

## Aesthetic Judge-Dependence and Expertise

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**Abstract:** This paper expounds and defends a judge-dependence account of aesthetic concepts, where aesthetic concepts are construed widely, to include for example both concepts of personal taste and more narrowly aesthetic concepts. According to such an account, it can depend on personal features of a judge whether it is correct for that judge to apply an aesthetic concept to a given object. After introducing and motivating the account, the article sets out to explain how some aesthetic questions can seem more objective than others, or how there seem to be experts on some aesthetic questions, despite the judge-dependence of aesthetic concepts.

**Key words:** aesthetic concepts, personal taste, judge-dependence, response-dependence, aesthetic expertise, aesthetic testimony, objectivity, Kant, Hume, Mothersill.

### 1. Introduction

In this paper, I want to expound and defend a judge-dependence account of aesthetic concepts. Aesthetic concepts are here meant to include both those concerning so-called matters of personal taste, and matters that are often seen as aesthetic in a narrower sense, such as the central aesthetic concept of beauty. It is an account of aesthetic *concepts*, and thus not directly an account of the meaning of the expressions that we use to express these concepts.<sup>1</sup> After introducing and motivating the account, I shall explain in what way it leaves room for the role of *expert* on these matters, distinguishing a variety of ways in which such a status might be justified. The resulting account therefore offers a uniform account of aesthetic concepts including both concepts of personal taste and aesthetic concepts more narrowly conceived. e.g. the concept of beauty. This raises the question why it is that we often have the impression that there is a significant contrast between matters of *personal* taste and properly aesthetic matters, an impression that makes the latter appear to have a greater claim to objectivity, and that there is more room for the role of expert in narrowly aesthetic matters than in those of personal taste. In the final section I shall therefore explain this impression by showing how it derives not from the *concepts* themselves but from certain social norms governing convergence in *taste*.

### 2. Aesthetic Concepts

Under the label “aesthetic concept”, I will be including ordinary concepts of personal taste, as they might be expressed by expressions like “tasty”, “fun”, “funny” or “pretty”, as well as more narrowly aesthetic concepts as they might be expressed by expressions like “beautiful”, “ugly”, “elegant” or “balanced”. I shall be arguing that both kinds of concept can be successfully treated as what I shall call “judge-dependent” concepts. Thus, I shall advocate a certain continuity between our

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<sup>1</sup> It is therefore equally compatible with an indexical contextualist, non-indexical contextualist, or relativist account of the linguistic *expressions* we use to express aesthetic concepts. For some discussion of these -isms see, e.g. Kölbel 2015, Lasersohn 2005, MacFarlane 2014, Stephenson 2007, Stojanovic 2007.

judgements of personal taste and aesthetic judgements in a narrower sense of “aesthetic”: both involve judge-dependent concepts, i.e. concepts that are correctly applied only to objects to which the thinker is disposed to respond in a certain characteristic way (more on judge-dependence shortly).

It is fairly easy to generate a superficial impression that concepts of personal taste (“tasty”, “fun”) contrast with narrowly aesthetic concepts (“beautiful”, “elegant”), in terms of their degree of objectivity: narrowly aesthetic concepts are often thought to have a greater claim to objectivity than concepts of personal taste. For example, the question which fabric will make for the more elegant curtains may seem more objective than whether peaches are tastier than strawberries. Perhaps the contrast can be pinned down more concretely in terms of the extent to which we allow there to be experts, or the extent to which we think that we can rely on expert testimony on these matters. The suggestion is that in the aesthetic case, we are more inclined to allow for experts and rely on their expertise. For example, it would seem odd to want to consult an expert on whether peaches or strawberries are tastier, while it would not seem so odd to consult an expert on which fabric for a curtain will be more elegant. It would be odd to seek expert advice on whether a fairground ride is fun, while it would not seem so odd to seek expert advice on whether, and in what way, a work of art is aesthetically valuable.

It is not obvious how one should demarcate the “narrowly aesthetic” as contrasting with the area of personal taste, when examining the merit of these pre-theoretical impressions. In any case, however, the claim seems to involve a rash generalization. Perhaps in some cases we do allow expertise on the question of whether something is tasty, as when we ask an expert culinary judge to evaluate samples. Perhaps when talking about the aesthetic value of an artwork, we do sometimes have in mind matters of purely personal taste. While it does seem that we treat some broadly aesthetic questions as more objective than others, it is not obvious that the dividing line is one between narrowly aesthetic judgements and judgements of personal taste. Thus it seems that there are some contrasts in apparent objectivity, or susceptibility to expertise. An account of aesthetic concepts in general should allow for such contrasts. The aim of §5 below is to explain how such contrasts can arise on a judge-dependence theory like the one here introduced.

Focussing on aesthetic concepts, and therefore on aesthetic judgements in quite a general sense, has precedents in the history of aesthetics. Thus, it seems that in Hume (1757), judgements of taste include both judgements of personal taste and judgements of aesthetic value. Similarly, Kant famously included in the category of aesthetic judgements both judgements of the agreeable and judgements of beauty (Kant 1790).

However, more recent aesthetics usually has a different focus. Sibley’s seminal article “Aesthetic Concepts” (1959) reflects a more contemporary take on what the properly aesthetic concepts are, concepts that play a role in the appreciation of art and other objects of aesthetic appreciation; concepts that are studied and employed in the discipline of aesthetics. Aesthetic concepts in the current sense include concepts of personal taste, like “fun” and “tasty”, which are explicitly not included in Sibley (1959, p. 423). On the other hand, it is not clear that aesthetic concepts in the current sense should include all of Sibley’s aesthetic concepts. For they are so many, varied, and in some cases so specialized, that it would be difficult to reach any reasonably justified conclusions concerning all of them. Many of Sibley’s concepts raise special problems, such as the problem related to their being, or having originated in, metaphors, and the problem of whether they are or are not evaluative.

### 3. *Judge-Dependence*

What is judge dependence? Judge dependent concepts are concepts that it is correct for a judge to apply to an object if and only if the judge bears a certain relationship to the object, and it is this relationship that differentiates one judge-dependent concept from another. Thus, the idea of judge dependence trades on the idea that concepts in general are governed by conditions of correct application. Before I go into more detail about judge dependence, let me elaborate briefly on this.

I am operating with the idea that concepts are individuated by rules or norms of correct application. That is, if the rules or norms governing one concept are different, from those governing another then these concepts are distinct. I am assuming that this basic conception of concepts makes concepts abstract: they exist timelessly as abstract rules, or systems of rules, independently of any thinker or community of thinkers employing them, and therefore also independently of any linguistic expression of an actual language expressing them. Thus in principle we can examine the properties of concepts in a purely a priori fashion by considering the consequences that arise from the rules or norms governing these concepts.<sup>2</sup>

By contrast, it is not an a priori question whether a given concept, individuated as indicated above, via the norms governing it, is in fact the concept certain speakers express with a certain linguistic expression (e.g. “beautiful” or “fun”), or whether it is a concept they are employing in certain concrete episodes of thought (e.g. their thoughts about what is beautiful or fun). In order to establish claims as to whether a given concept is being employed in certain episodes of thought, we need to consider empirical matters. The background empirical facts that ground claims of which concepts are being used or linguistically expressed by a thinker may be, for example, dispositional facts about the thinker and his or her community. I will be assuming here that if a thinker uses a concept that is governed by a certain norm of correct application, then he or she is subject to that norm. Being subject to the norm involves, at least, some sensitivity to it, which in turn involves at least some readiness to stand corrected if one violates the norm. Sensitivity to a norm should, in my view, be treated as a disposition to comply with it under certain conditions. What exactly constitutes being subject to a norm is too large an issue to be broached here. However, the minimal assumption here made is: that being subject to a norm, while not directly requiring reliable conformity to the norm, requires sensitivity to the norm, which in turn requires responsiveness to finding out that one is not complying with the norms. This should be acceptable both to those who believe in irreducible normativity and those who don’t (I myself sympathize with the latter).

Two further assumptions that I shall be making will play a methodological role in this paper: first, that the concept of beauty (ugliness, being fun etc) is the concept expressed by the public language expression “beautiful” (“ugly”, “fun”, etc), i.e. that the judgements expressed by sincere uses of simple sentences containing “beautiful” (“ugly”, “fun”, etc) are judgements involving the concept of beauty (ugliness, being fun, etc). Secondly, I shall be assuming that we, the competent users of the concept of beauty (etc), and the expression “beautiful” (etc), typically have some insight into the conditions under which the concept is used correctly, insights that can be reliably tapped into by reflecting on possible situations of application of the concept. In other

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<sup>2</sup> Thus, in Margolis & Laurence’s (2014) classification, the framework of theorizing about concepts is “Fregean”. In Machery’s (2009) sense, the notion of concept used is a philosophical one, not psychological (for its psychological relevance see the following paragraphs).

words: the norms of correct concept application to which users are subject can (even if imperfectly and defeasibly) be detected by asking these users to assess whether it would be correct for them to apply a certain concept in a certain situation.

Analogues of the second assumption are often made and exploited by philosophers examining concepts. Often, the investigating researcher is using him or herself as a source of empirical data in this way. I am aware that making and exploiting this kind of assumption is risky, for the researcher's own reflections may be distorted by prejudice or bias. Ideally, one should try to eliminate these distorting factors by considering not just the results of the researcher's own reflections on concept application, but collecting such data from a larger population of thinkers and controlling carefully for all sorts of distortions. However, three considerations mitigate or justify nevertheless proceeding in this way: (i) the researcher's own reflections are still the reflections of one of the relevant population, so they do have evidential value; (ii) the discussion amongst different, often competing, researchers provides some check against bias: those claims about the conditions of correct application of a given concept that some researchers reject, cannot be uncritically relied upon; and (iii) there seem to be other disciplines where this procedure (consulting one's own judgements, but checked by other researchers) seems not to be subject to excessive problems of bias—syntacticians use their own grammaticality judgements, for example. Finally, there is a pragmatic justification: the researcher's self-generated data are easy and cheap to come by.

With these preliminaries about concepts and their investigation out of the way, let us return to the idea of judge dependent concepts. Judge dependence is meant to be a generalization of the better-known idea of response-dependence.<sup>3</sup> Response-dependent concepts are those, the correct application of which to a given object depends on whether all the thinkers in a certain group (the *normal observers*) would respond in a certain way to that object under certain conditions. Thus, a concept *C* can be said to be response dependent if it is governed by a biconditional of the following form:

(RD) For all objects *o*: it is correct to apply concept *C* to *o* if and only if *o* is disposed to elicit response *R* in *normal observers* under normal conditions.

Response-dependence presupposes a certain uniformity amongst the relevant group of *normal observers*: if one of them has a disposition to respond with *R* to a given object under normal conditions then all the others also have this disposition. If there was no such uniformity at all, then according to (RD), concept *C* could not correctly be applied to anything, i.e. would be empty. Now, there is a question as to how “normal” observers and “normal” conditions are defined. For example, normal observers might be by definition those who respond in the required way to things falling under concept *C* (in which case (RD) would be circular). The same goes for “normal conditions”. Alternatively, there might be a substantial independent characterization of normal observers and conditions, thus making (RD) a substantial principle concerning *C*. But on both ways of construing normal observers or conditions, uniformity amongst normal observers is required for anything to be in the range of correct application of concept *C*.

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<sup>3</sup> For classic discussions of response-dependence, see Johnston 1993, Pettit 1991 and Wright 1992.

Judge dependence, as opposed to response-dependence, does not involve this requirement.<sup>4</sup> Again, correct application of the concept depends on the responses of the thinker. However, the idea is not that everyone, or everyone normal, responds with R to the same objects, but rather, thinkers may vary in their dispositions to exhibit response R, so that the range of correct application of the concepts may differ from thinker to thinker. A concept C is judge dependent, therefore, if and only if it is governed by a biconditional principle of the following form:

(JD) For all subjects *s* and all objects *o*: it is correct for *s* to apply C to *o* if and only if *o* is disposed to elicit response R in *s* under favourable conditions.

It is easy to see that according to (JD), if two subjects differ in the range of things to which they are disposed to respond with R under favourable conditions, then the ranges of things to which each of them can correctly apply C are different. The only other difference with (RD) is that (JD) speaks of favourable conditions instead of normal conditions. The point of this is to make clear that the conditions in questions are substantially and independently characterized, unlike on the mentioned circular readings of (RD). Favourable conditions are those conditions in which various cognitive functions tend to function well: the subject is awake, not drunk, not depressed, has not taken any drugs that alter his or her dispositions to have response R, etc.

Response dependence, as described by (RD)<sup>5</sup>, is a special case of judge dependence as described by (JD). Whether it is correct for a thinker to apply a judge dependent concept to an object depends on whether that thinker responds in the relevant way to the object under favourable conditions. That concept might *also* be response dependent, if all normal observers respond in the relevant way to the same objects (under favourable conditions).

Just as judge dependence is a generalization of response dependence, one could contemplate a further generalization of judge dependence, where the relationship between a judge and the objects to which she can correctly apply the concept need not involve the disposition of the objects to elicit a certain response in the judge, but may involve other types of relations between judge and object. For example, the concept of *one's uncle*, expressed by the expression “my uncle”, similarly has a range of correct application that varies from thinker to thinker. However, in this case, the condition an object needs to meet in order to be in the range of correct application for a given thinker does not involve a response triggered under certain conditions by the object in the thinker, but rather a different type of relation between thinker and object. However, such a further generalization need not detain us in the current article.

To conclude this section, let me illustrate judge dependence with some examples. One concept that seems eminently susceptible to analysis as a judge dependent concept seems to be the concept of pleasantness, i.e. the concept expressed by the expression “pleasant”. It seems clear that it is correct for a thinker to apply this concept to an object if and only if that object would please the thinker, i.e. cause (a certain type of) pleasure, under favourable conditions. Perhaps there is some difficulty in specifying the type of pleasure involved in being pleased by something, however, it

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<sup>4</sup> Compare Lewis' (1989) dispositional account of value (in effect a response-dependence account), in which the assumption that the relevant observers (“we”) are uniform is explicitly abandoned towards the end. See also Egan's recent elaboration of this point in Egan 2012.

<sup>5</sup> At least on a non-circular reading of (RD).

seems undeniable that some such condition of correct application governs the concept of pleasantness. It seems equally clear (and born out by this condition of correct application) that the range of objects to which the concept of pleasantness can be correctly applied will vary from thinker to thinker, and it will do so to the extent to which different thinkers are disposed to be pleased by different things. Thus, the relevant instance of (JD) would have it that

(JD<sup>pleasant</sup>) For all subjects  $s$  and all objects  $o$ : it is correct for  $s$  to apply the concept of pleasantness to  $o$  if and only if  $o$  is disposed to please (elicit a certain type of pleasure in)  $s$  under favourable conditions.

It is not difficult to find further examples of concepts that are plausible candidates for treatment as judge-dependent: *disgusting*, *boring*, *exhilarating*, *amusing*, *amiable*, *horrifying*, *cute*, etc. The plausible responses to be plugged into (JD), respectively, would be: disgust, boredom, exhilaration, amusement, love or liking, horror, affection/endearment, etc. In each of these cases, it seems clear that the ranges of correct application of the concept will vary from thinker to thinker as a result of the thinkers differing in their disposition to respond in the relevant way to objects.

I mentioned above that ordinary response dependence is a special case of judge dependence. Colour concepts are examples of this: concepts like *red*, or *green*, would seem to be plausible candidates for treatment as judge dependent *and* response dependent. It seems that (by and large<sup>6</sup>), the range of correct application of these concepts does not vary from thinker to thinker. However, it seems also clear that correct application here depends on the thinker's disposition to have a certain experiential response. We might call this response that of the object "appearing red", "appearing green", etc. Again, if we want to avoid circularity, we may need to characterize "appearing red" in an extrinsic fashion: the experiential response caused in each perceiver under favourable conditions by paradigmatically red objects, such as pillar boxes, tomatoes etc.

### 3. *The Judge-Dependence of Aesthetic Concepts*

Concepts of personal taste are plausible candidates for treatment as judge dependent. It is correct for a judge to apply the concept *tasty* to all, and only to, objects that would, under favourable conditions produce gustatory pleasure in that judge. Judges differ in their dispositions to experience gustatory pleasure, hence there are different ranges of correct application of the concept *tasty* for different judges. The same goes for the concepts *fun* and *funny*: It is correct for one to apply the concept *fun* to an object if and only if one would enjoy the object under favourable conditions. The concept *funny* is correctly applied to those things, and only to those, that would make one laugh under favourable conditions:

(JD<sup>tasty</sup>) For all subjects  $s$  and all objects  $o$ : it is correct for  $s$  to apply the concept of tastiness to  $o$  if and only if  $o$  is disposed to elicit gustatory pleasure in  $s$  under favourable conditions.

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<sup>6</sup> I am here ignoring some complications, such as differences in locating the central case of each colour or simple colour blindness (i.e. the inability to distinguish two colours that normal perceivers can distinguish easily). See Tye 2007 and Gómez-Torrente forthcoming for discussion.

- (JD<sup>fun</sup>) For all subjects *s* and all objects *o*: it is correct for *s* to apply the concept of being fun to *o* if and only if *o* is disposed to elicit enjoyment in *s* under favourable conditions.
- (JD<sup>funny</sup>) For all subjects *s* and all objects *o*: it is correct for *s* to apply the concept of funniness to *o* if and only if *o* is disposed to elicit laughter in *s* under favourable conditions.

These are plausible proposals because the hypothesis that these concepts are judge dependent in these ways would explain divergences in actual applications between different judges (even when conditions are favourable). It would also explain why we will take it as a sign of incompetence with the concept (or as a sign of the use of a different concept), if a thinker repeatedly and inexplicably violates these proposed norms: if a thinker tends to apply a given concept to things that do not have the disposition to cause gustatory pleasure (enjoyment, amusement) in him or her, and does so even under favourable conditions, then we would conclude that either this concept is not that of tastiness (being fun, being funny), or the thinker is not competent with it. Similarly, a thinker's divergent actual range of application of *tasty* (*fun, funny*) will not count as a sign of incompetence or mistake as long as differences in a thinker's dispositions to have gustatory pleasure (enjoyment, amusement) can explain the divergence.

I want to propose that not only concepts of personal taste, but all aesthetic concepts are judge dependent. In particular, this includes narrowly aesthetic concepts, such as that of beauty or elegance. Let us focus on the concept of beauty. What could be the response that an object needs to elicit in a judge, in order for the judge to be able correctly to apply the concept of beauty to it? The thought that the concept of beauty is constitutively linked to a certain type of pleasurable experience is not new. Kant famously claimed (1790, §1–3) that aesthetic judgements are connected to a kind of pleasure or delight, and that in the case of judgements of beauty (as opposed to judgements of the agreeable), this delight is independent of any desire, or “disinterested”. One crucial aspect of Kant's view of the disinterestedness of this delight seems to be that the delight involved in judgements of beauty does not depend on (belief in) the actual existence of the object judged to be beautiful. Mere imagination of such an object suffices to produce the delight in question. Similarly, Mary Mothersill, in her classic treatment of beauty (1984, p. 347), offers a view according to which beauty is a disposition to elicit pleasure (thereby developing Aquinas' dictum *pulchrum dicatur id cuius apprehensio ipsa placet*). My suggestion that the concept of beauty is in some sense meant to apply to objects that have a disposition to elicit a certain type of pleasure or delight is therefore very much in line with an important tradition in aesthetics. However, unlike Kant and Mothersill, I will be taking seriously the possibility that different thinkers may differ in their dispositions to experience the relevant type of delight when perceiving or otherwise apprehending an object of aesthetic appreciation.

Let us call the specific feeling of delight or disinterested pleasure that is linked to judgements of beauty “aesthetic delight”. There are interesting questions about the nature of aesthetic delight, but I shall put them aside here in order not to distract from the main purpose. Then we can articulate an instance of (JD) that articulates my proposal as to the central conceptual norm governing the concept of beauty:

(JD<sup>beautiful</sup>) For all subjects  $s$  and all objects  $o$ : it is correct for  $s$  to apply the concept of beauty to  $o$  if and only if  $o$  is disposed to elicit aesthetic delight in  $s$  under favourable conditions.<sup>7</sup>

The concept of beauty is regularly applied to objects of widely varying domains: to natural objects and artefacts, to concrete and abstract things, to landscapes, flowers, people, objects of design, works of art, performances, etc. This means that the mode in which an object's beauty can be appreciated can vary widely from object to object. It will often involve one or several sense-modalities, but it seems that more than basic sense perception is involved—at the very least some further experience or conditioning over and above basic perceptual abilities is needed in many cases of aesthetic appreciation. As a consequence, the idea of “favourable conditions” might need to be somewhat flexible: for example in the case of judging the beauty of a painting, favourable conditions will involve not only an awake, attentive and undistracted thinker, whose vision is functioning normally, but also appropriate lighting conditions, distance between thinker and painting etc. Some of these conditions may not be required for favourableness when the object is, for example, an evening dress that is meant to be worn in lighting conditions that would not be favourable for the appreciation of a painting. Favourable conditions for appreciating an object that is primarily auditorily perceivable may not require any light at all, and in that case there will be requirements that would be irrelevant for the appreciation of visual art. By contrast, the appreciation of a dance performance may require favourable conditions for both vision and hearing.

It seems clear that dispositions to respond with aesthetic delight to objects of aesthetic appreciation vary considerably amongst thinkers. Someone who has spent much time comparing different designs of chairs may appreciate differences that others do not notice, and she might therefore be disposed to experience aesthetic delight in response to a given chair, when another is not. But even with equal amounts of experience and equally good discriminating abilities, a given object may elicit aesthetic delight in one judge but not another, or perhaps elicit greater comparative aesthetic delight in one than in another. We can call the complex of dispositions that are responsible for the aesthetic responses of a judge (including responses of aesthetic delight) the judge's *taste*, or *sense of taste*.

Given (JD<sup>beautiful</sup>), then, it is clear that the range of correct application of the concept of beauty will vary from judge to judge, and it will do so in line with the variation in taste among judges. Thus, the hypothesis that (JD<sup>beautiful</sup>) governs the concept of beauty can explain divergences in judgements of beauty even amongst competent thinkers in favourable conditions. This is one of the advantages of the hypothesis.

This does not mean, of course, that it is impossible to apply the concept of beauty incorrectly. A judge who applies the concept of beauty to an object that does not elicit

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<sup>7</sup> It might be asked which response will be exploited in the case of other narrowly aesthetic concepts, if a generic notion of aesthetic delight is already exploited in the case of the concept of beauty. I cannot, in this paper, provide a comprehensive account of a wide range of different aesthetic concepts, e.g. those proposed by Sibley. However, let me provide some hints as to how one could respond.

The proposed account of beauty makes beauty a very general positive evaluative aesthetic concept. Other aesthetic concepts might differ by either involving a more specific or a simply a different type of delight. Some other aesthetic concepts might be thick concepts, i.e. concepts that combine evaluative with descriptive aspects. Thus, possibly, it is correct to apply the concept of balance to an object only if it elicits a certain type of aesthetic delight that is caused by certain proportions or distributions of features.



aesthetic delight in her under favourable conditions is indeed applying the concept incorrectly and thus making a mistake. This can happen for various reasons. Let us consider how judgements of beauty can be justified. Given our hypothesis, it is a certain dispositional relation between judge and object of aesthetic appreciation that ensures that the object is one of those to which the judge can correctly apply the concept of beauty. It is the object's disposition to affect the judge, or the judge's disposition to be affected by the object in favourable conditions, depending on the perspective we take. Now one way to test whether a disposition is present is to bring about the relevant favourable conditions, or something approximating them, and to see whether the suspected disposition is realized. In our case, this means that we expose the judge to the object of aesthetic appreciation under favourable conditions and ascertain whether aesthetic delight is produced. On the plausible assumption that judges have a reliable direct way to detect aesthetic delight in themselves, or that this delight at least reliably guides their aesthetic judgements, this gives us a canonical way of justifying judgements of beauty: the judge exposes him or herself to the object under favourable conditions and judges in line with the absence or presence of resulting aesthetic delight.<sup>8</sup>

The canonical method for arriving at judgements of beauty therefore produces very reliable results: a judge who applies the concept only to objects that have elicited aesthetic delight in her under favourable, or near favourable, conditions is very likely to be in compliance with the conceptual norm ( $JD^{\text{beautiful}}$ ), i.e. very likely to judge correctly. Similarly, if she denies the concept of an object only if the object fails to produce aesthetic delight in her under near favourable conditions, she is very unlikely to be judging incorrectly in the sense of ( $JD^{\text{beautiful}}$ ). However, conditions may fall short of being favourable in some unnoticed way, and this may result in mistakes. So even the canonical method is fallible.

But the canonical method is not the only one. A judgement that some object is beautiful might be inferentially based on a general belief that objects of type T are beautiful, and a further belief that the object in question is of type T. Similarly, such a judgement may be based on testimony that the object is beautiful: the thinker is told that the object is beautiful and judges it to be so as a result (which, on a Humean inferentialist account of testimony, might be special case of the inferential justification just mentioned)<sup>9</sup>. Of course non-canonical methods are more prone to error: the beliefs from which the thinker infers may be false, or the testimonial source unreliable.<sup>10</sup>

To be more precise, then, the first advantage of the hypothesis is that it is capable of explaining how bona fide correct judgements by different thinkers (or the same thinker at different times) can diverge in the range of objects to which these thinkers apply the concept. In other words, we find divergences in what different thinkers regard as beautiful even when there is no good reason to think that the divergence is the result of some thinkers making some mistake.

There is not just divergence in application ranges amongst thinkers. There is also *convergence*, and the hypothesis is capable of explaining that too. Given that there are psychological similarities amongst all human thinkers, and given that often thinkers

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<sup>8</sup> Compare Lewis 1989.

<sup>9</sup> For Humean inferentialism about testimony, see, e.g., section X of Hume 1777/1975, Fricker 1987 or Fricker 1995.

<sup>10</sup> There will be more discussion of aesthetic testimony in section 4 below.

are exposed to similar experiences, similar education and other influences, they may also often acquire tastes that are similar in some respects. These similarities can come about in many different ways. For example, people may develop similar senses of fashion (an aspect of taste) partly because they are part of the same group or exposed to the same influences. Thus, there will be both significant divergences and significant convergences in different judges' tastes. The convergences seem to be useful for many of our practices involving beauty: they facilitate the production of beautiful artefacts by some for the benefit of others, the sharing of aesthetic experiences and our discourse about it, etc. Often, similarities in taste mark out social groups and are regarded as important for group membership.<sup>11</sup>

Aesthetic delight is an experience that is not under the direct voluntary control of thinkers. Thinkers can decide which experiences to expose themselves to and thereby deliberately try to influence their dispositions to experience aesthetic delight, i.e. gradually develop their sense of taste. They can, to some extent, decide to pay, or not to pay, attention to a given object of aesthetic appreciation or specific aspects thereof. They can perhaps take certain measures to put themselves in a mood that is conducive (or not) to aesthetic appreciation. However, at any one time, once conditions are fixed, they are at the mercy of whether their taste produces aesthetic delight or not. Thinkers cannot generate aesthetic delight in themselves arbitrarily and at will.

This helps explain another phenomenon concerning judgements of beauty: *inauthentic* judgement. When someone makes judgements of beauty that are not in line with their own aesthetic responses, then we consider these judgements to be inauthentic, and we do so even if we agree with the judgement. Thus, if someone, perhaps under the influence of an influential witness, claims to find something beautiful, but is not able to arrive at such judgements in similar cases, merely using the canonical method (and not relying on testimony), then we have a sense of something close to, but not quite identical to, insincerity. It would be insincerity (lying), if the thinker in question was claiming that the object is beautiful without judging it to be beautiful. But there seems to be room for *inauthenticity* short of *insincerity*: when the thinker convinces herself that the object is beautiful under the influence of the witness, but does not in fact have the dispositions to experience aesthetic delight that would render her judgement correct (perhaps wishfully thinking that she does). The hypothesis that ( $JD^{\text{beautiful}}$ ) governs the concept of beauty explains this phenomenon.<sup>12</sup>

A final advantage I want to claim for the hypothesis that ( $JD^{\text{beautiful}}$ ) governs the concept of beauty is that it provides an explanation for the motivational role of judgements of beauty. It seems plausible that judgements of beauty (like moral judgements) carry with them some motivational force: judging that something is beautiful gives me, *ceteris paribus*, a reason to prefer it to other things that I do not judge to be beautiful. Perhaps this form of internalism about aesthetic judgement is not completely uncontroversial (as in the moral case). But nevertheless, our hypothesis provides an explanation. Aesthetic delight, whatever exactly it is, is a kind

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<sup>11</sup> There will be further discussion of the social significance of taste in section 5 below.

<sup>12</sup> I am not here making the stronger claim (which I reject), that aesthetic judgements that are made on the basis of any other method than the one I have called "canonical" are therefore illegitimate, or do not involve a genuine application of the aesthetic concept (Wollheim 1980). As outlined above, I do accept that the concept of beauty can be legitimately and competently applied on the basis of inference or testimony alone. However, the phenomenon of inauthenticity I am describing may well be what has misled some philosophers to accept the stronger claim.

of pleasure, and pleasure is intrinsically good, i.e. worth pursuing for its own sake. This would explain why, when judging something to be beautiful, I have reason, *ceteris paribus*, i.e. in the absence of any other motivational factors, to prefer it to things I do not judge to be beautiful. For if there is no motive apart from the judgement that the object is beautiful, then the object's potential for producing aesthetic delight in me gives me a reason to prefer experiencing it to experiencing other things. To be sure, there are some complications that need to be taken care of in articulating the exact internalistic principle. To start with, the hypothesis would not explain the judge's preference if the judge is sure that favourable conditions will never obtain (even in the absence of further, interfering, motives). However, on the face of it, the conceptual link between pleasure and beauty that is proposed in (JD<sup>beautiful</sup>), provides a good start for an explanation of the motivation provided by judgements of beauty.

One objection that may be raised here is that I have been appealing to Kant's idea that judgements of beauty are linked to a special, disinterested kind of delight, i.e. a delight that does not depend on the satisfaction of any desire. The problem, so the objection goes, is that for Kant, it is desire and reason that generate action, and judgements of beauty are explicitly dissociated from these mechanisms (in addition to the delight not depending on desire satisfaction, judgements of beauty are also not conceptual in the sense that we do not, according to Kant, employ our conceptual faculties to arrive at them). However, I do not believe that this represents a problem for my proposal: to the extent to which Kant thinks that aesthetic delight has no motivational force, i.e. that we will not act in order to enjoy this delight, I will simply have to disagree with Kant. In any case, the idea of a type of pleasure that cannot motivate us seems dubious, and it is not clear that Kant's doctrine of the disinterestedness of aesthetic delight really entails it.<sup>13</sup>

#### ***4. Aesthetic Expertise***

I have proposed an account according to which aesthetic concepts generally are judge dependent, so that the range to which a given judge can correctly apply one of these concepts depends on the taste (response profile) of that very judge. At first sight, such an account would seem to face a difficulty with the apparent existence of aesthetic testimony and expertise, and with the impression that some aesthetic concepts are more objective, or more susceptible to expertise, than others. To the extent to which judges differ in their taste, the range to which they can correctly apply one of these judge dependent concepts will also differ from judge to judge. This suggests, at least at first sight, that no one can figure as a fully general expert in these matters, for there will always be those thinkers who have diverging ranges of correct application. Moreover, it suggests that there should not be any difference between the realm of personal taste and that of the narrowly aesthetic. If people's dispositions to experience aesthetic delight vary as much as their dispositions to experience gustatory delight or enjoyment do, then there would seem to be no reason to expect the aesthetic realm to involve greater objectivity, or that there should be more room for experts, than the realm of personal taste.

In order to explain the appearance of greater objectivity, and our greater readiness to give some people the status of experts, in some areas when contrasted with others, I

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<sup>13</sup> See Zangwill 1992 and Wenzel 2009. Thanks to Filippo Contesi and Chris Prodoehl for discussion of Kant's idea of a disinterested pleasure.

shall first distinguish several ways in which we can assess and compare the competence of judges in both realms. Once I have made these distinctions, I shall explain in which ways this leaves room for experts on judge dependent matters in general. Finally, I shall explain why some of these ways of being an expert seem to have a greater role in the narrowly aesthetic realm than in matters of personal taste, thereby explaining the impression of contrast between matters of personal taste and the narrowly aesthetic.

I already outlined canonical and non-canonical ways of justifying the application of judge dependent concepts. Each of them aims at ensuring that the thinker judge correctly (in the sense of the relevant instance of (JD)). This general picture leaves room for several ways in which one can assess how good judges are in their use of these concept, and corresponding ways in which one judge can be superior to another.

First, and most obviously, we can assess the likelihood that a thinker's judgements are *correct*, i.e. the likelihood that the judge will apply one of these concepts only to those objects which would elicit the appropriate response in him under favourable conditions. We can also make corresponding comparisons: one judge may be more likely than another to apply an aesthetic concept only to things that would in fact provoke the right response *in him or herself* under favourable conditions (and to deny the concept only of objects which fail to provoke the response). Let us call this way of assessing the competence of a judge "likelihood of correct judgement".

While likelihood of correct judgement is beneficial for each judge him or herself, it does not unconditionally ground any status as expert, for given the mentioned variation in different thinkers' dispositions to respond, one thinker's applying a concept correctly does not in any way guarantee that another thinker would also judge correctly if she applied the concept to the same objects. In order for likelihood of correctness to make a thinker a good testimonial source, further conditions would need to be met, such as, for example, relevant similarity of tastes etc.

Secondly, we can assess the abilities of a judge to discern those features of objects of aesthetic appraisal that underlie our experiential responses to them. For example, whether a given taster experiences gustatory pleasure upon tasting a dish causally depends on many overlapping factors, such as the composition of the food, the ingredients, their origin, their composition, the way the meal was prepared, by whom, using which tools and procedures, etc. Similarly, the response an aesthetic judge experiences when seeing a painting under favourable conditions causally depends on many underlying features of the painting, such as the distribution and structure of the paint on its surface, the composition of the painting, the painter who made it, the period in which it was made, the school of painting to which it belongs, etc. Independently of whether a judge is good at applying an aesthetic concept correctly, i.e. only to those things which elicit the relevant response in him or herself, a judge can be more or less reliable at recognizing and discerning these underlying factors. For example, a culinary expert may be very knowledgeable about various types of raw ingredients, their provenance and resulting qualities, the possibilities of using these ingredients, techniques for doing so and the resulting flavours, and she might combine this knowledge with the ability to detect all these features gustatorily, etc. An expert on paintings (perhaps of a certain period) may be a superior judge on the provenance of paintings, on their paint distribution and the resulting experiential effects, on painters and their characteristic techniques and resulting experiential effects, on the cultural context (their own and the painter's) and its effect on the responses provoked by the painting etc.

Let us introduce the umbrella term “underlying features” for all the causal factors (including extrinsic, contextual factors) that are responsible for judges’ responses of gustatory pleasure, aesthetic delight, etc. Then we can say that some thinkers are excellent judges in matters of taste and beauty in the sense that they have excellent abilities to discern and recognize underlying features. The knowledge of, and ability to discriminate, underlying features can be subdivided into many different types of such knowledge and abilities. Some knowledge is general (e.g. paintings from this period are generally produced with such and such technique) and some is particular (e.g. this painting exhibits a composition typical of such and such period). There are also recognitional skills (such as the skill to recognize a type of composition by looking at a painting) and recognitional skills can be based on powers of discrimination with varying degrees of fineness (one judge may be able to discern differences that another judge is not able to notice). All the recognitional skills can be orthogonally divided into those that are based on direct experience of the objects of aesthetic appraisal (as in a direct visual appreciation of a painting, or sampling of a food), and those that are based on indirect kinds of evidence (e.g. via general knowledge, via measurement devices, etc). There is, finally, the associated skill of being able to exercise the above skills and the above knowledge reliably in the face of sources of distraction, such as prejudice, contextually salient comparisons, social pressure etc. Thus, the knowledge of, and abilities to discern, underlying features encompasses a very wide range of competence. Let me refer to them all summarily as “competences concerning underlying features”.

Competences concerning underlying features are independent of likelihood of correctness: they may or may not be accompanied by the tendency to apply concepts of taste and beauty correctly. However, a judge with superior competences concerning underlying features will be a valuable source of information to others. It is quite obvious how such a judge’s general and particular knowledge of underlying features can be useful when articulated in non-judge dependent terms, for example by saying “Painter X tends to use technique Y.”. But even if such a judge’s discernments of underlying features are articulated in judge-dependent terms (e.g. “Painter X paints better still lifes than painter Y.”) an audience who is less competent concerning underlying features may nevertheless rely on the superior judge’s detection of a relevant difference.

It seems likely that the experiential responses involved in some aesthetic concepts can *depend* on appropriate discriminatory abilities. Some features of an object of aesthetic appreciation may only cause aesthetic delight in those who can discern these features. In other words, some of the responses involved are complex and require training or education, and such training or education may require precisely a sharpening of the discriminatory abilities regarding underlying features. For example, being able to parse utterances in a language may be a precondition for experiencing the meter when listening to poetry in that language. Being able to discern painting styles may facilitate certain aesthetic experiences when looking at paintings. However, such dependence does not mean that the likelihood of correct judgement always requires, or is enabled by, competences regarding underlying features. Rather, it means that the development of a person’s competences regarding underlying features may be bound up with the development of that person’s taste, where such a development can have an effect on the range of correct application of a concept for that person. But it does not automatically lead to a change in likelihood of correctness.

A third way of assessing judges who employ judge dependent concepts consists in evaluating their response profiles, or tastes, i.e. the set of dispositions that determine in response to which objects they have the relevant experiential responses under favourable conditions. For example, I might rate highly (or look down upon) a person's taste because she is disposed to experience aesthetic delight in response to Cezanne's mediterranean landscapes, or I might appreciate (or look down upon) a person's taste because she is disposed to experience no aesthetic delight in response to paintings by Jack Vettriano. Unlike an assessment of the likelihood of correctness or competences concerning underlying features, an evaluation of response profiles does not seem to be an objective matter, but to depend itself on the assessor's personal preferences or dispositions. However that may be, an evaluation of the response profile, or taste, of a thinker is independent of the other two kinds of assessment. We can regard someone as excellent with underlying features, or highly likely to be correct but at the same time regard their taste as inferior or bad (or vice versa: we might appreciate their taste yet regard them as poor judges when it comes to underlying features, and perhaps unlikely to judge correctly).

An evaluation of a judge's tastes also seems to be independent of an evaluation of their conceptual competence: a negative evaluation of a thinker's taste does not bring with it a negative view of the thinker's conceptual competence, i.e. their grasp of the concept of tastiness, beauty etc. It is perfectly coherent to regard someone as having bad taste yet being competent with the concept of beauty.<sup>14</sup>

I said earlier that aesthetic delight is not an experience that a thinker can control voluntarily or deliberately. A thinker can deliberately expose herself to certain experiences and information and hope thereby gradually to shape her taste, i.e. her dispositions to respond with aesthetic delight. She can attempt to train her taste through deliberate training. But the response of aesthetic delight itself remains spontaneous and outside rational control. Given this involuntariness, there may seem to be a certain injustice in the significance we attribute to evaluations of someone's taste. The evaluation of a person's taste has important social consequences: we may want to seek or avoid someone's company merely on the basis of it. We might admire or look down upon others because of our evaluation of their taste. Taste also plays an important role in group identities: "we, in the working class, don't have such a decadent taste as to take delight in ... "; "we, the educated/refined, have too refined a taste to delight in ...." etc. The social significance of taste is quite distinctive, and it is different from that of morality: for example, we might find a friend's aesthetic choices and sensibilities embarrassing, but that in itself need not threaten our friendship. By contrast, we will find it much more problematic when a friend makes certain moral choices that we disapprove of. This is no longer a matter of mere embarrassment, but we may feel a duty to change such a friend's mind or to terminate the friendship.

A lot more could be said about the social significance of taste. However, for our purposes, it is important to highlight the interpersonal and social nature of evaluations of taste. The norms that require people to have tastes of a certain kind are not conceptual norms: they are not norms the sensitivity to which is regarded as a sign of

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<sup>14</sup> Commentators have drawn my attention to the fact that this impression may not be universally shared when it comes to the narrowly aesthetic range, e.g. beauty. Some will regard minimally good taste as a requirement for possession of the concept of beauty. However, I believe that this impression is motivated precisely by the appearance of greater objectivity in the narrowly aesthetic realm, and this appearance will shortly be explained.

incompetence with the relevant aesthetic concepts, such as that of beauty or tastiness. It seems that the primary conceptual norm for the concepts of tastiness and beauty is given by the relevant instance of (JD): a thinker counts as competent with a concept once they manifest sensitivity to the requirement that their judgements should be in line with their own responses. Thus, people with differing tastes are nevertheless employing the same concepts of tastiness or beauty. We might perhaps say hyperbolically that someone has a different concept of beauty than we do. But this is *merely* hyperbole: when a child has learned to call those things beautiful or tasty that please it in the relevant way, but its range of application differs from that of its adult models, we will not conclude that it has acquired different concepts. Rather, we will say that they all employ the same concept, but due to their differing dispositions apply it to different ranges of things.<sup>15</sup>

There are, then, three ways of assessing judges in their use of judge dependent concepts of taste: (a) in terms of their likelihood of being correct; (b) in terms of their competences concerning underlying features; and (c) in terms of the value of their taste, i.e. their response profile (where this value may itself be a judge dependent issue). These types of assessment leave room for several ways of being an expert on the matters judged.

As already mentioned, likelihood of correctness does not by itself mark anyone out as a good testimonial source, and therefore does not justify the status of expert. If the correctness of someone's judgement that something is tasty or beautiful is to make her a reliable testimonial source, some further conditions need to be met: for example, the potential source's taste would need to be relevantly similar to the recipient's.

Excellent competences concerning underlying features, by contrast, do justify such a status. Someone who is good at discerning the features underlying our dispositions to respond to something with gustatory pleasure, aesthetic delight, etc, is thereby an interesting testimonial source. If her testimony takes the form of expressing objective judgements (e.g. "this dish was made with from ingredients produced in such and such a manner"; "this painting was produced by a member of such and such a school"), then the testimony does not, strictly speaking, have aesthetic content: it is testimony about aesthetically relevant objective matters, i.e. about the underlying features. However, the testimony could also take the form of expressing judge dependent contents ("this dish is tasty"; "this painting is excellent"). In this case, the expert concerning underlying features is in addition employing a specific taste, or range of tastes, with respect to which it is correct to judge these contents. Relying on the explicitly asserted content in these cases requires assuming more than the source's reliability concerning underlying features (for example, that their judgement was correct with respect to a taste relevantly similar to the recipient's). Or alternatively the recipient may rely on the source not on the explicitly judge dependent content, but rather that there is a relevant difference in underlying features (i.e. again a content that is aesthetically relevant but not itself aesthetic).

Finally, some people are valued as experts for having superior tastes: we value their way of responding aesthetically to objects. We might strive to emulate such people, i.e. try to have a taste similar to theirs. They are our models or gurus. Experts in this sense will not *per se* be good testimonial sources. For starters, even if we want to respond to objects of aesthetic appreciation in the way our models do, this is not

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<sup>15</sup> Thanks to François Recanati for raising an objection that led me to clarify the point made in this paragraph.

something that it is in our power to do through mere decision. Rather, if we want to have responses similar to theirs, we can at best try to habituate ourselves in ways that might gradually change us in the desired direction. Wishful thinking about this may lead us to make inauthentic judgements of the kinds mentioned in the last section.

### *5. Personal Taste vs the Properly Aesthetic*

I have proposed a uniform account of aesthetic concepts as judge dependent, exemplified by concepts like that of tastiness and beauty. Given the uniformity of the account—all aesthetic concepts are governed by an instance of (JD) as their central conceptual norm—one might expect the account to predict that the role of experts, if any, is similar across the entire range. If that were so, the account would be in prima facie tension with the impression mentioned at the outset that narrowly aesthetic concepts, like that of beauty, are in some sense more objective than mere concepts of personal taste, an impression that appears to be fed by the greater role played by experts in the narrowly aesthetic realm.

Let us begin by examining in a little more detail the alleged differences between the realm of personal taste and the narrowly aesthetic. I accept that there may be impressions of different degrees of objectivity, however, I believe that these derive from differences in the amount of room we leave for expertise in different cases. We are generally more inclined to treat certain people as experts in the more narrowly aesthetic area. We are used to the idea of an art expert, someone who is expected to be a superior judge of many aesthetic evaluative matters. Art experts are treated as more reliable than non-experts on their area of expertise, which may be, amongst other things, the beauty of art objects. Perhaps we do not usually think of art experts as providing expertise on what is beautiful, but that is certainly one case. Often, the expert's judgements will concern more specific evaluative matters, such as elegance or balance. Moreover, of course, art experts are often superior judges of underlying factual matters, such as provenance, technique, materials etc.

We are perhaps less used to the idea of experts on what is tasty, although we do allow room for wine experts and culinary experts. Presumably, no-one would consult an expert on whether vanilla is tastier than chocolate icecream, perhaps not even about a particular pair of samples. We might consult someone on this, but our interest in the verdict of the person consulted will not be grounded on some general status as expert, but rather on some assumptions about their taste, for example that it is relevantly similar to our own. Similarly, it would seem strange to seek out an expert on whether this or that game is more fun, but it would not be strange to consult those about whose tastes we can make reasonable assumptions that render their verdict interesting for us. The same goes for expertise on what is funny or amusing: there does not seem to be any room for the role of expert here, except for expertise on underlying matters. When we seek advice directly on what is or is not funny, we are always, I believe, making assumptions on the consulted person's sense of humour.

Even when it comes to high cuisine and wine, areas where experts undoubtedly have a role, we would not normally expect the expert to rule on whether one dish or wine is tastier than another. What we do expect them to be able to judge more reliably, besides objective underlying features, are evaluative matters such as whether one food or wine is better than another, or was produced in a better way from better ingredients. There is room for accepting the expert's verdict on the question what is



better, yet having preferences, or making tastiness judgements, that go in the opposite direction.

Thus, the role of expertise on aesthetic matters is complicated. While there is some truth to the observation that in the more narrowly aesthetic area, expertise has a greater role, closer examination shows that the role of expertise is variable in all areas. Let us explore the explanatory resources of the account of aesthetic judge dependence and expertise proposed in the last two sections.

As we saw in section 4, all judge dependent concepts allow for testimonial sources whose reliability is premised upon likely correctness and presumed similarities of the response profiles of source and recipient. Where dispositions to respond vary a lot amongst members of a group, there is therefore no straightforward role for a group-wide role as expert based merely on likelihood of correctness. However, when dispositions to respond are uniform within a group, the account predicts group-wide experts. This might explain why we would not look for an expert on whether vanilla is tastier than chocolate, while we would, perhaps seek someone's expertise on which vanilla icecream is tastier than which other vanilla icecream: response profiles vary too much on the first type of issue, but there is at least a chance of convergence on the second.

In the case of high cuisine, wine and art, matters are a little more complicated because evaluations of taste also play a role here. Of course, when it is obvious that my taste differs relevantly from an alleged expert's, I will not accept them as a testimonial source: when the expert loves molecular cuisine, because she loves tasting pure flavours, then a client who prefers the complex flavours of traditional cooking should not follow this expert on whether this or that restaurant offers tastier food. The same goes for experts who respond with aesthetic delight to things to which we don't: they cannot serve as experts on what is beautiful. Nevertheless, there will be other matters on which these people can reasonably be treated as experts, namely other aesthetic matters where their taste and ours agree (and, of course, underlying objective matters).

The matter is more complicated when social norms regarding taste come into play. As pointed out in section 4, the status of aesthetic expert may be grounded in social norms about the kind of taste, i.e. the kind of response profile, one ought to have. Experts in this sense are models or gurus whom others try to emulate. In areas where there are such social norms regarding aspects of taste, the situation is complicated by the fact that while social norms prescribe a convergence of taste, actual tastes may in fact fail to converge as required. Suppose, for example, that there are social norms that require one to respond with aesthetic delight to the city of Florence, but as a matter of fact many people that are subject to these norms do not respond in this way. In this situation, if things were as the social norms require them to be, then there could be general experts on beauty in the following sense: they are (or are presumed to be) more likely than others to make judgements that would be correct for someone with tastes that comply with the norms. However, following the verdicts of such experts would not increase anyone's likelihood of judging correctly—except for those who in fact have a taste that conforms to the social norms. Let's call experts in this sense "social aesthetic experts".

The phenomenon of art critics, who evidently exist and enjoy the status of experts, seems to me to be a *mélange* of several phenomena. Some art critics are, or claim to be, experts on underlying features. Some art critics are experts because they are likely

to be correct and in their area of expertise there is sufficient similarity amongst the response profiles of them and their clients. Thirdly, some art critics are simply social experts: there is social pressure, whatever its exact explanation, to have a taste like theirs. These three different phenomena can, of course, be combined within the same expert: it is not unusual for the same art critic to function both as a taste guru and as an expert on underlying features. The three types of expertise may occur in their own characteristic proportions in experts concerning other matters, such as culinary experts, wine experts or fashion experts.

To conclude, then, a judge-dependence account of aesthetic concepts has the resources to explain a great deal of the varying phenomena of expertise across different areas of aesthetic judgement. Any impressions of varying objectivity, I conjectured, derive from the phenomena of expertise. Thus they pose no obstacle to a judge dependence account of aesthetic concepts in general, including both matters of personal taste and more narrowly aesthetic matters.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Thanks very much to Filippo Contesi for providing very useful comments on an earlier version of this paper. I also benefitted from discussion with the audience of a related paper presented to the Aesthetics and Cognitive Science Seminar at the Institut Jean Nicod in November 2015. Thanks are also due to the Institut Jean Nicod for hosting my research stay in 2015 and thereby not only providing agreeable facilities, but also many invaluable opportunities for fruitful interaction with other researchers in areas related to cognitive science and philosophy.

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