

Aesthetic Higher-Order Evidence for Subjectivists¹

Christy Mag Uidhir and Luis Oliveira

University of Houston

Aesthetic subjectivism takes the truth of aesthetic judgments to be relative to the individual making that judgment. Despite widespread suspicion, however, this does not mean that one cannot be wrong about such judgments. Accordingly, this does not mean that one cannot gain higher-order evidence of error and fallibility that bears on the rationality of the aesthetic judgment in question. In this paper, we explain and explore these issues in some detail.

Aesthetic judgments seem to indicate something affective about the person who makes them. When I judge that my entrée was *delicious*, that your painting is *beautiful*, that tonight's movie was *good*, or that some new piece of music is *great*, I seem to be indicating something or other about my preferences, desires, emotions, feelings, and so on.² This is not simply because we can infer from these aesthetic judgments something about me, much like you can infer that I am having a certain kind of visual experience from my claim that there is an empty blue chair in the corner over there. Instead, there seems to be something in the very content of aesthetic judgments that makes them partly about my affective states and experiences.

One common way of making sense of this apparent feature of aesthetic judgments is to accept that, indeed, there is not much more to them than some kind of truth-apt expression of our preferences, desires, emotions, feelings, tastes, and so on. On this view, in other words, there is no *independent* “fact of the matter” regarding the deliciousness of my meal or the beauty of your painting, and no *objective* standards by reference to which we can determine whether some movie is truly good or some piece of music truly great. There is no independent fact of the matter, that is, as to the deliciousness of Foie Gras Ice Cream, the beauty of a Thomas Kinkadee cottage painting, the goodness of an Ingmar Bergmann psycho-analytic flick, or the greatness of Bob Dylan's tunes. That I judge these delicious, beautiful, good, and great speaks to my personal preferences – in some sense or another – and to nothing more. These aesthetic properties are not “in the objects,” so to speak, such that you and I can succeed or fail to *detect* them. Call this view *aesthetic subjectivism*. In section 2 below, we will describe in some detail a *response-dependence* version of this view.

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² Ordinarily, the predicates ‘good’ and ‘great’ can be used in almost any context: good/great car, good/great game, good/great decision, good/great person, good/great inference, etc. We here assume there is an “aesthetic sense” of ‘good’ and ‘great’ without thereby committing ourselves to any particular view on how to draw the relevant distinctions. Following Riggle (2016), moreover, we are not hereby committed to the traditional view (c.f., Hume and Kant, e.g.) that aesthetic judgments *per se* are characteristically “disinterested.” We are operating here with a more capacious notion instead, one where “aesthetic judgments” includes under the same umbrella what the traditionalist would distinguish as aesthetic judgments and judgments of personal taste.

Aesthetic subjectivism, as broadly sketched above, has widespread appeal. It is, nonetheless, somewhat of an outlier position in contemporary philosophy of art.³ Of course, philosophers in general are typically already inclined to be non-objectivists about predicates of personal taste (‘tasty’, ‘funny’, ‘sweet’, etc.), but the challenge here lies with aesthetic predicates, especially the standard ones about which few philosophers of art are subjectivists (‘beautiful’, ‘delicious’, ‘elegant’, ‘harmonious’, ‘sublime’, etc.). And while it is easy to see how higher-order evidence in aesthetics would be possible if objectivism about these predicates were true, the prospects are perhaps a little more daunting on the assumption of subjectivism instead. Some of the central concepts behind discussions of higher-order evidence – e.g. “peer,” “disagreement,” “expert,” “misleading evidence” – can seem entirely out of place in a context where we are each just talking about ourselves. We take up this challenge, even though our primary goal is not to assess the prospects for a promising version of aesthetic subjectivism. (Disclosure: one of us thinks the prospects are bright; one of us thinks the prospects are dim.) Our primary goal, instead, is to examine what talk of higher-order evidence amounts to if aesthetic subjectivism is true. We think it amounts to much indeed.

Here is how we proceed. In section 1, we provide a selective overview of the notion of higher-order evidence, identifying four different contexts in which the notion applies in slightly different ways. In section 2, we describe in more detail the *response-dependence* version of aesthetic subjectivism that we will be taking on board for the purposes of our discussion in this paper. With this bit of background in place, in section 3, we discuss the notion of *aesthetic higher order evidence*, focusing, in particular, on two ways in which aesthetic subjectivism makes sense of the four different contexts of application identified earlier: by attending to our dispositions and by attending to the proper conditions for having the relevant kind of experience. Finally, in section 4, we argue that our discussion reveals hidden resources for the subjectivist faced with what we call the “core objectivist intuition,” namely, that some aesthetic judgments are so implausible that they just must be unequivocally wrong.

1. Higher-Order Evidence

We have no interest in saying anything too controversial about evidence -- higher-order or otherwise. In fact, the less controversial we are, the more mileage we can get out of what we have to say about the implications

³ There, nonetheless, are a variety of authors who defend views about aesthetic judgments that are similar to, or in the vicinity of, the view we will defend in section 2 below. See, for example, Goldman, (1995), Levinson (2010), Melchionne (2010), Egan (2010, 2014), López de sa (2017), and González Prado and Milić (2018). Moreover, Chalmers and Bourget’s (2014) survey of philosopher’s views included the question: “Aesthetic Value: Objective or Subjective?”. While there are many ambiguities about this way of posing the question, they found that 46.36% of non-specialists answered “subjective” while only 26.12% of specialists shared the same view (see p. 21). For a recent overview of nearby views about aesthetic value that place a premium on experience, much like our view of their semantics places a premium on experience, see Servaas van der Berg (2022).

for aesthetics. Our plan for this section, then, is simply to get clear about what we mean by the relevant epistemic terms, staying close to fairly standard accounts.

Some proposition p is *evidence* for my belief that q when p is an indication of q 's truth. Taking 'k' to stand for background knowledge, we can say more carefully that:

Evidence: p is evidence for S 's belief that q iff $\Pr(q / k) < \Pr(q / p \ \& \ k)$

As the name suggests, *higher-order evidence* is in some sense evidence about your evidence. The most discussed cases, however, are cases where higher-order evidence bears negatively on what you believe (cf., e.g., Kelly, 2005; Feldman, 2007; Christensen, 2010). For one reason or another, discussions of higher-order evidence have focused almost exclusively on the rational impact of evidence of error or fallibility. Accordingly, we can here focus on the following more careful statement:

Higher-Order Evidence: p^* is higher-order evidence against S 's belief that q iff

- (i) p^* is evidence for q^* ,
- (ii) q^* is either about S 's evidence p for q or about the use S has made of p ,
- (iii) q^* bears negatively on the rationality of S 's belief that q .

Ordinarily, we can get this kind of evidence from instances of peer disagreement, expert testimony, etiological information about irrelevant influences, information about suboptimal circumstances surrounding our experience, and so on. Consider some typical examples:

Peer Disagreement: You calculate the value of a 20% tip on your share of a business lunch and come to believe that "it is x " (q_1). You then find out that "your colleague arrived at a different value for the same percentage of an equal share" (p^*_1).

Expert Testimony: You read a scientific study on the propagation of viral bioaerosols and infer that "the chances of infection in circumstances C are low" (q_2). You then find out that "the authors of that study believe that the chances of infection in C are high" (p^*_2).

Irrelevant Influences: You are choosing between two candidates for a position in your organization and conclude that "the male finalist has a slightly stronger CV than the female finalist" (q_3). You then find out that "non-blind assessments of comparable CVs are typically unconsciously biased towards male candidates" (p^*_3).

Suboptimal Circumstances: You are looking at various objects coming through a factory line and you form the belief that "this factory is producing a series of red lunchboxes" (q_4). You then find out

that “there is a bright red light shining directly on top of the section of the conveyor belt that you can see” (p^*_4).⁴

In each of these cases, you have acquired higher-order evidence against the relevant q -belief. For example, p^*_1 is evidence (of whatever strength) for “I made a mistake calculating the tip” (q^*_1); and p^*_2 is evidence (of whatever strength) for “I misunderstood the evidential import of the data” (q^*_2); and p^*_3 is evidence (of whatever strength) for “my belief is not related to the evidence in the right way” (q^*_3), and p^*_4 is evidence (of whatever strength) for “my evidence is misleading” (q^*_4). Each of these q^* claims is about my evidence for the relevant q -belief or about my use of that evidence, and each is more likely to be true given the relevant p^* claim than they were before. Conditions (i) and (ii) are satisfied.

There are different ways, however, of spelling out the details behind condition (iii) and different views on the all-things-consider impact of your higher-order evidence, in each of these cases, on the rationality of the relevant q -belief. The central issue here is the interplay between structural and substantive rationality (c.f., Worsnip, 2018), and some of the related issues include the possibility of rational dilemmas (c.f., Christensen, 2016), the rationality of level-splitting (c.f., Weatherson, 2019), the prospects of fallibilism (c.f., Neta, 2019), as well as the explanatory power of the mechanisms by which our higher-order evidence p^* can outweigh (c.f., DiPaolo, 2019), undercut (c.f., Pollock, 1986), and/or bracket (c.f., Elga, 2007) our evidence p for q .⁵ Yet we needn’t worry ourselves with any of those details here. What matters presently is how talk of higher-order evidence can make sense given aesthetic subjectivism, and not what is the correct thing to say about these kinds of cases. What we see clearly from this brief overview, at any rate, is that making sense of such talk requires identifying (a) a target q -belief, (b) S ’s evidence p for q , (c) S ’s higher-order evidence p^* against q , and (d) the relevant q^* that could satisfy conditions (i), (ii), and (iii). We have our hands full.

2. Aesthetic Subjectivism

Assessing the proper role of *aesthetic* higher-order evidence requires clarifying, first, the propositions that are accepted and expressed through aesthetic “judgments” and “assertions.” In order to facilitate the comparisons and analogies with typical discussions of higher-order evidence, we here make two methodological simplifications. First, we focus on what are sometimes called “aesthetic verdicts” (attributions of thin predicates such as ‘delicious’, ‘beautiful’, ‘good’, ‘great’, etc.) and sometimes opposed to “substantive

⁴ Some who try to be careful about *how* higher-order evidence defeats think of Suboptimal Circumstances as involving an undercutting defeater rather than a higher-order defeater (e.g., Christensen, 2010; Schechter, 2013; Lasonen-Aarnio, 2014; and DiPaolo, 2019.) We are here purposively working with a broader notion in order to highlight the variety of resources available to the aesthetic subjectivist.

⁵ See Whiting (2020) for an overview of all these issues.

aesthetic judgments” (attributions of thick predicates like ‘balanced’, ‘dynamic’, ‘graceful’, etc.).⁶ Second, we assume that an aesthetic judgment is partly constituted by an aesthetic belief and that an aesthetic assertion expresses, in part, an aesthetic belief. This allows us to unify our discussion around aesthetic beliefs which, of course, can be then identified with the target q-beliefs we need.

What is the content, then, of aesthetic beliefs, given the anti-realist metaphysics of aesthetic subjectivism? On the view we are interested in here, aesthetic beliefs are about *response-dependent properties* of the same kind as those involved in judgments or assertions about our personal tastes (‘tasty’, ‘funny’, etc.).⁷

Simplifying a bit, a *response-dependent property*, in general, is any property F for which a bi-conditional of the following kind holds:

x is F iff x has the disposition to produce in subject S the response R under conditions C

Which S(s), R, and C we are talking about, of course, varies with case and context, and not all of them will fit with a subjectivist metaphysics.⁸ A typical example of a response-dependent property that does, in fact, seem to fit with some kind of subjectivism, however, is the property of “being funny,” of which we could say:

x is funny_S iff x has the disposition to [e.g.] amuse S under C.⁹

This means that when I say or believe, for example, that “this movie is funny,” I am saying and believing something different than you when you say or believe that “this movie is funny”:

“This movie is funny_{Luis}” = “This movie has the disposition to amuse me [Luis] under C”

“This movie is funny_{Christy}” = “This movie has the disposition to amuse me [Christy] under C”

⁶ See the essays in Young (2017) for discussion.

⁷ We are here following Lewis (1989), Egan (2010, 2014), and López de sa (2017).

⁸ Substantive judgments can have a very complex and contextual relationship to *valence* and still be reducible to a general kind of response property, provided that response property itself is responsible for the complex and contextual relationship to valence. “Fear,” for example, can be reduced to a certain reactive property without removing the complex ways in which we sometimes shun or welcome that reaction -- as in fearing an assault vs fearing something in a movie (c.f., Bantimaki, 2012; Strohl, 2012).

⁹ The plausibility of this particular bi-conditional is not presently important. It here serves only to illustrate the formal elements of the view in question. The hard work of identifying the correct bi-conditionals for subjectivist analyses is another matter entirely (cf., Lewis, 1989, p. 85; Egan, 2014, pp. 87-8). See Egan (2014), in particular, for a version with *de se* content that allows for the attribution of the same property.

I am talking about *me* when I ascribe this kind of response-dependent property to something, and you are talking about *you*. Although we are using the same English predicate, we are predicating different properties altogether: funny_{Luis} and funny_{Christy}.

Of course, there is much more going on in any judgment or expression than just what is revealed by their truth-values. For example, these kinds of semantically subjective claims often come with what López de Sa (2017, p. 50) calls a “presupposition of commonality,” an implicit assumption that we are all similar in the relevant respects – similarly disposed under C, that is, such that “funny_{Luis}” = “funny_{Christy}”. At other times, these kinds of claims are moves in the conversational game, angling for persuasion or coordination. These are all matters of pragmatics. It is perfectly natural, after all, to respond to such claims by emphasizing the subjectivity marked by indexicality: “well, *I* don’t find it funny.” Pragmatically, this amounts to a cancellation of the operant presupposition, a challenge to any pressure for compliance, and a denial of any attempt at coordination.

Consider, then, a parallel view of the content of aesthetic beliefs. If we take “being delicious,” “being beautiful,” “being a good movie,” and “being a great piece of music” as response-dependent properties, we are then committed to the truth of bi-conditionals of the following *kind*:

x is delicious_S iff x has the disposition to [e.g.] gustatorily please S under C.

x is beautiful_S iff x has the disposition to [e.g.] visually please S under C.

x is a-good-movies_S iff x has the disposition to [e.g.] entertain S under C.

x is great-musics_S iff x has the disposition to [e.g.] aurally please S under C.¹⁰

This would mean that when I say or believe, for example, that “this Foie Gras ice cream is delicious,” I am saying and believing something different than you when you say or believe that “this Foie Gras ice cream is delicious.” I am talking about *me*, and you are talking about *you*; we are using the same English predicate, but we are predicating different properties. And while our aesthetic judgments often carry a presupposition of commonality, and often angle at persuasion and coordination, these are not features best explained by their semantics. In the strictly semantic sense, as the old saying goes, *de gustibus non est disputandum*.¹¹

¹⁰ Again, the plausibility of the bi-conditionals in these examples is not important. We are here only interested in the relation between this *kind* of view and a certain *kind* of evidence. All we want, therefore, is some clarity on the *kind* of content, and the *kind* of truth-conditions, of the relevant target q-beliefs. We are not performing conceptual analysis here.

¹¹ See González Prado and Milić (2018) for the suggestion that aesthetic judgments are double speech acts involving an assertion (understood in contextualist terms as we’ve done here) and a recommendation to “exercise a sensibility” that would lead to a shared appraisal.

3. Aesthetic Higher-Order Evidence

We now have a picture of the content of the target q-beliefs in cases of aesthetic judgments that fits with the metaphysics of aesthetic subjectivism. And we can now consider aesthetic versions of the typical sources of higher-order evidence with more care. Consider:

Aesthetic Peer Disagreement: You finish a shared meal and you form the belief that “it was delicious” (q_1). You then find out that “your friend and fellow ‘foodie’ thought it was terrible” (p^*_1).

Aesthetic Expert Testimony: After spending some time listening to a new album, you form the belief that “it’s music is great” (q_2). You then find out that “a music critic I respect thought it was horrible” (p^*_2).

Aesthetic Irrelevant Influences: You finish watching an all-male remake of an older all-female ensemble movie and you conclude that “the new version was better” (q_3). You then find out that “comparative assessments of this kind, in our culture, are typically unconsciously biased towards men” (p^*_3).

Aesthetic Suboptimal Circumstances: You encounter a striking green-ish painting at a museum exhibit and you form the belief that “it is beautiful” (q_4). You are then informed by the docent that “there is a green light inadvertently pointing at that painting” (p^*_4), an issue that will be fixed soon.

In each of these cases, the relevant p^* is only higher-order evidence against the relevant q-belief, recall, if

- (i) p^* is evidence for q^* ,
- (ii) q^* is either about S’s evidence p for q or about the use S has made of p ,
- (iii) q^* bears negatively on the rationality of S’s belief that q .

But what is the relevant q^* that satisfies (i) and (ii) in each of these cases?

In order to satisfy condition (ii), notice, q^* would need to be about my evidence for the target q-belief or about my use of that evidence. Given our version of aesthetic subjectivism, in other words, q^* would have to be about my evidence for, or the use of my evidence for:

- (a) This meal has the disposition to gustatorily please me under C.
- (b) This music has the disposition to aurally please me under C.
- (c) *This* movie is more disposed to entertain me under C than *that* movie.

(d) This painting has the disposition to visually please me under C.¹²

But now consider something important that is often and incorrectly said of subjectivism in general: that the view in question does not allow for error. This is not the case. When I say that something is *delicious*, for example, I am making more than just the claim that I am presently pleased in some way – the kind of claim that it would indeed be hard to make and be wrong about. I am making a more stable, more general claim than that instead. I am making a claim, that is, about the stable connection between an object’s (non-aesthetic) properties and my affective responses to it: that I am *disposed to be* gustatorily pleased by that object, *when under certain appropriate conditions*. The evidence I am getting for these target q-beliefs from my present experience can, therefore, be misleading. Indeed, there are two aspects of aesthetic beliefs that, given our version of subjectivism, allow for evidence of error and fallibility: its focus on our dispositions and its focus on the proper conditions for the relevant kind of experience (on being “under C”). We will discuss each in turn.

3.1. Inductive Evidence for Aesthetic Dispositions

Since the truth value of an aesthetic belief is partly grounded in our dispositions to respond to objects in certain ways, our evidence for its truth or falsity is necessarily inductive in its character: our present aesthetic experience is evidence for some relevant aesthetic belief, in other words, only insofar as it is evidence about how we are disposed to affectively respond to the relevant object. This feature easily explains how we can have higher-order evidence of (at least) two of the four kinds identified above.

Consider a case of peer disagreement we will call *Chili Con Carne*:

Jenny and Carlos decide to meet each week to go out to dinner. They go to tapas bars, Vietnamese, Pakistani, Japanese, French, and Thai restaurants. Wherever they go, they always order the same thing and share it. After each meal, Jenny and Carlos discuss their dish extensively and find that not only have they reached the same verdict but have done so for remarkably similar reasons. One week, however, Jenny cannot make it for the scheduled time, and they end up trying the same dish, as usual, but by themselves. After the meal, Jenny forms the belief that “*Rosie’s* chili con carne is delicious” (q_1), only to find out later that “Carlos thought it was terrible” (p^*_1).

According to the kind of aesthetic subjectivism we have outlined, Carlos and Jenny are really speaking about different properties here:

¹² Once again – just so there is no misunderstanding – we are not endorsing these bi-conditionals as correct conceptual analyses.

“*Rosie’s* chili con carne is delicious_{Jenny}” = “*Rosie’s* chili con carne has the disposition to gustatorily please me (Jenny) under C”

“*Rosie’s* chili con carne is terrible_{Jenny}” = “*Rosie’s* chili con carne does not have the disposition to gustatorily please me (Carlos) under C”

Strictly speaking, Carlos is talking about *Carlos* when he ascribes this kind of response-dependent property to *Rosie’s* chili con carne, and Jenny is talking about *Jenny* instead. Again, strictly speaking, there is no immediate disagreement between them; they could both be right. Nonetheless, given their excellent track-record of matching judgments in a variety of cuisines, Carlos and Jenny have amassed a good amount of evidence for the belief that they have similar aesthetic dispositions of the gustatory kind. As González Prado and Milić (2018, p. 7) have put it, Jenny and Carlos can here “inductively infer from their past agreements that they will keep agreeing in their responses in new cases.” For this reason, the fact that Carlos thought that *Rosie’s* chili con carne was horrible is actually evidence for Jenny (of whatever strength) for the following further claim: “I made a mistake when inferring something about my disposition to be gustatorily pleased by *Rosie’s* chili con carne under C from my presently pleasant experience” (q^*_1). Since q^*_1 is about Jenny’s evidence for q_1 , or about her use of that evidence, and since q^*_1 is more likely true given p^*_1 than without it, q^*_1 is higher-order evidence for Jenny against q_1 . Likewise, of course, for Jenny’s judgement about *Rosie’s* chili con carne as evidence for Carlos. Aesthetic higher-order evidence of this peer disagreement kind, it turns out, is perfectly compatible with subjectivism.

Now consider a case of suboptimal circumstances we will call *Flag*:

Jenny encounters a Jasper Johns flag painting at a museum exhibit. The painting looks greenish and Jenny believes she is looking at Johns’ 1969 *Flag (Moratorium)*. Jenny then forms the belief that “this painting is beautiful” (q_4), just in time to be informed by the docent that “there is a green light inadvertently pointing at that painting” (p^*_4), which, the docent adds, is actually Jasper John’s 1954 *Flag*.

According to the kind of aesthetic subjectivism we have outlined, the content of Jenny’s belief is of the following kind:

“The painting in front of me is beautiful_{Jenny}” = “The painting in front of me has the disposition to visually please me (Jenny) under C”

There is no question, of course, that Jenny is *currently* visually pleased. But since Jenny’s judgment is about the actual painting in front of her, and since she knows that Jasper John’s 1954 *Flag* is not green, p^*_4 is evidence (of whatever strength) for the following further claim: “the evidence from my presently pleasant experience for my disposition to be visually pleased by this painting under C is misleading” (q^*_4). And, once again, since

q^*_4 is about Jenny's evidence for q_4 , or about her use of that evidence, and since q^*_4 is more likely true given p^*_4 than without it, q^*_4 is higher-order evidence for Jenny against q_4 . Aesthetic higher-order evidence of this suboptimal circumstances kind, it turns out, is perfectly compatible with subjectivism as well.

3.2. The Proper Conditions for Aesthetic Appreciation

We have just seen how the inductive character of aesthetic evidence makes room for aesthetic higher-order evidence. We now focus on a similar connection between higher-order evidence and the proper conditions for having the relevant kind of experience (the idea of "being under C"). Of course, this is not because there is some mysterious normativity lurking beneath the propriety of those conditions – not for the subjectivist, at least. What is at stake here, instead, are the conditions for having a certain *kind* of experience, however we end up evaluating it.

Consider a case of expert testimony we will call *Philip Glass*:

Carlos watches the famed B-horror movie *Candyman* (1992) and enjoys it thoroughly, except for its unusual soundtrack. After looking up the score, Carlos forms the belief that "Philip Glass' soundtrack is not great" (q_2). After talking to Jenny, however, Carlos finds out that "the respected venue *Filmscorer* thinks "Philip Glass' soundtrack is great" (p^*_2).

According to the kind of aesthetic subjectivism we have outlined, recall, Carlos and the *Filmscorer* critic are once again speaking about different properties here:

"Philip Glass' soundtrack is not great_{Carlos}" = "Philip Glass' soundtrack does not have the disposition to aurally please me (Carlos) under C"

"Philip Glass' soundtrack is great_{Critic}" = "Philip Glass' soundtrack has the disposition to aurally please me (Critic) under C"

Strictly speaking, Carlos is talking about *Carlos* when he ascribes this kind of response-dependent property to Philip Glass' soundtrack, and the critic is talking about *herself* instead. Strictly speaking, there is no immediate disagreement between them; they could both be right. Nonetheless, given Carlos' respect for *Filmscorer* as a venue for experts, the fact that the critic thinks Philip Glass' soundtrack is great is evidence for Carlos (of whatever strength) for the following claim: "I misunderstood the import of the evidence from my being presently displeased for my disposition to be aurally please by Philip Glass's soundtrack under C" (q^*_2). This is not, however, because Carlos has established an excellent track-record of matching aesthetic judgments with the relevant expert. Rather, this is because Carlos now sees that he has not placed himself in the proper conditions to have *the kind of experience of Glass' music that was intended for its appreciation*. Carlos' expectations in

his initial engagement with the art work, we can say, were those of a traditional slasher movie. But by reading the critics' work, Carlos now understands that he has not attended to what Glass' soundtrack was intending to achieve and has thereby not put himself in a position to properly judge his dispositions towards it. By holding on too tightly to the expectation of "discordance, tension, and jump scares," Carlos now sees that he has missed the "haunting, nostalgic, regretful" tones that lead the viewer to a more subtle appreciation of Candyman's torment.¹³ And since q^*_2 is about Carlos' evidence for q_2 , or about his use of that evidence, and since q^*_2 is more likely true given p^*_2 than without it, q^*_2 is higher-order evidence for Carlos against q_2 . Aesthetic higher-order evidence of this expert testimony kind, it turns out, is perfectly compatible with subjectivism.

Finally, consider a case of irrelevant influences we will call *The Women*:

Carlos watches the classic, ground-breaking 1939 all-female ensemble film *The Women*. He then watches its mixed-cast 1956 remake *The Opposite Sex*. Carlos concludes that "the new version was better" (q_3). Jenny then reminds him that "comparative assessments of this kind, in our culture, are typically unconsciously biased towards men" (p^*_3).

According to the kind of aesthetic subjectivism we have outlined, the content of Carlos' belief is of the following kind:

"*The Opposite Sex* is a better-movie_{Carlos} than *The Women*" = "*The Opposite Sex* is more disposed to entertain me (Carlos) under C than *The Women*"

There is no need to question whether Carlos is correct about his comparison between the present pleasure of watching either flick. But since Carlos understands that bias can distort our experiences, he understands that he may not have had the kind of experience of these movies he was after. Jenny's reminder, therefore, is evidence for Carlos (of whatever strength) for the following further claim: "my comparative belief about my dispositions to be entertained by these movies under C is not related to the evidence in the right way" (q^*_3). And since q^*_3 is about Carlos' evidence for q_3 , or about his use of that evidence, and since q^*_3 is more likely true given p^*_3 than without it, q^*_3 is higher-order evidence for Carlos against q_3 . Aesthetic higher-order evidence of this Irrelevant Influences kind, it turns out, is perfectly compatible with subjectivism too.

To sum up: In all of these various cases, the relevant q^* claim is about my evidence for the relevant q -belief or about my use of that evidence, and each q^* is more likely to be true given the relevant p^* claim than they were before. Conditions (i) and (ii) are satisfied. Aside from the general epistemological complexities behind

¹³ See <https://thefilm scorer.com/candyman-philip-glass-1992/>

the details of condition (iii), nothing about aesthetic subjectivism produces a barrier for the existence and importance of aesthetic higher-order evidence.¹⁴

4. Higher Order Evidence and the Core Objectivist Intuition

There are many reasons to be suspicious of aesthetic subjectivism. Chief among them, however, is the widespread and entrenched belief that some aesthetic judgments are so outlandish that they simply must be wrong. Insofar as aesthetic subjectivism countenances the possibility that these are true, subjectivism must be wrong as well. Call this *The Core Objectivist Intuition*. What our discussion in the previous section reveals, however, is that aesthetic subjectivism has much more to say in reply to this challenge than might at first appear.

First, by being capable of accounting for aesthetic error, the subjectivist can join the objectivist in suspecting that outlandish judgments are false. This is not because of the objectivity of the relevant aesthetic property, of course, which some individual has failed to detect, but rather because it is not implausible to suspect that someone so *similar* to us in many other respects probably wouldn't be so *dissimilar* to us as to have wildly wayward dispositions under the proper conditions for the relevant experience.¹⁵ It is not implausible, in other words, for A to suspect that outlandish aesthetic judgments are cases where the individuals making the judgments are mistaken about themselves. This, of course, is another instance of aesthetic higher-order evidence. The higher the degree of relevant similarity between A and a certain group G – similarity with respect to general affective dispositions – the stronger A's higher-order evidence against their own outlier judgment – evidence that it is, in fact, outlandish.¹⁶

Consider the following candidates for outlandish aesthetic judgments:

- (1) Justin Bieber's music is greater than Mozart's.

¹⁴ We have not here attempted to characterize "C" in any detail. This is by design. Once again, our goal is not to defend the plausibility of aesthetic subjectivism – a goal that would certainly require defensible and detailed analyses of the relevant contents. Instead, our goal is simply to note that there is nothing about the *kind* of view in question that prevents the existence of higher-order evidence.

¹⁵ Think back to our *Chili Con Carne* case. In that case, Jenny or Carlos can *both* say: "how could someone that is so similar to me, as evidenced by all those identical judgments about various kinds of dishes, be so dissimilar to me in this particular case?"

¹⁶ This point bears a family resemblance to a similar point in the disagreement literature. Elga (2007), Kornblith (2010), and Vavova (2014), for example, all note that disagreement's epistemic significance must to be measured against a backdrop of relative agreement. As Vavova (2014, p. 315) puts it, commenting on Kornblith's discussion of Elga: "This suggests that there is an inverse relation between how confident I should be that you are my peer and how deep our disagreement goes. The deeper the disagreement, the less confident my evaluations of your epistemic credentials. And the less confident those evaluations, the less significant our disagreement can be."

(2) Thomas Kinkade's paintings are as beautiful as Mark Rothko's.

According to our version of aesthetic subjectivism, these are claims about someone's dispositions to affectively respond to certain objects, under the proper conditions for having the relevant kind of aesthetic experience. As we have seen, however, we can be wrong about this kind of thing. It is not implausible to suspect, for example, that most people making judgments like (1) and (2) have not carefully attended to the relevant objects under the proper conditions, and therefore have not acquired reliable evidence about their own relevant dispositions under those conditions. Once these works are attended to in the appropriate way – i.e., in the way that is prescribed by the kind of aesthetic experience that the work is attempting to produce – it is not implausible to suspect that the judgments will go away.

Suppose Carlos makes the following claim to Jenny:

(3) J.J. Abrams makes better films than Ingmar Bergman.

Jenny, aghast, wonders not only how Carlos, but how anyone could have such an outlying judgment. Obviously, Jenny thinks, something must be wrong, and she thinks she knows what it is. So she asks: "how many Bergman films have you actually seen, Carlos?" "Just one," he replies, "*The Serpent's Egg* (1977)." Jenny, knowing that many hold *The Serpent's Egg* to be Bergman's worst film, makes a deal with Carlos. He promises to watch five more films from Bergman vast body of work and then re-evaluate his judgement thereafter. Jenny shows Carlos *Summer with Monika* (1953), *Wild Strawberries* (1957), *The Silence* (1963), *Cries and Whispers* (1972), and *Fanny and Alexander* (1982). After watching these five films, Carlos has a much better background in Bergman cinema and so Jenny reasonably expects Carlos to retract his previous judgment and issue forth a new one according to which Bergman, not Abrams, makes better films.

This process of aesthetic education, of aesthetic self-discovery, of recognition of aesthetic error, and so on, is perfectly compatible with aesthetic subjectivism. More importantly, these considerations go some way towards insulating subjectivism from the challenge posed by the core objectivist intuition. But we are still talking about subjectivism, of course. If it turns out, truly, that one's dispositions, under the appropriate conditions for aesthetic appreciation, reveal preferences that favor Bieber over Mozart and Kinkade over Rothko, then the challenge might be renewed: (1) and (2) are so outlandish that they simply must be wrong, and aesthetic subjectivism wrong with it.

The second thing the subjectivist can say, however, is that different aesthetic categories aim at different *kinds* of aesthetic experiences, experiences under different conditions for appreciation. What this can mean, in

effect, is that certain apparently felicitous judgments are rather infelicitous comparisons of very different things. That there is such a thing as infelicitous cross-category aesthetic comparisons seems undeniable. What's greater: Wolfgang Mozart's music or Wolfgang Puck's smoked salmon pizza? What's more beautiful: the Lascaux cave paintings or Wylie Dufresne's eggs benedict?¹⁷ Someone judging one of these as greater or more beautiful than the other can be rightfully challenged as obtuse. Each of these objects calls for very different kinds of aesthetic experiences and it seems inappropriate to weigh these experiences on the same scale. What the aesthetic subjectivist can say about (1) and (2) and similar outlandish judgments, therefore, is that they betray more subtle infelicities of a similar kind. Mozart's music is firmly in the category of 18th Century European classical composition and Justin Bieber is 21st Century bubble-gum pop. What music in these different categories is trying to achieve is entirely different, the experiences they are trying to produce are entirely different, the aesthetic engagement they are calling for is entirely different, and so on. Someone who listens to Mozart in the same manner as they listen to Bieber (and vice versa), and who attempts to judge their merits at achieving the same kind of thing, is simply not attending to that kind of art as they should. For these reasons, there will be many outlandish judgments that the subjectivist will be able to reject as infelicitous without appealing to the objectivity of aesthetic properties.

This too is an instance of aesthetic higher-order evidence. The more widely and resolutely A's judgment is perceived as outlandish, the stronger A's higher-order evidence for the infelicity of their judgment. The evidence in this case, notice, is not that the judgment should be reversed – as in the Abrams vs. Bergman example – but rather that no judgment of that kind should be issued in the first place.

We can multiply examples of subtle cross-category aesthetic comparisons *ad nauseum*. Here's one more: Are the films of Douglas Sirk more beautiful than those of Stan Brakhage? Sirk, known for his Hollywood melodramas in the 1950s, is certainly a far cry from Brakhage, who is perhaps the most important experimental filmmaker of the last fifty years. To be sure, some, maybe even many, think they have an answer to this question. A few, however, hold the question problematic on its face. That is, to judge a Brakhage film beautiful requires understanding what Brakhage is trying to do with film; so too with Sirk. And they're doing such vastly different things with film, one might as well be doing comparative judgments of tastiness between potato salad and a size 9.5 leather Oxford.

Of course, once again, we are still talking about subjectivism. It may well turn out, truly, that someone's dispositions, under the appropriate conditions for aesthetic appreciation, reveal preferences that issue category appropriate outlandish judgments. For example:

¹⁷ <https://www.eater.com/2015/1/14/7533485/wd50-eggs-benedict-wylie-dufresne-eater-elements>

(4) Kevin Federline's *Playing with Fire* (2006) is greater than The Beatles' *Revolver* (1966).

So the challenge can be again renewed: (4) is so outlandish that it simply must be wrong, and aesthetic subjectivism wrong with it. The third and final thing that the subjectivist can say here, however, is that we are now miles away from the initial force of the core objectivist intuition. We are not here granting that anyone who sincerely believes and utters (4) speaks truly. We are here saying that (4) may be true for someone who is, implausibly, so *dissimilar* to us as to have preferences, desires, emotions, feelings, tastes, and so on, that produce dispositions to be more aurally pleased by Federline than by the Beatles. This may or may not be a fictitious being. But if this being exists, they are hardly the engine for the knockout punch the objectivist initially presumed.

Conclusion

Given its anti-realist metaphysics and its contextualist semantics, aesthetic subjectivism may seem at first incapable of making sense of the notion of aesthetic higher-order evidence. But this is a mistake. Since the content of aesthetic beliefs makes reference to our *dispositions* under *appropriate circumstances for having a certain kind of experience*, it turns out that we are fallible and can be wrong about them even if aesthetic subjectivism is true. In this paper, in fact, we have argued that aesthetic subjectivism can countenance four of the most familiar kinds of higher-order evidence discussed in the literature: from peer disagreement, from expert testimony, from etiological information irrelevant influences, and from information about one's suboptimal circumstances.

We have also argued that careful attention to the nature of higher-order evidence reveals novel resources for the subjectivist against what we have called the *Core Objectivist Intuition*: the widespread and entrenched belief that some aesthetic judgments are so outlandish that they simply must be wrong, no matter how they may be related to the internal constitution of the individual making the judgment. As it turns out, however, aesthetic subjectivism can join the objectivist in suspecting that many outlandish judgments are false and in suggesting that many are infelicitous. While the core objectivist intuition may not be totally defanged – since subjectivism does indeed leave open the possibility of true and felicitous outlier judgments – properly understanding what would allow for that possibility makes them, we think, less outlandish than it might seem at first.

All of this suggests that talk of aesthetic higher-order evidence is not only sensible but indeed essential for a full understanding of aesthetic subjectivism and its plausibility. Many of our aesthetic interactions consist in

the sharing and acquiring of aesthetic higher-order evidence of error and fallibility. Nothing observed in these practices is lost by the acceptance of subjectivism.

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