

# AESTHETIC SUPEREROGATION

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A number of moral philosophers have accepted the need to make room for acts of supererogation, those that go beyond the call of duty. In this paper, we argue that there is also good reason to make room for acts of aesthetic supererogation.

Many aestheticians and ethicists are interested in the similarities and connections between aesthetics and ethics.<sup>1</sup> One way in which some have suggested the two domains are different is that in ethics there exist obligations while in aesthetics there do not.<sup>2</sup> However, Marcia Muelder Eaton has argued that there is good reason to think that aesthetic obligations do exist.<sup>3</sup> We will explore the nature of these obligations by asking whether acts of aesthetic supererogation (acts that go beyond the call of our aesthetic obligations) are possible. In this paper, we defend the thesis that there is good reason to think such acts exist.

## I. SUPEREROGATION IN MORAL THEORY

Ruqia Hassan was a thirty-year-old journalist who wrote about daily life in occupied Raqqa, the Syrian stronghold of Islamic State (ISIS). Through a series of posts on social media, Hassan courageously criticized the violent actions of ISIS, the Assad regime, and the airstrikes from coalition forces. As her posts became

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<sup>1</sup> Martha C. Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); Berys Gaut, *Art, Emotion and Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Philippa Foot, *Moral Dilemmas and Other Topics in Moral Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002); Alfred Archer, 'Aesthetic Judgements and Motivation', *Inquiry* (forthcoming).

<sup>2</sup> Stuart Hampshire, 'Logic and Appreciation', in *Aesthetics and Language*, ed. William Elton (Oxford: Blackwell, 1954), 161–69.

<sup>3</sup> Marcia Muelder Eaton, 'Aesthetic Obligations', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 66 (2008): 1–9.

increasingly critical, the ISIS police force decided to arrest her. She was arrested in July 2015 and executed two months later.<sup>4</sup>

Hassan's decision to risk her life in order to expose the horror of life in Raqqa seems to have clear moral value, her actions are admirable and praiseworthy, and there was good moral reason to act as she did. However, despite the fact that Hassan's act is one of obvious moral value, it does not seem plausible to think that she was morally required to act in this way. It is a commonly accepted feature of common-sense morality that there are some acts, like Hassan's, that are supererogatory or beyond the call of duty.

What is it about acts like Hassan's that make us reluctant to categorize these acts as obligatory? In his paper 'Saints and Heroes', J. O. Urmson argued that there are some morally good actions that no one could decently demand that people perform or could fairly blame people who fail to perform them.<sup>5</sup> This makes it problematic to class these acts as morally required, for two reasons. First, moral requirements are often thought to be conceptually tied to demands. According to this thought, if an act is morally required for an agent then people can legitimately demand that she perform it. John Stuart Mill outlines this link between obligation and demand in the following way: 'It is part of the notion of duty in every one of its forms that a person may rightfully be compelled to fulfill it.'<sup>6</sup> If we accept that obligations can be legitimately demanded of people but that no one could legitimately demand that Hassan act as she did, then we must also accept that Hassan's act was not morally required.

Second, moral requirements are also thought to be conceptually tied to blame. According to this line of thought, someone who violates a moral requirement and lacks a good excuse, is blameworthy for her action. Stephen Darwall, for example, claims: 'It is a conceptual truth that an act is morally wrong, if, and only if, it is blameworthy if done without an excuse.'<sup>7</sup> Again, if we accept this link between moral requirements and blameworthiness, and we think it would have been inappropriate to blame Hassan had she acted otherwise (even if she lacked an excuse), then we must also accept that Hassan's act was not morally required.

<sup>4</sup> Aisha Gani and Kareem Shaheen, 'Journalist Ruqia Hassan Murdered by Isis after Writing on Life in Raqqa', *Guardian*, 6 January 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/05/journalist-ruqia-hassan-killed-isis-raqqa-syria>.

<sup>5</sup> J. O. Urmson, 'Saints and Heroes', in *Moral Concepts*, ed. Joel Feinberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 60–73.

<sup>6</sup> John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty and Utilitarianism* (New York: Bantam Books, 1993), 193.

<sup>7</sup> Stephen Darwall, 'Bipolar Obligation', in *Morality, Authority, and Law: Essays in Second-Personal Ethics I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 21.

These conceptual links between obligation and demands and blame, together with the plausible claim that demands or blame would have been inappropriate for Hassan's act, give us reason to accept the existence of acts of supererogation. But how should we characterize these acts?

Since Urmson's article, a number of moral philosophers have attempted to make sense of the supererogatory. While there is no general consensus on exactly how to define the concept, there is a general agreement that supererogation involves the following necessary and sufficient conditions:

An act is supererogatory if and only if:

- (i) It is morally optional (neither morally required nor morally forbidden).
- (ii) It is morally better than the minimum that morality demands.<sup>8</sup>

If we accept this way of understanding supererogation, then we are able to stipulate two conditions that are necessary for the existence of supererogatory acts in any given normative domain:

- (a) That normative domain must generate requirements.
- (b) It must be possible to perform acts that are both permissible (according to the given normative domain) and better (according to the given normative domain) than the acts that are required by that domain.<sup>9</sup>

In the next two sections we will argue that there is good reason to think that the domain of aesthetics satisfies both criteria.

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<sup>8</sup> Dale Dorsey, 'The Supererogatory, and How to Accommodate It', *Utilitas* 25 (2013): 371; Michael Ferry, 'Does Morality Demand Our Very Best? Moral Prescriptions and the Line of Duty', *Philosophical Studies* 165 (2013): 574; David Heyd, *Supererogation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 5. Some authors argue that there is a need to add a further necessary condition, that the act be praiseworthy to perform. See Paul McNamara, 'Supererogation, Inside and Out: Toward an Adequate Scheme for Common-Sense Morality', in *Oxford Studies in Normative Ethics*, ed. Mark Timmons, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 203; Gregory Mellema, *Beyond the Call of Duty: Supererogation, Obligation and Offence* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1991), 17; and Phillip Montague, 'Acts, Agents, and Supererogation', *American Philosophical Quarterly* 26 (1989): 102. For an argument against including this additional necessary condition, see Alfred Archer, 'Are Acts of Supererogation Always Praiseworthy?', *Theoria* 82 (2016): 238–55.

<sup>9</sup> These criteria are similar to those given by McElwee for the conditions that need to be met in order for acts of supererogation to exist in a given normative domain. See Brian McElwee, 'Supererogation across Normative Domains', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* (forthcoming).

## II. ARE THERE AESTHETIC OBLIGATIONS?

Marcia Muelder Eaton defends two arguments for the existence of aesthetic obligations.<sup>10</sup> First, if there are aesthetic *dilemmas*, then there must be aesthetic obligations from which such dilemmas originate. An aesthetic dilemma could involve a classic ‘burning-museum’ case in which one has to make a choice between saving one of two paintings, both alike in their ability to enlighten, please, educate, and provoke wonder, but the second being more beautiful.<sup>11</sup> Eaton notes that those working in art restoration often face precisely these kinds of aesthetic dilemmas in their practice. She concludes that the ‘great pains’ restorers take in recording exactly what alterations were made and the ‘sense of real loss’ experienced when restoration requires removal of the artist’s work – such as when one painting has been done atop a first – are indicative of a genuinely felt obligation.<sup>12</sup> What demands consideration by the decision-maker in these cases are the *aesthetic properties* of the object – and it is this realm of properties that makes the dilemma an aesthetic one, rather than an economic, moral, or any other kind of dilemma. If moral dilemmas emerge out of a conflict of moral obligations, then the existence of genuine aesthetic dilemmas indicates a conflict between aesthetic obligations.

Second, we can recognize an obligation to tell good stories about others when we are in a position to do so (such as in delivering a eulogy or writing an obituary).

<sup>10</sup> Eaton, ‘Aesthetic Obligations’.

<sup>11</sup> We might wonder whether it would be possible for two paintings to be alike in their ability to promote pleasure, even if one were more beautiful than the other. After all, according to the two dominant views, beauty is to be understood as the ability to promote pleasure in the right sort of spectator. Hume is usually understood as holding the view that facts about what is beautiful are to be determined by what brings pleasure to ideal critics, though this interpretation of Hume is disputed by Ross. See David Hume, ‘Of the Standard of Taste’, in *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, vol. 1 (London: Longmans, 1875), 266–84, and Stephanie Ross, ‘Humean Critics: Real or Ideal?’, *British Journal of Aesthetics* 48 (2008): 20–28. Kant, on the other hand, claims that beauty should be understood in terms of the ability to bring pleasure to disinterested observers. If we accept that beauty is to be understood in terms of the ability to cause pleasure then it does not seem possible to say that two paintings could be equal in their ability to cause pleasure but that one could be more beautiful than the other. See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). However, it is important to note that for both Hume and Kant, beauty is not to be understood in terms of the ability to cause pleasure in general but rather in the ability to cause pleasure in certain kinds of observers. Both views, then, leave room for the possibility that two paintings could be equal in their ability to cause pleasure amongst people in general without being equal in their ability to cause pleasure in the right kind of observer. This means that both views are compatible with the possibility that two paintings could be equal in their capacity to cause pleasure (amongst people in general) without being equally beautiful. We thank the editors of this journal for asking for clarification here.

<sup>12</sup> Eaton, ‘Aesthetic Obligations’, 4–5.

One fictional example Eaton gives is from William Maxwell's novel *So Long, See You Tomorrow* in which the narrator labours to 'fulfil the obligation to give someone else a story – authentic, appropriate, plausible, subtle, in short, a good story'.<sup>13</sup> The fact that the narrator is concerned not only with the truth of the story but also with the *style* in which it is told renders this obligation aesthetic.<sup>14</sup> The form of the obligation it takes is an extension of the ethical obligation between rights and duties: we, plausibly, have an ethical obligation to accord due respect to others. When this respect involves telling a story about another person, which requires a certain style, we are – as Eaton argues – entering squarely into the aesthetic domain.

Howard Press offers another reason to think that aesthetic obligations exist: they are derived from the principle 'One ought to appreciate what is beautiful'.<sup>15</sup> Appreciation could involve a number of commitments: putting oneself in, or not removing oneself from, a position to appreciate what is beautiful; being duly sensitive to consider what is beautiful; or making an attempt to develop one's aesthetic talents. When we are subject to maxims or principles the content of which is aesthetic, we can reasonably call it an aesthetic obligation. And perhaps then we can recognize that there are special obligations for the exceptionally gifted. Where the average person might find an aesthetic obligation to pay attention in music class and see if she finds playing an instrument enjoyable (and if she doesn't then she will not be blameworthy if she decides take up some other hobby), another person who demonstrates exceptional skill in a particular area might have an obligation to take lessons, and so forth. Even if we do not accept that such effort is required of the exceptionally gifted, this sense of obligation is at least reflected in the language we often use in relation to such cases. If we meet someone who demonstrates great artistic promise, and we find out later they never pursued it, both the language we use and the feeling we experience often indicate we think they ought to have tried to develop those talents. We can see this as well in the public outcry of fans when a band breaks up – it is not uncommon to hear complaints such as the band 'owes it to the fans' to put aside their differences, get back together, and make more music. Similar language is employed when an artist's farewell album is far worse than their earlier work: it is felt that they owe it to the fans, to the music, or even to themselves to have ended with something better.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>14</sup> Of course, this is assuming that a work's narrative is an aesthetic property. We are grateful to an anonymous referee for requesting clarification here.

<sup>15</sup> Howard Press, 'Aesthetic Obligation', *Journal of Philosophy* 66 (1969): 525.

These three different kinds of cases seem to be plausible examples of aesthetic obligation.<sup>16</sup> Before we proceed with our argument it is worth flagging up an objection that we will return to later in our paper. Someone confronted with the examples of aesthetic obligation which we have provided may claim that the obligations here are not distinctively aesthetic. Instead, it might be argued that these are moral obligations with aesthetic content. We might think that we have moral obligations to promote what is valuable and that the promotion of aesthetic value is included in this. If this were the case, then it could legitimately be argued that all of the examples we have given are really cases of moral obligation, rather than aesthetic obligation. We will respond to this objection later in the paper, however, we must first examine whether the obligations we have investigated in this section can be surpassed.

### III. CAN AESTHETIC OBLIGATIONS BE SURPASSED?

Let's take the burning-museum case we just considered. If we can recognize that there is an aesthetic obligation to save the more beautiful work of art, all other things being equal, we are beholden to make the decision in that dilemma to save it. But imagine now that the more beautiful artwork is located in the next room of the museum – the flames are rising, and to get into that room will be considerably more dangerous and risky. Whilst endeavouring to save this work merits praise, *not* doing so hardly seems *blameworthy*. By acting in this way I've certainly fulfilled the general aesthetic obligation to save the more beautiful painting – but I've also done more than required, in the act of putting my life in danger to do so (possibly demonstrating courageousness in facing that danger).

With reference to the second case – that of telling good stories about others – we can identify cases of surpassing any aesthetic obligations that are in place. Eaton refers to how, following the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, a team of reporters at *The New York Times* created bespoke pieces about each person who lost his or her life. These 'Portraits of Grief', as they were called, went beyond the newspaper's standard obituary format to become, essentially, short narratives akin to what is crafted in the genre of flash fiction. One portrait began: 'When Oscar F. Nesbit went to work, he was always impeccably dressed in a suit and tie, with a newspaper in his hands and a greeting on his lips. He used the newspaper to satisfy his interest in crossword puzzles and stock tables.' While this project was overall much loved and appreciated as a beautiful thing

<sup>16</sup> One form of aesthetic obligation we haven't considered here concerns obligations to works of art themselves. For an insightful contribution to this debate, see Anthony Cross, 'Obligations to Artworks as Duties of Love', in this issue of *Estetika*.

for the newspaper to have done, it does seem odd to suggest that the reporters were under an obligation to tell the stories in that way. It is precisely the poetic and impressionistic features of these stories that strike the reader as going beyond any existing obligations – and these features are aesthetic in nature.

Eaton builds her obligation to tell good stories about others from the fundamental right we as individuals have to tell our own story – to be the authors of our own lives. This kind of *autonomy* may indeed function as a kind of obligation we have to ourselves, and can reasonably be considered aesthetic. A further plausible case of going beyond this obligation might be making one's (entire) life into a beautiful story. Simone de Beauvoir, in her *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, wrote about how, as an adolescent, she

dreamed of making her life into a grand story that would inspire others [...] 'There was no longer any God to love me, but I should have the undying love of millions of hearts. By writing a work based on my own experience I would re-create myself and justify my existence. At the same time I would be serving humanity. What more beautiful gift could I make it than the books I would write?'<sup>17</sup>

Here, de Beauvoir is talking about recreating her life in novels, telling stories that could inspire others. But it's hardly surprising to see this reflected in her actual life. One of her biographers notes this exactly:

It's impossible to read about Beauvoir's life without thinking about your own. You find yourself wanting to live more courageously, with more commitment and passion. She makes you want to read more books, travel across the world, fall in love again, take stronger political stands, write more, work harder, play more intensely and look more tenderly at the beauty of the natural world. That is indeed a beautiful gift.<sup>18</sup>

While possessing autonomy over one's own life and life story can be considered an obligation one has to herself as an individual agent, perhaps structuring one's whole life as a beautiful story that can inspire others exceeds this. The contrast here would be between telling a story that is somewhat (or sufficiently) beautiful, and telling a story that is exceptionally beautiful or grand. In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche paints a portrait of what might be involved here:

One thing is needful. – To 'give style' to one's character – a rare and great art! It is practiced by those who survey all the strengths and weaknesses of their nature and then fit them into an artistic plan until every one of them appears as art and reason

<sup>17</sup> Hazel Rowley, 'Going Private: Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre, Then and Now', *The Monthly*, December 2008, <https://www.themonthly.com.au/issue/2008/december/1277356198/hazel-rowley/going-private>.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

and even weaknesses delight the eye. Here a large part of second nature has been added; there a piece of original nature has been removed – both times through long practice and daily work at it. Here the ugly that could not be removed is concealed; there it has been reinterpreted and made sublime. Much that is vague and resisted shaping has been saved and exploited for distant views; it is meant to beckon toward the far and immeasurable. In the end, when the work is finished, it becomes evident how the constraint of a single taste governed and formed everything large and small.<sup>19</sup>

It does indeed seem plausible that organizing one's life in this way, for the purpose of giving it 'style', is beyond the aesthetic obligation we have to tell a good story about ourselves.

We have a third possible case of aesthetic supererogation – acting on the maxim of something like 'appreciate what is beautiful', 'seek out what is beautiful', or 'develop your aesthetic talents'. Consider the music lover who acts on the imperative to appreciate or seek out beauty by every now and then going into town to catch a performance by the Scottish National Jazz Orchestra: they play a style of music she enjoys and she'd like to learn more about by taking in the occasional live performance. Very broadly, we can imagine that for some individuals, attending a performance could be one way of acting on the appropriate maxim, thereby satisfying her aesthetic obligation.

Now, imagine that she loyally follows the Scottish National Jazz Orchestra on their year-long world tour, attending each and every gig. Assuming our music lover is still getting something out of each performance, still learning and appreciating, then it seems there is nothing blameworthy about this activity (at least not in the aesthetic domain), and we might be right to praise her commitment to, love for, or appreciation of the music. But for the average jazz enthusiast, this kind of commitment can hardly seem to be required, and so functions as aesthetic supererogation worthy of praise.

When it comes to developing one's aesthetic talents, it is natural to think of practitioners as well as patrons. Consider Van Gogh's letters to his brother Theo, in which the artist writes that he paints 'not only with color, but with self-denial and self-renunciation, and with a broken heart'.<sup>20</sup> Eric Michaud comments on these letters with regard to the extent to which the artist went to develop his talents that 'All Van Gogh's "madness" is connected to this extreme and painful knowledge that his very existence as a painter requires not only separation from others, but also the sacrifice of others, and above all of those closest to

<sup>19</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 2010), 232.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Eric Michaud, 'Van Gogh, or The Insufficiency of Sacrifice', *October*, no. 49 (1989): 33.

himself.<sup>21</sup> Acting on the maxim to develop one's aesthetic talents very likely does not 'require' one to separate herself from others, nor sacrifice others. Yet if this was what the artist went through to develop his talents and bring into being his work, we cannot seem to blame it aesthetically, and in fact a sacrifice of this kind may also be praiseworthy.

In all three cases, then, it looks as though whatever aesthetic obligations exist have been surpassed. We can then say that acts of aesthetic supererogation exist. These acts must meet the following necessary and sufficient conditions:

An act is aesthetically supererogatory if and only if

(i\*) It is aesthetically optional (neither required nor forbidden from the aesthetic point of view).

(ii\*) It is aesthetically better than the minimum that is required from the aesthetic point of view.

#### IV. OBJECTIONS AND RESPONSE

Before we conclude, it is worth discussing two objections that might be raised against our argument. The first objection is the one we flagged up earlier in this paper. It might be argued that the source of the obligation in all of the cases we have presented as examples of aesthetic obligation is an underlying moral obligation. These cases then may be seen simply as moral obligations that have aesthetic content. If, for example, we think that we have a moral obligation to promote what is valuable, then it seems reasonable to think that the promotion of aesthetic value should be included within this. This allows us to account for the feeling of obligation to save the more aesthetically valuable painting in the burning-museum case. Rather than appealing to the category of the aesthetically required to make sense of this feeling of obligation, we can simply say that this is an example of a moral obligation. Similar explanations may be given for our other two cases. It seems plausible to think that we have moral obligations to give due respect to others. It does not seem unreasonable to think that fulfilling this obligation may in some situations require us to tell good stories about other people. Again, we can explain why this may seem required without making any appeal to a distinctively aesthetic form of obligation. Lastly, the obligation to develop one's aesthetic talents might be thought to follow straightforwardly from the moral obligation to develop one's talents in general. In all three cases it does not seem unreasonable to think that such moral obligations exist. Moreover, explaining the feeling of obligation by appealing to the existence of a moral obligation may be thought to provide a simpler

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

explanation for the phenomena than by appealing to the existence of aesthetic obligations.

However, two responses can be given to this worry. First, even if we accept that there is a moral obligation in these cases, we are not prevented from saying that there is also an aesthetic obligation. It may be that our sense of obligation in these cases is over-determined and is being generated by both a moral obligation and an aesthetic obligation.

The second response is that appealing to the existence of a moral obligation with aesthetic content in these cases cannot account for all of the negative reactions we experience. Consider the following example. On 22 June 2014, the police in Deeside, Scotland, were contacted after a local rural beauty spot on top of Scolty Hill near Banchory had been vandalized. Local councillor Karen Clark had this to say about the incident: 'It is a horrendous mess and people should be ashamed of themselves for spoiling our beautiful landscape in this selfish way. Scolty Hill is valued by the local community. I am sure they will be upset to see this kind of antisocial behaviour which has such a detrimental impact on the environment.'<sup>22</sup> This example clearly involves the violation of a moral prohibition. The vandalism was not only damaging to the local environment but can also be considered to be an assault on a shared local resource. Most importantly for our purposes, the vandalism harms those people who take pleasure in experiencing the hill's beauty. It is tempting to think then that our negative reactions to this can be explained by appealing to the clear moral obligation that has been violated in this case.<sup>23</sup>

However, our negative reactions to this example do not seem to be exhausted by our ordinary negative moral responses. Those who vandalized Scolty Hill do not only seem to be criticizable from the moral point of view but also from the aesthetic point of view. Of course we would blame those responsible and perhaps also feel moral outrage or resentment towards them. However, we also feel a distinct kind of revulsion at those who could engage in such wilful attacks on beauty. This kind of revulsion seems to be expressed by the chairman of the Banchory Paths Association when he claimed: 'Those who cause such ugliness have very ugly minds.'<sup>24</sup> This comment does not simply express moral outrage. There is a severe aesthetic criticism being levelled at the vandals here, which we might call aesthetic disapproval or aesthetic blameworthiness. A similar form of

<sup>22</sup> 'Councillors Outraged after Vandals Target Beauty Spot', *Deeside and Piper Herald*, 26 June 2014, <http://www.deesidepiper.co.uk/news/environment/councillors-outraged-after-vandals-target-beauty-spot-1-3457684>.

<sup>23</sup> We thank Alan Millar for helpful discussion about the destruction of areas of natural beauty.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

disapproval seems to be present when we consider the three examples of aesthetic obligation discussed in Section II. While we would be unlikely to experience the same force of revulsion in these cases, there does nevertheless appear to be a distinctly aesthetic form of disapproval that we would feel towards those who violate their obligation to protect or appreciate what is beautiful, who show no interest in developing their aesthetic talents, and who refuse to tell good stories about people when the situation arises. Concerning someone who refuses to protect or appreciate what is beautiful, we might think that the term 'philistine' could be used to express this form of aesthetic disapproval (though this term is also used by some as an expression of class prejudice). This form of aesthetic disapproval gives a reason to think that a distinctively aesthetic wrong has been committed. This means that even if we accept that many cases of aesthetic obligation will also be morally obligatory, we still have good reason to think of the aesthetically obligatory as a distinct normative category.

The second objection that might be raised against our view is that these obligations are only surpassed from the moral standpoint. We might think for example, that if the obligation to tell good stories about others or ourselves is a moral obligation, then the act of going beyond this duty could be an act of moral supererogation. Of course, the obligation is also being surpassed from the aesthetic point of view, so this objection does not show that there are no cases of aesthetic supererogation. Nevertheless, if it were the case that all instances of aesthetic supererogation were also instances of moral supererogation, then the category of the aesthetically supererogatory would appear to be of less philosophical interest.

In fact, however, not all cases of aesthetic supererogation are also cases of moral supererogation. Take, for example, Van Gogh's painful sacrifices of himself and those close to him for the sake of his art. These sacrifices, particularly of those close to him, do not seem especially praiseworthy from the moral point of view. In fact, we might, morally, think that they are even wrong and blameworthy.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, Van Gogh's sacrifices in pursuit of his artistic goals are aesthetically valuable. They also surpassed his duty to develop his artistic talents. This is a case of aesthetic supererogation that does not seem plausible to think of as also being an instance of moral supererogation. The category of the aesthetically supererogatory, then, is not merely a subset of the morally supererogatory.

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<sup>25</sup> In response to the above example, it might be objected that if the act is morally wrong then it cannot be aesthetically optional, at least if we assume that morality overrides aesthetics. However, accepting this overridingness claim only commits us to claiming that this act is not optional from the all things considered normative point of view. This does not prevent the act from being optional from the point of view of aesthetics. We are grateful to the editors of this journal for pushing for clarification here.

## V. CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have argued that if aesthetic obligations exist, then we have good reason to think that aesthetic supererogation exists as well. We started by examining the conditions that are needed for the existence of acts of supererogation in a given normative domain. In order for there to be cases of supererogation in a given normative domain, that domain must generate requirements and it must be possible to perform acts that are better (according to the normative domain) than the acts required by that domain. We then argued that there is good reason to think that the domain of aesthetics satisfies both of these conditions.

The first reason why this conclusion is philosophically significant is that it adds to our understanding of the nature of aesthetic obligations. Like moral obligations, the act that is best from the aesthetic point of view need not be the act that we are aesthetically required to perform. By pointing out this similarity between moral and aesthetic obligation, our paper also contributes to the study of the similarities and differences between morality and aesthetics.

Our conclusion is also significant because of the interesting new research possibilities that it opens up. First, our claim that acts of aesthetic supererogation are possible raises the question of how the problem of the 'good-ought tie-up' might be solved in the aesthetic realm. This is the problem of explaining what the connection between moral reasons and moral requirements might be once we have accepted that acts of moral supererogation exist.<sup>26</sup> On the most straightforward way of spelling out this connection, the act that is most strongly supported by moral reasons will be the act that is morally required. This view, however, is incompatible with the existence of acts of moral supererogation, since these will be better supported by moral reasons than the moral requirement that they surpass. The challenge raised by this problem is to find an alternative connection that is capable of making space for supererogation. A potentially fruitful area of research in aesthetics would be to investigate what a plausible solution to this problem might look like in the aesthetic realm.<sup>27</sup>

The next set of questions raised by our conclusion concerns the agent-based concepts that are often thought to be closely connected to supererogation.

<sup>26</sup> This name is given in Heyd, *Supererogation*, 4. For a statement of the problem, see Alfred Archer, 'The Supererogatory and How Not to Accommodate It', *Utilitas* 28 (2016): 179–88.

<sup>27</sup> In a discussion of a different problem, Strandberg suggests that aesthetic reasons may be non-requiring justifying reasons. See Caj Strandberg, 'Aesthetic Internalism and Two Normative Puzzles', *Studi di Estetica* 44, no. 4 (2016): 23–70. This could perhaps offer a solution to the problem of the 'good-ought tie-up' in aesthetics which mirrors the solution that Horgan and Timmons offer for moral supererogation. See Terry Horgan and Mark Timmons, 'Untying a Knot from the Inside Out: Reflections on the "Paradox" of Supererogation', *Social Philosophy and Policy* 27 (2010): 29–63.

Urmson's paper on supererogation sought not only to highlight the need to make room for this category in moral theory but also to provide accounts of moral sainthood and moral heroism. These have also been influential in moral theory, leading to an investigation into the nature of moral sainthood in particular.<sup>28</sup> Once we accept the existence of acts of aesthetic supererogation, then a natural next question is whether similar agent-based categories could be developed in the aesthetic realm. Can interesting accounts of aesthetic sainthood and aesthetic heroism be developed? If so, what would such people be like? Would they be the kind of people it would be rational to aspire to be?

To our minds, the most significant consequence of our conclusion is that it opens the door for a new line of research into the limits of aesthetic demands. Urmson's paper that highlighted the existence of acts of supererogation generated an extensive and fruitful investigation into the limits of moral demandingness.<sup>29</sup> We propose that a similar investigation has the potential to deepen our understanding of aesthetic reasons and aesthetic normativity. Our hope, then, is that our work in this paper serves as groundwork for future research into aesthetic demandingness.

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<sup>28</sup> See Alfred Archer, 'Saints, Heroes and Moral Necessity', *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 77 (2015): 105–24; Archer and Michael Ridge, 'The Heroism Paradox: Another Paradox of Supererogation', *Philosophical Studies* 172 (2015): 1575–92; Vanessa Carbonnell, 'What Moral Saints Look Like', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 39 (2009): 371–98; and Susan Wolf, 'Moral Saints', *Journal of Philosophy* 79 (1982): 419–39.

<sup>29</sup> For some recent contributions to this discussion, see Vanessa Carbonnell, 'Differential Demands', in *The Limits of Moral Obligation: Moral Demandingness and Ought Implies Can*, ed. Marcel van Ackeren and Michael Kühler (London: Routledge, 2016), 36–51, and Brian McElwee, 'Demandingness Objections in Ethics', *Philosophical Quarterly* 67 (2017): 84–105.

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