

The Uses of Aesthetic Testimony

C. Thi Nguyen

(This is a pre-print draft. The final version appeared in *British Journal of Aesthetics* 1 (1), 2017: 19-36. It is available at <https://doi.org/10.1093/aesthj/ayw089>)

Abstract

The current debate over aesthetic testimony typically focuses on cases of doxastic repetition — where, when an agent, on receiving aesthetic testimony that *p*, acquires the belief that *p* without qualification. I suggest that we broaden the set of cases under consideration. I consider a number of cases of action from testimony, including reconsidering a disliked album based on testimony, and choosing an artistic educational institution from testimony. But this cannot simply be explained by supposing that testimony is usable for action, but unusable for doxastic repetition. I consider a new asymmetry in the usability aesthetic testimony. Consider the following cases: we seem unwilling to accept somebody hanging a painting in their bedroom based merely on testimony, but entirely willing to accept hanging a painting in a museum based merely on testimony. The switch in intuitive acceptability seems to track, in some complicated way, the line between public life and private life. These new cases weigh against a number of standing theories of aesthetic testimony. I suggest that we look further afield, and that something like a sensibility theory, in the style of John McDowell and David Wiggins, will prove to be the best fit for our intuitions for the usability of aesthetic testimony. I propose the following explanation for the new asymmetry: we are willing to accept testimony about whether a work merits being found beautiful; but we are unwilling to accept testimony about whether something actually is beautiful.

Suppose that I have never seen Van Gogh's *Iris*es for myself, but my art teacher tells me that it's an extraordinarily beautiful painting. Intuitively, something seems to have gone wrong if I were to simply to acquire, on the basis of testimony and testimony alone, the belief, "Van Gogh's *Iris*es is a very beautiful painting." It may be more palatable if we imagine my acquiring a more qualified belief from testimony: say, the belief that the painting was probably beautiful, or that I was likely to find it beautiful when I finally saw it for myself. But the naked repetition of the claim, to another or

to myself, seems wrong. We seem to think such unqualified aesthetic judgments should come from direct experience, and not be acquired second-hand.

Let's call this sort of case "doxastic repetition" - when, on the basis of received testimony that *p*, an agent believes that *p*. What's especially fascinating here is that doxastic repetition seems entirely acceptable in all sorts of non-aesthetic contexts. There is nothing wrong with acquiring, via my mechanic's testimony, the unqualified belief that my car needs a muffler. Thus, there seems to be an asymmetry between aesthetic and non-aesthetic testimony. Other kinds of cases also seem to support the existence of such an asymmetry. Suppose, for example, that another person were to describe to me, in exquisite detail, particular visual details of Van Gogh's *Iris*. It seems entirely unproblematic for me to acquire second-hand knowledge about those details - say, the fact that the painting contains spots of pure, unmixed purple, or that the flowers are bordered in thick, dark lines. But it seems quite problematic for me, on the basis of such second-hand knowledge about the details of the painting, to render a considered judgment on the quality of the whole painting. We seem to require direct experience with the art object, or an adequate surrogate, to make such overall aesthetic judgments. But again, there seems to be a sharp asymmetry between the aesthetic and non-aesthetic cases. There seems to be nothing wrong with a medical specialist listening to another's descriptions of particular physical details over the phone, and then rendering a considered medical judgment.

Call these sorts of cases "negative intuition cases" about aesthetic testimony. On a first pass, they all seem to share a certain sort of character: we find it intuitively problematic when a person renders some sort of considered aesthetic judgment solely from the basis of testimony. Cases like this are central to the current debate about aesthetic testimony, and are usually treated as crucial support for the position allied "pessimism". Pessimists about aesthetic testimony hold that there is something illegitimate about basing an aesthetic belief on the testimony of another (Hopkins 2011). Optimists, on the other hand, hold that there is nothing illegitimate about using aesthetic testimony;

their task, then, is to explain away these negative intuitions. Aaron Meskin, for example, has suggested that negative intuitions about aesthetic testimony come, not from any principled illegitimacy in using aesthetic testimony, but simply from the greater practical difficulty of finding reliable aesthetic experts (Meskin 2004, 84-9).

There are, on the other hand, also positive intuition cases for aesthetic testimony. For example, it seems utterly ordinary to rely on a friend's movie recommendation to pick which movie to watch, or to consult restaurant review on Yelp before picking between new restaurants. Such cases are good news for the optimist, but demand an explanation from the pessimist. These positive cases also seem to have their own distinctive character: they are usually cases in which one uses testimony to generate a belief about what action one should take, rather than as the grounds for some sort of considered aesthetic judgment. Thus, pessimists usually try to treat recommendation cases as either peculiar border case of aesthetic testimony, or not as aesthetic testimony at all. Robert Hopkins, for example, argues that the most plausible form of pessimism is one that claims that there is a special, non-epistemic norm governing aesthetic beliefs, which renders aesthetic testimony unusable in most cases. The pessimist can then treat recommendation cases as special cases where the norm lapses because, in selecting a movie, we must take action, but have no information of our own to go on (Hopkins 2011, 154-5). Others have argued that such recommendations cases can be explained as instances of non-aesthetic testimony - for example, as psychological predictions (Meskin 2004, 72; Whiting 2015, 99).

I do not think any of these accounts are right. The problem lies, at least in part, in the narrowness of the cases under discussion, especially with positive intuition cases. What we're groping around for is a description of the hinge-point where our intuitive rejection of aesthetic testimony gives way to intuitive acceptance. A good theory of aesthetic testimony will properly explain the location of that hinge. But I think, in fact, we don't actually have a clear idea of where that hinge actually lies, because the recent discussion has drawn from an impoverished set of cases.

The primary task of this paper, then, will be to enrich the store of positive intuition cases - to explore the richly varied uses to which we put aesthetic testimony, and use that enriched store to get a better sense of the location of the hinge. And there are a great many such cases, for our aesthetic lives often depend on the careful exercise of what we might call *aesthetic trust*. Aesthetic trust shows up in so many places: not only when we follow recommendations, but when we entrust ourselves to aesthetic instructors, when we take art appreciation classes or enter musical training. We might follow Annette Baier's suggestion that what it is to trust another person is to make oneself vulnerable to that person, to rely on their goodwill (Baier 1986). And it does seem that we do aesthetically trust in that sense. We make ourselves aesthetically vulnerable: we put ourselves in danger of excruciating movies, miserable dinners, wasted energy, and perhaps even the long-term malformation of our tastes.

But this exploration of positive intuition cases will not yield a simple optimism about aesthetic testimony. When we explore the varied uses of aesthetic testimony, we will find that our intuitions have a significantly more complex structure than we might have suspected. I will argue that, in fact, not only is there an asymmetry between aesthetic and non-aesthetic testimony, but that the asymmetry is itself asymmetrical: in some sorts of cases, the asymmetry between aesthetic and non-aesthetic testimony is strong; in other sorts of cases, that asymmetry seems to disappear.

How do we cope with this complex structure? I will suggest that many of the standing theories of aesthetic testimony simply do not fit the enlarged set of cases. I will also point to some theories that do fit the enlarged cases; one of which is a complex hybrid of optimism and pessimism, the other of which is, technically, pessimistic. We need, I think, to move past the usual optimism and pessimism debate, and its narrow focus on a few sorts of cases. We need to look for explanations of those cases where we do engage in aesthetic trust, where we must trust to get on with our aesthetic lives - and an explanation of why our intuitions shift as they do between the positive and negative cases.

Assertion Cases and Action Cases

Let's begin by considering the most basic positive intuition case and see how far it will get us. It will help us distinguish between various theories in the pessimistic mood. Let's start with the simplest position, which we might call naive aesthetic puritanism.¹ Naive aesthetic puritanism is the view that we may never learn any information whatsoever about an aesthetic object through aesthetic testimony. But all sorts of everyday cases make this most extreme form of pessimism extremely implausible. Consider the following:

CASE 1: RECOMMENDATION

Tim listened to a new jazz album at a friend's house a few times and didn't like it. But his friend Jane, who is a jazz musician and who Tim thinks has extraordinary taste, tells him that the album is incredible, and that he's missing its brilliance. So Tim buys a copy for himself and gives it a number of serious listens, because of Jane's recommendation.

Recommendation seems obviously acceptable. Surely, Tim has learned *something* about the album from Jane's recommendation. And he hasn't merely learned something about its merely physical properties, like its durability - he's learned something about its musical qualities. At the very least, he's learned that it deserves further aesthetic consideration. Since Recommendation seems like a plausible use of testimony, we ought to reject naive aesthetic puritanism.

But there are many weaker formulations of pessimism which are compatible with Recommendation. Consider the asymmetry thesis: "that aesthetic testimony is epistemically

¹ This is distinct from, but inspired by, Brian Laetz's description "aesthetic puritanism". The discussion of pessimism that immediately follows is heavily inspired by Laetz's work mapping out the varieties of pessimism (Laetz 2008).

inferior to non-aesthetic testimony” (355). Recommendation is surely compatible with the asymmetry thesis. So long as some uses of aesthetic testimony are forbidden while their non-aesthetic counterparts are permitted, then the asymmetry thesis holds. While we would happily accept if Tim said that the album was “probably incredible”; or that he “had it on good authority that the album was incredible”; or even that had “good reason to think it was important”, we still balk at Tim’s saying or believing that the album was incredible, full stop.

Or, consider another thesis from the pessimistic stable, the acquaintance principle: that “judgments of aesthetic value... must be based on first-hand experience of their objects and are not, except within very narrow limits, transmissible from one person to another” (Wollheim 1980, 233). Recommendation is compatible with the acquaintance principle, because the acquaintance principle focuses narrowly on “judgments of aesthetic value”. Proponents of the acquaintance principle could account for Recommendation by claiming that Tim had acquired some sort of aesthetic knowledge, but denying that it was a full-fledged judgment of aesthetic value. Or, as Meskin suggests on the pessimist’s behalf, the pessimist could explain away the case by claiming that Tim had acquired only non-aesthetic beliefs through testimony - for example, a predictive belief about what he was likely to enjoy (Meskin 2004, 72).

So proponents of both the asymmetry thesis and the acquaintance principle can rest unbothered by Recommendation. But, then, consider the following case:

CASE 2: INSTRUCTION

I am trying to decide what sort of musical education to give my child. My own tastes are, I believe, fairly plebeian. I enjoy the pop songs that I grew up with, and some musicals that I feel slightly guilty about liking. I consider sending my child to classical piano instruction, but my child loves rap and wants to take some rap classes. I have my doubts - no matter how many albums my child plays for me, I just can’t hear anything musically worthwhile. But my friend Roger, a professor

of music theory and a wonderfully sensitive listener to all kinds of music, tells me that rap is actually a very complicated and musically valuable form. This sets my mind to rest - after all, what I really want is for my child to learn something worthwhile, and the fact that Roger respects rap is far more telling than my own distaste. So I pony up and pay for my child to go to rap academy.

Notice the details of this case. I do not simply seek to make my child happy, or to give my child a skill that will please others. If it was only that, then a pessimist could maintain that I had merely acquired psychological knowledge about others, thus holding the judgment of value at arm's length. But in the Instruction case, I want my child to learn something worthwhile. I am acting out of a desire to help my child learn something aesthetically valuable. I accept Roger's assessment of the aesthetic value of rap and am acting because I now believe rap to be a valuable musical style. In this case, I have acquired a full-blooded judgment of aesthetic value through testimony. In fact, I actually defer to this second-hand belief. It trumps my first-hand experience for deciding on a rather significant life project. Since I find Instruction quite acceptable, I therefore reject the acquaintance principle.

One might protest, along the lines of Meskin's and Whiting's earlier suggestion, that I am not acquiring a judgment of aesthetic value in Instruction but merely acquiring non-aesthetic knowledge - say, psychological knowledge. Couldn't we say that I had merely learned that it was likely that my son would find rap school valuable? But that is a very different story from the one I've told. In Instruction, I am not sending my son to rap school because he thinks it's valuable. My son's beliefs about the value of rap were fully apparent to me before I consulted my friend. I consulted my friend to establish what I should believe about the value of rap, and his testimony brought me to believe in the value of rap myself. My change in willingness to act here can only be explained by my having acquired a direct belief about the value of rap through testimony.

The difference between Instruction and Recommendation will be clearer if we return to Hopkins' pessimistic account of recommendation-type cases. Recall that Hopkins posits a special norm which requires that one's aesthetic judgments proceed from one's own experiences - in other words, the acquaintance principle.² Hopkins acknowledges the positive intuitions about movie recommendations but explains these instances as special lapses of the norm concerning aesthetic testimony. We get a special exemption from the norm because, once we have decided to go out to a movie, we cannot avoid making some sort of a decision, and we have no other information to go on. In that case, the norm lapses. But this lapsing is a minor effect, says Hopkins, since that primary norm will re-assert itself once we have experienced the movie for ourselves. Once I have seen the movie for myself, then my own judgment is the only one that matters (Hopkins 2011, 154-5). Contrast this to how testimony works elsewhere - the fact that I worked out the math problem and got a different answer than you did doesn't cancel the weight of your testimony. The fact that you disagree still has some weight for me and gives me a reason to doubt myself, to re-check my work and perhaps even to suspend judgment until I figure out the reason for the disagreement. But once I've seen *Requiem for a Dream* for myself and found it manipulative and overwrought, your passionate love for it no longer matters. According to the acquaintance principle, once I have an experience of my own, the testimony of others is supposed to count for nothing. But that's not what's going on in Instruction: here, I have experiences of my own, but I nevertheless treat another's testimony as trumping. I send my child to rap academy despite my own inability to find rap worthwhile in my own experiences. I trust my friend's assessment of the worth of rap over my own, and I act on that trust.

One might protest that Instruction works here only because I've circumscribed a very specific sort of value judgment. But the peculiar selectivity of our intuitions is exactly what I am trying to

² In Hopkins' version, the acquaintance principle doesn't emerge from epistemic considerations, but from non-epistemic norms about what we may use in forming aesthetic judgments.

expose. I grant that it would, indeed, be very strange for me to turn around and claim, solely from testimony, that rap is beautiful or brilliant, full stop. But it seems permissible for me to believe that rap is aesthetically worthwhile and even to take on a significant life project solely from testimony. What's interesting here is that most of us seem to have both a positive and a negative intuition here. We have the intuition that it is impermissible for me to let another's testimony trump my own when declaring that *Requiem for a Dream* is aesthetically gross, but, at the same time, the intuition that it is permissible for me to let another's testimony trump my own in Instruction. Our intuitions about the acceptability of using testimony do not simply hinge between aesthetic and non-aesthetic cases; they also hinge between different sorts of aesthetic cases.

Crucially, Instruction and Recommendation aren't bizarre, cooked-up cases. They are familiar and everyday. They exemplify a vital kind of aesthetic relationship: one of aesthetic trust. We engage in such aesthetic trust in many situations. Obviously, we use aesthetic testimony to select where we will spend our attention and our money. But there are many subtler forms of aesthetic trust. Many institutions and practices build aesthetic trust into their very foundations. Take, for example, art appreciation classes. Of course it would be problematic for me to simply copy an instructor's judgments wholesale. But the very practice of enrolling in the class embodies a significant trust in the instructor's judgment - that what they put in front of us is worth our attention, our time. The act of going to an art museum is predicated on aesthetically trusting the museum's curators - trusting in their ability to pick, from the endless stream of aesthetic production, those things that are especially worthy of our attention.

A pessimist might argue here that no actual aesthetic judgment passes through teaching. When somebody brings my attention to a certain curlicue in the painting, I am only following their direction in order to have my own experience of the painting and form my own judgment. But the fact that I am following that instructor's pointed finger in the first place, that I am expending my psychic energy trying to attend to that particular feature and engage with what aesthetically follows

- the fact that I am paying attention at all, instead of texting with my friends or at home eating pie - those facts depend on the fact that I trust the instructor, aesthetically, in her implicit and explicit claims about what's worth paying attention to. If my instructor tells me to be sure to come to the next class because we'll be talking about the most artistically profound paintings from the 20th century, I might reasonably believe her and, on the basis on the basis of her testimony, decide not to skip class after all. The pessimist, of course, will continue to hammer on our intuitive resistance to brute doxastic aesthetic repetition - after all, even in the classroom, there is something wrong with simply acquiring, wholesale, my teacher's positive judgments. But this simply raises an even more interesting question: why is it that am not permitted to doxastically repeat my teacher's explicit proposition, but, at the same time, I am permitted to treat her claims as showing *something*, as weighing *somehow*, such as to generate a reason for action? If a direct transmission of a proposition about aesthetic properties and aesthetic values is forbidden, what, exactly, is the thing that has passed between us that could move me to act?

Asymmetries in Action

The negative intuition cases about aesthetic testimony are usually taken to show that there is some asymmetry between aesthetic testimony and non-aesthetic testimony. What we've discovered now is that the structure of our intuitions is even more complex: the asymmetry is itself asymmetrical. In some kinds of aesthetic testimony, the asymmetry seems strong; with other kinds of aesthetic testimony, the asymmetry seems far weaker. But on what features do our intuitions hinge?

One might be tempted, from the cases given so far, to declare a simple solution: we can act from second-hand beliefs about aesthetic value but we are simply forbidden from asserting them to others. But I do not think this is right. The block does not simply disappear in all action cases. There

are problematic uses for aesthetic testimony in cases with no assertion whatsoever, in cases of pure action from testimony. Consider the following case:

CASE 3: PRIVATE DISPLAY

I am fabulously wealthy. I wish to hang a picture in my bedroom, so that I may be surrounded by beautiful things. I have an opportunity to purchase a Turner painting for a relatively good price. I am assured by artists and art historians that I trust that the painting is of the utmost beauty and sensitivity, a real landmark. I study it for a long time and fail to register its beauty in any way. But still, I trust my artist friends, the art historians, and especially the fact of their consensus, and hang the painting in my bedroom for the rest of my life, not because I'm hoping to see the beauty for myself - I've given up on that - but because I'm confident that it is in fact beautiful, and that it therefore does make my bedroom more beautiful, even though I can't see it for myself.³

In Private Display, I am doing something ridiculous. What Private Display shows is that the block against using aesthetic testimony is not confined to making assertions from testimony; there are cases of action from testimony that ring with a similar absurdity.

But now consider the following case:

CASE 4: PUBLIC DISPLAY

I run a small local museum, and I am offered a chance to obtain a Turner painting for a very good price. I am assured by artists and art historians that I trust that the painting is of the utmost beauty and sensitivity, a real landmark. I study it for a long time, and fail to register its beauty in any way. But still, I trust my artist friends, the art historians, and especially the fact of their consensus, and hang the painting in my museum, not because I'm hoping to see the beauty for

³ This case is adapted with very slight changes from (Driver 2006, 623).

myself - I've given up on that - but because I am confident that it is in fact beautiful, and that it does in fact contribute to the aesthetic value of the art contained in my museum, even though I can't see it for myself.

Where Private Display seems absurd, Public Display seems quite reasonable. These two cases show that our resistance to aesthetic testimony doesn't hinge on the difference between assertion and action. Taken together with Instruction, they suggest an entirely different location for the hinge. Let me make an initial proposal: the more we describe the case in terms of personal aesthetic experiences, the more likely we are to resist the use of aesthetic testimony. The sorts of second-hand judgments that provoke negative intuitions - claims that a work is "brilliant", "elegant", "radiant," "subtle" - all imply something about personal experience. So does the personal display case - the reason it seems so odd is because, presumably, the reason we hang something in our own bedroom is for the sake of our own experience. On the other hand, the more the cases are put in terms of something public or intersubjective, the more we seem to permit second-hand knowledge. It seems reasonable to acquire second-hand beliefs about aesthetic value and worth. And, presumably, when I am hanging something in my museum, my own experience of it is less important than a sense of its being aesthetically valuable, or important, or worthwhile.

To my mind, cases like Public Display have their greatest plausibility when we think about aesthetic blind spots, along of the lines of Karen Jones' analysis of moral blind spots (Jones 1999). Jones suggested that the most plausible cases for second-hand moral knowledge involved an agent coming to acknowledge a particular bias in himself. For example, a male CEO might come to accept reports by women that there was persistent sexism in his company, despite not seeing it for himself. He can come to accept the possibility of a blind spot. Such blind spots cannot usually be simply willed away, but they can be maneuvered around with a little trust in others. Similarly, imagine that a museum director is extremely sensitive, aesthetically oriented, and yet must admit to

herself that she simply cannot get a feel for Rococo art. It makes sense, then, for her to seek the testimony of others and to defer to their judgment in her Rococo acquisitions. This is an act of aesthetic trust, and a profound one. I find deference to aesthetic testimony in this case to be utterly palatable and reasonable; it is, in fact, how I hope a museum director would act. But if we imagine that very same museum director deferring to others when choosing which piece of Rococo art to hang in her own bedroom, then something seems to have gone wrong. The difference here, I take it, is because we are supposed to hang paintings in our own bedrooms because we find them beautiful, but we are supposed to hang paintings in the museums in our charge because we believe them to be aesthetically worthy or aesthetically valuable.

New cases versus old theories

Now that we have made a bit of headway on expanding the cases under consideration, let us turn to some recent attempts to explain the difficulties of aesthetic testimony. The new cases I've just presented will have, I hope, revealed the narrowness of the recent discussion. If we accept the new cases, then we will have to reject many standing theories. And the journey will help us get a better grip on the exact location of that hinge.

First, Hopkins argues for a non-epistemic requirement for autonomy in aesthetic judgment. Hopkins suggests that there might be a requirement that one grasp the aesthetic grounds for an aesthetic belief, just as we are required to grasp the moral grounds for our moral beliefs (Hopkins 2011). But Hopkins' formulation suggests that the autonomy requirement applies to any judgment of aesthetic value. With Instruction, we saw that it was possible to have a justified judgment of aesthetic value without grasping the aesthetic grounds for that judgment. It could be that there is an autonomy requirement that applies to some subset of judgments of aesthetic value, but this would require a finer-grained formulation than Hopkins'.

Aaron Meskin gives a defense of optimism by offering an alternate account of the original asymmetry which he calls aesthetic infertility. Meskin argues that we could, in principle, learn aesthetic truths from experts, but experts are extremely rare - most people are simply unreliable (Meskin 2004, 85-8). This, says Meskin, is why aesthetic testimony cannot be used ordinarily - it is because the average person doesn't possess the requisite expertise. But there should be no problem with accepting aesthetic testimony if we actually managed to locate a genuine aesthetic expert. This explains, for example, why we're willing to accept expert advice for, say, aesthetically worthwhile travel destinations (Meskin 2007). But Meskin's account doesn't fit the new cases. If it were simply a problem of finding reliable experts, then we wouldn't find an asymmetry between private and public cases. I should have just as much trouble finding experts for putting a painting in my museum as I would for putting it in my bedroom. Similarly, if Meskin's account were right, then the asymmetry should depend on the expertise of the testifier. If the testifier is not an expert, I should neither doxastically repeat their claims nor act on their judgments. If, on the other hand, the testifier is an expert, I should be able to do both. But, as I have argued, this is not what our intuitions actually say. In the rap academy case, for example, we are still resistant to doxastic repetition of an expert's testimony, but are willing to act from that same testimony. Meskin's view does not fit the intuitions about the broadened set of cases.

Jon Robson has focused on a different, but related, topic: explaining our resistance to making assertions based on aesthetic testimony comes. He argues that this resistance arises from norms of signaling. When I make a claim of aesthetic beauty, I am signaling that I possess various desirable traits and abilities - my intelligence, skill, perceptivity, and so forth. The wrong of making an aesthetic assertion from second-hand testimony is that of misrepresenting myself to another person, and signaling skills or abilities that I do not have (Robson 2015). If this is right, then the same norms should apply to public actions, which also signal skills or abilities. Thus, if Robson is right, then our intuition of the wrongness should disappear when we get to cases of private action.

But in fact, the reverse occurs. In the Private Display case, there is no signaling whatsoever, but acting from second-hand testimony seems the height of absurdity. Whereas in the Public Display case, there is a much more significant chance of false signaling, but action from second-hand testimony actually seems much less problematic.

Rachel McKinnon distinguishes between speakers *accepting* and *believing* testimony. Belief, for McKinnon, is the tendency to feel that p. Belief is passive and beyond my control. Acceptance is active - it is a decision to treat p as true. She suggests that coming to believe, passively, from testimony is permissible, but that actively accepting that p on the basis of testimony is wrong (McKinnon 2016). But McKinnon's account doesn't fit the cases, either. In the Instruction case and the Public Display case, if anything is passive, it is my inability to find an aesthetic act beautiful. When I put the painting in my museum even though I am completely unable to find it beautiful, I am clearly *accepting* that it is beautiful: I am actively deciding to treat the painting as beautiful, even if I don't passively find it so. The cases indicate the reverse of McKinnon's view.

Of all the explanations extant, the one that comes to closest to explaining these intuitions is the distinction between first-personal aesthetic judgment and third-personal aesthetic knowledge. This distinction is well-known from Frank Sibley's work on aesthetic concepts, and has been more recently refined and applied to the puzzle of aesthetic testimony by Malcolm Budd (Sibley 1965; Budd 2003). I will use Budd's formulations for simplicity, but I take my discussion here to apply to the whole family. Budd argues that we ought to distinguish between aesthetic *knowledge* and aesthetic *appreciation*. To know that a performance is graceful is to know that it is properly characterized as graceful, or has the property of gracefulness. Testimony can transmit such knowledge. But appreciation is something more, and does require direct experience of an artwork or some adequate surrogate.

The reliable informer, as he perceives the work, will not just perceive the work as being graceful, but will perceive the gracefulness *as it is realized in the work*.... In contrast, the one who has no first-hand experience of the work will, given the infinitely many strikingly

different ways in which gracefulness can be realized in a work of art, have little or no idea of the work's appearance simply in virtue of knowing at second hand that the work is graceful. (391)

And, says Budd, aesthetic appreciation is required for a wide variety of aesthetic attitudes: liking, respecting, finding contemptible.

Budd's account gets quite a bit of traction on these cases. The primary motivation for acquiring a painting for a museum is that it possesses some aesthetic qualities, like gracefulness. This is a matter of aesthetic knowledge, and so can be acquired through testimony. But the primary motivation for picking which painting to hang in my bedroom is my own appreciation of its aesthetic qualities, which requires direct experience.

It is tempting to terminate the inquiry here and give the point to Budd. But, to my ear, Budd's account isn't quite right either. Under Budd's account, the block against aesthetic testimony holds solely over matters of aesthetic appreciation; there should be no block at all for second-hand aesthetic knowledge. But this does not seem to be the case. Even if I trust my friend Jane very much - even if I have every reason to trust and esteem her knowledge and sensitivity to jazz - it simply does not seem to me that her testimony that an album is beautiful gives me knowledge that the album is beautiful, full stop. It gives me warrant to believe that the album is *probably* beautiful, or that I will *likely* come to find it beautiful. But it seems to me that I have to appreciate the album's beauty for myself in order to know, without qualification, that the album is beautiful. Budd's argument depends on thoroughly disentangling the requirements for aesthetic knowledge from those for aesthetic appreciation. Empirical knowledge can certainly be disentangled in this way; I can say, "I know, because of the work of scientific experts, that my DNA controls protein synthesis, but I just don't understand it for myself, despite years of trying." But if Budd were right, I should also be able to say, without hesitation, "I know, because Jane says so, that the album is beautiful, I just don't see it myself, despite years of trying." But this version sounds very strange to my ears. On the other hand, take that museum director with a blind spot. It seems perfectly reasonable for her

to say, "I am certain that Picasso is one of the great painters, and his paintings are among the most aesthetically important. The art world is nearly unanimous in that regard. I'm just biased by a traumatic childhood experience I had at the Tate."

By Budd's analysis, the hinge should happen between different *epistemic relationships* between the viewer and the work, even for the very same property. For the property of gracefulness, I should be able to know that it exists in the work through testimony, but I shouldn't be able to appreciate it for myself through testimony. But if Budd is right, then the hinge will occur in that very same place for all aesthetic properties - we should find claims of second-hand aesthetic appreciation all uniformly problematic and claims of second-hand aesthetic knowledge all uniformly unproblematic. In other words, the asymmetry should be even across all cases of aesthetic testimony. But, instead, the asymmetry seems itself asymmetrical. The last set of intuitions suggest that the hinge happens, not between different kinds of epistemic relationship we can have to a piece of aesthetic content, but between different kinds of aesthetic content. Some kinds of aesthetic knowledge claims - claims about gracefulness, delicacy, balance, wildness, sumptuousness - do not seem to be wholly transmissible through aesthetic testimony. But other kinds of aesthetic knowledge claims - claims about aesthetic worth, value, and importance - do seem to be transmissible through aesthetic testimony. Rather than explaining the hinge in terms of two different epistemic relationships we might have to the same aesthetic content, these cases suggest that there are two categories of aesthetic content.

For the reader who shares my intuitions on Recommendation, Instruction, Private Display, and Public Display - and I am guessing that most will - I think I have given a decisive case against Meskin's, Robson's, and McKinnon's accounts. The case I've made against Budd is much thinner, and rests on a rather delicate set of intuitions which I suspect that not all my readers will share. Thus, I take myself to have narrowed the field to two candidates: Budd's view that explains the hinge in terms of two kinds of epistemic relationships we can have towards aesthetic content, and my view

that there are two categories of aesthetic content. I have also pointed to some delicate intuitions that, to my mind, make the two-categories view slightly more appealing. But we can, perhaps, get a little further along if we seek a clearer account of what these two categories might be.

Candidate explanations

Let's step back and sum up. I've suggested that we have a very complicated relationship to aesthetic testimony. We resist using it mightily in some ways, but in other ways we let it have profound effects on our actions, our projects, and even our self-regard. Testimony can guide our beliefs, but not all our beliefs. We can come to think that a work is valuable, is worthwhile, or deserves our attention through testimony - but it doesn't quite seem right to say that we know it is beautiful, full stop, from testimony. Testimony can guide our actions, but not all our actions. We can come to think that a period of art is worth studying or worth putting in the required curriculum from testimony, but it would be strange to hang a painting in my own bedroom if it truly left me cold, even if the voices of the art experts were united in its praise. What account, then, can capture this asymmetrical asymmetry?

I have suggested that there are two categories of aesthetic content, about which we have different intuitions concerning the usability of testimony. It will help to focus on a moment where those two categories come apart. Suppose an aesthetic compatriot tells me that a work is worth my time and attention. Think about that fascinating moment after I have accepted my compatriot's claims, when I am treating their testimony as motivating - enough to keep me listening - but before I have seen the beauty for myself, the moment when I am still struggling with a recalcitrant work, when I am still straining to understand Ornette Coleman or James Joyce because I trust another's testimony that there's something there worth struggling for. If we attend to the language of that moment and the delicacies of what we might easily say, I think several options suggests themselves

as natural fits. The first, and to my mind the best fitting, is something along the lines of a sensibility theory, a la John McDowell's and David Wiggins (McDowell 1985; Wiggins 1987; D'Arms and Jacobson 2007). I will focus on McDowell's approach here, but I think my claims are applicable to other sensibility theories.

For McDowell, some secondary properties can have both a subjective component and a cognitive component. "Fear-inspiring" is such a property. Whether or not something actually inspires fear in me is a subjective matter. But the fear itself is significantly cognitive, since it represents the world in a certain way, and reasons bear on it. I can fear rightly or wrongly. My fear of a grizzly bear is well-founded; my fear of a caterpillar is ridiculous. In McDowell's language, an object can merit fear. Suppose for the moment that some aesthetic properties are this sort of secondary property. An object is graceful if it actually inspires a feeling of gracefulness in me, and if it merits that feeling. But I can speak of the object's meriting being found graceful, even if I do not myself find it graceful.

Let us add a proviso: my knowledge or belief that it is graceful is justified only if both I actually have the feeling, and the object truly merits the feeling. Being graceful thus has both a subjective and a cognitive criterion. Thus, there is something wrong with my saying that I know that it is graceful without having felt it for myself, for I have failed to meet the subjective criterion. But this limitation only applies to gracefulness, full stop. No such requirement for personal acquaintance applies when we talk merely of an object's meriting being found graceful.

The difference between Budd's account and this merit-based sensibility account is significant. In Budd and all the other Sibley-inflected accounts, there is one entity - gracefulness - to which I stand in two different relationships. I can know that it is present in the object, or I can appreciate the particular way it is realized in the object. Knowledge can be passed through testimony, but appreciation cannot. But in the sensibility account, there are two distinct (though metaphysically entangled) properties: whether something is found beautiful, and whether it merits a beauty-

response. And under this account, the answer to the optimist/pessimist debate is quite tangled. We should be pessimists about the subjective aesthetic property of beauty and optimists about the objective property of merit. And this explains our cases quite nicely. The Instruction case permits the use of testimony where I acquire knowledge of whether or not rap merits being found beautiful, which is what I care about when choosing musical instruction for my child. Using testimony is impermissible in the Private Display case because I am choosing based on the subjective property of its being beautiful to me; but using testimony is permissible in the Public Display case because I am choosing based on the objective property of its meriting being found beautiful.

The sensibility account explains the location of the hinge. Knowledge of an aesthetic property, like beauty, cannot pass through testimony because there is a first-personal requirement attached to subjective properties. But knowledge that something merits a beauty-response can pass through testimony because merit is a cognitive matter. I put paintings in my bedroom if I find them beautiful, but I put paintings in a museum if I think that they merit being found beautiful. The judgment of experts may tell me that a painting deserves to be found beautiful, but not whether I will actually find it beautiful. The judgment of experts tells me whether it's worth sending my child to rap academy, or perhaps even whether it's worth my time to make another attempt to feel it for myself, but it cannot tell me ahead of time whether it will be beautiful to me. And this account fits neatly what I would actually say if I never came to see the beauty of Jane's beloved jazz album. I would say, "I just don't think it's beautiful. I know I'm probably missing something. Maybe I need to listen to some more late Coltrane. Maybe I'm just insensitive. But I just don't see it."⁴ This locution - being unwilling to commit to the beauty of a thing, but willing to admit to its meriting being found beautiful - seems very natural to me. Most importantly, in my view, the most natural way to

⁴ It is an interesting question whether a sufficiently robust quasi-realist projectionist theory could also capture these intuitions of inadequacy and education. I have chosen not to discuss projectivism here, because I have been convinced of the superiority of a McDowellian sensibility theory in this space. Others who are not so convinced may elect to attempt to insert a quasi-realist projectivism here, but such a theory would have to be sufficiently robust to capture talk of aesthetic inadequacy and aesthetic education.

describe the acceptability of the positive intuition cases is to speak in terms of passing knowledge about aesthetic value - and sensibility accounts have a very comfortable place in their ontology for this talk of value, in the form of aesthetic merit.

But some do not seem to share my precise intuitions about how to describe the cases, and, in particular, are resistant to this talk of value. In particular, I have found that some readers are willing to accept the broad outlines of the outcomes I've described in these new cases - that it is fine to send my child to rap school based on testimony and hang that painting in my museum based on testimony - but that they resist my claim that I have learned, through testimony, that rap and the painting is aesthetically valuable. For those readers, let me offer an alternate account which avoids talk of merit and value, which I will call the normative account. In the normative account, we distinguish between claims about an object's aesthetic properties - an object's being beautiful or aesthetically valuable - and normative claims about what aesthetic properties we ought to discover or find. Accordingly, we note that our intuitions seem to forbid acquiring second-hand beliefs about aesthetic properties through testimony but permit acquiring second-hand beliefs about norms about aesthetic properties. This account would fit with the general shape of the positive intuition cases and the permissibility of acting from testimony, but would describe my actions in those cases differently. Under this account, we would say that, in Instruction, I am sending my child to rap school not because I have learned that rap is valuable or has merit, but because I have learned that one should find it beautiful. And similarly we might say that I ought only hang things in my room if I find them beautiful myself, but that I ought to hang things in my museum if I think that they ought to be found beautiful. The normative account differs from the sensibility account in that it does not invoke any robust ontology of aesthetic value, nor does it ascribe properties of aesthetic merit to objects. Instead, the account only refers to norms concerning aesthetic properties.

If we accept the normative account, then we will be led to be pessimists about acquiring second-hand beliefs about aesthetic properties but optimists about acquiring second-hand beliefs

about normative considerations about aesthetic properties. Traditional pessimists may see this as good news. The thesis of pessimism was that one could not acquire aesthetic beliefs through testimony. Therefore, the following escape hatch presents itself: to rescue outright pessimism from these new cases, one need only give an account of “aesthetic belief” narrow enough to exclude beliefs about the norms of aesthetic discovery and appreciation. We might take a similar escape hatch to rescue the acquaintance principle. The acquaintance principle claimed that “judgments of aesthetic value” had to be based on experience; if we give an account of how a norm might pass through testimony without requiring also that a judgment of aesthetic value passed, then we could make the acquaintance principle compatible with the new positive cases. Such maneuvers might, for example, rescue Hopkins’ version of pessimism. But the normative account, even if it can be made to acquiesce to pessimism, still leaves us with the same general insight: that there is a vast swath of usable testimony in our aesthetic lives that bears on our aesthetic actions and choices, even if it is not, technically, testimony about aesthetic beliefs. Again, we have discovered another optimism next door, concerning testimony about norms about aesthetic belief.

On simply the grounds of the cases considered here, I find the sensibility account more compelling than the normative account, as it provides a more complete explanation of the hinge. If it turns out that there is a cognitive account of aesthetic merit, then we have a neat explanation of why the intuitions fall as they do - we have negative intuitions in those cases where testimony is of subjective aesthetic properties, and positive intuitions with cognitive properties. The normative account, on the other hand, leaves unanswered the question of why it is that we can pass norms about aesthetic properties through testimony, but not the aesthetic properties themselves. We could answer that question by grounding those norms in some objective properties of merit, but then we would be explaining the normative account in terms of the sensibility account. The normative account thus has to walk a very narrow tightrope: it must explain why we can acquire beliefs about norms about aesthetic properties through testimony, without saying that we acquiring

beliefs about aesthetic value through testimony. That tightrope seems very difficult to walk. Where might the norm that I ought to appreciate rap come from, if not some account that says that rap is valuable or merits appreciation? Perhaps there is a good answer to this question, but I do not yet see it. So, based on the analysis of these cases alone, the sensibility account seems preferable. And if, we are in the business of reasoning from these intuitions about the permissibility of testimony to conclusions about aesthetic ontology, then we could count these cases as weighing in favor of a sensibility theory, and thus the existence of cognitive properties of aesthetic merit. But I freely admit that this is not decisive. If there were other arguments which weighed in favor of the normative account, and we could find a way to walk that tightrope, then the normative account could also be made to fit the cases.

But both these accounts have a similar shape: they forbid a certain kind of direct aesthetic judgment of an object to pass through testimony, but do permit another sort of judgment about something like norms or merit. Both permit robust forms of aesthetic trust, and explain why cases of action in the aesthetic world through testimony is often permitted, and why classical cases of doxastic repetition of aesthetic testimony are problematic. And furthermore, in order to explain the forms of aesthetic trust, both seem to commit themselves to some form of cognitivism - whether we hash it out in terms of aesthetic properties or in terms of norms concerning aesthetic properties.

But could we explain the cases more minimally, in a way that an outright aesthetic non-cognitivist would accept? Here is another proposal that avoids commitments to aesthetic cognitivism of any sort, whether it be about properties or norms. Let us say that I am permitted to use aesthetic testimony when it bears on predicting aesthetic reactions, but not permitted to use aesthetic testimony when it comes to establishing my own aesthetic beliefs. The Public Display case will then be explained in the following way: I use aesthetic testimony to predict how potential museum patrons will respond to a particular painting. This predictive account can also attempt to

handle the Instruction case by saying that all I've acquired through testimony is predictions about how others might react to my child's rap prowess.

I've already given some reasons that the predictive account is a poor fit for Instruction. But there are even more phenomena the predictive account cannot explain. My partner has said that, while she is sure that Tarkovsky and Bergman are quite valuable, she can never actually appreciate them, because she can only really respond to works that are at least a little bit funny. She is quite sure this makes her a bad person, but there it is. The minimalist, predictive proposal cannot capture this sense of inadequacy in the face of aesthetic testimony. For the minimalist, the only use of testimony is predicting other's reactions; testimony is inert when it comes to reflecting on my own experiences. The predictive proposal can't account for the complexly apologetic position I can put myself in. I can become convinced by testimony that I am aesthetically inadequate, but yet still be unable to bring myself to simply take up an experts' judgment as my own. The more robust sensibility account explains this use of aesthetic testimony very neatly. Trustworthy testimony convinces me of a work's merit; my own lack of feeling leaves me unable to assert it for myself, and so I must apologize for my insensitivity. I can become convinced, through testimony, that I am aesthetically inadequate. The normative account can also make sense of my inadequacy; I am failing to appreciate as I ought.

Most importantly, the two cognitive accounts have a far better explanation for the way aesthetic testimony plays out in the discussion of aesthetic education. We seem to seek expert testimony not as predictors of what we will likely find beautiful, but as indicators of what is worth finding beautiful or what we should find beautiful. I think this is clearest when get past only thinking about review and recommendation cases and consider the phenomenon of aesthetic education. When a friend I trust tells me I should take free jazz more seriously, or that I haven't paid enough attention to Brahms or classical Indian music or rap and I respond accordingly, what I'm doing is not simply taking up a prediction about my own future pleasure. If that were the case, I could simply test it out.

But my attitudes are far more complex. Even if my life is suffused with aesthetic pleasure, I feel that it is important that that I at least make the effort. I think that I am missing something, that there is, perhaps, something a bit wrong with me. I think it is important that I give it a shot. I think that it is important that the students of my university get exposed to worthwhile music and I am willing to defer to the beliefs of musicians and musical scholars about what is worthwhile.

It's worth reflecting here again on the Private Display case. What is it, exactly, that I'm doing wrong when I, based solely on testimony, put that painting up in my own bedroom? I think we don't want to say here that I'm completely insane. Rather, I'm a bit of a boor. I'm misunderstanding something about the nature and purpose of art. A predictivist would have quite a bit of trouble explaining what was going on. If the goal of aesthetic testimony was simply predicting my own positive experiences, then my actions - hanging up the painting because it was beautiful, knowing full well that I would never see it for myself - would seem utterly incomprehensible and deranged. If I have settled on the belief that I will never see the beauty for myself, then aesthetic testimony, understood as solely a psychological predictor, should no longer have any bearing on my choices of what I hang in my own room. A sensibility account, on the other hand, could be quite illuminating here. Under a sensibility theory, what I'm doing is still a mistake, but it is now a comprehensible one. I have confused two things: whether something is beautiful, and whether it merits being found beautiful. The reason to hang something in my private room is that I actually find it beautiful. When I hang a painting that I do not find beautiful in my room based on expert testimony, I have confused beauty and merit. And that strikes me as a very illuminating description of the boorishness I would display by hanging that painting. I am being ham-fisted; I am treating a complex, partially subjective, partially cognitive property as if it were a simple, uncomplicated empirical property - treating art as if it were, say, an antibiotic or a muffler, that would do me some good even if I didn't have any particular understanding of it for myself. Similarly, the normative account offers a slightly different, but also insightful reading - in that case, we might say the boorishness is in skipping a

step. I have skipped from knowing that I should find something beautiful, to acting as if I already did.

This also highlights what's strange about Budd's account. Under Budd, when I've received trustworthy testimony about the beauty of a painting but have failed to see it for myself, I should say: "I know the painting is beautiful, but I don't appreciate it for myself." This strikes me as conceptually strained. But the sensibility account and the normative account offer familiar and coherent interpretations of this state: after receiving the testimony, I would say that I knew that the painting deserved an aesthetic response or that I had reason to discover certain aesthetic properties in it, even if I had not achieved that state myself. But I could only rightfully say that it was beautiful, full stop, when I'd finally seen it for myself.⁵

If all this is right, then we have made some headway towards narrowing the field of theories. Some recent accounts have been rejected outright, but to varying degrees, I consider Budd's account, the sensibility account, the normative account, and the predictive account still live. What seems to select between them are various delicate intuitions which different people seem to feel with different degrees of force. I have given those intuitions which I find most compelling; I take there to be significant reasons to pick the cognitive accounts over the predictive, and some thinner reasons to prefer the sensibility account over the normative account. These conclusions are based only on comparisons between a handful of candidate theories and intuitions, and I do not take myself to have given an exhaustive list of either. In fact, one of the primary goals of this paper is to stimulate the generation of both a wider list of cases and a larger menu of candidate theories.

⁵ I do not take myself to have argued for the truth or real existence of McDowellian merit. I take myself merely to have shown that a commitment to something like aesthetic merit is contained within my intuitions about aesthetic testimony, and those whose intuitions are sufficiently similar to mine. Nor have I argued that a McDowellian account of secondary properties is correct; there are significant difficulties with the account. It would be entirely compatible with what I've argued here to accept my analysis of these intuitions, and use this as a basis for rejecting the truth of these aesthetic intuitions. I simply hope to have illuminated the content of the intuitions.

I do take what I've shown here to weigh against recent arguments for straightforward optimism about aesthetic testimony. Meskin's, Robson's, and McKinnon's accounts cannot explain the complex location of the hinge. But I take my work here to suggest something else: that we ought to move beyond the optimism/pessimism debate. There are a host of cases in which we resist the use of aesthetic testimony, and a host of cases where we rely, act from, and trust in testimony. If one takes the normative account above, one may still be able to claim a victory for pessimism by holding to a very narrow view of the scope of pessimism and excluding from considerations testimony about norms bearing on aesthetic appreciation. But this seems to me, even if technically true, to only be a part of a much more complicated story. If we were to close the inquiry there, we would have provided an incomplete accounting of our epistemic relationships with others in the aesthetic world. If we are not predictivists, then we need some explanation for the substantial place of aesthetic trust in our lives - of the many forms of aesthetic trust which seem, not only palatable, but vital - and we need an explanation which can make sense of the delicate relationship between the negative cases and the positive ones.

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