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Aesthetic testimony, understanding and virtue

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Abstract

Though much of what we learn about the world comes from trusting testimony, the status of aesthetic testimony – testimony about aesthetic value – is equivocal. We do listen to art critics but our trust in them is typically only provisional, until we are in a position to make up our own mind. I argue that provisional trust (but not full trust) in testimony typically allows us to develop and use aesthetic understanding (understanding why a work of art is valuable, or similar); and aesthetic understanding is an essential component of aesthetic virtue. Aesthetic virtue is the orientation of a whole person towards aesthetic value and aesthetic reasons, through action, non-cognitive and cognitive attitudes. The ideal (aesthetically virtuous) way to make aesthetic judgements is through your own aesthetic understanding.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Though¹ we learn a great deal about the world from testimony, some kinds, including testimony about aesthetic value and aesthetic reasons (“aesthetic testimony”) seem problematic.² There is something very peculiar about judging Rembrandt's drawings great works of art if you haven't seen them for yourself; or telling people that *War and Peace* is a masterpiece when you haven't read a single word.

Aesthetic testimony is not the only kind whose status is puzzling. Similar questions arise over moral testimony – that is testimony about moral right and wrong, good and bad – it seems problematic to make moral judgements on the basis of testimony rather than making up your own mind.³ But often the two puzzles are given very different solutions. In aesthetics, there is typically an appeal to the importance of first hand perceptual experience in aesthetic judgement, the

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so-called “Acquaintance Principle”, but perception is not plausibly the canonical route to moral judgement.⁴ In my view, however, this explanation is not complete and the purpose of this paper is to supplement it with an appeal to the importance of aesthetic understanding. I argue that we listen to testimony as a guide to developing our own aesthetic understanding, which is an essential component of aesthetic virtue in both creative artists and appreciative audiences. Ideal aesthetic judgements are made on the basis of aesthetic understanding, not testimony. This explanation would generalize satisfactorily to explain the status of moral testimony, since (as I have argued elsewhere) it is plausible that moral understanding is an essential component of moral virtue, and that moral judgements should be made on the basis of that understanding.⁵

The focus of this paper, however, is aesthetic testimony. Section 2 describes in more detail its equivocal status. Section 3 gives an account of aesthetic virtue as the orientation of a whole person towards aesthetic value and aesthetic reasons, through action, non-cognitive and cognitive attitudes. In sections 4 and 5. I argue that aesthetic understanding is the cognitive component of aesthetic virtue, and the ideal (aesthetically virtuous) way to make aesthetic judgements is through your own aesthetic understanding, rather than trusting testimony. In section 6 I sketch an account of aesthetic appreciation, and argue that it provides a compelling account of when and why acquaintance with an artwork is important. I conclude by suggesting other places where aesthetic understanding and aesthetic virtue may be important, and by drawing parallels between aesthetics and ethics.

2 | THE EQUIVOCAL STATUS OF AESTHETIC TESTIMONY

Many of our beliefs are based on testimony. Of course, you should trust only competent and honest speakers, but when you do, their testimony can give you knowledge.⁶ There is no presumption that beliefs or assertions made on that basis are merely provisional or need to be qualified. Testimony about aesthetic value (“aesthetic testimony”) seems different. Suppose the editor of *Sight and Sound* gives Evelyn a piece of “pure” aesthetic testimony, e.g. that *Citizen Kane* is a great film - one of the greatest films of all time.⁷ It would be odd for her simply to take his word, to form a confident opinion that it is excellent and say the same to anyone who asks her. Any such judgement would have to be qualified - *Citizen Kane* is an excellent film, *or so I’ve been told* - as would any assertion, otherwise it will be assumed that she has seen the film herself, made up her own mind about it, and that the judgement of the artwork is her own.⁸

We do listen to art critics and act on their recommendations, watching films or plays and so forth because we think they will be good, and we think that because the critics say so. But we don’t typically put our full trust in them; the judgement we make on that basis is provisional because it is supplanted and can even be entirely overturned once we are in a position to make up our own minds. Of course, we may still be guided by critics towards the good (and bad) features of the artwork, but in the end, we base our evaluation on our own view of the artwork.

Why don’t we typically fully trust aesthetic testimony? Perhaps the answer is that there are no truths about aesthetic value, or the truths are dependent on one’s own personal subjective experience of works of art and so are relative to each person.⁹ Then there would be no point in trusting aesthetic testimony because you could not get true beliefs or knowledge of aesthetic value from others: speakers would tell you what was good for them, not what was good for you.

But this is not a very satisfactory explanation of the status of aesthetic testimony for a couple of reasons. First, because it explains the negative but not the positive qualities of aesthetic testimony. We don’t in fact reject aesthetic testimony entirely; its status is equivocal because we do pay

attention to it, and even trust it, just provisionally. It is hard to see why it would have any positive status at all according to this view.

Secondly, the kind of aesthetic relativism that would warrant rejecting aesthetic testimony entirely - relativism to each person - is not very appealing. Even if you are sceptical about aesthetic truth or aesthetic knowledge, it is overwhelmingly plausible that there are better and worse ways of forming aesthetic judgements. Good critics spend time becoming acquainted with the work of art, trying to understand it, and make their judgements of value based on that understanding. But if there are better or worse ways of making aesthetic judgements, then some critics may be better than you at making those judgements. For simplicity, we may call these better judgements true, and we will assume that the truths can be known (without a commitment to substantive aesthetic realism).¹⁰ And if there are aesthetic experts, why not trust them fully and confidently, rather than merely provisionally?¹¹

Perhaps the answer is that even if there are some aesthetic experts, it is difficult to know who they are. Of course, there are professional art critics, employed by university departments, art schools and the media. But one might reasonably doubt that they meet the rather high standards for being a “true judge” of aesthetic value.¹² And it is no secret that they do not always agree amongst themselves. Perhaps that explains why our trust in aesthetic experts is not very confident.

Identifying aesthetic experts is not easy. But at the same time, it doesn’t seem to get at the heart of the puzzle. Even if you could find someone who you really thought was competent and reliable, still it seems that you should trust their testimony only provisionally, until you are in a position to make up your own mind. But why? Why shouldn’t aesthetic testimony be trusted in the way that non-aesthetic testimony is, confidently and without qualification?

One very influential explanation derives from Kant. Kant thinks that aesthetic judgements (“judgements of taste”) are essentially subjective: they can only be made on the basis of a very particular kind of pleasure: pleasure unaccompanied by desire. Trusting aesthetic testimony is problematic because the resulting judgment, not being based on this “disinterested” pleasure, is not really a proper aesthetic judgement at all.¹³

One might think that aesthetic judgements can legitimately be based on a wider range of responses to an artwork than disinterested pleasure, and so revise Kant’s view into the “Acquaintance Principle”: “judgements of aesthetic value... must be based on first-hand experience of their objects and are not, except within very narrow limits, transmissible from one person to another” (Wollheim, 1980 p. 233). If the Acquaintance Principle is correct, then aesthetic judgements should not be based on aesthetic testimony (at any rate, not on aesthetic testimony alone).¹⁴

I think that there is something right about this idea, but as it stands it is not an adequate solution to the puzzle. The basic problem is that whilst it tells us what is missing in judgements based on aesthetic testimony (they are not based on first-hand experience of the artwork), it is not obviously true that acquaintance is always required for aesthetic judgement, or why it is, when it is. It needs to be supplemented with an account of why aesthetic judgements should be first-hand.

There is an explanation. I argue that the ideal way of making aesthetic judgements – the kind of aesthetic judgements that an ideally aesthetically virtuous person would make - is to understand why the artwork is good (or not), and to use that understanding to make an aesthetic judgement. Acquaintance with a work of art is often helpful and sometimes essential to understanding why it is valuable, and this explains when and why first-hand experience of works of art is often so important to aesthetic judgement; in addition, acquaintance is important or even essential to other elements of aesthetic virtue, particularly aesthetic appreciation (see section 6).

3 | AESTHETIC VIRTUE

What is aesthetic virtue? Whilst moral virtue is the orientation of a whole person towards moral value and moral reasons; aesthetic virtue is the orientation of the whole person towards aesthetic value and aesthetic reasons.¹⁵ Just as in the case of moral virtue, there are specific virtues, like honesty and courage, that are instances of this general idea. These are distinguished by being directed towards particular kinds of aesthetic value, or because the agent has to overcome specific kinds of obstacle to doing so or particular temptations to do otherwise. Thus we can outline aesthetic virtues corresponding to moral virtues of honesty and courage:

Moral Honesty: an honest person is disposed to tell the truth and keeps her promises, even if there are advantages to herself in doing otherwise; she is motivated by respect for others and concern for the truth, and judges it right to do so for the same reasons.

Moral Courage: a courageous person is disposed to be steadfast in response to dangerous or frightening situations for the sake of a worthwhile cause, e.g. to protect the well-being or rights of others; she is motivated by this cause and judges it right to persist for the same reason.

Aesthetic Honesty: an honest artist is disposed to make her art truthful, despite commercial advantages to doing otherwise, even though it may be easier or more comfortable to lapse into stereotypes or clichés; she is motivated to do so because she cares about aesthetic value and judges it right to do so for the same reason.

Aesthetic Courage: a courageous writer is disposed to take risks to explore a new aesthetic form, to transgress social norms, to defy political authorities, is motivated to do so because she cares about aesthetic value, and judges it right to do so for the same reason.

Critics and audiences can likewise be honest and courageous in their responses to works of art, e.g. in their judgements and recommendations, despite temptations and obstacles in the way. The moral and aesthetic versions of the virtues can be manifest in the same person but it is perfectly possible to respond to moral value but not aesthetic value or vice versa (e.g. you may be outspoken in favour of human rights, but artistically highly conservative in your tastes, or aesthetically adventurous and risk-taking but cautious in defence of other people).¹⁶

Aesthetic virtue is the orientation of the whole person towards aesthetic value and aesthetic reasons. It consists in three main components: orientation through action, non-cognitive attitudes and through cognitive attitudes.

Characteristically, an aesthetically virtuous person does (aesthetically) right actions. What does this mean? It means that they engage with works of art. Qua artists, they create valuable works of art and qua audience, they appreciate those works of art (and other examples of aesthetic value e.g. natural beauty).¹⁷ Aesthetic appreciation might not sound very active, but it includes, for instance, seeking out works of art, trying to understand them, and praising or recommending them to others (or not). Aesthetic virtue is not just for great artists, it can be manifested in everyday ways: in how you dress, or decorate your house, which books you read and which music you listen to.

The second dimension of aesthetic virtue is non-cognitive attitudes. Characteristically an aesthetically virtuous person has the right motivations, right feelings and emotions. They take pleasure in beauty, for instance, and they are motivated to create or appreciate valuable works of art for their own sake.

Non-virtuous agents have the wrong sorts of motivations. A snob for instance, wants to go to the ballet at Covent Garden not because of her great love of *Swan Lake*, but because she aspires to be part of a social elite.¹⁸ A poseur wants to fit in with some particular social group, so pretends to enjoy the music, art and literature associated with it. We do not admire or try to emulate snobs and poseurs— quite the opposite — even when the works that they like are genuinely good. They are not an aesthetic ideal, they fall short of virtue because their appreciation of artworks is for the wrong reasons.

Similarly, artists can create works of art, even good works of art, for the wrong reasons. Scott Fitzgerald, for instance, keen to make money, deliberately wrote his short stories “with a twist” that would make them sell better to the magazines. An artist might judge something the thing to do to please her patron; or lead to further commissions. Acting on the basis of these sorts of reasons might seem unlikely to produce art at all, let alone good art. But that is not necessarily true. Maecenas, patron to Horace and Virgil, had excellent taste. If Horace, for instance, decided to develop a theme in his poetry because Maecenas would like it, the result would be a good poem. He would have done an aesthetically right action - an action supported by aesthetic reasons – but he would have acted only in accordance with those reasons, not from them. By contrast, if he chose to develop the theme because of its aesthetic merits (because it was an effective metaphor, for instance), then he would be doing the right thing for the right reasons, his action would have aesthetic worth.

Aesthetic judgements can be based on the right kinds of reasons, in response to aesthetic merits and defects of the work of art, or the wrong kind of reasons. For instance, a snob who takes pleasure in being in the company of the right kind of people, may mistake this for pleasure in the elegance and beauty of the performance, and on that basis judge that the ballet is good. An artist who is convinced that an artwork will sell well may take great satisfaction in that, and on that basis judge that it is good. These are not ideal aesthetic judgements, even if they are correct (for the artworks in question may genuinely be good).

Unfortunately, there is evidence that many of our aesthetic judgements are not made for the right reasons. Factors like the familiarity of the work, whether we believe it to be worth a lot of money, and so on, influence our judgements of aesthetic value.¹⁹ Often we are completely unaware of this influence and we devise rationalizations to make it appear that the judgement is properly based, that is, that it is responsive to aesthetic reasons. Thus the snob wrongly takes her judgement on the ballet to be based on the beauty and elegance of the dancers; and the artist mistakenly takes her judgement of her work to be based on its merits, not on its projected sales.

It is disconcerting to find out the extent that our aesthetic judgements are influenced by this sort of factor, because this is plainly not the right way to make aesthetic judgements. In the first place, they are almost certain to be less reliable than judgements reflecting aesthetic factors. But secondly and more importantly, even if turned out that more expensive works of art (for instance) tended to be better, this still this would not be the ideal way of making aesthetic judgements. Aesthetic virtue requires a full orientation towards aesthetic reasons and value, it requires you to respond through your actions, motivation and judgement. Just as your actions should be for the right reasons, so should your aesthetic judgements. Both should be based on aesthetic reasons.

4 | AESTHETIC UNDERSTANDING

What does it mean for an aesthetic judgement to be based on aesthetic reasons? I will argue that aesthetic understanding plays a very important role. There are many kinds of aesthetic understanding, many of which are important responses to works of art. Perhaps the most fundamental response concerns understanding the work itself. What is it about? What might the artist be trying to achieve?

Alongside attempting to make sense of the artwork, we can engage with it more critically, evaluating it but also trying to understand why it is a successful work of art (or not); why it is aesthetically or artistically valuable (or not). Of course the two kinds of understanding are very closely related: making sense of a work of art is in part a matter of grasping its meaning and significance; understanding why it is good is a matter of understanding it as meaningful and significant. Nevertheless, they can be distinguished, and it is the latter kind of aesthetic understanding in which I will be interested here, for instance, understanding why *Middlemarch* is an exceptionally good novel; why *Citizen Kane* an excellent film, and so on.²⁰ Or conversely, in understanding why a work of art is not good. Aesthetic understanding is factive and requires a grasp of the reasons for the conclusion. This grasp is a kind of know how or set of abilities that I call “cognitive control”, that gives you a kind of mastery of the connection between aesthetic reasons and aesthetic evaluations.²¹

For instance, here is Clive James, literary critic, on Judith Krantz’s novel *Princess Daisy*:

Princess Daisy is a terrible book only in the sense that it is almost totally inept... In fact, it wouldn’t even be particularly boring if only Mrs Krantz could quell her artistic urge. ‘Above all,’ said Conrad, ‘to make you see.’ Mrs Krantz strains every nerve to make you see. She pops her valves in the unrelenting effort to bring it all alive. Unfortunately she has the opposite of a pictorial talent. The more detail she piles on, the less clear things become.²²

James has aesthetic understanding. He makes the correct aesthetic evaluation of *Princess Daisy* (that it is terrible) on the basis of the reasons why it is terrible (almost totally inept, unclear, lifeless) and can explain those reasons.²³ He has the kind of grasp of these aesthetic reasons so that if he were to read a similar book (e.g. another Judith Krantz, the (fortunately) imaginary *Princess Buttercup*) he would be able to judge it himself and to explain its (lack of) value himself.²⁴

Aesthetic understanding essentially involves a grasp of aesthetic reasons. This grasp consists in the ability (or know how) to respond to aesthetic reasons yourself, by judging whether a work of art is good or not on the basis of those reasons, and in explaining why it is good or not.²⁵

What does it mean to base an aesthetic judgement on aesthetic reasons? Must the judgement be the conclusion of an explicit piece of reasoning, from the aesthetic merits and defects of a piece to an overall evaluation of it? I don’t think this kind of reasoning is unheard of. Sometimes the specific merits and defects of a work are easier to grasp than whether the piece is successful or not, especially when works are very complex. To make an overall judgement, you might reflect on the merits and defects of the piece, and then come to a conclusion. However, this sort of conscious inference is not essential to aesthetic understanding. Whether the work is good or bad may strike you immediately, at the same time as the reasons why (this book is terrible! So badly written!). It can still be true that the judgement (the book is terrible) is based on those reasons, because if those reasons were slightly different (i.e. the book was slightly better or slightly worse written), you

would make a different judgement. That is all that is essential to basing your aesthetic judgement on aesthetic reasons, and so all that is required for aesthetic understanding.

It is also part of aesthetic understanding that you can explain your judgement. These explanations can use “thick” aesthetic terms, as James does (clumsy, lifeless, inept; graceful, bold etc).²⁶ Explanations may be more or less detailed or full, and there may be more than one possible explanation of why a work is or is not valuable. Aesthetic understanding, correspondingly, comes in degrees - the more detailed an explanation you can give (or more rival explanations you can give), the better you understand: James devotes more than 3000 words to *Princess Daisy*, he understands very well indeed what has gone wrong.

Acquiring aesthetic understanding means acquiring the right kind of grasp of aesthetic reasons. This grasp (or cognitive control) is a kind of know-how or set of abilities and like most abilities, needs to be developed through reflective practice. Here, what is needed is reflection on why *Middlemarch*, or *Citizen Kane* is excellent, or why *Princess Daisy* is not, and on whether the verdict would be different if they were slightly altered in various ways (which may require imagining other similar works of art), and so on. That is, to develop your abilities to make aesthetic evaluations on the basis of aesthetic reasons, and to explain those judgements.

Clive James tells us that *Princess Daisy* is a dreadful book. Why not just believe him and save yourself the exquisite boredom of reading it yourself? Engaging with the book is plainly not worth doing for its own sake. Of course you can just take his word and you might know that it was bad, and know why. But you would not have grasped why it was so bad.

Naturally, James recognizes this, and as a good critic, puts you in a position to make up your own mind and at least to begin to develop your own aesthetic understanding. The review quotes at length examples of failed prose, from which a reader may judge (with the guidance and assistance of James’s comments) just how bad the book is:

‘Her black eyes were long and widely spaced, her mouth, even in repose, was made meaningful by the grace of its shape: the gentle arc of her upper lip dipped in the centre to meet the lovely pillow of her lower lip in a line that had the power of an embrace.’²⁷

James does not expect a reader to take him at his word. This might give her aesthetic knowledge, but no more, and certainly not the grasp characteristic of understanding.²⁸ To get that, the reader has to engage with the work itself, and see exactly how the book is inept and lifeless (and how similar books would have similar flaws and would also be terrible). Then she will have cognitive control, and then she will truly understand why *Princess Daisy* is a failure.²⁹

An ideal aesthetic agent will have and use aesthetic understanding to make her aesthetic judgements, rather than base them on testimony, because an ideal aesthetic judgement will be based on the kind of grasp of aesthetic reasons characteristic of aesthetic understanding.³⁰

Imagine you are a poet in the midst of creating a work of art. You have reached a particularly difficult and important stage. Yet you are not sure how to proceed: should you reach your conclusion in the next stanza, or develop your theme for a little longer before drawing your ideas together? You are also uncertain about the register to use in this stanza: is it too harsh, too colloquial, or forceful in just the right way? At this point, you need to make an aesthetic judgement – at the very least “this is best development of this poem” or at least “this is what I should do next”. Would it be aesthetically virtuous of you to make your judgement solely on the say so of a teacher, critic or patron?

Obviously not. In so doing, you would not be responsive to aesthetic value and aesthetic reasons yourself. Your judgement would not be based on your grasp of the significance of developing the work one way or another.

Perhaps an apprentice might follow the lead of more experienced artist without understanding why the resulting artwork would be good. But a mature artist would and should rely on her own aesthetic understanding. She herself would be attuned to aesthetic reasons in her judgements as well as her motivations and actions. So she would treat aesthetic testimony as at most a provisional guide to help her make up her own mind. She would not form a judgment merely on someone else's say so, no matter how expert.³¹

Critics and audiences likewise should respond to aesthetic value and reasons directly, developing and using their own aesthetic understanding. When Clive James evaluates Judith Krantz, it is his own judgement and his own reasons for that judgement that we expect to hear. If, having run out of time to look at the book, he merely passed on the views of friends or colleagues, this would be inappropriate, exactly as if he were unduly influenced by the immense popularity and high sales of the book, or its predominantly female readership, in his review. All of these are non-aesthetic reasons, that is, reasons of the wrong sort.

My account of aesthetic understanding and its role in virtue suggests that it is better for an artist or critic to have a grasp of aesthetic reasons that is conscious and articulable.³² Though I think it is possible in some sense to grasp reasons without being able to articulate them, I do think it is better to be aware of them and to be able to convey them to others. In the first place, an awareness of aesthetic reasons is likely to help you make better aesthetic judgements and take better aesthetic actions in the future. As an artist, if you have no idea at all why some of your artworks are successful and others are not, it is very hard for you to go on to avoid the defects and make more successful future works. As a member of the audience, awareness of the aesthetic features of the artwork helps you to appreciate it, to recommend it more persuasively. It is plainly essential to the role of a critic, whose purpose is in part to help others to develop aesthetic understanding. Thus as we have already seen, Clive James does not complete his review of Krantz's novel with one sentence, but goes on at length to help the audience grasp why the novel fails and allow them to draw their own conclusions.

An awareness of aesthetic defects and merits in a work of art and an ability to explain why it is (or is not) valuable are ways in which we can respond to its value. Someone fully responsive to aesthetic value would not be struck dumb when asked why an artwork was good. They would have an explanation. And since aesthetic virtue just is full orientation towards aesthetic value – responsiveness to that value in every way open to us – then explicit aesthetic understanding must be a component of aesthetic virtue.

In making an aesthetic evaluation through a grasp of aesthetic reasons, your judgements are responsive to aesthetic value in a very special way: they mirror both the content and form of that value.

A belief of the content: "*Princess Daisy* is a terrible novel" mirrors the world, we might say, if *Princess Daisy* is a terrible novel. That is, true beliefs mirror the world in virtue of their content.

What then, does it mean for beliefs to mirror the world in virtue of their form? Think for a minute about aesthetic value and aesthetic reasons. These are not completely isolated from one another. Rather they stand in a particular structure, in a particular relationship with one another. For instance, *Citizen Kane* is an excellent film because its cinematography is beautiful, it has a strong narrative and a powerful lead performance. These are the reasons why the film is valuable. *Princess Daisy*, by contrast, is terrible because it is inept, lifeless and badly written.

Now suppose that you read *Princess Daisy* (or relevant extracts) and, in recognizing that it is inept, lifeless and badly written, you recognize that it is bad. Then you have a belief (*Princess Daisy* is bad) which is dependent on your other beliefs (that it is inept, lifeless and badly written). Not necessarily because you consciously inferred that it is bad from its being inept, lifeless and badly written, it may simply appear to you that the book is bad in virtue of being badly written etc, such that your beliefs that it is badly written etc explain why you have the belief that it is bad. These beliefs are true, and so mirror the world in virtue of their content. But also, there is a mirroring in the structure of dependence of one of the set of beliefs on the other – the belief that the book is terrible depends on your belief that it is inept, etc, just as its lack of merit depends on its ineptness. So if you changed your view on the book's ineptness, you would change your overall evaluation (your evaluation is sensitive to those reasons, though again, not necessarily as a matter of conscious inference).

When you use aesthetic understanding – that is, you grasp the aesthetic reasons and you base an aesthetic evaluation on them – in judging that an artwork is valuable, you mirror the world in two ways: in both the form and the content of your aesthetic beliefs. This structural connection is a set of dispositions connecting the two, as you have based your conclusion that the book is bad on the basis of the reasons that make it bad and you would have made a different evaluation, had it different qualities.

This idea of mirroring the structure of aesthetic reasons has a particularly significant role in acting for the right reasons – aesthetically worthy action. Just as morally worthy action is action on the reasons that make an action right (e.g. that it is helping the needy, that it is keeping a promise), aesthetically worthy action is action based on the reasons that make it aesthetically right, e.g. to praise *Citizen Kane* because it has beautiful cinematography and a compelling lead performance.

To criticize *Princess Daisy* for the right reasons, it is not sufficient for you to know that it is bad. If that is all you know – because you know it on the basis of pure aesthetic testimony – you are not responding to the reasons why it is bad. And again, it is not sufficient to know that *Princess Daisy* is inept and lifeless, or that it is bad because it is inept and lifeless. Acting for a reason requires that reason to influence your actions in very specific ways: the “reason role”.³³ You need a set of dispositions to act in the way recommended by the reason (*ceteris paribus*), and to respond appropriately if the situation were slightly different. Thus if your reason for criticizing *Princess Daisy* is that it is terrible because it is lifeless and inept, it must be that you are disposed to judge it to be terrible because it is inept and lifeless and so forth, and you are also disposed such that if it were inept and lifeless in a slightly different manner (a bit less inept, or a bit more lifeless, and so on, as *Princess Buttercup* might be) you would make the appropriate judgement. If you do not have this set of dispositions, that the novel is inept and lifeless is not playing the reason role for you and it cannot be your reason for action. Perhaps instead you are responsive to Clive James's verdict alone, and you are drawing the conclusion that it is terrible because Clive James criticized it, and you would have drawn a different conclusion had he written something else. In that case, Clive James's verdict is your reason for judgement, and any action based on that judgement will be made for the wrong (i.e. non-aesthetic) reasons and will not be aesthetically worthy.

But a disposition to come to the right aesthetic evaluation on the basis of the reasons that make it true, and to do so similarly in other cases – this set of dispositions just is the cognitive control that is part of aesthetic understanding. So doing the right thing for the right reasons, and making the right judgement for the right reason, requires you to have and to use aesthetic understanding.

5 | AESTHETIC UNDERSTANDING AND TESTIMONY

The significance of aesthetic understanding in aesthetic virtue explains the status of aesthetic testimony. We tend to trust aesthetic testimony only provisionally. This is because provisional trust is typically the best way of developing aesthetic understanding, and acquiring and using aesthetic understanding to make aesthetic judgements is a key component of aesthetic virtue.

At this point it is worth distinguishing again pure and impure aesthetic testimony. Pure aesthetic testimony is an evaluation unaccompanied by any reasons or explanation (“*Citizen Kane* is a great movie”). Trusting testimony of this kind will obviously not get you aesthetic understanding because you will have no idea of the aesthetic reasons why the evaluation is correct. This is not an ideal (aesthetically virtuous) kind of aesthetic judgement.

But of course critics often give reasons and explanations, they point out interesting features of a work of art and explain its aesthetic merits and defects. In so doing they, in a sense, make aesthetic reasons available to you. Is it possible to get aesthetic understanding from a critic, and so to make an ideal judgement even whilst trusting what they say?

This is a complex question. In the first place, it may be essential to grasp aesthetic reasons properly, that you do have the visual experience or the feelings or emotions prompted by a first personal experience of a work of art (I shall say more about this in the next section). In many, perhaps most cases, testimony will not give you a sufficient grasp of aesthetic reasons to give you understanding. But that is not to say that it is impossible for a critic’s testimony (perhaps combined with a vivid imagination) allows you to grasp aesthetic reasons. An exceptional critic might describe the work very accurately and conjure up a vivid image of it, on the basis of which you can understand why it is good (or, as in the case of Krantz, terrible).

However, it is important to note that even in this case, where testimony alone generates aesthetic understanding, you are not simply putting your trust in what the critic says. To trust is to defer to her judgement and think no more about the issue. This is not typically a good way of getting understanding. Instead, you need to use her descriptions and explanations as a guide, perhaps an indispensable guide, to developing your own grasp of aesthetic reasons, and basing your own judgement on them. This is essential to the ability to go on in a new case, faced with a new work of art, to grasp its aesthetic merits and defects and evaluate it yourself, without falling back on the critic’s judgement and guidance. To acquire aesthetic understanding, you must go be able to respond to aesthetic reasons yourself, and to do that, you must not just put your trust in the critic, but explore what they say, the work of art, the relations between reasons and the overall evaluation until you have mastered it and are able to go on yourself in new cases.

So it is still true that we should typically not trust aesthetic testimony, even “impure” testimony with rich, detailed and vivid explanations from aesthetic experts, fully and confidently, but only provisionally; because instead of deferring to the critics, we should use what they say as a basis for developing and using our own aesthetic understanding.³⁴

6 | AESTHETIC APPRECIATION AND ACQUAINTANCE

When the puzzle of aesthetic testimony was introduced, I mentioned the Acquaintance Principle: “judgements of aesthetic value... must be based on first-hand experience of their objects”. The Acquaintance Principle is widely accepted, and it appears to give an explanation of what is wrong with trusting aesthetic testimony that has nothing to do with aesthetic understanding.

However, I will argue that the Acquaintance Principle, properly understood, is not in tension with what I have said here about aesthetic understanding. I agree that acquaintance with a work of art is often (but not always) very important in making aesthetic judgements, and my account of aesthetic understanding is able to predict when it is important and when it is not (e.g. when a good copy or an imaginative representation is sufficient instead). In addition, I can explain why acquaintance also essential to aesthetic appreciation, and so to other aspects of aesthetic virtue that are not directly concerned with aesthetic judgement.

But let us begin with aesthetic judgement. The aesthetically ideal (virtuous) way of making aesthetic judgements requires having and using aesthetic understanding. Aesthetic understanding often requires acquaintance with a work of art. Why? Some aspects of some works of art are difficult or impossible to articulate: the precise shade of colour used in a painting, exactly how it contrasts with the other colours, and so on. Sometimes these qualities are aesthetic merits or defects.

Visual experience (or in the case of music, auditory experience) can be crucial to making aesthetic evaluations, therefore, but sometimes non-cognitive attitudes are also essential. That a play is boring is an aesthetic defect that may explain why it is no good, but you may have to experience exactly how boring it is, and in what way, to grasp the strength of this reason, how it interacts with other features of the play (for instance, are parts boring in order to heighten the contrast with the parts with more action); such that a particular non-cognitive reaction (did you feel the tension heighten or not) may be essential to grasping the aesthetic merits and defects of the work, and the way that they contribute to its overall value.

So it may be important to see a painting or experience a work of art to know exactly what it is like, and so whether it aesthetically valuable or not. However, seeing the original is not always necessary. Sometimes seeing a good copy, or (in the right circumstances) a similar work by a similar artist – or reading the text of a play or the score of a musical work – may also allow you to grasp the aesthetic reasons appropriately and so to understand why the original is good.

It is not impossible to grasp aesthetic reasons through imagining the work of art, and this possibility is particularly important for artists who are making aesthetic judgements in the course of creating a work of art. Obviously an aesthetic judgement about a work of art that one might create (i.e. that it would or would not be aesthetically valuable, or that it would be good (or not) to develop the work in one direction or another) cannot be responsive to the work itself – it does not exist yet, and may never exist – but only to an imaginative representation of it.

Of course, it is hard to be sure whether one has imagined the work accurately enough and in sufficient detail to make such a judgement. For many of us (who are not talented artists) it may be difficult to make any aesthetic judgement at all on that basis, and certainly it is difficult to be confident that whatever judgement you come to will be true of the artwork itself. Even great artists tend to re-evaluate the artwork during the process of creation, as for instance, a development that seemed promising in their imagination does not always turn out as well as expected.

First-hand experience, typically through perception, plays a very important role in understanding why a work of art has aesthetic value, and therefore in the aesthetically ideal way of making judgements of value. That is why the Acquaintance Principle appears plausible. But there are exceptions to the rule when we are able to understand why the work is valuable (or not) without being acquainted with the object itself but a copy, similar artwork, or an imaginative representation.³⁵ Thus the account given here of aesthetic understanding and aesthetic virtue is able to explain when and why the Acquaintance Principle is true and when and why it admits exceptions.

But acquaintance also has a very significant role in the other elements of aesthetic virtue, in particular, in non-cognitive attitudes, and in the activity of aesthetic appreciation.

Aesthetic appreciation does typically require acquaintance with a work of art. If you have acquaintance with an excellent copy, you may appreciate it (the copy), but you are not appreciating the original, or only in a highly qualified way. Appreciation involves a very active engagement with a work of art. Some of that work is cognitive, involving judgement and imagination, to come to understand the work itself: what is it, what is it trying to achieve, and whether it succeeds. Appreciating a work of art also involves having the requisite non-cognitive attitudes. This may be pleasure (as Kant thought) or may be a kind of liking (a liking that presents itself as merited, for instance³⁶), but a very wide range of attitudes can be involved: admiration, delight, horror, dismay, disappointment, frustration, fear and anger, can all be appropriate responses even to very good works of art (think of a Greek tragedy, or *Waiting for Godot*), and of course bad ones may be dull, confusing, or painful to engage with.

These non-cognitive attitudes are important for their own sake, as a component of appreciation and of aesthetic virtue. But they also feed in to our aesthetic understanding, drawing attention to features of the artwork and providing grounds for or making salient its aesthetic merits and defects, and so allowing us to why it is (or is not) valuable. And our aesthetic understanding can in turn encourage certain non-cognitive attitudes: admiration for the clever structure and satisfaction in the way that the main theme is resolved for instance. Thus the cognitive and non-cognitive attitudes intertwine and reinforce one another when appreciation goes well, allowing an ever more fitting response to aesthetic value.³⁷

With this account in hand, we can see that there are a number of reasons why acquaintance with a work of art is important. Aesthetic virtue is a matter of responding to aesthetic value and reasons through action (appreciation), and through your cognitive and non-cognitive responses. To appreciate a work of art, you (typically) need to be engaged with that work itself, a description is not normally sufficient, nor is even a very good copy. Similarly, to have the fitting non-cognitive attitudes towards a work of art, you typically have to be acquainted with it. A description, even a very accurate one, often does not provoke the same reaction, at the same intensity, as the original, though a copy might. And finally, to understand why a work is valuable or not, typically acquaintance with it or a very similar work is needed. In principle testimony may (in some cases) be sufficient, but typically, trust in testimony is not conducive to acquiring or exercising your own understanding.

This account of aesthetic judgement and its relationship to acquaintance and testimony has some similarities to “appreciation” accounts, that require a genuine aesthetic judgement to depend on appreciation of or engagement with a work of art.³⁸ So it is perhaps worth emphasizing the differences between these accounts and mine, and the advantages of my account.

First, I allow, as “appreciation” accounts do not, that genuine aesthetic judgements may be made without appreciation of or engagement with a work of art, provided that it is based on aesthetic understanding (which can sometimes be acquired without this engagement). This is essential to the possibility that artists may make aesthetic judgements in the course of artistic creation. It is an advantage of that I can give a unified account of aesthetic judgements made by audiences and artists; whilst “appreciation” accounts are better suited to the former than the latter; it is not clear how they can account for aesthetic judgements about works of art that do not yet exist.³⁹

Secondly, according to my account, it is possible to make aesthetic judgements on the basis of trust in testimony, though it is not ideal or aesthetically virtuous to do so. It seems to me highly plausible that if you do trust an art critic and on that basis judge that *Citizen Kane* is a great film,

you have made an aesthetic judgement, whereas accounts that require engagement or acquaintance for an aesthetic judgement deny that this is even possible.⁴⁰

Finally, my account has the advantage of offering an explanation of the importance of aesthetic appreciation and aesthetic understanding in terms of a broader account of the nature and importance of aesthetic virtue, rather than simply insisting that engagement with works of art is important. Moreover, this account generalizes to explain the nature and importance of moral virtue (and so the status of moral testimony). It is of course highly desirable to have a unified account of the status of moral and aesthetic testimony, but it is at least not obvious how “engagement” or “appreciation” accounts could generalize to account for moral testimony.

Of course, there are important differences between aesthetic and moral testimony. It has seemed to many, for instance, that there are stronger reasons to trust testimony about morality than about aesthetics.⁴¹ This might seem to be a problem for an account like mine that gives the same explanation for what is wrong with trusting either moral or aesthetic testimony (namely, that doing so is not virtuous, because you are not developing or using understanding). Doesn’t it follow from my account that they should be equally problematic? Not necessarily. The difference can be explained, on my account, by differences in the relative importance of trying to achieve virtue by developing your own understanding, versus getting your judgements (and so your actions) wrong in the two domains.

Suppose that you have reason to think that you are not virtuous, and in particular you have not (yet) developed understanding. If you were virtuous, you would make your own judgements. Should you do the same, even though you lack understanding?

On the one hand, to acquire virtue we need to practice responding virtuously. On the other hand, there can be significant drawbacks to trying to emulate an ideal, if one is not capable of so doing – the result can be disastrous.

Elsewhere, I have argued that we have quite strong reasons to trust moral testimony from an expert if we do not have moral understanding, even though an ideally morally virtuous agent would make her own moral judgements.⁴² That is because making incorrect moral judgements can have very significant consequences. As a result of mistaking which actions are right and wrong, you may do the wrong action, violating a moral obligation or harming or wronging a person. There are strong reasons to avoid this, and therefore to trust the testimony of a moral expert, if you can find one, if you are not capable of acquiring moral understanding yourself.

In aesthetics, however, going wrong is typically not such a serious matter. If you fail to respond as the virtuous do, you will perhaps create or appreciate art that is not particularly valuable, take pleasure the wrong aspects of a work of art; or judge works of art wrongly, or on the wrong basis. You would not be very admirable, but there are not such strong reasons to avoid creating or appreciating bad art as to avoid harming or wronging a person. Therefore, in aesthetics, even if your own aesthetic judgement is unreliable and you do not yet have aesthetic understanding, you do not have strong reasons to trust testimony instead. Of course you should listen to the critics, and perhaps provisionally trust their judgements. But there is very little pressure to defer to an aesthetic expert. In aesthetics, the presumption in favour of making up your own mind is very strong.

7 | CONCLUSION

Aesthetic testimony has an equivocal status. Sometimes we rely on it, as when we cannot experience an artwork for ourselves, or when we are beginning to develop our own aesthetic understanding. But we typically trust it at most provisionally, for the ideal of aesthetic virtue is to judge

works of art ourselves, using our own understanding, whether one is a creative artist or an appreciative member of the audience.

Now that we have an account of the nature and importance of aesthetic understanding, we can use it to resolve other outstanding questions in the epistemology of aesthetics, such as, how should you respond to widespread and persistent disagreements about aesthetic value? Should you retain your aesthetic judgements in the face of this disagreement, or should you give some (even equal) weight to the judgements of others? If the argument here is correct, then it is ideal to respond directly aesthetic reasons. It follows that you should not give any weight to the views of others who disagree with you, as such. For this is at best an indirect, “second hand” route to the truth (and that is so whether they are aesthetic peers or even more expert than yourself). This can, I think, help explain the way in which aesthetic disagreements can be “faultless”⁴³ and it also contributes to explaining the nature of aesthetic judgement.⁴⁴ In addition, aesthetic understanding partly constitutes what it means to be an aesthetic “expert”; and it has a very significant role in characterising the purpose and value of aesthetic education.

Similarly, the account of aesthetic virtue sketched here can be applied to existing debates in aesthetics, such as arguments about whether particular traits, such as creativity, are aesthetic virtues.⁴⁵ We are also in a position to give an account of aesthetic appreciation: appreciating a work of art is responding to it through action, non-cognitive and cognitive attitudes, ideally as the virtuous would (i.e. by means of aesthetic understanding).

Finally, a very important implication of the argument here is that aesthetics and ethics are fundamentally similar. In both domains, testimony has an equivocal status, and the explanation is the same in each domain. Moral and aesthetic understanding are structurally identical. Both are extremely important as a component of moral and aesthetic virtue respectively, which are likewise structurally identical, as orientation towards value and reasons (a different kind of value in each case). Virtue of each kind is admired and praised; failures of virtue are disappointing, frustrating, blameworthy. There are deep parallels between the two domains: exploring the extent and limit of these parallels is likely to be very fruitful.

ENDNOTES

¹ I would like to thank Alexander Bird, Roger Crisp, Dorothea Debus, Jim Grant, Paul Lodge, Errol Lord and audiences at Oxford, the University of York and the St Andrews Moral and Aesthetic Testimony workshop, for helpful discussions and for comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

² There is a large literature on aesthetic testimony (see Robson, 2012). The classic discussion is in Kant (2005/1790). More recent contributions include Wollheim (1980), Budd (2003), Hopkins (2000, 2001, 2011), Livingston (2003), Meskin (2004), Laetz (2008), Robson (2014, 2015a, 2015b, 2018a, 2018b); Whiting (2015), Lord (2016) and Ransom (2019).

³ Hills (2013a). See also Jones (1999), Hopkins (2007) McGrath (2008, 2011).

⁴ Wollheim (1980) p. 233, Eaton (1994), Robson (2018a).

⁵ Hills (2009, 2010, 2013a, forthcoming).

⁶ By trusting testimony, I mean that you defer to the speaker’s judgement and think no more about the issue (see Hills forthcoming for further discussion of what it is to trust testimony).

⁷ “Pure” aesthetic testimony gives an evaluation of an artwork without any explanation of the evaluation or reasons why it is correct. “Impure” testimony also gives those reasons. Initially I will discuss pure testimony but in later sections I will consider impure testimony too (as much testimony from aesthetic critics is impure, involving giving explanations).

⁸ Indeed the puzzle about aesthetic testimony is often described in terms of assertion, and an explanation is offered of why the assertion, as such, is inappropriate, for instance, in terms of the norms governing assertion or the norms of conversational implicature (e.g. Mothersill (1994), Robson (2015a), but see Ninan (2014) for arguments that these norms cannot be understood as conversational implicatures). But it seems unlikely that this can fully

explain the problem, because making an aesthetic judgement on the basis of aesthetic testimony seems to be problematic, whether or not the judgement is ever asserted (Hopkins, 2011; Robson, 2015a).

⁹ Meskin (2004) considers whether we think aesthetic testimony problematic because we (incorrectly) take aesthetic truths to be relative.

¹⁰ The same puzzle arises for sophisticated versions of subjectivism, relativism or quasi-realism, which allow for some notion of truth in aesthetics. These theories also need to explain the status of aesthetic testimony.

¹¹ Laetz (2008).

¹² Meskin (2004) emphasizes this problem with trusting aesthetic testimony.

¹³ This is a simplification of Kant's more nuanced views. (Kant, 2005/1790: 5: 215-6). At some points he seems to leave open the possibility that those aesthetic judgements that are not judgements of taste might legitimately be based on testimony, even if judgements of taste (singular aesthetic judgements) could not be. For a more recent defence of the Kantian position, see Gorodeisky and Marcus (2018).

¹⁴ The Acquaintance Principle claims that aesthetic judgement should be based on experience of the artwork, but leaves it open (as Kant does not) that it could have a different basis. In my view it is not very plausible that a judgement like "*Citizen Kane* is a great film" that is based on testimony is not an aesthetic judgement at all, and this counts against the Kantian and neo-Kantian theories (including Gorodeisky and Marcus, 2018).

¹⁵ Aesthetic virtue has recently been discussed by Woodruff (2001) and Roberts (2018), but the major accounts in the literature are Goldie (2007, 2008, 2010) and Lopes (2008). Goldie has a more Aristotelian conception of virtue than I do (defining virtue as a character trait that makes a contribution to a good life, and hoping to use the resulting account of virtue to define aesthetic value). Lopes has a "Moorean" account which is more similar to mine, as it defines virtue as a kind of response to aesthetic value (independently conceived). Nevertheless, his account depends (as mine does not) on beauty being intrinsically valuable. Kieran (2008, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2014) has a number of discussions of specific virtues, especially creativity, and a discussion of snobbery that is similar to mine. None of the above specifically relate aesthetic virtue to aesthetic understanding, or to the debate on testimony.

¹⁶ There is much more to be said about the relationship between moral and aesthetic virtue. For instance, Iris Murdoch emphasizes the similarities in terms of sensitivity to and discernment of value (Murdoch, 2001); Nussbaum (1990) emphasizes that moral sensitivity may be necessary for understanding artworks (and hence for aesthetic virtue). See Hills (2018a) for further discussion.

¹⁷ Thus I agree with Nguyen (forthcoming) that engagement with art is very important. In my view this includes creation as well as appreciation (which Nguyen concentrates on); and I offer (as he does not) an explanation for the importance of engagement, and in reaching an aesthetic judgement through that engagement in terms of the significance of aesthetic understanding, and its role in aesthetic virtue. Thus my account could be seen as supplementing his by putting aesthetic engagement and appreciation in a broader (evaluative) context.

¹⁸ Kieran (2010), Ransom (2019).

¹⁹ Cutting (2003, 2006), Kieran (2010, 2011).

²⁰ Irvin sketches a similar account of aesthetic understanding as mine, involving abilities to respond to aesthetic reasons in evaluation (Irvin, 2007).

²¹ This account of understanding why, of which aesthetic understanding is a specific case, is defended in Hills (2016).

²² James (1980).

²³ An objector might say: this cannot be right because aesthetic judgements are not made for reasons. Kant, for instance, claims that certain aesthetic judgements are not made through concepts but "immediately" on the basis of feelings of pleasure (or displeasure) (Kant, 2005/1790: 5:215). So aesthetic judgements cannot be based on aesthetic understanding. This objection is mistaken. Consider an aesthetic judgement: suppose that you (correctly) judge that *Citizen Kane* is good. And then you think: why? Clearly the ideal here is to uncover reasons that play two roles, that explain why *Citizen Kane* is good and at the same time explain why you judge that it is good. You are looking both externally (at the film) and at the same time internally (to your own responses to it, see Dorsch (2013) and Cavedon-Taylor (2017). Of course these two sets of reasons are not always the same, for we often make aesthetic judgements for the wrong sorts of reasons, such as whether the artwork is worth a lot of money. Moreover, we often afterwards rationalize such judgements. But the very fact that we do rationalize aesthetic judgements suggests that we expect them to be made for reasons, and that the ideal of aesthetic judgement involves the exercise of aesthetic understanding. It is true, however, that being based on reasons does not

mean that it is the result of a conscious inference. I do not think these are unheard of in aesthetic evaluation but neither are they essential: the evaluation is still based on reasons, provided it is sensitive to them (i.e. if you changed your view about how well written it was, you would change your evaluation too).

- ²⁴ Of course works of art are individuals and importantly different from one another and I am not suggesting that aesthetic understanding enables you to judge a separate work of art without engaging with its specifically; but if you have aesthetic understanding of one work, you will be able to judge another that has similar merits and defects to it, provided you do engage with it.
- ²⁵ This raises a number of questions. For instance, must explanations be made in terms of laws (or law-like principles)? This is pressing question for aesthetic understanding, because many have thought there are no law-like generalizations or “principles of taste” that support judgements of aesthetic value (Sibley, 1959). Does this cast doubt on the possibility of aesthetic understanding? Not at all. In fact, Sibley’s own view is that there are no law-like “bridge” principles, linking aesthetic and non-aesthetic properties. But he does think that there are important connections between thick aesthetic concepts and aesthetic value: if you attribute grace, or intensity to a work of art without any further qualification, he says, you imply that it is good (Sibley, 2001). These principles can play a role in aesthetic explanation. In any case, however, I am liberal about the forms that explanation can take: I see no reason why explanations must contain strict or even *ceteris paribus* laws, so even if there were no genuine principles of taste, aesthetic understanding would still be possible.
- ²⁶ Even if (as is likely), these thick terms apply in virtue of the natural (non-aesthetic) properties, see Zangwill (2014); a classic discussion is Sibley (1959, 1965).
- ²⁷ From *Princess Daisy* by Judith Krantz, quoted in James (1980).
- ²⁸ See Nguyen (forthcoming) describes Brandon, who trusts audio guides to great works of art, but makes no effort to get the kind of grasp of aesthetic value and reasons that would allow him to make judgements of them by himself. He may have aesthetic knowledge, but he does not have understanding.
- ²⁹ Irvin (2007) likewise argues that the development of aesthetic understanding involves provisional trust in experts, but this is eventually superseded by your own responses to the artworks, based on your own aesthetic experience (p.298). Later I will discuss whether it is possible to get aesthetic understanding from detailed, persuasive testimony from a critic.
- ³⁰ In my Hills (2009, 2010), I have argued the same for moral understanding, that is, that moral understanding is an essential component of moral virtue.
- ³¹ Of course, things are more complicated. Sometimes an artist’s judgements about what to do next are heavily influenced by an artistic tradition which dictates the right way to write a sonnet or compose a symphony, for instance; or by the words and deeds of other artists with whom she is collaborating. Here one artist’s aesthetic judgements are shaped by another person’s aesthetic judgement. But in most cases, this is not because only one of them is responding to aesthetic reasons and the other is doing what they are told. In a true collaboration, both of them are aesthetically responsive. Similarly artistic traditions, even those that are very constraining, can still make room for the artist’s own judgement, though in so doing she will be responding to aesthetic reasons that are influenced by or even entirely determined by the tradition.
- ³² Ransom (2019) also uses a framework of virtue to explain the puzzle of aesthetic testimony, but by appeal to aesthetic competence leading to “apt” judgement. The concept of aesthetic understanding developed here could be considered a kind of aesthetic competence and offers an additional explanation (through the idea of “mirroring value” and of acting for reasons) of why aesthetic competence does not include trusting appropriate aesthetic experts (as competence in other topics does).
- ³³ For further discussion of the “reason role” see Hills (2016, 2018b).
- ³⁴ I am grateful to an anonymous referee for prompting me to clarify this argument. Hills (forthcoming) discusses different ways testimony can influence a judgement, other than through trust.
- ³⁵ Either by gaining the relevant experience without acquaintance, or (even more unusually) gaining understanding without a relevant aesthetic experience at all.
- ³⁶ Gorodeisky and Marcus (2018).
- ³⁷ I agree with Whiting (2015) that any non-cognitive attitudes that are based on an aesthetic judgement that is formed on testimony are inadequate (not ideal); but not with his explanation (that the aesthetic belief on which they are based is not rational). In my view, the best explanation of what is less than ideal with both the non-cognitive and cognitive attitudes here is that neither is formed, as they should be, in direct response to aesthetic reasons.

- ³⁸ E.g. Kant's account of aesthetic judgement, and neo-Kantian theories such as Gorodeisky and Marcus (2018), see also Nguyen (forthcoming).
- ³⁹ Thus any account of aesthetic judgement that makes it somewhat like perception has difficulty with this problem. Gorodeisky and Marcus (2018) distinguish aesthetic judgement from aesthetic beliefs and practical judgements and may be forced to say that artists have only aesthetic beliefs or that they make practical judgements of what to do; in neither case do they make aesthetic judgements: in my view this is very implausible.
- ⁴⁰ Budd (2003). Gorodeisky and Marcus (2018) distinguish aesthetic belief from aesthetic judgement for this sort of case (i.e. so that trusting testimony results in an aesthetic belief rather than an aesthetic judgement) but I see no strong ground for distinguishing the two.
- ⁴¹ See also Hills (2009). Nguyen (forthcoming) agrees that there are stronger reasons not to defer to experts in aesthetics rather than ethics, but gives a very different explanation of why. However, others have disputed this (especially Driver, 2006).
- ⁴² Hills (2009, 2010).
- ⁴³ Schafer (2011), see also Hills (2013b).
- ⁴⁴ As Hills (2015) does for moral judgement.
- ⁴⁵ Gaut (2010, 2014), Kieran (2014).

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