

Meinong on Aesthetic Objects and the Knowledge-Value of Emotions

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I trace a theoretical path along Meinong's works, by means of which the notion of aesthetic object as well as the changes this notion undergoes along Meinong's output will be highlighted. Focusing especially on *Über emotionale Präsentation*, I examine, on the one hand, the cognitive function of emotions, on the other hand, the objects apprehended by aesthetic emotions, i.e. aesthetic objects. These are ideal objects of higher order, which have, even though not primarily, the capacity to attract aesthetic experiences to themselves. Hence, they are connected to emotions, being what is presented by them. These results are achieved on the basis of a fundamental analogy between the domain of value and the aesthetic domain. Finally, the notion of an absolute beauty is discussed.

1. Introduction: The way ahead

While Meinong's theses about fictional objects have been widely examined and are still discussed, his theory of aesthetic objects has not yet received the attention it deserves. Actually, even if the problem of fictional objects is of considerable importance for Aesthetics, a fictional object is not necessarily an aesthetic object. The goat-stag (τραγέλαφος) of which Aristotle speaks¹ is an object of fiction, not an aesthetic object. Thus, neither non-existence nor being the product of phantasy constitute sufficient conditions for something to be an aesthetic object. Therefore the question arises, what are the necessary

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¹ Cf. Aristotle, *De interpr.* 1, 16a16–18; *Phys.* IV 1, 208a29–31; *An. pr.* I 38, 49a24; *An. post.* I 7, 92b7.

conditions for the constitution of aesthetic objects?

A composite answer to this question is offered by Meinong, together with several members of the Graz School, as the controversies between its members show. Not only Stephan Witasek in his *Grundzüge der allgemeinen Ästhetik* [*Outlines of General Aesthetics*] (1904), but also Christian von Ehrenfels, France Veber, Rudolf Ameseder, Alois Höfler, Robert Saxinger and Ernst Schwarz dealt with topics in Aesthetics. In the present paper, I will not undertake to deal with the aesthetic theory developed by Meinong or by the Graz school comprehensively,² but rather restrict myself to the issue of aesthetic objects.

Meinong did not write a specific text on Aesthetics, but he did touch on questions of Aesthetics in several works, and these allow us to assume that Meinong had developed an elaborate set of ideas on the subject. His most structured conceptions about Aesthetics can be found in one of his latest and most difficult works, namely *Über emotionale Präsentation* [*On Emotional Presentation*] (1917), which presupposes – and sometimes revises – the results of his researches in the theory of objects, the theory of values, and psychology. In what follows I'll try to trace a theoretical path through Meinong's writings, with particular attention given to this work (Meinong, 1917), in order to highlight the notion of aesthetic object and illustrate the changes this notion undergoes along Meinong's output.

According to Meinong, any object (concrete, abstract, non-existent and even impossible) is given independently of the subject, but is accessible only by means of the subject – to put it more precisely – by means of mental experiences (representations, thoughts, feelings, desires). In particular, aesthetic objects can be attained by means of a peculiar kind of experience (*Erlebnis*), namely, aesthetic feelings. It is thus necessary also to deal with the emotions and their objects, that is to say, with values. For Meinong, aesthetic objects can be understood by analogy with objects of value, while remaining distinct from them.³

2. Values and Emotions (Meinong's First Value Theory)

In his first theory of values, presented in *Psychologisch-ethische Unter-*

² About this, see Raspa (2010).

³ Reicher (2006) acknowledges that Meinong's value theory can be applied to Aesthetics, but she does not investigate what Meinong actually said about aesthetic values.

suchungen zur Wert-Theorie [*Psychological-Ethical Investigations on Value Theory*] (1894), Meinong conceives value as depending on the psychological or mental, that is, on psychological analysis. In the first instance, we can say that something has a value for us when it is not a matter of indifference to us. Analogously, in so far as an aesthetic object has a value, we are not indifferent to it – it arouses something in us. Here Meinong defines value by means of the notion of possibility: the value an object has resides in the possibility of its being evaluated (*Werthgehalten-werden-können*). Thus an object has a value in so far as it is able to arouse in a subject the basis of a value-feeling (Cf. Meinong, 1894, GA III, p. 37) (i.e. a feeling of pleasure or displeasure for the existence or the non-existence of something). One year later, in *Über Werthhaltung und Wert* [*On Valuation and Value*], Meinong states again that «The value of an object can be [...] defined as its capacity to be appreciated by an intellectually and emotionally normal subject» (Meinong, 1895, GA III, p. 248). Valuation (*Werthhaltung*) is that psychological fact (a feeling) that is always associated with a value. If something has a value for me, then I will be related to it in such a peculiar way that the thing will acquire a special meaning for me (Cf. Meinong, 1894, GA III, p. 26). Valuation makes an object's value manifest; notwithstanding, value is not connected with actual valuation – this in fact not only can vary from person to person but in certain circumstances can even not arise – rather with potential valuation. According to *Psychologisch-ethische Untersuchungen zur Wert-Theorie*, value belongs to the object, but it requires an existing subject to make the valuation. As a consequence, a thing loses its value as soon as the subject (for which it has a value) ceases to exist.

To ascribe a value to something thus means not only to ascribe to it a certain faculty, but at the same time to assert the existence of a subject which can realize this faculty (Meinong 1894, GA III, p. 40).

Furthermore, the object has certain properties that, once they are acknowledged by the subject, allow for its valuation; and the object possesses these properties independently of being valuated. This means that value and valuation must be kept distinguished and that value is a second-order property, or, as Meinong will say in *Über emotionale Präsentation*, a higher-order property (Cf. Meinong, 1917, GA III, pp. 392, 394 [1972, pp. 96, 97–98]).⁴ If we apply this definition of value to a property like beauty, it follows that an

⁴ See also Meinong (1921, GA VII, p. 22; 1974, pp. 228–229).

object is beautiful if it is able to arouse in a subject the grounds for a positive aesthetic feeling. I stress here “positive” because even ugly, gloomy, languishing or boring are aesthetic properties.

There is another topic that anticipates Meinong’s mature theory: the cognitive role of emotions. Emotions perform an intellectual function by means of which properties such as the beautiful, good or pleasant – which require a valuation – can be apprehended. Otherwise, i.e. without taking emotions into account, the apprehension of such properties would be forbidden. In any case, it would appear that common sense does not distinguish physical from aesthetic properties, e.g. a harmonious from a low voice (Cf. Meinong, 1894, GA III, p. 38).⁵ While the pitch is a property of the object (the voice), which is perceived by means of a sense organ, its being harmonious is grasped also by means of a feeling, which – according to Meinong – is not a property of the object, but indicates a relation between the subject and the object or, more accurately, some of the object’s properties. This seems to hold both for aesthetic feelings and value-feelings, which in any case differ in this regard: value-feelings are directed toward existence, while aesthetic feelings seem to be indifferent as regards existence, being thus directed – to adopt a term from Meinong’s mature vocabulary – toward so-being (Cf. Meinong, 1894, GA III, p. 28).⁶

Another point, which will be developed in a very different way in *Über emotionale Präsentation*, concerns the relativity of value and hence of aesthetic properties like beauty. Since – as we have already highlighted – a value is given only because and only in so far as a subject exists for which it is a value, it follows that there is no absolute value, but only one that is relative to a subject. Whatever, according to Meinong, this does not mean that there are no objective values.

In the preceding, we have said that value and valuation must be kept distinguished. In fact, valuation is a psychological fact, while value is an object’s quality that does not spring forth from the valuation. Value does not correspond to value-feeling, but it is associated with a feeling, at least possibly, since a thing has a value not only when a subject pays attention to it, but even when it is not thought of and hence it is not valued. It often happens that we attribute value to something which has no value or, conversely, we refrain from

⁵ Cf. also (Schuhmann, 2001, p. 533).

⁶ In § 5 (see fn. 12) we will see that Meinong will replace “existence” with “being”.

attributing value to something which has it. A subject can attribute value to an event which has not taken place; or she can attribute to a twig the value of a divining rod. In these two cases, by means of valuation, a value is ascribed to the object which depends only on the subject, being thus totally subjective. When valuation is really applied to an object (as for example to a medicinal plant), then its value is objective (Cf. Meinong, 1894, GA III, pp. 78–81). Value therefore is objective when its valuation does not rest on false premises (judgments) as in the case of superstition. In § 7, we will see that the meaning of “objective” shows a strong analogy with the meaning of “justified” (*berechtigt*). Following this analogy, we can also say that there is an objective beauty, which does not depend only on subjective liking. Now this is only a surmise made by analogy but we will deal with it at the end of this paper.

3. Impersonal Values and Emotional Presentation (Meinong’s Later Value Theory)

Even if Meinong in his *Psychologisch-ethische Untersuchungen zur Wert-Theorie* speaks of objective values, he still subscribes here to a subjectivistic theory of values. Seventeen years later, in his *Für die Psychologie und gegen den Psychologismus in der allgemeinen Werttheorie* [*For Psychology and against Psychologism in the General Value Theory*] (1912), his value theory undergoes an objectivistic twist, as a consequence of his theory of objects.⁷ There, Meinong asserts that «the value of an object lies in the fact that a subject has, could have or should reasonably have an interest in the object» (Meinong, 1912, GA III, p. 277). With the expression “should reasonably have”, Meinong asserts that not all values are relative; he does not give up on the idea that certain values arise and vanish with a subject, but he asserts that, next to these kinds of values – called “personal” – there are also “impersonal” (or absolute) values, which brought him – as he himself admits (Cf. Meinong, 1917, GA III, p. 438 [1972, p. 135]) – to abandon the relativistic and psychologistic position he previously upheld. It is within this new conception that Meinong develops his theses about aesthetic objects, which we have up to this point treated by analogy with objects of value. But it is worth noting that the framework is not completely different, so that the new conceptions enrich and complete the earlier ones.

⁷ About this, as well as about pre- and post-theory of objects’ value theories, see (Raspa, 2013).

In the first instance, Meinong maintains again that our attitude toward value involves both intellectual and emotional experiences. For Meinong, objects can be apprehended only by means of a subject, i.e. by means of mental experiences (representations, thoughts, feelings and desires). And it is by means of the different kinds of experiences that different classes of objects can be found: from intellectual experiences (representations and thoughts), *objecta* and *objectives* are found, and from emotional experiences (feelings and desires) the classes of *dignitatives* and *desideratives* are determined. Meinong reasserts and explains that emotions play a cognitive role and that it is by means of them that objects can be apprehended. He does this by introducing the notion of “emotional presentation” (*emotionale Präsentation*).

Presentation is the act of a psychical experience that offers an object to thought. Traditionally – as Meinong asserts in the 1912 essay – this role was attributed to representations, which is partially incorrect because also judgments and assumptions present their peculiar objects to thought, i.e. objectives, and even emotions play this role. Actually, emotions are more imperfect than representations as cognitive experiences, but when a subject thinks of pleasant weather, or of a beautiful melody, then the feeling of pleasure that arises is not the result of thinking activity. The apprehension of properties like “beautiful” or “pleasant”, in fact, can be explained only by conferring on emotions a cognitive character. Hence, when we say that the sky is beautiful, we ascribe to the sky a property in the same way as when we say that it is blue. In any case, the experience which presents that property is not simply an apprehending experience, but rather an emotion. Presenting experiences (both intellectual and emotional) contribute to the apprehension of objects, as is underlined in cases where an object, though presented through an intellectual experience, engenders at the same time an emotional experience. This kind of relation can be found in the judgment “this ornament is beautiful”, in which there is an object (the ornament), presented by an intellectual experience (a representation), and another object (the beauty), which is instead presented by an affective experience. If the ornament is really beautiful, then it deserves the emotional experience which presents the beautiful. Beauty is thus an object of feeling (*Fühlgegenstand*) (Cf. Meinong, 1912, CA III, pp. 278–279). Hence, Meinong offers the following definition of an object of value:

Thus, [...] an object has a value not because the interest of a subject is turned to it, but firstly because it deserves this interest. Or rather, put more simply: an

object has a value insofar as whatever has to be presented by value experiences actually pertains to it; and therein lies an even simpler definition: value is what is presented by means of value experiences. By itself, of course, an object presented through emotions is as little an experience as an object presented intellectually. Value as I understand it is thus apprehended by means of an experience like all that is apprehended, yet by its nature it no longer has any relationship to an experience: it is neither personal, nor relative; hence, it can be termed impersonal or even absolute (Meinong, 1912, GA III, p. 280).

This definition – Meinong says – could apply also to Aesthetics and produce analogous conceptual constructions (*Begriffsbildungen*). Meinong was tempted to widen the meaning of the term “value”, but doubts about language made him give up (Cf. Meinong, 1912, GA III, p. 281).

4. Aesthetic Objects: A First Acquaintance

Meinong also treated of aesthetic objects in two earlier works. In the first, *Über Urteilsgefühle: was sie sind und was sie nicht sind* [*Judgement-feelings: what they are and what they are not*] (1905), he speaks of literature, and so he examines the aesthetic objects which occur in poems and novels. Against Theodor Lipps, who ascribes an aesthetic reality to the characters of *Faust* (Cf. Lipps, 1905, p. 489; 1906, p. 27), Meinong holds that there is only one reality – that of the empirical world –; notwithstanding, he admits (with Lipps) that as regards the characters of a novel, it is necessary to take into account both the real psychological experience and the unreal object (Cf. Meinong, 1905, GA I, p. 599–600). Even if Meinong does not manage to achieve a distinction between autographic and allographic works, he associates literary works with musical ones. With regard to the question of where these works lie and when they came into existence, he replies: The being of a (literary or also musical) work is not at all existence, but it is a being which is disconnected from space and time, so that in certain circumstances the work can also be lost to humanity, but it can never be deprived of its own being.

Such a thesis brings forth a peculiar conception of artist’s creating activity, in which the artist is not so much a creator but a discoverer:

What the artist “creates” is a more or less composite reality, which has the property, for those who apprehend it, to “mean” something more or less composite, specifically the aesthetic object, which in this way, for those who apprehend that reality, is picked out from among the infinite totality of the

objects outside of being and from whose viewpoint it can appropriately be designated as a predetermined object (Meinong 1905, GA I, p. 603).⁸

The artist works with real material, with signs, words, propositions that express real experiences, which are necessarily directed toward objects, which do not exist but consist of a possible combination of signs, belonging to the realm of extra-being. From the aspect of the subject, the artist does create, while, from the perspective of the object, he discovers a possible combination of signs. The artist relates the reader to the object, and opens to the reader a world which is otherwise precluded – a non-existing world. Meinong strongly reaffirms that, leaving aside the cases of an architectural construction or a natural landscape, «the true object of an aesthetic attitude is not at all touched, at least theoretically, by the existence of reality» (Meinong, 1905, GA I, p. 605), but shows the peculiar immutability of the timeless object.

Finally, regarding literature (or “discursive arts”), in *Über Annahmen* [*On Assumptions*] (1910) Meinong maintains that the true aesthetic objects are objectives and that these are apprehended by assumptions. Assumptions are psychical experiences, which are intermediate between representations and judgments (Cf. Meinong, 1902, p. 277; 1910, GA IV, p. 367 [1983, p. 262]). They are affirmative or negative like judgments, but without claiming truth like representations (Cf. Meinong, 1902, p. 257; 1910, GA IV, pp. 3, 340, 368 [1983, pp. 10, 242, 262–263]; 1921, GA VII, p. 33). Assumptions occur in the cases of fiction, within the realm of “as if”, and conspicuously in lies, games, and art (Cf. Meinong, 1902, pp. 36–37; 1910, GA IV, p. 107 [1983, p. 81]). Literary tales are sometimes true, but they are mostly fictions and “fiction is just assumption” (Meinong, 1902, p. 45; 1910, GA IV, p. 115 [1983, p. 86]). Hence in literature, though judgments are not excluded, we are dealing primarily with assumptions; and since objectives are the objects of assumptions, as of judgments, they are the true aesthetic objects of narrative works. Moreover, assumptions play a prominent role in art (Cf. Meinong, 1902, pp. 210–211; 1910, GA IV, pp. 168–169 [1983, p. 124]), since our attitude toward aesthetic objects does not demand at all the conviction that these exist, and indeed the objectives that occur in art works are not generally believed, but assumed.⁹

⁸ Cf. also (Meinong, 1910, GA IV, p. 274 [1983, p. 197]; 1915, GA VI, pp. 49 ff., esp. p. 52 fn. 1).

⁹ I have discussed the theses expounded in this section more extensively in (Raspa, 2006). The present work may be read as a complement to that study in order to have a more complete picture of Meinong’s Aesthetics.

5. The Cognitive Functions of Emotions

Up to this point, we have dealt with emotions and aesthetic objects, searching out Meinong's position within works that treat of value theory or of topics other than Aesthetics. What comes out is not really a theory but a not-structured set of thoughts. Meinong's theses about Aesthetics are analyzed more in detail in *Über emotionale Präsentation*, where the cognitive role of emotional presentation (thus of emotions) is deepened, and many conceptions, that he developed along his career, are refined and made more precise or even presupposed, as the great number of cross references highlights.

We already know that objects can be apprehended by means of presentation. We also know that this role is played not only by representations but by any kind of experience, so that if both an intellectual and an emotional presentation occur, then emotions take part of the cognitive process. Now we must turn to examine in greater depth the role played by emotions.

In this process, representations have a 'basic' position. According to the Brentanian intentionality thesis, which Meinong endorses, any thought requires an object that is thought, any feeling an object that causes pleasure or displeasure, any desire an object toward (or against) whose being or non-being a subject is directed. Meinong calls this object a "presuppositional object" (*Voraussetzungsgegenstand*), which does not necessarily have to be apprehended by means of a representation, since – as we already know – even the other apprehending experiences have their own peculiar object. Anyhow, it must be apprehended by means of a psychical experience which – when not itself a representation – presupposes a representation (Cf. Meinong, 1917, GA III, p. 294 [1972, pp. 8–9]). Consider the case of judgment: it is a non-independent experience, which – in order to exist – is in need of another experience that will function as its «psychological presupposition» (*psychologische Voraussetzung*) (Meinong, 1917, GA III, p. 290 [1972, p. 6]). For Meinong, judgment always requires a representation, while the converse does not hold. Moreover, judgment has a double object: the one about which we judge (i.e. the representational object) and the one that is what is judged (i.e. the objective) (Cf. Meinong, 1910, GA IV, pp. 43–44 [1983, p. 38]). It is impossible for a judgment not to judge about something as well as not to judge something. This implies that judgment cannot directly apprehend its object and that it invokes another experience, toward which it is non-independent. This prerequisite experience presents the object which is judged about, so that

in the simplest case it is a representation, which works as a psychological presupposition (Cf. Meinong, 1917, GA III, pp. 351–352 [1972, pp. 60–61]). In this sense, any experience ‘is based’ on a representation.

The notion of non-independence pertains both to psychical experiences and to objects. Meinong introduces the notion of psychological presupposition in 1894, but it finds a place in his subsequent production (Cf. Meinong, 1894, GA III, pp. 45–46; 1905, GA I, pp. 582–583), as well as the notion of objects’ non-independence, which is introduced in the 1899 work on higher order objects and later on developed and refined. For an object to be non-independent upon another object means that the former cannot be without the latter, which is the peculiar condition of higher order objects and – as a consequence – of aesthetic objects. But we must proceed slowly here, step by step.

According to Meinong, presentation can occur because any experience has a part (*Bestandteil*) or piece (*Stück*) – i.e. the content – which varies or remains constant with the object, so that it is by means of content that an object can be presented to thought (Cf. Meinong, 1917, GA III, pp. 288, 339, 347 [1972, pp. 4, 49, 55]). If we take into account representation, it is possible to note that two different representations can apprehend two different objects, in virtue of their content. Two representational acts can differ – for example, in one case a subject perceives something, in the other he remembers something – so that in the first case the representation is perceptual, while in the second imaginative, but the object that is apprehended by means of these two representations remains unaffected by such a modification, and can be the very same object in both cases. But, if the object is the same, then also the content is the same (Cf. Meinong, 1917, GA III, pp. 340–341 [1972, pp. 50–51]). By means of the analysis of content, Meinong explains how it is possible to acknowledge aesthetic objects.

Meinong begins his analysis by saying that it is doubtful that emotions have a content in the same way as representations and judgments;¹⁰ he believes that emotions do have a content, but only in a peculiar way. In fact, what can be considered as the content of emotions or desires belongs to their psychological presuppositions, hence, in most cases, to representations. If someone likes a colour, her feeling of pleasure concerns an object (the colour) and a content,

¹⁰ Meinong speaks about the content of feelings in his (1894, p. 39 *passim*), because at that time he did not yet distinguish between content and object, a distinction which was introduced in 1899 (Cf. Meinong, 1899, GA II, pp. 381 ss. [1978, pp. 141 ss.]).

which is notwithstanding an integrating part of the representation of the colour and not the content of a feeling. Actually, it is the content of that experience, which serves as a psychological presupposition of a feeling and in virtue of which a feeling can rise. Emotions, together with the object toward which they are directed, make up a complex: if someone smells a flower's scent, then there is a representation, which is directed to a certain object and which serves as its psychological presupposition, but by means of this presupposition, the emotion is directed toward an object, which is hence the object of that emotion, and not merely the object of a representation (or of a judgment). The object is connected with the psychological experience toward which it is directed (Cf. Meinong, 1917, GA III, pp. 314–315 [1972, pp. 26–27]).

Perhaps however emotions may have their own content, which might not coincide with the content of their psychological presupposition; if this were so, then the cognitive role of emotional presentation and hence of emotions themselves, would be strengthened.

Let us consider some examples, such as a refreshing bath, fresh air, sublime works of art, boring or entertaining stories: these attributes have a close relationship with feeling, but they are analogous to other properties which are usually presented by representations. If I say that the sky is blue or that it is beautiful, in either case a property is attributed to the sky. In the first case, the property is presented by a representation, in the second one, by a feeling (of pleasure). It can be objected that “beautiful”, “pleasant”, “sublime”, “sad”, “entertaining” express feelings but that they cannot be ascribed to objects (things or events). Meinong replies to this objection that, by analogy, when we say that the sky is blue, we do not intend to ascribe a representation as a property to the sky. Here he states the same thesis as in 1912, but while it is patent that experiences are not properties ascribable to objects, it is harder to say that the sadness of a melody is not a feeling but a higher order object that can be apprehended by means of an emotional presentation.

There is another objection, Meinong wants to overcome: feelings are more subjective than representations, so that it is hard to look at feelings as capable of characterizing objects with regard to their objective properties. Consider again the example about the sky. When someone says that the sky is blue, what she really wants to say is that she is having a sensation of blue caused by the sky. Anyhow, the judgment is not about the sensation perceived by the judging person, but about the sky and its property of being blue. The same analysis can then be applied to the judgment “the sky is beautiful”, so that between the

feeling of liking and the sky there is the same relation as holds between the sky and the representation of blue. Feelings thus, under favourable circumstances, can present a content. Moreover, Meinong elicits the analogy between feelings and representations by asserting that the character of subjectivity proper to feelings does not preclude them from presenting an object to thought, because it is also shared by representations. Subjectivity is hence an obstacle to apprehension, but it does not preclude it and this implies that even feelings – which are more subjective than representations – allow for some sort of knowledge. Presentation must be admitted also for feelings, otherwise many objects would remain inaccessible to apprehension, because feelings allow for the apprehension of peculiar features of reality. Hence, despite all their peculiarities, feelings have an affinity with intellectual experiences, or as Meinong puts it, «a quasi-intellectual functioning» (Meinong, 1917, GA III, p. 320 [1972, p. 31]).

Looking again at attributes like beautiful or pleasant, we can inquire after what kind of properties they are. Meinong maintains that something can be called beautiful or pleasant if it gives rise to a feeling of pleasure. Anyhow, he also stresses the fact that when someone attributes the property of being beautiful or of being ugly to something, she is referring to the object's properties, not to her own feelings. Here, Meinong asserts – in a way that seems patently in contrast with the preceding – that an aesthetic property like beauty is not constituted by its relation to an experience but is an object in itself, a higher order object like the sadness of a melody, which is presented by means of a feeling (Cf. Meinong, 1917, GA III, pp. 324, 365–366 [1972, pp. 35, 72]).¹¹ I will attempt to analyse this point more closely at the end of the present paper, but for the moment it is worth looking at the second kind of non-independence, the one pertaining to objects.

This non-independence assumes different forms, according to the kind of being that it helps to constitute. There is (*a*) a non-independence of existence, if an object cannot exist unless another object exists; (*b*) a non-independence of subsistence, as the one exemplified by the equiangularity of a triangle on its equilaterality; (*c*) a non-independence that has nothing to do with existence or subsistence (i.e. being), but concerns so-being. Any object of higher order can be taken as an example of (*c*): difference is non-independent, since there can

¹¹ For a critical analysis of this point, which involves feeling-expressivism and realism, see (Langlet, 2010).

be no difference without something that is different (which must be already a plurality). Moreover, this something does not necessarily have to exist and even less to subsist (the round square is different from the oval triangle). Hence, «if there is to be any meaningful talk about difference at all, we must presuppose so-beings with a ‘so’ such that ‘difference’ can be applied to them» (Meinong, 1917, GA III, p. 353 [1972, p. 61]; translation slightly modified). Actually, without a plurality there would be no difference, not even in the sense of extra-being, while if there is a plurality in the sense of extra-being, the difference between them would have not merely extra-being but subsistence. In cases of this sort, higher order objects show (*d*) a peculiar non-independence of extra-being. The relation between *inferiora* and their *superius* is not convertible; this assertion must not be interpreted psychologically – as meaning that difference cannot be thought of without what is different – rather, simply as a necessary fact occurring to what is different, which does not involve any thought of the difference. What is different is «logically prior» (Cf. Meinong, 1917, GA III, pp. 353–354 [1972, p. 62]).

The main kind of higher order objects is formed by founded objects (*fundierte Gegenstände*) and necessity is essential for them. A logical *prius* comes along, whenever a *posterius* is in need of it, whereas the *prius* has no kind of dependence on the *posterius*. In cases of this kind, one may speak of a foundation (*Fundierung*), which, as is true of psychological presupposition, is similar to what obtains between judgments and representations: «Judgments cannot exist without underlying ideas, whereas there is no objection in principle to ideas being given without judgments» (Meinong, 1917, GA III, p. 356 [1972, p. 64]). This relation of dependence is equivalent – ontologically – to the one subsisting between objectives and objecta and it plays a fundamental role, as we will see, for the acknowledgment of a peculiar kind of higher order object, like absolute beauty.

This new framework allows us to better understand the thesis that Meinong already presented in 1894: aesthetic feelings are feelings of so-being, in contrast with value-feelings which are feelings of being (Cf. Meinong, 1917, GA III, pp. 373, 375–376 [1972, pp. 80, 81–82]).¹²

We have seen that aesthetic feelings can have not only representations but also judgments and assumptions as their psychological presupposition. Now,

¹² Here Meinong modifies his previous conception, according to which value feelings are feelings of existence (see § 2).

judgments and assumptions have objectives as their presuppositional object and this means that our aesthetic attitude is directed also toward objectives. As we have stated earlier, aesthetic feelings are not directed toward being but only toward so-being. But does this mean that they are never directed toward existence? Taking literature as an example, Meinong easily shows that aesthetic feelings disregard the actual being of their objects. In dramas, it often happens that assumptions pass over into judgments, so that an «astonishing sovereignty of poetic or, more generally, artistic imagination» emerges:

So, for example, in modern drama, exact information is frequently given as to the age or other properties of the characters in the play. At first this information can only be of the order of assumptions. But once such assumptions are made, the characters in question *are* indeed of the indicated age, as if the playwright were free to do with them as he wished (Meinong, 1917, *GA* III, p. 374 [1972, p. 80]; translation slightly modified).

According to this thesis, so-being plays a constitutive role for aesthetic objects and feelings; but it seems opposed to everything that compels us to attribute aesthetic dignity to objects of sensation or to higher order creations founded on those objects. We can look at music, but especially to sculpture and painting. According to Meinong, a colour, shape or sound even if they are not a so-being, they are a so (*ein So*), and a so is always present in any case of so-being. This answer can be seen as unsatisfactory but the point at issue is this: if it is true that the mere so-being even of non-existent objects can be the presuppositional object of an aesthetic feeling, then this is enough for Meinong to say that aesthetic feelings are not – in their proper essence – feelings of being. Thus, aesthetic feelings are «really indifferent whether their object-presuppositions are serious or imaginative» (Meinong, 1917, *GA* III, p. 375 [1972: 81]): as drama shows, aesthetic feelings can be determined even when their presuppositions consists of assumptions about untrue happenings. In such a case, aesthetic feelings are true feelings, and this hold also when the ones caused by the drama are imaginative.¹³

6. Aesthetic Objects as Higher Order Objects

We come now more specifically to the objects of aesthetic feelings. If it is true

¹³ I have dealt with the dichotomy serious/imaginative as well with the difference between real feelings and phantasy-feelings in (Raspa, 2006 and 2010).

that an aesthetic object is one possessing aesthetic properties, it is also true that such are those properties which are capable of arousing aesthetic feelings.

Stephan Witasek developed an aesthetic theory deeply rooted in Meinong's philosophy.¹⁴ In the *Grundzüge der allgemeinen Ästhetik*, he maintained that «an object becomes an *aesthetic object*, if it is bearer of aesthetic properties» (Witasek, 1904, p. 27). But what kind of properties are the aesthetic ones? On the basis of Meinong's dichotomy of real/ideal, Witasek explains that aesthetic properties, the most characteristic of which is beauty, are not real, i.e. perceptible, but ideal non-perceptible properties (Cf. Witasek, 1904, p. 14). If I look at a painting, I perceive masses of colour, not the beauty of the painting; if I listen to a melody, I hear sounds, but the beauty is not something existing alongside them. Moreover, an aesthetic property like beauty is not an objectual (*gegenständliche*) property, that is, a property which is represented together (*mitvorgestellt, mitgedacht*) with the representation of the object and can then describe it. For example, colour is an objectual property of a painting, but the similarity of this to a copy is not. The same holds for beauty, which is «an extra-objectual (*außergegenständliche*) determination of its bearer» (Witasek, 1904, p. 15).

Still in the *Grundzüge der allgemeinen Ästhetik*, Witasek says that an object is aesthetic when it is the object to which our feeling of pleasure and displeasure is directed. This means that aesthetic properties are relational, because they connect the aesthetic object to the mental attitude of a human subject. The relation is, on one hand, a causal one, whereby an aesthetic object (a painting, statue, or melody) induces an aesthetic attitude in the subject, and, on the other hand, a final relation, for the aesthetic feeling is in turn addressed to the aesthetic object.

An aesthetic property of an object is the fact that it may stand in a causal or final relation with a subject's aesthetic attitude (Witasek, 1904, p. 22).

Therefore, an object becomes an aesthetic object, insofar as it stands, or can stand, in a given relation with a subject. This does not entail that objectual determinations, real or ideal, are indifferent in order for an object – for example – to be beautiful: «being beautiful means standing in a certain relation to a subject,» (Witasek, 1904, p. 28) and such a relation depends on the properties of the object.

¹⁴ I deal very shortly with Witasek and only in relation to Meinong's point of view; for more details on Witasek's Aesthetics see (Smith, 1996), (Schuhmann, 2001), (Reicher, 2006, pp. 313–319), (Allesch 1987, pp. 357 ss. and 2010), (Raspa, 2006, pp. 65 ss., and 2010, pp. 21–38).

In *Über ästhetische Objektivität [On aesthetic Objectivity]* (1915), Witasek states more precisely the essential characteristics of aesthetic objects: these are the non-independence (*Unselbständigkeit*) from the *substratum*, which means that the being of an aesthetic object is founded on the being of another or other objects, and the dependence (*Abhängigkeit*) on variations of the *substratum* (Cf. Witasek, 1915, pp. 105, 108, 110–112). Meinong shares this thesis, but that does not mean that he agrees completely with his pupil. The points of disagreement between the two are relevant and relate to the role of objectives in Aesthetics, to different conception of phantasy-feeling, and – what for us is more important in this context – to the notion of aesthetic object, namely whether this is or is not an object of higher order. However, Meinong discusses in details Witasek’s point of view, which he examines closely with the intention of developing it further (Cf. Meinong, 1917, GA III, pp. 387 ff. [1972, pp. 92 ff.]; Witasek, 1915, 112 ff., 180 ff.).

We have seen (§ 5) that an intrinsic non-independence applies not only to psychical experiences, but also to objects. That is why Meinong can speak about a parallelism between objects and the experiences which apprehend them. We know that the presenting experiences have as psychological presuppositions other experiences, which are above all intellectual experiences; in the same way, aesthetic objects are non-independent of being and dependent on so-being upon what is apprehended by the presuppositional experiences. This is the translation in Meinong’s language of Witasek’s thesis.

Like the property “red”, the property “beautiful” requires a *substratum*, something of which it is a property; but it requires in addition another property or set of properties as its basis. The property beautiful is then non-independent from its basis and dependent upon the characteristics of such a basis. This makes it possible that a thing is more beautiful or uglier than another. There are evident analogies between aesthetic properties and objects of higher order. For example, similarity does not occur without similar objects; moreover, whether, and to what extent, two objects are similar, depends on the characteristics of the objects. Therefore, aesthetic properties seem to be ideal objects of higher order. But according to Witasek there are four reasons that exclude such a possibility. In what follows I will deal only with the two of them, which are discussed by Meinong.¹⁵ I will restrict my remarks to beauty, but the discourse may also be extended to other aesthetic properties.

¹⁵ For more details see (Raspa, 2006, pp. 73–77).

Witasek observes that an object of higher order, like similarity, is *between* the two members, connects them and builds with them a complex; beauty does instead not connect, for example, the tones of a melody, but has the whole melody as its basis. As a consequence, one can see that beauty does not need a plurality of *inferiora* as its basis, as objects of higher order do, but rather a unity; for objects of higher order, on the contrary, being based on a unity is a limiting case (namely that of identity) (Cf. Meinong, 1899, *GA* II, 394 [1978: 149]). If Witasek is right, much of Meinong's theory concerning aesthetic objects falls apart.

Meinong sees the major difficulties by accepting that aesthetic objects are objects of higher order in the oneness (*Einsheit*) of the *substratum* and identifies Witasek's error in his having considered objects of higher order only from the point of view of *objecta*, and not also from that of objectives. This is Meinong's argument: if objectives are also objects of higher order; and there are objectives that are not based on a plurality of *inferiora* – like objectives of being (“A is”) or of existence (“A exists”), which are monadic by nature –; then not all objects of higher order need a plurality of *inferiora*, and if this is so, the main obstacle in considering aesthetic objects as objects of higher order, that is the oneness of *substratum*, no longer subsists. Their dependence on the *substrata* presented by the psychological object-presuppositions of aesthetic-feelings is a sign – just as Witasek recognized – of the *superius* character of aesthetic objects, which can be subsumed under the concept of higher order objects.

7. Absolute Beauty

The last question that is still open concerns objective beauty. We have seen that emotional experiences are means of knowing objects. But knowing – Meinong says – is always an intellectual operation; an emotional experience cannot alone apprehend an object, but only if it is connected with an intellectual experience as its psychological presupposition (Cf. Meinong, 1917, *GA* III, p. 403 [1972, p. 106]).

If knowledge is justified judgment, and if – although under certain conditions – emotions are means of knowledge, one wonders if they too possess the moment of justification (*Berechtigungsmoment*). But if emotions are not sufficient for knowledge, then a part of their justification should be searched in non-emotional experiences.

To address the issues, Meinong considers the analogy of ideas. Traditionally, it has been denied that ideas can be true or false; nonetheless, one says that someone has a right or a false idea, if by means of it one may make a true or a false judgment. If we substitute the idea as means of presentation with an emotion, then the reason that the corresponding judgment is justified or not can be attributed to the emotion. An emotion is then never justified *per se*, but in relation to an object toward which it is directed. Nobody would say that a feeling of pleasure is justified or not justified, but one may be justified or unjustified in being pleased with something or with a certain fact – one is unjustified in taking pleasure from the pain of raped children. Meinong synthesizes this idea in this way:

If *P* is an object presented by an emotion *p*, then it is justifiable to attach the emotion *p* to an object *A* if *P* in fact applies to *A* (*dem A zukommt*), and the judgment “*A* is *P*” is therefore correct (Meinong, 1917, GA III, pp. 414–415 [1972, p. 115]).

In other words, an emotion is justified if the judgment which attributes the proper object of the emotion (a predicate like the beauty) to its presuppositional objects (for example, a subject like a melody) is justified. So the way to an objective beauty is open (as it was hypothesized at the end of § 2).

Let us come back to the analogy with values. Meinong defines value as «the capacity of an object to attract interest upon itself as a value-objectum» (Meinong, 1917, GA III, p. 426 [1972, p. 125]). It is obvious to speak of a relativity of all values, since the value of a thing often depends on the value of another thing, on the stock of material goods (according to the law of marginal utility), on the nature or on the interest of the subject. On the other hand, there are also good reasons for speaking against such a relativism. First of all – Meinong observes – if an object loses value as soon as the subject feel no more interest in it, reading and writing should not have any value for the majority of children, nor food, clothes and house for those who were in a state of mental confusion. On the contrary, we all recognize the value of those activities and things; therefore, the value may not coincide with the mere interest of the subject. Secondly, there should be no errors even with respect to the value (*Wertirrtümer*), which derive instead from the lack of attention to that “should reasonably have” (see § 3). Referring to the case of superstition already discussed in 1894, Meinong points out that, if the value depends on the mere interest of the subject, then one might attribute to a putative divining rod as

much value as to a medicinal plant. On that occasion, he had spoken in the first case of “subjective value”, in the second of “objective value”, and he recognized axiological dignity also to the subjective value; now, instead, he assumes that whoever judges correctly denies a value to a divining rod. Moreover, if the existence of the subject is the ultimate foundation of all values, it would be superior to any value and life would be the highest good. Finally, it would even be possible for some people to turn good into bad, right into wrong (Cf. Meinong, 1917, GA III, pp. 427–430 [1972, pp. 125–127]).

Now, even though the predicate “valuable” does not differ characteristically from the predicate “beautiful” – so that the former means the capacity of an object to attract a value feeling, the latter the capacity of an object to attract an aesthetic feeling –, this does not however imply that the relation to the subject enters into the definition of both predicates. The relation to the subject is constitutive neither of the value nor of the beauty. If we paraphrase what Meinong writes on value, then we can say that ‘beauty (or another aesthetic object) does not primarily consist in the capacity to attract aesthetic experiences to itself but simply consists in what is presented by aesthetic experiences’ (Cf. Meinong, 1917, GA III, pp. 432–433 [1972, p. 130]).

In stating this, Meinong does not replace the concept of relative value with that of relation-free value, but simply affirms that there are two notions of value. He synthesizes this with reference to value experiences as means of knowledge:

Value-experiences can, in particular, be utilized as the means of knowing the objects to which they attach. They are a means of knowing (*Erkenntnismitte*) in a double sense. First, in the sense that what is presented by the value-experience is to be attributed to the objects as their property, and secondly in the sense that the objects have the property of provoking the experience which corresponds to the object of presentation (e.g., value). It is clear that the second interpretation remains valid even when the first does not, and even when the first cannot with right be attempted at all (Meinong, 1917, GA III, pp. 427–435 [1972, p. 132]).

To sum up, Meinong endorses two notions of value, a value relative to a subject and a relation-free value. Both are of great importance in value theory and in life. With the help of the concept of justification, one can say that there is a relative value wherever there is a value-experience regardless of its justification, while a relation-free value is always connected with a justification.

One could call the first kind of value ‘objective’ and the second kind ‘subjective’, but since Meinong used these terms as applying to relative values (see § 2), then he proposes the terms ‘personal’ and ‘impersonal’.

Meinong repeatedly reaffirms that what is true for the domain of value also applies *per analogiam* to the aesthetic domain (Cf. Meinong, 1917, GA III, pp. 452, 455, 458 [1972, pp. 147, 149, 151]), and therefore it is legitimate to ask whether there is beside a personal (relative) beauty also an impersonal (relation-free) beauty.

The question has received a negative answer by those who, like Witasek (Cf. Witasek, 1915, 198 f.), argue that neither the existence of objects of perception nor the existence of ideal objects of higher order can belong to aesthetic objects, that these are to be taken into consideration only as objects of apprehension, that is, in relation to a subject, and that aesthetic norms are laws of psychological attitude. Meinong has instead shown that aesthetic objects are ideal objects of higher order; for these the a priori knowledge is appropriate, but is it really possible to know aesthetic objects a priori? The aesthetic character of an object cannot be verified empirically, since a property like beauty can adhere to the existent (i.e., to nature) as well as to the non-existent, as is proven by arts. On the other hand, if the same melody can be considered good, bad or indifferent, then it would seem that there is no a priori, and hence necessary connection between the melody and its corresponding aesthetic property, but anything which is known a priori is necessary. Therefore, if aesthetic objects are accessible neither to empirical nor to a priori knowledge, they belong to the domain of the *Erleben* and the relativistic point of view is justified (Cf. Meinong, 1917, GA III, pp. 453–454 [1972, pp. 148–149]). However, if one considers Greek sculpture and German poetry or music, it is difficult to maintain an “absolute relativity”.

Given this situation, it seems that, as in the case of values, there is a personal (relative) beauty *and* an impersonal (relation-free) beauty. But how can the latter be demonstrated? According to Meinong, the ideality of an object is accessible to empirical knowledge. It is indeed possible to apply induction to not existent but subsistent instances, and hence

it can happen that a state of affairs knowable *a priori*, that is, a necessary state of affairs (*Sachverhalt*), is connected with real (*reale*) concomitant state of affairs, in which latter natural lawfulness may make its appearance, that can be established empirically, or rather, inductively (Meinong, 1917, GA III, p. 456 [1972, p. 150]).

For example, the equality of the angles at the base of an isosceles triangle may be proved *a priori*, but it may also be established by measuring of a number of triangles.

Meinong's aim is not to say that inductive knowledge attains the same necessity of a *a priori* knowledge, but to show, rather, that by induction one can reach relation-free results.

On the basis of a fundamental analogy between the beauty and value, and starting from the analysis of the latter, Meinong intends to argue that there is *also* an impersonal beauty, as well as an impersonal value. Since the empirical data available to us are personal values, it is only by way of these, by induction, that one can reach impersonal values.

That an objectum *A* has the impersonal value *N* can be concluded under favorable circumstances from the fact that in *A* the personal value *N* occurs, i.e., that the idea of *A* under favorable circumstances arouses an emotion, or at first a feeling, which presents the object *N*. By reason of this presentation, it is presumed that the object *A* serves as foundation for the object *N*. The presentation here is the concomitant fact through which the induction gets hold of the *a priori* fact of the foundation [of the value in the object] (Meinong, 1917, GA III, pp. 456–457 [1972, p. 150]).

The object *N* is an object of higher order, and if it is founded on the object *A*, this implies that there is a relation of necessity between the *inferius* *A* and the *superius* *N*. Is this the same necessity which holds in the domain of the *a priori*? We can only presume (*vermuten*) it, since the process we adopted was induction, but our surmise is justified (in the sense we have seen above).

We can now develop Meinong's argument *per analogiam*. If *N* means 'beautiful' and it is founded on *A*, then *A* is beautiful, and if *A* serves as foundation for *N*, relation-free beauty pertains to it simply by virtue of the foundation. All this does not hold as a proof that there is a relation-free absolute beauty, since in connection with emotional presentation the impersonal beauty is accessible to us only through a detour by way of experience, that is, by way of the personal beauty, but— to adopt Meinong's words — «the way has been cleared to give reasons for such» (e.g., impersonal beauty) (Meinong, 1917, GA III, p. 460 [1972, p. 153]).

Do we find this disappointing? Whatever the case, the same Meinong will interpret — at the end of his life — by an analogy with Fechner's concept of a "bottom-up Aesthetics" — his own whole work as a "bottom-up philosophy" (*Philosophie von unten*);

and such a philosophy encompasses within it also the theory of objects unreservedly, in so far as it may start from the given subsistent or even outside of-being [*aussersciend*] as an empirical science can start from what is given in experience (Meinong, 1921, GA VII, pp. 42–43).¹⁶

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¹⁶ See also (Manotta, 2005).

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