

Numbered Paragraphs: An Essay on Aesthetics

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- 1 We express our personality by what we say and by what we do.
- 1.1 What is said with words can be described in words easily. (We can put quote marks around what we said.)
- 1.2 What we do, we do in many ways, and all these ways “show” a personality.
- 1.21 “Style” is a word sometimes used to describe this. Style is the invention of a pattern of variations where variations are allowed to be invented.
- 1.211 (It cannot be seen ahead of time what variations are allowed to be invented.)
- 1.212 Personality is shown when variations coalesce into a pattern we can “grasp.”
- 1.2121 (Consistency is not required of such a pattern. What would it mean to be inconsistent? To open and close a door simultaneously?)
- 1.213 Those who invent a pattern of variations that is not allowed to be invented always show the same personality—the outlaw—as long as those variations are not allowed. (Later retrospection can reclassify outlaws as showing distinct personalities.)
- 1.2131 “Outlaws are capable of anything.” (Of course this is never true.)
- 1.22 “Body language” is not a language. (Body movements show things; they do not say things. We do not “do” languages; we speak languages.)
- 1.221 Sign language *is* a language. But, of course, sign language is not “body language.”
- 1.222 Just as we can talk about words, we can talk about actions. We can talk

about what actions show. (But we can't use quote marks. We can use videotape and point out things to each other.)

- 1.2221 Perhaps we sometimes confuse what actions show with how we can use terms about those actions to refer to what actions show.
- 1.23 We cannot speak without acting. (We cannot speak without showing something.)
- 1.231 And our actions always show more than we say. (Unless they don't coalesce into a pattern. Unless we are outlaws.)
- 1.232 Actions are often habitual, and the actor can be unaware of them.
- 1.2321 We usually communicate more than we are aware of by what we show. (We "reveal" more than we realize.)
- 1.2322 (Unless we are professional actors.)
- 1.2323 We often dislike someone because he has shown us something, revealed something—his personality. And yet his words are impeccable: they reveal nothing like what they show. We too, sometimes, can't put what we've seen into words. We "smell" trouble.
- 1.23231 (We need to practice coining new words.)
- 1.23232 "Personal chemistry" is always more a matter of what is shown rather than of what is said. (We sometimes like or dislike a person more for how she pauses between words or for how she arranges words in a sentence than for what she says.)
- 1.233 I can say a sentence, and wave my hands (a certain way). I can say a sentence, and pause between phrases (a certain way). I can say a sentence, and make facial movements (a certain way). I can say a sentence, and pitch the sound of my voice (a certain way).
- 1.2331 "A certain way," must always be used here. This is because current vocabulary fails us. Videotape is needed. (Or, a choreographic language for what accompanies utterances is needed.)
- 1.23311 New vocabulary can always be invented.
- 1.2332 We can call the actions of the human accompanying the utterance the "body" of the utterance.
- 1.23321 What is shown by an utterance is always shown by the body of the

- utterance. (But not every aspect of the body shows something.)
- 1.23322 “Accompanying” suggests a metaphysical distinction where a metaphysical distinction may not exist.
- 2 Contemporary poetry is not an oratory art; it is a written art.
- 2.1 Sometimes poetry is read aloud or is acted with great skill, but nevertheless it is evaluated solely on the basis of what is communicated on the page.
- 2.11 This can change; this may change. But it is true now.
- 2.12 Sound is communicated by words on a page just as sound is communicated by a score. But this is not the same sound as what we hear during any performance—even if the performance is one where we read aloud to ourselves.
- 2.121 We can read something aloud in many different ways, and yet the sound communicated by what we read is always the same.
- 2.2 An inscription has a body just as an utterance has a body.
- 2.21 The body of an inscription is both auditory and visual.
- 2.211 There is more to the body of an utterance than the auditory aspect of the body of an inscription.
- 2.22 The body of an inscription always shows more than it says.
- 2.221 “The cat is in the hat,” says, “the cat is in the hat.” It shows this at least: its second word rhymes with its sixth word.
- 2.222 What is shown by an inscription can be said elsewhere (in another inscription, for example).
- 2.2221 Correction: What is shown by an inscription can be described elsewhere (by another inscription, for example).
- 2.2222 To say what something shows is not to provide a translation into words of what it shows. A pen is red (it shows its color); “The pen is red,” is not a translation of this property of the pen; it is a statement that the pen has this property.
- 2.223 What is shown can be missed even if what is said is completely grasped.

- 2.2231 This is why there is literary criticism.
- 2.2232 We can explain poems. We can't explain jokes. Why?
- 2.22321 Jokes have "punchlines": they require knowledge, and they require a surprise ending. Poems don't require a surprise ending. The literary critic can say what a poem shows (if we need it said to us), and after doing so, we can read the poem again, and see what it shows directly while we read what it says.
- 2.22322 (We can experience it again and aright after we're prepared with background knowledge. A poem that is "spoiled" after its first read, or by being explained, is not a good poem.)
- 2.22323 (It's pleasurable seeing what a poem says and seeing what it shows at the same time. Poems are designed to be pleasurable in this way.)
- 2.224 "Skyscrapers are acupuncture needles," is a metaphor. (For that matter, "skyscraper" is a metaphor.)
- 2.2241 "Skyscrapers are acupuncture needles," says something that isn't true.
- 2.2242 Does it show something that *is* true? If we put what it shows into words will we find that it shows something true?
- 2.22421 What is shown is neither true nor false: it just is.
- 2.22422 If we say what is shown, we say something that is true. (What we say is shown is indeed shown, and that is why what we say is true.) But this is not to make what is shown true. How would we do that?
- 2.2243 Suppose we say that what "skyscrapers are acupuncture needles" *really says* is that skyscrapers look like acupuncture needles. But this isn't what it says, so this isn't what it really says either.
- 2.2244 Does "skyscrapers are acupuncture needles," show that skyscrapers look like acupuncture needles? How would it do that? An inscription only shows its own properties, and some properties of its narrator, not the properties of anything else.
- 2.2245 Does a pen's redness show that the sunset is red? Does a pen's redness show that the sun is yellow? Does a pen's redness show anything other than the pen's redness?
- 2.2246 If an utterance is true, doesn't it show something about what it says? No. It

- says something, and what it says is true. But this is not to show anything about what it says.
- 2.2247 (Things only show things about themselves. Sentences only show things about themselves and about those who say or write them.)
- 2.2248 Suppose we say that skyscrapers really look like acupuncture needles (or that they really look like that if we're in certain states of mind), and suppose we say the poet was trying to attract our attention to this fact.
- 2.22481 We could say this. But what would this fact (if it were true) have to do with Aesthetics?
- 2.22482 What *is* part of Aesthetics is the fact that the identification of skyscrapers with acupuncture needles makes associations that connect to other parts of the poem. *This* is shown and not said (by the entire poem).
- 2.22483 Not everyone would think to identify skyscrapers with acupuncture needles. This is not shown (but that the narrator purports to identify these things is shown).
- 3 Personality can become an aesthetic object. It can be related to aesthetically. (These mean the same thing.)
- 3.1 We call the personality of the artist, when viewed aesthetically, "sensibility."
- 3.11 Personality and sensibility are not the same things.
- 3.111 There is a fact/value distinction in Aesthetics. (Perhaps it is even called a fact/value distinction.)
- 3.112 How can such a sharp distinction exist in nature? It does not exist in nature. It is stipulated by us.
- 3.1121 There are places where gardens are art. (Not among us, of course.)
- 3.1122 Venetian noblemen masturbated, viewing the very same paintings that Schopenhauer, some centuries later, would claim the contemplation of which extinguishes sexual desire. These noblemen regarded the paintings aesthetically, just as Schopenhauer did. They were not confused about what they were looking at.
- 3.11221 (They didn't think they were looking in windows.)

- 3.11222 To say that Schopenhauer was right and the noblemen wrong, or *vice versa*, is to suggest there is some *fact of nature* that will tell us when a psychological response to something is an aesthetic response and when it's not.
- 3.1123 There are no psychological dispositions that come marked in nature as aesthetic responses, no psychological responses (even pleasurable ones at the sight of sunsets or birds) that automatically are aesthetic ones; there is no aesthetic faculty—in the visual cortex, say—no aesthetic module in the mind. (Or in the brain.)
- 3.11231 An aesthetic reaction to something is surely a reaction of pleasure, we'd say. Of course. But not just any pleasurable sensation is aesthetic—tickles, for example, are not aesthetic (so we say).
- 3.11232 And, we also say, some things that do not give us ordinary pleasure nevertheless give us aesthetic pleasure.
- 3.112321 But this is a mistake. We see two people yelling at each other on stage, and we think, "If *this* were happening for *real* I would be repulsed." But we cannot imagine what we think we can imagine: To take away the audience and the stage is to change the experience. To leave the audience and the stage, but change the assumption that what is happening is staged, is still to change the experience. And, of course, if it were happening for real, and I did not know it, I would not be repulsed.
- 3.1124 We stipulate which pleasures are aesthetic and which are not. And the proof is that different cultures stipulate these things differently.
- 3.1125 All sorts of (causal) factors influence where we stipulate the border between aesthetic pleasure and mere pleasure. Call the study of this the sociology of art. It looks striking that we are so labile in what we treat as aesthetic only if we forget that the border is stipulated.
- 3.11251 It is a hard question to answer to what extent what gives us pleasure is biologically fixed and to what extent it is not.
- 3.11252 (But this is not a question in Aesthetics.)
- 3.113 A fictional narrator can speak in the first person, and her sentences can show things which are not true of the author. But this is not the source of the fact/value distinction in Aesthetics. For even if the fictional narrator says everything that the author believes to be true, and if her sentences all show things which are true of the author, there is still the distinction between the personality of the author and the sensibility of the fictional narrator.

- 3.114 We say that the sensibility of the fictional narrator is depicted by the work of art (if it is) or shown by the work of art. (Or both.)
- 3.115 We never say that the personality of the author is depicted or shown by the work of art (unless we are confused). We say that the personality of the author is the *cause* of the work of art.
- 3.116 We can aesthetically condemn the sensibility depicted or shown in a work of art. We can't morally condemn that sensibility. (But if we are confused, we can try to.)
- 3.1161 (When we are confused, we sometimes try to do something impossible. We succeed in doing something else, which is what always happens when we try to do something impossible.)
- 3.1162 (We seem to morally condemn characters in fiction: "Raskolnikov is a bad man," we might say. And we might even say this in an angry tone of voice. But this is like saying "Raskolnikov has a sister," or "Pegasus has wings." We often say such things (and so it is alright to say them), but we should be clear about what we're doing (and saying); what we *must* be doing (and saying).)
- 3.117 We can morally condemn an author. (We may, for example, aesthetically condemn the sensibility depicted in a work of art, and morally condemn the author for creating that sensibility.)
- 3.118 Dostoyevsky is a racist. His German or Polish characters are always presented quite negatively. Are there *aesthetic flaws* in his work as a result? Secondary characters in novels can be one-dimensional—good or bad—or just minor. (This is allowed aesthetically.) Dostoyevsky's Polish and German characters are always minor ones.
- 3.12 No work of art is autobiographical.
- 3.2 Poetry is the most idiosyncratic of written artforms.
- 3.21 One aim of good prose is to show sensibility despite the apparent uniformity of what prose shows.
- 3.22 In poetry we are expected to show new sensibilities honestly.
- 3.221 This is a directive to poetry: this is a point about how poetry and prose are institutionally divided today; we can feel this difference between them because of what we are allowed to do.

- 3.2211 (There are always exceptions. And some of the greatest work is exceptional.)
- 3.23 It is always easier to like new prose than it is to like new poetry.
- 3.231 You have to get used to new poetry. You have to get used to new people.
- 3.2311 (Unless, of course, they're just like people you've met before. Or: they speak—pretty much—like people you've met before. Or: you avoid being intimate with them.)
- 3.232 Once upon a time, poetry was popular.
- 3.2321 Once upon a time, poetry had a different role. It did not show sensibility. (That was not its job.)
- 3.2322 It is hard (nowadays) for poetry to be popular. It is hard for people to be popular and *intimate* with the people they are popular among.
- 3.23221 (This is not a remark about lack of time.)
- 3.23222 The work of any poet is an acquired taste.
- 3.23223 (Except in cases of love at first sight.)
- 3.233 Originality in poetry today is *only* a matter of creating a new sensibility.
- 3.2331 (New to the canon, of course.)
- 3.2332 There are no schools in poetry. (“School,” in the sense of “school of fish.”)
- 3.23321 Poetry does not “celebrate one’s ethnicity.” Or one’s “gender.”
- 3.233211 (I could have written: “Poetry should not ‘celebrate one’s ethnicity,’” for, just as with logic, merely stipulative constraints are often transformed into the normative language of law and proscription.)
- 3.2333 Formalist experiments in poetry have a way of looking alike (the variations introduced don’t coalesce into patterns, or if they do, they seem to be the same patterns other formalist invent.)
- 3.23331 (We sometimes suspect all formalist poetry has been written by the same person, even if the tricks are different.)
- 3.23332 (They all show the same sensibility.)

- 3.22334 Confessional poetry fails when it doesn't show a new sensibility.
- 3.23341 (New to the canon, of course.)
- 3.23342 Sylvia Plath didn't have a new sort of personality: narcissistic rage, hysteria, melodrama, delusions: we've seen all this before.
- 3.233421 (Sylvia Plath couldn't write short stories.)
- 3.23343 Sylvia Plath invented a new sensibility: We hadn't seen that "voice" before. Not in poetry. (Where it matters.)
- 3.2335 Lyric poetry is not autobiography.
- 3.23351 Lyric poetry imitates autobiography.
- 3.233511 "Imitate," is a good word. It puts a gap between the thing being imitated and the thing doing the imitation.
- 3.233512 Nevertheless, we often confuse the thing imitated and the thing imitating.
- 3.2335121 (Perhaps it is no coincidence that the poet—in English—we know least about is one we think is the best.)
- 3.23352 Poetry does not settle scores.
- 3.233521 Have poets taken revenge on relatives and friends through their poems? Of course.
- 3.2335211 (People stab each other with screwdrivers too. And yet, no instruction manual on screwdrivers describes the best way to do this.)
- 3.2335212 Have mathematicians taken revenge on others by proving new theorems? Perhaps. Perhaps some have thought they were doing this.
- 3.2335213 (The psychological process of transference is confused.)
- 3.23522 The desire for revenge (in an author) may cause a poem to have certain qualities.
- 3.233523 We can condemn an author (morally) for creating a poem with certain qualities.
- 3.233524 We cannot condemn the poem (aesthetically) because certain causes gave rise to certain qualities in it.

- 3.2335241 (God may visit punishment of the father's sins unto his children: We are more logical than that.)
- 3.233525 We can only evaluate a poem's qualities aesthetically.
- 3.23353 Poetry is *only* designed to provide aesthetic pleasure.
- 3.233531 This may make us think: If that is true, only gods could write poetry.
- 3.233532 But we have created an unreal problem.
- 3.2335321 Pleasure is an end in itself.
- 3.23353211 Sexual pleasure is an end in itself.
- 3.2335322 Perversity is the introduction of goals other than pleasure into the process of enjoying a pleasure.
- 3.23353221 (De Sade was a pervert.)
- 3.2335323 Those who have sex for the purpose of procreation are perverted.
- 3.2335323 (This doesn't mean, of course, that someone who *wants* offspring is perverted.)
- 3.2335324 (Evolution's "purposes" cannot be our purposes.)
- 3.2335325 Suppose someone says: "But there would be *no* sex if procreation were unnecessary." (Amoebas don't have sex.)
- 3.2335326 To talk about *purposes* in the case of evolution is really only to talk about causes.
- 3.2335326 And if A is the cause of why B gives me pleasure, it never follows that A is the reason why I pursue B. (Pleasure is always an end in itself.)
- 3.23353271 (Unless I'm perverse.)
- 3.2335328 Perversity (in poetry) is mediocrity.
- 3.2335329 The goal of a poet is to create poetry she enjoys.
- 3.23354 One's political views are part of one's biography.
- 3.233541 A poem does not *express* an author's political views.

- 3.233542 (An author's political views can cause a poem to have certain qualities.)
- 3.233543 A poem can *imitate* a political tract, of course. (Or a philosophical tract.)
- 3.233544 Only a confused author would try to change the world by writing poetry.
- 3.2335441 (Unless, of course, he was only *pretending* to write poems, and was really trying to do something else.)
- 3.2335442 (In this case, he would not be confused, although he would still be incompetent. And not necessarily as a poet.)
- 3.2336 Some playwrights have created new sensibilities. Shaw, for example. We should not confuse the sensibility shown by a writer with the fictional personae depicted (or shown).
- 3.2337 Can an artist create more than one sensibility? Is this what a dramatic poet does?
- 3.23371 Perhaps we do not allow artists to do this.
- 3.23372 (Unless the artist adopts a pseudonym we never discover.)
- 3.22373 This, too, is a matter of stipulation.
- 3.22374 Characters in plays show their "personalities" by what they do when they say things. Dramatic poets also have characters that show their "personalities."
- 3.233741 For a character to show his personality is not the same as for the poet to show his sensibility. Even if both of them do it by means of exactly the same words. (At the same time.)
- 3.2337411 No narrator is only her words.
- 3.23374111 (This is why two types of narrators, using exactly the same words, can nevertheless show different things—have different properties that they show.)
- 3.23374112 (This is why nested narrators don't create philosophical problems the way a statue and the clay it is composed of does.)
- 3.2337412 Everything can be imitated.
- 3.23374121 This is a license we extend to art.

- 4 Biography aspires to be a science.
- 4.1 Biography aspires to be a science the way that psychology and sociology aspire to be sciences.
- 4.12 Psychology and Sociology study causes.
- 4.121 (This doesn't mean psychologists and sociologists are successful at identifying causes. It is very hard to study causes, except in very simplified cases, such as in rigid-body dynamics.)
- 4.122 We have Mill's methods.
- 4.1221 Factor analysis is a mathematized version of Mill's methods.
- 4.13 Some sciences have theories that enable us to identify causes more easily (Perhaps only such "sciences" should be called sciences.)
- 4.131 Freud invented no theories, in this sense. There are perhaps no theories in psychology or sociology, in this sense. (None yet, anyway.)
- 4.1311 (Biographers aren't humble enough.)
- 4.2 Literary criticism is not biography. Self-applied literary criticism is not autobiography.
- 4.21 Suppose a poet shows a "fascination" or an "obsession" with light. Either this fascination "works" aesthetically or it doesn't. We may not see the associations (they aren't said), and the literary critic can point them out. (And, in this way, we can be brought to see whether the associations work or not.)
- 4.22 The biographer can try to explain what caused the poet to make such associations—what is behind the poet's metaphorical obsessions.
- 4.221 A great mathematician may be obsessed with triangles. This doesn't show she wants to be a triangle, or that she identifies (in some way) with triangles, or that she is sexually attracted to triangles. Perhaps the causal mechanisms operate at some other level entirely. (Certain patterns are cognitively salient to her.) Perhaps the obsession is there only because the mathematician finds she can easily prove things about triangles, and not so easily prove things about other things.

- 4.2211 (Perhaps there is a genetic connection between the capacity to manipulate images of triangles, or apply algorithms to them, and certain sorts of dyslexia.)
- 4.222 A great poet's obsession with things may be equally subtle (causally speaking). And also, perhaps he can easily create images about certain things and not about other things, and this has nothing to do with his psychology (as psychoanalysts would try to understand it), or with his biography (as his biographer would understand it).
- 4.2221 These are remarks about how hard intellectually-respectable biography really is.
- 4.23 The scientist can say why gold has the properties it has. But this won't orient us into appreciating those properties.
- 4.231 To know *about* something is one thing; to react aesthetically to it is quite another. To learn to appreciate poetry is to be oriented a certain way so that we can react to it aesthetically.
- 4.2311 Knowledge of causal facts is irrelevant to the experience of what smells good to us and what doesn't. (Learning why something makes us gag is one thing; gagging over it is another.)
- 4.23111 (Learning facts cannot put us into the relation of getting pleasure from something unless it is precisely the pleasure of learning those facts that we are after.)
- 4.23112 This is about relating in one way to something and relating in another way to it.
- 4.2312 It is not the purpose of art to educate. Which is not to say that education is not needed to appreciate art.
- 4.23121 If a poem says things about milking cows, these things may be true. And you might learn about these things this way (if you don't live on a farm, for example). But a poem can say things about milking cows that are false, and be a better poem as a result.
- 4.23122 Poems are not didactic.
- 4.231221 Poems can imitate the didactic, of course. Poems can also imitate the informative.
- 4.231222 Suppose someone says: "To invent a new sensibility is to teach us something. It is to teach us that people can be like *this*. We may not have

realized before that people can be like this. (We may not have met anyone like this.) People like this might not even exist until after the poem is widely read and people begin to imitate the sensibility. Then a new sort of *person* arises.”

- 4.2312221 Even if this happens, it happens by accident. (We don't give people credit for what they do by accident.)
- 4.2312222 A sensibility exists on paper, or on stage, or in other artificial settings. Why do we believe that if someone imitates such a thing, they have a personality that “matches” the sensibility? Why do we believe that what we aesthetically respond to corresponds to what exists?
- 4.23122221 (Something can't be a little impossible.)
- 4.2312223 Why do we believe that because something is new to the stage or to poetry that it corresponds to something new about persons?
- 4.2312224 (A philosopher may take himself to be exploring “logical space”: among the possibilities here is our actual world. The inventor of a new sensibility is not exploring psychological space. She has invented a new aesthetic product. (She is only exploring aesthetic space.))
- 4.2312225 (Imitation is not a form of knowledge-gathering.)
- 4.23123 Stipulations are conventions. And conventions must be learnt.
- 5 The point of literary criticism is not to evaluate.
- 5.1 (“Evaluate,” in the sense of setting standards.)
- 5.2 (This is not a remark about word usage; it is a remark about what is possible.)
- 5.3 To describe what is shown is not to evaluate it. Once we have all the facts (we can see what is said; we can see what is shown; we can read the poem “in real time,” let its “events” unfold for us in their designed order), we can evaluate the poem ourselves.
- 5.31 Evaluation is matter of comparing one experience against another. We must have access to both experiences to be able to do this. (We cannot evaluate experiences on hearsay.)
- 5.311 A philosopher's word for “experience” is “qualia.”

- 5.312 Some philosophers claim that qualia does not exist. (Perhaps they are right.)
- 5.313 Perhaps there is more than one sense in which art involves illusion.
- 5.4 One point of literary criticism is to warn us, save us from having the experience. (She's already been down that road.)
- 6 We decide what is art and what isn't.
- 6.1 This is why we think we take an ordinary garbage can, put it in a museum, and make it into art.
- 6.11 (This is not to say we haven't committed an abuse by doing this. We have to be able to relate to something aesthetically: we can be oriented into doing so (by being shown things) but we can't be commanded into feeling pleasure.)
- 6.12 (Bad art is often a matter of tyranny.)
- 6.13 (We can be fooled aesthetically only if we accept things on authority or because it is fashionable.)
- 6.14 (To accept something as art because it is fashionable is not to stipulate that it is art. For we can take something to be art because it is fashionable and not experience it aesthetically.)
- 6.2 Knowing why something is pleasurable, feeling (mere) pleasure, and feeling aesthetic pleasure, are three different things.
- 6.21 Knowing about something, being (merely) angry about it, and judging that that state of affairs is immoral, are also three different things.
- 6.22 To relate to something morally is one thing; to relate to it aesthetically is another. Morality has no more to do with Aesthetics than Science does.
- 6.221 Poetry does not supply cautionary tales. (Except by accident.)
- 7 Clear distinctions are always stipulated ones. We must not forget what we have stipulated.
- 7.1 (Unless, of course, we want to do something else.)