

## CONSISTENCY, CONVERSATIONAL IMPLICATURES AND THE GENERALITY OF CRITICAL REASONS

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**Abstract.** *In this paper I examine whether critical reasons we give for evaluative aesthetic judgments must be generalizable in order to be adequate. In the first part of the paper, I introduce central concepts relevant for the problem of aesthetic evaluation (aesthetic value, evaluative judgments, critical reasons, aesthetic experience), as well as crucial distinctions in contemporary aesthetic and meta-aesthetic debates: aesthetic cognitivism/non-cognitivism and aesthetic particularism/generalism. After I point to some relations between these concepts, in the second part of the paper, using Frank Sibley's view as an example, I examine in more detail what sort of consistency characterizes critical reasons, that is, what sort of consistency distinguishes the rationality of aesthetic evaluation. This paper offers an alternative view of the weak aesthetic generalism that rests on the concept of Gricean conversational implicatures. In the end, I argue for James Shelley's critical compatibilism, which gives considerable merit to both sides in the debate.*

**Key words:** *consistency, aesthetic value, generality of critical reasons, inherent evaluative polarity, merit-properties, conversational implicatures.*

The early analytic aesthetics was marked by several ongoing debates. The first debate deals with the possibility of an essentialist definition of the concept of artwork. The second is concerned with the question whether the reasons we give for our evaluative aesthetic judgments can be generalized, that is, whether it is possible to formulate universal aesthetic canons. The third, somewhat more recent and more specific aesthetic dispute, pertains to the question to what degree the semantic intentions of an author constitute the meaning of a literary text. The three issues, along with meta-aesthetic questions about the ontological status of aesthetic properties, the question of the way we

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discern them, and the question of aesthetic value, represent the central questions put forward by contemporary aestheticians.

The main topic of this paper is what conditions a critical reason must satisfy in order to be adequate and, more specifically, whether it has to be generalizable. As we shall see, in order to answer this question we have to examine what type of consistency an aesthetic evaluation has. Given that aesthetic evaluation is a rational activity, it is obvious that it must be consistent. Thus, in order to show what form such a consistency takes, we need to determine what (if any) type of generality characterizes critical reasons.

Let us begin with some terminological distinctions. If we want to examine the nature of aesthetic evaluation more closely, we must first say what it consists in. It seems fairly obvious, almost trivial, that aesthetic evaluation consists in ascribing aesthetic value to an object. It is, however, incorrect to say that aestheticians are unanimous in that respect. Aesthetic non-cognitivists, for instance, argue that evaluation does not presuppose ascription of "objective properties". According to them, it is an expression of a positive or of a negative attitude towards a given object or some sort of prescription. There are also those who do not agree with the claim that aesthetic evaluation consists in ascribing aesthetic value to an object, even though they do believe that aesthetic judgments have truth value. In their opinion, aesthetic judgments do not state anything about the evaluated object. Such judgments merely state that we have a certain sort of experience when we perceive an object, i.e. that it affects us in some way. Since an object X can have different effects on different people, the truth value of the corresponding judgments will differ from subject to subject. Because of that, those who subscribe to such a meta-aesthetic view are often called relativists (see Cova and Pain 2012).

In spite of these differences, the proponents of all three positions – cognitivism, non-cognitivism and relativism – can give the same general answer as to why we *say* that a poem is marvelous, that an actor's performance is magnificent, that a piece of music is sublime, etc. None of them would endanger the coherency of their respective positions if they agreed with the claim, stemming from British empiricists and Kant, that aesthetic judgments are made on the basis of the experience we have while we read a poem, while we watch a play or listen to a performance, etc. In short, according to this thesis, the central aspect of an aesthetic experience is the aesthetic pleasure we feel while marveling at something (compare Kendall 1993). Furthermore, aesthetic experience is the ground on which the aesthetic judgment is determined. In other words, we make such judgments on the basis of what we feel while being affected by the given object.

If the differences in ontological and epistemological starting points of these three views do not imply different explanations of how we arrive at evaluative aesthetic judgments, do they pertain to the critical reasons we give for such judgments? According to aesthetic non-cognitivists, we neither give critical reasons in order to justify our aesthetic judgments, nor do we argue for their truth because such judgments are not genuine propositions – they are merely disguised expressions and prescriptions. An evaluative judgment is, for non-cognitivists, complete, which means that it does not require any further explanation. Nevertheless, from a pragmatic point of view, it might be necessary for us to give some reason. Namely, the persuasiveness of the subjects who make such judgments often relies on the interlocutor's assumption that what is communicated is something universally valid and intersubjective. In such cases, a hearer expects a speaker to base his judgment on adequate reasons that pertain to the properties of the judged object. If we,

however, hold that evaluative judgments are true or false on the basis of whether we have some kind of aesthetic experience, it is not clear whether we would have to elaborate on such judgments by giving objective reasons. On the other hand, if we, contrary to both camps, agree that subjects making aesthetic judgments lay claim to objectivity, then these subjects must give an account of why their judgments are justified.

Aside from these views, there is an anti-realist version of aesthetic cognitivism, put forward by Kant.<sup>1</sup> Kant maintains that aesthetic judgments (judgments of the form “X is beautiful”) have both truth value and universal validity. However, he further claims that in making such judgments, we do not ascribe an objective property (of beauty) to objects, but merely claim that they affect us in a certain way. However, due to the fact that human beings are cognitively uniform, we ought to expect universal assent. Thus, evaluative aesthetic judgments have the property of subjective generality. Moreover, the conjunction of subjectivity and generality (that is, universal validity) is their distinctive property. I do not want to examine the tenability of this view,<sup>2</sup> I merely want to point out that it too, in my view, requires us to give appropriate objective reasons for our judgments. Some might disagree and claim that it is enough to abstract from all the “pathological” (idiosyncratic) and cognitive inclinations. It is difficult, however, to defend this thesis considering that there is always the possibility of self-deception and that, moreover, such an act of abstraction is not itself intersubjective. Thus, to paraphrase Wittgenstein’s famous thought: the internal experience requires external criteria.<sup>3</sup>

If this is true, then it seems that Kant was wrong when he said that aesthetic judgments do not require reasons (Kant 2000, §8, esp. 5:216). However, his thesis is not entirely wrong, either. For the majority of contemporary aestheticians, his thesis is acceptable if reasons are understood as being conclusive: aesthetic judgments need not, and cannot be justified by conclusive reasons. Since Kant believed that in making aesthetic judgments we do not apply certain concepts, that is, we do not follow strict rules (see Kant 2000, §6-9), I believe that Kant too adhered to such a view of the generality of critical reasons.<sup>4</sup> More explicitly, this view entails that we cannot make substantive aesthetic judgments (using terms such as “vivid”, “tragic”, “graceful”, etc.) from which we would be able to infer that a certain object has aesthetic value. We cannot, for instance, formulate the canon that would claim that all vivid landscapes are beautiful, that all psychologically persuasive novels are excellent, that all pastoral symphonies are magnificent, etc. Those who believe in aesthetic canons today hold the view that, in aesthetics, one can formulate weak (*pro tanto*) canons.

Such a departure from the traditional Platonist paradigm is not only an instance of a more general, Wittgensteinian turn towards aesthetic anti-essentialism, but is also a consequence of Kant’s influence. Namely, Kant held that beauty is, without concept, an object of a universal satisfaction (Kant 2000, §6-9). However, even though different scholars are still debating the precise meaning of this thesis, there is no doubt that Kant denies that

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<sup>1</sup> Kant develops the original version of such a position in his third *Critique* (see Kant 2000). I find his view somewhat problematic. However, examining its plausibility would move us away from the main topic.

<sup>2</sup> That is the topic of my forthcoming talk at Kant Congress in Vienna (2015): “Why Beauty Has to Be a Property? Kant’s Critique of Taste and Its Meta-Aesthetic Implications.”

<sup>3</sup> The *locus classicus* of that idea are the paragraphs dealing with the issue of private language. See Wittgenstein 1953, §241-315, esp. §261.

<sup>4</sup> Such a view is now common and is advanced by all the sides in the debate.

we make aesthetic judgments by applying concepts or following rules. We do not say that a rose is beautiful because we can apply some concept to it, i.e. because it belongs to a certain class of objects (say the class of wild roses). As I mentioned earlier, aesthetic judgments are made based on the feeling we have while we perceive an object or are in some other way directly acquainted with it. That is why aesthetic judgments are logically singular, i.e. pertain to individual objects, not to classes of objects. When we make such judgments, we only need to reflect on our own feelings and judge autonomously, without relying on rules or on some authority. If we have abstracted from the idiosyncratic, such judgments will, presumably, be universally valid. That is, they will hold for other people as they hold for us. However, we will not be able to justify or support our judgment by appealing to the pleasure we feel, even if the pleasure is disinterested.

Every aesthete who insists, like Kant and Hume do, on the difference between universally valid aesthetic judgments and judgments about personal preferences, can explain it persuasively by pointing out that our aesthetic judgments have to be justifiable by appropriate critical reasons. Somewhat paradoxically, such reasons do not pertain to the determining ground of some such judgment; instead of making the nature of aesthetic experience more explicit, such reasons point to certain properties for which we appreciate a work and marvel at it. Here we can see a sort of asymmetry between reasons for which we say that X is aesthetically valuable and reasons which *make* X aesthetically valuable. We claim that X is aesthetically valuable because it affects us in a certain way, produces aesthetic pleasure in us, but in justifying such judgments we cannot appeal to inherent properties of our experience, as they are not inter-subjectively verifiable.

Both Kant and the British aestheticians abandoned the Platonist paradigm. They relinquished the old faith in the possibility of defining a concept of beauty. According to Kant, we do not make judgments like “X is beautiful” by applying some criterion that specifies individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for the application of the concept of beauty (Ibid). He was aware that the concept of beauty is trans-categorical and that there is nothing that beautiful objects have (non-trivially) in common, at least not in the realm of their inherent properties (which some such definition would focus on). Here we need to make a distinction between three questions. First, why do we claim that an object is beautiful? Second, what do such judgments pertain to (what makes them true or false)? Third, why is an object beautiful, what makes it beautiful? Just as we do not appeal to inherent properties of an object in answering the first question, so in answering the latter two questions we do not appeal to inherent properties of the aesthetic experience we have while perceiving the object. What makes our judgment more than a mere report on personal preferences and on how a given object affects us is precisely the fact that some such judgment can be justified by giving reasons that pertain to the objective properties of a given artwork. Such an asymmetry can be explained if we understand the aesthetic value as a dispositional property of an object, which by its very nature has a subjective and an objective side. Even though it is clear that the critical reasons we give for our aesthetic judgments appeal to objective properties of a given artwork, and that this is a necessary condition for the adequacy of a critical reason, this in itself is still not enough to make a critical reason adequate. It is obvious that such a reason must specify the properties of an object that are more substantially related to its aesthetic value – properties which make an object such that it yields in us aesthetic pleasure.

However, Monroe Beardsley and Frank Sibley, the most influential proponents of aesthetic generalism (a position according to which critical reasons have to be general in order to be adequate), believe that this is not enough to make a reason adequate. Discussing Beardsley's paper "On the Generality of Critical Reasons" (Beardsley 1962), Sibley points out that he agrees with Beardsley that reasons (aesthetic reasons not being an exception) must be general in order to be consistent. Both philosophers reject the thesis that "any 'reason' offered to support the judgment that one work has aesthetic merit may be offered to support the judgment that another work has an aesthetic defect" (Sibley 2001c, 104). Nevertheless, they oppose such aesthetic particularism for different reasons. Beardsley considers it false because he believes that certain formal characteristics (unity, complexity and the intensity of regional qualities) always, that is without exception, contribute positively to the value of an artwork (Beardsley 1962, 485). For Sibley, particularism is unacceptable because one of the two reasons would at least be incomplete. According to Sibley's position, one of those two reasons would either be false, or it would require some kind of support or justification.

Beardsley's position is more clearly generalist than Sibley's. Beardsley holds that there are precisely three primary criteria of aesthetic value, and that the properties that constitute such criteria always positively contribute to the value of a given artwork (Ibid). These primary criteria of aesthetic value are such that every increase in one of the three categories, provided there are no decreases in the other two, always results in increase of the value of a given artwork. Thus, according to Beardsley, unity, complexity and intensity of regional qualities are safe, whereas other properties are in the same sense risky (Beardsley 1974).

Even though Sibley *prima facie* adheres to aesthetic generalism, though, as we will see, only nominally, he criticizes Beardsley's thesis in several ways. Setting aside Sibley's criticism of Beardsley's choice of unity, complexity and intensity of regional qualities as primary positive criteria of aesthetic value, I shall focus on two complementary criticisms Sibley puts forward in his paper "General Criteria and Reasons in Aesthetics". Developing his position in contrast to Beardsley's view, Sibley starts with the thesis that artworks are organic wholes in which a work's value is not a simple sum of the value of its elements or properties. This is the consequence of the fact that properties of an artwork mutually interact. Since such properties are combined with a (mostly) unpredictable outcome, the value of the work cannot be determined simply by calculating the sum of positive or negative polarity of its properties. Thus, for instance, even if a novel is psychologically persuasive, epically comprehensive and politically insightful, we still cannot infer that a given novel is good. This does not hold only for the specific aesthetic properties of artwork, like the ones just mentioned, but also for the more general formal characteristics such as unity, complexity and the intensity of regional qualities.

Beardsley was, hence, wrong to believe that each of the three properties always, that is, without exception contributes to the value of the artwork in which it figures. Whether unity, complexity or the intensity of regional qualities (expressiveness), will actually contribute to the value of an artwork depends on how that property relates to other properties of a given work. Considering that unity, complexity and expressiveness can stand in various relations that yield an unpredictable outcome, it seems that we cannot formulate aesthetic canons of the following sort: "Every unique artwork is *pro tanto* good"; "Every complex artwork is *pro tanto* good"; "Every expressive artwork is *pro tanto* good". The three formal

characteristics that are, according to Beardsley, primary positive criteria of aesthetic value are not the exception. Namely, we cannot find properties that could serve as the basis for such general laws either among aesthetic, or among non-aesthetic properties (regardless of them being abstract or concrete). Sibley, thus, rejected the idea of formulating aesthetic canons, viewing it as something that belongs only to the history of philosophy. Furthermore, what holds for the more particular canons, such as: “All vivid paintings are *pro tanto* beautiful”, also holds for the more general canons, such as the ones envisaged by Beardsley. Both types of canons have a whole series of exceptions that cannot be exhaustively enumerated.

If we want to characterize the nature of Sibley’s position properly, we should bear in mind that his rejection of the idea of aesthetic canons does not mean that he also gave up on the idea of the generality of critical reasons. As I mentioned earlier, both he and Beardsley maintain that it is wrong to say that any “reason” offered to support the judgment that one work has aesthetic merit may be offered to support the judgment that another work has an aesthetic defect. Unfortunately, Sibley does not say explicitly why he thinks that this particularist view is false. If he did, it would help us understand in what sense and on what grounds Sibley’s belongs to the generalist camp. Even though there is some disagreement among commentators with respect to that question (see, for instance: Bergqvist 2010; Kirwin 2011), Sibley certainly believes that consistency of aesthetic evaluation requires of the critical reasons we give for our evaluative judgments to be general. However, according to him, that still does not imply that critical reasons can be *generalizable* (such that they can function as the basis for formulating aesthetic canons).

The generality of critical reasons is reflected in the fact that properties that they appeal to have *inherent evaluative polarity*. The properties with inherent positive or negative evaluative polarity are, for Sibley, merit-properties. It is important to make a distinction between merit-properties and aesthetic value. In claiming that a work has some such property, we still do not evaluate it, at least not directly; if cognitivists are right, when we ascribe an aesthetic value to it, we do it explicitly. There are some indications that Sibley equates merit-properties (properties with inherent evaluative polarity) with aesthetic properties, which he defined in his earlier papers by appealing to the concept of taste (Sibley 2001a, 2001b). Still, it is not clear whether he did make such an equation, especially because he does not explicitly define merit-properties in a way that would allow us to compare them to a more or less explicit definition of aesthetic properties, given at the beginning of his paper “Aesthetic Concepts” (Sibley 2001a, 1-3). In spite of this ambiguity, all merit-properties are apparently characterized by the fact that in appealing to them we can formulate critical reasons that are complete. More precisely, that is possible in situations where the polarity of an evaluative property that reason appeals to is the same as the polarity of a corresponding evaluative judgment. Like all contemporary aestheticians who abandoned the essentialist idea that one can formulate necessary and sufficient conditions for the application of value concepts, Sibley is certain that such reasons cannot be conclusive. Moreover, he does not subscribe to the generalist thesis that merit-properties always contribute to the value of the work in which they figure.

Sibley’s way of articulating the generality of critical reasons consists in the fact that he puts forward a claim that reasons which appeal to merit-properties are *prima facie* reasons for positive or negative value of artwork or other aesthetically evaluated objects. Such a rule holds with no exceptions, but, as was mentioned, with one restriction – namely, it holds only when evaluative polarity is the same in both a judgment and in the corresponding

critical reason. Formulated differently, Sibley's thesis entails that we can say *tout court* something like: "This novel is true to life and is *pro tanto* valuable", or "This novel is bad in so far as its characters are stereotypical". Such reasons do not require further qualifications or explanations because they appeal to merit-properties whose evaluative polarity is the same as the polarity of the corresponding evaluative judgments. This still does not mean that such reasons are indisputable or that they cannot be rejected, but it does mean that they are self-explanatory and that they do not need further clarification, precisely because of the fact that properties which we appeal to in giving them have inherent evaluative polarity.

What, then, remains of the inherent evaluative polarity of certain properties, if it cannot be assumed that the work characterized by some such property (or even some combination of them) would be *pro tanto* good. Instead of defending a version of the thesis pertaining to weak aesthetic canons, or maintaining that merit-properties correspond to some sort of defeasible concepts, Sibley consistently retains the position from his earlier papers that taste is needed for making aesthetic judgments. Just like we need taste in order to grasp certain specific aesthetic properties (vividness of a landscape, gracefulness of a motion, the tragic nature of a character's fate, the distinctness of a detail on some portrait, etc.) and make an appropriate judgment, we also need it for making evaluative aesthetic judgments like: "*Santa Maria della Salute* is an extraordinary lyric poem", or "The last stanza of *Santa Maria della Salute* is considerably weaker than its previous stanzas", etc.

If we consider the role that taste, according to Sibley, plays in making evaluative judgments, or in the very process of judging, there is seemingly no difference between aesthetic particularism and aesthetic generalism. Namely, in making evaluative judgments, we do not appeal to any general rules. Thus, every potential canon we formulate by appealing to properties that have inherent evaluative polarity would have a large number of exceptions. Moreover, we would not be able to delineate such exceptions by any additional rule. In other words, we would only be able to say: "The canon X holds, except when it does not", but formulating such a canon would not make much sense.

Where should we, then, draw a distinction between a particularist viewpoint, such as the one put forward by Arnold Isenberg (Isenberg 1949), and Sibley's weak generalist thesis? One objection commonly leveled against Sibley is that merit-properties do not exist in two ways: first, *in vacuo*, having inherent evaluative polarity; second, *in situ*, as properties of a particular work, whose merit depends on other properties that it has. George Dickie answers this objection by formulating a hypothesis (Dickie 1987). According to him, we should understand Sibley's thesis about inherent evaluative polarity existing *in vacuo* as claiming that a work which has only one merit-property would be (*pro tanto*, or to a degree to which it has that property) a good artwork.<sup>5</sup> Thus, for instance, a play with a properly motivated plot would be (to the degree to which its plot is motivated) a good play, assuming that is its only merit-property. The distinction between Sibley's generalism and proper particularism, in line with Dickie's explanation, should apparently be sought primarily at the ontological level. Unfortunately, Dickie's explanation is only slightly more plausible than the claim about merit-properties existing in two ways (which we have no reason to adhere to), instead of existing in only one way. Even though that question is empirical, there could hardly be any artwork with only one evaluative property. Even if such works do exist, it still

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<sup>5</sup> This, more precise formulation, which is also in accordance with the thesis about weakened canons, is mine.

not clear how that fact helps Sibley defend his thesis about the inherent polarity of merit-properties.

Regardless of Dickie's suggestion, we are left with the same problems threatening Sibley's view. However, perhaps the interpretation put forward by Anna Bergqvist will yield a more favorable outcome. In her opinion, Sibley is a generalist merely nominally, while actually being a particularist and a holist. She thinks that Sibley is a particularist because, in her opinion, he believes that what is a reason in one case need not be a reason in another (Bergqvist 2010, 4-5). However, as we already pointed out, Sibley explicitly states at the beginning of his paper "General Criteria and Reasons in Aesthetics" that he disagrees with such a proposition (Sibley 2001c, 104-105). It is not immediately clear how that statement relates to his core views, primarily to the thesis that a piece of artwork is an organic whole (Sibley 2001c, 107). However, Sibley did consider himself an opponent of particularism. Thus, until we exhaust all interpretative options that take this into account, we have no real reason to assume the opposite.

Although Anna Bergqvist is wrong about the nature of Sibley's position, one of her observations can help us understand it better. According to her, Sibley aimed to show that, in comparison to other properties of an artwork, the aesthetic properties we appeal to when justifying our evaluative judgments have a privileged position. Thus, Beardsley was wrong in believing that there is a principal difference between the three properties he considered primary (positive) criteria of aesthetic value, and all the other properties of that work.<sup>6</sup> In place of such a distinction, Sibley suggests that a distinction should be made between merit-properties and all other properties (see, for instance, Sibley 2001c, 109). Regardless of what one thinks about the tenability of Sibley's position, Sibley has a good reason to believe that this distinction has greater explanatory strength than Beardsley's. If we equated merit-properties with aesthetic properties, as Sibley himself probably did, appealing to his distinction would enable us to delineate the field of the aesthetic.<sup>7</sup> Sibley's view is, in this respect, more plausible than both Beardsley's generalist thesis, and Jonathan Dancy's *par excellence* ethical particularism, whose theory Anna Bergqvist compares to Sibley's.<sup>8</sup> Whereas Dancy cannot draw a principal distinction between the ethical and the non-ethical,<sup>9</sup> Beardsley draws the analogous aesthetic distinction in the wrong place. Both of them, unlike Sibley, commit an error of flattening the moral and aesthetic landscape, respectively. Sibley was aware of this sort of advantage he had over Beardsley when he criticized him for not making a proper distinction between judgments like: "This painting is beautiful because it is vivid", and judgments like: "This painting is beautiful because of its dominant, mostly blue and green pastel shades".

As we have seen, we can look for the distinction between a *par excellence* particularism (similar to Dancy's ethical particularism) and Sibley's generalism in several different places. Since Sibley agrees with the particularists that in making evaluative aesthetic judgments we do not appeal to rules or canons, and remains consistent to his view of taste, it is obvious that this

<sup>6</sup> Such properties constitute secondary criteria of aesthetic value.

<sup>7</sup> Even though Sibley was heading in that direction, he did not go as far as Nick Zangwill, who claimed that substantive aesthetic properties (vivid, graceful, delicate, etc.) are aesthetic terms only derivatively. That is, Zangwill claimed such terms are aesthetic only in so far as they contribute to aesthetic value. See Zangwill, 1995.

<sup>8</sup> Dancy develops his view in: Dancy 2004.

<sup>9</sup> Such a criticism is advanced by Margaret Little. See: Little 2000.



distinction cannot be found in our judging of an artwork. We have also seen that it cannot be plausibly drawn at the ontological level. However, drawing the distinction between two views with respect to the justification of an evaluative judgment, i.e. by appealing to the idea of the completeness of critical reasons, is not only more plausible, but is also much more in the spirit of Sibley's approach. As Oliver Conolly and Bashshar Haydar point out, Sibley notices a sort of asymmetry between merit-properties on the one hand, and non-merit-properties on the other (Conolly and Haydar 2003). When the evaluative polarity of an evaluative judgment coincides with the inherent evaluative polarity of the property to which we appeal when giving a critical reason, no further justification or support is required. In some cases, giving a critical reason will mean appealing to a property without inherent evaluative polarity ("This melody is wonderful because it is so slow", or "This glass is beautiful because it is so thin", and the like). In such instances, we must offer an additional, linking explanation. We must also do so when we appeal to a merit-property which reverses its polarity in a given instance: "The value of Shakespeare's comedy *The Merchant of Venice* is marred by its bizarrely tragic plot elements". In that case, we need to give a so-called reversing explanation. However, as the two authors mention, even in cases where the evaluative polarity of a prominent merit-property coincides with the evaluative polarity of a judgment, we must explain why that is so. That is, we must offer some additional reasons and respond to critical challenges.

An alternative way of stating this would be to say that the expressions which constitute such (complete) critical reasons have certain *conversational implicatures*.<sup>10</sup> When we, accordingly, say that Miloš Crnjanski's "Sumatra" is a lyrically pure poem, or that Chekhov's "Ward 6" is a philosophically deep and a psychologically subtle story, we claim both that these literary works do have the properties we ascribe to them and that we appreciate these works precisely *because* they have those properties. Here I cannot go into more detail on how exactly conversational implicatures are to be understood: in a cognitivist or a non-cognitivist manner. It is enough to say that cognitivists understand them as communicating that a work (in our opinion) has a certain merit-property. The non-cognitivists, on the other hand, do not imply that, aside from the explicitly formulated judgment about a given work, there is also a certain evaluative judgment which holds, but merely that in judging we express our preferences and recommend the work in this or that way. Whichever view of conversational implicatures we adopt, it seems to me that one thing will be true. Namely, what holds for conversational implicatures in general – that an utterer can explicitly deny them, that they are defeasible – will also hold in both of these cases.

Thus defined, the thesis about aesthetic conversational implicatures is weaker than Beardsley's or some similar view of the *pro tanto* canons. Such a thesis would have less potential difficulties either with the thesis about complete reasons, as we formulated it earlier, or with Bender's thesis about empirical generalizations, according to which the assumption about inherent evaluative polarity of aesthetic properties rests on the (contingent) fact that such properties have historically been present in paradigmatically good artwork (Bender 1995). Both of these can be criticized on the grounds that they cannot explain why, in some particular case, having a certain aesthetic property is an advantage rather than a flaw. The thesis about aesthetic conversational implicatures does not purport to

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<sup>10</sup> The term "conversational implicature" is introduced by Grice. See: Grice, 1975.

answer that question: it simply explains why some properties of artworks are considered virtues and why some others are viewed as defects – namely, the very language we use appears to point towards the correct understanding.

Furthermore, by appealing to the thesis about conversational implicatures we can connect the other two theses and offer a more complete picture of the nature of aesthetic evaluation. The existence of conversational implicatures can be explained by Bender's thesis about empirical generalizations: the fact that the properties such as tragic force or properly motivated plot have figured in plays or novels of great merit regularly, i.e. often enough, generated this connection – a sort of archetypal semantic synapse – between concepts of the evaluative properties and the concept of aesthetic value. With all this in mind, we can explain why Sibley almost certainly thought that some critical reasons, unlike others, are sufficiently informative. Such reasons obviously appeal to properties with strong evaluative implications, where such synapses are firm – the properties that have figured relatively often, relatively prominently and as relatively representative in paradigmatically good, bad or mediocre artwork, i.e. artwork that is often cited as an example. In spite of that, it seems to me that aesthetic reasons that appeal to properties with supposedly inherent evaluative polarity do not speak *tout court*, in themselves, or they do not have that sort of completeness ascribed to them by Sibley. In every critical dialogue where some such reason figures, an interlocutor that questions certain evaluative judgment can always require an additional clarification or question the judgment by pointing out the inconsistency of that reason with the reasons we give in analogous cases. Such parallels shift the dialogue about a particular work to a more general, comparative context in which the rationality of aesthetic evaluation depends on the consistency that characterizes the way in which a speaker supports his evaluative judgments.

Each of these theses might have been taken up by Sibley, although it is not quite clear whether he actually subscribed to any of them. Perhaps it is easier to determine the nature of Sibley's position by appealing to the negative instead of appealing to the positive theses that are implicitly stated in it. Staying consistent to his defining of aesthetic properties by appealing to the concept of taste, Sibley denies that critical reasons have inferential role in making judgments like "X is a good/successful/aesthetically valuable work of art". We make evaluative aesthetic judgments in essentially the same way we make substantive or the more specific aesthetic judgments – by applying taste. The consequence of this is the fact that such judgments cannot be justified in the way they could have been if they had rested on rules or principles. It appears that we can draw an analogy here with the way in which we generally understand the relation between the explanation and prediction in natural sciences. Namely, in cases where we can provide a deductive-nomological explanation, we can also give a proper prediction; if we cannot do the former, we will not be able to do the latter. It seems that there is a similar sort of complementarity in aesthetics. If we deny that evaluative aesthetic judgments are made by applying some rules, then we seemingly cannot appeal to any rules in justifying them. However, if we do not appeal to general rules in principle in justifying some such judgment, it is questionable whether we still can consider it a justification.

The terminological aspect of this problem can be resolved if, instead of justification, we talk about supporting evaluative aesthetic judgments with critical reasons. Even when we do that, though, we are still left with the substantive aspect of the problem: should we consider the possibility of supporting evaluative aesthetic judgments at all, if the reasons

we give to support them are not generalizable? If critical reasons cannot be generalized, should we say that an aesthetic evaluation is consistent? Arnold Isenberg's position does not encounter such a problem. Isenberg does not view critical reasons as propositions we give for our evaluative judgments, which is why Connolly and Haydar term that view "illusionism" (Connolly and Haydar 2003, 115). According to Isenberg, the role of critical reasons is to guide our perception, i.e. to turn our attention towards certain aesthetically relevant aspects of a given object so that we are able to see its aesthetic value. Although this thesis seems tenable, Isenberg is certainly wrong when he adds that the terms that figure in critical reasons, say the term "assonance", have different meaning for different critics (Isenberg 1949, 338–339). Such a claim is clearly untenable and it leads to an unacceptable semantic decisionism which does not fit our common language practice.

Still, if in making evaluative aesthetic judgments we do not appeal to critical reasons and if, consequently, we cannot truly justify such judgments by appealing to those reasons, why would we need them at all? An acceptable answer is provided by James Shelley (Shelley 2004). By combining elements of Isenberg's particularism and Sibley's generalism, he maintains that critical reasons are general in spite of not being generalizable, that is, in spite of the fact that in making evaluative aesthetic judgments we do not rely on general rules generated by such reasons. According to Shelley, the role of critical reasons is explanatory (Shelley 2004, 136). Their aim is to explain why some artwork is aesthetically valuable, i.e. to say what its value consists in. By giving critical reasons for our evaluative judgments, we help our interlocutor perceive (grasp) the aesthetic value of a given work. For many contemporary aestheticians, the role of criticism ends there (Weitz 1956). When our interlocutor, motivated by a critical reason that we offered, makes an appropriate judgment, our task is complete. However, as was mentioned at the beginning, the determining ground of such a judgment is aesthetic experience or aesthetic satisfaction, and not a critical reason. This asymmetry between reasons on which our evaluative aesthetic judgments rest and reasons we use to support them can only be explained if we understand aesthetic value as some sort of dispositional property.

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## KONZISTENTNOST, KONVERZACIONE IMPLIKATURE I OPŠTOST KRITIČKIH RAZLOGA

*U ovom radu se razmatra još uvek otvoreno pitanje da li kritički razlozi koje navodimo u prilog vrednosnim estetičkim sudovima moraju biti uopštivi da bi bili adekvatni. U prvom delu rada uvode se centralni pojmovi vezani za problem estetičkog vrednovanja (estetičko vrednovanje, estetička vrednost, vrednosni sudovi, kritički razlozi, estetički doživljaj), kao i ključne distinkcije u savremenim estetičkim odnosno metaestetičkim sporovima: estetički kognitivizam/nekognitivizam i estetički partikularizam/generalizam. Pošto ukažem na neke odnose među pojmovima koji su centralni za estetičko vrednovanje, u drugom delu rada na primeru estetičkog stanovišta Frenka Siblija detaljnije ispitujem koja vrsta opštosti karakteriše kritičke razloge, to jest koji vid konzistentnosti odlikuje racionalnost estetičkog vrednovanja. Ovaj rad nudi alternativno viđenje oslabljene teze o opštosti kritičkih razloga, koja polazi od grajsovskih konverzionih implikacija. Na kraju se argumentiše u prilog jednoj vrsti kritičkog kompatibilizma koja potiče od Džejmsa Šelija, a koja u velikoj meri daje za pravo obema stranama u ovoj debati.*

Ključne reči: *konzistentnost, estetička vrednost, opštost kritičkih razloga, inherentna vrednosna polarnost, vrednosna svojstva, konverzacione implikature.*