One possible answer is to maintain that the increase in confidence does not consist in a strengthening of epistemic trust, but rather in something like a merely causal influence on some non-rational feeling of confidence or certainty, or some non-rational disposition to rely on our aesthetic experience and judgement. Accordingly, the increase in trust reflects no positive contribution from

an epistemic point of view. To the contrary, it is actually in danger of rendering our aesthetic judgements epistemically inadequate. For it may decrease its epistemic standing (e.g., its likelihood of being true) by making us less critical and less responsive to opposing reasons. That is, we run the risk to hold on to our judgement for non-epistemic causes, namely an increased feeling of confidence or a strengthened disposition to trust. Although the gain of confidence need not necessarily have these negative consequences, it also has no positive effects because of which it could count as adding something valuable to our aesthetic judgements.

So, perhaps the kind of confidence involved amounts rather to some kind of epistemic credence or trust. But, as noted above, the non-inferentialist wants to deny that our knowledge of the metaphysical underpinnings of aesthetic qualities supplies us with evidence for believing in the exemplification of the latter. Hence, the non-inferentialist should rather say that what we are concerned with here is not the evidential justification of the particular aesthetic judgements, but instead our general trustworthiness as critics in aesthetic matters. In other words, the suggestion should be that our manifestation of the ability to recognise the lower-level features and their realisation of the aesthetic qualities is an indicator of the quality of our aesthetic sensitivity – at least on this particular occasion. It reveals that we are good judges of aesthetic qualities and, in this sense, adds further support to our aesthetic judgements. Similarly, if we discover that someone is very good in visually differentiating and identifying objects far away, we may trust his respective judgements more than those of less discerning people.

But this proposal is flawed. Part of the reason for this is that the comparison with visual discrimination actually reveals a significant difference. We find out whether someone is good at recognising objects in the distance by looking at whether his past discriminations and judgements have been accurate. That is, we trust him because, in the past, he was mostly right about the distinctness and identity of distant objects. The parallel suggestion in the aesthetic case would be that we have confidence in someone (who may actually be identical with ourselves) because, in the past, he was mostly successful in recognising aesthetic qualities. The proposal at hand, however, locates the reason for the increase in trust, not in the quality of (past) recognitions of aesthetic qualities, but instead in the quality of (present) recognitions of the underlying realisers of such qualities. Accordingly, the suggestion is that we should trust someone's

aesthetic judgements because he has shown himself to be able to identify the lower-level features and their contribution to the aesthetic qualities.

Now, this proposal can be made to work only if it is true that someone, who is good at the identification of aesthetically relevant lower-level features, is also good at recognising aesthetic qualities. This would be the case if the awareness of the lower-level features would actually enable or help him to discover the relevant aesthetic qualities – either along the lines of proposal (i), or because this awareness would provide him with evidence for the ascription of the qualities. But both options are not open to the non-inferentialist: the first for the reasons outlined at the beginning of this section; and the second due to the view's commitment to the non-evidential character of the support provided by our awareness of the lower-level features. However, if proposal (i) fails and the ability to recognise lower-level properties as realisers of aesthetic qualities does not reveal a sensitivity to evidence (or epistemic reasons) for aesthetic judgements, then it becomes mysterious why the possession of this ability should have any bearing on the epistemic standing of someone as a judge in aesthetic matters. There is no reason to assume that someone, who possesses knowledge of how aesthetic qualities are realised, should count as a better judge of aesthetic qualities than someone, who lacks that kind of knowledge. A blind person may know everything about how colours are realised by their bearers. But this does not render him good at experientially (rather than inferentially) recognising the colours of objects.

Two other epistemically relevant factors to be checked are the suitability of the specific viewing conditions and the proper operation of the mind of the experiencing subject (e.g., whether he is distracted, suffers from some cognitive or neurophysiological deficiencies, or lacks the required discriminatory or conceptual abilities). But, again, the normalcy or faultlessness of these factors cannot be established by reference to the lower-level features of the experienced objects. It is true that, if we discover that someone does not see an object as yellow, despite the fact that our best colour science predicts it to be yellow, we may actually have good reason to suspect that there is something wrong with the viewing conditions or the mind of the person. But this conclusion is possible only because our scientifically gained knowledge of the connection between reflectance properties and colours allows us to infer the yellowness of the object at issue. Non-inferentialists about aesthetic judgements deny, however, that a similar kind of inference is possible in the case of aesthetic ex-

perience. So, whether the circumstances are suitable for aesthetic judgement and whether the critic's mind is working properly cannot be decided on the basis of recognising certain lower-level features of the object. In accordance with this, our practice of challenging the aesthetic judgements of other subjects typically presupposes that there is nothing wrong with respect to these two epistemically relevant factors.

As already noted in section I, understanding how aesthetic qualities are realised by the lower-level features of specific objects may very well add something to our aesthetic experience of those objects. More specifically, it may enrich the latter by enabling us to fully appreciate the aesthetic value of the objects or to respond with adequate aesthetic emotions to them – thus offering the possibility of accepting Sibley's proposal (iii). However, as important as this enrichment might be, it does not affect the standing of our aesthetic judgements. At best, it bestows some value on our related, but independently acquired knowledge of the realisation of the aesthetic qualities by the lower-level features. For, as outlined in section I, it is this kind of knowledge – rather than the mere ascription of aesthetic qualities – which is crucial for the occurrence of aesthetic evaluations and emotions. So, there is no obvious sense in which the possible enrichment of aesthetic appreciation that comes with aesthetic perception adds something positive to the status of any experientially based aesthetic judgements involved in the same instance of appreciation.

This leaves us with element (iv) in Sibley's account of the impact of metaphysical reasons on aesthetic judgements: the satisfaction of a distinctively aesthetic kind of curiosity. Sibley's idea appears to be that we have a specifically aesthetic interest in coming to know which lower-level features are responsible for the aesthetic qualities of an object, and how the former contribute to the determination of the latter. Satisfying this kind of curiosity is then taken to support or supplement our aesthetic judgement, albeit not by adding to the latter's evidential justification. It seems undeniable that our desire to understand artworks and similar objects includes that we care about knowing how aesthetic qualities are realised by relevant lower-level features – and not seldomly more than about knowing that the aesthetic qualities are instantiated in the first place. When considering artworks with a high degree of originality, say, our critical activity typically focusses less on the relatively unspecific and

obvious fact that they are original, and more on the precise and partially hidden ways in which they manage to be so. Correspondingly, there is likely to be much more disagreement about the latter than about the former. Once we compare this aesthetic type of curiosity with its scientific counterpart, however, the proposal turns out to be problematic. The main difficulty is to delineate the kind of interest distinctively linked to aesthetic judgement and appreciation, and to get clear in which sense its satisfaction might add something to our aesthetic judgements.

When we engage with artworks on our own or talk about them with others, we may refer to the lower-level features of the works for various reasons, not all of which are concerned with the appreciation of their aesthetic value, or with the explanation of why they possess their aesthetic qualities. Painters may be curious about the kind of paint used because they are impressed by its durability and want to try it out for themselves. Historians may be interested in the type of wood of a painting's frame in order to get clearer about why people at that time used different kinds of wood for different purposes. Biologists may have a similar interest in the wood because they study the distribution of types of tree in the region where the painting was made. However, these are not cases of aesthetic curiosity, but rather examples of a practical, historical or similar form of interest. Even when we are aiming to understand the metaphysically explanatory link between lower-level features and aesthetic properties, this need not happen because of any aesthetic interest in the object in question. A metaphysician worrying about the ontological status of aesthetic properties or artworks may concern himself with the relation of determination holding between the non-aesthetic and the aesthetic in the hope that this will shed light on some of his philosophical problems.

But even if our interest in an object and its features is clearly aesthetic in nature, we do not care about all possible metaphysical explanations of the presence of aesthetic qualities. When we notice that the harmony of a painting is partly due to the fact that the gestures and postures of the depicted characters are roughly mirrored in the spatial orientation of elements of the landscape, such as trees or roads, we do not care about how much the respective lines in fact diverge from being straight lines or true parallels. Or when we recognise that the dramatic nature of a piece of music is partly a matter of a continuous and rhythmic low pitch sound, we are not really captivated by the additional knowledge of the specific length of the sound waves, or of the

precise intervals of the rhythm specified in milliseconds. None the less, these latter facts about the piece of music, just as the actual angle between the lines on the painting, may very well be used, from a metaphysical perspective, to account for the harmonious or dramatic characters of the works. To take an even more radical example, the harmony of the painting – and most of its other aesthetic qualities – depends on the specific nature and distribution of the molecules making up the paint on the canvas. But we do not pay attention to that molecular structure while experiencing and appreciating the painting.

It is true that, when we are aiming to fully appreciate a painting, we may be interested in physical facts about the wooden panel or the paint used, which tell us something about the age of the work; or in the results of an X-ray investigation, which reveal something about the development of the artist's ideas during the process of painting. But we normally do not care about the precise length of the light waves reflected by the coloured canvas, or about the molecular structure of the oil used in mixing the paint. The respective facts strike us as aesthetically irrelevant, as not in any way enriching our understanding of the work. Similarly, there may be future artworks, the recognition of the aesthetic properties of which requires us to study the reflectance properties of their surfaces, or their atomic composition. But even then, there will be metaphysical facts – for instance, about the subatomic particles – which we do not care about from an aesthetic perspective.

A scientist or metaphysician, on the other hand, has any interest to keep on investigating, given that his goal is to fully comprehend the nature and origin of the objects concerned. It is here that we find a central difference between aesthetic and scientific curiosity. The latter is not restricted to certain metaphysical truths and explanations. From a scientific point of view, it is interesting to find out as much as possible about the constitution and causal powers of things. In contrast, our aesthetic curiosity is rather limited, once it comes to metaphysical matters. This fact is in need of explanation: why are we aesthetically curious only about some facts about the realisation of aesthetic qualities, and not others? However, when we address this question, the problematic status of Sibley's fourth proposal – and indeed of the non-inferential approach as a whole – becomes apparent: they simply do not have the resources to provide a satisfactory explanation of the limits of our aesthetic interest.

As a first possible answer, the non-inferentialist might suggest that our

aesthetic curiosity stops at the level of perceivability: that we do not care about explanations which trace aesthetic qualities back to imperceivable lower-level features. This may be true in some cases, but not in all. Many aesthetic qualities depend directly on imperceivable features of their bearers, and we are aesthetically interested in the respective metaphysical knowledge. We do care, for instance, about the usually imperceivable age of a painting because it tells us something about its originality. In addition, many aesthetic qualities of novels depend on non-aesthetic features – such as the meaning of its words, or the elements of its story-line – which we cannot experience and have to grasp intellectually.

Similarly, it is imaginable that there may be forms of art which we are supposed to appreciate by means of oscillographs which render otherwise imperceivable sound or light waves accessible in the shape of changing curves on the screen. But it is not clear whether this kind of access to the waves – in contrast to our access to the marks on the screen – should still count as perceptual. One simple way of dealing with these last cases might be to treat the mentioned tools and their effects literally as part of the artwork. Thus, the perceivable parts of the piece would be the images of the waves produced on the screens. But this might be in tension with the artist's intentions, or the curatorial conventions, which do not take the oscillographs to be part of the work. It is also doubtful whether we could establish a satisfactory theory of which elements belong to certain artworks of certain types, that could rule out the possibility of artworks which are accessible only via oscillographs and the like, but do not contain the latter or their perceivable effects as their parts.

Most importantly, however, noting that our aesthetic interest is, in certain cases, restricted to perceivable lower-level features and their contribution to aesthetic qualities would not amount to a very illuminating characterisation of the limitation of aesthetic curiosity. For it would still be in need of explanation why our interest does in fact not extend to imperceivable lower-level features. For the same reason, the limitation of aesthetic curiosity cannot be accounted for in terms of the idea that it is concerned merely with what enables and enriches more complex and emotional aesthetic experiences. For, again, this would just shift the explanatory burden since we would then need to say why this limited concern might be in place, without simply falling back on option (iii) discussed above.

A second possible non-inferentialist answer is that we are interested only

in those metaphysical facts which we actually manage to explanatorily link up with the aesthetic qualities. Knowing the precise angles of the nearly parallel lines or the molecular structure of the paint may not mean much to us because we do not recognise their contribution to the harmonious or garish character of the painting. And learning something about the wavelengths and temporal intervals may remain aesthetically uninteresting for us if it does not help us to make sense of the dramatic nature of the music.

But the problem with this proposal is that the acquisition of the missing understanding normally does not undermine our impression that reference to features like the molecular structure is aesthetically beside the point. Coming to know the exact angles of the lines in the painting may tell us why they are approximately parallel. And, from a purely scientific point of view, this additional information is interesting and illuminating, at least to some extent. But it does not add anything to our aesthetic understanding of why the painting is harmonious. Knowing that the lines are approximately parallel suffices here already. Similarly, that the garishness of the painting is ultimately due to the molecules of paint on its surface is aesthetically irrelevant, even if we know how the latter contribute to the brightness and purity of the colours responsible for the former. Importantly, the limitation of aesthetic curiosity concerns not merely our (rather trivial) knowledge *that* the precise angles of the lines or the molecular structure of the paint determine the aesthetic qualities of the painting, but also our (very substantial) knowledge of *how* the former realise the latter – or at least how they realise the approximate parallelity of the lines or the brightness and purity of the colours, which again realise the latter.

A third and final option for the non-inferentialist is to maintain that our aesthetic curiosity is limited to those lower-level features, noticing which helps us to recognise the respective aesthetic qualities – of course without providing us with further evidence for our aesthetic judgements. However, this would mean that we would lose or fail to develop this interest in the underlying properties, if we came or were already able to recognise the aesthetic qualities in question. For instance, once we got the other party to recognise the aesthetic qualities at issue by pointing them to suitable lower-level features, the latter would stop being of any help for us and would therefore cease to be relevant for our aesthetic experiences. But this is obviously not the case in real aesthetic disputes. Even if there is agreement on the presence of a certain aesthetic quality, we may still refer to some lower-level features in support of our

aesthetic judgement – in fact, we may still disagree about reference to which lower-level features is of justificatory importance. The problem is thus that the proposal under consideration treats our curiosity as purely pragmatic. In particular, it ignores the fact that there is a link between the aesthetic qualities and the underlying lower-level features, and that this link is of significance for why identifying the latter may provide support for ascribing the former.

So, the current challenge for the adherent of the non-inferential view – namely to provide us with a satisfactory specification of our distinctively aesthetic interest in certain, but not all, of the lower-level features which help to realise aesthetic qualities – is still unanswered. As a result, non-inferentialism is subject to two serious objections, and not only one. First, it cannot render plausible the idea that identifying the metaphysical connection between the two sets of properties can provide some form of non-epistemic or, more generally, non-evidential support for our aesthetic judgements. That is, it cannot make sense of our expectation of good critics to be able to point to lower-level features in support of their aesthetic judgements. At least, none of Sibley’s four proposals has been resourceful enough to resolve this issue; and it is not clear whether there are any other, more promising options available to the non-inferentialist about aesthetic matters. Second, as just argued, non-inferentialism cannot account for the limitation of our aesthetic curiosity. In the light of both objections, non-inferentialism in the form advocated by Sibley is better to be given up.

IV.

There is, of course, a relatively simple solution to the two problems mentioned at the end of last section. It consists in adopting an evidential understanding of the support provided by the recognition of the lower-level features. The first problem disappears immediately: pointing to relevant evidence clearly bolsters our aesthetic judgements. But also the second problem can be dealt with in a straightforward manner. The key idea is to say that, when referring to the lower-level features in aesthetic debates, we are interested in proper justification – namely in the evidential impact of our recognition of the lower-level features on the occurrence and epistemic standing of our aesthetic judgements. This interpretation of our practice of demanding and providing support for our

aesthetic judgements in terms of lower-level features explains the limits of our aesthetic curiosity in terms of the fact that only those lower-level features matter for us, the awareness of which provides us with evidence for (or against) our ascription of the aesthetic qualities concerned. We are aesthetically interested in these – but not other – lower-level features precisely because identifying them may help us to improve and solidify the evidential standing of our aesthetic judgements and, as a consequence, also to advance the emotional, evaluative and other elements of aesthetic appreciation.

Now, it is natural to assume that evidence for (or against) the ascription of certain properties to objects has the function to enable us to infer the presence of the latter (cf. Austin (1962, 115f.) and Williamson (2000, 194ff.)). Accordingly, the recognition that the lower-level features of an object together provide sufficient evidence for the instantiation of a certain aesthetic quality should put us into the position to reason to the conclusion that the object possesses that quality. If some of the underlying features of an artwork speak clearly in favour of its elegance, and no other features undermine their evidential force, it should be possible for us to infer that the object is elegant. This means, of course, giving up non-inferentialism and endorsing inferentialism. The price for resolving the two problems just raised may therefore be to reject the idea that we experience (or feel, intuit, etc.) aesthetic qualities.

The inferential account, however, faces its own difficulties. One has already been mentioned, namely the problem of accounting for the fact that many of our aesthetic judgements are actually formed in a non-inferential manner. Especially the idea of implicit inferences needs further elucidation and support. Another problem is how to accommodate Sibley's convincing arguments against the existence of aesthetic principles. The best idea seems to be to understand aesthetic reasoning as a special form of abduction or informed guessing, which need not be guided by principles and does not require conclusive or otherwise very strong evidence for justification. But more needs to be said to make proper sense of this idea.

These and similar difficulties may motivate one to hold on to the claim that aesthetic judgements are always non-inferentially grounded in experience, and to try to combine this claim with the idea that our awareness of suitable lower-level features may give us some extra evidential support for our experientially based recognition of aesthetic qualities. What such a hybrid view would en-

tail is that the recognition of the lower-level features never provides us with sufficient evidence for inferring the aesthetic qualities in question. That is, while we receive some evidential support for aesthetic judgements by noticing the underlying features, we do not receive enough support to come to ascribe aesthetic qualities on this evidential basis alone.

This is – perhaps – the view put forward by Elisabeth Schellekens in a recent essay (Schellekens, 2006). The qualification is needed since she is not explicit about whether she unconditionally endorses the view proposed at the end of her paper, or about whether this view understands the epistemic backing provided by our recognition of the lower-level features to be evidential. Before addressing this issue in more detail, it is worthwhile to get clearer about the general picture of how aesthetic judgements are formed and justified that Schellekens puts forward:

[O]ur judgement to the effect that the [Chrysler] building is indeed elegant may be understood to follow from the perception that it is so and also from our reflection on various salient features of that building. Perhaps, then, it would be better to understand an aesthetic perception as that which provides the experiential grounding of an aesthetic judgement, and an aesthetic judgement as that which reports on a perception. Thus a judgement may be allowed to involve a set of reflections – reflections most probably prompted by the perception but not, strictly speaking, part of that aesthetic perception itself – concerning features of the object of aesthetic appreciation. Some of those features may be considered relevant to the things aesthetic character, and can thus lead us to confirm our perception in the form of a judgement. To use Sibley's scheme whereby 'A' refers to a non-aesthetic feature and 'B' an aesthetic quality, it is not because we know A that we perceive B; but we can say that because we perceive B and know, or come to know A, we can judge that 'x is B'. (Schellekens, 2006, 175f.)

This passage shows that, for her, it all starts with the experience of aesthetic qualities. This experience may then prompt us to look for and identify some of the lower-level features which contribute to the realisation of those qualities. Finally, we form respective aesthetic judgements in response to our experience of the aesthetic qualities and (if applicable) also to our identification of their underlying realisers. That is, Schellekens takes aesthetic judgements to be experience-based, but not necessarily merely so. Their formation also

often involves the reflection on relevant lower-level features; and this reflection may add to their justification. The question is then whether its justificatory contribution is evidential in nature.

Some formulations of Schellekens' – notably those passages in which she appears to identify the experiences themselves as the recipients of epistemic support – suggest a negative answer. For instance, she writes that the aim of our practice of pointing to the underlying features is 'to check whether our aesthetic perception is well grounded' (Schellekens (2006, p. 177)), and that this may lead to a 'confirmation' of the experience of the aesthetic quality in question (cf. the passage quoted above). Given that Schellekens accepts that aesthetic perception is like ordinary perception in not being based on or responsive to evidence, the kind of backing hinted at in these passages might be non-evidential. The proposed solution would therefore be very similar to Sibley's proposal (ii) discussed above and face more or less the same problems. In particular, it would still be unclear why someone, who is good at identifying lower-level features that realise aesthetic qualities, is also good at experiencing aesthetic qualities. A physicist specialising in the reflectance properties of objects may in fact be colour-blind and hence not the ideal perceiver of colours.

But there are other passages in Schellekens' essay that suggest a positive answer to the question of whether she takes the epistemic support under consideration to be evidential. For example, she characterises the support in question as 'some kind of rational justification' (Schellekens (2006, p. 177)), that is, as some kind of justification involving epistemic reasons (or evidence) for or against forming aesthetic judgements, rather than mere explanations of why something possesses certain aesthetic qualities.⁸ Similarly, she is exclusively concerned with the epistemic standing of particular aesthetic judgements, rather than with the more general quality of subjects as aesthetic critics. Finally, she concentrates her discussion on the epistemic impact of recognising the salient non-aesthetic features that realise the aesthetic qualities of their bearers. And, as already illustrated, reference to such underlying features can at best play an *evidential* role in the epistemic justification of aesthetic judgements.

Now, independently of whether this second interpretation of Schellekens' article

⁸ See Dancy (2000, 8ff.) and Schellekens (2006, p. 174) for the distinction between rational justification and explanation.

is actually adequate, what are the prospects of the resulting hybrid position? That is, how plausible is it to combine the non-inferentialist element of an experiential grounding with the more inferentialist idea that we may provide the latter with additional – though never sufficient – evidential support by pointing to relevant lower-level features? The main problem for the hybrid view is to account for the motivational and justificatory impact of the reference to the lower-level features.

This becomes already apparent if we consider Schellekens' view on how we form aesthetic judgements. They are said to be responses both to experience and to reflection. But how do these two elements interact? They should not be taken to serve together as an inference base for the ensuing aesthetic judgement. Not only would this suggestion contradict the non-inferentialist claim that aesthetic judgements are not based on inferences. But it would also overlook the fact that the experience is already sufficient to ground the judgements: there is no need for additional motivation or justification. As a result, it remains mysterious how the recognition of the lower-level features is supposed to make an independent contribution to the formation and vindication of aesthetic judgements.

The problem persists even if it is assumed – contrary to what Schellekens proposes in the passage quoted above – that aesthetic judgements are initially grounded solely in experiences of aesthetic qualities, and that the reference to lower-level features becomes evidentially relevant only after the formation of the aesthetic judgements – notably once the initial experience-based judgements are questioned.⁹ The reference to lower-level features can be properly said to retrospectively bolster a certain aesthetic judgement only if it has the power to prevent us at least sometimes from giving up the judgement in response to challenges to its standing. Similarly, the reference to lower-level

⁹This idea of merely retrospective justificatory power is also problematic since the justificatory power in question is experience-independent and, hence, should not change in relation to whether we refer to the lower-level features before or after experiencing the object and forming our experience-based judgement about it (cf. the respective discussion in section II). Schellekens (2006, p. 177)'s claim that a properly cognitivist (and non-inferentialist) account of aesthetic judgement 'would have to ensure that the distinctively aesthetic element always comes into play before we look for any salient non-aesthetic features' may be read as an endorsement of the idea of retrospective justification. But this interpretation would be in conflict with the passage from her paper quoted above, according to which the consideration of the lower-level features comes in between aesthetic perception and aesthetic judgement.

features can be properly said to retrospectively undermine a judgement only if it has the power to move us at least sometimes to give up the judgement and, possibly, to replace it with a different one. Now, in both cases, the recognition of the lower-level features has motivational impact. Moreover, its motivational force has to be more or less of the same kind and strength as that of experience. In the first case, it is strong enough to outweigh the impact of the doubts fuelling the challenge, which may be due to, and borrow their motivational power from, a diverging experience – whether one’s own in the past, or that of another critic in the present. The second case requires that the reference to the lower-level features is sufficient to override or undercut the impact of the initial experience, and possibly also to determine which specific new judgement to form. What these considerations indicate is therefore that the strength of the rational influence of the additional evidence is comparable to that of the original experience, meaning in particular that it should be powerful enough to ground judgements on its own.

One might be inclined to reply that the reference to lower-level features does not directly lead to a sustainment or revision of opinion, but instead only by reaffirming or changing the experience on which the original judgement was based.¹⁰ But this rejoinder should be rejected. In many cases, we revise our aesthetic judgements after having finished our experience of the artwork in question (e.g., after watching or recalling the ending of the movie), so there is nothing any more to be influenced. More important, since experiences are not sensitive to evidence (or epistemic reasons), the impact of recognising the lower-level features would turn out be merely causal and non-evidential; and the difficulties for Sibley’s proposal (ii) would reoccur.

To conclude, even in cases where the reference to underlying features is clearly of motivational and justificatory relevance, it remains unclear why it is not sufficient on its own to ground aesthetic judgements, but only in conjunction with experience; and how it can rationally interact with experience in the first place. The hybrid view is therefore not better equipped than Sibley’s non-inferentialism to avoid the tension between the claim about the experiencability of higher-level aesthetic qualities and the idea of supporting the corresponding

¹⁰ Schellekens (2006, n. 39) allows for this possibility, but does not take it to be central to the formation or revision of aesthetic judgements in the light of the recognition of lower-level features.

judgements in terms of relevant lower-level features. It is also not easy to see how some other non-inferentialist account of our canonical access to aesthetic qualities could do better than the two discussed in this essay. Perhaps we should therefore start to look for an alternative account of the (inferential) justification and (often non-inferential) motivation of our ascriptions of higher-level features to experienced objects – possibly in terms of some non-deductive and non-principled (e.g., particularist) form of reasoning in response to the (often experiential) recognition of the realisers of aesthetic qualities, which is compatible with Sibley’s rejection of the possibility of aesthetic judgements that are grounded in principles and deductions.¹¹

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