

3 Over-Appreciating Appreciation

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Aestheticians have had a great deal to say recently in praise of (aesthetic) appreciation. This enthusiastic appreciation for appreciation may seem unsurprising given the important role it plays in many of our aesthetic practices, but we maintain that some prominent aestheticians have overstated the role of appreciation (and, perhaps more importantly, understated the role of other elements we will discuss) when it comes to the exercise of aesthetic taste. This is not, of course, to deny the obvious fact that appreciation often plays an important role in our aesthetic practices but merely that it is a mistake to cast it in the role of the *sine qua non* of aesthetics. We will focus below on the following three claims, which we identify from the recent literature (though we don't mean to suggest that these are the only respects in which the value of appreciation has been overstated):

- A1 We should reinterpret various influential claims in aesthetics in terms of appreciation.
- A2 Aesthetic judgement in the absence of appreciation is (or is close to) worthless.
- A3 The aim of engaging with artworks is appreciation.¹

We will argue—with reference to examples from the ongoing debate concerning the Acquaintance Principle (*AP*) and related claims—that each of these theses is mistaken. In §§1–3, we address each claim in turn, before briefly offering some concluding remarks in §4.

Before moving on, it will be useful to say a little more to set up our discussion. Our focus in this chapter is on appreciation in aesthetics, but of course, the term ‘appreciation’ can be rather slippery. As such, it's important to make it clear that our focus will be on a particular species of appreciation which has garnered a great deal of focus in aesthetics and which has been taken to involve something like “perceiving [a work's aesthetic properties] as realized in the work” (Budd, 2003, p. 392) or “experiencing the qualities of a thing” in such a way as to find them “worthy or valuable” (Dickie, 1974, p. 40) or as an experience which “allows one to fittingly have the full range of affective and conative reactions”

appropriate for the entity (Lord, 2018, p. 76). The details of such a notion will, naturally, need to be spelled out in order to arrive at a full account of appreciation, but we will not attempt to do so here.²

1. Acquaintance and Exegesis

As mentioned, our discussion will focus on examples concerning the famous debate surrounding acquaintance and aesthetic taste. It has often been thought, as Carolyn Korsmeyer (2013, pp. 258–259) phrases things, that “both literal taste and taste for art require first-hand acquaintance with their objects” and that just “as one cannot decide that soup is well seasoned without actually sipping it, so one cannot conclude that music is moving without hearing it.” However, this apparent truism has recently been subject to a number of challenges (see, e.g., Budd, 2003; Livingston, 2003; Robson, 2013).³ In the aesthetic case, this debate has, of course, centred on Wollheim’s influential claim that “judgements of aesthetic value, unlike judgements of moral knowledge, must be based on first-hand experience of their objects” (1980, p. 233). The debates surrounding Wollheim’s ‘Acquaintance Principle’ (and parallel claims found in, e.g., Tormey, 1973; Pettit, 1983; Mothersill, 1994, p. 160) have concerned both the truth of the principle and various exegetical issues surrounding how it is best interpreted. Our focus in this section will be on a debate of the latter kind.

It may initially seem that to defend *AP* here someone would need to show that, contra recent criticisms, acquaintance of a certain kind is necessary for legitimate aesthetic belief. Some supporters of *AP* have, however, recently taken a rather different tack, arguing that the version of *AP* under attack was never one which Wollheim—or indeed many celebrated advocates of parallel principles—ever intended to defend. The most developed argument for a view of this kind is presented by Dominic McIver Lopes (2014, p. 170), who claims that “the controversy over the acquaintance principle ensues from an incorrect interpretation of it.” According to Lopes (*Ibid.*, p. 175), ‘aesthetic judgement’ can refer to both “experience-like states ascribing aesthetic value and non-experiential states ascribing aesthetic value” (*Ibid.*, p. 175)—that is, roughly, appreciation-like-states and belief-like states, respectively. It is, Lopes maintains, the former with which *AP* is properly concerned, but many recent participants in the debate concerning *AP* have mistakenly taken it to be concerned with the latter.

If Lopes is right, *AP* should be reinterpreted in terms of appreciation and, thus redefined, it seems to at least come very close to rendering *AP* a truism. There may be a little housekeeping to do when it comes to spelling out precisely what acquaintance amounts to, but it seems clear that no one would want to allow that appreciation (of the kind outlined earlier) is available via testimony or via appeal to various other sources of

aesthetic belief proposed as counterexamples to the spirit (and not merely the letter) of *AP*.⁴ Indeed, Lopes's own understanding of appreciation appears intended to render the principle something of a truism. According to Lopes (*Ibid.*, p. 179), aesthetic appreciation is "defined as a cognitive process where interpretation and clarification produce an ascription of aesthetic value." While this description is somewhat lacking in specificity, Lopes (*Ibid.*) suggests that we can fill in some of the details by claiming that aesthetic appreciation involves what he terms 'α-judgements'—that is, "experiential states ascribing aesthetic values" (*Ibid.*, p. 175). Lopes is keen to stress here that the experiential states in question do not have to be (directly) caused by the objects themselves and that the relevant experience does not have to be a *perceptual* experience.⁵ Still, though, it is clear that testimony and its ilk will have no place here, and so *AP*, once properly formulated, begins to look very close to being trivially true.

We are sympathetic to some aspects of Lopes's view. It does seem eminently plausible, for example, that *some* of the apparent controversy concerning acquaintance has been a merely verbal dispute between those who propose that it is a necessary condition for aesthetic appreciation and those who deny that it is a necessary condition for aesthetic belief. The phrase 'aesthetic judgement' is, after all, a notoriously slippery one, with some philosophers using it as a mere synonym for 'aesthetic belief' (Hopkins, 2006), while others set up a clear contrast between the two (Todd, 2004). Yet there are at least two reasons for believing that Lopes is mistaken in maintaining that his appeal to this appreciative interpretation of *AP* will dispel these debates entirely. First, regardless of historical exegesis, there are those (such as Hanson (2015) and Hopkins (2006, 2011)) who seem, at the very least, to be sympathetic to a version of *AP* explicated in terms of belief. Second, Lopes is mistaken in his exegetical proposal that we should interpret *AP* as concerned with appreciation rather than belief.

Immediately prior to his introduction of *AP*, Wollheim (1980, pp. 231–232) considers two different understandings of the nature of the aesthetic which he labels 'realism' and 'objectivism'.⁶ The first of these is importantly distinct from realism, as it is now standardly understood in meta-aesthetic debates, and amounts to the claim that "attributions of aesthetic value have truth-value" and "the truth-value of such judgements depends entirely on the local character of that to which it is attributed" (*Ibid.*, p. 231). This appeal to 'local character' is somewhat oblique, and it is unclear whether it would include, for example, facts about the artist's intentions or comparisons with the broader categories to which the work belongs. All that is relevant for present purposes, though, is that the realist takes aesthetic value to be "altogether independent of the psychological properties of human beings" (*Ibid.*). Objectivism, by contrast, makes direct reference to such properties. While the objectivist also accepts that judgements of aesthetic value have truth values, they claim that the truth

conditions for such judgements somehow concern “the experience of humanity at large.”⁷ As such, the objectivist would be committed to an absolutist—rather than a relativist or contextualist—understanding of the semantics of aesthetic judgement.^{8,9}

So how does all of this relate to the alleged requirement that aesthetic judgements “*must* be based on first-hand experience of their objects” (Ibid., p. 233, italics ours)? It seems clear that the ‘must’ here is intended to be deliberately ambiguous depending on whether we are considering the view of the realist or the objectivist. Beginning with the realist, Wollheim asserts that they will find no place for a requirement for firsthand experience “as part of the truth-conditions of aesthetic evaluations” but, rather, that they are “highly likely to insist on some such experience as an epistemic condition of aesthetic evaluation” (Ibid.).¹⁰ It is clear, then, that Wollheim is happy to countenance an epistemic, and so belief-focused, reading of *AP* and therefore that, contra Lopes, those who propose such interpretations have not misinterpreted Wollheim.

Still, while Wollheim takes the realist’s commitment to *AP* to be an epistemic one, the same does not apply to his objectivist interpretation of the principle. Rather, Wollheim (1980, p. 232) suggests that the objectivist will hold that the special kind of experience she is concerned with “appears crucially in the truth-conditions of judgements of aesthetic value.” It is difficult to see, though, precisely how we are to understand this claim. The most straightforward interpretation here—one made even more plausible by the fact that Wollheim contrasts the objectivist’s view with that of the realist who believes that “aesthetic value has the status of a primary quality” (Ibid.)—is that the objectivist treats aesthetic properties as being constitutively response dependent. Yet such an interpretation would leave it mysterious why the objectivist should be committed to *AP*. After all, colour properties are frequently (though not uncontroversially) taken to be response dependent, but this isn’t taken as a motivation for applying a version of *AP* to colour judgements. Indeed, it is a perennial aim of those proposing principles such as *AP* to draw a clear contrast between aesthetic and colour cases (see, e.g., Alcaraz León, 2008, p. 292; Pettit, 1983, p. 25).

A supporter of Lopes might propose, then, that we would be better placed interpreting this objectivist reading of *AP* along appreciative lines. However, while this interpretation may well render the principle considerably more plausible in itself, it would be considerably *less* plausible as an interpretation of Wollheim. It seems very much as if Wollheim takes the objectivist as offering a straightforwardly doxastic account of aesthetic judgement, one according to which these judgements are in no wise to be identified with any kind of experiential or appreciative state. He talks, for example, of aesthetic judgements of this kind having “truth-values” and “truth-conditions” (1980, p. 232). Further, he proposes (Ibid.) that certain kinds of experience (which seem very much to match the kinds of

experience we are discussing under the heading of ‘appreciation’) provide justification for our aesthetic judgements and perhaps serve as a part of their truth conditions rather than being constitutive of the judgements themselves. Given this, it seems clear that, contra Lopes, both of the interpretations of *AP* which Wollheim himself proposes are focused on aesthetic belief.¹¹

Lopes’s exegetical claims don’t stop with Wollheim, though, as he takes other famous advocates of principles such as *AP* to have been misrepresented as discussing belief when they are really concerned with appreciation. For example, he takes Philip Pettit to be expressing a view of this kind when he makes his (1983, p. 15), claim that “the state one is in when one sincerely assents to a given aesthetic characterisation is not a state to which one can have non-perceptual access”. Again, though, we are unconvinced, and much of what Pettit says elsewhere in the same paper seems to clearly favour an epistemic (and, therefore, doxastic) interpretation of his view. Consider, for example, his (*Ibid.*, p. 25) claim that in aesthetics “perception is the only title to the sort of knowledge which perception yields.”

On a more concessive note, we do find Lopes’s exegetical claims much more plausible with respect to some of the other authors he discusses. In particular, we are rather more sympathetic (for reasons we won’t discuss here) with his (2014, p. 174) claim that Sibley should be interpreted as talking about appreciation rather than belief in his famous (2001, p. 34) claim that to suggest “that one can make aesthetic judgments without aesthetic perception [. . .] is to misunderstand aesthetic judgment.”¹²

We do not take these concessions to be inconsistent with our argument in this section, however. Recall that our general aim in this chapter is not to deny that appreciation is important but merely to highlight ways in which this importance has been overstated. Lopes may be right—indeed, we suspect he *is* right—to maintain that claims about the importance of acquaintance are sometimes about appreciation. He is wrong, though, to maintain that those who have taken them to be about other things (most notably belief) are simply mistaken. This is a theme we will return to when we discuss other cases in which aestheticians have been too quick to move from the undoubted claim that appreciation matters in matters of aesthetic taste to the claim that it is (or at least is very close to being) all that matters.

2. The Value of Mere Aesthetic Belief

In this section we will turn to consider *A2*, the claim that there is little (if any) value to forming aesthetic judgements in the absence of appreciation. Before doing so, though, it’s worth briefly pausing to consider two related positions: the position that such judgements are illegitimate and the position that they are impossible.

The most obvious motivation for the latter position would be the view—suggested by, e.g., Gorodeisky and Marcus (2018) and Todd (2004)—according to which aesthetic judgement is identical with (or at least constitutively requires) a certain kind of appreciative state. A view of this kind contrasts with an alternative, and we believe correct, position according to which aesthetic judgement is belief (or at the very least some belief-like state). Of course, some apparent disputes over this issue could merely be the result of different aestheticians stipulating different usages of ‘aesthetic judgement.’ In the cases we are concerned with, though, it is the result of a genuine and substantive disagreement—a disagreement which is, roughly, with how to identify the mental correlate of aesthetic assertions. According to one camp, this correlate is typically (Gorodeisky and Marcus explicitly allow exceptions, and they are by no means alone here) an appreciation-like state, while according to their opponents, it is a belief-like state. Our sympathies in this debate are, as we have indicated, with the latter camp (for reasons indicated in, e.g., Robson and Meskin (manuscript)), but we will not argue for this view here. Instead, we will merely highlight that even those who take aesthetic judgement to be identical with appreciation still allow that there is such a thing as aesthetic belief.¹³ We will, therefore, focus in what follows on the legitimacy and value of certain kinds of aesthetic belief without taking any stance as to whether these count as aesthetic *judgements*. Those who hold that they do not can simply rephrase our claims accordingly.

What about the claim that the judgements in question are illegitimate? Let’s consider someone who is the recipient of pure aesthetic testimony (that is, who merely receives testimony that some aesthetic claim, *P*, is the case without any access to supporting reasons, etc.). We already mentioned that we are unaware of any aesthetician who would want to claim that such an individual could legitimately *appreciate* (or indeed appreciate simpliciter) the object in question on this basis. The question of whether they could legitimately believe that the object is, say, beautiful on this basis is, by contrast, far more controversial. It is commonplace to divide the debate concerning aesthetic testimony into two broad camps. *Optimists* claim that testimony can serve as a legitimate source of aesthetic judgement, whereas *pessimists* deny this.¹⁴ Some pessimists (such as Whiting, 2015) deny that judgements of this kind qualify as knowledge, while others (such as Hopkins, 2011) argue that they fall afoul of some kind of non-epistemic norm.

Importantly, our claim about the value of aesthetic judgement formed on the basis of testimony is neutral with respect to the optimism/pessimism debate. Some pessimists—those who take aesthetic judgements to be something other than beliefs—can allow that aesthetic beliefs formed on the basis of testimony are perfectly legitimate, and pessimists who take aesthetic judgements to be beliefs can take us to be merely highlighting the benefits of doing something illegitimate (after all, contra the cliché,

crime sometimes does pay). Still, though, our claim is quite controversial. Indeed, it is commonly rejected by writers on both sides of the aesthetic testimony debate. As we will see, the particular reasons given for rejecting the claim vary, but the basic idea behind them seems to be that acquiring true aesthetic belief—or even *knowledge*—on the basis of testimony would be of scant value, given that such beliefs would not be accompanied by the richer kinds of mental state required for appreciation (with the further claim being, of course, that it is appreciation that we are really seeking in our aesthetic engagements). Despite the important differences between them, we take Ransom (2017), Lord (2018), Hills (2009), and Nguyen (2019) to all be offering suggestions along these general lines.

Ransom (2019) offers a Sosa-inspired account, which captures valuable epistemic inquiry in terms of the performative achievements which are not the mere production of a true belief but the production of true belief as a result of one's aesthetic competence. Here aesthetic competence is the skill set involved in a rich, appreciative grasping of the artwork and its aesthetic features attained via firsthand acquaintance. Ransom argues that a 'testimonial competence' can be attained via appeal to aesthetic testimony, where this is the skill set involved in ascertaining a true belief by judging whether a testifier is competent and sincere. Ransom also argues that testimonial competence can provide a form of aesthetic knowledge. However, she argues that only firsthand acquaintance will produce knowledge of the rich, appreciative kind. According to Ransom, during our aesthetic engagements, we most desire acquaintance with the relevant aesthetic object, as this enables a rich understanding of the matter in question: by being acquainted with the object, we can grasp how the relevant aesthetic properties have been ascribed and thereby develop our aesthetic taste. She explicitly denies that there is anything bad about acquiring the shallower kind of knowledge via testimony; nevertheless, the only means by which she justifies its value is in terms of pointing us in the right direction when we are developing the richer kind of knowledge. Arguing here (Ransom, 2019, p. 426) that aesthetic testimony is "an important source of training" for our aesthetic taste, she continues 'Aesthetic testimony can be vital for developing aesthetic competence as it can serve as a source of knowledge for novices who would otherwise be unsure of how to approach certain artworks, or even which artworks to engage with.'

Comparable moves are made, for example, by Lord (2018), who draws a distinction between 'appreciative knowledge' and 'know-how' and a basic propositional form of knowledge, only the latter of which can be acquired through testimony. Lord also claims that the appreciative kind of knowledge is the most valuable. He does allow that "given various pressures on our time, attention, and stamina," deference can be a valuable tool by which we can arrive at "various aesthetic truths." Nevertheless, he insists that it is a non-ideal (indeed, defective) means of engaging with

an aesthetic object, because it doesn't allow us to appreciate the object in question. He argues that whilst we might attain beliefs in various aesthetic truths, and even knowledge, via deference, "[t]he primary downside is that deference cannot put us in a position to gain *appreciative* knowledge. This is because it does not put us in a position to be acquainted with the specific ways in which the aesthetic features are realized. This is a serious failing given the centrality of appreciation to our aesthetic lives." The main claim here is that deference is not conducive to appreciation, which is a central component of our aesthetic lives.

Nguyen (2019) argues that when we acquire beliefs via deferential testimony, far from enabling the training and development of appreciation, this mode of belief formation cuts short the opportunity for appreciative practice. In doing so, Nguyen suggests, it cuts short the opportunity to participate in that which is primarily valuable about this practice, that which our applications of aesthetic taste are *for*. To bring this out, Nguyen compares aesthetic appreciation to a game. He argues that "[w]hen we play a game, we try to win. But often winning isn't the point; playing is" (2019, p. 1127). Similarly, when we aesthetically appreciate, we try to form correct judgements, but forming correct judgements is not the point; the point is the process of engaging with the aesthetic object, i.e. the process of "interpreting, investigating, and exploring the aesthetic object" (Ibid.). Nguyen argues that this is evidenced by the fact that if we did merely aim for correctness, then it would make sense for us to simply defer to the testimony of experts. Yet he argues that it doesn't make sense for us to simply defer, as this defeats the point of the process in a similar manner to the shortcuts and cheats of a game. According to Nguyen, when we form appreciative aesthetic judgements, we require autonomy, that is to say our judgements must have been formed through our own cognitive efforts.

All of this seems very damning when it comes to the value of mere aesthetic belief. So why do we demur? We saw that Nguyen aims to explain an aspect of our aesthetic behaviour—our avoidance of merely deferring to experts—by appeal to our disregard for mere aesthetic belief. However, it is by no means clear that this is a genuine aspect of our aesthetic practice. Indeed, one of us has previously argued (in Robson, 2014) that there is good reason to think that we frequently *do* defer to others in aesthetic matters. Further, we believe that there are often significant benefits to doing so. One obvious benefit to having true aesthetic beliefs—whether acquired via testimony or otherwise—is that it will increase the number of true beliefs we have. And having true beliefs, whether about aesthetic matters or otherwise, is often a valuable thing in itself. This is not, of course, to suggest that all true beliefs are particularly valuable (perhaps memorising the first three digits of the phone numbers of everyone in Ottawa would, while being an impressive feat, have scant, if any, value). However, we think—given the importance we often attach to aesthetic

matters—that it would (at the very least) be an oddity if it was *never* valuable for its own sake to have true beliefs in aesthetics.

Moreover, we think that it is not only possible to have true aesthetic beliefs via testimony but also aesthetic knowledge (of course, as we discuss in what follows, this aspect of our position isn't entirely neutral with respect to the optimism/pessimism debate). This would include what McShane (2018, p. 629), in a parallel discussion of moral testimony, terms “remedial” cases—cases in which we rely on testimony because we are concerned that our own judgement is compromised in some way. In such remedial cases, our aesthetic judgements may be too distorted by bias (imagine being asked to judge a beloved child's piano performance objectively), or they may be compromised because we lack the ability to engage with certain works (those with no appreciable sense of humour would be poor judges of the relative merits of sitcoms). Other limitations might apply not to an individual's ability to judge any particular work but, rather, to the range of works which any single individual can reasonably expect to be able to competently judge for themselves. Artforms are typically complex things (with long histories, litanies of conventions, etc.) such that acquiring the ability to properly judge artworks within a certain art kind, or even of a certain genre within that kind, can take a great deal of time and effort. Given this, it seems unlikely that any single individual will be able to develop a reasonable level of expertise in more than a fraction of the world's many and varied artforms. Testimony, by contrast, can give us access to the judgements of those who have expertise across the full gamut of cases. Finally, there will be cases in which we are prevented by historical contingencies or similar factors from properly applying our own judgements, the most prominent example here being ‘lost work’ cases, in which we have no choice but to rely on testimony when looking for knowledge concerning works that are no longer extant (and where no suitable photographs etc. are available).¹⁵

It could be objected that all of these epistemic advantages require that we abandon our feigned neutrality and commit to rejecting pessimism concerning aesthetic testimony. However, this is not the case. Recall that some pessimists are perfectly happy to allow that we *can* acquire aesthetic knowledge that is based on testimony while insisting that we should not do so (such pessimists could, therefore, just allow that we are once again considering the advantages available to us in violating their norms). Further, even many of those who *do* accept pessimism on epistemic grounds shy away from the hard-line view that aesthetic knowledge is *never* available via testimony (with cases involving lost works etc. being common areas for making concessions). Of course, we don't want to pretend that our epistemic claims here are entirely neutral—some pessimists would certainly reject them. What we want to emphasise is that they are rather less controversial than one might initially think.

Regardless of what we make of these epistemic claims, though, we can still appeal to the value of mere true belief. However, while we do think that the mere acquisition of true beliefs can be an important goal of some of our aesthetic practices, we don't want to overstate our case here. In particular, we are happy to concede that many cases in which we engage with artworks have nothing to do with the acquisition of true beliefs (aesthetic or otherwise). The person who relistens to a favourite musical work or rewatches a beloved film is rarely doing so with any aim to increase their store of true beliefs. And even if our initial engagement with a work leads us to the true belief that the work is beautiful, this is rarely taken to be of much importance in comparison to other factors such as, most obviously, appreciating that beauty.¹⁶

Still, we shouldn't be too hasty to denigrate the value of mere true belief in our aesthetic practices. Even if we bracket the intrinsic value of such beliefs, we can see that there are various important roles within the artworld which someone with true beliefs can perform regardless of their own appreciation of the works in question. As Nguyen (2017, p. 24) points out, a curator charged with, say, filling their museum with the best examples of impressionist works their budget can afford need not have any appreciation for impressionism themselves.¹⁷ Merely having the right beliefs about the value of the works seems enough here. Similarly, truth (rather than personal appreciation) seems more important when it comes to which works are most worthy of preservation or of receiving various honours etc.¹⁸

Importantly, though, our claim is not merely that those who are interested (whether for practical purposes or otherwise) in increasing their store of true aesthetic beliefs can rely on testimony just as well as on firsthand judgement.¹⁹ Rather, there seem to be some cases in which we *ought* to rely on testimony. Imagine that you are asked to choose which of a list of works are the most valuable artistic treasures and, therefore, in most urgent need of being protected in the face of some imminent conflict or natural disaster. We propose that there would be something wrong here with merely relying on your own judgement rather than (time permitting) doing your best to defer, via testimony, to the critical consensus. And we suspect that something similar will apply to at least some of the other cases we have discussed.

It could be objected at this stage, though, that in each of these cases the value of belief merely lies in promoting further aesthetic appreciation (either for the individual themselves or for others). The value of preserving great works, for example, is that it makes these works available as sources for appreciation to further generations. We suspect that, even in the cases we have highlighted, this objection overstates things and that there is, for example, a great deal of value to preserving masterpieces beyond their ability to furnish future appreciation. Rather than pushing this point here, though, we turn in the next section (as part of our response to A3) to

consider a particular kind of value which, we will argue, frequently plays an important role in our everyday aesthetic practices. This kind of value is often manifested without our ordinary engagements with artworks (rather than merely for those in much less common roles such as curator) and doesn't reduce to the instrumental value of promoting future appreciation.

3. Testimony and Social Value

In the last section, we suggested that the value of mere aesthetic belief is often underestimated, leading to an endorsement of claims such as A2. These considerations also give us reason to reject a strong version of A3 which takes appreciation to be the sole aim of our engagement with artworks. Still, such an extreme version of A3 was never very plausible, since it is clear that there is a range of reasons—financial, educational, romantic, etc.— people engage with artworks. A more *prima facie* plausible version of A3 would, therefore, need to make a weaker claim. Perhaps the claim—as some of the views we've discussed seem to suggest—that appreciation is the *canonical* aim of engaging with artworks and that other aims we might have either fail to relate to our engagement with artworks as artworks (such as the financial aim of the person who trades impressionist paintings as if they were any other commodity) or else serve an enabling function in relation to appreciation (either that of the individual themselves or some target group such as visitors to their gallery). In this section, we will sketch a provisional account according to which even this weaker interpretation of A3 is mistaken.

To begin, let's return to the case of forming aesthetic beliefs based on testimony. In our view, the strongest reasons to think that there is considerable value to such a practice are social. Aesthetic practice has too frequently been treated by philosophers (and others) as a solitary pursuit when it is, in fact, frequently communicative, a form of intellectual or emotional sharing. This can encompass dialogue *with* the work but also, crucially, dialogue *about* it. The former involves an anthropomorphized view of aesthetic appreciation, which is fairly common within aesthetic literature (consider, for example, Anthony Cross's (2017) claim that we should treat artworks as friends), but we will have little to say about it, since the 'dialogue' here is, of course, typically metaphorical. The latter, by contrast, allows for a much broader range of dialogue (both metaphoric and literal). Focus on the way we engage with the artwork itself, while important, frequently overlooks the value of the engaged relationship which we have with the artist and the broader art community, a relationship between a collection of individuals created around the artwork, fostering connections and a sense of community. Interpersonal interactions with others are central to our aesthetic lives, and the formation of aesthetic beliefs on the basis of testimony can contribute to fostering these.

To see the importance of such deference here, return to the more mundane cases of testimony. When one accepts another's testimony, a bond is forged between the testifier and the receiver. This is reflected by work on 'testimonial insults' by, for example, G. E. M. Anscombe (1979), Olivia Bailey (2018), Finlay Malcolm (2018), and Allan Hazlett (2017). They argue that when one testifies, this can be understood as an extension of an invitation to one's audience, an invitation to take one's word for whatever it is that one is testifying to. The invitation is posed as an offer, and the audience is invited to believe in the truth of the proposition whilst being relieved of their "usual epistemic responsibility to review the evidence before making up one's mind about [it]" (Bailey, 2018, p. 141). If one were to reject the testifier's invitation and seek evidence, then this, they argue, would be received as an insult: when one testifies that *p*, one puts *p* forward as true, one *vouches* for it. To reject another's testimony and seek evidence is thereby to disparage either their competence or their sincerity, which reflects negatively on them in an insulting way. And this applies even if one's reasons to reject the testimony are justified, even if the testifier's competence or sincerity should be questioned.²⁰ This general picture, then, suggests that there is an important social role to the giving and receiving (or failing to receive) testimony in general. And it is, of course, by no means the only story which could be told concerning the social value of testimony. Given this, we see no reason those attracted to any of these general stories concerning the social role of testimony couldn't apply them in the case of aesthetics. Yet we think the defender of aesthetic testimony can go even further.²¹

Aesthetic testimony tends to be taken up, at least in part, because we trust the testifier, where this involves feeling some kind of respect towards them. We feel related to them and want to see things in the manner that they do. It arises alongside a desire to harbour a sense of community and belonging with others.²² This sense of belonging is fundamental to the kind of trust involved in the reception of aesthetic testimony, and it is also fundamental to what we find aesthetically valuable about our engagement with artworks. Once we recognise the centrality of this interaction, we can see that, far from being detrimental to our aesthetic engagements, the formation of aesthetic beliefs via testimony is a manifestation of (at least one key aspect of) what we find valuable about such practices.²³

We are now in a better position to understand where accounts such as Nguyen's go wrong. Nguyen argues that deference to aesthetic testimony strikes us as odd and wrong, and it strikes us so because it terminates our engagement with the work. Most significantly, he takes this to indicate that we do not value the mere formation of true beliefs in our aesthetic engagements and that we instead value the challenge of solving a puzzle, a persistent reassessment of aesthetic objects, which is part and parcel of an appreciative experience. In certain respects, Nguyen is on the right lines, but we believe that he overlooks some other important aspects of

our aesthetic practices. It is true that we enjoy the persistent reassessment of aesthetic objects, but we often do so, at least in part, because we value the interpersonal aesthetic interaction which this brings. Stopping at true belief and not investigating a work further may strike us as odd—in those cases in which it does strike us as odd—not simply because we think we should rise to the challenge of appreciatively solving a puzzle nor simply because we want the puzzle to continue but because we value interpersonal aesthetic interaction. And interactions of this kind are something which can be enhanced by a continuous aesthetic puzzle. We may enjoy viewing a beautiful meadow and relish it even more side by side with a friend, but the complex aesthetic properties found in the kind of ‘puzzle’ cases on which Nguyen focuses allow for a much richer range of social negotiations (a beautiful vista may be enchanting, but conversations about its beauty tend not to be).

This interpersonal interaction may be enhanced by our endeavours to solve an aesthetic puzzle, but such puzzle-solving endeavours are not the only means by which interpersonal interaction is enabled—it may equally well be enabled by discussion, debate, and even the simple acceptance of testimony. Moreover, the kind of isolated and autonomous puzzle-solving endeavour on which Nguyen often focuses may sometimes prove to be problematic in itself, since it can come to hinder richer interpersonal interactions. When autonomously engaging with the work for oneself, one will be able to achieve some interpersonal interaction, to the degree that one sees oneself as bonding with an artist or art community by discovering the aspects of an artwork laid out within it. Here one might see oneself as investigating an artwork in the manner that a treasure hunter might approach the deciphering of an ancient coded map. Still, there is something far more enriching about not going it alone, about thinking through and discussing the puzzle with a friend, sometimes relying on their insight and sometimes letting them rely on yours (even in cases where each of you would have solved the puzzle more quickly alone).

The portrayal of the aesthetic appreciator as a lone puzzle solver who ignores the word of others in a purist pursuit of aesthetic truth simply neglects the valuable interpersonal interactions that we can have with others in a shared pursuit of an aesthetic goal. Indeed, the more appropriate comparison will often be to that of team games, which function as a group exercise. This is not to claim that the lone puzzle solver does something illegitimate, nor, we believe, does the person who simply acquires true beliefs via testimony and leaves it at that. Nevertheless, in both cases we maintain that there is more of value to be had (though whether it will be worth seeking out these further values in a particular case will, of course, be a complex matter), since the opportunity for further dialogue and engagement with others is thwarted.²⁴

On the kind of interpersonal model of aesthetic engagement that we are suggesting, the receipt of aesthetic testimony will rarely be a stopping

point. Rather, it will be a spur to further investigation of the work itself and to comparisons and contrasts between a friend's taste and our own.²⁵ On the other hand, the proposed model is incompatible with a complete rejection of the value of aesthetic testimony and, more generally, with a push for autonomy in the exercise of our aesthetic taste.

Our appeal to interpersonal factors is, of course, in need of further development, and we don't mean to suggest that the sketch we have offered here captures anything like the full range of interpersonal benefits of engaging with artworks (and still less that it captures all the non-appreciative value in doing so). However, we think the points we have highlighted in this section are enough to motivate two claims. First, that our frequent practice of joining with other people to engage with an artwork is often as much and perhaps even more about our relationship to these individuals as it is about our relationship to the work. Second, that these interpersonal aspects of our aesthetic practice are not merely means to enabling appreciation (as is sometimes taken to be the case for other non-appreciative goals such as acquiring true aesthetic beliefs). We have seen that in many cases, we do come to a richer appreciation of artworks through our interactions with others, but this isn't a necessary condition of these activities being valuable. Imagine that, after having a long conversation with a friend about the putative merits of a film you have previously dismissed, you rewatch the film in question and still find nothing there to appreciate. This may be a disappointment, but we find it implausible to think that it is enough to render the whole process worthless.²⁶

4. Concluding Remarks

We have argued that appreciation is over-appreciated when it comes to matters of aesthetic taste. Our primary aim in doing so, however, is not to denigrate aesthetic appreciation (we've been known to engage in it ourselves) but, rather, to highlight how an excessive focus on appreciation can lead to the neglect of other important aspects of our aesthetic practice. We have made some suggestions concerning what (some of) these aspects might be and the reasons for their importance, but we intend these far more as springboards for future discussion than as any kind of definitive account. In our views, the values and goals of our aesthetic practice are manifold, and fully exploring each of these (and the relationships between them) will prove to be a monumental task—a task that cannot make much progress if we are lured into taking a single goal amongst many as the *sine qua non* of all of our aesthetic activities.

Notes

1. Our discussion focuses on artworks, but many of the claims we discuss have also been applied to other objects of aesthetic judgement.

2. One such account is offered by Iseminger (1981, p. 389), who suggests that “S appreciates the Fness of a if and only if (i) a is F; (ii) S experientially takes a to be F; (iii) a’s being F and S’s experientially taking a to be F are “cognitively related”; (iv) S believes that the Fness of a is good.”
3. We focus here on aesthetic taste. For some objections to acquaintance claims in relation to gustatory taste, see Meskin and Robson (2015).
4. It might be thought that Amir Konigsberg (2012) is an exception here, since he has argued that it is possible to transmit appreciation via testimony. According to Konigsberg (Ibid., p. 156), “it is not only possible to transmit declarative aesthetic knowledge through testimony” but also to transmit “aesthetically appreciative experiences.” This would, however, be a mistake, since his concern is not with aesthetic testimony as this is standardly understood but, rather, with ‘aesthetic testimony’ understood as “aesthetic and non-aesthetic descriptions communicated from person to person” (Ibid., p. 154).
5. This allows him to avoid some well-worn objections to other formulations of AP concerning, for example, exact duplicates (Ibid., pp. 181–182) and literary works (Ibid., pp. 180–181). Discussion of these worries for principles such as AP date back at least as far as Tormey (1973, p. 39).
6. Wollheim also discusses two other views (Ibid., pp. 234–240), which he labels ‘relativism’ and ‘subjectivism.’ He takes the former to be incompatible with AP (though we found his argument here rather obscure) and leaves the relationship which the latter bears to it unexplored. So far as we can see, though, his discussion of these other two views provides no resources for defending the kind of account which Lopes proposes.
7. Wollheim does sometimes suggest (Ibid., pp. 233–234) that the objectivist should only be concerned with the experiences of those individuals who possess and are able to draw on a relevant level of understanding in relation to the work in question. We will not, however, attempt to resolve the apparent tension here, since it is irrelevant to our arguments.
8. For discussions of these different semantic views, see, e.g., Baker and Robson (2017, pp. 430–433), Schafer (2011) and Wyatt (2018).
9. Admittedly, it’s not entirely clear that Wollheim’s objectivist is committed to absolutism about aesthetic judgements. The letter of the view is compatible with taking a human’s judgement that ‘xs are beautiful’ to be equivalent to ‘xs are beautiful for human beings’ and similarly taking a judgement that ‘xs are beautiful,’ when made by the member of another species *s*, to be equivalent to ‘xs are beautiful for the members of species *s*.’ Developed in this way, the objectivist’s analysis of aesthetic judgements would be somewhat similar to the ‘group contextualist’ analysis of predicates of personal taste that is proposed by Glanzberg (2007).
10. Wollheim takes it for granted here that both the realist and the objectivist would *want* to accommodate AP.
11. At least provided we focus on something like what Neil Sinclair (2006) terms “minimal belief.”
12. Chapter Two of Robson (manuscript) discusses some reasons for favouring this interpretation.
13. Todd (2004) is a possible exception here, but we think that a fully developed version of Todd’s quasi-realist project would end up taking aesthetic judgements to be beliefs (at least in the minimal sense outlined in, e.g., Sinclair (2006)).
14. These distinctions, as stated, are very rough. For a more complete account, see Chapter One of Robson (manuscript).
15. One of us has also argued elsewhere (Robson, 2018) that testimony alone can provide us with a better epistemic position than first-hand acquaintance alone. However, we take no stance on that issue here.

16. A further argument against mere testimonial belief is presented by Howell (2014). Howell argues, in the context of a parallel argument pertaining to ethical testimony, that the possessor of such beliefs “might not understand how to apply” them nor be sufficiently motivated to act or be moved by them. Such beliefs will be “cognitively isolated” and “not introduced in a way that guarantees integration and coherence for the subject.” We agree that these things *might* be the case (both in the moral and in the aesthetic case) but see no reason they need be so. In most domains, we can be motivated to act on the basis of testimony and can integrate our testimonial beliefs with our wider web of beliefs, etc., and we don’t take Howell to have given enough of a reason to take the moral (or aesthetic) cases to be exceptional here.
17. Nguyen (2017) highlights a range of other useful examples here.
18. And something similar will apply when determining, e.g., which artists are most deserving of various endowments.
19. Of course, we don’t mean to suggest that these are the only sources available to them.
20. Of course, in cases in which there is strong enough reason to take the testifier to be unreliable, we might judge that an insult of this kind is perfectly justified (both epistemically and otherwise).
21. Remember that we are focusing here on the person who defends reliance on aesthetic testimony as valuable. This is still compatible with the pessimist’s denial that reliance on aesthetic testimony is legitimate.
22. Robson (2014) discusses empirical support for some of these claims.
23. McShane (2018) tells a similar story in relation to the social value of moral testimony.
24. And we suspect it will be very rare, though not unheard of, for there to be cases in which we are under any obligation to seek out these further values.
25. It is worth noting that using aesthetic testimony in this sense is something that even pessimists will often countenance (see Hopkins, 2011, p. 153).
26. Again, a comparison with gustatory taste can be made here when we consider how important social values often are when it comes to our engagement with food and drink.

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