

## Dubious Pleasures

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*Abstract: My aim is to discuss the impact of higher-order evidence on aesthetic appreciation. I suggest that this impact is different with respect to aesthetic beliefs and with respect to aesthetic affective attitudes (such as enjoyment). More specifically, I defend the view that higher-order evidence questioning the reliability of one's aesthetic beliefs can make it reasonable for one to revise those beliefs. By contrast, in line with a plausible account of emotions, aesthetic affective attitudes are not directly sensitive to this type of higher-order evidence; they are sensitive only to those features of objects that make such attitudes (un)fitting. Thus, I argue, there are cases of non-defective recalcitrant aesthetic attitudes in which the subject has both a non-defective, fitting aesthetic affective attitude and a reasonable belief questioning the fittingness of this attitude. I further discuss whether in this type of case the subject has decisive reasons to try to change her recalcitrant attitudes, say by trying to modify her aesthetic affective dispositions. My answer is negative. Even granting that subjects always have aesthetic reasons to try to avoid aesthetically unfitting attitudes, these reasons can be outweighed by further reasons not to do so – perhaps including aesthetic reasons related to the construction of valuable aesthetic identities or to the value of aesthetic engagement.*

### 1. Introduction

We are often interested in hearing whether others (critics, friends) disagree with our assessment of artworks and objects of aesthetic interests. And, in our more reflective moments, some of us are inclined to ponder over the possibility that our aesthetic evaluations are somehow defective – say, due to bias, prejudice or an insufficiently refined aesthetic sensibility. Both the testimony of others and our own self-scrutiny can give rise to doubts about the reliability of our aesthetic assessments.

Indeed, there is evidence that our aesthetic tastes and evaluations are often biased and subject to non-aesthetic influences. For example, Spotify data suggests that musical taste is fixed around the music one listened to as a teenager (Stephens-Davidowitz, 2018; for a more nuanced reading of these results, Jakubowski *et al.*, 2020). Thus, when a subject judges that shoegaze is better than post-rock, this is likely due not to the aesthetic features of these subgenres, but to

the contingent fact that the subject listened to shoegaze as a teenager. More generally, framing and exposure effects can bias our aesthetic responses – we tend to prefer artworks we are more familiar with (Cutting, 2006). And, as Kieran (2010) argues, aesthetic appreciation is frequently driven by social considerations, in particular by the desire to appear as socially superior, which underlies the aesthetic vice of snobbery. Furthermore, these biases are not easy to recognize and counteract from a first-person perspective. Lopes (2014) discusses studies showing that we are bad at identifying the reasons motivating our aesthetic assessments. When asked about such reasons we tend to confabulate and cite considerations different from the ones that actually motivated our responses. Therefore, introspection and reflection about one's aesthetic reasons seem to be an unreliable way of detecting and correcting possible biases (for a more optimistic view, Dorsch, 2014).

In light of all this evidence, doubts about one's reliability as an aesthetic judge seem, at least in some cases, reasonable. The question I want to tackle is whether such doubts can have an impact in the appropriateness of the attitudes involved in aesthetic appreciation. That is, I want to investigate whether doubting one's reliability as an aesthetic assessor of some artwork should, by itself, lead to revising one's appreciation of that artwork.

Consider Susana, who is visiting the art exhibition in her son Ivan's school. After examining the different pieces, Susana judges that Ivan's work is excellent, far more original and appealing than the rest. However, she is also aware that she tends to be biased when assessing her son's achievements. Should Susana's awareness of her bias influence her assessment of Ivan's artwork?

Notice that Susana does not need to discover any defect or shortcoming in Ivan's artwork by becoming aware of her tendency to be biased. It may even be that in this case Ivan's artwork is indeed excellent, as Susana judges it to be. The question is whether the mere realization that she tends to be biased when assessing her son's work should make Susana revise her initial enthusiastic appraisal, perhaps by adopting a more cautious appreciative stance.

This question has to do with the role of higher-order evidence in aesthetic appreciation. By attending to testimony, engaging in reflective scrutiny, or reviewing studies about aesthetic appreciation, subjects can acquire evidence about the reliability of their own aesthetic attitudes. For instance, the fact that Susana is typically biased when judging the performances of her son provides evidence suggesting that her assessment of her son's artwork is unreliable. This type of evidence is higher-order in the sense that it is evidence for a (higher-order) attitude about the normative status of some (lower-order) attitude. More specifically, higher-order evidence, as I will understand it, includes evidence about the normative standing of an attitude, and also evidence about whether the subject has formed the attitude in a way that is reliably responsive to the features that determine its standing.

Higher-order evidence has been widely discussed in epistemology, in particular (but not only) in relation to peer disagreement,<sup>1</sup> and also, sometimes more indirectly, in ethics in debates about moral ignorance or about moral disagreement (a unified discussion can be found in Weatherson, 2019). In this paper I investigate how higher-order evidence bears on aesthetic

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, Christensen (2007; 2010); Elga (2007); Matheson (2009); Lasonen-Aarnio (2014). For a recent survey, see Whiting (2020).

appreciation.<sup>2</sup> Aesthetic appreciation involves, I will assume, different types of attitudes, including beliefs (e.g. about the beauty of an artwork) and also feelings like pleasure, awe or boredom. I will argue that the significance of higher-order evidence is not the same for these two types of aesthetic attitudes. Specifically, I will argue that when discussing aesthetic beliefs, we can export many of the conclusions reached in epistemological debates about higher-order evidence. However, when examining the impact of higher-order evidence on aesthetic affective attitudes we should rather turn to discussions about recalcitrant emotions (emotions that are in tension with the subject's evaluative beliefs).<sup>3</sup> Taking cue from a plausible analysis of recalcitrant emotions, I will claim that recalcitrant aesthetic feelings do not need to manifest any defect of rationality – understood as a defect in the subject's responsiveness to reasons. I will further suggest that it is not obvious that subjects always have reasons to try to resolve tensions between their aesthetic beliefs and affective attitudes. Indeed, I will make room for the possibility that a subject has aesthetic reasons not to try to change an affective attitude that is likely to be aesthetically unfitting.

### **Aesthetic pleasures**

Aesthetic appreciation does not consist only of beliefs attributing evaluative properties, such as beauty or elegance, to an object. At least in typical cases, feelings or affective attitudes play a central role in aesthetic appreciation – these feelings are an integral part of aesthetic experience (Walton, 1993; Gorodeisky and Marcus, 2018; Hills, forthcoming, p. 12). For the sake of simplicity, I will focus on aesthetic appreciation involving aesthetic pleasure or enjoyment (aesthetic pleasure is characterized in detail by Gorodesiky, 2021).

Like other emotions or feelings, aesthetic affective attitudes have conditions of fittingness, correctness or appropriateness<sup>4</sup> (I will use these terms interchangeably). Some artworks, but not others, merit awe, enjoyment or liking. I will assume that the fittingness of aesthetic affective attitudes is linked to the evaluative properties of the object targeted by the attitudes. That is, whether an aesthetic affective attitude is fitting depends on whether it reflects the evaluative features of the object. In this way, an artwork merits enjoyment only if it has the evaluative property of being enjoyable. More generally, beautiful objects deserve pleasurable appreciation (Gorodeisky, 2021; also Walton, 1993, p. 506).

On this view, the truth conditions of beliefs ascribing aesthetic values correspond to the fittingness conditions of the affective attitudes associated to those values. For instance, the belief that Ivan's painting is beautiful is true in those conditions in which it is aesthetically fitting to experience pleasure in appreciating the painting. Likewise, the truth conditions of the belief that some film is enjoyable are those conditions in which it is aesthetically appropriate to enjoy that film.

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<sup>2</sup> Kieran (2010) discusses the influence of higher-order evidence in aesthetic appreciation, in relation to the sceptical challenge raised by snobbery.

<sup>3</sup> Aesthetic recalcitrant emotions are discussed by Gorodeisky and Marcus (2018).

<sup>4</sup> Gorodeisky and Marcus (2018); Gorodesiky (2021); Kubala (2021). For the general view that emotions have fittingness conditions, see among others McDowell (1998, pp. 112-130), D'Arms and Jacobson (2000), Tappolet (2016).

The claim that aesthetic feelings can be unfitting does not presuppose any strong form of realism about aesthetic value. Even if aesthetic value depended ultimately on the attitudes and responses of subjects,<sup>5</sup> it could be that a particular response of the subject is inappropriate, insofar as it does not fit the underlying values determined by her other attitudes, in particular those attitudes adopted in conditions of sufficient reflection. This could happen, for instance, if the subject is tired or has not paid enough attention to the object in question, or if her responses are distorted by biases or prejudices. Thus, the possibility of unfitting aesthetic affective attitudes is only barred by extreme subjectivist views according to which the aesthetic value of an artwork is directly fixed by the current attitudes of the subject.

### **Aesthetic doubts**

If mistakes in aesthetic appreciation are allowed for, it becomes possible for subjects to acquire evidence questioning their reliability in making correct aesthetic assessments. This will be higher-order evidence, in the sense specified above: it is evidence for higher-order beliefs about whether the subject's aesthetic attitudes have been formed in a reliable way. For instance, evidence that the subject is tired, distracted or influenced by bias can act as higher-order evidence for the belief that the subject's aesthetic assessments are likely to be unreliable in the present circumstances. This is what happens in Susana's example. She has evidence that she tends to be biased in favour of her son Ivan, and this makes her doubt the reliability of her appreciation of Ivan's artwork. Disagreeing testimony can play a similar role. The fact that trusted experts differ from us in their assessment of some artwork may provide evidence that our evaluation is somehow misguided (Gorodeisky and Marcus 2018, p. 122).

A common intuition in debates about higher-order evidence is that subjects should be sensitive to higher-order evidence questioning their reliability. Failing to manifest such sensitivity would reveal a dogmatic disposition, which seems criticisable. In the context of discussions of peer disagreement, this intuition is usually fleshed out as the view known as conciliationism (for instance, Christensen, 2007; Elga, 2007; Matheson, 2009). The core of this view is that subjects should revise their (first-order) attitudes after facing peer disagreement, typically by bringing them closer to the attitudes of the disagreeing party. This is so even when engaging with the disagreeing peers does not make the subject acquire new first-order reasons regarding her attitudes,<sup>6</sup> but only higher-order evidence questioning that these attitudes have been appropriately adopted. On a broader understanding, conciliationism is, roughly, the view that subjects should revise their lower-order attitudes when acquiring undefeated higher-order evidence questioning their reliability in adopting those attitudes.

The conciliationist intuition is also appealing in the case of aesthetic appreciation. If Susana has good reasons to think that her assessment of Ivan's artwork may be biased, it seems she should become somewhat dubious about that initial assessment. She should temper her

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<sup>5</sup> Hanson (2018) offers a distinction between robustly realist and response-dependent aesthetic properties. I remain neutral about whether response-dependent properties can count as realist in some relevant sense.

<sup>6</sup> I will think of reasons as favouring considerations. In particular, reasons for belief are constituted by evidence, that is considerations concerning the truth of the belief.

original enthusiastic judgment, allowing for the possibility that Ivan's work is not so extraordinary after all. Otherwise, she will be dogmatic and aesthetically chauvinist.

However, it is not obvious how to vindicate the conciliationist intuition (for critical discussion, see among others Lasonen-Aarnio, 2014, 2020; Weatherston, 2019). Remember that the idea is that higher-order evidence can make subjects revise their attitudes even when they do not get new first-order reasons for or against their original attitudes. Yet, if these attitudes remain well supported by the subject's original first-order reasons, why should they be revised? For instance, it could be that Susana's assessment of Ivan's work was based on features of that work that actually make it worth admiring – perhaps this is a case where her tendency to be biased has not affected her assessment.

An attractive way of accounting for the impact of higher-order evidence is to appeal to deliberative competences. These are the competences involved in deliberation, understood as the process of revising one's attitudes by settling some question in response to considerations treated as reasons. I will say that one has deliberative control over an attitude if one is in a position to form, maintain or revise that attitude through suitable deliberative processes. When deliberating about some issue, one engages in reasoning about that issue and revises one's attitudes in light of the conclusions reached about the correct answer to one's deliberative question.

On the view I want to propose, deliberative competences are constituted by reliable reasoning dispositions, that is reliable dispositions to be guided by reasons, and to avoid guidance by non-reasons (i.e. considerations that are not actually reasons favouring the relevant attitude). The exercise of deliberative competences would be incompatible with manifesting a risky reasoning disposition, in other words, a disposition that in relevantly similar situations would lead the subject to be misguided by non-reasons. This is what Lasonen-Aarnio (2020) calls a bad (reasoning) disposition. Insensitivity to higher-order evidence would display a risky reasoning disposition of this type, given that in similar situations in which the subject has that evidence, her reasoning will be based on non-reasons. For instance, in many situations similar to Susana's current one, if she disregards the evidence that she is biased, her aesthetic beliefs will be guided by considerations that do not actually provide sufficient support for those beliefs.

There are at least two ways to account for conciliationism in terms of deliberative competences. On a first option, subjects only have access to those reasons on which they can rely competently, that is by manifesting a good reasoning disposition (see González de Prado, 2020; also Sylvan, 2015; Lord, 2018). If an agent can only rely on some reason by displaying a bad, risky reasoning disposition, then this reason is not accessible to the agent in her deliberation, in the sense that it will not determine what attitudes she ought to adopt when deliberating. As we have just seen, the acquisition of higher-order evidence may undermine the subject's capacity to rely on a certain reason competently. Thus, such higher-order evidence can defeat the subject's access to some of her (lower-order) reasons.

I am sympathetic to this first view (González de Prado, 2020), but for the purposes of this paper I can work with a weaker view, which has been defended by Lasonen-Aarnio (2020). On this second approach, bad reasoning dispositions are perhaps compatible with access to or possession of the relevant reasons (these reasons still count for determining what attitudes

ought to be adopted). Yet the subject will not be in a position to rely on those reasons reasonably, in the sense that by doing so she would manifest a bad reasoning disposition (see also Wietmarschen, 2013; Silva, 2017). And a subject is criticisable for adopting attitudes unreasonably, manifesting such bad reasoning dispositions, even when the attitude happens to be correct. Subjects that are insensitive to higher-order evidence are criticisable precisely for displaying this type of bad, risky reasoning disposition, that leads them to form attitudes in unreasonable ways (even if perhaps those attitudes are actually correct). By contrast, a subject that revises her attitude in the face of higher-order evidence will perhaps fail to respond to some of her actual reasons, but she will manifest a good reasoning disposition in doing so. Manifestations of competence can be praiseworthy even when the subject's performance is ultimately unsuccessful.

The views I have just presented can be directly applied, I think, to aesthetic beliefs – for instance the belief that some artwork is beautiful, elegant or admirable. After all, these beliefs differ from non-aesthetic ones only in their subject matter. Arguably, reasons for aesthetic beliefs are constituted by considerations concerning the truth of their contents.<sup>7</sup> As happens generally with beliefs, the adoption and maintenance of these aesthetic beliefs reflects on the subject's deliberative competences, that is her competences to form and revise attitudes by responding to her recognition of certain considerations as reasons. But, as argued above, ignoring one's higher-order evidence when adopting a belief will usually display a bad reasoning disposition. This type of belief will be at best unreasonable, and at worst unsupported by the subject's accessible reasons.

Let us go back to Susana's example. Susana has higher-order evidence that her original belief that Ivan's work is extraordinary was unreliably adopted, due to her bias in favour of her son. Thus, she can only keep this aesthetic belief by displaying a bad reasoning disposition, that makes the belief unreasonable (if not unsupported by the accessible reasons). In other words, by keeping her original aesthetic belief Susana shows a deficient deliberative competence, more specifically a deficient competence to avoid guidance by non-reasons. Susana can only be a reasonable, competent reasoner by revising her original belief, and adopting a cautious attitude that properly reflects the doubts created by the higher-order evidence. Perhaps she should suspend belief about the quality of her son's work, or at least reduce her initial confidence that it is extraordinary.

To be sure, this conclusion is not uncontentious, and it assumes several commitments in debates about higher-order evidence. But, I think, it is a plausible picture of the impact of higher-order evidence on aesthetic deliberation, which offers an attractive way of vindicating an analogue of the conciliatoinist intuition for cases like Susana's.

Note that I can remain neutral about the acquaintance principle, that is the thesis that aesthetic judgment requires first-hand experience of the object appreciated (Wolheim, 1980). True, the type of higher-order evidence I am discussing is not always acquired through first-hand experience – for instance, it can be provided by testimony, or by scientific studies about biases.

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<sup>7</sup> Perhaps the relevant reasons for belief can only be acquired through first-hand experience of the object. As discussed below, my claims here are intended to be neutral about the acquaintance principle.

However, I am not claiming that such higher-order evidence can offer sufficient reasons to believe that an object has certain aesthetic properties. For my purposes here, it is enough to grant that higher-order evidence can give the subject reasons to doubt the reliability of her aesthetic assessments. This is what happens in Susana's case. The evidence about her biases provides reasons to doubt the reliability of her evaluation of Ivan's artwork.

### **Dubious pleasures**

I have argued that higher-order evidence can have an impact on the reasonability (and perhaps even the appropriateness) of aesthetic beliefs. A further question is what happens with the affective attitudes, such as pleasure or enjoyment, characteristic of aesthetic appreciation. A tempting answer is that these attitudes should be sensitive to higher-order evidence in a similar way to aesthetic beliefs. After all, I have granted that aesthetic affective attitudes can be unfitting. I am also willing to grant that aesthetic affective attitudes can be evaluable as (ir)rational, depending on their support by considerations relevant to their fittingness.<sup>8</sup> On this view, an emotion would be irrationally formed if it is not based on considerations relevant to its fittingness.<sup>9</sup> Thus, subjects can get higher-order evidence that their affective attitudes have been formed unreliably, so that it is likely that they are inappropriate or irrational. One may think that maintaining one's attitudes in such circumstances reveals a risky, criticisable deliberative competence.<sup>10</sup>

However, it is not clear that the adoption and maintenance of aesthetic affective attitudes reflect directly on the subject's deliberative competence. It does not seem that we can form affective attitudes by deliberating about what attitude to adopt. In particular, affective attitudes do not seem to be apt as conclusions of processes of reasoning. So, even if aesthetic feelings are perhaps evaluable in terms of rationality, what I am suggesting is that we do not have deliberative control over them, or at least it is far from obvious that this is the case.

Not being subject to deliberative control is arguably a general feature of emotions (see Döring, 2014, 2015; Gubka, forthcoming). Again, I am not assuming that emotions cannot be rational, but rather than they are not formed, maintained or revised by engaging in deliberation. This claim gains some support from the phenomenology of our emotional lives: in general, our emotions do not appear to us as produced by deliberating about what to feel. Further support is provided by considering recalcitrant emotions. These are emotions that the subject has despite believing that it is unfitting to do so. For instance, it sometimes happens that I am angry at something which I recognize does not merit such anger.

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<sup>8</sup> These considerations can be regarded as reasons for affective attitudes, if we understand reasons as fitting-makers (Schroeter and Schroeter, 2009), or evidence of the fittingness of a response (Whiting, 2018). Gorodeisky and Marcus (2018) argue along these lines for the existence of aesthetic reasons for feelings.

<sup>9</sup> Lord (2019) defends a view on which aesthetic appreciative attitudes are based (non-inferentially) on perceived fitting-making features.

<sup>10</sup> Note that I am not assuming that there are aesthetic affective attitudes one ought to have, or that there are requiring aesthetic reasons (for arguments against this view, see Whiting, 2021). I am just assuming that aesthetic affective attitudes can be inappropriate or unfitting.

Recalcitrant emotion seems to be more widespread than overtly akratic beliefs (that is, beliefs that one believes to be irrational or inappropriate). This poses a puzzle. Although in cases of recalcitrant emotion the subject considers her affective attitudes inappropriate or defective (even, perhaps, irrational), often she is not in a position to change them. What makes this type of tension between the agent's beliefs and her affective attitudes harder to resolve than other forms of incoherence? An attractive explanation appeals to our lack of deliberative control over our emotions. Attitudes subject to deliberative control, like belief, tend to be revised when one takes them to be inappropriate or unreliably formed. As discussed above, deliberative competences involve avoiding risky dispositions to maintain attitudes one takes to be (probably) inappropriate. Emotions, by contrast, are not subject to this form of deliberative control, and that is why recalcitrant, akratic emotional states can be more pervasive and persistent than other types of incoherent attitudes.

The lack of deliberative control over our affective states motivates a view of emotions as analogous to perception in relevant respects.<sup>11</sup> Perceptions, like emotions, have conditions of correctness or accuracy, but they are not controlled by our deliberative capacities. That is, we cannot form a perception by deliberating about what to perceive. In this way, neither perceptions nor emotions are formed as the conclusion of a piece of reasoning.<sup>12</sup>

Indeed, there are cases of perceptual illusions, analogous to recalcitrant emotions, in which the subject has a perceptual impression that she believes (or even knows) to be inaccurate. The standard example is the Müller-Lyer illusion, an optical illusion in which subjects perceive two lines known to be identical as having different lengths. We can also think of cases in which the subject believes her perceptual capacities to be somehow defective and unreliable. For instance, I often have visual impressions that I know are inaccurate because they are produced by a defective, myopic visual system.

Persistent perceptual illusions can be accounted for by a view on which beliefs and perceptions are formed via different types of processes. In particular, the mechanisms generating perceptions are, to some extent at least, modular, in the sense that they are encapsulated from information coming from other parts of the subject's cognitive system. On the view I am exploring, something analogous happens with emotions (see Prinz, 2004, 2006; Brady, 2007; Döring, 2014; Tappolet, 2016; also D'Arms and Jacobson, 2003). Emotions would be formed through processes that are in a relevant way informationally encapsulated and isolated from other cognitive processes, in particular, deliberative processes.

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<sup>11</sup> Perceptual theories of emotions are defended among others by Prinz (2004, 2006), Brady (2007), Tappolet (2012, 2016); Döring (2007, 2014); for objections, Helm (2001, 2015).

<sup>12</sup> Siegel (2017) argues that perceptions are evaluable as (ir)rational and can be formed inferentially (for critical discussion on this, Lord, 2020). However, she grants that we lack deliberative control over perceptions, although she adds that the same happens for certain beliefs, such as delusions. In this paper I wish to remain neutral about this last issue. My point is that, if some beliefs are not subject to deliberative control, then they will not be sensitive to higher-order evidence (although perhaps they should show such sensitivity, insofar as they should be under deliberative control). This is what seems to happen with the sorts of delusions discussed by Siegel.



I do not need to commit myself here to any specific view about the modularity of perception and emotions (for discussion see Prinz, 2006). It is enough to assume that the processes of formation of emotions are to a significant degree insulated from the subject's deliberative capacities. This would explain why emotions are not directly responsive to higher-order evidence, given my claim that the impact of higher-order evidence on our attitudes is due to the sensitivity of deliberative competences to such evidence. This does not rule out that higher-order beliefs can somehow modulate the management of our emotions. For instance, it could be that the subject's emotions can be sometimes dampened by the belief that they are uncalled for. However, these modulations would be less direct and immediate than what we find in attitudes formed or revised by deliberating.<sup>13</sup>

I will assume here that aesthetic affective attitudes, as types of emotions or feelings, are not adopted and maintained by manifesting the subject's deliberative competences. My aim is to explore the implications of this view for discussion about the impact of higher-order evidence on aesthetic appreciation. To be clear, I am not assuming that deliberative competences play no role in aesthetic appreciation. Reasoning may allow subjects to recognize features of an artwork that make it beautiful or worth admiring. The recognition of these features would then be the input for the formation of the relevant affective responses. For instance, reasoning and deliberation may be involved in recognizing the coherence of the plot of a novel, and this recognition can be part of what grounds the subject's enjoyment of that novel. However, the subject's enjoyment is not the result of a piece of reasoning in which enjoyment is shown to be fitting.

On the view I am assuming, aesthetic affective attitudes that are in tension with higher-order evidence do not display defective deliberative dispositions, since they do not display deliberative dispositions at all. Thus, a subject cannot be criticised for manifesting bad, risky deliberative dispositions on the grounds that she has adopted such an affective attitude.

Is there something else criticisable in the adoption of this type of recalcitrant affective attitude? The answer depends on the details about the sorts of processes and mechanisms involved in the formation of aesthetic affective attitudes, and their functions and standards of correctness. A possible view is that these mechanisms are sensitive only to the presence (and absence) of features making the attitude fitting. But the relevant mechanisms would not be responsive to higher-order evidence questioning their reliability, or to indirect evidence of (absence of) fitting-making features – that is, evidence that is not constituted by the fitting-making features themselves. By contrast, deliberation is sensitive to higher-order evidence, and to indirect evidence of fittingness.

This contrast is what one would expect from a view of emotions as analogous to perception, given that perception is also insensitive, at least to a large extent, to indirect evidence of this sort. Both perceptual and emotional systems would lack the sort of reflective dimension that makes doxastic deliberation responsive to higher-order evidence about its own reliability. This reflective dimension is characteristic of our deliberative competences, and

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<sup>13</sup> For discussion about ways in which emotions can be said to be under reflective control, see Cox (2019).

therefore of attitudes over which we have deliberative control, but not of the processes of formation of states such as emotions and perceptions.

To illustrate the contrast between the mechanisms of adoption of beliefs and of affective attitudes, consider the following example. Ana is in a cinema watching a film in a foreign language she does not understand. The rest of the audience laughs at a certain bit of dialogue. This is evidence that the dialogue is amusing (that is, that the dialogue has features that make amusement fitting). Ana, therefore, has reasons to believe that the dialogue is amusing. However, she is not in a position to be amused herself by the film's dialogue. Since she does not understand it, she cannot recognize directly the features that make it amusing. The indirect evidence of provided by the audience's laughter is just not the right sort of input for Ana's mechanisms of formation of affective attitudes like amusement.

Now, if being responsive to higher-order evidence is not part of the function of the mechanisms of formation of aesthetic affective attitudes, then it seems that the adoption of recalcitrant attitudes, in tension with the subject's higher-order evidence, does not need to make the performance of these mechanisms defective. Rather, the performance of these mechanisms would be assessable in relation to their sensitivity to the direct recognition of (the absence of) features making the relevant feeling fitting. We can therefore introduce a notion of basing according to which an aesthetic affective attitude is properly based only if it is produced by a mechanism successfully fulfilling its function of responding to fitting-making features (for a notion of non-inferential basing compatible with this idea, see Lord, 2018). Yet this type of basing would not be under the scope of deliberative capacities, and would not be directly sensitive to the subject's higher-order attitudes.

Likewise, perceptual systems are assessed with respect to their sensitivity to perceptual information, but not with respect to their conformity with the subject's higher-order beliefs. Think of merely apparent perceptual illusions, that is situations in which the subject mistakenly believes that she is undergoing an illusion, although her perception is actually accurate. In these cases, the performance of the subject's perceptual system can hardly be assessed as defective. For the perceptual system is doing what it is supposed to do, that is to form an accurate perception by manifesting proper sensitivity to the perceptual information available. If anything, it is the subject's belief that might be criticisable (although perhaps it is a reasonable belief, based on apparently strong evidence).

We can find analogous situations with recalcitrant aesthetic feelings. These would be cases in which the subject has a fitting aesthetic affective attitude, despite believing that it is unfitting. For instance, it could be that Susana's enjoyment of Ivan's work is actually fitting, even if she believes it is not. On the view I am exploring, Susana's affective attitude would not be defective in this case, insofar as its adoption manifests proper sensitivity to the presence (and absence) of features of the situation making the attitude fitting. By contrast, in cases in which the subject's belief is true and her affective attitude is unfitting, what would make the attitude criticisable is not that it is in tension with the belief, but its unfittingness.

### **Non-defective aesthetic recalcitrant attitudes**

According to the view I am presenting, recalcitrant aesthetic affective attitudes do not need to involve either defective affective attitudes or criticisable beliefs. As we have seen above, higher-order evidence, even when misleading, can make it reasonable (and perhaps appropriate) for the subject to doubt the fittingness of her aesthetic affective attitudes. Yet when this higher-order evidence is misleading, and the subject's affective attitudes are actually fitting, there does not need to be anything defective in the subject's adoption of those attitudes.

Consider again a situation in which Susana's assessment of her son's Ivan has not actually been influenced by her tendency to be biased in his favour. Her enjoyment and enthusiasm for Ivan's artwork are indeed fitting in this case. Still, given that she knows that she is typically biased when assessing her son, it can be reasonable for her to doubt that her affective appraisal of Ivan's work is fitting. We can even assume that Susana's (misleading) evidence about her being biased is strong enough to make it reasonable for her to have high credence that her enjoyment of Ivan's work is unfitting.

There is a type of tension or incoherence among Susana's doxastic and affective attitudes in the example above. Strictly speaking, this tension is not analogous to cases of akratic incoherence. After all, Susana is not fully believing that her affective attitudes are unfitting. Rather, she has high credence that such attitudes are unfitting. Yet this type of tension between first-order attitudes and higher-order credences can seem in itself problematic (see, among others, Horowitz, 2014; Lasonen-Aarnio, 2020). I grant that, in the epistemic and practical domains, this tension is indeed problematic, and points to some defect in either the subject's first-order attitudes or in her higher-order stance towards them. My contention is that things are different with respect to aesthetic affective attitudes, and in general with respect to emotions and feelings. Both the subject's affective attitudes and her high credence that those attitudes are unfitting can be perfectly non-defective, or at least non-criticisable. Susana's aesthetic feelings are not defective when she fittingly enjoys Ivan's work despite her misleading, but reasonable high credence that such feelings of enjoyment are unfitting.

### **Should we try to avoid recalcitrant aesthetic attitudes?**

Even if subjects do not have deliberative control over their affective attitudes, they clearly have such control over ways of acting that can shape, to some extent at least, those affective attitudes, or their dispositions to form them (see Gubka, forthcoming). These actions would afford a form of indirect (and perhaps limited) control over the subject's affective attitudes. For instance, by undergoing therapy a subject can hope to overcome her fear of flying. Similarly, Susana could try to undertake courses of action that offer some hope of bringing her aesthetic feelings in line with her aesthetic doxastic attitudes. For example, she could try to assess all the works in the school's exhibition blindly, without checking the author's name. Or perhaps she can train in certain forms of meditation that promise to make her impartial and detached in her assessment of people's performances.

I will say that a subject tries to have (or avoid) certain affective attitudes when she acts in ways that she takes to increase the probability of having (or avoiding) those attitudes. Thus, trying is not understood here as a mental attitude, but as an intentional action aimed at promoting (or inhibiting) the adoption of certain attitudes. The question I want to consider is

whether Susana should try to rein in her recalcitrant aesthetic affective attitudes. It could be that, while finding oneself with recalcitrant aesthetic affective attitudes is not in itself irrational, one always has sufficient reasons to try to change such recalcitrant attitudes (compare: it is not irrational to have certain allergic reactions, but there can be reasons to try to suppress those reactions). Do we always have sufficient reasons to try to align our aesthetic affective attitudes with the doxastic stance about their fittingness supported by our evidence?

One may think that, by trying to moderate her enjoyment of Ivan's work, Susana would show proper responsiveness to the reasons supporting her doxastic stance – in particular, her high credence that enthusiastic enjoyment of Ivan's work is not fitting. Note, however, that these reasons just indicate that Susana's aesthetic feeling is likely to be unfitting. This does not need to entail that they are also reasons for Susana to try to avoid such risky aesthetic feelings. It could be replied that one has always reasons to try to avoid attitudes that are (likely to be) unfitting. However, it is not obvious that this is so. It can be questioned that we always have reasons to try to avoid unfitting aesthetic attitudes.

The fact that a performance will lead to violating some standard of fittingness or correctness does not need to imply, in principle, that one has reasons to avoid that performance. It can be granted that standards of fittingness ground a form of criticizability (in the sense that assessing a performance as unfitting is a way of criticising it). Still, it is a further question whether there are reasons for one to care about such criticism. Consider norms of etiquette. One may lack reasons to respect the standards of correct behaviour set by an old-fashioned code of etiquette. This is so even if the code is active in that members of the community sanction and criticise each other in accordance with it. Still, one may lack reasons to take heed of those sanctions (say, the relevant sanctions take the form of downgrades in social reputation, and one lacks reasons to care about that type of reputation). So, not all standards of correctness are authoritative over subjects, in the sense of generating reasons with deliberative weight – in particular, reasons for the agent to try to avoid violating the standard (for the distinction between authoritative reasons and standards of correctness, see Maguire and Woods, 2020; also Lord and Sylvan, 2019).

A possible reply is that aesthetic fittingness standards are not like the standards of games or etiquette, since fitting aesthetic appraisals are always valuable, while there is disvalue in unfitting aesthetic appraisals (for discussion, Kubala, 2021). This could be because there is derived aesthetic value in having a fitting response to aesthetically valuable objects. One could argue that such responses manifest respect for what is aesthetically valuable, and that respecting something valuable has derivative value (for this notion of derivative value in terms of respect, see Hurka, 2001; Sylvan, 2020). On the contrary, unfitting response would show lack of respect or concern for aesthetic values, which would have derived disvalue. Regardless of the details of the account of aesthetic value one favours, the idea is that one has reasons to try not to violate aesthetic standards of fittingness because such violations are disvaluable. In general, we have reasons to try to avoid disvaluable outcomes. I will say that (practical) reasons to try to modify aesthetically unfitting attitudes are aesthetic reasons for action – insofar as they relate to aesthetic (dis)value.

I think it is an open question whether there is always value in having fitting aesthetic responses, and disvalue in having unfitting ones. However, I will grant that it is so, and that there

are always some (aesthetic) reasons to try to change aesthetically unfitting attitudes. Still, aesthetic value is not the only relevant concern when deciding how to act. Other types of value can have a bearing on the advisability of an action. For instance, in some cases there could be moral value in trying to have unfitting aesthetic responses. In these cases, the subject could have moral reasons that outweigh her aesthetic reasons against trying to have aesthetically unfitting responses.

The aesthetic fittingness of some affective attitude is determined only by considerations concerning the aesthetic features of the object of that attitude. Other types of considerations, for instance regarding the moral or prudential value of getting to form the attitude, are the wrong kind of reason for adopting that aesthetic attitude, in the sense that they do not bear on its aesthetic fittingness (for an introduction to the distinction between wrong and right kinds of reasons, see Gertken and Kiesewetter, 2017). However, I am not discussing now the reasons for adopting aesthetic affective attitudes, but the reasons for trying to form, or modify such attitudes. And, remember, I am thinking of this trying as an intentional action. The crucial point is that, while the non-aesthetic value of having a certain affective attitude may not determine the aesthetic fittingness of that attitude, it does have a say in the advisability of trying to form or change the attitude. When deciding how to act, non-aesthetic reasons can be relevant even if the choice concerns strategies to shape one's aesthetic attitudes.

In deliberations about whether to try to adopt some attitude, all the relevant reasons are in a strict sense practical – that is, they are reasons for action, in this case those actions that constitute one's trying. Some of these practical reasons can be aesthetic in the sense specified above, insofar as they relate to the aesthetic (dis)value of the attitude one could try to have. But there can be other relevant practical reasons that have to do instead with moral or prudential considerations. And, in principle, all these different practical reasons can properly weigh in one's practical deliberation about whether to try to have certain attitudes. We do not have wrong kinds of reasons for trying to have attitudes subject to fittingness standards. In order to settle this type of deliberation, all the relevant reasons have to be balanced. While aesthetic considerations may sometimes win the day, there can be other cases in which moral or prudential reasons have more weight. Perhaps actions that go against the subject's aesthetic reasons will be criticisable and regrettable, to some extent, from an aesthetic perspective. However, such (aesthetically criticisable) actions may enjoy decisive support from stronger moral or prudential reasons.

Going back to Susana's example, it could be that her bond with her son would benefit from experiencing genuine enthusiasm for his artwork. If she just feigns enjoyment without actually experiencing it, Ivan will notice that his mother's enthusiasm is not authentic, and will resent her for it. Given this, Susana has moral, family-related reasons to try to genuinely enjoy Ivan's work. In this way, she has (non-aesthetic) reasons to refrain from acting in ways that are likely to cool down her original enjoyment. And these reasons could in principle outweigh whatever aesthetic reasons she may have to try to avoid aesthetic affective attitudes that are probably unfitting. In this case, Susana ought not to try to modify her aesthetic feelings towards Ivan work, even if this makes her criticisable on aesthetic grounds.

Indeed, one can have non-aesthetic reasons against trying to change an attitude one knows to be aesthetically unfitting. Uncertainty about the aesthetic fittingness of the attitude is

not needed in order to have such non-aesthetic reasons. Think of a case of guilty pleasure. Susana enjoys watching reality TV with her son Ivan. She knows that those TV shows are not aesthetically valuable, and that her enjoyment of them is aesthetically unfitting. However, this enjoyment brings her pleasure, which is in itself valuable, and also contributes to her bond with Ivan. So, Susana has (non-aesthetic) reasons not to try to stop enjoying those reality TV shows, despite knowing that they are not aesthetically worth enjoying. And these non-aesthetic reasons could in principle outweigh any aesthetic reasons Susana may have to try to stop her unfitting enjoyment of those TV shows.

### **Aesthetic tensions**

An interesting question is whether subjects can have aesthetic reasons to preserve affective attitudes that they consider likely to be aesthetically unfitting. In principle, there would be room for this type of aesthetic conflict if aesthetic values could be realized or respected not only by having fitting aesthetic responses, but also by other aspects of aesthetic experiences.

For example, Nguyen (2020) has argued that the main point of aesthetic practices is to engage in appreciation aiming at aesthetically fitting responses. This engagement comprises the different processes involved in forming an aesthetic judgment, among other things, paying attention to details, connecting them, exploring affective resonances or examining alternative interpretations. According to Nguyen, appreciative engagement has its own aesthetic value, beyond the possible value of the resulting fitting responses. On this picture, therefore, a subject can have aesthetic reasons to engage in appreciative processes that involve affective attitudes that she regards as probably unfitting. This could happen if such engagement promises to be aesthetically fruitful and rewarding in itself, despite the high risk of leading to unfitting aesthetic responses. For instance, Susana may know that her appreciative engagement tends to be richer and more intense when she is personally invested and familiar with the relevant artwork, as happens with Ivan's. Perhaps she knows that only this emotional investment will motivate her to spend sufficient time paying attention to the details of an artwork, so that she can engage in the sort of intense appreciative engagement that, I am assuming, is aesthetically rewarding. The aesthetic value in such intense appreciation would give Susana (aesthetic) reasons to engage in it, even if she is aware that her affective responses to Ivan's work are probably biased. True, Susana could attempt to avoid the disvalue of unfitting aesthetic attitudes by trying to repress her responses to Ivan's work. But then she would miss the value of the appreciative engagement afforded by her responses to that artwork. It may be that the reasons to engage in this valuable appreciation outweigh the reasons not to have unfitting aesthetic attitudes.

Note that on Nguyen's view valuable aesthetic engagement is not totally disconnected from aesthetic fittingness, since it aims to produce fitting responses. However, one can engage in an activity with some aim knowing that success is unlikely. For example, when playing basketball one can try to score from a difficult position, realizing that the shot will probably fail to achieve its goal. Likewise, Susana could engage in aesthetic appreciation aiming at fittingness while recognizing the high risk that the resulting aesthetic attitudes are unfitting.

Let us assume, as a further possibility, that part of the point of our aesthetic lives is to establish a continuous, cohesive aesthetic personal identity (Cross (2021) has recently discussed

the value of aesthetic identities, in relation to the value of aesthetic commitments). In that case, there may be aesthetic value in adopting aesthetic attitudes that cohere with and reinforce one's aesthetic identity. This would allow for aesthetic reasons to maintain attitudes that are probably aesthetically unfitting, but bolster one's aesthetic identity. Think of Anna, a prog rock fan. Anna knows that her tastes are probably shaped by arbitrary biographical factors (e.g. the type of music she happened to be exposed to as a teenager). Moreover, she realizes that vanguard rock genres (like prog rock used to be) tend to run out of steam with time and become stagnant, full of clichés and nostalgia. Thus, Anna acknowledges that some of the more recent prog rock albums she enjoys are likely to be derivative efforts, not particularly worth listening for outsiders. However, appreciating these new albums and their virtues is part of her identity as a prog rock fan – it is important for her aesthetic self-conception. Insofar as there is aesthetic value in sustaining this time extended aesthetic identity, Anna can have aesthetic reasons to enjoy derivative albums that do not merit, on their own, aesthetic enjoyment.

To be sure, the views that appreciative engagement or aesthetic identities are aesthetically valuable require further argument. My aim in this section has not been to provide a full defence for those views, but rather to direct our attention to the possibility that aesthetic fittingness is not the only source of aesthetic reasons. These views are presented as exemplifications of this possibility. What I want to suggest is that perhaps unfitting aesthetic attitudes can sometimes contribute to aesthetically valuable aspects of our lives – such as the construction of coherent aesthetic identities. If this is so, agents can have aesthetic reasons not to try to avoid attitudes that are likely to be aesthetically unfitting.

## Conclusions

I have argued that we do not have the same form of control over all aspects of our aesthetic responses. While beliefs about aesthetic issues are subject to deliberative control, aesthetic feelings are not directly under the scope of our deliberative competences. I have further claimed that our attitudes are sensitive to higher-order evidence insofar as they are under deliberative control. Therefore, aesthetic beliefs, but not aesthetic feelings are directly responsive to higher-order evidence. As a result, clashes between aesthetic beliefs and aesthetic affective attitudes in the presence of higher-order evidence do not need to reveal flaws either in our deliberative competences or in our dispositions to form aesthetic feelings. Moreover, it is not obvious that there are always sufficient reasons to try to avoid these clashes. Whatever aesthetic reasons there are to avoid probably unfitting aesthetic feelings can in principle be outweighed by further moral and prudential (or, perhaps, even aesthetic) reasons not to do so.<sup>14</sup>

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