Beautiful, Troubling Art: In Defense of Non-Summative Judgment*

1 Ethics and Aesthetics—The Standard Debate

Can the ethical features of a work of art bear on its aesthetic value? Are they ever appropriate bases for aesthetic evaluation? The battle lines of this debate are largely agreed upon by its contemporary disputants. "Autonomists" answer in the negative; while many of them[1] are happy to concede that one can issue ethical evaluations of a work of art—e.g., *Triumph of the Will* is evil—such an evaluation is *totally independent* of proper aesthetic evaluation.[2] Such Autonomists evaluate art aesthetically and ethically, but hold the two evaluations apart; Leini Reifinstahl's paean to Hilter is an aesthetic masterpiece, they might say, and as a separate matter, evil;[3] "Age Ain't Nothing But a Number," the hit produced by R. Kelly and sung by Aaliyah, his then-15-year-old secret bride is (aesthetically) groovy and (ethically) disturbing; HBO's *Game of Thrones* is epic and entertaining, and (unrelatedly) misogynistic.[4]

"Interactionists" disagree. The most strident among them take an ethical flaw to be aesthetically damning; ethically flawed art is ipso facto *bad art*.[5] Others defend "moderate ethicism," claiming only that some ethical flaws *count against* a work's aesthetic value, and likewise some ethical merits of a work count in favor.[6]

*Thanks to XXXX

[1] Notably excepting Bell (1924).

[2] As is typical in this debate, I'll speak of aesthetic value and evaluation as synonymous with artistic value and evaluation; we are interested in the value of the art qua art (Devereaux 1998; Harold 2006; Hanson 2020; Stear 2023; Gaut 2007, p. 26-42). A view that allows ethical features to influence artistic but not (narrowly) aesthetic value will, for our purposes, be treated alongside other kinds of autonomism.

[3] Posner (1997, 1998); Anderson and Dean (1998); Harold (2020); Clavel-Vázquez (2023). For an excellent critical overview, see Stear (2023).

[4] Not to mention anti-democratic in its defense of technocratic rule unconstrained by popular opinion—but that's a story for another day.

[5] Plato (2004, 561c-383c6); Rousseau (1960); Tolstoy (1996).

[6] Which ethical flaws? There is much disagreement among interactionists about what ethical features are relevant to aesthetic value/evaluation, including the perspective a work adopts, what it teaches us, the choices of an implied author, the decisions made in its actual production, its impact on humans, and more; see Booth (1988, 1998); Nussbaum (1990); Carroll (1996); Kieran (2001, 2004); Gaut (2007); Harold (2008); Nannicelli (2020); Matthes (2021); Willard (2021); Saito (2022). The arguments in this paper are neutral with

Today's ethicism is not puritanical; many of its defenders are just as eager as autonomists to condemn flatfooted, moralistic criticism to the flames.[7] Ethicists make only the moderate claim that ethical flaws make an artwork aesthetically *worse*. Worse how? One (now widely rejected) strategy would be to hold that a work *would be better* were the (relevant) ethical flaw removed. But this has obvious problems: the ethical flaw might be bound up with aesthetic merits of the piece; cutting has consequences, and it isn't always possible to remove a flaw, ethical or otherwise, without damaging or even ruining the work (Jacobson, 1997). So following Berys Gaut, many ethicists have instead deployed the notion of the "pro tanto" or contributory (2007, pp. 57–66): *Game of Thrones*'s use of sexual violence is a *pro tanto* consideration that detracts from the series' overall aesthetic value; but it might for all that still be pretty good (at least until season 5) because the merits *outweigh* the flaws.[8]

Notwithstanding exciting new challenges,[9] I find extant arguments for the conclusion that the ethical bears on the aesthetic convincing; so I won't try to further motivate interactionism or directly argue against autonomism. Instead, I want to explore *how* ethical merits and flaws can bear on aesthetic value because I share with autonomists a sense that there is something *off* about ethicism as its defenders and opponents alike understand it. That something stems from the appeal to the *pro tanto* as the key to moderation.

The pro tanto has its home in ethics, and when reasoning about what to do, pro tanto considerations are those that contribute to the overall normative status of an action; they combine, weigh against one another, and determine whether an action is right, wrong, to-be-done, etc. And it is just this structure that Gaut sees at play when a work's ethical (de)merits count for (or against) its aesthetic value. Having taken account of a work's aesthetic features—ethical and non-ethical alike,

> We then need to make an *all-things-considered* judgment, balancing these aesthetic merits and demerits one against another to determine whether the work is, all things

respect to these important in-house debates. Alongside ethicists stand "immoralists," who claim ethical flaws can be aesthetic merits as in Jacobson (1997), Kieran (2004, ch. 4), and Eaton (2012), though see Stear (2022). My key claims are consistent with immoralism and any kind other kind of interactionism, e.g., the aestheticism of Rothfeld (2022)).

[7] Booth (2018); cf. Gaut's insightful reading of *Lolita* in (2007, pp. 194–202).

[8] See also Carroll (1996) and Matthes (2021); on the appeal to the pro tanto as moderating, see Harold (2008). Note that when ethicists talk about the "pro tanto", they don't always draw a distinction between features which count in favor or against aesthetic value, on the one hand, and considerations which defeat, silence, intensify, attentuate, etc. other feature's impact on overall aesthetic value.

[9] See Harold (2020) and Clavel-Vázquez (2023).

> considered, good. And we should not suppose that there is any mechanically applicable weighing method that could determine the truth of such a judgment: overall judgments are plausibly ones that resist any form of codification in terms of mechanically applicable principles. These kinds of pro tanto and all-things-considered judgments are common in other evaluative domains, notably the moral domain. (1998, p. 183, emph. original)

Gaut's appeal to the notion of the pro tanto has been almost universally adopted, with autonomists and ethicists alike in broad agreement about what is under dispute: affirming or denying the proposition that the ethical features of a work bear on its aesthetic value (or serve as appropriated bases of aesthetic evaluation) as pro tanto considerations. So entrenched is this understanding of the question of interaction that it is often taken as definitional of ethicism.[10]

What is off about all this? Autonomists have long worried that ethicism "tend[s] to flatten out the topography of the artistic landscape" (Kieran, 2004, p. 176).[11] They worry that if one is "prepared to trade [aesthetic values] off against the moral," one is left with a reductive understanding of art (Posner, 1997, p. 3). I suggest that, couching ethicism in terms of of the pro tanto unnecessarily saddles it with exactly this flattening or reductive character. When we reason about what to do, we take competing considerations and weigh them against one another until we iron things out, reducing our judgement to a final verdict about whether the action is to be done or not. We go from reduce myriad competing factors to a verdict about whether, all things considered, the action under consideration should be done. But as Nehamas warns, "the idea that 'having found out about all the components of the work, we put everything together and give a verdict' depends on, and encourages, a

[10] In his earlier work defending a version of ethicism, Harold defines the view in contributory terms as that which holds "if a moral flaw of a work affects that work's aesthetic value, it reduces that value; if a moral virtue of a work affects that work's aesthetic value, it increases that value" (2008, p. 46). He goes on to make the weighing of the pro tanto central to good aesthetic reflection: "reflection… is a conscious deliberative process of weighing competing considerations that aims at arriving at a conclusion (although many times reflection does not arrive at a clear conclusion.… Reflection is prompted by conflict—it is when two or more aspects of a prescribed responses conflict with one another that one is required to deliberate in order to resolve the apparent tension" because those responses have opposite valences (ibid., 59–60). Nannicelli describes his interactionism as consisting in the view that "the presence of an ethical flaw that results from the production of an artwork yields a *pro tanto* artistic demerit—disvalue which, everything else being equal, diminishes the overall artistic value of a work, but which can be overridden by other sorts of value that may also be present in the work.…this is a fairly weak and uncontroversial thesis" (2020, p. 10). Clavel-Vázquez likewise understands the interactionism she opposes to be defined by the pro tanto: "Moralists argue that ethical flaws and merits are *pro tanto* aesthetic flaws and merits.… Immoralists argue that ethical flaws are sometimes aesthetic merits.…" (2023).

[11] Kieran himself does not endorse this as a problem for all ethical criticism, but he does see it as a worry to be taken seriously.

deep misunderstanding of…aesthetic value" (Nehamas, 2007, p. 44, quoting Lyas 1997, p. 118); moreover, it makes ethicism needlessly unattractive. Critical engagement with a work surely doesn't require an accounting of its various ethical flaws and merits and trading them off the non-ethical in the same way one weighs competing pro tanto reasons for action or belief. It's as though (to caricature a bit) the relevant ethical features of a work are like little force vectors that (the moderate allows) can be overridden, but nevertheless contribute to an overall aesthetic value—*Games of Thrones* is good, but not great… a 7/10![12] However moderate that may be, it *still* feels flat-footed; does allowing ethical features of a work to matter aesthetically really require this kind of *flattening* of the ethical and the non-ethical into one aggregate value?

"Good, not great" or "7/10"—such aggregative verdicts sit ill with the nuance which animates today's ethicists, many (all?) of whom would recoil from such simpleminded verdicts. But the idea that ethical and other aesthetic features are pro tanto contributions to an overall aesthetic value lends itself to just such a way of thinking. After all, what is the pro tanto or contributory if not a contribution to some univocal, final verdict, as Gaut put it above, "whether the work is, all things considered, good"? In their quest for moderation, I suggest today's ethicists have landed upon too limited an understanding of *how* the ethical can bear on the aesthetic. Nor is this understanding in terms of the pro tanto essential to the view or to the arguments ethicists make.[13]

Consider Toni Morrison's critical essay on *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. She writes that in reading the book as a young adult, "the satisfactions were great…. Nevertheless,… curling through the pleasure, clouding the narrative reward, was… alarm, coupled… with a profoundly distasteful complicity" (p. 1). Morrison spends her essay diagnosing her alarm, detailing the "genius" of the book's exploration of loneliness and abuse, its humiliating, minstrel-like treatment of Jim, and Huck's need for a father figure whom *he* can control—a father figure he can find in Jim because of the racial inequity that underwrites their relationship and which the novel fails to reckon with adequately.

What is important for our purposes are not the details of Morrison's critical evaluation but its structure. She is upfront and explicitly ethical in her aesthetic evaluation; ethical

[12] While she doesn't use the phrase "force vectors," Hanson seems to have something like that metaphor in mind when she writes, "While interactionists may disagree with each other about rather a lot, however, they are united in their commitment to what autonomism denies: that moral flaws and merits—at least sometimes—*bear on artistic value in one direction or another*" (Hanson, 2020, p. 210, my emphasis).

[13] Neither is it essential to any of ethicism's interactionist cousins—moralism, immoralism, contextualism, etc.

and non-ethical features alike bear on her judgments without any sharp demarcation between them. For Morrison, critically evaluating a work is a thoroughly ethical business.[14] But the book's ethical flaws do not, for Morrison, make "this amazing, troubling book" *less* amazing (p. 8); nor do I read her as suggesting her experience was *less* pleasurable. Things are more complicated that that: her pleasure was *mixed* with alarm; the book is amazing and troubling *both*. I read Morrison as offering what I'll call a "non-summative" judgment: while seeing the work's ethical features (the good, the bad, and the in-between) as entirely relevant to her aesthetic evaluation, she does not see them as pro tanto contributions to a "summative" aesthetic evaluation. *Huckleberry Finn* is not *less* amazing because it is troubling; rather, it is "amazing, troubling." Her initial aesthetic, evaluatively-laden affective response is not of less pleasure, but pleasure mixed with unease and alarm. Put one way, she refuses to make an all-things-considered judgment of the aesthetic value of the novel; put another way (the way I prefer), her "all-things-considered" aesthetic judgment, i.e., that which fully reflects all considerations, is not *summative*—it is exactly unlike assessing what one should do or believe on the basis of pro tanto considerations. Such reasoning is essentially summative: it's not enough to judge that p counts in favor of ϕing and q against—one must combine those two elements into a single verdict about whether to ϕ. Morrison's aesthetic judgment abstains from just that—it does not take the different dimensions of her assessment to determine a further, unidimensonal value of the novel.

This essay defends two separable theses. The first is that there is nothing wrong (or missing or incomplete) with aesthetic evaluations like Morrison's; non-summative aesthetic evaluation is in no way defective or missing something in refusing to consider all things in service of a further, summative evaluation. Call the claim that non-summative aesthetic judgment is not thereby defective the "Modest Thesis". If true, it makes space for an interactionist view that retains some of the spirit of autonomism. One could hold that an evaluator manifests no defect of aesthetic judgment in resisting, with Morrison, the idea that *Huckleberry Finn*'s being troubling forces one to find it *less* amazing. There's nothing *wrong* with refusing to count (some) ethical flaws *directly against* other features of the work (though we'll see in §5.1 this needs qualification).

Having argued for the Modest Thesis, I'll go further: not only is non-summative judgment ok, summative aesthetic judgment is defective. Call this attack on summative

[14] As it is for most critics outside the formalist tradition that arose in the twentieth century and which still holds much sway (Booth 1988, p. 25; Gaut 2007, pp. 95–106)

aesthetic evaluation the "Extreme Thesis." Put not in terms of judgments of value but of value itself, it holds that aesthetic value is irreducibly multidimensional, and that the attempt to collapse multiple dimensions of aesthetic value into a single dimension is a mistake—whether those dimensions are ethically inflected or not. The Extreme Thesis makes room for non-summative ethicism—which holds that ethical flaws and merits can bear on the aesthetic value of a work without being pro tanto contributors to some aggregate aesthetic value. I'll defend my extremism by looking to other domains in which summative evaluation is defective, e.g., in evaluating people's characters. This extremism is consistent with virtually all of the key arguments given by ethicism's defenders; what's more, a revisonary account of *how* the ethical matters can better capture the nuance ethicists are after.

As one last bit of introduction, let me offer a metaphor. Before Gaut and company thought to use the idea of the pro tanto to make space for their moderate ethicism, W.D. Ross, the patron saint of the pro tanto in ethics, sought to use contributory notions to make space for *moderate* deontology. He thought we had five prima facie duties, e.g., fidelity, non-maleficence, etc., and that they could compete (2002, ch. 2); ϕing might keep a promise but cause harm, and so fidelity and non-maleficence might conflict. In the face of such conflict, however, we must weigh competing considerations against one another to form a summative judgment that ϕing is right (or wrong). But imagine Ross's relief if we didn't have to choose between our prima facie duties—if there were always ways of acting in light of competing considerations that could do justice to each so that they never had to compete! While (obviously) an idle fantasy in the case of reasoning about what to do, I think things are quite like that when it comes to art: in the face of competing claims, when the ethical pulls one way and the non-ethical in another, we need not arrive at an all-things-considered summation of two competing, pro tanto considerations; we can evaluate non-summatively. The appropriate response to non-summative evaluation is affective (evaluatively laden) responses—feelings like pleasure and alarm which we can have in complex, multi-valenced ways made fitting by an object's non-summative, multidimensional value.[15]

[15] It might be that evaluations just are non-cognitive expressions of affective responses (as in Gorodeisky and Marcus 2018), or that they are more distinct, with feelings made warranted, fitting, or meritted by the underlying values. Either conception is fine for my purposes. Moreover, while I will talk in the manner of a realist, objectivist about aesthetic value/evaluation, the theses of this paper can be accepted by aesthetic antirealists and relativists of many stripes.

2 Defining "Summative," "Non-Summative," and "Sum"

Contrast the following normative judgments:[16]

Non-summative	Summative
• "*p* is a reason to ϕ, and *q* is a reason not to"	• "ϕing is right"
• "fidelity recommends ϕing, but non-maleficence recommends $\neg\phi$-ing"	• "ϕing is permissible"
• "*q* suggests *p*, but *r* suggests otherwise"	• "You should believe *p*"
• "*Huckleberry Finn* has a great plot and evocative language."	• "*Huckleberry Finn* is a great novel"

The best characterization I can give of "non-summative" and "summative" is by ostension—non-summative judgments are like those on the left; summative ones like those on the right; and summing is moving from left to right. I'll flag immediately that by "summing" I don't mean "adding"—the multiple normative elements that feature in the leftward judgments might combine to form their rightward counterpart non-additively.[17] As I am using it, to "sum" is to take multiple normative inputs and deliver a single, univocal normative output like "right" or "to be believed" or "excellent."

But can we more precisely characterize the difference between left and right above—a difference which cuts across quite different modes of normative assessment (deontic, evaluative, about belief, action, art, etc.)? Yes, via an extended sense of the notion of a "dimension": judgments on the left feature multiple dimensions of normative assessment, where those on the right are unidimensional—they have only one normative element. Novels can be good with respect to their plot (one dimension) and their language (another). To summatively evaluate the novel is to reduce one's multidimensional analysis to a single dimension of overall goodness (or goodness qua novel). Likewise if one is considering how much confidence to have in hypothesis *H*, one might consider *H*'s simplicity (one dimension of epistemic assessment) and *H*'s predictive power (another), and weighing them together arrive at the conclusion that one should have, e.g., credence .8 in *H* (a unidimensional assessment). And while "dimensions" paradigmatically refers to something gradable, we can extend the usage to cover non-gradable summative judgments. In the sense I intend,

[16] Throughout, I will talk as though judgements are objects of thought and represent them as sentences. This is largely for ease of exposition and to remain neutral on the kind of thing that a normative judgement is; nothing in the argument would be frustrated by instead talking about summative and non-summative normative propositions.

[17] Kagan (1988); Berker (2007).

the permissibility, to-be-doneness, or rightness of an action are all "dimensions," albeit non-gradable ones. So in my sense, weighing fidelity against non-maleficence and deciding that an action is *right* is moving from a multidimensional assessment (these reasons pull one way, those the other) to a unidimensional one. Summing is in this (not necessarily pejorative) sense *reductive*—it takes multiple dimensions of input to yield a unidimensional output.

Summing plays an essential role in deciding what to do and what to believe. Consider an agent who sees reasons for and against various actions, correctly recognizing what, e.g., fidelity and non-maleficence require in all cases, but who never sums—who never takes the various dimensions of his assessment of a possible and reduces them to a single dimension of assessment like "ϕing is permissible/to-be-done/required/etc." So long as reasons come cheap enough (there's always *some* reason not to…), such an agent would never be in a position to act on the basis of his reasoning. On some views, he might not be able to act intentionally at all.

Non-summativity is clearest when the various elements stand in some kind of tension with one another, e.g., "*p* is a reason for, *q* against." But as I am using it, non-summative judgments can involve elements which all share the same valence e.g., "*Huckleberry Finn* has a great plot and evocative language."[18]

Non-summative judgments often involve *some* prior summing. To say that *Huckleberry Finn* has a great plot involves combining assessments of the beginning, the middle, the end, etc. By "non-summative" judgment I just mean one that leaves *some dimensions* unsummed.

3 Avoiding Summative Judgments All Together

How essential are summative judgments to our normative lives? I'll argue it depends on the kind of normative assessment, with a contrast emerging between assessments of what to do or believe, which are paradigmatically summative, and evaluations of art, which are paradigmatically non-summative. That division with belief and action on one side of the

[18] While non-summativity is often reflected in the language we use, it might be hidden. Suppose we define "F" as the property of having good plot and bad characters; "Huckleberry Finn is F" looks summative in featuring only one evaluative term, but that one term builds in two dimensions of assessment. So (non-)summativity ultimately depends on *what underlying dimensions* of value there are. That might be an objective matter—what dimensions carve normative reality and the joints; it might be context sensitive in some way, e.g., relative to an evaluative practice. See the the end of §5.1. Thank you to XXXX

summative/non-summative divide and artwork on the other will be blurred as the essay goes on. But to make the contrast sharp, I'm going to overstate things and argue for what, in the end, is not *quite* right: that assessment about what to do or believe is essentially summative and aesthetic evaluation is essentially non-summative. With the contrast drawn in an overly stark way, we'll be in a position to develop a more nuanced account (in §§5 and 6).

The first contrast is one that emerges from a 50,000 ft. view of things. Consider an agent who reasons about what to do: he sees reasons for and against various actions, he can correctly recognize when ϕing would hurt someone, when it would keep a promise, etc; however, he never forms summative judgments. That is, he rightly identifies all of the reasons, but never forms judgments like "This is the thing to do" or "I have sufficient reason to ϕ." Such an agent would not be in a position to act on the basis of his reasoning. On some views,[19] he might not be able to act intentionally at all.

Here are two reactions to such a case: first, one might think it is impossible as described. To reason about action—to identify *reasons*—just is to identify considerations that bear on all-things-considered judgments about what to do, and all-things-considered judgments about what to do are *summative*. Reasons to ϕ, one might claim, just are considerations that bear on whether ϕing is to-be-done (or right or some other summative category); and someone who lacks any disposition to form some kind of summative judgment just isn't deploying the notion of a *reason* at all. A more modest response is to think that practical agency is impoverished inasmuch as it never results in summative judgments. Our agent reasons *badly*; something is (profoundly) *amiss* if he never sums. (What about practical judgments of the form "ϕing is required, but regrettable"? The phenomenon of "trace effects" is of central importance, but for ease of exposition, I'll set aside the complication they pose until they play a starring role in §6.2 and continue to talk as though judgment about what to do is essentially summative.)

Much the same can be said of an epistemic reasoner who considers various bits of evidence that bear on whether *p* but *never* sums up those considerations into a judgment about what beliefs (or credences) to form. Sometimes, we are not yet in a position to form a summative judgment about a proposition; but someone who *never* formed judgments about what epistemic states he should adopt upon weighing all the evidence would be quite bizarre. Maybe (the strong response) such a case is impossible; or maybe (more modestly)

[19] Those that hold intentional action is under the guise of the good and disallow acting for no reason at all.

such an agent would be *profoundly* normatively flawed. Such an agent is reasoning poorly or not at all; properly judging what to believe looks like a summative matter.

Things look very different in the aesthetic case. Consider an aesthetic evaluator who is deeply sensitive to all the features—ethical and otherwise—of every work of art she encounters and who judges art in the manner of Morrison: she makes aesthetic evaluations like "*Huckleberry Finn* is amazing and troubling" but refuses to sum those two elements together into a further, summative judgment. Or to take the ethics out of it, imagine she makes judgments like "Mahler's Symphony No. 7 is transcendent, dense, and inaccessible." An agent like that doesn't even have a whiff of impossibility about her; and while some claim that such a person is making a normative error in not getting quite right the way in which a work's being troubling counts against its *overall* aesthetic value, that putative normative error is nowhere near as striking as it is in the practical or the epistemic case.

To be sure a total aversion to summing in the aesthetic domain clearly would be defective. Imagine our aesthetic evaluator could merely identify relevant features of a work but in no way synthesize those features into any kind of unified evaluation; she could identify that Jim on *this* page is caricaturish, on *that* page more humanized, but has no evaluation of how the novel develops Jim as a character overall. The various evaluatively significant parts of a work of art are parts *of a whole*, and so must be understood in relation to one another.[20] Some summing is necessary—and addressing when considerations do and don't sum will be the subject of §5.1. For now my point is more modest. Summing seems necessary in assessing what to do in a way it isn't in aesthetic evaluation. An agent cannot always *conclude* his practical reasoning with judgments like "ϕing would keep a promise but cause great harm"; that leaves the job of assessing what is to be done unfinished. But while orthodox ethicism claims an agent who always concludes her aesthetic evaluations with judgments like "It's an amazing, troubling book" is making a normative error, that error is not so glaring one as to raise a question about *impossibility*. This contrast is my first argument—or maybe is rather more a warm up: aesthetic evaluation doesn't seem to work like simple pro tanto reasoning about what to do or believe.

[20] Cf. Hume (1985).

4 Avoiding Summative Judgment in Particular Cases

Let's now zoom in and consider a particular case in which summative and non-summative judgments might be at play. Imagine your friend Aisha is constructing a syllabus for a freshman literature class and deciding whether or not to include the *Odyssey*. You're no expert in literature, but she knows you study reasons and rationality—you must be good at making tough decisions! So she asks for your help.

You start by asking her what she thinks of the book as a work of literature. "Is it good? What do you think of it?" Aisha is an expert, and she gives a complicated answer—she discusses its imagery, its character development, its plot, and (in a Morrison-esque way) enumerates many ethical dimensions of the work that she takes to be essential to a holistic evaluation of it qua artwork—that its conception of a life well lived has such and such insights but is thusly mistaken. Aisha is by no means *moralistic* about any of these things; she thinks some aspects of the work's ethical outlook constitute aesthetic flaws, but not that they overshadow the work's many merits; she thinks all of this—the good, the bad, and the ugly—would make for rich class discussion. Her long answer over, you press her to sum it up: "OK, but what's the bottom line? How aesthetically good is it?" Aisha might naturally resist that kind of pressure to reduce her complex evaluation to a bottom line. "This isn't accounting, it's literature," she scolds you. "You asked me what I thought of a work as complex as the *Odyssey* and you expect a bottom line? A score out of 10? Get over yourself. It's amazing in these ways, it's flawed in those—what more do you want?"

Aisha's response seems spot on, and the appropriateness of both her non-summative evaluation and of her rebuke offer some support to the MODEST THESIS—there is nothing wrong with her refusal to sum. Aisha's rebuke also suggests (although for now it's just a suggestion) something stronger: would her answer might be made *worse* (too accounting-like?) by appending a summative conclusion? More on that later; but for now consider the contrast with other avoidance of summative judgment.

Having just given you a rich account of the *Odyssey*'s aesthetic value, suppose you ask Aisha, "what do you think about including it on the syllabus?" Here she gives another long answer: she enumerates many reasons to do it, and many reasons not to (worries about the canon, the time it would take to cover adequately, the other works she would have to cut). She doesn't come to a conclusion, so you press her to sum it up: "OK, but what's the bottom line? Should it be on the syllabus or not?"

Here your demand for a summative answer is spot on! Syllabus construction is more like accounting than aesthetic evaluation in demanding a bottom line. An analogue to her prior resistance to the question sounds confused: "This is a literature class! You asked me a complex practical question and I just gave you a complex answer enumerating the various considerations for and against inclusion. What more do you want?" Of course there is something more to want—the *answer* to the practical question Aisha faces: whether to include it!

Or consider avoiding epistemic summing up. You ask Aisha, "Was Homer a single author?" She gives a long answer, citing lots of textual and historical evidence for and against. You are again unsatisfied and press for a bottom line: "OK, but give me an answer! Does the *Odyssey* have a single author?" Here things are more complicated than in the practical case. The best answer Aisha can give might well not be a straigthforward "yes" or "no." But it *should* be summative—even if that summative judgment is something like "Well, at this point the evidence doesn't favor one hypothesis over the other," or weak like "It's likely one author." Giving an answer that merely cites the evidence but in no way expresses a view about how that evidence sums up is incomplete and so defective.

This comparison is my second argument: that your demand for summing up in the case of pure aesthetic evaluation is inapt is all the more highlighted by contrasting it with how apt it is in these cases about action and belief. These seem like different normative assessments that allow for different kinds of answer. Correct assessments of what to do or what to assign or what to believe about Homer are summative, whereas correct aesthetic evaluations needn't be.

5 When and Why Can One Avoid Summing?

It's trivial that, in some sense, non-summative evaluations are correct. When Aisha is deciding whether or not to assign the *Odyssey*, the non-summative judgment "*These* are the reasons for and *those* against" is true. But in such a case the non-summative judgment is *incomplete*—it does not suffice as an answer to the normative question posed (i.e., should I assign the *Odyssey*?). In that sense it is a defective answer. The opponent of the MODEST THESIS thinks that's what's wrong with a judgment like Morrison's—it might be true, but in refusing to sum "amazing, troubling" into a further summative assessment, she left the evaluative job unfinished. And a non-summative judgment is "unfinished" when finishing

a normative assessment requires one sum. So when are we required to sum?

Let's start with a case of practical assessment. Suppose that you are back with Aisha, helping her think through what books to assign on her introductory syllabus. She is considering two texts for her unit on ancient Greece: Aeschylus's *Agamemnon* and Euripedes's *Medea*. Let "α" name the action of assigning *Agamemnon*, "*a*" the reasons that speak in favor of α, "μ" the action of assigning *Medea*, and "*m*" the reasons speaking in favor of μ. Here is a non-summative judgment Aisha might form about her practical situation:

(1) "*a* counts in favor of doing α, and *m* counts in favor of doing μ."

This is an intermediary judgment; and in arriving at it, Aisha hasn't finished her normative assessment; because (1) lacks a summative assessment of α or μ, it is not yet a judgment about what Aisha should do, and inasmuch as it is attempting to be, it is defective. Imagine we ask Aisha, "What *should* you, in the end, do?" and in typical fashion, she intransigently refuses to sum the considerations, replying instead:

(2) "I should do α because *a*, and I should do μ because *m*."

Does (2) look like a good practical judgment? Or is it like (1), incomplete and so defective in its refusal to sum *a* and *m*? It depends on the relationship between α and μ. Suppose that Aisha has space for only one last text on her syllabus, α and μ exclude one another. Then her situation would be as it was in thinking about the *Odyssey*—she would need to sum the reasons (*a* and *m*) to form an adequate answer to her practical question. Or imagine that while in principle she could assign both (who hasn't been tempted to just assign twice the reading one should?), she ought not do both α and μ. Now because α and μ normatively exclude one another, any all-things-considered assessment of the situation will need to reflect a summative judgment about the relative strength of *a* and *m*.[21] (2) is defective (it sounds outright confused!), exactly because it refuses to sum *a* and *m* and deliver a proper verdict.

But suppose, by contrast, that Aisha has room on the syllabus for both texts (and to simplify, imagine no others are in the running). Then summing *a* and *m* is unnecessary. That is, ending her practical assessment with (2) is fine—she has considered all the relevant things and needn't come to some further judgment that sums *a* and *m*. Of course, she

[21] I am drawing heavily on the arguments of Massey (ms) and Faraci (2020), responding to Maguire (2018), whose basic picture I am deeply sympathetic to but which cannot adequately accommodate the phenomena discussed in §5.1.

could. She might further judge along the single dimension of having more (or less) reason that:

(3) "I have more reason to do α than μ."

But (3) isn't relevant; and she manifests no practical deficiency in failing to arrive at it. (2) suffices as an all-things-considered judgment. Why? Because the space she had on her syllabus affords Aisha the luxury of not having to weigh *a* and *m* against one another.

The upshot: refusing to sum is not mistaken when Aisha should instead respond fully to both *a* and *m*, i.e., by doing both α and μ, what *a* and *m* call for, respectively. In the absence of some *need* for summing *a* and *m*, Aisha's refusal in no way impugns her practical assessment. And the need to sum comes from some kind of exclusion: when α and μ exclude one another either normatively or just as a matter of fact. Put in slogan form: if Aisha has the room (e.g., on her syllabus), she needn't sum; refusal to sum is not deffective when and because Aisha has *room* to respond to each consideration in full.

But that is *just* how things are with respect to aesthetic evaluation. The responses made fitting by the flaws and merits of artwork are evaluatively laden affective responses—things like pleasure and alarm. And to stretch the metaphor a bit, Morrison has room in her heart to feel both pleasure and alarm—there isn't just one slot in her emotional life to be filled by just one emotion. The affective responses do not compete with each other the way plays do for the last slot of a syllabus. Pleasure and alarm do stand in some kind of tension with one another, but they do not exclude one another—pyschologically or normatively; it isn't impossible, irrational, or inapt to feel a mixture of pleasure *and* alarm together. Note that I'm not suggesting in responding with "pleasure curled with alarm" Morrison's evaluative, affective responses are just pure pleasure and pure alarm, like discrete items on a syllabus. The pleasure and alarm are mixed in this case—because that which makes them warranted (the merits and demerits of the work) are so bound up with one another. And so, the pleasurable and alarming features of the novel are not evaluatively separable.[22] Nevertheless, nothing in Morrison's (or our) affective life demands she pit the elements against one another like pro tanto contributions to an overall evaluation. Each element contributes to a multidimensional assessment because she has *room* in her emotional life to respond to each element. (To foreshadow §5.1 a bit, if it *were* impossible or inapt to feel both pleasure and alarm together, summing would be necessary.)

[22] On this point, I am especially thankful to XXXX

And it's not just Morrison and *Huckleberry Finn* that are like that. I can warrantedly whoop with delight at Daenerys's latest triumph while feeling serious unease about *Game of Throne*'s misogyny; I can even appreciate the groovy rhythm of "Age Ain't Nothing but a Number" while feeling revulsion towards the song's perspective on sexuality[23]—these affective responses exhibit tension in being oppositely valenced, but they do not *exclude* one another, descriptively or normatively.

In this consists one of the most remarkable and important features of art: in engaging with art, we have the space to *feel so much*—to be large, to contain multitudes. Many of the most aesthetically enriching works of art are those that inspire feelings with stand in some tension with one another—with mixed valences and mixed content. In the aesthetic domain, we can and should wrestle with many feelings, including those that stand in tension with one another, without the need for summative (reductive) resolution. No small part of the value of aesthetic experience is that we are here free to feel so much at once without having to flatten all of our feelings (or the evaluations that make them fitting) into a single dimension.

All of this is to say that in aesthetic evaluation, there is no *need* for summative judgment. That isn't to say that our aesthetic lives more broadly don't require summative judgment. Deciding what to hang on the wall of a museum or home, what art to engage with, what to recommend, what art to create (and how), whether to repair something—these decisions about what to do force us to form summative judgments of all kinds. But evaluating art is not doing something with it; evaluation of art isn't just something we do in service of making decisions. It is in that sense (perhaps among others) *disinterested*.

Consider the many merits and flaws of "Age Ain't Nothing But a Number." How those flaws and merits do (or do not need to) sum depends on the kind of normative assessment at issue. Should R. Kelly have produced this song? No! The flaws count against the merits, here outweighing them. Should I play it at my wedding? Here, too, I must sum—the merits and flaws count directly against one another, and again the flaws win out. But where I lack the freedom to avoid summing in such cases, I have that freedom when merely evaluating the song. I can think it is good in these ways and bad in those, and I can respond with the complex mix of emotions all these evaluative dimensions make fitting.

My main defense of the Modest Thesis can be summed up (no pun intended)

[23] Or towards the immoral acts bound up in its production—the particular flavor of interactionism is besides the point.

quickly: because we have room in our affective lives for many warranted responses to art—including (and especially!) those that stand in some tension with one another—there is no need for summative judgments. And absent that need, non-summative judgments like Morrison's are in no way defective.

5.1 A Complication: When Summing Is Necessary

Before defending the Extreme Thesis, the scope of the Modest Thesis needs refining. *Sometimes* the features of a work bear on *the very same response*; put another way, sometimes features of a work actually *do* interact in just the way that ethicists traditionally claim when we either cannot or should not feel both affective responses at once.

Consider Gauguin's 1896 *Poèms Barbares* (Savage Poems), likely a portrait of the then-14-year-old Pau'ura a Tai (whom Gauguin described as his "native wife") in a Madonna-like pose with strong sexual overtones (Harvard Art Museums, 2023). Some depictions of nude forms are valuable in part because of their erotic beauty; i.e., for some art (not Gauguin's), a non-summative evaluation would include erotic beauty as a dimension of the art's goodness, and would make fitting (alongside other feelings) appreciation of the work's sensuality. But the particulars of Gauguin's painting undermine erotic beauty; that this painting is *of* a sexually exploited woman, that it plays an important role in upholding the culture of objectification of women and constructing an colonial image of "native" women as sexual objects—these things *undermine* the eroticism of the painting. Young victims of sexual exploitation aren't erotic; audiences that find them so are making a (patriarchal, colonialist) mistake in not taking seriously the way in which the work's ethical flaws *undermine* this would-be merit.

Put in the terms of the last section, one *doesn't* have room in one's affective life to appreciate both the painting's eroticism and its exploitation. Because we don't have room for both responses, some summative judgment is needed—we need to sum the aspects of the work which not only stand in tension with one another but warrant *exclusive* responses. There is room here for different notions of exclusion; maybe it is a descriptive matter—a question (perhaps relative to a given audience) of what emotions can be held alongside others (Carroll, 1996). Maybe (as I prefer) it is a more normatively inflected sense of exclusion wherein the flaw undermines the merit when it would be a *mistake* to hold both emotions at once (Gaut, 2007).[24] Either way, we can say that a non-summative judgment like "*Poèms*

[24] A mistake either because the underlying merits and flaws make one response fitting and the other unfit-

Barbares is astounding in its use of color, beautifully erotic, but sexually objectifying" is mistaken; the third element undermines the second (though not the first). Where Morrison *can* (fittingly) feel pleasure curled with alarm, responding to the many elements of *Huck Finn* at once, one might not be able to experience an appreciation of the erotic while also recognizing the objectification of the painting. The painting is not "erotic, troubling-in-being-objectifying" but rather *not erotic* because it is troublingly objectifying.[25]

A further complication came up briefly above: the various un-summed elements of a non-summative aesthetic evaluation might themselves be summative. To say that *Huckleberry Finn* has a good plot is already to express a judgment which sums many subsidiary evaluations (of this, that, and the other bit, of how they fit together, etc.). It is be a defect in one's aesthetic evaluation *not* to sum two evaluative elements into a further summative evaluative element when both bear on the *same* response.

This might all seem to undermine the Modest Thesis, but it instead clarifies it. When do we need to sum? We can put things both in terms of our responses or in terms of value. (And if you think the two come apart, you can take your pick.) In terms of value: we must sum flaws and merits of an artwork when those flaws and merits bear on the *same dimension of aesthetic value*, e.g., erotic beauty. We needn't (and I'll later argue we shouldn't) when they don't. Or: we must sum flaws and merits when they both bear on the fittingness of the *same response*, e.g., appreciation of erotic beauty.

A full accounting of exactly when summation is called for is an account of the many dimensions of aesthetic values and/or of the fittingness conditions of the affective responses made fitting by aesthetic merits and flaws, i.e., of when merits and flaws bear on the same response. I'm not offering either, although I take standard ethicist arguments like that given above to show that among the dimensions of aesthetic value are ethically sensitive ones (like erotic beauty) and among the fittingness conditions of some responses (like appreciation of erotic beauty) are ethical ones (like the fact that the model is objectified). Even granting that, there is still room for a great deal of (orthogonal) disagreement about what dimensions there really are, whether they are real or admit of some irrealist/response-

ting; or perhaps because there is something inapt about the combination of responses. Cf. Matthes (2021).

[25] In focusing on the *perspective* of the artwork, the argument of this section follows the path laid by Carroll and, especially, Gaut. But the non-summativism I defend, and the idea that flaws and merits sum when they bear on the same dimension of aesthetic value, is compatible with any kind of interactionism—although the details might need tweaking. It is easy, for instance, to tell similar (and compatible) stories about the choices an implied artist made (à la Booth 1988), Gauguin's actions in producing the work (Nannicelli, 2020), the artworks' hostile impact on its audience (Saito, 2022), the perverse things it teaches (Gaut, 2007; Kieran, 2004), etc.

dependent treatment, whether the dimensions are objective or contextually set, e.g., relative to an evaluative or aesthetic practice or culture. The MODEST THESIS requires only that in some contexts, there are multiple dimensions of aesthetic value and so can remain neutral on these issues.[26]

All this is to say that orthodox, i.e., summative, ethicism gets *part* of the picture right—ethical dimensions *can* be pro tanto contributors (or defeaters or enablers or intensifiers, etc.) of a dimension of aesthetic value. Likewise, they are completely right in holding that there is no demarcation between (relevant) ethical and non-ethical features of a work—they can all determine aesthetic value, i.e., make fitting evaluatively laden affective responses. Their mistake was to insist that this kind of contribution was the *only* way ethical dimensions of a work could serve as a basis for aesthetic evaluation.

6 In Defense of Extremism

The EXTREME THESIS—that summative aesthetic evaluation is actually defective—might seem all the more indefensible in light of that last section. Likewise it runs counter to a consensus in aesthetics.[27] My case against summative judgment will proceed by first looking to other loci of normative assessment in which summative judgment is a mistake.

6.1 Judging People

Consider first evaluating people's characters. (Here I take for granted that although there is one sense of "value" in which all are equally valuable, there are still non-trivial ways of *evaluating* people's flaws and merits of character. From here on out, when I speak of the value of, or evaluating, a person, I mean her character.)

To be sure, many judgments about people are summative, e.g., deciding whether someone is worth befriending, or forgiving, or recommending to others.[28] But although someone's character is relevant to all those decisions, asking *what to do* with a person isn't the same as evaluating *her*. And summative evaluations of people themselves are strikingly defective; if I ask you what you think of someone, "He's a 7" is funny (or depending on the context horrifically demeaning) exactly because it's so inapt! And it isn't a repellent an-

[26] The EXTREME THESIS demands that there is not (ever) just *one* dimension of aesthetic value.

[27] For a critical overview (to which I am very much indebted), see the first part of Nehamas (2007), citing (among others) Beardsley (1958); Isenberg (1973); Mothersill (1984); Goldman (1995).

[28] Although even here, we might find trace effects make summative assessments incomplete, see §6.2.

swer just because the value is too low. "She's a 10/10!" seems just as bad. To make this especially sharp, imagine my saying "10/10" is neither a flat-footed way of saying another is infinitely valuable nor an expression of a non-cognitive attitude like "yay her!!!" Imagine I really weighed up another's merits and flaws and, upon careful consideration, concluded that she was a 10. That is *deeply* troubling. A world in which our judgments of others was in this way flattened into a single, summed-up dimension—in which judgments of others were no more multidimensional than an Uber rating—is the stuff of science fiction nightmares and totalitarian politics.[29]

Is the problem just that the ratings are numerical? That makes the matter especially vivid, but isn't the heart of what's wrong. Suppose you learned that I keep a running *qualitative* list of all the people we know: "She's great, he's fine, she's meh, they're super!" This, too, is clearly a defective way of relating to others and responding to the value of their characters. You might think the problem with my summative judgments is they way they might manifest in disrespectful behavior. But imagine whatever the verdicts, I behave well to all, keeping my evaluations to myself. There is still something wrong with my evaluative judgments themselves. Nor is the problem with engaging in normative assessment of others in general. It is a pathologically non-judgmental conception of interpersonal relations that holds we should never make evaluations like "Honesty is one of their best qualities" or "Her temper is a flaw" or "He's beautiful, and troublingly aware of it!" The problem, I submit, is in *summatively* evaluating others—in treating them as though their merits and flaws determined some unidimensional, overall value.

Why would summative judgment of people's character be defective where non-summative judgments of others needn't be? We can get at the issue from two perspectives: by thinking about aretaic values and by thinking about what's wrong with the summative judge (and "judge" does seem like the right word).[30] First in terms of value, the problem is that what is good about, say, kindness isn't the sort of thing that is outweighed by something like intemperance. Or the other way around, a flaw like cruelty isn't compensated by a merit like courage. Flaws and merits of character are incommensurable and non-fungible—they don't contribute to aggregate aretaic value. That isn't to say that such merits and flaws can't weigh against each other when we make *decisions* about, e.g., spending time with people. But aretaic *value* is fundamentally multidimensional, and it is a mis-

[29] As in the Black Mirror episode "Hang the DJ" (Patten, 2017) or China's emerging social credit systems (Kobie, 2019).

[30] Cf. Nehamas (2007).

take to think those dimensions are pro tanto determinants of a unidimensional, aggregate value. (This is maybe an underappreciated respect in which people's value is intrapersonally non-fungible.)

In terms of the evaluator, there is something defective in treating merits and flaws like they bear on a *verdict* about the value of another (Nehamas, 2007). While sometimes reducing the dimensions of normative assessment is apt, it is here objectionably *reductive* to take that kind of evaluative stance towards another person—why care? What good does such a judgment do?[31] Granted one has to weigh flaws and merits summatively making some decisions, e.g., rendering a verdict on a particular job application. But people are not just their applications, and taking that kind of attitude towards the person's character as a whole is grotesque. That's no small part of why being on the academic job market—when it is hard *not* to feel like one's whole self is being given a unidimensional verdict—is a horrific experience for so many; that's no small part of why dating apps can feel so dehumanizing to some.[32] People as such shouldn't be put in the reject pile or swiped left on—not simply because another pile is better, but because we shouldn't be evaluatively sorting people as such into piles at all.

6.2 Moral Residue and Practical Judgments

We can now turn to something that may have been bothering readers throughout my discussion of the essentially summative nature of judgments about what to do: the phenomenon of trace effects or moral residue. Suppose that I should ϕ even though in so doing, I'll harm someone, and consider the following two judgments:

(4) "I should ϕ."

(5) "I should ϕ, but ϕing warrants regret."

(5) is a non-summative judgment—it assesses ϕing along two dimensions, *viz.* whether it should be done and whether it warrants regret. (4), though true, is incomplete; if I judged

[31] Cf. (Jollimore, 2011, esp. Ch. 4), which defends a conception of valuing wherein some values (like that of people, beautiful artifacts, and parts of nature) place demands on *how it is* that we value them. For Jollimore, people and majestically beautiful things can only be properly valued when the valuer refrains from *comparison*. Though nothing I have said here commits me to this anti-comparative picture, the structure of my proposal is the similar: people (and as I'll later say art) can only be properly valued when the valuer refrains from forming a wholly summative judgment.

[32] On the parallels, see the (outstanding) Kay 2017.

only (4), my practical judgment would be defective.[33] Sometimes, then, non-summative practical judgment is called for and its absence would manifest a(n often profound) normative defect in assessment. Put in terms not of the assessment but the things judged, the normative significance of the fact that ϕing would hurt someone is not exhausted by its pro tanto contribution to determining whether I should ϕ; it matters in second dimension of practical assessment as well, one which cannot be reduced to the first.

My earlier claim that summing is necessary for assessing what one should do still stands—that particular (and central!) dimension of practical assessment requires summing. Why? Because the *should-be-doneness* of an action is a single dimension of assessment! But it is not the only dimension of assessment of an action with which practical reasoning is concerned. Practical reasoning also bears on affective responses like regret, and further dimensions like regretability call for non-summative judgment. Or if you don't like that way of describing things, here is another way of saying much the same thing: our reasoning and judgments as acting agents involve more than answering the (unidimensional) question of what we should do; it also involves responding to other dimensions of assessment of our actions. And inasmuch as we are forming judgments of this broader kind, non-summative assessment is called for exactly *because* there is more to the assessment of action than whether it should be done.

The contrast between practical judgments in this broad sense which includes assessments of regrettability and the like and aretaic judgments of people can be put in terms of questions: there is no question like "how good is he?" which is a) central to our evaluations of others, b) essentially summative, and c) appropriate to ask; but the question "should I ϕ?" is a) central to our practical agency, b) essentially summative (bc should-be-doneness is unidimensional), and c) not only appropriate but necessary to ask.[34] I likewise think there is no good question of that form about art.

6.3 Judging Art

People, actions, and art are (obviously!) different, and arguments by analogy are dangerous. But my hope is that the accounts of non-summative practical and aretaic assessment make

[33] To clarify, I don't think that agents who do not actually *judge* that (5) but who *feel* regret are manifesting an error, because I do not think virtuous emotional responses need to be backed by explicit judgment. But qua judgment, (4) alone is defective in the same way that qua agent, one who ϕed without regret manifests a vice.

[34] This question-based way of putting things draws on the framework developed throughout the work of Hieronymi, e.g., in her 2005.

sense of a picture which, once in view, will make sense for art: that summative evaluative judgments of art are defective in being reductive and too much like a verdict; that in so doing, they leave something essential out; that the underlying values to which aesthetic evaluation and affective attitudes respond is irreducibly multidimensional.

The arguments in favor of this extremism have in large part already been made above. The first starts with Aisha's rebuke that summatively evaluating the *Odyssey* is inappropriate and accountant-like. That complaint makes even more sense when we see that reductively summing is a mistake in other domains as well.

The second is my favorite argument, one I've only made schematically: on the one hand, autonomism seems implausible, but, on the other, there seems something unnecessarily *flattening* or *reductive* about always treating ethical flaws as though they simply count against (or undermine) aesthetic merits. Non-summativism about aesthetic evaluation allows us to fully respect the significance of aesthetic merits and flaws, ethical and otherwise.

The third is a (very) short new one: extremist multidimensionalism about aesthetic value fits nicely with pluralism about aesthetic value, and if ever there is a domain in which pluralism is called for, it is the aesthetic![35] A commitment to pluralism about the aesthetic is one of the very things that motivates Gaut to appeal to the *pro tanto* in understanding his ethicism (1998, pp. 182–183). But allowing a plurality of values to be pro tanto contributions to the aesthetic goodness of a thing is at best a moderately pluralist position. More maximalist pluralism would hold not only that many kinds of consideration can contribute to a summative overall value, but that overall value is itself irreducibly multidimensional. Here is a kind of analogy. Suppose a merchant considers wide range of factors in setting the price of a new good—its durability, utility, spiffy new packaging, etc. Her pluralism is like Gaut's—taking a wide variety of inputs to bear on her summative assessment (her price). By contrast an extremist merchant would refuse to set a price at all—instead of taking multiple inputs to bear on a univocal output, she would insist that the final evaluation of her new good is beyond price: it's so durable, so useful, and comes in this spiffy a package! Merchants, of course, shouldn't be extremists—they need to sum! The point is to see that between our two merchants, it is the latter (idealistic?) merchant who could lay a greater claim to a pluralistic way of thinking about the value of her goods. So, too, can we lay a greater claim to aesthetic pluralism by insisting that in the final telling, aesthetic value is nonsummative. And while I don't assume extant ethicists, who understand their view

[35] Cf. Saito (2007); Peacocke (2021).

in terms of the pro tanto (see §1, n.10 especially), would accept the Extreme Thesis, inasmuch as they want to pursue their pluralist motivations to the fullest, they should join me in my extremism.

That's basically the argument. I'll now say a little more to unpack the view and head off some objections. Contrast two aesthetic evaluators: Morrison and Schmorrison. Morrison judges *Huckleberry Finn* as "amazing, troubling"; or rather, she offers "amazing, troubling" as a kind of shorthand for an evaluation that really takes the entirety of her essay to lay out. She regards the many flaws and merits holistically and in relation to one another, but not as reducing to some unidimensional aesthetic value. Schmorrison is *just as* aware of all of the particular merits and flaws, but sees "amazing, troubling" as combining to make a summative judgment: "Overall, the flaws count against the merits, and so in sum the novel is a 7" (or is "great"). I submit that Schmorrison is making a mistake.

Put in terms of value, the novel's humanity, racism, exploration of childhood, evocation of the sounds of America—these are merits and flaws that lie on different dimensions of aesthetic value and do not trade off. They are incommensurable and non-fungible and don't determine some further aggregate value. In terms of what's wrong with Schmorrison, she is responding to the value of these merits and flaws objectionably reductively—too accounting-like. Crucially, she is missing out on part of what makes engaging with art so wonderful—that it affords the freedom to be large and contain multitudes, and to wrestle with many affective responses which exhibit tension without settling which feeling or evaluation wins out.[36]

Maybe this still seems *too* extreme. I can offer a slightly moderated picture for those who still balk. On a slightly moderated extremism, Schmorrison (who, recall, writes the entire essay delineating many dimensions of value *before* concluding with her summative judgment) makes no error because alongside her summative judgment ("It's great!") were the non-summative grounds "It's amazing, troubling." The problem would be if Schmorrison judged *only* "It's great." This version of the Extreme Thesis holds that when

[36] One might worry I am here offering something like the wrong kind of reason for certain ways of evaluating. Maybe there is some defect or non-ideal quality to summative evaluation of people or art; but just because we have some reason to avoid summative evaluation, that doesn't mean that the values themselves don't sum or that qua *evaluation* (narrowly construed) there is something defective about non-summative judgment. This worry misconstrues the above argument. I am not suggesting that the fact that summative judgment involves relating poorly to another is itself a *reason* not to summatively evaluate. I am assuming that an evaluation is flawed iff it fails to appropriately respond to the underlying values, and in identifying something wrong with summative evaluation, I take myself to be committed to thinking the underlying normative facts themselves don't sum. For a general defense of arguments of this kind, see Yao (2023).

standing *alone*, summative judgments are defective because they leave something essential out in much the same way as practical judgments that don't take account of moral residue; but that defect can be remedied by pairing them with non-summative evaluations. Put in terms of value, this moderated picture could hold that one can define up a derivative, thin sense of unidimensonal aggregate value that takes each dimension of value as a ground. One natural way of doing so is to think aggregate value corresponds to the evaluand's place in a partial ordering constructed by comparing all the valuable things; but the view is still extremist in insisting this unidimensional notion of value is quite lightweight—*real* value is multidimensional. (And one could also say the same about aretaic evaluations and value if my preferred extremism seems too strident in that domain as well.)

Does accepting either version of the Extreme Thesis come at too high a price? Does it threaten to make a hash of core aesthetic practices like 1) comparing works of art, 2) offering recommendations, or 3) speaking of a work simply as "good" or "amazing"? No! I'll take these three worries in order.

Comparing two works does not require that one be able to place each work on a unidimensional scale of aesthetic value; comparability does not require unidimensionality (Chang, 1997). There is a conception of comparison that *is* incompatible with the Extreme Thesis, namely one on which to compare two things, A and B, with multidimensional values, one must first aggregate the multidimensional values into a single aggregative value, and then compare their aggregated values. On this picture, in comparing two restaurants, A and B, where A has great food and mediocre ambience and B has great ambience and mediocre food, one must first sum the value of food and ambieance into an aggregative aesthetic or resatuarantal value then see whether A or B has more of it. But that is not the only way to think about comparing A and B. Instead one might avoid aggregating and directly compare A and B as irreducibly multidimensionally valuable things, as in "A's food-goodness and ambience-goodness together are better than B's food-goodness and ambience-goodness." This style of comparison, which eschews aggregation, *is* compatible with extremism. Nor is it foreign to the ordinary practice of comparing restaurants. While Yelp first delivers a summative judgements (out of five stars) on the basis of which its users can compare restaurants, consider instead Zagat's rating scheme, with its three separate scores for food, decor, and service. To compare restaurants, Zagat does not first sum up the categories into an overall score, and neither need its users; they can make comparisons between restaurants without first arriving at wholly summative judgements about

each of them.[37]

And whatever one thinks of Zagat, a conception of comparing art which insists one *first* aggregates the value of each work and *then* compares their total value sits ill with the phenomenology of thoughtful critical comparison. If pressed to say which is better, The Jackson 5's "I Want You Back" or "ABC," it seems a bit artificial to require one *first* arrive at a summative judgement of each song and then compare. Instead, one might naturally compare the two songs' lyrics, melody, rhythm, baseline, and the myriad interplay of those various elements to one another, considering how all these various dimensions of value compare. To say "I Want You Back" is better needn't assume it has more overall aesthetic value; it's betterness can consist in its being better along many dimensions, e.g., its melody and vocals, perhaps even alongside its being worse in others, e.g., its educational value.

All that said, recommendations—even Yelp-like ones like "4/5 stars"—can be squared with extreme non-summativism about art. They make sense as expressing something like the strength of a recommendation to another that she make the *decision* to engage with the work. If "3/5 stars" means something like "You have a strong, but not super strong, reason to read this book," that is consistent with thinking that the *value* of the work cannot be summatively captured. And this way of thinking is consistent with critical practice; reviews are best when they offer an *invitation* for their reader to engage with a work and come to their own evaluative conclusion, with some helpful guidance about how strong a reason one has to take up or reject that invitation (Nehamas, 2007, p. 52).[38]

Lastly, the Extreme Thesis can allow that saying a work (or person) is "good," "bad," or "amazing," is appropriate as shorthand. A rough approximation of a things' value is often useful. When I don't need a full accounting of a thing's value, "it's amazing!" might suffice. What extreme non-summativism insists on is that we not mistake such useful shorthand for a proper statement of a thing's aesthetic value. Summative evaluations are *helpful summaries* of a thing's complicated value, not verdicts resulting from the summing of many dimensions values into a single dimension.

[37] See Hedden and Muñoz's defense of "Dimensionalism," the view that "overall value relations are determined solely by how things compare along value dimensions" (2023, p. 1). While they take for granted that if A is better overall than B, A has more overall value than B, none of their arguments establish or commit them to the claim that A and B have to have an overall value or that comparisons must be made in terms of overall value. One natural way of developing Dimensionalism is the view I prefer: that there is no overall value at all but there are overall value relations. Another is that I have suggested above: defining a derivative (lightweight) notion of overall value *in terms of* value relations. Thanks to XXXX for conversations and correspondence about this.

[38] Cf. Hills (2022).

7 Conclusion

The debate with which this paper opened might, at the close, have seemed like an odd choice. Autonomists and ethicists can each accept even my EXTREME THESIS—they would disagree about whether the relevant dimensions of aesthetic value have ethical features among their grounds; or about whether the relevant aesthetic affective responses have ethical features among their fittingness conditions. Nor does my defense of the non-summative essentially turn on ethical dimensions of a work; on my view, multidimensional, non-summative judgments are appropriate even when nothing ethical is afoot; what one might call a "bad" statue would be better judged as "devoid of character with a lifeless form and garish materials." Nor even, as the last sections made clear, is the place of non-summative judgment cordoned off to the aesthetic; it has a place wherever values are irreducibly multidimensional.

But the question of how the ethical bears on the aesthetic makes especially sharp and vivid the need for non-summativism. Embracing the non-summative can answer an anxiety that besets urgent and long-overdue discussions about unethical art and artists—where ignoring ethical flaws seems like a huge mistake, but an alternative of verdictive, summative treatment (of art and people both) might leave one feeling uneasy, however supposedly moderated by an appreciation of the pro tanto. I have suggested that understanding things in terms of the pro tanto still leaves one's ethical criticism of art and artists unduly *reductive* in being summative. But where in response, some urge an impoverished aversion to ethically-laden judgment (or a hollow insistence that it has nothing to do with *art*—as though one of the central features of the human experience could ever be divorced from ethics),[39] my hope is that appreciating the possibility—and maybe even centrality—of non-summative judgment offers a better way forward.

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[39] Or as Henry James put it: ''To deny the relevancy of subject-matter and the importance of the moral quality of a work of art strikes us as, in two words, ineffably puerile'' (1984, p. 157).

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