Replies to Arguments Suggesting that Critics' Strong Evaluations Could Not Be Soundly Deduced

There is a widely held view according to which the truth or otherwise of strong evaluative judgments of critics is not (and could not be) established by sound deduction from the descriptions of the work which they might offer in support of those judgments. That is to say, on this view, the reasons offered by critics in support of their judgments are not (and could not be) such as to entail the truth of the judgment that a work of art is good or great.

Not only is this position widely held, a surprising number and variety of arguments have been employed in its favour. In this paper I shall consider seven of the arguments which have been used in the service of this account of the nature of the critic's reasoning and I shall argue that each is inadequate.

The paper is divided into two main parts. In the first I consider four arguments, each of which focuses on the nature of critics' evaluative judgments in deciding that such judgments cannot be established as the conclusions of sound deductive arguments. The first two of these arguments are of a generality
which suggests that they might count against many accounts of practical reasoning; the third and fourth arguments, as well as those in Part Two, are more specific to the case of aesthetic or artistic evaluations. In the second section I consider three further arguments, each of which concentrates on the nature of the evidence offered by critics. These arguments suggest that such evidence as critics might consider could not be adequate to serve as premises from which strong evaluative judgments may be soundly deduced. In a brief, final section, I consider an eighth objection to the claim that critical reasoning in aesthetics is deductive.

Part One

(A) One reason offered for thinking that reasoning in aesthetics cannot be deductive appeals to the alleged gap between facts and values. Critics' reasons are descriptive of the work in question; no factual premises of that type could validly yield evaluative conclusions. Evaluations go beyond truth and, hence, cannot be entailed by premises which are merely factual.

This general objection to the deduction of evaluations from factual premises could be met if it were the case that evaluations are measures of instrumental efficiency. If a good fishing knife is good because it efficiently performs the function of fishing-knives, then it will be a matter of fact whether or not a particular fishing-knife is or is not a good fishing-knife, because it will be a matter of fact whether or not the particular fishing-knife in question efficiently meets the function for which we have fishing-knives. On an instrumental account of value, goodness is relative to needs and needs can be specified as matters of fact. Accordingly, goodness itself becomes a matter of fact.
Evaluations are a sub-set within the realm of facts. Evaluative facts are objective (and so may be assessed in accordance with inter-personal criteria for truth) in that the needs in questions are the needs of people in general, and not the special needs of any particular person at any particular time. (I can agree that this is a good fishing-knife although not what I need, since at the moment it is a drink which I need.) That which is good is not indifferent to the wants of people, although goodness is impersonal in depending neither on the wants of any particular person, nor on the wants of everybody at some particular time. (A good fishing-knife would still be a good fishing-knife even if no-one had a need for a fishing knife at that time, where 'that' time is any particular time. Equally, a good fishing-knife would still be a good fishing-knife even if the knife which I need at the moment is a bad fishing-knife - perhaps because I do not want to appear to be very adept in the use of fishing-knives.) What makes goodness a property of the object, rather than of its observer, is this dimension of impersonality, even if it is true that nothing would have a value had no people ever existed.

Is the value of art instrumental in the way outlined? Apparently so. 'Art' seems not to identify a natural kind, but rather, a type of thing we go out of our way to introduce into the world. That is, the concept is one that we have adopted, rather than one which has been forced upon us by divisions inherent in the world's structure. 'Art' is a classificatory term which reflects not so much the world's natural divisions, but rather the imposition of our needs upon the world. The needs in question are needs for the stimulation of pleasure, rather than the demands which establish the requirements of social life in general, because, as a rule, we concern ourselves with art neither in order to survive nor out of a sense
of duty, but for the pleasure which attends its appreciation and comprehension. Even if the life of the individual would be impoverished by the absence from his life of art, it is not obvious that social life would be rendered impossible by a general lack of interest in art.

To take this line is not to be committed to the view that 'art' is a functional concept in that only works which meet the function(s) of art are artworks. (For example, it might be the case that the procedures by which art-status is achieved or conferred have drifted free from the function which gave point to their adoption.) Neither, in holding this view, is one forced to think that art meets only one function in our lives. Instead, it is to allow that art is a functional concept in that artworks are evaluated in terms of the way in which they engage (or are likely to engage, perhaps) with the point(s) of art. It is to say that the concept of art has a purpose, if not that instantiations of the concept are to be defined as being of that purpose.

If the above is granted, there is no reason to suppose that there is a gap between factual premises and evaluative conclusions such that deduction could not be involved in a move from the former to the latter.

(B) A different, but related, view sees evaluations as disguised 'ought'-statements and follows Hume in concluding that the attempt to deduce such statements from factual, 'is'-statements is fallacious. An evaluation is said to be a disguised 'ought'-statement since it is intended to lead to action, rather than to belief. As such, critics' judgments could not be entailed by factual descriptions of artworks' properties and it is just such descriptions which critics offer as evidence for their evaluations.
The reply to the objection might go as follows: why take 'this is a good work of art' as a disguised 'ought'-statement in the first place? Why not take it at face value, as an 'is'-statement, and hence deny that the fallacy identified by Hume is being committed? The answer to these questions no doubt is supposed to be this: the critic's argument aims at an action, at getting a response from the audience, and not merely at agreement in beliefs. The critic is like the man who announces from the swimming pool that "it is wonderful in." Usually, such a remark is made to encourage others to enter the pool and, if all that those others do is to take the speaker's word for the fact, without feeling inclined to enter the water, then he has failed to produce the desired response. Similarly, it might be said, to regard critics' judgments merely as 'is'-statements is to miss their point. Criticism in the arts has as its goal the production of an experience of the work, rather than the mere creation of beliefs. So it is that the critic supposes the audience's access to the work; criticism is considered in the presence of the work under discussion. The critic tries to provide an involvement in the work and not simply to produce beliefs about it. Deductive reasoning aims at the production of beliefs, so no amount of deductive reasoning will ensure the production of the appropriate response to the work. Criticism in the arts does not operate deductively.

As an account of the point of criticism these answers are unobjectionable, but as an account of the role of reasoning in criticism they are inadequate. Even if the critic does intend to produce a response, it is not obvious that that intention can be grafted directly onto the critic's judgment, converting it from an 'is'-statement to an 'ought'-statement. The appropriate gloss on the critic's statement perhaps is this: 'I advise you to experience the work as I recommend, because the
work is the more enjoyable when viewed in such a manner.'  (It would always be appropriate to ask why this manner of viewing the work would be enjoyable, and to persist with such "why" questions until the critic's answer took the form of a description of the work or its parts.)

Even if the critic aims at a particular response which requires the active involvement of her audience in the work, the critic's advising them of this remains an 'is'-statement. Moreover, if the above objection works, it would show not only that reasoning in aesthetics is not deductive, but also that many paradigms of deductive argument are not deductive. Someone who argues deductively usually hopes that his audience will experience the force of the argument for themselves, and not merely that they will reach an "intellectual" acceptance of its soundness. Not everyone can see that an argument is valid, especially if it is long and complex. The audience might accept that the argument is valid on the authority of another person, or through a mechanical application of rules for validity, without coming to feel that the conclusion is entailed by the premises. And not everyone can see that the premises of an argument are true, although it may be accepted that the premises are true on the say-so of someone accepted as an authority. For these reasons an arguer might feel that her argument has failed, despite its acceptance, because she intended that the acceptance be founded on an experience of the argument's convincingness. However, that an argument does not result in the experience intended by the arguer does not mean that the argument is not deductive. In the same way, the fact that the critic intends his arguments to lead the audience to experience the artwork in a particular way, and that no amount of deductive
reasoning can guarantee this result, does not show that reasoning in aesthetics is non-deductive.

(C) The two objections considered above each aims in its own way to establish that aesthetic reasoning could not be deductive. At this stage it is appropriate to consider a quite different objection which could be developed from (B). It might be held that it is irrelevant to argue over whether or not the critic could use deductive reasoning, because, as a matter of fact, reasoning plays no central role in criticism. Reasoning is irrelevant to the critic’s enterprise, because the point of criticism is to convey an experience of the artwork to an audience and, since that experience must have a perceptual foundation, criticism must therefore depend on ostension and not on reasoning. If aesthetic properties are simple in nature, so that no amount of reasoning could assist in their recognition, deductive reasoning is irrelevant in aesthetics. If I want someone to recognise the redness of red, I must show that person red objects, rather than reason with him, and if I want someone to recognise that chocolate tastes nice, I must give that person some chocolate to eat, rather than reason with her. If aesthetic properties are simple, sensuous properties then there is nothing to be said by way of argument when it comes to inducing another to experience them.

The above characterisation of aesthetic properties is not uncommon in the literature and often goes with the view that one need bring to an aesthetic experience none of one’s knowledge and experience of art or life. (Indeed, some "aesthetic attitude" theorists have argued that the proper appreciation of aesthetic properties requires that one put aside all that one knows and all one’s "practical" concerns.) However, despite the popularity of such views, they seem
plainly to be false. No doubt an aesthetic appreciation of an object is an appreciation of it for its own sake, but the 'it' to be appreciated is a symphony (or whatever) and not an individual tout court, and to appreciate a symphony for its own sake necessarily is to bring to the experience of it a knowledge of the conventions and practices which distinguish symphonies from other types of music. The appreciation and understanding of art is unavoidably cognitive in this way. The aesthetic properties of a work, rather than inhering in it like sixpences awaiting discovery in a Christmas pudding (by someone with taste!), depend for their character both on their context within the work and on the work's context within (or as a reaction against) the history of art-making traditions. The recognition and appreciation of artistic properties involves a great deal by way of "intellectual" work. Aesthetic experience is no less thought-impregnated than is ordinary perception (in which, for example, one sees from the gauge that the car is running out of petrol, or one sees that an argument is valid).

Once we move away from the merely sensuous, a person's beliefs play an important part in determining what he perceives and experiences. For example, if I learn that those whom I took to be my friends have betrayed me to my enemies, my view of them is bound to alter - their smiles now strike me as empty, rather than welcoming, their laughter sounds hollow and mocking rather than convivial and warm. So, too, it is with the experience of works of art, where one's beliefs play an equally important rôle in shaping the experience of a work's properties. That being so, deductive reasoning may have a part to play in criticism, even if the critic aims at the production of an experience and not merely at the production of belief.
More than this, providing grounds for belief is integral, and not merely incidental, to the activity of criticism. There are many ways of causing experiences in others which do not involve one's reasoning with them - one can give them drugs, poke them with sticks, and so on. Criticism, even if it aims at inducing a particular experience of the work, is criticism only if it aims at inducing this experience through reason-giving. A critic might be able to produce the desired experience of a work in the members of an audience by administering a drug to them, but the critic would not be acting as a critic in doing so. To act as a critic is to presuppose the possibility of giving relevant reasons which describe the work in question.

This is not to say that critics always do or could produce deductive arguments; it is not even to say that the appropriate experiences standardly are produced through the critic's deductive reasoning. A critic might make a series of unfocussed remarks, only some of which are about the work directly, in the light of which her audience experiences the work in some altogether new fashion. If this approach produces the desired response, it may be all that is needed. But suppose that the response is not forthcoming. Even if the induction of an engagement with the work is the point served by criticism, the tradition within which critics work presupposes that part of the job of the critic is to tie that response to an apprehension of relevant features of the work. Whether or not some particular critic is prepared to pursue a description of the work in a way which reveals the appropriateness of the desired response, the tradition of criticism is founded finally on the possibility of just such an approach to the work.
Shusterman categorises three forms of criticism: (i) descriptivism, in which the work is described; (ii) prescriptivism, in which the critic says that the work ought to be experienced as she recommends; and (iii) performativism, in which the critic confers a property on the work by rendering the work in a certain way. Shusterman regards these different approaches to criticism as mutually irreducible. They are irreducibly different activities in that performativism, for example, is not a disguised form of description. Nevertheless, on the view which I have presented above, prescriptivism and performativism are legitimate activities of criticism only insofar as they presuppose the possibility of a descriptivist approach. The critic does not have a right to our obedience, so in saying that the work ought to be experienced in some particular way, the critic can always be asked why we ought to see it that way. Similarly, a critic who constitutes a work's properties through his "performance" of the work might be asked to justify his "performance" of the work in question. To reject such invitations for justification is, in the last analysis, to abandon the traditions of criticism. To reply to such requests is to explain the bases for one's judgments, their bearing on the way in which the work is to be experienced, and the relevance of such an experience to the enjoyment and understanding of the work in question, all of which, ultimately, leads the critic and the audience back to descriptions of the work itself.

If prescriptivism and performativism seem to be more attractive than does descriptivism as characterisations of the nature of criticism, perhaps this is because they are more readily to be seen as aiming at the evocation of an experience of the work, and not merely at the audience's acquisition of beliefs about the work. But I have tried to show above that this impression is
misleading. It arises only if one sees the production of belief as quite a
different matter from the induction of an experience of, and involvement in,
the work. I have argued that these activities are not antithetical and, further, that
in the case of criticism they must be seen as going together.

(D) Now someone might accept that reason-giving is, at base, essential rather
than incidental to criticism and yet deny that the reasons offered could function
as the premises of deductions leading soundly to critical evaluations. One
argument which might be offered for such a view is the following.

It might be argued that the multiple interpretability of artworks shows
that critics' interpretations (and evaluations) are neither true nor false, and,
hence, that those interpretations could not be deduced validly from factual
premises. Artworks are multiply interpretable neither because they are always
vague, nor because we lack access to the evidence which would allow us to
adjudicate in favour of one or other disputed interpretation, but because
artworks radically under-determine their interpretation. Moreover, artworks
lend themselves to interpretations which differ not merely in being
complementary, but differ also in being contrary or contradictory. To preserve
the notion of truth from paraconsistency, it must be accepted that critical
judgments are not to be assessed for truth. Interpretations cannot be true (or
false) because 'p and q' cannot be true (or false) where the conjuncts are
contraries or contradictions, whereas contrary interpretations of artworks are
equally permissible. To preserve the objectivity of criticism, it might be said that
interpretations are to be assessed for plausibility, where plausibility is not
derivative from truth (that is, is not to be understood, for example, as a probabilistic assessment of a statement’s truth).

I have discussed this view at length elsewhere and shall comment on it only briefly here. Were we concerned with that which an utterer meant by an utterance on the particular occasion of its use, normally only one interpretation of the utterance could yield a true interpretation of it. However, if we were concerned with the meanings which might be put upon an utterance without regard to that which was meant by it, contrary interpretations are likely to be equally possible. For example, it might be the case that the utterance lends itself fully and equally to a literal and to an ironic reading, so that it is true that the utterance can be interpreted in both ways. Now, of these two models of interpretation, the second is closer, I believe, to that which is involved in the interpretation and appreciation of artworks (though I should add the caveat that not all artworks bear their meaning as do linguistic utterances). That is to say, rather than being concerned to discover the meaning of a painting or a poem (a meaning determined by the artwork’s creator), critics are concerned to discover the various (and perhaps contrary) readings which the work will sustain when approached as a coherent whole. If that is indeed the case, it should not be surprising that artworks under-determine their interpretations and, more importantly, it will not follow from their multiple interpretability that interpretations cannot be assessed for truth or falsity. A true interpretation will be one which the whole work might consistently and coherently sustain and there will be no reason to believe either that there will be only one true interpretation, or that different true interpretations will not be contraries. What is true, on my view, is that King Lear can be read such that Lear is sane and that
Lear is senile - and, by simplification, that it is true that the play can be read such that Lear is sane. I reject as meaningless the question "Is Lear at the same time both sane and senile?". To think that such a question must be legitimate if the contrary interpretations can be true is to be too much captivated by the standard approach to utterances as vehicles for intended meaning.

(I prefer to describe multiple interpretations as forming inclusive disjunctions rather than conjunctions. One can know that the work sustains different interpretations as one views it in terms of one of those interpretations, but one cannot experience the work in terms of different interpretations at the same time. Similarly one can know that the duck-rabbit picture can be seen under both aspects, but one cannot see it under more than one aspect at a given time. The formulation of the relation between multiple interpretations in terms of an inclusive disjunction is intended to capture this idea. The formulation of the relation between multiple interpretations in terms of a conjunction too easily suggests something which I do not believe - that a work might be experienced at a given time under conflicting interpretations.)

There are several points to be made in connection with the above. I think that most judgments of critics are unlikely to be more than plausibly true. Deductive reasoning may deal with probabilistic premises. "Most x's are y's; p is an x; so p probably is a y" is a deductively valid argument and, with the appropriate substitutions, it might also be a sound argument even if the p in question turns out not in fact to be a y. In the above I am not rejecting the view that critic's reasoning should be regarded as hedged about with qualifications; instead I am rejecting the notion that critics' reasoning might be plausible.
without there being some connection, ultimately, between plausibility and truth. If, as I have supposed, the appeal to standards of plausibility is supposed to preserve the objectivity of criticism, then I doubt that it can do that job if the connection between truth and plausibility is abandoned (and I suspect that a defence of the objectivity of criticism along the lines suggested appears to be convincing only where some connection with truth is smuggled in by the backdoor).

I also believe that my account does not in any way prostitute the ordinary notion of truth. There is nothing strange, I believe, in the view that it can be true that one and the same text might be read both as p or as q where p and q are contraries. What is atypical here is not the notion of truth to which I appeal, but the nature of an aesthetic interest in a text as an interest in the (more enjoyable) readings which it can sustain. In the standard case, a text is intended to have a (more or less) determinative meaning, so the typical concern is with the meaning of the text, and along with the singularity of that concern goes a singularity in the range of true interpretations. Where the focus falls, as it does in criticism within the arts, on a meaning, there no longer is a single interpretation to be revealed.

Part Two

It might be argued that syllogistic reasoning in aesthetics always is defeasible, where the conclusion to be drawn is one about the goodness of a work of art, on the grounds both that the soundness of such reasoning relies on the availability of true generalisations and that there are no true generalisations about aesthetic properties of a kind which will license the valid deduction of strong aesthetic judgments. The point is this: if the reasoning is valid at least one
of the premises is too strong to be (proved to be) true, or if the premises can be (proved to be) true, at least one of them is too weak validly to entail the conclusion. (Even Beardsley accepts that aesthetic evaluations are to be established inductively, rather than deductively, for this reason.\textsuperscript{vii})

Validly to yield the conclusion that a work is good, premises such as the following are needed:

(1) \(P\) is a value-conferring property in art in general, \(p\) being some aesthetic property; and

(2) This is a work of art which has \(p\).

Isenberg, amongst others, has claimed that there is no aesthetic property which could be substituted for \('p'\) in (1) which would result in (1)'s being true, for there is no single property the possession of which guarantees the goodness of the work in which it is instantiated.\textsuperscript{viii}

It might appear that the above argument could be strengthened were we to add other premises: (4) The work also possesses \(x, y\) and \(z\) and it lacks \(q\) and \(r\); (5) \(x, y\) and \(z\) are good-making properties in art and \(q\) and \(r\) are bad-making properties in art. This appeal to what is in effect a \textit{ceteris paribus} condition fails, however, on two counts. (a) It is unlikely that one can exhaust the list of value-relevant properties in art, so the list must be open-ended. One cannot assign a truth-value to an open-ended list, so the \textit{ceteris paribus} clause cannot function as a premise in a sound deduction. (b) In fact, when it is the generality of artworks which is being discussed, most of the properties which might be listed as value-
conferring will appear also in the list of disvalue-conferring properties, because what makes for aesthetic goodness in one context may detract from it in another.

Dickie has considered and rejected two further lines of reply to Isenberg's objection:

(a) Some aesthetic properties, such as unity, must be value-conferring, in which case there need be no difficulty in our deducing that a work with unity has some good in it. But, of course, this conclusion falls far short of the strong conclusion that the work is good, since a work might have some good in it while being indifferent, or worse than indifferent, in its overall aesthetic value.

(b) An instrumentalist on aesthetic value might appear to be able to bypass the difficulties which attend reference to value-conferring properties. On Beardsley's view (for example), to judge a work of art to be good is to say that it gives rise to an aesthetic experience which is pleasurable in its magnitude; a good work of art is one which meets the function of art, that function being to provide the kind of pleasure which attends the aesthetic appreciation of the work. (Obviously Beardsley must qualify his view, insisting that the percipient be appropriately skilled in the appreciation of the artistic qualities of works of the kind in question, that the perception of the work take place under standard conditions, and not in a drug-induced state for example, and so on. Problems which might arise in the elaboration of these qualifications do not concern Dickie and will not detain us here.) So, Dickie points out, it appears that Beardsley could appeal to an argument such as the following:
(1') All works of art which give rise to aesthetic experiences of great magnitude are good; and

(2') This work gives rise to an aesthetic experience of great magnitude; so

(3) This work of art is good.

But, now, the problem lies in demonstrating the truth of the premises and, since the aim here is not to challenge the instrumental account of aesthetic value, the concern focuses on the second premise. If someone did not accept that (2') was true, how would one attempt to convince that person? Inevitably the justification of the second premise would lead back to a discussion of the work's aesthetic properties and their power to induce an aesthetic experience of great magnitude. (The relevant properties are "regional", according to Beardsley - unity, complexity and intensity.)

Dickie concludes that the appearance that we can by-pass reference to aesthetic properties is illusory and the problems mentioned above with respect to such reference recur. He shares Isenberg's view that aesthetic reasoning is not strictly deductive because the premises involved either are unproved, or are seen to be true only post facto because one accepts the truth of the conclusion. One can accept that the work in question has unity and deny that it thereby gives rise to an aesthetic experience of great magnitude; or, because one does accept that the work gives rise to an experience of great magnitude, one retrospectively attributes this to the power of the relevant regional properties. (2') can be justified only by reference to the relevant aesthetic properties, but, prior to one's having experience of the work, no account of its properties can establish the
claim that they will have the power to produce an aesthetic experience of great magnitude.

Now, is the claim that there are no true generalisations of the kind required to yield a deductively sound evaluation of an artwork justified? At least three arguments have been offered in its defense: (E) that an aesthetic interest precludes the formulation of general rules of aesthetic value, since what we value in works is their uniqueness, rather than that which they share with other pieces; (F) that the creativity displayed by artists in the production of art shows that neither they nor their products are subject to rules (other than rules of thumb, perhaps) such as might feature as the major premise of a sound deductive argument with a strong evaluation as its conclusion; (G) that any given aesthetic property will be neutral with respect to value in some works, value-conferring in other works, and disvalue-conferring in yet other works, so generalisations about the dependence of aesthetic value on the occurrence of any given set of aesthetic properties always will be defeasible. In the remainder of this section I shall discuss these arguments and attempt to counter each one in turn.

(E) One widespread view rejects the claim that aesthetic reasoning may be deductive on the following grounds: deduction presupposes the possibility of generalisation, since deductive arguments must contain at least one general premise. In the matter of the evaluation of artworks, generalisation is impossible because we value artworks ‘for their own sakes’ and, hence, for their uniqueness. To value something for that which marks it as unique is to value it for a property which it does not share with other things and which, therefore, cannot be
generalised. That is, judgments of aesthetic value always are particular in a way which prohibits the formulation of general rules of aesthetic value of the kind "all works with $p$ have aesthetic value", where $p$ is some aesthetic property. To deduce that some artwork is good, appeal must be made to some such premise, but no such premises are true.

I believe that the plausibility of this argument is illusory. The crucial move in the argument is the step from the claim that artworks are valued 'for their own sakes' to the claim that artworks are valued for their unique properties. That step is illegitimate; to make it is to mischaracterise what is meant in saying that artworks are valued 'for their own sakes.' To value a work of art 'for its own sake' is to value it for the individual which it is, and to value the work for the individual which it is is not necessarily to value it for properties which mark it as unique.

A stronger version of the objection might insist that artworks are valued as unique individuals, rather than for their possession of unique properties. One reply to this version of the objection could take the form of an argument to the effect that aesthetic uniqueness is not always, automatically consequent on quantitative (or structural) uniqueness, but I prefer a different reply. I love the people whom I love for being the unique individuals they are - I love them because they are who they are (and because I am who I am). But the evaluation of people has a more public function than does love (though there is an obvious connection between the two concerns) and for that reason we have a general interest in the qualities of character, such as honesty and integrity, which are desirable (and likable) in people in general. The exclusivity of love does not
count against the formulation of generalisations about what is good or bad in human character. Aesthetic evaluations play a similarly public and interpersonal rôle in directing people to worthwhile artworks, notwithstanding the fact that different individuals have different preferences and tastes. Aesthetic evaluations do not prescribe the art which one is to love or loathe, even if it is true that the artworks which one loves are loved as unique individuals. So, by analogy, aesthetic evaluations aim at a general categorisation of artworks and there is no special problem in allowing that we might generalise about the qualities which are desirable in artworks, or in types of artworks, even if this does not entirely cover or explain the intimacy of the relation which might hold between any particular person and any particular artwork. That we value artworks for their own sakes does not mean that we value them as unique individuals (although they might be loved as unique individuals). Artworks are appreciated as symphonies, tragedies, minimalist paintings, sonnets, and so forth. The properties which I value in a sonnet are properties which might be generalisable as valuable in any sonnet, even if not all sonnets possessing the relevant properties appeal to me equally.

In this context it is appropriate to make some remarks about novelty in artworks, since the uniqueness of a work might often derive from its novelty. (i) Novelty has come to be valued in art only comparatively recently. (ii) If novelty is a value-conferring property in artworks, then it is a property about which we can generalise. Although different works cannot each be novel in the same way, novelty, as an artistic property, can be common to a great many works. Novelty might be a good thing wherever it occurs. (iii) That novelty is valued in an artwork does not necessarily entail that the value attaches directly to its novelty.
We might value the first occurrence of an idea or effect because the idea or
effect is a good one and not because this is its first occurrence; the idea or
effect will be valued for its occurrence in subsequent works. (iv) The value of
originality very often appears to concern the evaluation of the artist and his
achievement, rather than the work itself. We might admire the artist's originality
without necessarily admiring the artist's products as good works of art.

It does not follow, then, from the fact that we value works of art 'for
themselves' that we cannot generalise about that which is valuable in art, or in
types of art. If in fact there are no true generalisations about aesthetic value, then
this is so for some reason other than for the reason that an aesthetic interest is an
interest in the individuality of its object.

(F) There is a widely held view according to which artists are unconstrained
by rules in their exercise of creativity and that this is an essential feature not only
of art-making, but also of the product which results. If artists are unconstrained
by rules and if they frequently overthrow and repudiate the artistic conventions
and practices of their artistic forebears, then there will be no uniformity from
artwork to artwork and could be no true generalisations of the form "P is a value-
conferring property in art in general."

The objection stated above is not entirely convincing, I find, for this
reason: although it may be the case that artists revolt against what they perceive
as constraints upon their creative freedom, it cannot be the case that the artist
rejects every aspect of the artistic tradition against which she acts, for, were she
to do so, there would no longer be a reason for us to recognise her products as
art. Artists often achieve new and exciting uses of their materials, but if what
they create is new and exciting art (as opposed to some new and exciting form of non-art), there must be some way of seeing their products as integrated with, and flowing from, the historical tradition of art-creation. For the artist's product to be an artwork, and not something else, some thread of continuity must tie this product to other artworks.

In fact, when one reviews the history of art, what one tends to find is that artistic conventions often are gradually eroded. When they are dramatically rejected, they are rejected in a piecemeal fashion, and in a way which often draws a connection with the art of some distant past, if not the immediate past. The act of repudiation ties itself to the tradition in referring to the new creation not just as different, but as a reaction to the tradition. For that matter, the process of reaction and repudiation lies squarely within the tradition, since it is what radical artists traditionally do. Easy though it may be to lose sight of the continuities which tie revolutionary art to its historical predecessors, it is just those continuities which unify the concept of art through time and which make of new forms of creation, or new products of creation, new artforms, or new artworks.

However, clearly the objection has some force, for, even if there is a continuity which ties the art of the present to the art of the past, there is nothing to say that the unifying principle has not itself altered through time. The continuities between the art of the present-day and the art of the 19th Century may not be the same as the continuities between the art of the 19th and 18th Centuries. Granting this, what follows, I take it, is not that there are no rules of artistic value, but that such rules as there are must (sometimes) be relativised to
historical periods, or to historical points of view. To allow this is to clarify the process of critical evaluation, rather than to concede the impossibility of such reasoning, because it is not as if the historical relativity of criteria for aesthetic evaluation will be disputed nowadays by many theoreticians.

(G) A further objection to the idea that there might be general rules for aesthetic value comes from the fact that the aesthetic significance of properties is neither fixed nor regularised according to any principle. For example, a particular shade of red may be vivid in one place and garish in another.

As the objection stands, it invites an obvious reply. As I have already indicated, artistically important properties are complex, context-dependent properties, so there is nothing surprising or difficult about the fact that the same first-order property might feature in different contexts which give rise to differing artistic properties. In the same way it is not surprising that phonemes might, in different combinations, generate words and sentences with quite different meanings; meaning comes into play at the macro-level, rather than at the micro-level of first-order, simple properties.

One way of refining the objection is this: the same complex of features may generate aesthetic properties with an artistic importance and value which differs from work to work. For example, elaborate thematic development is a desirable attribute in a symphony but may be a distraction and fault in a simple song. Because the value and importance of complex aesthetic properties varies from work to work, so that what confers value in one case undermines it in another, there can be no general rules for aesthetic value of the kind stated previously in (1) - "P is a value-conferring property in all artworks."
This form of the objection is powerful. For example, the truth of (1) could not be salvaged were we to allow that critical evaluations should be relativised sometimes to historical points of view, for a rule of the form "P is a value-conferring property whenever it appears in artworks of the 18th Century" would also be patently false. Innumerably many features are value-conferring in works of art and innumerably many features count against value in works of art, and most of the features which appear in the one list appear also in the other.\textsuperscript{12}

However, the power of the objection need not prove decisive provided that we appreciate that the context within which aesthetic properties take on artistic significance is not solely or simply internal to the work, but is determined also by external factors, and that these external factors include, as well as art-historical considerations, the style and type of the work. That is, the objection might be met if it could be shown that critics' judgments are relativised to types or categories of artworks, and that, within a given type or category of art, only some properties are value-conferring and only some (different) properties are disvalue-conferring.

Earlier I noted that an interest in the individuality of an artwork is, typically, an interest in it as a type of individual. Mozart's Jupiter is of interest as a classical symphony - not simply as an instance of instrumental music, or music, or fine art, or art. So there is nothing counter-intuitive about the view that critics' judgments of particular works are relativised to the types or categories of art within which those works fall.\textsuperscript{13} Usually we distinguish between artforms (music, painting etc.) and, within artforms, between genres (symphony, song etc.) and, within genres, between sub-genres (classical symphony, romantic
symphony etc.). It is consistent with an instrumentalist view of aesthetic value that art be seen as performing more than one function, or as performing its functions in more than one way, so there is no difficulty in our allowing that that which is enjoyable in art varies from artform to artform and from genre to genre. Neither is there a difficulty, I think, in holding that, for any given genre or artform, only some kinds of features are value-conferring and only some (other) kinds of features are disvalue-conferring. In the classical symphony some things are of value (for example, the economical use of material) and some things are of disvalue (for example, a lack of formal balance). Monothematicism is a virtue insofar as it contributes to the unity of movements in Haydn's symphonies, whereas thematic richness is a virtue in Mozart's symphonies insofar as its contributes to the development of contrast and diversity, but this is easily explained once we recognise that Haydn generated diversity and contrast through his use of rhythm and tonality while Mozart generated formal unity through his use of structural, motivic and tonal factors.

Provided that artworks can be correctly classified with respect to their type - perhaps by reference to their creator's intentions, or in terms of their use of conventions, or by their place within a social or historical context of art-creation - then criteria for aesthetic value which apply generally to works of that type might allow for the valid deduction of critical evaluations of such works. What makes for "unity, complexity and intensity" in a classical symphony is clear enough, as is what counts against such properties, even if quite different criteria for "unity, complexity and intensity" apply to folk songs. So the appropriate relativisation of the argument given above would seem to save it from the objection given. We get:
(1") \( P \) is value-conferring in romantic symphonies; and

(2") This romantic symphony has \( p \); and

(3") in addition to \( p \), this romantic symphony has other properties which are good-making in romantic symphonies and it lacks properties which are bad-making properties in romantic symphonies; so

(4") This is a good romantic symphony.

The relativisation of the judgment to the appropriate class of works not only gives force to (1"), it also makes it possible to assign a truth-value to the crucial third premise (which fills the role of the ceteris paribus clause which I have discussed previously). It is not implausible to suggest that the appropriate relativisation of the judgment to the work’s category or genre sets a limit to the length of the list of good- and bad-making properties, while it also ensures that the list of good-making properties does not include properties also found in the list of bad-making properties. Neither is it implausible to suggest that, where the relativisation of the critics’ judgments is not made explicit by them, it is, nevertheless, properly to be understood.

Part Three

There is an eighth objection to the claim that critics' evaluative judgments are deductively based. As a logical point it fails, since it obviously relies on the fallacy of composition, but as a psychological point it could contain an important element of truth.
The fallacious version of the argument is this: "while the objections so far considered fail when each is viewed in isolation, their accumulated weight might be sufficient to do that which none could do alone. Where each lends its weight to that of others, together they might prove victorious where each alone fails." The fallacy here consists in a reliance not on the contents of the previous seven objections, but simply on their number; the argument gives relevance to that factor by suggesting that, in being collected, the seven objections are joined to form some new, more powerful entity, whereas, in fact, to collect the objections simply is to list them (as a series of failures) and is not to combine them.

The "psychological" version of this objection is as follows: so ubiquitous and deeply felt is the belief that critics' reasoning cannot be deductive that philosophers have gone to the lengths of producing not less than seven arguments aiming to establish that conclusion. Even if those arguments fail, their number is a symptom of how widely held and firmly entrenched is the belief in question. It would be wiser to respect such a deeply held intuition, even if it stands unproved as yet, than to induce from a mere seven failures that that intuition is unsupportable.

This reading of the objection invites two replies. First, I should like to see the factual claim about the strength and universality of the intuition made good. Second, there is the obvious point that, while a belief might be widespread because it is a true belief, other explanations for its being widely held are possible - for example, that a great many people have been exposed to a persuasive ideology. And we might prefer the second sort of account if it is the
case that the genesis and spread of such a belief arose out of the intellectual climate of a particular age, an age which in many ways we have passed. I wonder if it is incidental that a Romantic view of the artist as genius, unfettered by convention and achieving the inexplicable, took hold just at the time that some of these arguments for the non-rationality of criticism first appeared.

Stephen Davies,
Department of Philosophy,
University of Auckland, Private Bag, Auckland,
NEW ZEALAND.
I take the good-making properties in such a case to include the following: a blade of more than ten and less than thirty centimeters in length; a pointed rather than a rounded tip to the blade; a handle which not only offers a secure grip, but which also is made of a material such as to give the whole sufficient buoyancy that it floats in water; a serrated [top] edge suitable for scaling, etc. etc..

One way of replying to this objection is not available in aesthetics as it might be in ethics. One might, in an argument about morality, appeal to a premise which is an 'is'-statement of the form 'it is your duty to do X'. That 'is'-statement licenses the conclusion that one ought to do X. But (normally) no-one has a moral obligation to respond in a particular way to an artwork, so premises of that sort are not available to art critics.


The view which I have characterised here is pre-eminently associated with Joseph Margolis.

vi  In this I agree with Susan L. Feagin - see her 'Incompatible Interpretations of Art', *Philosophy and Literature*, 6 (1982): 133-146. In other respects we disagree. She believes that statements about fictional characters are neither true nor false and couples this with the view that the characters and events in question are partly constituted by the interpretations offered of them, so that multiple interpretations do not conflict directly, although they may conflict in their theoretical orientations. I believe that she shifts the problem of the truth of interpretations to that of truth-in-fiction, rather than removing the issue altogether.


Similar points are made by Noël Carroll in 'Art, Practice, and Narrative', *The Monist*, 71 (1988): 140-156.


I am happy to acknowledge the helpful criticisms made by Laurent Stern, John Brown, Ray Martin and Jerrold Levinson of an earlier draft of this paper.