Aesthetic properties, mind-independence, and companions in guilt

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1. Introduction

Companions-in-guilt arguments (CGA's) are arguments in which one thing is shown to share some similarity with another thing. This similarity can then be exploited in a number of ways. A common strategy is to use the similarity to undermine arguments against the existence of an entity. For instance, some philosophers argue that moral reasons would have to be categorical, and that categorical reasons don't exist (e.g. Mackie 1977, Joyce 2001).[1] Others retort that epistemic reasons are also categorical, but that we cannot reasonably deny their existence. This would undermine categoricity as sufficient ground for rejecting moral reasons too (e.g. Shafer-Landau 2006, Cuneo 2007).

In metaethics, companions in guilt have so far been sought in epistemic and prudential judgements (for an example of the latter, see Fletcher 2018). Might aesthetic judgements be a further candidate? The aim of this paper is to explore this possibility. The focus will be on judgements of beauty and artistic merit.

CGA's relating moral to aesthetic judgements are unlikely to succeed unless aesthetic judgements are in relevant respects analogous to moral judgements. For the purposes of this paper, I will assume that moral judgements concern mind-independent, non-natural facts.[2] So my first task is to show how one might argue for a conception of beauty and artistic merit as mind-independent and non-natural. This occupies the next four sections of the paper. The case that I present (but ultimately reject) is partly negative and partly positive. I first argue against a popular conception

[1] A reason is categorical if its rational authority is independent of our desires and interests.

[2] I will not assume that such facts exist.

of aesthetic properties as dispositions to produce responses in ideal judges. I describe this theory in section 2 and present my arguments against it in section 3. In section 4, I explain which positions are left standing. In section 5, I show how certain assumptions about the phenomenology of aesthetic judgement can be used to defend a mind-independent conception of aesthetic properties. In the final section, I tackle the question whether aesthetic judgements can be partners in guilt to moral judgements, and help to undermine skeptical worries about the existence of mind-independent value and categorical reasons. My conclusion will be that there is hope for such arguments, provided aesthetic judgements are likely to concern mind-independent, non-natural value. Although this idea is more defensible than is often assumed, I ultimately doubt that it is true.

2. Against the dispositional view

Nowadays, many philosophers endorse a mind-dependent form of realism about aesthetic properties. According to this view, an artwork's beauty or goodness consists in the work's disposition to produce a positive response in well-placed judges. This dispositional view is inspired by Hume's essay *Of the Standard of Taste*. Hume starts with a paradox in our thought about aesthetics: on the one hand, we think that there is no arguing about taste. On the other hand, we think of certain artists as *so* much better than others that anyone who denies this must be making a mistake. Hume suggests that the first thought is explained by the (correct) sense that judgements of taste, including judgements of beauty and artistic merit, are sentiments that lack representational content. If such judgements do not aim to represent the world, then they are not more or less correct in virtue of the accuracy of the representation. But Hume thinks that there can nevertheless be a standard that allows us to condemn some aesthetic judgements as mistaken.

Hume compares the situation to colour. Although (he thinks) colours are not properties of objects either, there is nevertheless a standard that governs colour judgement. This standard is the following: if properly functioning observers, placed in normal conditions, have a certain visual experience, then the object has some particular colour. Roughly speaking, an observer functions properly if s/he has healthy visual organs, and conditions are normal if s/he is viewing the object in daylight. This standard allows us to condemn various judgements as mistaken and

think of others as correct, without committing to the mind-independence of colour. Furthermore, the standard is not subjective in the sense that its relevance to colour judgements depends on individual endorsement. The standard is part of the public rules that determine whether a word expresses the concept of red, blue, green, etc.

Hume believes that this model can also be applied to judgements of beauty and artistic merit. In the case of beauty, we might say this: if properly functioning judges, placed in normal conditions, have a (certain) pleasurable experience upon examining the work, then the work is beautiful. The task is then to specify under what conditions a judge is functioning properly, and thus well-placed to discern the "true beauty" of an object.[3] Hume gives us four conditions.[4]

First, an ideal judge has delicacy of taste. This is the ability to discern very fine differences in colour, texture, organization, etc. (especially those prone to provoke positive or negative responses).

Second, an ideal judge must be experienced with works of a similar kind. This comprises both the idea that she had frequent opportunity to examine work in a particular genre, and also to *compare* works that realize a wide range of the genre's possibilities.

Third, an ideal judge must approach the work without prejudice. This means that she should take into account the audience for which the work was intended, as well as its purposes. This may require placing oneself in the shoes of people different from oneself, and setting aside individual relations to the artist (such as jealousy).

Fourth and finally, a good judge must have good "sense", which appears to be intellect or understanding. Intellect or understanding is relevant generally, for instance for checking the workings of prejudice, determining the genre to which a work belongs, and determining its purposes (Carroll 1984). But Hume also believes that the

[3] To make the analogy with colour even closer, we should say something about what makes for normal conditions. In the case of visual arts, this will no doubt involve lighting conditions, spatial positioning, etc. We may also be able to distinguish between well-functioning judges and normal conditions by reference to the distinction between abilities and their exercise (someone with various abilities may not always exercise them properly, perhaps because they are not in the right mood). Although this is not strictly kept apart in Hume's explication of conditions on an ideal judge, nothing important hinges on it.

[4] Some authors think that Hume distinguishes five criteria (e.g. Carroll 1984). But that is because they believe that the requirement of experience does not already comprise the idea that an ideal judge must have had ample opportunity to compare different works in the genre, works that realize a wide range of its possibilities.

quality of art can depend on its veracity, as when the success of a novel depends on the extent to which it is insightful about human relationships. Good sense is required to discern this too.

Hume thinks that the standard of taste is set by the reactions or verdicts of those who meet these criteria:

> 'Strong sense, united to delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by comparison, and cleared of all prejudice, can alone entitle judges to this valuable character [of the ideal judge]; and the joint verdict of such, wherever they are to be found, is the true standard of taste and beauty.' (2004, pp. 86-87)

So, although Hume thinks that judgements of beauty are non-representational, he nevertheless thinks there is an intersubjective standard of beauty: a work is beautiful if and only if ideal judges react to it with a positive sentiment.

My reading of Hume is as a noncognitivist: judgements of beauty are appreciative states rather than representations of artworks as having certain properties.[5] This is not the majority view in contemporary aesthetics. Many aestheticians endorse a cognitivist view that is also suggested by Hume's essay. According to this view, judgements of beauty and artistic goodness are beliefs about the work's tendency to produce positive responses. The property of being beautiful can then be identified with the property of being such as to provoke a positive response in ideal judges. *Mutatis mutandis* for artistic goodness. Views along these lines are defended, or at least floated, by Slote (1971), Pettit (1983), Goldman (1995), Railton (1998), Levinson (2007), Ross (2014), Simoniti (2017), Zangwill (2000), Sibley (2001) and Kivy (2015).[6]

[5] Zangwill (1994) also interprets Hume as a noncognitivist.

[6] There are differences between these philosophers. Some of them allow that the relevant dispositions are, or can be, relative to sensibilities (Goldman 1995, Levinson 2007). Others are silent on this issue. Railton (1998) does not explicitly endorse a dispositional understanding of aesthetic properties, though this would match his wider philosophical commitments. Zangwill (2000) sympathetically discusses (without fully endorsing) a rigidified theory of beauty, according to which it is the property of being such as to elicit a hedonic response *in beings with our actual constitution*. Others are silent on the issue of rigidification. Some authors seem to be talking primarily about concepts like *elegant* and *garish*, or emotion terms like 'moving' and 'sad' (Levinson 2007, Simoniti 2017). It is not clear whether they

This reductive form of realism fits with much in Hume's essay (it is in tension only with his claim that judgements of beauty are sentiments). For instance, it would make aesthetic judgements more closely analogous to judgements of colour, since colour judgements are most naturally thought of as representational states. Furthermore, Hume believes that beautiful or successful works of art have properties that make them suitable to trigger certain reactions in people, and that the reactions of art critics constitute good evidence that the work does indeed have those properties. This makes room for the idea that beauty and artistic merit should themselves be identified with properties of the object.

I take the dispositional view to be intended as a *reductive* form of realism about aesthetic properties, where the properties of beauty and artistic merit are natural properties (broadly understood). In order for the view to be reductive, the notion of an ideal judge must not itself presuppose or involve irreducibly evaluative properties. This is not obvious. For instance, you might think that delicacy of taste should be understood not just as the ability to make fine discriminations between perceptual properties, but as the ability to make fine discriminations between *artistically relevant* perceptual properties, or properties *relevant to beauty*. And you might think that this stands in the way of a reductive understanding of beauty and artistic merit.[7] However this may be, I will not pursue this line of objection here. I will proceed on the assumption that an ideal judge has various abilities which do not essentially involve or presuppose irreducibly normative or evaluative properties.

3. Why the dispositional view is mistaken

I think the dispositional view is mistaken about beauty and artistic merit, because our judgements are not appropriately sensitive to the reactions of others, ideal or non-

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would extend their view to beauty and artistic merit. Some philosophers don't explicitly discuss the conditions under which or in whom the response is supposed to be produced. The arguments in this paper are primarily relevant to dispositional theories (relative to sensibilities or not, rigidified or not) that identify beauty and artistic merit with a disposition to produce some kind of response in ideal judges. It is not entirely clear how many philosophers ultimately endorse such a view.

[7] I am not sure whether this is right. After all, an ideal judge must also be able to determine the genre to which a work belongs, and understand its purposes. Perhaps the relevance of perceptual properties to an artwork's beauty and success are wholly determined by such features.

ideal. The arguments to follow are relevant to any version of the dispositional view that makes non-redundant reference to a group of people. Reference to others is redundant if their sensibilities are identified in such detail that they would necessarily come to exactly the same judgements about all aesthetic matters as oneself. In such cases, one might as well say that aesthetic judgements concern dispositions to provoke responses in oneself. The latter view is a more extreme form of relativism that is not touched by my arguments in the same way. I will return to this option in section 4.

First, consider beauty. There is no serious, consistent pattern of deference with respect to 'beauty'. Ordinary people do not retract their judgements in light of what the experts say, even if they know about it. So their concept of beauty is unlikely to track the feelings of ideal judges. But since experts use the same concept as lay people, their judgements are equally unlikely to track the feelings of ideal judges. Moreover, even if experts did use a different concept of beauty, then their concept would be unlikely to track the responses of ideal judges as well, since not even experts make their application of 'beauty' depend on the judgements of others. Experts are likely to know (or at least believe) that other experts find different objects beautiful, but confidently proclaim an object's beauty (or lack of it) regardless.

A second consideration is this: there is something bizarre about judging an object to be beautiful that one does not find attractive (I am thinking here of cases where one is acquainted with the object, and found it unappealing; I am not thinking of cases where one is *told* that it is beautiful, without having seen it for oneself). But such a judgement should be unproblematic if the truth condition of 'X is beautiful' was: 'X is disposed to provoke a positive response in ideal judges'.

It does not help to point out that the assertion of an object's beauty conversationally implicates a positive experience.[8] For I am thinking of the *thought* that an object is beautiful. The strangeness of such a thought cannot be explained in terms of conversational implicatures generated by its assertion.[9]

One might try the following explanation: if one does not find an object beautiful, then that is evidence that ideal judges would not find it beautiful either. So it would be odd to judge it beautiful in the face of countervailing evidence.

[8] An explanation proposed by Mary Mothersill (1984).

[9] For the same point, see Hopkins (2000).

But this is unconvincing. The evidence provided by one's own responses might be very weak, and one might know it to be weak, as would be the case if one knew that one's responses diverge from those whom one considers to be experts. In that case, one would consider oneself to have overwhelming evidence that ideal judges would find it beautiful. Yet it would still be odd to judge the object beautiful.

The foregoing considerations count heavily against the idea that 'X is beautiful' ascribes the property of being such as to cause a favourable response in ideal judges. But what about judgements of artistic merit?

It is more plausible that there is a pattern of deference when it comes to judgements of artistic merit, at least among non-experts. And there isn't as direct a connection between judging art to be good and having a positive response to it. For instance, Noël Carroll argues that what he likes and dislikes does not correspond to what he judges to be good or bad in art:

> 'I like horror novels. I enjoy staying up all night long reading them until the last demon is exorcised off the last page. Yet I don't think that any of the hundred or so horror novels that I've read in the last two years was good. I also read good novels in between gorging myself on pulp fiction. And I have no trouble seeing that a novel like William Golding's *Rites of Passage* is very good, miles above anything by Stephen King, a bad writer whose books I buy obsessively. I may enjoy King while judging him to be inferior to Golding as a writer.' (1984, p. 187)

Carroll also says that he judges some art to be good that he personally dislikes.

So my first two arguments are not obviously applicable in the case of artistic merit. But the dispositional view still faces difficulties, principally to do with the possibility of divergence.

Even Hume recognized that ideal judges need not have the same reactions to everything. He allowed that ideal judges might diverge in preferences due to age, personal predilection, and the time and culture in which they grew up. If judgements of artistic goodness are correct only if ideal judges would respond the same way, then such judgements must be incorrect when this is not the case. Hume appears to have thought that divergence among ideal judges would only affect comparative judgements of artistic merit like the following:

(1) Shakespeare is better than Milton.

(2) Bach is better than Mozart.

In these cases, it may be plausible that such judgements are false. Each artist has so many virtues that it may be wrong to rank one above the other.

But Hume was too optimistic about the extent to which divergence can occur. First, meeting the requirements on an ideal judge is conceptually and metaphysically compatible with different responses to any work of art. But secondly, the evidence from art criticism suggests that such divergence *actually occurs* with respect to judgements not at all similar to (1) and (2). For instance, some film critics praise Boyhood. Others consider it a failure. Some critics rate Damien Hirst. Others think he is a charlatan. I could go on.

It is not as plausible to consider all these judgements false, unlike (1) and (2). More importantly, art critics don't *consider* all such judgements false, despite being aware of the fact that others don't agree with them. This makes it doubtful that their judgements track the joint verdict of ideal judges. In fact, the mere *possibility* of psychological divergence among ideal judges shows that they do not.

If one nevertheless wants to assign the property of being such as to cause a favourable response in ideal judges as the semantic value of 'artistically good', one would have to explain why the verdicts of actual critics do not track the Humean criteria. The obvious way to do this is to hypothesize that actual critics believe that those who disagree with them are not in fact ideal (either in the sense that they lack the required abilities or fail to exercise them properly).

In assessing this hypothesis, it is important to bear in mind that we are assuming that the notion of an ideal judge is not itself irreducibly normative: an ideal judge is not defined as someone who makes *correct* judgements of artistic merit. The notion is explicated in terms of various abilities, such as the ability to make fine discriminations in perceptual properties, the ability to determine genres, or the aims internal to a work. Do critics believe that anyone who meets these criteria responds the same way (at least with respect to issues that are unlike Shakespeare versus Milton)?

An implicit belief in sameness of response might result from a critic's experience with other experts. This is not because all critics in fact think alike, but

because there is significant *overlap* in judgement. This might lead one to believe that dissenters on a particular issue must be failing in the exercise of their abilities.

But suppose it became apparent that divergent judgements did not result from a failure to discriminate between perceptual properties, or a failure of classification into genres, or a failure to pick up on the content of the work. Would that make art critics inclined to retract their verdict?[10] I suspect it wouldn't. If so, then this is evidence that divergences between actual critical judgements and the verdicts of ideal critics cannot be explained by an implicit belief that dissenters are not in fact ideal

Although whether critics would retract their judgement is (or seems to be) an empirical question, it can be made plausible that they would not, or in any case that such retraction would not be explained in a way congenial to the dispositional view. For suppose that you yourself judge a work to be bad, but that your friends think highly of it. The fact that others do respond in different ways may indeed make one doubt one's verdict. But this is best explained by uncertainty about having missed some feature that would justify a different verdict. The evidence that could change your mind is not evidence *that people in fact respond in different ways*. You are looking for features of the work that you may have failed to notice or appreciate. If you became aware of those features, but failed to see them as sufficient, it would be reasonable for you to retain your judgement.[11] But all of this is true for critics too. They would not consider the verdict or reactions of other critics *by itself* good evidence for an aesthetic judgement. Rather, they would consider *whatever these reactions are based on* as potential evidence. This is in tension with the idea that judgements of merit are beliefs about whether an object has properties that elicit certain responses in ideal people. For that would make the very fact that people respond in certain ways relevant evidence for a judgement about merit.[12, 13]

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[10] I am here assuming that the information about divergence does not throw doubt onto these critics' own exercise of their abilities.

[11] It might, theoretically, be the case that taking them to be sufficient itself consists in a belief that ideal judges would take them to be such, but this does not appear to be the best interpretation in light of the same considerations as I adduced above.

[12] So I concur with Zangwill here: 'Perhaps it is true that we are disposed to respond in certain ways to aesthetic features. But we take our responses to be *warranted*—and we take them to be warranted in virtue of the aesthetic features that we experience. Even if it is true that ideal critics *necessarily* come to know a thing's aesthetic properties (or else they are not ideal), that would not be part of what being

Some subsidiary considerations strengthen this conclusion. First, I've already argued that beauty is not the property of being such as to elicit a positive response from ideal judges. But some judgements of artistic merit are largely based on experiences of beauty. If beauty is the main good-maker of a work of art, but such judgements do not track the reactions of ideal judges, then it would be odd if judgements of goodness based on beauty *did* track them.

Secondly, saying that a work of art is good does not appear to be the same as saying that it is such that certain people would respond to it a certain way. It seems to be an *evaluation* of the work, not a description of psychological facts. It is not difficult to imagine situations in which people do respond to some work, yet believe that they ought not. Although these considerations are not decisive, it adds to the evidence against the dispositional view.

4. What's left?

The foregoing does not mean that Hume was wrong to suggest that judgements of beauty and artistic merit are subject to the standards that he specifies. We don't take seriously negative appraisals of a work based on jealously towards the artist; if a person fails to understand a work's internal aims, we would consider her judgement unreliable (etc.). What is wrong with the dispositional view are not the criteria, but its identification of beauty and merit with dispositional properties to produce responses in people who meet them.

So where does this leave us? There are at least three remaining theories. The first is noncognitivism. According to this view, judgements of beauty and artistic merit are not beliefs about the instantiation of properties in the first place. The second

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an aesthetic property *consists in*.' (2001, p. 203) However, I think that the "rigidified hedonic response-dependent account" of beauty that Zangwill discusses in (2000) falls to very similar arguments (although Zangwill does not endorse this view, he seems quite sympathetic).

[13] This argument also counts against a relativized version of ideal observer theory, as defended by Goldman (1995). Goldman takes aesthetic properties to consist in dispositions to produce various responses in ideal observers *who belong to certain groups* (presumably groups consisting of people similar to oneself). This is still in tension with the fact that we do not consider people's responses as *direct* evidence for positive aesthetic judgements. For such responses are direct evidence for the claim that an artwork has the relevant dispositional property.

is a form of indexical contextualism, according to which aesthetic judgements are true iff they are in accordance with the speaker's standards.[14] The third view holds that aesthetic judgements ascribe mind-independent properties to art.[15]

Of course, one of the difficulties raised for the dispositional view also applies to the idea that beauty is mind-independent. This concerns the oddity of judging a work beautiful that one personally dislikes.[16] If one nevertheless wants to defend a mind-independent conception of beauty, one has to show that this aspect of judgements of beauty is strongly counterbalanced by other features, such that the best overall account favours independence of the mind.[17] Let us assume that this is possible. But even if it is not, the difficulty is not obviously applicable to judgements of artistic merit (one does not have to find a work beautiful to judge it good). So a mind-independent theory belongs to the possibilities here.

Unfortunately, space does not permit me to assess noncognitivism. I will assume that it is false.[18] This leaves us with relativism and mind-independence. In the

[14] You might think that this theory is also ruled out by the fact that we don't treat facts about responses as direct evidence for aesthetic judgements. But I don't think that is clear-cut. If one's own standards rate artworks for having various non-aesthetic properties, then the only way of finding out whether an artwork meet one's own standards is by acquiring information about the work of art, not one's responses to it (which might not stand up to one's own scrutiny). This would explain why only facts about the artwork count as evidence *from one's own perspective*. It does not, of course, explain why we don't treat the reactions of others as evidence that *their* judgements are true. One would have to look elsewhere for an explanation of that phenomenon (perhaps Björnsson & Finlay 2010 helps).

[15] This view is rarely explicitly defended. Perhaps Zemach (1991) is a proponent.

[16] Louise Hanson (2018) thinks that 'X is beautiful, but I don't like it' is not akin to a Moorean paradox. I think it is. The sense that can be made of such a statement depends on the fact that one can like and dislike an object for many different reasons. But if the features in virtue of which one judges an object to be beautiful are exactly those in virtue of which one dislikes it, then the statement is paradoxical (possibly even contradictory).

[17] As Louise Hanson (2018) points out, there is also something odd about saying 'X is wrong, but I do not disapprove of it'. Despite this, many metaethicists defend the mind-independence of moral properties. They may succeed, provided they can show that this aspect of moral judgements is counterbalanced by aspects that suggest mind-independence, and that have to be retained in the best systematic view of the nature of such judgements. An explanation of the apparent strangeness would also be important.

[18] If one wants to argue against noncognitivism in aesthetics, one could apply the standard objections to noncognitivism about moral judgements to aesthetic judgements (principally the Frege-Geach problem and the problem of certitude).

next section, I show how to motivate the view that beauty and artistic merit are mind-independent properties. If this motivation is convincing (which I ultimately doubt), it opens the door to companions-in-guilt arguments relating moral to aesthetic judgements. These will be examined in the final section.

5. Motivating mind-independence

Some aestheticians believe that aesthetic experience has an objectivist phenomenology.[19] Take the following passage from Zangwill (2000):

> 'common sense (folk aesthetics) does not represent aesthetic properties as depending on our actual hedonic reactions. Intuitively aesthetic properties depend on a thing's physical and sensory properties, and maybe on its context as well, but not on our actual pleasures or displeasures [...] Those who fail to appreciate the Alhambra are not just different but defective. ' (2000, p. 616)

Zangwill makes two points here. The first point is that aesthetic properties would appear to us as independent of our actual states of pleasure and displeasure. The other is that we would not be tolerant of divergent judgements of beauty (elegance, etc.). What he means by this is that we would not just refrain from calling divergent judgements of beauty true,[20] but also that we take people who make them to be *mistaken* (which presupposes that our respective judgements concern the same subject matter).

Interestingly, these are exactly the kinds of observations that push some metaethicists away from relativism and in the direction of mind-independent conceptions of moral properties. Take the view that moral judgements are true in virtue of the speaker's standards (as in Wong 1984, Finlay 2014). Such views are

[19] A view famously held by Immanuel Kant with respect to beauty (although the sense in which he took the phenomenology to be objective was more to do with universality than mind-independence), and endorsed by Zangwill (2000), Kivy (2015) and Boghossian (manuscript), among others.

[20] Which may be the case also for statements like 'Vegemite is tasty', if we dislike it ourselves. Nevertheless, we may not believe that when two people make divergent judgements about tastiness, at least one of them is making a mistake.

often rejected because they would be in tension with the way we evaluate the truth of moral statements (e.g. Brogaard 2008, Parfit 2011). For suppose that John says:

(1) Surrogate motherhood is wrong.

If John's statement is true in virtue of his standards, and his standards forbid surrogacy, then his statement is true. But Bahati, whose standards allow it, would not *judge* it to be true even if she knows that John's standards condemn it. So the way in which Bahati and others who reject John's standards evaluate the truth of moral assertions does not seem to match the relativist theory about their truth conditions.

A closely related problem is that of disagreement. Suppose, again, that John says (1), and Bahati says

(2) Surrogate motherhood is not wrong.

If John's statement is true in virtue of his standards, and Bahati's statement is true in virtue of hers, then what John and Bahati say can be simultaneously true. As a result, they do not really disagree with each other. John's claim concerns what is required by his standards, while Bahati's claim concerns what is required by hers. Yet it seems as if John and Bahati disagree about the same issue.[21]

But even if relativists can give credible explanations of patterns of truth evaluation and the sense of disagreement, proponents of mind-independence will stress phenomenology. They will say that it doesn't *seem* as if moral truths depend on contingent standards, and that it *seems* as if people who make divergent moral judgements are not just speaking falsely but making a *mistake*.[22] And they would say that such impressions are best explained by the hypothesis that moral judgements ascribe mind-independent properties.

[21] This point is sometimes thought to count equally against new wave relativism, according to which a moral proposition is true iff it is in accordance with the standards of an *assessor* of the proposition. For a statement of the view, see MacFarlane (2007); for the criticism in terms of disagreement, see Francén (2010).

[22] For considerations of this sort, see Mackie (1977), Joyce (2001), Cuneo (2007), Enoch (2011), Parfit (2011), Olson (2014), Streumer (2017), and many others. In the case of morals, the point is often made in terms of an inescapable *authority* that moral facts or standards appear to have.

If Zangwill is right, then the same considerations apply to aesthetic judgements. For in that case,

> (1) we do not evaluate other people's aesthetic assertions as if they are true insofar as they conform to the speaker's standards,
> (2) we believe that speakers who make divergent judgements about aesthetic properties disagree about the same subject matter,
> (3) we believe that if two people make divergent judgements about aesthetic properties, then at least one of them is making a mistake, and
> (4) we experience aesthetic properties as if they are independent of our contingent standards and responses.

These considerations would appear to favour a mind-independent understanding of aesthetic properties.

Of course, mind-independent is not the same as irreducible, and irreducible is not the same as non-natural (being water is mind-independent, but nevertheless reducible to other properties, which are also natural). But there are reasons to think that mind-independent aesthetic properties would have to be non-natural.[23]

First, Nick Zangwill (2000) argues that sensory properties are non-rigidly mind-dependent,[24] and that aesthetic properties depend on sensory properties. If he is right, then aesthetic properties supervene on such things as appearances, which are by definition mind-dependent. If one wants to identify aesthetic properties with mind-*in*dependent properties, then they would have to supervene on appearances. But what natural yet mind-independent property might supervene on appearances and reasonably be identified with aesthetic properties?

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[23] Although there are also reasons to think that they would not. Zangwill (2000) appeals to the apparent causal role ascribed to aesthetic properties in ordinary thought. One of these roles is perception.

[24] This means that whether something is red is not uniquely tied to the actual constitution of human beings. Zangwill's argument for this thesis is as follows: suppose there were Martians with an inverted colour spectrum relative to our own. The experience they have when confronted with tomatoes is qualitatively indistinguishable from the experience we have when confronted with grass. Would we consider the Martians' judgements as mistaken? Zangwill thinks that we would not. This means that colours cannot consist of dispositions to produce sensory experiences *in creatures like us*.

Secondly, any plausible mechanism that could tie our aesthetic concepts to natural properties would probably lead to relativism, understood as the idea that different communities (or even different people) refer to different properties with their use of 'beautiful' and 'artistic merit'. Take causal theories of reference. Such theories maintain that the reference of a term is determined by that which causally regulates the concept. What this means is that if one group systematically tokens the concept of beauty in response to certain features, but another systematically tokens the concept in response to others, then their concepts refer to different properties (Horgan & Timmons 1991). But this contradicts theses (2) and (3) above. So if these theses support mind-independence, then they also support a non-causal theory. Similar conclusions are likely to hold for other ways of determining a natural referent.[25]

A third reason to suspect that mind-independent aesthetic properties would have to be non-natural is that there is unlikely to be any relatively unified property that counts as natural and could be identified with aesthetic properties. The supervenience base of aesthetic properties is extremely diverse (especially when it comes to beauty and artistic merit). Anything that binds them together is likely to consist in effects they have on our minds. But if aesthetic properties are *in*dependent of our minds (and so cannot consist in dispositions to produce such effects), then our only option is to identify them with a huge disjunction of non-relational properties. Such a disjunction may be too disunified to count as the referent of our concepts.[26]

Although the foregoing considerations are not decisive, they are certainly suggestive. If Zangwill is right about the phenomenology of aesthetic judgement, non-naturalism in aesthetics might well be plausible (I will return to this below). In the final section, I will discuss whether this conception of beauty and artistic merit gives rise to companions-in-guilt arguments relating moral to aesthetic judgement.

6. Companions-in-guilt arguments

A common type of companions-in-guilt argument (CGA) aims at showing that we should not reject the existence of some entity on the basis of an allegedly problematic

[25] One way to ensure the same referent for all speakers is to claim that there are many conceptual truths relating beauty and artistic merit to non-aesthetic features. But this is deeply implausible.

[26] This last consideration is not decisive. There might be something unified about the *concept* of beauty and artistic merit, which can nevertheless explain why its referent is disunified.

feature, because the same feature is had by some other entity whose existence we are justified in accepting.[27] We might understand such arguments as attempts to undermine the epistemic significance of the consideration used to support a negative existential judgement. Their force depends, among other things, on the existence of independent reason to accept the existence of the entity that shares the allegedly problematic feature.

But other CGAs are possible. If there is no independent reason to accept the existence of the entity that shares the problematic feature, then one might argue in the other direction, and claim that since the problematic feature warrants a negative existential judgement about X, it also warrants a negative existential judgement about Y.

If beauty and artistic merit are indeed non-natural, mind-independent features, then both types of CGA are on the table. If there is something problematic about non-natural, mind-independent *moral* value, then beauty and artistic merit share in the problem (at least insofar as it boils down to the non-natural and mind-independent nature of that value, rather than its moral status). But perhaps this shows that we should lower our suspicion of mind-independent value, if there is some independent reason to think that beauty and good art exist.

Suppose one wants to argue for the latter claim. One way to do this is to say that one can simply *see* that certain things are beautiful, and that it would be costly to deny the veridicality of these apparent perceptions (notice that an analogous argument is not as convincing for goodness in art, since judgements about that are more likely inferential).

One problem for this reasoning is that it is unclear *how* one could perceive non-natural properties in the first place. After all, they are often thought to lack a causal role. A second problem is that we may be able to give plausible explanations of the apparent perception of beauty in ways that do not require us to postulate min-independent beauty. For instance, Kant (2013) thought that the disinterested nature of the pleasure that grounds a judgement of beauty plays an important role in explaining

[27] For an in-depth discussion of different types of companions-in-guilt arguments, see Lillehammer (2007).

why it appears to be warranted by the object, rather than dependent on contingent features of our psychology.[28]

However, when it comes to explaining why beauty appears to be objective, one might say that the burden of proof is on the sceptic. Such a sceptic does not have the same resources available as sceptics about mind-independent moral properties. For instance, some philosophers think it was evolutionarily useful for humans to conceive of moral rules as imbued with a special authority (Joyce 2001, Olson 2014). But even if it was evolutionarily useful to have a sense of beauty, it is not clear why this sense would come with an objectivist phenomenology.[29] So perhaps the task is not so easy.

One might also say that it would be absurd to conclude that nothing is beautiful, even apart from considerations about what explains the sense that beauty is mind-independent. This would be a kind of Moorean argument for aesthetic realism. Jonas Olson (2014, chaper 7) develops such an argument on behalf of the moral realist. The argument has only one premise, and goes as follows:

(1) It is a fact that torturing babies for fun is wrong.
(2) So, there is at least one moral fact.

The idea behind this argument is that it is not clearly more plausible that there are no moral facts than that torturing babies for fun is wrong. Since, by hypothesis, the truth of (1) requires the existence of mind-independent moral facts, we have reason to accept at least one mind-independent moral fact.

Realists about mind-independent beauty might argue in a similar fashion. They might say:

[28] By 'disinterested', Kant means that the pleasure does not result from the fact that the existence of the beautiful object serves the satisfaction of our desires.

[29] An option might be to relate the development of a sense of beauty to the use of seeing certain features as objectively valuable (e.g. features that are conducive to health). Thanks to Wessel van Dommelen for this suggestion. Another possibility is to relate the development of a sense of beauty to practices that sustain a sense of community. Perhaps that is somehow furthered by the impression that certain artefacts or rites are objectively beautiful. This is of course highly speculative and not initially as promising as evolutionary explanations of the belief that morality is objective.

(1*) It is a fact that Monument Valley is beautiful.

(2*) So, there is at least one aesthetic fact.

Again, the idea would be that premise (1*) is much more plausible than whatever leads to scepticism about the existence of mind-independent value.

Olson ultimately rejects the Moorean argument because there would be plausible explanations of our moral thought and discourse that do not appeal to moral facts. Such explanations crucially involve evolutionary tales about the benefits of beliefs in objective moral facts. But if such debunking explanations are not forthcoming in the case of beauty, the Moorean argument has more force in the aesthetic case.[30] If so, then one can run a CGA relating moral to aesthetic value as follows:

Companions-in-Guilt Argument 1

P1. Beauty is a mind-independent, non-natural value.
P1. We have good (Moorean) reason to think that beauty exists.
C1. So, we have good reason to think that at least one mind-independent, non-natural value exists.
P4. Since we have good reason to think that at least one mind-independent, non-natural value exists, we have no general reason to think that mind-independent, non-natural values are ontologically suspect.
C4. So, we have no general reason to think that mind-independent, non-natural moral values are ontologically suspect.

This argument's plausibility depends on a number of assumptions. In particular, it depends on the assumption that we have good reason to think that beauty is mind-independent, and the assumption that the best explanation of the impression that beauty is objective is that we actually perceive (or intuit) mind-independent beauty. I have my doubts about the first assumption, and will return to this below.

[30] Perhaps debunkers can argue that aesthetic judgements are an outgrowth of a more general capacity for normative or evaluative judgements, which capacity also explains why moral requirements seem objective. Thanks to Bart Streumer for this suggestion.

CGA1 tries to undermine the fact that moral values would have to be mind-independent and non-natural in kind as a reason to reject their existence. It does not specifically target the fact that moral facts would involve categorical reasons. Most extant CGA's in metaethics do have this target. As indicated, some philosophers argue that moral reasons would have to be categorical, and that categorical reasons don't exist (Mackie 1977, Joyce 2001). Others retort that epistemic reasons are also categorical, but that we cannot reasonably deny their existence (e.g. Shafer-Landau 2006, Cuneo 2007, Rowland forthcoming). This would diminish the significance of categoricity in the moral case as well.

When it comes to categorical reasons, companions in guilt have so far been sought in epistemic and prudential normativity (for an example of the latter, see Fletcher 2018). But what about aesthetics? If we suppose that beauty and artistic merit are mind-independent and non-natural in kind, might they provide categorical reasons?

I'll start with artistic merit. As Louise Hanson (2017) has argued, the kind of goodness involved in judgements to the effect that something is *a good artwork* is plausibly *attributive goodness*, or goodness *qua* member of its kind. If so, then it may seem doubtful that judgements about artistic goodness entail judgements about categorical reasons. After all, the fact that something is a good K (knife, house, gun, torture-method) does not in general entail that you have reason to do anything, let alone categorical reason.

The fact that something is a good K *might*, of course, give you a reason to do something, but only because that fact explains why it is (in some way) good *simpliciter*[31], or because there are valid normative principles that require you to do something involving good Ks. But such further facts about good Ks are unlikely to follow from the *concept* 'good qua member of its kind'.

Nevertheless, there might be something about the concept of *artistic* goodness that sets it apart from other kinds of attributive goodness, such that judgements involving it do entail judgements about categorical reasons. If there is such a difference, it is most likely to stem from the concept of art.

Some aestheticians define art such that anything that is art is necessarily valuable (e.g. R. G. Collingwood 1958, Bell 1914). Such views are vulnerable to a

[31] See also Hanson (2017) .

decisive objection: they make bad art into a contradiction (Dickie 2000). So it seems unlikely that judgements involving the concept of artistic goodness entail judgements about categorical reasons because the concept of art is evaluative in this sense.

But there is another option. Attributive goodness is goodness qua member of its kind. This means that the standard of goodness is related to the kind of thing it is. In some (perhaps all?) cases, the standard is set by the *function* of the item: knives are for cutting, and a good knife performs that function well. If we take this model, and want to know the standard of good art, we need to know art's function.

If art has a function, it is related to human experience. Paintings, music, theatre (et.) are meant to provide perceptual-cum-cognitive experiences. If so, then one might propose that the function of art is to afford *valuable experiences* (perhaps of a certain type). Saying that a work of art is good would then amount to saying that it affords valuable experiences. This directly links judgements of artistic merit to judgements about valuable experiences, and can easily accommodate bad art: bad art fails to live up to the standard internal to it.[32]

Some philosophers believe that value is the source of reasons.[33] They might say that if X is valuable, then we have reason to relate to X a certain way. This view would establish connections between judgements of artistic merit and reasons. Take the view that pleasure is intrinsically valuable. Those who hold this view can also hold that we have categorical reason to experience pleasure. Such people would say that although the reasons are generated by subjective mental states, it is not the fact that we *desire* pleasure, or that we *value* it, that explains why we have reason to pursue it. Now suppose that good art affords intrinsically valuable experiences (these would plausibly include certain kinds of pleasure). One might then say that this entails that certain people, in certain contexts, have categorical reason to attend to

[32] Is this view vulnerable to my objections against the dispositional view? Perhaps. After all, the view does involve claims about a dispositional property. But this property is characterized in evaluative terms: good art is such as to afford experiences it would be *valuable* to have. It does not say that good art is such that people who meet various requirements would have such an experience.

[33] Joseph Raz (1999) defends a version of the view. Stephen Finlay (2014) holds it as well, although he rejects the idea that goodness can generate reasons that have rational authority irrespective of our desires.

good art (namely those people likely to have the relevant experiences upon attending to the work[34]).[35]

However, even if it could be shown that judgements about goodness in art entail judgements about categorical reasons, we still need to know whether there is independent reason to believe that good art exists in order to run a CGA that undermines the epistemic significance of categoricity.

One might argue that the best explanation of the fact that critics arrive at judgements about good art is that it really exists. One step in such an argument might again be an appeal to the difficulty of explaining why we should conceive of artistic goodness as mind-independent in the first place, if the property does not exist. What possible evolutionary benefit could attach to conceiving of artistic quality as mind-independent? And if there is no evolutionary benefit, how might appreciative states give rise to the impression that goodness in art is objective?

Similar routes might be taken in the case of beauty. According to Roger Scruton, it is a platitude that beauty is always a reason for attending to the thing that possesses it (2011, p. 5). However, if a platitude is something fairly obvious, then Scruton's claim is not. Despite this, beauty might provide categorical reasons to attend to the object that possesses it. If there is reason to think that beauty is mind-independent and that it is a value, one might (again) appeal to the idea that value grounds reasons to establish connections between beauty and reasons. As before, the failure of evolutionary or Kantian explanations of the sense of objectivity might undermine debunking explanations of our experiences. This would help to defend the reality of beauty, and allow a companions-in-guilt argument of the following kind (*mutatis mutandis* for artistic merit):

Companions-in-Guilt Argument 2

[34] The fact that this depends on context and psychological features of individuals does not make the reasons any less categorical, so long as the existence of those reasons is not explained by the fact that anyone wants to have or values having the relevant experiences.

[35] You might think that statements about what is good art do not entail anything about categorical reasons, because the following claim seems perfectly coherent: 'Mozart's requiem is good art, but I have / there is no reason to attend to it'. However, I don't think the intuitive evidence here is clear enough to confidently reject the hypothesis.

P1. We have good reason to think that beauty is a mind-independent, non-natural value.
P2. We have good reason to think that beauty exists.
C1. So, we have good reason to think that at least one mind-independent, non-natural value exists.
P3. We have good reason to think that mind-independent, non-natural values generate categorical reasons.
C2. So, we have good reason to think that beauty generates categorical reasons.
C3. So, we have good reason to think that at least some categorical reasons exist.
P4. Since we have good reason to think that at least one mind-independent, non-natural value exists, and that it generates categorical reasons, we have no general reason to think that mind-independent, non-natural value and categorical reasons are ontologically suspect.
C4. So, we have no general reason to think that mind-independent moral values and categorical moral reasons are ontologically suspect.

Of course, the strength of CGA2 depends on many assumptions. It stands or falls with the idea that value generates reasons, that the best conception of beauty is as a mind-independent, non-natural value property, and that the best explanation of our conception of beauty is that mind-independent, non-natural beauty actually exists.

I have my doubts about the second assumption (and hence the third). Although Zangwill is adamant that we do not tolerate divergent judgements of beauty, and that we experience aesthetic properties as mind-independent, I cannot confirm this for myself. Although it is correct that I would not call divergent judgements true, it does not strike me that those who make such judgements *are making a mistake*. This is by no means as intuitively clear as is often claimed in the case of morals. Since the case for a mind-independent conception of beauty crucially depends on these alleged intuitive data, the case is not particularly strong. This seems to me a crucial asymmetry between morals and aesthetics, and explains why a mind-independent conception of moral properties is more defensible than a mind-independent conception of beauty.[36]

[36] This is one answer to Hanson (2018). Hanson argues against what she calls The Asymmetry Claim: the idea that mind-independent realism about beauty is less defensible than mind-independent realism

Things are less straightforward when it comes to artistic merit. Perhaps we are less tolerant of diverging judgements here. But it is important to focus on the right cases. Hume was right that reasonable judgements about art are made in the light of a proper understanding of the work and a suitably impartial frame of mind. Any tendency to reject divergent judgements as mistaken had better not boil down to a failure to meet such criteria. So we must focus on cases where two people understand the work, know about the intended audience, place themselves in their shoes (etc.), yet come to different conclusions regarding the work's overall merit. I think that such cases are both possible and actual. Do we think that at least one of these two people is making a mistake? Perhaps. However, it is not clear to me how strong this intuition is. So I doubt that it can serve as a solid foundation for a mind-independent metaphysics of artistic merit.

7. Conclusion

In this paper, I have described one way to argue for a mind-independent conception of beauty and artistic merit. Such a conception allows the development of new companions-in-guilt arguments relating moral to aesthetic judgement. The strength of the arguments crucially depends on a phenomenological premise: that beauty and artistic merit appear to us to be objective. I think that can be questioned.

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about moral properties. She challenges those who believe in the asymmtry to isolate a relevant difference between beauty and moral properties.

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