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Aesthetic Evaluation and First-Hand Experience

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ABSTRACT

Evaluative aesthetic discourse communicates that the speaker has had first-hand experience of what is talked about. If you call a book bewitching, it will be assumed that you have read the book. If you say that a building is beautiful, it will be assumed that you have had some visual experience with it. According to an influential view, this is because knowledge is a norm for assertion, and aesthetic knowledge requires first-hand experience. This paper criticizes this view and argues for an alternative view, according to which aesthetic discourse expresses affective states of mind, analogously to how assertions express beliefs. It is because these affective states require first-hand experience that aesthetic discourse communicates that such acquaintance is at hand. The paper furthermore argues that the lack of an experience requirement for aesthetic belief ascriptions constitutes a problem for the kind of expressivist who claims that evaluative belief states are covert non-cognitive states.

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1. Introduction

It is a peculiarity of aesthetic discourse that statements to the effect that something is, for instance, tasty, funny, beautiful, or sublime communicate that the speaker has had first-hand experience of the object. The following statements all signal that the speaker has had such experience:

- (1) It's such a wonderful novel; insightful and moving, with the most beautiful and bewitching language.
- (2) The lobster rolls at *Neptune Oyster* are tasty.
- (3) St Mark's basilica is incredibly beautiful.

This phenomenon goes quite deep. Making an aesthetic or taste assertion while explicitly denying that you are acquainted with the object sounds odd:

- (1a) ?? It's such a wonderful novel; insightful and moving, with the most beautiful and bewitching language. It's such a shame I've never read it. [Robson 2012]
- (2b) ?? The lobster at *Neptune Oyster* are tasty, but I've never tried one. [Ninan 2014]
- (3b) ?? St Mark's basilica is incredibly beautiful, but I've never seen it. [Cf. Ninan 2014]

Following Dilip Ninan, I will call this phenomenon the *acquaintance inference*, referring to the fact that a listener will infer that the speaker has had first-hand experience with the object, when statements like (1)–(3) are made.

The question to be pursued in the following is that of what grounds the acquaintance inference for statements like (1)–(3). Why is it that aesthetic and taste discourse communicate that the speaker has had first-hand experience with the object? Drawing from speech act theory, I argue that aesthetic and taste statements *express* affective mental states, in a sense of ‘express’ that is analogous to how assertions express beliefs. I furthermore argue that these affective states are such that they require first-hand experience. Loving, hating, and liking the taste of things requires that one has had first-hand experience of the taste of those things. It is because aesthetic and taste statements express such states that they communicate that the speaker is acquainted with the object.

The argument has two important upshots for metanormative theorizing. First, the acquaintance inference provides support for the expressivist idea that speakers express affective attitudes when they make aesthetic statements. Second, I show that some data points relating to the acquaintance inference speak against the expressivist contention that aesthetic beliefs are identical with non-cognitive states of mind. The upshot is that the acquaintance inference provides linguistic support for a main tenet of expressivism about evaluative aesthetic discourse, while on the other hand it causes trouble for a standard way developing expressivist theories.

2. Some Terminology

Sometimes a distinction is made between so called predicates of personal taste and aesthetic predicates proper. A common view is that while predicates like ‘fun’, ‘tasty’, and ‘boring’ are intuitively subjective, aesthetic predicates proper, like ‘beautiful’, ‘elegant’, and ‘sublime’, are more objective. For reasons of brevity, I will use the term ‘aesthetic predicate’ to cover both so-called predicates of personal taste and aesthetic predicates proper. This should not be understood as taking a stance on whether there are any semantic or metaphysical differences between the two purported groups of predicates and properties. I wish to remain neutral regarding that question. What is important for our purposes is that both groups of predicates trigger the acquaintance inference. It does not make any more sense to call a building sublime or a painting exquisite and then directly go on to proclaim that one hasn’t seen them, than it does to praise the funniness of an episode of *The Simpsons* in the same breath as one makes explicit that one hasn’t watched it. Similarly, *pace* a recent argument by Jon Robson [2015], the acquaintance inference is not specifically related to art and artifacts. A statement to the effect that a particular sunrise is fantastic gives rise to the acquaintance inference, just as much as does a similar statement concerning a painting.

The term ‘acquaintance’ will remain more or less unspecified. What kind of acquaintance is required to sincerely make aesthetic statements varies with the subject matter: to make a sincere aesthetic statement about the content of a book, you must have read at least parts of it; to call a building beautiful you must have seen it, or at least a photograph or replica of it. Probably some kind of intellectual acquaintance is needed for a sincere ascription of beauty to a chess move. I trust that it is generally clear from the context what kind of acquaintance is required.

3. Implicature and Presuppositions

When a statement like any of (1)–(3) is made, the speaker communicates without asserting that she had had first-hand experience of what is talked about. Accordingly, one might think that the acquaintance inference is a form of Gricean implicature. This has been suggested by Malcom Budd [2003] and hinted at by Mary Mothersill [1984: 85]. However, as pointed out by Ninan [2014], the acquaintance inference behaves quite differently from Gricean implicature.

Conversational implicatures are generated by the making of a statement without being part of the conventional meaning of the uttered sentence. For example, answering

(4) I have to work.

to the question of whether you are coming to the party on Friday implies that you are not coming. Since conversational implicatures are generated by context, rather than by being part the conventional meaning of the sentence, they can be cancelled. For instance, one can take away the implicature generated by (4) simply by saying

(5) I have to work, but I will come anyway.

Cancellability is generally taken to be a defining feature of conversational implicature. It should be clear why this makes it an unlikely candidate to explain the acquaintance inference. If each of (1)–(3) conversationally implied that the speaker is acquainted with the object, then each of (1b)–(3b) should be able to cancel that implication. But, as the infelicity of each of (1b)–(3b) shows, this is not the case [ibid. 2014: 297].¹ Furthermore, explaining the acquaintance inference by appeal to conversational implicature would require an explanation of how the purported implicature is generated. No such explanation has been provided.

Next, consider presuppositions. Presuppositions are pieces of information that an utterer takes for granted when making a statement. They are not part of the regular semantic content of the statement; they constitute background information in a conversational contribution. An often-invoked example is the presupposition that ‘quit’ invokes in statements like

(6) Julia has quit smoking.

(6) does not assert, but presupposes, that Julia used to smoke in the past. Presuppositional content is normally separated from at-issue content through its behaviour in embedded sentential contexts. For instance, whereas semantic content is withheld in conditional antecedents, someone who makes a statement like

(7) If Julia has quit smoking, no one in our group smokes anymore.

¹ The uncancellability of the acquaintance inference also constitutes a potential problem for a recent proposal by Robson [2015], according to which the acquaintance inference is due to the speaker signalling evolutionary advantageous traits when making evaluative aesthetic statements. Robson’s proposal seems to require that the acquaintance inference can be cancelled [ibid.: 10].

is committed to Julia having smoked in the past. If the acquaintance inference were presuppositional in nature, it would behave as the presuppositional content of (6) and (7), and so the speaker should still be committed to having had first-hand experience when (2) and (3) are embedded into conditional antecedents. But this is not so. Consider these:

- (8) If the lobster rolls at *Neptune Oyster* are tasty, we should eat there.
- (9) If St Mark's basilica is incredibly beautiful, Alex was wrong.

Neither of these statements conveys that the speaker has had first-hand experience with the object. The acquaintance inference thus fails the presupposition test. Similar considerations can be brought to bear against the notion that the acquaintance inference is due to conventional implicature [ibid.: 297–8].

The upshot, then, is that the acquaintance inference cannot be explained as a form of implicature or presupposition.

4. The Epistemic View

The data canvassed has shown that the acquaintance inference is active only when aesthetic predicates occur in asserted (and negated) contexts but when it does occur, it is uncancellable. Drawing on this, Ninan [2014] suggests that the acquaintance inference can be explained by appeal to the knowledge norm for assertion. According to Timothy Williamson [2000], the one and only constitutive rule for assertion is this:

The Knowledge Rule: One must: assert *p* only if one knows *p*.

An argument for this view is that it is infelicitous to assert something while denying that one knows it:

- (10) ?? The cat is on the mat but I don't know that the cat is on the mat.

According to Ninan's suggestion, the infelicity of each of (1b)–(3b) is due to an explicit violation of the knowledge rule. The utterer would be asserting something while making it explicit that she does not know that what is asserted is true. This theory fits with the data. If the acquaintance inference is due to the conditions for successful performance of a speech act, then it is to be expected that it is not cancellable by explicit negation, but on the other hand is cancelled in unasserted contexts like conditional antecedents.

The idea that aesthetic *knowledge* requires first-hand experience has been around in the aesthetic literature for quite some time, under the name of the 'acquaintance principle' (see Robson [2012] for an overview). Ninan's suggestion is to mobilize the acquaintance principle together with the knowledge norm of assertion to explain the infelicity of statements like (1b)–(3b).

On a natural interpretation of this view, aesthetic knowledge is unattainable through testimony since *aesthetic beliefs* are such that they can only be justified when based on first-hand experience. First-hand experience would be a normative requirement for aesthetic beliefs. I will discuss two problems for this view. First, aesthetic beliefs need not be unjustified when first-hand experience is lacking. Consider these:

- (11) I believe that the novel is wonderful, but I haven't read it.
 (12) I believe that the lobster Rolls at *Neptune Oyster* are tasty, but I haven't tasted them.

The view under consideration predicts that the beliefs self-ascribed with (11) and (12) are necessarily unjustified. But that doesn't seem right. Challenging these beliefs on the ground that they are necessarily unjustified does not seem natural at all. Moreover, as several theorists have pointed out, it is perfectly fine to act on aesthetic testimony [Hopkins 2011; Robson 2012]. What is more natural than to watch a movie on the basis of reviews, and to explain this action by appeal to the belief that the movie is good? Again, we are not at all inclined to say that this belief or the corresponding action was unjustified.²

The adherent of the acquaintance principle could perhaps respond by pointing out that the word 'believe' denotes a weaker state of mind in ordinary discourse than it is normally taken to do in philosophical literature [Hawthorne et al. 2016]. It is aesthetic belief in the strong philosophical sense that lacks justification when based solely on testimony, not belief in the weak sense of ordinary discourse, such a theorist could argue. It is belief in the strong philosophical sense, expressed by ordinary assertions like (1)–(3), which requires acquaintance for its justification. The kind of 'weak beliefs' denoted by the word in ordinary English might still be rational to act upon, in a way perhaps similar to how one can be justified in believing that a particular ticket in a lottery is not the winning ticket, without this belief amounting to knowledge. In this case, it seems rational to act on the belief (that is, by not buying the ticket) even though knowledge is lacking. The aesthetic case is similar, an adherent of the acquaintance principle could claim.³

A problem for this line of response is that it seems that one can, when lacking acquaintance, be in even stronger, non-factive, cognitive states with aesthetic content, without seeming unjustified:

- (13) I am sure that the novel is wonderful, but I haven't read it.
 (14) I am certain that the lobster rolls at *Neptune Oyster* are tasty but I haven't tasted them.
 (15) I am convinced that St Mark's basilica is incredibly beautiful, but I haven't seen it.

None of these statements is infelicitous, and they don't seem necessarily unjustified. An advocate of an epistemic explanation of the acquaintance inference must explain why it seems that, lacking first-hand experience, one can nevertheless be justified in being in a strong epistemic state, like certainty, with aesthetic content, even if this state could never amount to knowledge. One shouldn't be certain of things that one is not in a position to know. A defender of the epistemic explanation must either deny this or deny the data.

² Recently, Daniel Whiting [2015] bites this bullet. He maintains that it is always not rational to form aesthetic beliefs solely on the basis of testimony. For criticism of Whiting, see Lord [2016].

³ Note that this view is incompatible with the doctrine, advocated by Stanley and Hawthorne [2008], that one is only justified in acting upon beliefs that amount to knowledge.

A second challenge for the adherent of the epistemic explanation of the acquaintance inference is to explain *why* aesthetic knowledge is only attainable through first-hand experience. She must explain what peculiar characteristics of aesthetic properties makes knowledge about facts involving them not transferable through testimony.

One might think that such an explanation can be found in the sensuous nature of these properties. It is a common idea that aesthetic properties have an ontological status similar to that of colours [McDowell 1987; Wiggins 1998]. Like many aesthetic properties, colour-properties are strongly related to the visual: they concern what a thing looks like. A good way of finding out what colour a thing has is to look at it—that is, through first-hand experience. So, one could think that classifying aesthetic properties as sensuous or response-dependent could constitute an explanation of why first-hand experience is required for knowledge about them. However, colour-statements do not give rise to the acquaintance inference. This is exhibited by the felicity of statements like this:

(16) Barack Obama's car is black, but I haven't seen it.

Similarly, consider the property of being poisonous. This property is arguably even more essentially connected to the reactions that it causes in people than colours are. But it is not very plausible that one cannot know that arsenic is poisonous without having tasted it, and statements to the effect that something is poisonous do not trigger the acquaintance inference:

(17) Arsenic is poisonous but I've never tasted it.

Analogies with statements about colours or other alleged secondary qualities are to no avail for adherents of the epistemic explanation.

Maybe the problem with this analogy with properties like poisonousness is that if something is poisonous then it causes similar reactions in almost everyone. Similarly for colours, if colours are response-dependent properties. It could be argued that aesthetic properties, on the other hand, exclusively concern the reactions that they cause in some particular person. This suggestion is tentatively endorsed by Ninan [2014: 307]:

Suppose that for me to believe the ... proposition expressed by *The lobster rolls are tasty* is for me to believe that the lobster rolls are tasty relative to me. But what is it for something to be tasty relative to me? Perhaps this should be understood in terms of dispositions: something is tasty relative to me iff it is disposed to cause pleasant gustatory experiences in me if I were to taste it.

As we have seen, the problem does not arise with respect to the belief that lobster rolls are tasty, since such a belief can be justified without acquaintance. Nevertheless, one might think that there is something to the idea advanced by Ninan. It is because these properties concern *my reaction* that I must taste lobster rolls, to be able to assert sincerely that lobster rolls are tasty. But, as noted by Ninan, it is not clear that this kind of relativism actually would explain the acquaintance principle [ibid.]:

But then the question arises: why can't I know that something is disposed to cause pleasant gustatory experiences in me unless I actually taste it? In general, one does not need to realize a

disposition of something in order to know that it has the disposition in question. For example, I can know that this vase is fragile without striking it to see if it breaks.

Perhaps it could be maintained that there is a major element of uncertainty involved in our reactions to aesthetic objects which stands in contrast to, for instance, the stability of a vase's tendency to break when struck. It could be argued that, in contrast to many other dispositional properties, how we are disposed to react aesthetically to various objects is so opaque that the only way to know what one's reactions would be is to trigger them. It is difficult to assess such a proposal without seeing it fleshed-out in more detail, but it seems that going down this route gives you a coherent view. However, this theory is adjoined with heavy commitments, including that semantic relativism or subjectivism is true for all aesthetic predicates; that one can be justified in acting on beliefs that do not amount to knowledge; and that the relativity of aesthetic facts makes them unknowable through any kind of evidence other than first-hand experience. I conclude that we should not explain the acquaintance inference by appeal to knowledge, and that we should look for an alternative explanation.⁴

5. The Expressive Speech Act View

While appeal to the knowledge norm fails to provide an adequate explanation, the idea that the acquaintance inference is somehow connected to the condition for successful performance of a speech act seems right. As noted, this fits well with the fact that it only shows up in asserted contexts, and that it is uncancellable in such contexts. In relation to this, an observation by Mothersill [1984: 168] is also relevant:

If someone praises a movie ..., and it then emerges that he hasn't actually seen it, we feel not just annoyed but as if we'd been lied to.

As Mothersill points out, it is insincere to make an aesthetic statement when the requisite first-hand experience is lacking. This observation indicates that it is specifically in the norms governing the sincerity of speech acts that we should look for an explanation of the acquaintance inference.

Standardly, an utterance is said to be insincere when what it communicates fails to match the speaker's attitudes (cf. Stokke [2014]). Within speech act theory, it is common to take illocutionary types to be individuated by the attitude or mental state that constitute their 'sincerity condition'. When performing an illocutionary act, the speaker is said to *express* the state in which the speaker is required to be, in order for the speech act to be sincere [Searle 1979: 4]:

A man who states, explains, asserts or claims that *p* expresses the belief that *p*; a man who promises, vows, threatens or pledges to do *a* expresses an intention to do *a*; a man who orders, commands, requests *H* to do *A* expresses a desire (*want, wish*) that *H* do *A*; a man who apologizes for doing *A* expresses a regret at having done *A*; etc. In general, in the performance of any illocutionary act with a propositional content, the speaker expresses some attitude or state Notice that this holds even if he is insincere, even if he does not have the belief, desire intention, regret or pleasure he expresses, he nonetheless expresses a belief, desire, intention, regret, or pleasure in the performance of the speech act.

⁴ Note that one of the major advocates of taste-relativism, John MacFarlane, agrees that relativism doesn't explain the acquaintance inference [2014: 143].

For example, the sincerity conditions for assertions are beliefs. One cannot felicitously make an assertion while denying being in the corresponding belief state. This is evinced by Moore's paradox:

(18) ?? The cat is on the mat, but I don't believe that the cat is on the mat.

Representing oneself as being in the belief state—namely, expressing that state—is a condition for the felicity of the speech act.

The positive proposal of this paper is that aesthetic statements belong to the family of illocutionary act types that Searle calls *expressives*, which have typically positive and negative attitudes as their sincerity conditions [Searle and Vanderveeken 1985: 211]. Paradigmatic examples of such speech acts are apologising and thanking, by which the speaker expresses regret and gratefulness, respectively. In relation to aesthetic statements like (1)–(3), the idea is that these serve to express distinctively affective states. When making a statement like any of (1)–(3), you are voicing an affective attitude in relation to the assessed object. For instance, the sincerity condition for calling something 'tasty' would be the state of appreciating the taste of it.⁵ To call something 'tasty' is to express one's liking of its taste, analogously to how assertions express beliefs.

On this suggestion, the acquaintance inference is explained analogously to the explanation invoking the knowledge norm. Making an aesthetic statement while denying that you are acquainted with the object is tantamount to explicitly violating a felicity condition of the speech act, since (and this is the heart of the matter) *there is no way of being in the state expressed by the speech act if you aren't acquainted with the object*. The mental states expressed by (1)–(3) are such that they can only be acquired through acquaintance. That is why (1b)–(3b) are infelicitous. They make violations of the sincerity conditions of the speech acts explicit, analogously to how the infelicity of a Moorean assertion like (18) is explained in this framework as an explicit violation of the speech act's sincerity conditions.

Someone might want to protest that the given account is more of a stipulation than an explanation. The explanatory burden rests on the claim that it is not possible to be in the affective states that are allegedly expressed by these utterances, without having first-hand experience of the objects. But what *independent* reasons do we have to believe that claim? As noted, it makes perfect sense to believe something about objects without having had first-hand experience of them. Why should this kind of affective state be any different in this regard? This objection has a straightforward reply. Consider these:

(19) I love this novel.

(20) I appreciate the taste of lobster rolls at *Neptune Oyster*.

(21) I adore St Mark's basilica.

These statements are in some ways similar to (1)–(3), but they differ in that they make explicit reference to a kind of affective, object oriented, mental state.⁶ Importantly, (19)–(21) are also odd when combined with statements to the effect that you are not

⁵ In section 6, I say more about the nature of these states.

⁶ The claim is not that it is exactly these states that are expressed by (1)–(3). The claim is that aesthetic statements express states belonging to the *family* of affective object-oriented states. See further discussion in section 6.

acquainted with the object. It does not make sense to love, adore, or detest the content of a book, the taste of lobster rolls, or the visual qualities of a building, without having first-hand experience of them.⁷ Given that these are instance of the types of mental state expressed by evaluative aesthetic statements, it is to be expected that such statements are infelicitous when the lack of first-hand experience is made explicit.

Another plausible feature of this account is that it gives the same explanation of why it is active in, on the one hand, cases like (1)–(3), and, on the other hand, cases like (19)–(21). In the former cases, it is active since statements like these perform expressive speech acts, the sincerity conditions of which requires acquaintance. In the latter cases, it is active since these statements make explicit reference to the same kind of affective mental states that are expressed by (1)–(3). In contrast, alternative explanations of the acquaintance inference, like appeals to knowledge, will have to give a different explanation for cases like (19)–(21). Since no properties of the objects are involved in statements like (19)–(21), an adherent of the epistemic explanation cannot say that reference to aesthetic properties is what activates the acquaintance inference in these cases.

There is another datum relating to statements like (19)–(21) that lends support to the expressive speech act view. It is a well-known fact that many speech acts can be indirectly performed by explicitly referring to their sincerity condition [Searle 1975; Levinson 1983: 264ff]. For instance, one can order someone to close the door by saying

(22) I want you to close the door.

Similarly, you can ask someone what time it is by saying

(23) I wonder what time it is.

Wanting that *p* and wondering whether *p* are the sincerity conditions for requests and questions, respectively.

If the expressive speech acts view is correct, it should be possible to perform the speech acts performed by statements like (1)–(3) by explicitly referring to their sincerity conditions, in the same way as utterances of (22) and (23) in most contexts constitute a request and a question, respectively. This prediction is borne out, at least for taste predicates. Despite their differences in meaning, (24) and (25) do seem to make roughly the same move in the language game in many contexts:

(24) These lobster rolls are tasty.

(25) I like the taste of these lobster rolls!

If the expressive speech act view is correct, a statement like (25) performs the same illocutionary act as (24) does, by making it explicit that the speaker is in the state that constitutes the sincerity condition of (24), similarly to the relationship between (22) and

⁷ That mental states such as appreciating a painting require first-hand experience has been noted by, among others, Budd [2003: 392]. Whiting [2015] argues that it is possible but *not rational* to be in such states without acquaintance. I will stick to the ‘not possible’ formulation in this paper, but a similar story could be told if Whiting is right.

an explicit request, and between (23) and an explicit question. This diagnosis has intuitive plausibility.

6. What Kind of Mental States?

I have referred to the mental states allegedly expressed by aesthetic statements as ‘affective’, and I have exemplified what I mean by this, by pointing to such states as liking, disliking, and loving. This section expands on the nature of the states in question.

First, note that one should not take ‘affective’ here to mean that the states in question must be occurrent. It makes perfect sense to say of a person that she likes lobster rolls even though she is not in any affective occurrent state at all. One can truthfully ascribe states such as loving, hating, and liking to sleeping persons. Yet it is natural to think of love and hate as affective states. The fact that one can make assertions like (1)–(3) without representing oneself as being in an occurrent state, therefore, does not speak against the theory at hand. Standing states can be affective.

Another issue concerns the fineness-of-grain of the mental states in question. The point of comparison so far has been with fairly generic states like love and hate, approval and disapproval. But there is an abundance of aesthetic terms, like ‘dynamic’, ‘sombre’, ‘delicate’, ‘serene’, just to take a few from Frank Sibley’s famous list [1959]. It does not seem adequate to say that all of these express states on a one-dimensional scale, like approval and disapproval. More plausibly, the state of finding something elegant is phenomenologically distinct from the state of finding something beautiful or sombre, in a way that is not reducible to a quantitative difference. The exact nature of each and every one of these states is not something that a theory like the current one is in a position to explain. What is important is the general hypothesis that they belong to the family of affective object-oriented states, and as such exhibit a similar experience requirement as does loving, hating, and liking the taste, sound, or look of things.

Relating to this, our theory predicts that combining aesthetic statements with denial of being in an allegedly corresponding affective state should give rise to Moorean infelicity. For taste predicates, this prediction is clearly borne out. Calling something delicious while denying that one appreciates its taste is infelicitous:

(26) ?? Broccoli is delicious but I don’t like it [Woods 2014: 8].

With aesthetic predicates proper, the case is less clear, presumably since the states themselves are less easy to identify. Again, the present proposal is not wedded to a reductive theory according to which all of the states expressed by aesthetic statements can be located on, for instance, the approval/disapproval scale. With that said, with aesthetics predicates that carry a very salient positive or negative valence, and therefore are easily located on a scale between the positive and negative, you do get Moorean infelicity:

(27) ?? St Mark’s basilica is incredibly beautiful, but I don’t in any way appreciate the way that it looks.

The fact that (27) is infelicitous indicates that appreciating a visual object’s look is at least part of what it is to find the object to be beautiful. This is not to say that the state in question is exhausted by the appreciation gloss.

Not all aesthetic predicates carry even a light positive or negative valence:

(28) The ending of that movie is overwhelmingly sad.

It could be argued that (28) triggers the acquaintance inference, but that a movie's having a sad ending has no immediate implications for the movie's overall quality. This is compatible with our theory: while lacking positive or negative flavour, the state of mind expressed by (28) can still be affective, and by virtue of this can trigger the acquaintance inference for that statement.

7. Semantics or Pragmatics?

Is the expressive speech act view best taken as a view of the conventional meaning of aesthetic terms, or rather as solely a view of the pragmatics of the statements in question? This is a difficult question, partly because the notion of illocutionary force has always been standing with one leg on each side of the semantic/pragmatic divide. The major reason for believing that the illocutionary force in question is semantically encoded is that the acquaintance inference resists cancellation. If the acquaintance inference was purely pragmatic, one would expect the denial of first-hand experience to force alternative interpretations of the utterances that did not require acquaintance, instead of giving rise to infelicity. Moreover, as already noticed, it is not clear which conversational principles would give rise to the pragmatic content in question.

An interesting point of comparison is provided by explicit performatives like

(29) I promise to go to the party.

Theorists have argued for decades about whether the non-assertoric illocutionary force of such statements should be understood as conventionally encoded in the 'I promise', or whether it can be explained through pragmatics. Similarly to the current proposal about aesthetic statements, the non-assertoric illocutionary force of explicit performatives is only present in unembedded clauses, where it appears to be uncancellable.

A point in favour of the pragmatic view is that there are some occurrences of aesthetic predicates in asserted contexts that don't trigger the acquaintance inference. One class of such occurrences contains so-called 'exocentric' uses of taste predicates [Lasersohn 2005: 672]:

(30) Mary: How did Bill like the rides?

John: Well, the merry-go-round was fun, but the water slide was a little too scary.

In this conversation, John is naturally interpreted as saying that Bill found the merry-go-round fun and the waterslide too scary. John's statement can be sincere without him having experienced the attractions himself. Another kind of example of aesthetic predicates occurring in asserted contexts without triggering the acquaintance inference is embeddings under future tense operators, like 'will' [Klecha 2014]:

(31) The next Star Wars movie will be lousy.

This does not indicate that the speaker has watched the movie. So, there is a limited class of examples of asserted occurrences of aesthetic predicates that do not trigger the acquaintance inference. This may be taken as evidence against there being something in the lexical meaning of these words that is directly responsible for that inference.

8. Metanormative Consequences

In maintaining that (unembedded) evaluative aesthetic statements express affective attitudes, the expressive speech act view vindicates a main tenet of metanormative expressivism. Several theorists take the claim that evaluative discourse expresses non-cognitive attitudes *in the same way* as non-evaluative vocabulary expresses beliefs to be a constitutive feature of expressivism [Schroeder 2008: 3; Woods 2014]. The speech act theory that I have argued for here makes good on that analogy.⁸

However, the argument offered here is partly different from how expressivist positions are normally motivated. In metaethics, expressivism tends to be motivated to a large extent by ontological parsimony, and the claim that moral thought is internally motivating whereas pure beliefs are not. The kind of expressivism offered here is motivated solely by linguistic concerns. The expressive speech act view gives the best explanation of what is special about aesthetic *discourse*. No view about the ontological status of aesthetic properties follows directly from it.

Still, one might want to know where the expressive speech act view stands in relation to classical disputes in metanormative theory. Can it be developed in way that vindicates the kind of anti-realism with which expressivism is traditionally associated? Samuel Cain Todd [2004] claims that aesthetic judgements are necessarily connected to appreciation, and that this is what explains the experience requirement on aesthetic discourse. His view is broadly similar to the explanation of the acquaintance inference offered here. Todd furthermore claims that this constitutes a good argument for anti-realism ('quasi-realism', in Simon Blackburn's [1993] sense).

While I am generally sympathetic to this view, there are caveats. Contemporary anti-realist expressivists don't deny that there is such a thing as believing that torture is wrong. Instead, they argue for a theory of belief ascriptions according to which non-cognitive states of sufficient complexity can count as beliefs. As Allan Gibbard [2013: 183] puts it,

I genuinely believe that pain is bad, and my expressivist theory, filled out, explains what believing this consists in.

So, according to this popular strand of expressivism, the mental state attributed by a statement like

(32) Holmes believes that pain is bad.

is really the non-cognitive mental state *expressed* by this statement:

(33) Pain is bad.

⁸ This is a necessary condition for expressivism. Is it sufficient? In so far as hybrid expressivism is counted as expressivism, it is. If one thinks of expressivism as wedded to anti-realism, it is a necessary but not sufficient condition for a view to be expressivist.

A problem for the corresponding theory about aesthetic vocabulary is that belief states involving aesthetic concepts don't require acquaintance. As already noticed, it is not problematic to *believe* that a movie is good without having watched it. This makes it unlikely that the beliefs states attributed by statements like (11) and (12) are, as expressivists claim, identical to the sort of affective states that are allegedly expressed by (1)–(3). This is a unique problem for the theorist who argues for anti-realist expressivism from the acquaintance inference. All anti-realist expressivists owe us a story about what is going on when their target vocabulary is embedded under attitude verbs that are seemingly cognitive, like 'believes' and 'knows'. The dominant expressivist answer is that these are really covert ascriptions of non-cognitive states. But since, in the present case, the non-cognitive states require experience, whereas the belief states attributed by (11) and (12) do not, it is implausible that such belief states really are affective in nature. The standard anti-realist expressivist account of cognitive attitude embeddings is therefore not available to the expressivist at hand. She must give a different account of what goes on in such constructions. It remains to be seen whether she can give one that is compatible with aesthetic discourse's being ontologically uncommitted, in the sense that such an expressivist would want.

Another way to develop the account offered here would be along the lines of hybrid expressivism. According to such a theory, there would be two illocutionary forces involved in statements like (1)–(3). In addition to the expressive illocutionary force, such statements also involve straightforward assertions that ascribe properties to objects. This would be an adoption of the expressive speech act view along cognitivist lines. While nothing of what I have argued here rules out such a view, it faces some questions of its own. What characteristics of these properties make them apt to refer to, while simultaneously expressing, attitudes? Is it possible to make an assertion with the same content as (1)–(3) without expressing the corresponding attitude? If the answer is 'no', then why not? If the answer is 'yes', then which assertions are those?


9. Conclusion

I have proposed that the experience requirement on aesthetic discourse is explained by the thesis that such statements express affective states of mind. One cannot be in such states without having had first-hand experience. This explanation of the phenomenon, I've argued, fits well with the linguistic data, as well as with the conditions for the sincerity of aesthetic statements.

This explanation vindicates the expressivist idea that aesthetic discourse is essentially affective. On the other hand, I have pointed out that it makes perfect sense to attribute aesthetic belief states to individuals who lack first-hand experience of the object. This constitutes a problem for the anti-realist expressivist's contention that such belief states really are covert affective states. The acquaintance inference supports a central tenet of aesthetic expressivism, while it also constitutes a problem for the contemporary expressivist view of the nature of evaluative belief ascriptions.⁹

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