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Considerations from Wittgenstein,
Language, and Music*

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Aesthetic Concepts, Perceptual Learning, and Linguistic Enculturation: Considerations from Wittgenstein, Language, and Music

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Abstract Aesthetic non-cognitivists deny that aesthetic statements express genuinely aesthetic beliefs and instead hold that they work primarily to express something non-cognitive, such as attitudes of approval or disapproval, or desire. Non-cognitivists deny that aesthetic statements express aesthetic beliefs because they deny that there are aesthetic features in the world for aesthetic beliefs to represent. Their assumption, shared by scientists and theorists of mind alike, was that language-users possess cognitive mechanisms with which to objectively grasp abstract rules fixed independently of human responses, and that cognizers are thereby capable of grasping rules for the correct application of aesthetic concepts without relying on evaluation or enculturation. However, in this article I use Wittgenstein's rule-following considerations to argue that psychological theories grounded upon this so-called objective model of rule-following fail to adequately account for concept acquisition and mastery. I argue that this is because linguistic enculturation, and the perceptual learning that's often involved, influences and enables the mastery of aesthetic concepts. I argue that part of what's involved in *speaking* aesthetically is to belong to a cultural practice of *making sense* of things aesthetically, and that it's within a socio-linguistic community, and that community's practices, that such aesthetic sense can be made intelligible.

Keywords Aesthetic Concepts · Perceptual Learning · Imagination · Music · Wittgenstein

Cognitivist and Non-Cognitivist Accounts of Aesthetic Cognition

Cognitivism with respect to aesthetics is traditionally understood as the view that aesthetic statements express aesthetic beliefs the propositional content of which are

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Aesthetic concepts, perceptual learning, and linguistic enculturation: Considerations from Wittgenstein, language, and music

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Abstract: Aesthetic non-cognitivists deny that aesthetic statements express genuinely aesthetic beliefs and instead hold that they work primarily to express something non-cognitive, such as attitudes of approval or disapproval, or desire. Non-cognitivists deny that aesthetic statements express aesthetic beliefs because they deny that there are aesthetic features in the world for aesthetic beliefs to represent. Their assumption, shared by scientists and theorists of mind alike, was that language-users possess cognitive mechanisms with which to objectively grasp abstract rules fixed independently of human responses, and that cognizers are thereby capable of grasping rules for the correct application of aesthetic concepts without relying on evaluation or enculturation. However, in this article I use Wittgenstein's rule-following considerations to argue that psychological theories grounded upon this so-called objective model of rule-following fail to adequately account for concept acquisition and mastery. I argue that this is because linguistic enculturation, and the perceptual learning that's often involved, influences and enables the mastery of aesthetic concepts. I argue that part of what's involved in *speaking* aesthetically is to belong to a cultural practice of *making sense* of things aesthetically, and that it's within a socio-linguistic community, and that community's practices, that such aesthetic sense can be made intelligible.

Keywords Aesthetic Concepts; Perceptual Learning; Imagination; Music; Wittgenstein

1. Cognitivist and non-cognitivist accounts of aesthetic cognition

Cognitivism with respect to aesthetics is traditionally understood as the view that aesthetic statements express aesthetic beliefs the propositional content of which are [END PAGE 90] truth-evaluable. This view, call it *aesthetic cognitivism*, claims that the aesthetic beliefs expressed in aesthetic statements are genuine beliefs that are capable of being implemented in cognitive operations. So aesthetic cognitivism asserts the authenticity of aesthetic cognitions. This view is most attractive to realists who claim that aesthetic statements express truth-evaluable beliefs at least some of which are true by virtue of representing aesthetic features or properties that can be said to genuinely obtain in the

world.¹ In contrast, non-cognitivism with respect to aesthetics is traditionally understood as the view that aesthetic statements do not express aesthetic *beliefs*, but rather work primarily to express something non-cognitive, such as attitudes of approval or disapproval, or desire. This view, call it *aesthetic non-cognitivism*, claims that there are no genuinely *aesthetic* beliefs and so none that could be implemented in cognitive operations. To be clear, aesthetic non-cognitivists don't deny that aesthetic statements can *cause* cognitive *effects* in cognizers. Rather, they deny that aesthetic statements have cognitive *content*. The aesthetic non-cognitivist holds of aesthetic statements in general, as Rorty (1987) does about metaphor in particular, that they are like "poetry which send shivers down our spine, non-sentential phrases which reverberate endlessly, chang[ing] our selves and our patterns of action" (pp. 285) which, however, "do not (literally) *tell* us anything, but [...] make us notice things [...] They do not have cognitive content, but they are responsible for a lot of cognitions" (pp. 290). Aesthetic non-cognitivists typically assume that there can be no genuinely aesthetic beliefs because they assume that there are no aesthetic features that genuinely obtain in the world for such beliefs to truth-aptly track. Accordingly, the non-cognitivist thinks that we should forego talk of aesthetic statements expressing beliefs with aesthetic *content* and more accurately speak of the feelings and cognitions that aesthetic statements are capable of *causing*.

2. Aesthetic concepts, and metaphysical conceptions of mind and world

Emotivism is an early non-cognitivist position that Ayer (1952) proposed in *Language, Truth, and Logic*. Ayer's emotivist account held that "in so far as statements of value [...] are not scientific, they are not in the literal sense significant, but are simply expressions of emotion which can be neither true or false" (1952; pp. 102-103). Since Ayer held that only naturalistic scientific statements represent the world as it genuinely is, and since he held that evaluative statements such as those of aesthetics are not naturalistic scientific statements, Ayer concluded that such statements are not "significant propositions" suitable for truth-value. It is because aesthetic non-cognitivists like Ayer assume that there are no aesthetic features in the world that they deny that a belief can have as its content an aesthetic proposition representing how the world genuinely is.

Aesthetic non-cognitivists are typically motivated by a metaphysics that takes for granted what Williams calls the "absolute conception" of the world. Williams (1985) [END PAGE 91] explains this conception of the world as "consisting of nonperspectival materials available to any adequate investigator, of whatever constitution" which distinguishes "the world as it is independent of our experience" from "the world as it seems to us" (pp. 139-140). The absolute conception is

¹ Aesthetic cognitivists are normally aesthetic realists, but they need not be. For instance, the error theorist Mackie (1977) suggests that, although aesthetic statements may express truth-evaluable beliefs, aesthetic statements would all be systematically false because the world as it genuinely is does not contain aesthetic features. So Mackie is an aesthetic cognitivist yet an aesthetic anti-realist.

typically considered to be an “objective” account of the world precisely because it factors out features represented in terms of “the world as it seems to us” and leaves in its account only those features that are considered fundamentally primary by virtue of describing the world as it is independently of us. On this view, features represented in terms of “the world as it seems to us” do not provide us with genuine representations of how the world is, since these features aren’t represented as obtaining in the world as it is anyway, independently of us. Resultantly, the absolute conception in its purest form denies the genuineness of evaluative features in general and aesthetic features in particular; as Hume popularly asserted, “beauty is no quality in things themselves [but] exists merely in the mind which contemplates them” (2007; pp. 234-235). On this view, accordingly, if beliefs are to track genuine features, they are to track those features articulated in descriptive naturalistic concepts, not aesthetic ones. And the acceptance of metaphysical commitments like this absolute conception of the world often motivates theorists of mind to assume that there are no aesthetic features in the world to be truth-conditionally represented as the content of aesthetic beliefs.

As the absolute conception sharply distinguishes “the world as it is independent of our experience” from “the world as it seems to us,” adherents of this view also typically draw a sharp distinction between belief states with cognitive content from non-cognitive affective states. The popular conception, which is again well stated by Hume, is that the mind is bifurcated into two distinct faculties: “reason” on one side of the divide and “taste” or “sentiment” on the other. In *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, for instance, Hume articulates the distinction as follows:

The distinct boundaries and offices of *reason* and of *taste* are easily ascertained. The former conveys the knowledge of truth and falsehood: The latter gives the sentiment of beauty and deformity, vice and virtue. The one discovers objects, as they really stand in nature, without addition or diminution: The other has a productive faculty, and gilding or staining all natural objects with the colours, borrowed from internal sentiments, raises, in a manner, a new creation. (1998a; appx. 1.21)

Hume further suggests that reason involves “judgment of truth and falsehood, [where] they should be the same to every rational intelligent being” (1998a; pp. 74). In line with the absolute conception, it is presumably because “reason discovers objects, as they really stand in nature” that reason involves truth-evaluable judgments that “should be the same to every rational intelligent being.” This bifurcated conception of mind holds that the content of cognitive belief states are such that their implementation in thought and chains of inferences are “available to any adequate investigator, of whatever constitution,” and this conception is often relied upon to account for the fact that different

cognizers can hold beliefs with the same propositional content and can similarly operate over such content in processes of reasoning about the world. In other words, the best explanation for the fact that our judgments converge is that our judgments represent how things genuinely are (Williams, 1985). **[END PAGE 92]**

This bifurcated conception of mind further suggests that the faculty of reason is distinct from the faculty of “sentiment,” which involves “the particular fabric and [sentimental] constitution of the human species” (Hume, 1998a; pp. 74). Since this conception holds that truth-conditional beliefs are operative within the domain of reason alone and that the faculty of reason is fundamentally distinct from that of sentiment, this conception assumes that non-cognitive affective states are not themselves capable of truth-aptly representing the world or disclosing its features (Hume, 1998b). This conception assumes that affective or evaluative states are non-cognitive and so are thereby devoid of a propositional content that could be implemented as the mental content of different cognizers; non-cognitive states such as *desire* are assumed to merely present “the world as it seems to us” and in some sense only *accompany* genuinely cognitive operations. Thus, this bifurcated conception of mind rules out the possibility that our sentimental nature can itself “in some way [be] percipient, or at least as [being capable of] expanding our sensitivity to how things [genuinely] are” (McDowell, 1981; p. 143). As Hume (2007) expresses the view in *Of the Standard of Taste*:

The difference, it is said, is very wide between [cognitive] judgment and [non-cognitive] sentiment. All sentiment is right; because sentiment has a reference to nothing beyond itself, and is always real, whenever a man is conscious of it. But all determinations of the understanding are not right; because they have a reference to something beyond themselves, to wit, real matter of fact; and are not always conformable to that standard. Among a thousand different opinions which different men may entertain of the same subject, there is one, and but one, that is just and true: and the only difficulty is to fix and ascertain it. On the contrary, a thousand different sentiments, excited by the same object, are all right; because no sentiment represents what is really in the object. (pp. 234)

However, as Ayer and other non-cognitivists have realized, the acceptance of such a view results in the concession that genuine disagreement over aesthetic and other evaluative issues, such as those of morality,² are impossible.³ If aesthetic concepts are only “pseudo-concepts” as the non-

² For an analysis of moral terms (such as *courage*) that is consistent with the arguments presented in this article, see Croom (2010).

³ The intimate connection between our aesthetic and moral nature as human beings has been stressed at least since the time of Shaftesbury (1711), who wrote in *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* that “*beauty and*

cognitivist claims, then they have no genuine propositional content with which to contribute to a thought. And if aesthetic statements do not express genuine truth-conditional, propositional thoughts but mere emotive vocalizations, then they are thereby unsuitable to function as content capable of implementation in chains of reasoning and other cognitive operations. They also make it impossible for interlocutors to genuinely agree or disagree over propositions in which those “pseudo-concepts” occur. **[END PAGE 93]**

Most scholars have been unwilling to accept the conclusion that it is impossible to reason with evaluative concepts and genuinely disagree over the propositions in which they occur; as Kant distinguished in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, an aesthetic judgment of what is “beautiful” differs fundamentally from a report of what is only “agreeable (to me)” (2000; §7).⁴ Indeed, accounting for the possibility of both legitimate disagreement over, and valid reasoning with, evaluative statements is something we expect from a successful account of evaluative statements (Stevenson, 1937).

Resultantly, it has been popularly suggested that the content of evaluative concepts are not *exclusively* emotive or evaluative. Rather, evaluative concepts such as those of aesthetics also contain sufficient descriptive content such that we can reason with and genuinely disagree over the propositions in which they occur. The suggestion is that aesthetic concepts must have enough descriptive content – must, at least to some extent, truth-conditionally represent how the world is – such that they can be implemented in inferences about the world and in thoughts that yield a truth-conditional representation of how the world is. For instance, Hare (1970) argues that the term *good* is composed of both an evaluative and descriptive meaning (pp. 118-119). Hare further argues that, “although with ‘good’ the evaluative meaning is primary, there are other words in which the evaluative meaning is secondary to the descriptive. Such words are [for example] ‘tidy’ and ‘industrious’” (1970; pp. 121). The concepts *tidy* and *industrious*, which Hare points out, are typically called *thick concepts*. Such concepts are characterized as “hold[ing] together a property and an attitude [...] or, as it is also sometimes put, description and evaluation” (Dancy, 1996; p. 263). Typical examples that are particularly prominent in aesthetic judgments might include: *fat* (Blackburn, 1992), *shameful*, *lewd* (Gibbard, 1992), *treacherous*, *honest* (Blomberg, 2007), *courageous*, *delicate*, and many other aesthetic concepts (Burton, 1992). For instance, the aesthetic concept *delicate* is typically conceived as including both description and evaluation. *Delicate* is considered descriptive in that it is normally applied to the

good are still the same” (1999; p. 327, original emphasis). For an excellent discussion of the history of aesthetic thought, including a discussion concerning the connection between art and morality, see Guyer (2005).

⁴ Even Hume seems to acknowledge this in *Of the Standard of Taste* when he writes that “certain terms in every language which import [...] praise; [are such that] all men that use the same tongue must agree in their application of them” (pp. 231-232). Admittedly, Hume’s analysis is somewhat complex and is not the central focus of this essay; for an informative analysis of Hume on aesthetics, see Guyer (2005), especially chapter 2. Here I simply use Hume for the purposes of illustrating a line of thought in aesthetics, and thus it may be more accurate to call the corresponding line presented here a “Humean” one, rather than one endorsed wholeheartedly and in detail by Hume himself.

same types of descriptive items, e.g. to an object the characteristics of which “may involve small size, pale colors, [and] fragility” (Burton, 1992; p. 30),⁵ and it is by virtue of this descriptive component that aesthetic concepts are typically considered *genuine* concepts. Yet *delicate* is considered evaluative in that it is normally indicative of an evaluative pro-attitude, and it is by virtue of this evaluative component that aesthetic concepts are typically considered *aesthetic* concepts. That is, aesthetic non-cognitivists typically suggest that if aesthetic concepts lacked description then we could not genuinely *disagree* over the statements in which they occur, and if aesthetic concepts lacked [END PAGE 94] evaluation then there would be no *aesthetic* statements over which to disagree. So the aesthetic concept *delicate* presumably involves both description and evaluation, for example, a pro-attitude towards objects that are small, pale, and fragile.⁶

3. Aesthetic concepts and the disentangling manoeuvre

In *Non-Cognitivism and Rule Following*, McDowell nicely articulates the non-cognitivist account of aesthetic concepts. As McDowell writes:

when we ascribe value to something, what is actually happening can be disentangled into two components. Competence with an evaluative concept involves, first, a sensitivity to an aspect of the world as it really is [...] and second, a propensity to a certain [non-cognitive] attitude [...] from which items in the world seem to be endowed with the value in question [...] so] in making value judgments, [such as aesthetic judgments, an agent] register[s] the presence in objects of some property they authentically have, but enrich their conception of this property with the reflection of an [aesthetic] attitude. (1981; pp. 143-144)

Gibbard offers an example of how an evaluative concept might be applied, which will be helpful here. Gibbard, in describing how a foreign tribe – the Kumi – apply their moral concept *gopa*, explains their application procedure as consisting of two stages: “[first] they observe an act they know to be the killing of an outgroup member in the face of danger. They conclude ‘This act is *gopa*’. Then they further conclude, ‘Let us glory in this act!’” (1992; p. 268). According to Gibbard, the Kumi first cognitively track genuine descriptive features (the killing of an out-group member in the face of danger) and then respond to these genuine features with an evaluation (a positive

⁵ What is important here is the point that *delicate* is descriptive in that it normally applies to the same type of descriptive items; the particular descriptive example chosen here is inessential to my general point and may be substituted for another description that the reader finds more apt. But the point remains that *delicate* is descriptive in that it normally applies to *those* same types of descriptive items.

⁶ Scholars have also pointed out that slurs (e.g., racial slurs such as *chink* and sexist slurs such as *slut*) typically involve both description and evaluation as well (for instance, see Croom, 2011).

evaluation such as “how glorious!”). As this view suggests, the descriptive content of the Kumi’s cognition is distinct from their evaluative non-cognitive pro-attitude since the latter is only a response to the former. Aesthetic non-cognitivists claim that it is the descriptive content of the aesthetic concept that determines its correct application, because it is by virtue of its description alone that the aesthetic concept is applied to the same type of descriptive things. In other words, aesthetic non-cognitivists claim that aesthetic concepts have descriptive *shape* in that the concept is shaped by description. They further claim that the evaluative component is distinct from the descriptive and so does not determine the aesthetic concept’s shape (Williams, 1985). So on this view, one does not have genuinely aesthetic cognitions, but rather only genuinely descriptive cognitions with so-called aesthetic or affective responses. Aesthetic non-cognitivists deny that evaluation is itself “in some way percipient” or capable of “expanding our sensitivity to how things are” (McDowell, 1981; pp. 143). Rather, in cases such as these the non-cognitivist thinks that the evaluation accompanies the description to express a non-cognitive attitude towards the action or object the speaker is applying the aesthetic concept to. **[END PAGE 95]**

McDowell, however, rightly questions this non-cognitivist view that aesthetic concepts can be disentangled into distinct descriptive and evaluative components. Here is his central argument against the “disentangling manoeuvre,” which I have modified to apply to aesthetic concepts in particular:

If the disentangling manoeuvre is always possible, that implies that the extension of the associated [aesthetic] term [*delicate*...] could be mastered independently of the special concerns which, in the [aesthetic] community, would show themselves in [... affective concernedness towards] actions seen as falling under the [aesthetic] concept [*delicate*]. That is: one could know which actions the [aesthetic] term [*delicate*] would be applied to [...] without even embarking on an attempt to [...] comprehend their perspective [from inside the aesthetic community]; whereas, according to the [aesthetic non-cognitivist] position I am considering, the genuine feature to which the [aesthetic] term is applied should be graspable without benefit of understanding the special perspective [from inside. That is, it should be graspable from the outside, independent of the aesthetic community’s special perspective]. (McDowell, 1981; pp. 144)

McDowell doubts that aesthetic concepts can be disentangled into distinct descriptive and evaluative components because this “disentangling manoeuvre” would require that one could master the extension of the aesthetic concept independently of understanding the concerns of individuals that evaluate items as falling under the extensions that they do. That is, in order to master the aesthetic

concept *delicate*, the aesthetic non-cognitivist claims that one need not appreciate the concern with aesthetic evaluation nor understand the practice of aesthetic evaluation at all. Rather, they claim that it is sufficient to cognitively track purely descriptive features, for instance objects with the descriptive properties of being small, pale, and fragile. Presumably, evaluations are simply post-cognitive responses and do not contribute to the shape of the aesthetic concept, and so are not required for one to have mastery over its extension.

But as McDowell has suggested, this view seems ill conceived. In order to understand an aesthetic concept such as *delicate* and gain mastery over its extension, one must do more than cognitively track purely descriptive features. As Burton (1992) rightfully points out, “not just any small size, pale colors, and fragility will do the trick. Only some small, pale, fragile things are delicate; the vast majority are merely bland” (p. 30). For instance, whereas it is typically apt to ascribe the aesthetic concept *delicate* to fresh flowers or to a youthful lover, it would typically be considered inapt to ascribe that same term to, for instance, a small piece of rotting flesh that is nonetheless small, pale, and fragile. A small piece of rotting flesh that was nonetheless small, pale, and fragile surely wouldn’t serve as an apt paradigm for the concept *delicate*, nor would providing it as an example be a useful learning condition for those first acquiring that aesthetic concept. That is to say, only *certain* small, pale, and fragile objects are aptly *delicate*, and mastery over the extension of an aesthetic concept involves *evaluating* candidates for its extension and determining which ones are *apt*. “To learn to talk about things is to learn to engage in conversation and discussion, and this means to learn what is of interest, what matters” (Weston, 2010; pp. 250), so in order to learn to talk about and classify things [END PAGE 96] aesthetically one must further be able to appreciate why certain objects, and not others, are considered the ones *apt* for falling under the extension of particular aesthetic concepts.

To use language is to enact a linguistic performance, to demonstrate linguistic technique, and to engage in a linguistic activity, and this involves being practically cognizant of what is of interest to those sharing the perspective in which that activity takes place and from which that activity makes sense. The notion of a “language game” is apt because it emphasizes this *doing* (or practical action) of language and the perspectival orientation from which particular linguistic “doings” are practically possible. I think Weston captures this point nicely when he says:

One of the attractions, no doubt, of the idea of a “language game” is to emphasize that the intelligibility of what is said depends on what has gone on before and after, just as something can only be “scoring a goal” in the context of a football game taking place and certain other moves within the game occurring. The notion of a language game locates what is said within the context of activity, and activity is part of human life. (2010; pp. 248)

Further, I submit that to even understand a vocalization or a gesture *as expressing a proposition at all* first requires evaluating it from a perspectival orientation, in particular, one from which some particular linguistic action is practically possible, sensible, and appropriate. As Weston discusses the role propositions in particular play in linguistic activity:

A “proposition” is the formulation of what someone says that can be assessed as “true” or “false,” but in order for us to understand what is said as subject to such assessment, we have to understand it as an assertion, a claim, as said by someone who is asserting or claiming. An assertion, a “proposition,” is embedded in an enquiry, and so in relation to a question. But this, of course, means that outside of that context, the conditions for asserting and so for what is said as being a “proposition” are absent. (2010; pp. 248-249)

At this point, it should now be clear what is wrong with the aesthetic non-cognitivist’s position. The non-cognitivist Blackburn (1992), for instance, has argued that “discussion, for instance of whether Pavarotti is fat↓ [where *fat* is the description and ↓ is the tone expressing a con-attitude] is nothing new from discussion of whether to feel repelled or not at his weight” (p. 297). That is, Blackburn argues that the extension of aesthetic concepts such as *fat* are determined by descriptive features alone (e.g. weight), and that an aesthetic/evaluative attitude (e.g. as carried by the tone) can be disentangled from the description, and even removed, without alteration to that concept’s shape. But as it has just been argued, an aesthetic perspective or outlook is still required in order to determine the extension of an aesthetic concept, so even the aesthetic concept *fat* cannot be determined by descriptive features alone. For instance, Jay Cutler is an IFBB professional bodybuilder 5 feet 9 inches tall with a competition weight of 274 pounds.⁷ But given the fact that he is the current (2011) Mr. Olympia (a prestigious bodybuilding title that he has won 4 times) and is frequently featured in fitness magazines, it would clearly be inapt to apply the aesthetic concept *fat* to him on the **[END PAGE 97]** basis of his weight alone. Consider also the case of voluptuous glamour models. The glamour model Nicole Austin, for instance, is 5 feet 2 inches tall and weighs 135 pounds.⁸ But as evidenced by the fact that she was featured in *Playboy* (March 2008) and many popular glamour magazines, it would clearly be inapt to apply the aesthetic concept *fat* to her despite the fact that she is comparatively heavier than less voluptuous women of her height that could not make it as glamour models. Surely one would be violating certain appropriateness conditions of linguistic convention if one ascribed the term *fat* to paradigm bodybuilders and glamour models. And if a speaker continues

⁷ Facts are taken from Jay Cutler’s personal website: <http://www.jaycutler.com/bio.php>.

⁸ Facts are taken from Nicole Austin’s personal website: <http://www.cocosworld.com/index2.html>.

to misapply an aesthetic concept in this way, she might even provide warrant for her linguistic community to identify her as incompetent or unworthy of engaging in *sensible* communication, especially with respect to aesthetic issues.

In order to account for these points, the aesthetic non-cognitivist may suggest that we should include into the very meaning of an aesthetic concept that it contain only an *appropriate* amount of certain descriptive features. But, unfortunately, this suggestion cannot work because to include into the meaning of an aesthetic concept that it contain only an appropriate amount of certain descriptive features is simply to pack an evaluative requirement into the very definition of an aesthetic concept. That is, an aesthetic perspective or outlook is still required in order to determine what e.g. *counts as an appropriate amount* of smallness, paleness, and fragileness for an object to still count as a *delicate* one. To suggest that we pack an evaluative requirement into the definition of an aesthetic concept would be to allow evaluation to *shape* that aesthetic concept, and this is a commitment that the aesthetic non-cognitivist strictly *rejects*. So such an argumentative manoeuvre remains unavailable to the aesthetic non-cognitivist.

4. Perceptual learning: Learning to perceive and evaluate in language and music

It should now be clear that only certain descriptive features are apt for aesthetic concepts such as *delicate*, and an appreciation of why certain objects and not others are apt involves more than simply tracking some pre-evaluative set of descriptive features. In order to properly evaluate objects e.g. *as delicate* requires the development of a certain sort of sensitivity and sensibility. First, it often requires the development of certain sensitivities, and the fact that human sensitivities are indeed capable of development and fine-tuning through experience has by now been well established. For instance, many empirical studies have demonstrated the process of perceptual learning in both linguistic (Kuhl, Stevens, Hayashi, Deguchi, Kiritani, & Iverson, 2006; Kuhl & Rivera-Gaxiola, 2008; Pons, Lewkowicz, Soto-Faraco, & Sebastian-Galles, 2009) and musical (Hannon & Trehub, 2005; Monson, 2007; Curtis & Bharucha, 2009; Hyde, Lerch, Norton, Forgeard, Winner, Evans, & Schlaug, 2009; Kraus, Skoe, Parbery-Clark, & Ashley, 2009; Schnupp, Nelken, & King, 2011) acquisition.⁹ As Schnupp, Nelken, and King (2011) summarize several of these findings in *Auditory Neuroscience: Making Sense of Sound*, the “maturation of the central auditory pathways is heavily influenced by sensory experience” and so “perceptual abilities also change with experience” (p. 275, 278). [END

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⁹ Perceptual learning has been demonstrated, not only in audition, but in vision as well, and has been shown to enhance perceptual abilities and behavioral performance (Goldstone, 1998) through experience-induced alteration to the routing and/or weighting of sensory inputs to decision circuitry in the brain (Gu, Liu, Fetsch, Yang, Fok, Sunkara, DeAngelis, & Angelaki, 2011; see also Chowdhury & DeAngelis, 2008; Law & Gold, 2008, 2009).

In the case of language, for instance, empirical data has shown that performance on the /r-l/ phonetic contrast is equivalent for Japanese and American infants 6 to 8 months of age. However, by the time infants are 10 to 12 months of age, the performance of American infants on the /r-l/ contrast begins to improve significantly whereas the performance of Japanese infants on the /r-l/ contrast begins to decline, which is explained by the fact that (a) infants from different cultures all share the same biological capacity for perceptual learning, and (b) infants from different cultures experience different linguistic input and so develop different sensitivities as a result of their perceptual learning capacities (Kuhl, Stevens, Hayashi, Deguchi, Kiritani, & Iverson, 2006). The difference in performance on the /r-l/ phonetic contrast between Japanese and Americans becomes even stronger as these children develop into adulthood and accumulate more experience with the particular phonetics of their linguistic culture (Zhang, Kuhl, Imada, Kotani, & Tohkura, 2005).

Recent work has shown similar results for music as well. For instance, a study by Hannon and Trehub (2005) showed that, by 12 months of age, children develop a bias for the music of their culture where they had previously not shown this bias at 6 months of age, which suggests that children become perceptually sensitive to the music exposed to them through their culture. Further, Schnupp, Nelken, and King (2011) point out that recent “[n]euroimaging studies have shown that musical training can produce structural and functional changes in the brain areas that are activated during auditory processing or when playing an instrument, particularly if training begins in early childhood” (p. 280). This acquired musical sensitivity – that is, “the education of one’s perception that accompanies musical training and experience” (Monson, 2007; p. 58) – might be transmitted in a variety of ways: for instance, it might be transmitted vertically from musically talented parents to their children, horizontally among fellow peers and band members, obliquely from music teachers and professors to students, or by frequency dependent means such as through the imitation of the majority or pop culture trends (see also Boyd & Richerson, 1985; Bharucha & Stoeckig, 1986; Bharucha & Stoeckig, 1987; Justus & Bharucha, 2001; Laland, Odling-Smee, & Feldman, 2000). But in all of the aforementioned cases, an individual’s acquired perceptual sensitivity is explained on similar grounds. In particular, empirical work by Curtis and Bharucha (2009) suggests that “the acquisition of musical regularities [occurs for the individual] by internalizing the statistical patterns in the corpus of music to which they are exposed” (p. 367) and that this acquired “knowledge of a modal system drives listener’s expectations for future musical events” (p. 365). Furthermore, since a musician’s knowledge of a modal system drives their expectations in later musical situations, and since “[e]xpectancy violations are a source of affective response to music,” this suggests that “a native listener would have a unique set of affective responses evoked by culturally established expectancy violations” (Curtis & Bharucha, 2009; p. 373-374). Thus, through musical training and perceptual learning (Schnupp, Nelken, & King, 2011; p. 280; Hyde, Lerch, Norton, Forgeard,

Winner, Evans, & Schlaug, 2009; Kraus, Skoe, Parbery-Clark, & Ashley, 2009) one incorporates traditional musical techniques into one's motor behavior and physiological repertoire for action, thereby enriching one's sensitivities to solicitations for action in musical situations (McDowell, 1998; pp. 64; de Lima, 2007; §6.3; for similar ideas relating to dance, see Hahn, 2007). Such solicitations for action are, from the perspectival orientation of the individual, experienced within a *normative* dimension in that the individual employing the musical techniques of the tradition from which they learned will experience their [END PAGE 99] musical actions as more or less correct or *apt* (Wittgenstein, 1978; pp. 11; Rietveld, 2008; p. 978-979). That is, through the rigors of training and physical-behavioral conditioning one becomes attuned to the norms of their musical tradition and develops a *feel* for the musical situation such that their musical actions and expectations are immediately and unreflectively appreciated along an evaluative dimension (see also Meyer, 1956; Steinbeis, Koelsch, & Sloboda, 2006). Accordingly, the execution of such musical actions in particular contexts is accompanied by feelings of satisfaction, improvement, or discontent (Wittgenstein, 1978; pp. 7, 13; Monson, 2007; p. 57; Rietveld, 2008; p. 978-979).

Thus, apt aesthetic evaluations by individuals can also often require the development of a certain sensibility; it often requires enculturation into a shared practice and perspective that views actions as pro or con, as worthy of praise or worthy of contempt. Through our development and enculturation into a social and linguistic practice of evaluating objects (auditory or otherwise) and appreciating certain aspects or features in those objects as salient, we learn to collect certain objects and features, but not others, together under the extension of particular aesthetic concepts. As one grows into the aesthetic community and cultivates an aesthetically sensitive perspective, appreciation, or outlook, one learns how to pick out what aptly belongs under the extension of an aesthetic concept, and how to respond to the objects grouped together by this concept in certain ways. Through a bodily, engaged directedness and normative orientation within a practice, one cultivates a "perspective," or "an intuitive, holistic principle for organizing our thoughts about some topic" (Camp, 2009; pp. 110-111). Indeed, having such a perspective, as Camp explains, is what enables us to organize our thoughts about some topic by "imposing a complex structure of relative prominence on them, so that some features stick out in our minds while others fade into the background," by imposing "certain evaluative attitudes and emotional valences on its constituent features," and "by making some features especially central to explaining others" (2009; pp. 110-111). I think Camp offers an illuminating analysis of what a perspective consists in, so it is worth quoting another one of her passages concerning perspectives in the case of perception. As Camp explains:

In the perceptual case, when we shift between perspectives, different elements in the figure are highlighted, and take on a different significance: for instance, [in the famous duck-rabbit

figure,] the duck's bill becomes the rabbit's ears. We are under no illusion that the figure itself – the arrangement of dots and lines – has changed, but its constituent elements now hang together in a different structure for us. Further, the difference in our perception is not just a matter of apprehending a new proposition: we already knew *that* the figure could be seen as a rabbit, and that those were supposed to be the ears, for instance. Rather, the difference is experiential, intuitive, and holistic. (2008; pp. 2)

Camp further explains that the exercising of a perspective can even “cause a modification of our ongoing dispositions to notice, interpret, and respond to related situations as we encounter them in reality” and “can produce [in us a] conceptual transfiguration,” that is, “get us to see the world “in a new light,” shifting our sense of what is important, what sorts of people and possibilities are out there, and how we ought to respond to them” (2009; pp. 117). Accordingly, development or **[END PAGE 100]** enculturation into a perspective enables language users to cultivate the propensities and responsive actions required to employ concepts in appropriate ways, or to develop “the receptive propensities of a subject who possesses the relevant concepts” (McDowell, 1996; pp. 237).

By now I hope to have made clear that mastery over aesthetic concepts requires more than cognitively picking out so-called natural descriptive features in the world. Rather, it requires an aesthetically sensitive perspective, an aesthetic culture and education, and an aesthetic point or purpose, and so a “person from another culture who failed to see the evaluative point of a thick [aesthetic] concept would not be able to predict local use of it on the basis of descriptive similarities alone” (Dancy, 1996; p. 263). Resultantly, one cannot master the extension of an aesthetic concept independently of evaluation and the socio-linguistic practice in which that evaluation functions. Description, considered by the aesthetic non-cognitivist as something distinct and divorceable from evaluation, is insufficient for those outside the community of aesthetic evaluators to master the extension of aesthetic concepts because aesthetic concepts have both descriptive and evaluative shape (if one insists on maintaining that strict dichotomous characterization, as the aesthetic non-cognitivist does). Therefore, evaluation is not something that can simply be “disentangled” away from the aesthetic concept.

5. Rule following, and psychologically grasping independently fixed rules

I have up to this point criticized the position of the aesthetic non-cognitivist on the basis of their flawed assumptions concerning the nature of mind, language, and world. However, at this point I would now like to focus my criticism of the aesthetic non-cognitivist on the basis of their flawed conception of how the mind works with respect to concept acquisition and application in particular. Now, it is commonly understood that in order to correctly apply a concept, aesthetic or otherwise, to

the same types of things, one must use the concept in accord with the rule for its application. Or as it is sometimes put, in order for “judgments or utterances to be intelligible as applications of a single concept to different objects, [they] must belong to a practice of going on doing the same thing” (McDowell, 1981; pp. 145). This “going on to do the same thing” is typically conceived by the aesthetic non-cognitivist as fixed by rules that determines a concept’s correct application.¹⁰ Indeed, this view is held not only by philosophers but by many contemporary psychologists and behavioral scientists alike. For instance, Marcus, Vijayan, Rao, and Vishton (1999) have argued that children as young as seven months old possess “learning mechanisms” that enable them to “extract algebra-like rules that represent relationships between placeholders (variables), such as “the first item X is the same as the third item Y,” or more generally, that “item I is the same as item J”” (p. 77-78). They further claim that **[END PAGE 101]** “infants have the ability to extract those rules rapidly from small amounts of input and to generalize those rules to novel instances” and that this provides the infant with the means for “learning about the world and attacking the problem of learning language” (Marcus, Vijayan, Rao, & Vishton, 1999; p. 79).

Such abstract rules are typically conceived as being fixed “objectively” in accord with the absolute conception, that is, “independently of the responses and reactions a propensity to which one acquires when one learns the practice [involving the rule] itself” (McDowell, 1981; pp. 146). This is often assumed because, presumably, if rules themselves were *not* fixed independently of human responses then we would be unable to account for the normativity of rules, i.e. that one’s responses can be *wrong*. So many scholars have traditionally accounted for the fixedness or objectivity of rules on the grounds that rules are fixed independently of human responses. As Gibbard says about the idea that rules might be established on the basis of human responses, “I think I get the idea of a non-objectivist model, where we see [...] judgments as a cultural artifact. But where in this model is there room for truth and falsehood? There is only a way of living” (1992; p. 269).

However, an account of the fixedness of rules does not yet provide us with an account of how we grasp and act in accord with rules. So corresponding to an account of the fixedness of rules, an advocate of this so-called objective model of rule following must further provide an account of how we grasp and act in accord with such rules. Unsurprisingly, many scholars explain our ability to grasp and act in accord with rules by positing some “special psychic mechanism that ties discussion to action” (Gibbard, 1992; p. 278). For instance, psychologists and behavioral scientists Hauser,

¹⁰ Two points should be made clear here. First, my own variety of anti-non-cognitivism (sometimes simply called “cognitivism”) need not and does not subscribe to the non-cognitivist conception of rule following outlined in this paper. This will be made especially clear in §6-7 below. Second, “cognitivists” of certain varieties may still be vulnerable to my criticisms of the non-cognitivist position insofar as they subscribe to the same fundamental conception of rule following outlined here (as the psychological grasping of an abstract and independently fixed rule).

Weiss, and Marcus (2002) report that, “Our view is that the ability to learn rules is a domain-general mechanism [... one] able to participate in a wide variety of domain-specific and domain-general computations. We suspect, in fact, that the ability to learn a rule depends on some particular (as yet undiscovered) type of neural circuit that is quite common throughout the brain” (p. B21). So on this view, it is presumably because we possess the appropriate (although admittedly “undiscovered”) psychological machinery that we can grasp rules and act in accord with them. So we have here a two-component account of rule following involving (1) the claim that there are rules fixed independently of human responses, and (2) the claim that humans possess psychological machinery with which to grasp these independently fixed rules and act in accord with them. If the objective model lacks (1), then there are no rules for humans to psychologically grasp and act in accord with. If the objective model lacks (2), then there are no means for human to grasp rules and act in accord with them.

So what scholars like Gibbard would call an objective model of rule following is successful just in case (1) and (2) are both accounted for. McDowell’s criticism of this account of rule following in *Non-Cognitivism and Rule Following*, then, is based upon using Wittgenstein’s rule following considerations to discredit (2), thereby rendering (1) suspect. McDowell (1981) clearly suggests that this is his strategy:

The [so called “objective”] picture [we are considering here] has two interlocking components: the idea of the psychological mechanism correlates with the idea that the tracks we follow are objectively there to be followed, in a way that transcends the reactions and responses of participants in our practices. **[END PAGE 102]** If the first component is suspect, the second component should be suspect too. And it is. (pp. 150)

One might conceive of an initial argument against (2) along the following lines. Imagine that a child, Smith, has correctly solved a finite set of addition problems involving numbers < 57 . After sampling Smith’s finite success with such problems, we claim that, “Smith understands the plus rule.” To account for the continuity of Smith’s behavior in these cases, we posit the rule *plus* as one that is fixed independently of the responses of Smith and other problem solvers¹¹ and we posit a

¹¹ As Wittgenstein says, “Whence the idea that the beginning of a series is a visible section of rails invisibly laid to infinity? Well, we might imagine rails instead of a rule. And infinitely long rails correspond to the unlimited applications of a rule” (1953; §218). Things are no different for the algebraic case, for as Wittgenstein notes, “Isn’t one thinking of the derivation of a series from its algebraic formula? Or at least of something analogous? – But this is where we were before. We can indeed think of more than *one* application of an algebraic formula; and while every mode of application can in turn be formulated algebraically, this, of course, does not get us any further. – The application is still a criterion of understanding” (1953; §146).

psychological mechanism in Smith by virtue of which this rule is grasped.¹² But, as this argument might go, how does positing a psychic grasp of the *plus* rule account for the continuity of Smith's behavior? For consider also the following rules:

- (1) quus: denoted by " \oplus " where $x \oplus y = x + y$, if $x, y < 57$, but $= 5$ otherwise¹³
- (2) guus: denoted by " \oplus^1 " where $x \oplus^1 y = x + y$, if $x, y < 57$, but $= 6$ otherwise
- (3) buus: denoted by " \oplus^2 " where $x \oplus^2 y = x + y$, if $x, y < 57$, but $= 7$ otherwise
- (4) tuus: denoted by " \oplus^3 " where $x \oplus^3 y = x + y$, if $x, y < 57$, but $= 8$ otherwise

Since, by hypothesis, Smith has so far only solved problems involving numbers < 57 , one might just as legitimately posit Smith as grasping *any* one of these other rules, or *infinitely many others*, to "explain" his finite behavior. Yet if any of an infinite number of rules can be used to explain his finite behavior – and human behavior, mind you, is finite – then it becomes implausible that his behavior is satisfyingly explained by positing his psychic grasp of the plus rule in particular. That is, positing such a mediating mental state based on Smith's previous behavior gets us no further in understanding how Smith's behavior will continue in the future. Or, imagine that in a new case Smith is given a problem involving numbers > 57 , for example "67 + 92." He answers "7," and *insists* that this is how the rule he had learned was to continue (e.g. he says confidently, "I *know* it! Honestly, the rule *continues like this...*"). Although Smith's response here strikes us as odd, his response is still compatible with the examples from which he learned to solve problems, which all involved numbers < 57 . Again, this suggests "that his behavior hitherto was not guided by the psychological conformation we were picturing as guiding it" and that "the pictured [END PAGE 103] state, then, always transcends any grounds there may be for postulating it" (McDowell, 1981; pp. 147). As a result, the "postulation of the mediating state is an idle intervening step; it does nothing to underwrite the confidence of our expectation" of an agent's behavior (McDowell, 1981; pp. 148). So it seems that the positing of such a psychic "grasp" does nothing to ground the continuity of Smith's (or any human agent's) behavior.

To see why the view that "grasping a rule" consists in coming to possess the right mediating mental state fails, let us review a variety of ways that it might take shape. Account 1: when we grasp a rule we acquire a mediating mental state the content of which *encodes* a descriptive procedure for how

¹² "It is as if we could grasp the whole use of the word at a stroke" (1953; §191), Wittgenstein reports from the position of his interlocutor. Wittgenstein characterizes his interlocutor by saying that, "your idea was that this *meaning the order* [in "+1"] had in its own way already taken all those steps: that in meaning it, your mind, as it were, flew ahead and took all the steps before you physically arrived at this or that one. So you were inclined to use such expressions as "The steps are *really* already taken, even before I take them in writing or in speech or in thought." And it seemed as if they were in some *unique* way predetermined, anticipated – in the way that only meaning something could anticipate reality" (1953; §188).

¹³ Kripke, 1982; p. 9.

we are to act in accord with the rule.¹⁴ Indeed, this conception of rule following is popular among certain circles of empirical scientists and theorists of the mind. For instance, some proposing ideomotor models of perception and action hold that “goal *representations* that are functional anticipations of action effects play a crucial role in action control” (Hommel, Musseler, Aschersleben, & Prinz, 2001; p. 857, my emphasis; see also Greenwald, 1970, 1972; James, 1981; Lotze, 1852; Prinz, 1987, 2002). Proponents of information-processing models also “consider the role of instructions and intentions [as essential] for the formation and implementation of task-specific cognitive dispositions, or task sets. [In other words,] What they try to explain is action planning [...] on the basis of rules” (Hommel, Musseler, Aschersleben, & Prinz, 2001; p. 859). But what exactly is encoded as the content of what is grasped? One might suggest that the content consists in a descriptive list of procedures. On this view, grasping the plus rule consists in grasping that “ $1 + 1 = 2$,” “ $1 + 2 = 3$,” “ $1 + 3 = 4$,” and so on. But it is surely not the case that in grasping a rule, its entire application somehow appears before the agent’s mind,¹⁵ because the entire application is potentially infinite and includes cases the finite agent has never yet considered. So as it stands, this view is implausible.

Maybe, then, one could adjust Account 1 to Account 2: when we grasp a rule we acquire a mediating mental state the content of which encodes (a) an *abbreviated* list of procedures - e.g. “ $1 + 1 = 2$,” “ $1 + 2 = 3$ ” - and (b) the additional procedure, expressed by *and so on*, indicating that one is to use the examples displayed in (a) as samples to continue on in the same way (Kripke, 1982; p. 10-16). Yet to tell someone to “continue the same way” is just to tell them to “continue following the rule,” so *and so on* is not helpful because the very question is *what counts as continuing the same way*. In other words, if I do not already know how to follow the rule for plus then I will not know how to continue from “ $1 + 2 = 3$ ” in the same way in accord with the plus rule, and so to tell me to continue on with the plus rule in the same way with the phrase *and so on* is of no help to me. Yet one might try to adjust (b) of Account 2 to reformulate a new Account 3 in order to avoid the circular explanation that an agent can only grasp a rule if she has already understood it in the **[END PAGE 104]** first place. Account 3: the *and so on* in Account 2 does not simply mean “continue on in the same way,” but rather contains *a further rule* providing procedures for continuing on from the first rule (Kripke, 1982; p. 17). For example, this further rule might contain the procedure: *and so on* is to be continued

¹⁴ “What is the connection effected between the sense of the words “Let’s play a game of chess” and all the rules of the game?” (1953; §197) Wittgenstein asks. “Or is it, rather, that all the rules are contained in my act of intending?” (1953; §197). See also Kripke, 1982; p. 10-22.

¹⁵ “When someone says the word “cube” to me, for example, I know what it means. But can the whole *use* of the word come before my mind when I *understand* it in this way? [...] What really comes before our mind when we *understand* a word? Isn’t it something like a picture?” (1953; §139) Wittgenstein asks. He responds, “The picture of the cube did indeed *suggest* a certain use to us, but it was also possible for me to use it differently” (1953; §139). See also Kripke, 1982; p. 22.

as “ $1 + 3 = 4$,” “ $1 + 4 = 5$,” *and so on*. But this move is also unhelpful, because it returns us right back to the problems of Accounts 1 and 2: either (1) the entire application of this further rule is to appear before the agent’s mind, or (2) this further rule contains an abbreviated portion of its application along with the procedure, expressed by *and so on*, that one is to use these abbreviated portions as samples to continue on in the same way. And we have already seen why these options are inadequate.

Since accounts 1-3 failed, one might change their approach to Account 4: when we grasp a rule we acquire a mediating mental state that *causally disposes* us to act in accord with a rule (Kripke, 1982; p. 22-37). On this view, the connection between grasping a rule and subsequently applying it is a causal one, so there is no worry of interpreting what is encoded in the rule we grasp. Since our grasp of a rule causes us to act in accord with it, the rule that “someone means is to be *read off* from his dispositions” (Kripke, 1982; p. 29). This conception of rule following is also popular among certain circles of empirical scientists and theorists of the mind. As Hommel, Musseler, Aschersleben, and Prinz (2001) explain, all sensorimotor theorists of action conceive of actions, linguistic or otherwise, as “responses triggered by stimuli. Strict versions of the approach (like classical behaviorism) claim that such reduction to stimulus conditions is a necessary and at the same time sufficient condition for a full account of action” (p. 855). But this account cannot work because if we claim that our grasp of a rule causes us to act in accord with it, then there is no possibility of our grasping a rule and *failing* to act in accord with it. Here we are either causally disposed to act in way A and so act in accord with A, or we are causally disposed to act in way B and so act in accord with B. But in either case, since the rule that “someone means is to be *read off* from his dispositions,” there is no *failing* to act in accord with a rule, e.g. failing to act in accord with A. There is just acting in accord with *some other* “rule,” e.g. acting in accord with B. So dispositional Account 4, as merely descriptive of behavioral acts, fails to account for the *normativity* of rules, i.e. that one’s responses can be *wrong*. Moreover, since Account 4 fails to provide normative criteria for correct applications of a rule that are independent of an agent’s responses, it betrays the very reason most scholars appealed to the so-called objective model of rule following in the first place; i.e. to maintain objectivity by avoiding rules that are dependent upon agent’s responses.

I have now shown that four varieties of the so-called objective model of rule following fail. In Account 4, the connection between grasping a rule and subsequently applying it was too strict. Having rules causally determine our actions does not allow for an account of their normativity. In Account 3 the connection between grasping a rule and subsequently applying it was too loose. Encoding rules with further rules made fixing on an action impossible. And Accounts 1-2 required that we understand a rule before we can grasp it, which puts the cart before the horse. The failure of these accounts shows us that the connection between grasping a rule and subsequently applying it is

not plausibly established via the mediation of that rule somehow appearing before our minds. Furthermore, even if a rule *did* appear before one's mind, we can easily imagine that what appears before the mind [END PAGE 105] of an agent that correctly applies a rule can also appear before the mind of an agent that does not correctly apply it.¹⁶ So what comes before one's mind is not what *grounds* one's grasp of a rule, even if what comes before one's mind is often *associated* with it. Thus, advocates of the so-called objective model of rule following have not adequately supported their claim (2) that humans possess psychological machinery with which to grasp independently fixed rules and to act in accord with them. And this in turn renders suspect their claim (1) that there are such independently fixed rules, the following of which is to be explained by a psychic grasp of them. Such a two-component view of rule following, by divorcing rules from the "responses and reactions a propensity to which one acquires when one learns the practice" involving the rule itself, suggests a fanciful picture of what a rule is and what it takes to act in accord with it. Upon closer inspection we find that "there is no such thing here as, so to say, a wheel that he is to catch hold of, the right machine which, once chosen, will carry him on automatically" (Wittgenstein, 1970; §304). Resultantly, we see that this view of rule following not only fails to explain how we can grasp and act in accord with rules, but also fails to suggest a realistic picture of how this is to be practically achieved by everyday, human agents. For if we consider how students actually learn rules in concrete cases, we see that what is involved is a certain normative training, education, or enculturation;¹⁷ that is, a form of normative training into a socio-cultural practice where students learn to develop a knack, technical skill, or ingrained sensibility to intelligibly act and react as others do within their practice. As Wittgenstein notes in *Lectures in Aesthetics*, "Perhaps the most important thing in connection with aesthetics is what may be called aesthetic reactions, e.g. discontent, disgust, discomfort" (1978; p. 13) which, along with the acquisition and mastery of aesthetic concepts, are developed as proper normative components of aesthetic enculturation.

¹⁶ Wittgenstein says, "it is perfectly conceivable that the formula should occur to him and that he should nevertheless not understand. "He understands" must have more to it than: the formula occurs to him. And equally, more than any of those more or less characteristic concomitant processes or manifestations of understanding" (1953; §152).

¹⁷ I quote Wittgenstein at length: "“But how can a rule teach me what I have to do at *this* point? After all, whatever I do can, on some interpretation, be made compatible with the rule.” – No, that's not what one should say. Rather, this: every interpretation hangs in the air together with what it interprets, and cannot give it any support. Interpretations by themselves do not determine meaning.

“So is whatever I do compatible with the rule?” – Let me ask this: what has the expression of a rule – say a signpost – got to do with my actions? What sort of connection obtains here? – Well, this one, for example: I have been trained to react in a particular way to this sign, and now I do so react to it.

But with this you have pointed out only a causal connection; only explained how it has come about that we now go by the signpost; not what this following-the-sign really consists in. Not so; I have further indicated that a person goes by a signpost only in so far as there is an established usage, a custom" (1953; §198).

Additionally, we do not in real cases expect a student to acquire mastery of a rule “in a flash” via a psychic grasp of all the possible instances of a rule. Rather, we expect students to progressively become better at mastering the rule as their skill develops and as their involvement, in the practice where that rule functions, is fine-tuned. Indeed, the apt contiguity of behavior exhibited by children, which Marcus, Vijayan, Rao, and Vishton (1999) thought was best explained by assuming that these children psychically grasp abstract and independently fixed rules, has been modeled by other researchers utilizing methods that do not require the positing of agents cognitively grasping such [END PAGE 106] abstract and independently fixed rules at all. For instance, Christiansen and Curtin (1999) duplicated the findings of Marcus et al.’s original study through probabilistic models, and Altmann and Dienes (1999) duplicated these same findings through neural network models. I suggest that these models provide more realistic characterizations of how language users acquire both a normative appreciation of aesthetic practices and the ability to master the aesthetic concepts that are proper components of those aesthetic practices themselves. In other words, there are still various explanatory options available to scholars that can be used to explain the learning abilities of children that do not assume that these children possess mental mechanisms with which to psychically grasp abstract rules that are fixed independently of human responses and practices. So-called objective models of rule following – which are inspired by the absolute conception insofar as they attempt to account for the fixedness of rules by divorcing them from the “responses and reactions a propensity to which one acquires when one learns the practice” involving the rule itself – are therefore problematic and offer unconvincing explanations of how language users come to master concepts in general and aesthetic concepts in particular. As McDowell rightly asserts in *Mind and World*, “the structure of the space of reasons is not constituted in splendid isolation from anything merely human. The demands of reason are essentially such that a human upbringing can open a human being’s eyes to them” (1996a; p. 92).

6. Integrating rules, culture, and nature

We saw that aesthetic non-cognitivism is typically motivated by the absolute conception, a conception of the world “consisting of nonperspectival materials available to any adequate investigator, of whatever constitution” (Williams, 1985; pp. 139-140). This conception was meant to distinguish “the world as it is independent of our experience” from “the world as it seems to us” (Williams, 1985; pp. 139-140), and aesthetic non-cognitivists accepting this bifurcated conception of the world have typically adopted a correlated bifurcated conception of the mind. That is, as the aesthetic non-cognitivist sharply distinguished “the world as it is independent of our experience” from “the world as it seems to us,” they likewise distinguish belief states with cognitive content from non-cognitive affective states. Such a bifurcated conception of mind was implicitly assumed, for

instance, in Gibbard's account of the Kumi who were thought to first cognitively track purely descriptive features (the killing of an outgroup member in the face of danger) and then respond to these features with an affect or evaluation (a positive evaluation such as "how glorious!").

Likewise, the so-called objective conception of rules has widely appealed to aesthetic non-cognitivists because they have traditionally assumed that it only makes sense to say that one correctly acts in accord with a rule if there are independently fixed rules that one is capable of psychically grasping. Accordingly, they have assumed that it only makes sense to say that one correctly applies a concept, aesthetic or otherwise, if there are independently fixed rules for the application of that concept that one is capable of psychically grasping. In other words, aesthetic non-cognitivists assume an "objective" conception of rule following in an attempt to account for the normativity of concept application; to explain how it is that an [END PAGE 107] application of a concept, aesthetic or otherwise, can go wrong. The problem with "non-objective" accounts of rules, as Gibbard expressed earlier, is that they seem unable to account for the fixedness, and so normativity, of rules. That is, one might worry that by rejecting the objective conception of rules, the Wittgensteinian analysis has led us to what Dummett has called "full-blooded conventionalism," the view that a given statement's necessity and truth "consists always in our having expressly decided to treat that very statement as unassailable" (1959; p. 329, 337, 348; See also McDowell, 1981; pp. 150-152). The worry is that because there are no independently fixed rules for us to grasp, our treating any statement as true or false must ultimately result from a *decision* of how to treat that statement. But if the truth-value of a statement is a result of our decisions, then the truth-value of any statement is as flexible as our decisions are, and in that case we can no longer account for how our decisions about the truth-value of statements can be *wrong*. The general worry is that non-objective conceptions of rules must also be non-normative ones.

One of Wittgenstein's philosophical contributions was in showing that this worry is misplaced. By bringing rules out of individual minds and into the public space of culture, he avoids the worrisome claim that it is the decisions of individuals that determines the truth-value of statements. Indeed, the very point of dismantling Accounts 1-4 in §5 was to show that our rule following ability is not suitably grounded in the mind (and *mutatis mutandis* the decisions) of individuals at all (Wittgenstein, 1974; II, §33, 70). As Wittgenstein argues in *Philosophical Investigations*, "'obeying a rule' is a practice. And to think one is obeying a rule is not to obey a rule. Hence it is not possible to obey a rule 'privately': otherwise thinking one was obeying a rule would be the same thing as obeying it" (1953; §202).

Gibbard and other aesthetic non-cognitivists that worry that non-objective conceptions of rules must also be non-normative ones have, apparently, missed this point. Rules are not "in the mind" at all, but are rather diachronically stable patterns of activity that have been shaped by the

shared sensitivities and responsive actions of the agent's involved in the communal practice in which that rule has the particular function that it does. Nor is the substance of a proposition generated purely from within a psychological engine, but rather "a "proposition" requires the context of a lived linguistic practice, where what counts as engaging in that practice determines what counts as a "question," what counts as removing it, and so what counts as an "assertion" and as the determination of "truth"" (Weston, 2010; pp. 249). Like a well-trodden path through the wilderness, a rule (for concept application, assertion, or otherwise) receives its significance in part by the history of its use, the constitution of its users, and the purpose for which they used it, while further hinting at the direction for how it should continue. A rule is a constituent path within a community-wide practice, and because of its public nature, what constitutes following in accord with a rule is not some individual's decision. So, on the one hand, insofar as rules are not already "out there" independently fixed from human response, our "going on in the same way" in accord with a rule is in fact contingent in that it depends upon facts regarding our natural and socio-cultural constitution and tendencies. As Weston suggests:

Whether he can see a point in playing the game will depend, not on it, but on whether "he is able to see any unity in his multifarious interests, activities, and relations with other men; what sort of sense he sees in his life will depend on [END PAGE 108] the nature of this unity." And his ability to make such sense depends not merely on him but "on the possibilities for making such sense which the culture in which he lives does, or does not, provide." (2010; pp. 253)

But it would be confused to think that this entails that our "going on in the same way" in accord with a rule is decidedly *arbitrary*. I suggest that it is just a contingent fact that we human beings are born into a world equipped with needs (e.g. to eat and mate, etc.), purposes to achieve (e.g. to acquire food and mates, etc.), and instinctive sensitivities (e.g. to see things as edible or mate-able, etc.) and for, presumably evolutionary (e.g., see Tooby & Cosmides, 2005), reasons, nature has it that those of us who are alive today share in our basic needs, purposes, and sentient architecture such that we can work to attain these together. It is this common rootedness in nature, need, and purpose that brings our sensitivities and responsive actions together to form the practices that we have, and we do not decide to accept the procedures of our practices anymore than we decide to accept these practices themselves: "We do not decide to accept them or reject them at all, any more than we decide to be human beings as opposed to trees. To ask whether our human practices or forms of life themselves are "correct" or "justified" is to ask whether we are "correct" or "justified" in being the sorts of things we are" (Stroud, 1965; p. 518).

Furthermore, insofar as we are to achieve the ends of our practices, the steps we take are not arbitrary. “[T]he rules aren’t arbitrary if the purpose of the game is to be achieved,” as Wittgenstein says (1974; §140; See also Stroud, 1965; p. 515). And given the fact that we share in our ways of living it is also evident that we share in the rules for living those ways. So to ask if an agent is following in accord with a rule, then, only makes sense when that agent is considered within the wider context of her community of fellow practitioners. Indeed, it is with respect to these wider communal practices that an individual’s actions are to be considered as correct or incorrect. A “person goes by [an expression of a rule, such as] a signpost only insofar as there is an established usage, a custom” (Wittgenstein, 1953; §198). That is why it is not sensible to ask how an agent, divorced from the context of practice, can follow in accord with a rule that derives its sense from within that very practice itself.

For instance, we can justify the actions we take in football and chess by appealing to the rules of football and chess, but there is no justification for the rules of football and chess themselves: these rules just are what we *call* “football” or “chess.” Even in cases where one is justifying something as academic and prototypically intellectual as mathematical calculations, at some point the procedures for justifying come to an end and we must acknowledge that these practical procedures that we have carried out just are what we call “justifying a mathematical calculation.” That is to say, it is precisely these background procedures and activities that provide the appropriate context for the justification of particular mathematical calculations to be possible. In fact, what is taken as settled under certain circumstances is partly what makes an inquiry one of a particular sort (Weston, 2010). Likewise, we can justify aesthetic judgments in particular ways, but that these ways count as justifying aesthetic judgments cannot be “justified,” because this is simply part of what we call “making aesthetic judgments.” In other words, we would only understand what is being done as “making an aesthetic judgment” if under certain circumstances some things, such as particular procedures and activities, are presumed to be settled, because it is precisely these background [END PAGE 109] procedures and activities that provide the appropriate context within which aesthetic questions can be raised and aesthetic judgments can be issued and resolved.

7. Wittgensteinian implications for non-cognitivist accounts of aesthetic cognition

Let us now review how our Wittgensteinian rule following analysis dismantles the aesthetic non-cognitivist’s account of aesthetic concepts. First, the aesthetic non-cognitivist thought that in order to apply a concept correctly, there must be some objective rule that is independent of human sensitivities and responses that determines that concept’s correct application. Further, they claimed that we can only act in accord with the rule for that concept’s correct application by cognitively grasping it. In §5 we considered four different accounts of how this “grasping” might be achieved,

but we found them all to be inadequate. So thus far the aesthetic non-cognitivist has failed to provide a convincing account of how it is that we can follow in accord with a rule for the correct application of our concepts, aesthetic or otherwise. Moreover, it was precisely this failed assumption that rules for the correct application of concepts are fixed “independently of the responses and reactions a propensity to which one acquires when one learns the practice itself” (McDowell, 1981; pp. 146) that motivated the aesthetic non-cognitivist to suppose that “any respectable evaluative concept must correspond to a classification intelligible from outside the evaluative outlook within which the concept functions” (McDowell, 1981; pp. 153). That is to say, it is because the aesthetic non-cognitivist supposes that the correct use of *concepts in general* requires that one psychically grasp an independently fixed rule for their correct application, that they also suppose that the correct use of *aesthetic concepts in particular* requires that one psychically grasp an independently fixed rule for their correct application (as the latter is a subset of the former). And it was this erroneous assumption that led the aesthetic non-cognitivist to suppose that the extension of an aesthetic concept could be mastered independently of an involved understanding of the practice of aesthetic evaluation itself. However, as the Wittgensteinian analysis has shown, it is misguided to construe rules as fixed independently of human responses. Resultantly, there need be no supposition that the correct use of concepts in general requires that one grasp an independently fixed rule for their correct application, and so there need be no supposition that the correct use of aesthetic concepts in particular requires that one grasp an independently fixed rule for their correct application either. So the Wittgensteinian analysis does not suppose that the extension of an aesthetic concept could be mastered independently of an involved understanding of the practice of aesthetic evaluation itself. Indeed, it is suggestive of the idea that it only makes sense to say of an agent that she can correctly apply an aesthetic concept when that agent is considered within the wider context of her community of fellow aesthetic evaluators. It is clear, therefore, that the Wittgensteinian analysis not only avoids the problems that the aesthetic non-cognitivist faced with respect to mastery of aesthetic concepts in §3 and with respect to rule following in §5, but also explains how these problems in §3 and §5 are to be corrected.

Since aesthetic concepts are not independent of evaluation, it also follows that aesthetic concepts do not have purely descriptive shape. Resultantly, mastery over **[END PAGE 110]** aesthetic concepts is also guided by an evaluative or affective sensitivity. But notice that this casts doubt on the aesthetic non-cognitivist’s view that (a) cognitive states with descriptive content are distinct from (b) non-cognitive affective or evaluative states, and that (b) are simply post-cognitive responses that are incapable of disclosing features of the world (Williams, 1985; pp. 141). Indeed, since mastery over aesthetic concepts requires utilizing evaluative and descriptive sensitivity in order to pick out those features that aptly belong under that concept’s extension (see §3), we have reason

to be suspicious of the aesthetic non-cognitivist's strict separation of (a) from (b) since it claimed that only (a) is capable of determining a concept's extension. In §3 we saw how this claim was problematic. So our analysis not only renders suspect the aesthetic non-cognitivist account of aesthetic concepts in particular, but their presupposed bifurcated conception of mind more generally (McDowell, 1981; pp. 143, 154-156). I agree with McDowell that this conclusion need not pose a threat to naturalism, because "we do not need to equate the very idea of nature or the natural with the idea of instantiations of concepts whose primary home is the logical space in which natural-scientific intelligibility emerges" (McDowell, 1996; pp. 236). That our conception of what is natural must be restricted in such a way would require substantive metaphysical argumentation and cannot simply be assumed.

Notice also that the non-cognitivist's conception of rules as fixed objectively and "independently of the responses and reactions a propensity to which one acquires when one learns the practice itself" (McDowell, 1981; pp. 146) was not only unable to account for the vast range of aesthetic concepts we actually use in articulating features of objects and the world as conceived by us (see §2) but also rendered suspect how one "grasps" and applies the concepts of *any* features of the world at all. By imposing the restriction that what is "objective" must be fundamentally divorced from our responses, this conception made it impossible for the world to be something graspable by us at all. The purity it sought was otherworldly, and so it is not unreasonable to suppose that we "should accept sometimes that there may be nothing better to do than explicitly appeal to a hoped-for community of human response" in actions and judgments (McDowell, 1981; pp. 153). Rather than supposing that our conceptualization of the world requires epistemic access provided by psychological mechanisms located internal to the mind, "The issue of "world" is that of the way language games [that is to say, the linguistic activities that are constituent parts of our daily, practical lives] can be said to "fit" together, to form some overall "field" of intelligibility in terms of which life can have sense" (Weston, 2010; pp. 258).

8. Aesthetic cognition and imaginative identification

One counterargument proposed by aesthetic non-cognitivists that I will discuss here is what can be called *the sufficiency of imaginative identification* challenge. Altham (1986) posed this type of challenge in the following way:

it does not seem that, in order to grasp the extension of the [aesthetic] term, one must actually share the evaluative perspective of those who use it. It would be enough to have a merely imaginative identification with their perspective [... moreover,] if a merely imaginative identification suffices, then the thought [END PAGE 111] arises that once it

has been achieved, and the [aesthetic] term grasped, a neutral equivalent can be introduced.
(pp. 278-279)

Blomberg (2007) also writes:

it is not clear what the difference is between (a) accepting the evaluation embedded in a thick [aesthetic] concept (“sharing values”), and (b) grasping the thick [aesthetic] concept’s “evaluative point” imaginatively without accepting it, where (b) cannot amount to acquiring a purely descriptive equivalent of the [aesthetic] concept. Hare’s attribution [that one must accept the evaluation embedded in the community where the aesthetic concept functions in order to master that concept’s extension] is not entirely unwarranted until Entanglers [McDowellians/Wittgensteinians] provide a clear account of this difference. (p. 72-73)

First, we should not get carried away with the idea of “imaginative” identification. It is still to be identification nonetheless. And we already saw in §3 that e.g. only *certain* objects that are small, pale, and fragile are aptly *delicate*, and that how these certain objects are to be picked out involves more than simply tracking some pre-evaluative set of descriptive features. If Smith is to master the extension of the aesthetic concept *delicate* through an “imaginative identification” with the perspective from which those objects are appropriately collected together, then the imaginings of Smith must be *appropriately constrained* such that they are in line with the perspective that other aesthetic evaluators hold *non-imaginatively*. That is, the imaginative case is parasitic on the genuine case and so not just any imaginings will enable Smith to collect just those objects or features that are apt for the extension of *delicate*. Only certain imaginative identifications will be appropriate, and as we saw in §3 and §5, determining *what counts as appropriate* here is dependent upon an aesthetic perspective or outlook. Furthermore, mastery over an aesthetic concept consists in “be[ing] able to predict applications and withholdings of it in new cases” (McDowell, 1981; pp. 144) which requires that one is capable of utilizing this aesthetic perspective or outlook in new cases in order to pick out e.g. just those objects or features that are aptly *delicate* in some new case. So, on the one hand, it was by virtue of utilizing an aesthetic perspective or outlook that one identified old instances of *delicate* objects, and on the other hand, it is by virtue of utilizing an aesthetic perspective or outlook that one can pick out just those objects that are aptly *delicate* in new cases too. Resultantly, insofar as identification of aesthetic features in both old and new cases requires an aesthetic perspective or outlook, *re-identification* of aesthetic features *as the same* aesthetic features requires an evaluative perspective or outlook too. So even if I wanted to construct a “neutral equivalent” of an aesthetic term and apply it in new cases, it is still required that I utilize an aesthetic perspective or outlook in order to identify those features in

the object to which I intend to apply the neutral term as possessing features that are *aptly similar* to those of the aesthetic term which I am trying to replace. Without utilizing an aesthetic perspective or outlook I may not be using the “neutral term” as an apt equivalent of the aesthetic term at all.

Therefore, it is unclear what this “imaginative identification” as characterized by scholars such as Altham (1986) actually consists in, and how one in this imaginative state is to determine what actions or objects **[END PAGE 112]** count as appropriate ones for the extension of an aesthetic concept without already depending upon an aesthetic perspective or outlook to do this.

However, there is something right in raising the challenge of imaginative identification. Its importance is that it brings out a question about what constitutes the difference “between (a) accepting the evaluation embedded in a thick [aesthetic] concept [...] and (b) grasping the thick [aesthetic] concept’s “evaluative point” imaginatively without accepting it” (Blomberg, 2007; p. 72-73). The difference between (a) and (b) will be best explicated by an example. Imagine Smith, a young boy that, throughout some period during his upbringing, was taught to evaluate e.g. an object’s features of smallness, paleness, and fragileness. Maybe he grew up in a tribe where such objects are highly prized in his community. Or maybe he was born into city life where such features could be useful in identifying potential mates, etc. Regardless, Smith’s training consists in being educated into a social world that *makes sense* of evaluating objects on the basis of their being small, pale, and fragile. It is likely that Smith was taught that such objects are worthy of praise and adoration, but it is possible that he was taught otherwise. Either way, Smith’s aesthetic education is still such that he has acquired a sensitivity and sensibility to see that an object’s features are such that *some aesthetic evaluation or other is called for*. One could say, regardless of the evaluative *direction* Smith’s aesthetic attitude is pointing (e.g. pro or con), it is first required that Smith has become sensitive to an evaluative or aesthetic *point* (e.g. *that* an object’s features are such that some aesthetic evaluation or other is called for). And as long as Smith acquires sensitivity to the aesthetic practice such that he can identify certain relevant features of an object as salient (e.g. as being aptly small, pale, and fragile), and so understand that some aesthetic attitude or other is called for by that object, Smith is now *capable of conceiving* that one might evaluate these features with an attitude *opposite* of his. This is an option that, although not likely to convince Smith, is at least intelligible to him. And so this is how (b) grasping the aesthetic concept’s evaluative point imaginatively without accepting it, is to be distinguished from (a) accepting the evaluation embedded in an aesthetic concept. In other words, the difference is that in (b) one must simply acquire sensitivity to an aesthetic practice such that one can identify certain relevant features of an object as salient (e.g. as being aptly small, pale, and fragile) and so understand *that* an aesthetic attitude is called for by that object, while in (a) one has further fixed on *which* direction their aesthetic evaluation points. And if one cannot make sense of some situation having an

aesthetic point at all, then that is all the same as saying that one cannot grasp the aesthetic concept's aesthetic/evaluative point imaginatively.

Although Smith is capable of conceiving of the possibility that one might evaluate features with an aesthetic attitude opposite of his, Smith, having himself learned the evaluative point for particular practical purposes, will of course find one evaluative direction most natural since this is the evaluative direction in line with the purpose for which the evaluative point was taught. For example, Smith might have been taught to evaluate an object's being aptly small, pale, and fragile positively, because such objects are those that serve a significant purpose in the kind of culture he happens to be living in. Given Smith's bio-cultural environment, and thus the sort of evaluative training he received in order to productively engage in those environments, Smith will naturally find one evaluative direction as his default. A "neutral" [END PAGE 113] evaluative direction (of which it is hard, but maybe not impossible to find genuine cases) would be an exception case because to find no evaluative direction as natural to hold would suggest that there was no strong initial motivation for which the evaluative point was learned, and in that case, the relevant aesthetic concept would have been without much purpose anyway. However, I doubt that there are genuine cases of "neutral" evaluation that are still genuinely evaluative; they are more likely to be cases of multi-directional evaluation of which the weighing of directions makes a single direction less conclusive or compelling.

9. Concluding remarks

In this article I have shown why aesthetic non-cognitivism, despite its popularity throughout philosophy, psychology, and the behavioral sciences, remains a problematic position to hold regarding aesthetic cognition. My argument towards this conclusion proceeded as follows: in §1 I outlined the cognitivist and non-cognitivist accounts of aesthetic cognition. In §2 I explained some factors motivating the aesthetic non-cognitivist's account, including their metaphysical assumptions about the mind, language, and world, and in §3 I discussed the aesthetic non-cognitivist's claim that aesthetic concepts have descriptive rather than evaluative shape and can thereby be mastered independently of evaluation and the evaluative practices that form proper parts of linguistic enculturation. Aesthetic non-cognitivists assumed that concept acquisition and mastery are possible by assuming that language users possess cognitive mechanisms with which to psychologically grasp abstract rules – rules that are fixed independently of human responses – that determine a concept's correct application. By positing a cognitive mechanism with which to "objectively" grasp these abstract rules, aesthetic non-cognitivists argued that cognizers are thereby capable of grasping rules for the correct application of aesthetic concepts without needing to rely on enculturation. In §4, I discussed recent empirical work on perceptual learning in language and music acquisition that renders the aesthetic non-cognitivist's general position suspect. Then, in §5-7, I discussed several variations

of the non-cognitivist's objective conception of rules and rule following, and then used Wittgenstein's rule following considerations to explain why they were implausible. I then suggested other more plausible models as alternatives. Finally, in §8, I considered a counterargument that suggests that one can master an aesthetic concept independently of an evaluative form of linguistic enculturation by means of imaginatively identifying with the perspective in which such enculturation takes place. I ended the discussion by concluding that such counterarguments remain unconvincing. The conclusion that follows from the analysis provided in this article is that aesthetic non-cognitivism should be rejected because we have good reason to believe that enculturation *does* influence and enable the mastery of aesthetic concepts. Part of what's involved in *speaking* aesthetically is to belong to a cultural practice of *making sense* of things aesthetically. And it is within a socio-linguistic community, along with that community's practices, that such aesthetic sense can be made intelligible.

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