Aesthetic Judgments, Evaluative Content, and (Hybrid) Expressivism

Jochen Briesen
Department of Philosophy, University of Konstanz
Contact: jochen.briesen@uni-konstanz.de

Abstract. Aesthetic statements of the form 'X is beautiful' are evaluative; they indicate the speaker's positive affective attitude regarding X. Why is this so? Is the evaluative content part of the truth conditions, or is it a pragmatic phenomenon (i.e. presupposition, implicature)? First, I argue that semantic approaches as well as these pragmatic ones cannot satisfactorily explain the evaluativity of aesthetic statements. Second, I offer a positive proposal based on a speech-act theoretical version of hybrid expressivism, which states that, with the literal utterance of 'X is beautiful', we perform two illocutionary acts simultaneously, an assertive and an expressive one. I will specify this theory in detail and argue that it can satisfactorily account for the evaluative content of aesthetic statements. I will also discuss the advantages of the theory over other variants of expressivism in meta-aesthetics.

1. Introduction

A wide range of aesthetic predicates exist: 'X is beautiful/elegant/graceful/delicate/dynamic etc.' (Sibley 1959). Through the sincere and literal utterance of such sentences, we make aesthetic statements.[1] It is unclear how to delineate the class of aesthetic predicates — which words belong on the list, and why? For the purposes of this paper, it is not important to answer this question; it is generally accepted that there is a wide variety of aesthetic predicates that allow for certain differentiations. One important differentiation concerns their evaluative character: some carry a strong positive or negative valence, whereas others seem only weakly evaluative or not evaluative at all (Sibley 1974, Zangwill 2001, Bonzon 2009).

In this paper, I will concentrate on beauty statements, such as

(1) X is beautiful,

---

[1] I deliberately do not speak of aesthetic sentences being *asserted*, because I do not want to commit myself at the outset to the view that a literal and sincere utterance of an aesthetic sentences constitutes the speech act of an *assertion*. The additions 'sincere' and 'literal' are supposed to exclude unusual circumstances, such as the utterance of an aesthetic sentence during a theatrical performance etc.

that are considered strongly evaluative. In other words, it is generally agreed that (1) conveys that the speaker maintains a positive affective attitude (e.g. liking, appreciating) regarding X — or more precisely, regarding the sensual appearance of X.[2] Although (1) does not explicitly state so, we can infer from (1) that the speaker likes the way X looks or sounds. This is confirmed by the infelicity of the following statement:

> (2) ?? X is beautiful, but I do not like how X looks/sounds.

Statement (2) appears contradictory: with the first conjunct, one conveys that one likes how X looks/sounds, but with the second conjunct, one negates this sentiment.[3]

Why is it that, from (1), we can infer that the speaker likes how X looks or sounds, even though the sentence does not explicitly state so? Let us call this phenomenon 'the evaluativity inference'. The central question of the paper is: Why does a beauty statement give rise to the evaluativity inference?[4]

The explanation I prefer is based on a certain speech-act theoretical version of hybrid expressivism, which states that, by a sincere and literal utterance of (1), we perform two speech acts simultaneously — one assertive and one expressive. In the assertive act, we ascribe a certain property to X and express a belief with a certain propositional content. With the expressive act, we express a certain non-propositional affective mental attitude regarding the sensuous appearance of X. I will detail this form of hybrid expressivism and argue that, given the alternatives, it provides the best explanation for the evaluativity inference. I should note at the outset, that the theory presented here diverges from variants of hybrid expressivism discussed in meta-ethics in several significant ways. It is motivated differently, it is not characterized by analogous theses and, as a result, avoids some of the corresponding problems. While the limited space prevents a detailed discussion of the relationship between my version of hybrid expressivism and the variants in meta-ethics, I will address some of the most important differences in section 7.

Defending a hybrid theory with respect to statements of beauty may initially seem surprising. In aesthetics, the observation that aesthetic statements vary in their evaluative strength often results in a classification that allows for *purely* evaluative statements. Frank Sibley (1974: 7–9), for example, differentiates the class of aesthetic terms by (a) *solely evaluative terms*, which have no descriptive but purely evaluative content (his examples include 'beautiful', 'ugly', 'lovely' etc.); (b) *evaluation-added terms*, which have both descriptive and

---

[2] For simplicity, I will assume that 'X' refers to an object that can be experienced perceptually. Thus, I will exclude aesthetic statements that refer to abstract objects.

[3] For empirical data that confirm that speakers perceive sentence (2) as contradictory see Muth, Briesen, and Carbon, 2020. This study examines various aesthetic statements and demonstrates that the statement 'X is beautiful' conveys the speaker's liking for the object more strongly than other aesthetic statements (such as 'X is elegant'). Participants in the study were asked to rate the perceived level of contradiction on a 1–7 scale for specific sentences. Notably, participants' assessments of sentence (2) are significantly above the neutral midpoint. Conversely, this is not the case with other aesthetic statements, such as 'X is elegant' despite these statements often also express the speaker's liking for the object. These findings provide initial evidence that the evaluativity associated with 'X is beautiful' is a relatively robust phenomenon and that (2) is indeed perceived as contradictory.

[4] The evaluativity inference is related to the so-called acquaintance inference: in asserting (1), the speaker conveys she has first-hand experience with X. The acquaintance inference is widely discussed in the literature. Some of these discussions are mainly focused on predicates of personal taste, such as 'tasty' or 'tasty to me' (Anand and Korotkova 2018, Willer and Kennedy 2022, Dinges and Zakkou 2021); others include aesthetic predicates as well (Ninan 2014, Robson 2015, Franzén 2018). For a detailed discussion of how the variant of hybrid expressivism proposed here can explain acquaintance inference, see Briesen (forthcoming).

evaluative content (his examples include 'elegant', 'graceful', 'garish' etc.); and (c) *descriptive merit terms*, which only have descriptive content but are often used to support evaluative aesthetic statements (his examples include 'balanced', 'unified', 'vivid' etc.). This classification is mirrored by Nick Zangwill's (2001: 9–18) distinction at the level of aesthetic *judgments*. He distinguishes between *verdictive aesthetic judgments*, which correspond to Sibley's solely evaluative terms, and *substantive aesthetic judgments*, which correspond to Sibley's evaluation-added and descriptive merit terms.

In the context of these classifications, it might seem plausible that a hybrid theory applies to statements such as 'X is elegant/graceful/garish, etc.' rather than to 'X is beautiful'. However, this may be misleading. In my view, beauty statements are more evaluative than many other aesthetic statements, but they are not *purely* evaluative. There is a reading of 'beautiful' such that the term has both descriptive and evaluative aspects; and the best way to account for both aspects is provided by the version of hybrid expressivism outlined above.[5]

In the next section, I continue with preliminary remarks on different readings of the word 'beautiful' and specify in more detail the reading I will focus on (sect. 2). Then I make some remarks concerning the nature of the evaluative attitude conveyed by beauty statements (sect. 3). Afterwards I discuss different attempts to explain the evaluativity inference that might seem initially plausible but will turn out to be wanting (sect. 4–5). Finally, I elaborate and defend the explanation based on the speech-act theoretical version of hybrid expressivism outlined above. In the course of this defence, I will specify the theory in detail (sect. 6) and differentiate it from other forms of expressivism suggested in meta-aesthetics (sect. 7).

2.   Different Readings of 'Beautiful'

Aestheticians often differentiate between a *broad* and a *narrow* reading of 'beautiful'. In the broad reading, the term refers to aesthetic or artistic value in general; in the narrow reading, it refers to one species of aesthetic value (Beardsley 1981: 505–506, Scruton 2007: 15–16, Lopes 2018: 6).

Consider the following sentences:

---

[5] Sibley (1974: 8) acknowledges that the classification of 'beautiful' as a solely evaluative term might not be entirely appropriate. Zangwill (2001: 12) also allows for a reading of 'beautiful' such that the term does not denote a purely verdictive but also a substantive aesthetic quality. Additionally, Zangwill allows that some substantive aesthetic descriptions convey evaluations. In most cases, he explains this via a conversational implicature, but he allows 'for a residual class of substantive descriptions that are intrinsically evaluative' (ibid.: 18) such that they do not succumb to the implicature model. In my view, there is a reading of 'X is beautiful' such that it belongs to that residual class. I will discuss the implicature model as well as other pragmatic accounts of the evaluativity inference in sect. 5.

Furthermore, Sibley's distinction between *solely-evaluative* and *evaluation-added terms* is closely related to the distinction suggested in meta-ethics for moral terms, namely the distinction between *thin terms* (such as 'good') and *thick terms* (such as 'generous', 'courageous'). Bonzon (2009) transfers this distinction to the aesthetic realm and classifies 'beautiful' as a *thin* aesthetic term. He overlooks the point, also accepted by Sibley (1974: 8) and Zangwill (2001: 12), that there is a reading of 'beautiful' such that the term is not purely evaluative and must therefore be classified as a *thick aesthetic term*. I will argue that the evaluative content of 'beautiful' — understood as a thick term — is best explained by the proposed version of hybrid expressivism. Whether this is also true for thick *moral* terms is doubtful and cannot be discussed within the limited scope of this paper. For discussions of how the evaluative content of thick *moral* terms is to be specified and explained, see e.g. Eklund 2011, Kyle 2013, 2020, Väyrynen 2012, 2013, Zakkou 2021.

(3)   This artwork is beautiful.
(4)   This artwork is good (as an artwork).[6]

Sometimes, (3) is used synonymously with (4). In such cases, the term 'beautiful' is used in a broad sense. In the broad sense 'beautiful' is used to ascribe a general value to an artwork. The function of the term in this reading is simply evaluative, used to praise the artwork without specifying any features of the work on which the praise rests (Bonzon 2009: 194). In this sense 'is beautiful' is used 'synonymously' with 'is a good artwork'.

However, 'beautiful' is not always used in this broad sense. Take a look at the following conversation:

(5)   A: Look at the colours and composition of this painting. Isn't it beautiful?
        B: You're right, the painting is beautiful. Nonetheless, it is a bad artwork. It is not thought-provoking and kind of cheesy.

B's reaction in (6) is not contradictory, so her use of 'is beautiful' is not synonymous with 'is a good artwork'. Thus, she does not use 'beautiful' in the broad sense specified above, but rather in a more specific sense — one in which 'beauty' is not synonymous with 'artistic goodness'. She refers to a more specific kind of aesthetic value that is traditionally taken to be closely connected to perceptual pleasure and a certain kind of well-formedness (Hume 1740/2000: 299, Kant 1790/2000: §§ 1–9, Scruton 2007: 5).[7]

Note that this narrow reading still gives rise to the evaluativity inference. In (5), B conveys that, even though the artwork is pleasing to the eye and that she appreciates its visual beauty, it is nevertheless a bad artwork. In what follows, I concentrate on the narrow reading of 'beautiful'. It is the narrow reading of (1) that I see as having a combination of descriptive and evaluative components that is best captured by a speech-act theoretical form of hybrid expressivism.[8]

Besides broad and narrow readings, we also need to differentiate autocentric and exocentric readings of 'beautiful'. Take a look at the following conversation:

(6)   A: How is Hanna's trip to London?

---

[6] The addition in brackets is meant to clarify that (4) can only be used synonymously with (3) if in (4) the work of art is valued as a work of art and not as something else (financial investment, gift etc.).

[7] The appropriateness of B's reaction in (5) suggests that beauty (in the narrow sense) is not *sufficient* for artistic goodness. For considerations regarding the view that beauty (in the narrow sense) is also not *necessary* for artistic goodness, see, for example, Danto 2003: 33–37.

[8] While I believe that hybrid expressivism is also plausible for the broad reading of the term 'beautiful' (which is used in making art-critical statements), the application of the theory in this case involves additional complications that I cannot discuss within the limited scope of this paper. One difficulty is that Riggle's (2021) suggestion that the illocutionary force of aesthetic statements should be understood as an invitation, is particularly interesting with respect to art-critical statements and the broad reading of 'beautiful'. In my view, some version of this invitational force has to be incorporated in a hybrid expressivist view with respect to the broad reading of 'beautiful'. I will leave the details for another occasion. Another difficulty concerns the robustness of the evaluativity inference and the infelicity of statement (2): 'X is beautiful but I do not like how it looks.' If 'X' refers to an artwork (for example, a painting) and 'is beautiful' is understood in its broad reading, synonymous with 'good artwork', then there is a non-contradictory reading of (2) readily available: (2*) 'This painting is a good artwork, but I do not like how it looks.' Sentence (2)* does not seem to be infelicitous or contradictory. A painting can be considered a good artwork even if it lacks perceptual appeal or fails to provide visual pleasure, perhaps because it depicts a brutal and disgusting scene. This is another reason why the focus of this paper is on the narrow reading of 'beautiful'.

B: Great, she has been to a gallery and has seen a beautiful painting.

It is natural to assume that the painting B refers to is one that *Hanna* judged to be beautiful (perhaps by calling it 'beautiful'), and that B ties her statement to Hanna's judgment. This is commonly known as an exocentric reading of a term (Lasersohn 2005: 670). In such a reading, B's use of the term 'beautiful' does not convey that B (the speaker) likes the painting, but that the person to which the statement is tied to (in the example, Hanna) does so. In what follows, I will concentrate on autocentric uses of (1) that convey that the *speaker* maintains a positive attitude regarding the object of predication.

3.   The Attitude of Liking
In the introduction, I have described the positive affective attitude conveyed by (1) as a state of liking or appreciating. How should we understand the nature of those states? First, the states are intentionally directed towards a certain object: individuals like or appreciate *something*. The object about which the positive affective attitude is conveyed by (1) is the sensuous appearance of X. This is confirmed by the fact that, of the following sentences, only (7) is infelicitous:

(7)   ?? This flower is beautiful, but I do not like how it looks.
(8)   This flower is beautiful, but I do not like it — it belongs to a species that is gradually supplanting all the others.

In uttering (1), one does *not* convey that one likes X in all respects but rather that one likes the sensuous appearance of X. For simplicity, I will sometimes use 'S likes X' or 'S likes the appearance of X' as shorthand versions of 'S likes the sensuous appearance of X'.[9]

Besides its characterisation as intentional, how else should we specify the state of liking. First, we might try to specify it as an occurrent state with a certain phenomenal character, such as an object-directed feeling of pleasure. This, however, is not correct, because we can truthfully ascribe states such as liking to individuals who are not in an occurrent phenomenal state of pleasure (e.g. sleeping persons).

A more promising option specifies the relevant state of liking as a disposition. According to this view, one likes the appearance of X *if and only if* one is disposed to receive a certain kind of pleasure by experiencing X (under normal conditions of perception). Note, however, that dispositions do not necessarily manifest: a glass, for example, can have the disposition of being breakable without ever actually breaking. Thus, given a dispositional understanding of the affective attitude of liking, one can like X without ever having experienced the pleasure triggered by X. This is an implausible consequence of the view. One cannot like the sensuous appearance of something — for example, the smell of strawberries, the sound of a certain guitar, or the visual appearance of Jackson Pollock's No. 5 — without having experienced the object in question (or a copy of the object that allows for comparable experiences). The problem can be avoided by arguing that a state such as liking is not simply a disposition but a disposition that *has* been manifested. These special kinds of dispositions are sometimes referred to as 'tendencies' (Dinges and Zakkou 2021).

---

[9] As previously mentioned, I am deliberately bracketing out aesthetic statements that refer to abstract objects (see fn. 2).

Another promising option is to specify liking as a functional state that is specified by a certain causal profile. Namely, it is caused by the item toward which the attitude is directed, and it will cause other attitudes as well as a certain kind of behaviour.

For the purposes of this investigation, it is not necessary to discuss the pros and cons of the tendency- and the functional-state-account of liking. It is interesting to note, however, that both accounts imply that one can *like* the sensory appearance of an object *only* if one has experienced the object (or a copy of the object that allows for comparable experiences).[10]

The last preliminary remark concerns the relation of the state of liking and the more general, state of valuing. Not every instance of valuing is necessarily an instance of liking. It may be that one does *not* like the way a certain object looks, and yet one might still value the sensual appearance of the object — for example, because it exemplifies something interesting in a particularly lucid way. This is especially true with respect to artwork: it might be the case that a painting looks ugly and displeasing, such that one dislikes the way it looks in a certain sense — but one might nevertheless value the composition and general visual appearance of the painting because it exemplifies something interesting. This observation relates back to the comments regarding the different readings of 'beautiful'. If there is a broad reading of (1) in which the speaker expresses the general mental state of valuing, I will exclude this reading in what follows.

After clarifying these preliminaries with respect to the term 'beautiful' (sect. 2) and the corresponding affective attitude of liking (sect. 3), I now turn to possible attempts to explain the evaluativity inference.

4. Semantic Approaches

Semantic explanations of the evaluativity inference assume that it is part of the truth conditions of

> (1)   X is beautiful,

that the speaker likes the appearance of X. Advocates of this approach claim that (1) entails that the speaker likes the appearance of X.

If this view is correct, then (1) is false as used by speaker S simply because S does not like X. Additionally, if we accept the standard semantics of negation — according to which a negated sentence 'not-p' is true if and only if the sentence 'p' is false — then (9) is *true* as used by speaker S simply because S does not like X.

> (9)   X is not beautiful.[11]

This seems to be an overly chauvinistic consequence of the view. Note the following conversation:

> (10)   A: X is not beautiful.

---

[10] I will not mention the remark in brackets in the following, but it should always be kept in mind when I talk about liking (the appearance of) X presupposing the acquaintance with X.

[11] This, of course, must be read as a wide-scope negation: 'It is not the case that X is beautiful.' The same applies to the other negated sentences discussed in this section.

B: Are you sure? Many people in the neighbourhood consider it beautiful.
A: Yes, I am very sure. I do not like how the house looks; *therefore*, it is not beautiful.

In (10), B challenges A's assertion that 'This house is not beautiful'. Person A defends her statement by exclusively focusing on her own mental states, and she cites these as conclusive reasons for the truth of what she has said. This reaction is not only linguistically odd — it is also epistemically misguided to treat nothing but one's mental state as *conclusive* evidence for statements such as (9). In aesthetic discourse, we point to certain features of the specified object to defend our aesthetic claims; we will not convince somebody of the truth of our aesthetic claim by merely pointing to our mental state of liking or the lack thereof. The epistemic inappropriateness of A's reaction speaks against the semantic explanation of the evaluativity inference, because, according to that explanation, A's reaction in (9) should be fine.

To help clarify this point, see the following comparison to explicitly relativized taste statements:

(11) X is tasty *to me*.
(12) X is not tasty *to me*.

For (11) and (12), the following view is plausible: (11) is true as used in context C only if the speaker in C likes the taste of X. Thus, (11) entails that the speaker in C likes the taste of X. This explains the evaluativity inference for (11). Given the standard semantics of negation, (12) is true in C simply because the speaker of C does *not like* the taste of X. Note that, with respect to (12), the above-mentioned consequence does not seem problematic.

(13) A: This dish is not tasty *to me*.
      B: Are you sure? Many guests consider it tasty.
      A: Yes, I am very sure. I don't like how the dish tastes; *therefore*, it is not tasty *to me*.

In (13), A's reaction might be unfriendly, but it is neither linguistically odd nor epistemically inappropriate. With respect to (13), citing one's own mental state as a conclusive reason is perfectly fine. It is the difference between aesthetic statements and explicitly relativized statements of taste that is exemplified by the difference in (10) and (13) that speaks against the semantic approach to the evaluativity inference.[12] [13]

---

[12] For explicitly relativized predicates of personal taste a contextualist semantic is plausible. Such a contextualist account allows for a semantic explanation of the evaluativity inference. It is an interesting question whether a contextualist approach to the evaluativity inference also works for non-relativised predicates of personal taste (e.g. 'X is tasty') or for explicitly relativized aesthetic terms (e.g. 'X is beautiful *to me*'). I do not commit myself to any view in this regard, but rather merely claim that the contextualist specification of the semantic approach to the evaluativity inference is problematic with respect to non-relativized aesthetic expressions such as (1).

[13] Note that *relativistic* specifications of the semantic approach to the evaluativity inference face analogous problems. According to relativism, statements such as (1) are not sensitive to the speaker's liking in the context of utterance C_U, but rather to the assessor's liking in the context of assessment C_A (MacFarlane 2014). According to the so-called *Reflexive Truth Rule* put forward by relativists, speakers should not say something that is false according to *their own* context of assessment (ibid.: 102–111). Thus, we can infer from S's assertion of (1) that S likes the appearance of X. This is the relativist specification of the semantic approach

There is an additional and even more important issue to address. Remember that, according to all plausible conceptions regarding the metaphysical nature of the mental state of liking, it follows that, if one likes the sensual appearance of X, one has personal experience with X. Thus, for metaphysical reasons, advocates of the semantic approach must accept the following: if (1) entails that the speaker likes X, then it also entails that the speaker has personally experienced X. This is so because in order to like X, the speaker must be perceptually acquainted with X. Consequently, according to the semantic approach to the evaluativity inference, (1) is false simply because the speaker has not experienced X. Again, presupposing the standard semantics for negation, it follows that (9) is true, simply because the speaker has not experienced X. Thus, if the semantic explanation of the evaluativity inference were correct, then one could appropriately defend one's assertion of (9) through the following:

> (14)   I did not experience X; *therefore*, X is not beautiful.

This, however, is an unacceptable result. It is obviously epistemically inappropriate to regard the fact that I have not experienced an object as conclusive evidence for the truth of my claim that the object is not beautiful.

Thus, besides the problem of sanctioning the lack of *personal liking* as conclusive evidence for negative aesthetic claims, advocates of the semantic explanation of the evaluativity inference are confronted with a dilemma. Either they keep one of the suggested plausible analyses of liking and accept as a consequence that my statement 'X is not beautiful' is true solely because I have never *experienced* X. Or they dismiss this consequence by working out an analysis of the mental state of liking according to which it is possible to like the experience of something — for example, the smell of strawberries, the sound of a certain guitar, or the visual appearance of Jackson Pollock's No. 5 — without ever having made the experience. Neither option is particularly attractive.

5.   Pragmatic Approaches

Two pragmatic explanations of the evaluativity inference suggest themselves. According to the first, it is a linguistic presupposition of (1) that the speaker likes the object of predication. Just as the term 'quit' in the statement 'Jules quit smoking' triggers the presupposition that Jules has smoked in the past, so does 'beautiful' in (1) trigger the presupposition that the speaker likes the experience of X. This suggestion, however, is not convincing. In contrast to the evaluativity inference, presuppositions project over a wide range of operations, such as the following:

> (15)   Jules might have quit smoking.

---

to the evaluativity inference. Why is this suggestion also problematic? Let us refer to the context of utterance of speaker S with '$C_U{}^S$' and to the context of assessment of that same speaker (at the time of the utterance) with '$C_A{}^S$'. Note that assessed from $C_A{}^S$, if S does not like X, then (1) is false. Thus, given the standard semantics of negation, assessed from $C_A{}^S$, (9) is true simply because the speaker does not like X. Thus, according to relativism, in dialogue (10), A, citing her own mental states as conclusive evidence for the truth of her statement 'This house is not beautiful', as assessed from her context of assessment, should be fine. As mentioned, however, A's reaction in (10) seems misguided. Thus, relativist and contextualist specifications of the semantic approach to the evaluativity inference face analogous problems.

(16)   If Jules quit smoking, then her parents are happy.
(17)   Has Jules quit smoking?

The presupposition that Jules has smoked in the past is preserved in (15)–(17). However, the analogous sentences (18)–(20) do not trigger the evaluativity inference:

(18)   X might be beautiful.
(19)   If X is beautiful, then my mother will present X to an audience.
(20)   Is X beautiful?

None of the sentences conveys that the speaker likes X. This difference in the projection behaviour of presuppositions and the evaluativity inference speaks against the presupposition approach with respect to the evaluativity of aesthetic statements.

The second pragmatic approach assumes that the evaluativity inference is a Griceian implicature (Grice 1989). Because implicatures are classified as *conventional* or *conversational*, this approach has two subvariants. According to the first, it is a *conventional* implicature that the speaker likes X. This is unconvincing because it is widely accepted that conventional implicatures exhibit a similar projection behaviour as presuppositions (Potts 2015). Thus, the objection against the presupposition approach also applies to this subvariant of the implicature account.

The second subvariant specifies the evaluativity inference as a *conversational* implicature. The problem with this approach is that conversational implicatures can be cancelled. If 'q' is a conversational implicature of 'p', then it can be cancelled by 'p, but not q' or 'p, indeed not q'. However, as (2) has already illustrated, this is not the case with respect to the evaluativity inference triggered by 'X is beautiful'.[14] Furthermore, if the evaluativity inference were in fact a conversational implicature, there would need to be a corresponding Gricean mechanism that explains how this specific conversational implicature is generated. However, thus far, no such mechanism has been proposed and it is unclear which Gricean mechanism could account for it. This speaks against such an approach, regardless of whether the evaluativity inference can be cancelled or not.[15]

6.   Illocutionary Pluralism and Hybrid Expressivism

The previous sections have illustrated that both semantic and certain pragmatic explanations of the evaluativity inference are wanting. In what follows, I will suggest a different pragmatic explanation, namely a speech-act theoretical one. The explanation rests on the following version of hybrid expressivism: With the sincere and literal utterance of

(1)   'X is beautiful',

---

[14] As noted in fn. 5, for some substantive descriptions such as 'X is graceful/delicate', Zangwill (2001: 15–17) proposes an explanation of their evaluativity according to the implicature model. Zangwill takes the evaluative content to be cancellable in these cases, but he is not sure whether this also works for other substantive descriptions such as 'X is elegant' (ibid.: 17). I am more optimistic than Zangwill about 'X is elegant', but for the narrow and substantive reading of 'X is beautiful', the implicature approach seems futile for the reasons given above.

[15] The presented arguments in this section are closely related to analogous arguments in the debate concerning pragmatic explanations of the acquaintance inference, see fn. 4 for references.

we perform two illocutionary acts simultaneously: one *assertive* and one *expressive*. The *assertive act* ascribes a certain property to X and expresses the corresponding belief with a certain propositional content; in this respect, uttering (1) is comparable to uttering a declarative sentence, such as 'X is red'. The *expressive act* expresses a non-doxastic, non-propositional mental state M that involves the state of liking; in this respect, uttering (1) is comparable to uttering an exclamative sentence, such as 'How beautiful!' or 'Bravo!'.[16]

How are these two acts related? Which type of property do we ascribe to X so that the *assertive act* is accompanied by the *expressive*? I suggest the following answer: Beauty is a response-dispositional property, namely the property to evoke a certain kind of mental state M in subjects under certain (idealised) circumstances C. The mental state M is the manifestation of the disposition, and perceiving the object under ideal conditions (in the appropriate environment, with functional perceptual capacities, with the appropriate attention to certain details etc.) is the manifestation condition C. In the *assertive act* associated with the aesthetic statement (1), we ascribe this kind of response-dispositional property to X. Thus, 'X is beautiful' is true if and only if X has the dispositional property to evoke M in subjects under C. In the *expressive act* associated with (1), we express the mental state M that is the manifestation of the response-dispositional property, which we ascribe to the object X in the corresponding assertive act. Thus, these two acts are closely related: The mental state expressed in the expressive act is the manifestation of the dispositional property that is ascribed to an object in the assertive act.[17]

With respect to the relation between the two acts, I further suggest the following *simple principle*:

> (SP) The utterance of 'X is beautiful' is an instance of an expressive act of expressing M if and only if it is also an instance of the assertive act of ascribing the property beauty to X.

According to this principle, whenever 'X is beautiful' is embedded in a context wherein the assertive act is absent, the expressive act, and thus, the evaluativity inference is absent as well. This is illustrated by (18)–(20). None of those sentences conveys that the speaker likes X.

The expressive act correlated with (1) explains the evaluativity inference. As with all illocutionary acts, expressive acts are governed by sincerity conditions. The sincerity condition of an *expressive act* requires that one is in the non-doxastic mental state one expresses by the act. The corresponding rule is that you should utter 'q' only if you are in the non-doxastic mental state expressed by 'q'. For example, utter 'Ouch!' only if you are in the phenomenal state of feeling pain (Searle 1969: ch. 3).

---

[16] For a different variant of hybrid expressivism in meta-aesthetics, see Marques (2016). For a discussion of Marques' approach, see Hirvonen, Karczewska, and Sikorski. (2019). Marques argues that the evaluative content of aesthetic statements is conveyed pragmatically, via an implicature or a presupposition. Thus, her position faces the problems specified in sect. 5.

[17] It is not possible within the scope of this text to discuss and explicitly state the truth-conditions associated with the assertive act. Relevant questions in this respect are as follows: What idealisations are necessary concerning the manifestation-conditions C? Is the class of subjects in which the mental state is to be triggered restricted somehow? Should beauty ultimately be conceived as a single-track or multi-track disposition (Manley and Wasserman 2008)? For the purposes of this text, these questions do not have to be answered. However, it is important to note that some specifications of the truth-conditions (for example, specifications that result in a speaker-contextualist or relativist theory) would face the problems raised in section 4 for contextualism and relativism. For a detailed discussion of the truth-conditions of response-dispositional aesthetic statements, see Briesen 2020: 221–243.

It is part of the sincerity condition of the aesthetic statement (1) that one is in the non-doxastic mental state M that one expresses by uttering the sentence. The corresponding rule is: Utter 'X is beautiful' only if you are in the mental state M; this mental state involves liking the appearance of X. Thus, (1) can only be uttered appropriately if the speaker likes the appearance of X. Because we usually assume that the sincerity conditions of speech acts are met, the suggested line of thought explains the evaluativity inference — namely, it explains why uttering (1) usually conveys the information that the speaker likes the appearance of X.

Note that the evaluativity inference is only explained by the expressive part of aesthetic statements. But if the expressive act corresponding to aesthetic statements is enough to explain the evaluativity inference, then why should we accept the suggested version of hybrid expressivism that claims that, in uttering an aesthetic sentence, we perform *two* illocutionary acts, an expressive *and* an assertive one? Why not just accept simple expressivism and hold that with an aesthetic statement such as 'X is beautiful' we perform nothing over and above an expressive act of expressing a non-doxastic, non-propositional attitude of liking?

7. Simple Expressivism vs. Hybrid Expressivism in Meta-Aesthetics

In the following sections, I will introduce different variants of simple expressivism in meta-aesthetics and elaborate three advantages of the suggested hybrid approach. These three advantages make the hybrid approach preferable to simple expressivism. The first has to do with a problem that has been referred to as 'Kant's puzzle' (sect. 7.1.), the second with certain retraction data (sect. 7.2.), and the third with the notorious Frege-Geach problem (sect. 7.3.).[18]

7.1. Variants of Expressivism and Kant's Puzzle

Variants of expressivism in meta-aesthetics can be roughly classified into the following two camps. The first camp specifies the non-doxastic attitude expressed by 'X is beautiful' as liking or appreciating X (Blackburn 1984, Hopkins 2001, Todd 2004, Franzén 2018, Robson and Sinclair 2022). By sincerely and literally uttering 'X is beautiful', the speaker expresses appreciation (liking) of X. The second camp specifies the non-doxastic attitude expressed by 'X is beautiful' as an attitude of acceptance of a norm that sanctions or prescribes certain aesthetic responses (appreciation, liking) to certain objects (Gibbard 1990: 52). By sincerely and literally uttering 'X is beautiful', the speaker expresses acceptance of a norm that sanctions or prescribes appreciation of X. I accept that both variants of expressivism can account for the evaluativity inference of beauty-statements.

However, both variants of expressivism struggle to accommodate the following set of intuitively plausible, but seemingly inconsistent claims. The problem of explaining this peculiar combination of claims is often referred to as 'Kant's problem' or 'Kant's puzzle' (Hopkins 2001, Gorodeisky and Marcus 2018, Robson and Sinclair 2022).

> *Autonomy:* It is not legitimate to abandon an aesthetic judgment (such as the one expressed by 'X is beautiful') and adopt the opposing judgment (that is expressed by 'X is ugly') merely based on counter-testimony from others.

---

[18] The problems addressed in sections 7.2 and 7.3 are also discussed in Briesen (forthcoming).

> *Doubt:* It is legitimate to place less confidence in one's aesthetic judgement based on counter-testimony from others.
>
> *Re-Examination:* It is legitimate to re-examine the object of one's aesthetic judgment based on counter-testimony of others.

Note that the claims are formulated not in terms of aesthetic statements, but in terms of aesthetic judgments, where 'aesthetic judgment' refers to the mental state that is expressed via an aesthetic statement, whatever that state amounts to (Gorodeisky and Marcus 2018, Robson & Sinclair 2022).

Let us assume that *Autonomy*, *Doubt*, and *Re-Examination* are correct. How can expressivists explain this interesting combination of claims?[19] Expressivists of the first camp have the resources to explain *Autonomy*. According to their view, due to the sincerity condition correlated with expressive acts, the statement 'X is beautiful' expresses the non-doxastic, non-propositional mental state of liking X, and the opposing statement 'X is ugly' expresses the non-doxastic, non-propositional mental state of disliking X. Because counter-testimony cannot alter these non-doxastic mental states, it cannot legitimise adopting the respectively opposing attitude.

However, accounting for *Doubt* and *Re-Examination* is harder for expressivists that belong to the first camp. In response to this difficulty, expressivists from the first camp propose additional norms that regulate aesthetic discourse. These additional norms are supposed to explain why the attitude expressed via an aesthetic statement also normatively demands (Hopkins 2001: 169) or invites (Todd 2004: 283, Robson and Sinclair 2022: 12) the agreement of others. The challenge that these theories face is twofold: First, to avoid being *ad hoc*, this approach must systematically explain *why* these additional norms are supposed to hold (Robson and Sinclair 2022: sect. 3). Second, the additional norms must be specified in a way that allows one to account for *Doubt* and *Re-Examination* without thereby invalidating the expressivist explanation of *Autonomy* (Hopkins 2001: sect. 6).

Interestingly, regarding the second camp of expressivists, the situation is somewhat reversed. While a Gibbardian account of aesthetic statements might have the resources to explain *Doubt* and *Re-Examination*, it has a hard time explaining *Autonomy*. At least in the moral case, Gibbard explicitly allows for the legitimacy of testimonially formed mental states of norm-acceptance (Gibbard 1990: 180–181, Robson and Sinclair 2022: 5). However, if expressivists also accept this position in the aesthetic domain, then they cannot explain *Autonomy*. The problem is: According to this view, aesthetic judgments, i.e., the mental states expressed by aesthetic statements, are states of norm-acceptance. However, if states of norm-acceptance can be legitimately formed on the basis of testimony, then why is it not legitimate

---

[19] In the literature, *Autonomy* is particularly controversial. For an interesting discussion, see, for example, Robson 2014, 2015. However, a weaker version of *Autonomy* is plausible, even in light of popular counter-arguments. Even if we assume, contrary to *Autonomy*, that aesthetic judgments can sometimes be legitimately based on counter-testimony, it remains plausible that there is a distinction between aesthetic and other judgments in this regard. Unlike judgments about scientific facts or certain everyday matters (e.g., the presence of ice cream in the freezer), it remains exceptional to ground aesthetic judgments on (counter-) testimony in an epistemically legitimate manner. As far as I can see, the following considerations could also be formulated with a correspondingly weaker principle *Autonomy**, which does not claim that basing an aesthetic judgment on (counter-) testimony is always illegitimate, but rather asserts that it is more challenging than in non-aesthetic cases. For the sake of simplicity, however, I will adhere to the established strong formulation of the principle and formulate the following argument conditionally: If we accept *Autonomy, Doubt*, and *Re-Examination*, a distinct advantage of hybrid expressivism over simple expressivism can be established.

to abandon an aesthetic judgment and adopt the opposing judgment based on the counter-testimony of others? Thus, expressivists from the second camp are confronted with a dilemma: They must either accept that norm-acceptance in the aesthetic domain can also be based on testimony, which would contradict *Autonomy*, or they owe us an additional explanation why the moral case differs from the aesthetic case in this respect.

In summary, expressivists of both camps in meta-aesthetics are confronted with challenges regarding their respective explanations of *Autonomy*, *Doubt*, and *Re-Examination*. Within the limited confines of this paper, it is not possible to discuss in detail whether and how expressivists might be able to meet these challenges. But even without such a discussion, an advantage of hybrid expressivism emerges. If we accept that *Autonomy*, *Doubt*, and *Re-Examination* are correct, then hybrid expressivism holds an advantage, because hybrid expressivists have more resources at their disposal to account for this interesting combination of claims than simple expressivists do. The simple expressivist positions discussed assume that we express a *single* mental state with an aesthetic statement. According to the use of 'judgment' in the discussion of Kant's puzzle, this can also be formulated as follows: it is a *single* mental state that constitutes an aesthetic judgment. In contrast, the suggested version of hybrid expressivism holds that an aesthetic statement expresses *two different* mental states. This allows for a straightforward solution to Kant's Puzzle: one of those states accounts for *Autonomy*, and the other state accounts for *Doubt* and *Re-Examination*.

According to hybrid expressivism, by uttering 'X is beautiful' we perform two speech-acts: an assertive and an expressive one. In the assertive act, we express a belief with a certain propositional content, and in the expressive act we express the non-doxastic, affective mental state of liking the experience of X. Via recourse to the affective state, hybrid expressivists can adopt the explanation of *Autonomy* offered by the first camp of expressivists: Because counter-testimony alone cannot alter non-doxastic, affective mental states of liking or disliking, counter-testimony alone cannot legitimise adopting the respective opposing attitude.

In addition, via recourse to the assertive part of aesthetic statements, hybrid expressivists can also explain *Doubt* and *Re-Examination*: In the assertive part of an aesthetic statement, we express a belief with a certain propositional content. Counter-testimony can count as higher order evidence speaking against the belief expressed by the aesthetic statement. Therefore, in the light of counter-testimony, it is legitimate to place less confidence in one's aesthetic belief (see *Doubt*) and it is also legitimate to re-examine the object of one's belief (see *Re-Examination*).

Admittedly, this does not conclusively prove that hybrid expressivism provides a better explanation for *Autonomy*, *Doubt*, and *Re-Examination* than variants of simple expressivism. After all, simple expressivists might be able to come up with convincing responses to the challenges facing their respective explanations. Nevertheless, an advantage of the hybrid account can be noted: With regard to the hybrid approach the above-mentioned challenges do not even arise.[20]

7.2. Retraction Data

The second advantage of hybrid expressivism over simple expressivism in meta-aesthetics concerns certain retraction data. Suppose that after seeing X I utter 'X is beautiful' and that

---

[20] I will return to *Autonomy* in section 7.3 when discussing the Frege-Geach problem. In this context, I will also briefly discuss variants of simple expressivism that in some respects take their starting point from Gibbard but are not committed to states of norm acceptance.

my attention is then drawn to the fact that I have unnoticeably ingested perception-altering drugs. In this case, it seems appropriate and natural to retract my statement by stating the following: 'Okay, maybe X is not really beautiful, but I like how it looks right now'. Aesthetic statements are in this respect comparable to descriptive statements, such as 'X is red'. However, if stating 'X is beautiful' is nothing but an expressive act, this kind of retraction would not be required. For example, we can compare this to the purely expressive act of uttering the exclamative 'Ouch'. In uttering 'Ouch', I express pain; stating 'Ouch' is nothing but expressive. Even if someone points out to me that I have taken drugs that drastically lower my pain tolerance, I am not required to retract this purely expressive speech act.

We have already noted that in light of accounting for the claims *Autonomy*, *Doubt*, and *Re-Examination*, some versions of simple expressivism postulate additional norms that are supposed to govern aesthetic statements (Hopkins 2001, Robson and Sinclair 2022), and it is correct that these additional norms do not hold with respect to exclamatives, such as 'Ouch!' or 'Bravo!'. However, these norms cannot account for the above-mentioned retraction data. The additional norms are such that they normatively demand (Hopkins 2001: 169) or invite (Todd 2004: 283, Robson and Sinclair 2022: 12) the agreement of others. However, the retraction data specified above are independent of the agreement or disagreement of others. Thus, it is unclear how postulating norms that are concerned with the agreement of others are supposed to help to explain the data.

In contrast, hybrid expressivism can easily explain the data. In uttering 'X is beautiful', we perform an expressive *and* an assertive speech act simultaneously. In the assertive act, we ascribe a certain property to X. It is widely accepted that the act of assertion is governed by an epistemic norm, for example, the knowledge norm of assertion (Williamson 1996) or the weaker justified belief norm assertion (Schechter 2017). If, after our statement, someone points out that our judgment as to the presence of the property is clouded by drugs (and we do not have additional evidence that speaks in favour of the truth of our statement), the epistemic norm of assertion is no longer satisfied, and it is, thus, appropriate to retract the assertion. Thus, in contrast to simple expressivism, hybrid expressivism can easily explain the retraction data.

7.3. The Frege-Geach Problem and Aesthetic Beliefs

Another advantage of hybrid expressivism concerns the handling of the notorious Frege–Geach problem. Of course, this problem also arises for expressivist positions in meta-ethics and has been discussed intensively in this context. Nevertheless, it is helpful to look at the problem in more detail in the context of meta-aesthetics for two reasons. First, in contrast to moral statements, aesthetic statements pose particular difficulties for the attempted solutions of the Frege-Geach problem offered by variants of simple expressivism. These difficulties make simple expressivism in meta-aesthetics seem particularly unattractive. Second, the variants of hybrid expressivism in meta-ethics differ from the speech-act theoretical variant proposed here. It is therefore helpful to indicate in more detail how the variant of hybrid expressivism proposed here relates to the Frege-Geach problem.

The simplest way to explain the Frege-Geach problem is by focusing on certain instances of *modus ponens*:

(i)   If X is beautiful, then my mother will buy X.
(ii)   X is beautiful.
(iii)   Thus, my mother will buy X.

This argument is valid. However, no non-doxastic state of liking is expressed by the aesthetic sentence that occurs as an antecedent in (i). Thus, expressivists seem committed to the view that, while the meaning of (ii) consists in the expression of a certain non-doxastic mental attitude, this does not hold for the aesthetic sentence that occurs as an antecedent in (i). Thus, from an expressivist point of view, the antecedent in (i) and premise (ii) have different meanings. However, if expressivists commit themselves to this view, they cannot retain the validity of concluding (iii) from (i)–(ii). This is the so-called Frege–Geach problem. The heart of the problem consists, of course, in developing compositional semantics within the framework of an expressivist theory (cf. Schroeder 2008a).

The suggested version of hybrid expressivism provides a neat solution to the Frege–Geach problem. According to the suggested hybrid expressivist account, we perform an expressive *and* an assertive speech act with an aesthetic statement. The validity of the argument (i)–(iii) can, in this case, be explained via recourse to the assertive part of the utterance. Regarding the descriptive part of an aesthetic sentence, there are no principled difficulties for standard truth-conditional compositional semantics.

Proponents of simple expressivists have also suggested solutions to the Frege-Geach problem. We have distinguished two established variants of simple expressivism in meta-aesthetics: Blackburn-style expressivism and Gibbard-style expressivism (section 7.1). Blackburn (1984, 1993) attempts to solve the problem by suggesting a compositional semantics that involves a recursive mapping of sentences to mental states. The problem of this proposal is that all serious attempts to spell out this idea have far-reaching consequences. They ultimately force us to give up the most advanced and explanatory powerful form of compositional semantics that has been developed so far, namely, truth-conditional or possible world semantics (Schroeder 2008b).

The solution of the Frege-Geach problem offered by Gibbard (1990, 2003), on the other hand, is not inconsistent with truth-conditional or possible world semantics. The basic idea is to evaluate a sentence not only with respect to a world w, but with respect to a world-norm pair $< w, \pi >$, where norms are construed not as mental states but as certain kinds of abstract entities. This allows proponents of this approach to maintain the tools of possible world semantics and thereby overcome a broadly psychologistic semantics à la Blackburn. As discussed in section 7.1, however, this approach falls short when it comes to aesthetic statements, as it cannot account for *Autonomy* with respect to aesthetic judgments. Thus, the difficulties of solving the Frege-Geach problem for established variants of simple expressivists in meta-aesthetics can be summarized as follows: The solution which can be assigned to the first camp of expressivists must abandon truth-conditional or possible world semantics. The solution which can be assigned to the second camp of expressivists is compatible with truth-conditional semantics but cannot account for *Autonomy*.

This does not prove that it is *impossible* for simple expressivism to adhere to traditional truth-conditional semantics while at the same time respecting *Autonomy*. Building on Gibbard's basic idea, there have been various developments of expressivism that can uphold traditional truth-conditional semantics. Authors such as Yalcin (2012, 2018), Silk (2013), Charlow (2014), Willer and Kennedy (2022), and Ninan (forthcoming) have explored these possibilities.[21] Unlike Gibbard, none of these positions is committed to states of norm acceptance. Furthermore, some of these theories have been developed to account for the so-called acquaintance inference with respect to predicates of personal taste—namely the

---

[21] For developments of this idea within the context of dynamic semantics, see Charlow 2015, Starr 2016, Willer 2017.

phenomenon that we can infer from the statement "X is tasty" that the speaker has tasted X herself (Willer and Kennedy 2022, Ninan (forthcoming)). Because of the relation of the acquaintance inference to *Autonomy*, this even suggests that these theories may also have a chance of respecting *Autonomy*.

However, the positions have not been specifically tailored and suggested for aesthetic statements. Willer and Kennedy (2022) and Ninan (forthcoming) seem to assume that their respective theories are transferable, but a closer examination is required to determine whether this is indeed the case and what challenges may arise. Additionally, it is necessary to scrutinize whether these theories can maintain the expressivist explanation of the evaluativity inference proposed here. This is doubtful because a main innovation of these approaches consists in breaking the close connection between normative statements and non-assertive, expressive speech-acts, such as exclamatives (Yalcin 2018: 400). As a result, these theories would need to abandon the idea that aesthetic statements are mere expressive speech acts, leading to a loss in their ability to explain the evaluativity inference solely based on the sincerity condition of such expressive acts. Therefore, extra norms must be established to account for the evaluativity inference, raising questions about the plausibility and *ad hoc* nature of such a procedure. The complexity of these issues warrants detailed discussion, a task that is beyond the scope of this paper.

Thus, regarding the Frege-Geach problem only a limited advantage of hybrid expressivism can be stated: Hybrid expressivism provides a neat solution to the Frege-Geach problem while simultaneously explaining the evaluativity inference, respecting *Autonomy*, and adhering to traditional truth-conditional semantics. In contrast, the variants of simple expressivism explicitly suggested for aesthetic statements do not possess this capability, and whether other variants of simple expressivism are able to do so remains uncertain and debatable.

So far, I have addressed the question of how the solution to the Frege-Geach problem that is based on the proposed version of hybrid expressivism relates to solutions to the problem offered within variants of simple expressivism. Another interesting question is, how the proposed solution relates to solutions developed within hybrid expressivist positions in meta-ethics.

In this context, it is important to note that the speech act-theoretical version of hybrid expressivism suggested in this paper only concerns aesthetic *statements* and not aesthetic *beliefs* or *thoughts*. The theory claims that in making the aesthetic statement 'X is beautiful', we express a non-propositional, non-doxastic mental state M that involves liking X; and additionally, we express an ordinary descriptive belief with a certain propositional content, namely the belief that X has the disposition to evoke M in subjects S under idealised conditions C. This is an important difference from popular hybrid expressivist theories suggested in meta-ethics, which concern moral *beliefs* as much as they concern moral *statements*. This opens up a range of difficulties regarding hybrid expressivist solutions to the Frege–Geach problem in meta-ethics.[22]

---

[22] Hybrid theories in meta-ethics try to hold on to the expressivist solution of the so-called motivational problem, without falling into the problems of a simple expressivist position (Frege-Geach problem, open-question problem, etc.). Given these two objectives hybrid expressivism in meta-ethics has to concern moral *beliefs* as much as moral *statements*. For a thorough discussion of this point and of hybrid expressivism in meta-ethics in general, see Schroder 2009. For an interesting defense of the view against Schroeder's concerns, see Copp 2014, 2018. For other interesting versions of hybrid expressivism, see Boisvert 2008, Ridge 2014. For an overview of different issues concerning hybrid expressivism in meta-ethics, see Fletcher and Ridge 2014.

Because of the restriction to aesthetic *statements*, these problems do not apply to the version of hybrid expressivism suggested in this paper. For example, take a look at the following potentially problematic argument:

> (iv)   If X is exhibited in the gallery, then X is beautiful.
> (v)   X is exhibited in the gallery.
> (vi)   Thus, X is beautiful.

In the conditional (iv), the aesthetic statement occurs in the consequent, and in the utterance of (iv), we do not assert that X is beautiful and do not perform an expressive speech act of expressing the mental state M that involves liking. Now, suppose we are justified in assuming that (iv) and (v) are true without having seen X ourselves; for example, assume we are justified in believing (iv) and (v) through testimony. In this case, we can conclude from (iv)–(v) that (vi) is correct, that is, that X is beautiful, without having seen X ourselves and, thus, without being in the mental state of liking X.[23] Is this not in conflict with the suggested form of hybrid expressivism?

Since the version of hybrid expressivism suggested in this paper concerns aesthetic statements and not aesthetic beliefs, argument (iv)–(vi) does not pose a problem for the account. The suggested version of hybrid expressivism can allow for the possibility that a person *believes* that X is beautiful without being in a mental state of liking. However, the following still holds: if a person entertains the belief that X is beautiful without being in the mental state of liking, she cannot appropriately assert 'X is beautiful'. The reason for this is that with such a statement, she would not only perform an assertive speech act but also an expressive one: she would express a certain non-propositional, non-doxastic mental state of liking X. The sincerity condition of the expressive act requires that uttering 'X is beautiful' is only appropriate if the speaker is in the attitude of liking the experience of X. Therefore, the person in the situation described cannot appropriately utter 'X is beautiful'.

What the person could appropriately assert in this situation is, for example:

> (21)   Based on what others have told me, I believe that X is beautiful, but I haven't seen X myself.

Note, however, that in contrast to 'X is beautiful', (21) does not give rise to the evaluativity inference, i.e., it does not convey that the speaker likes the experience of X.[24]

---

[23] I will accept for the sake of argument that optimism with respect to aesthetic testimony is correct. For arguments in favour of the view that aesthetic beliefs can be justified via testimony, see Meskin 2004, Laetz 2008, Robson 2015, Lord 2016.

[24] Due to space limitations, I cannot discuss aesthetic belief ascriptions in detail here. I must content myself with a few remarks. As mentioned in the main text, in many contexts first-personal belief ascriptions, such as 'I believe that X is beautiful' do not convey that the speaker likes X. However, I accept that there are also contexts in which such a statement conveys the speaker's liking of X. However, in contexts where this is the case, 'I believe that p' is *not* used to express the second-order belief in the proposition [I believe that p], but the belief in the proposition [p] (for a detailed discussion of this general phenomenon, see Freitag and Yolcu 2021). Thus, there are contexts in which 'I believe that X is beautiful' is understood analogously to the assertion of 'X is beautiful' in that they both express the belief that X is beautiful. In such a context, 'I believe that X is beautiful' additionally expresses the non-propositional mental state M, and, thus, conveys that the speaker likes X.

What about third-person attributions of the form 'S believes that X is beautiful'? These statements, of course, do not indicate that the *speaker* likes X. However, I accept that in some contexts they convey that *S*, the person to whom the belief is attributed, likes X. Hybrid expressivism alone cannot explain this, but it

In summary, the form of hybrid expressivism proposed in this paper is superior to the variants of simple expressivism in meta-aesthetics. It provides elegant solutions to Kant's Puzzle (sect. 7.1) and effectively addresses the problem concerning certain retraction data (sect. 7.2). Moreover, it offers a resolution to the Frege-Geach problem without necessitating the abandonment of truth-conditional semantics or compromising the explanations of *Autonomy* and the evaluativity inference (sect. 7.3). In addition, the proposed variant of hybrid expressivism in this paper circumvents the challenges encountered by analogous solutions to the Frege-Geach problem put forth by hybrid expressivist positions in meta-ethics.

8. Conclusion

Statements of beauty carry a positive valence. By uttering

(1)   X is beautiful,

one conveys that one maintains a positive affective attitude with respect to the sensual appearance of X. Even though (1) does not explicitly state so, by hearing (1), we can infer that the speaker likes how X looks or sounds. How can we explain this evaluativity inference?

After clarifying some preliminaries (sect. 2–3), I have argued that semantic (sect. 4) and certain pragmatic (sect. 5) explanations are flawed. My positive proposal consists of a speech act-theoretical explanation based on a specific version of hybrid expressivism (sect. 6). Namely, with the literal utterance of (1), we perform two illocutionary acts simultaneously. We perform an *assertive act* and thereby assert the proposition that X has the disposition to evoke a certain mental state M (that involves liking the appearance of X) in subjects S under appropriate conditions C. Additionally, we perform an *expressive act,* thereby expressing a non-propositional, non-doxastic mental state M, which is the manifestation of the dispositional property that we ascribed to X in the assertive act.

The expressive act correlated with (1) explains the evaluativity inference. Expressive acts are governed by sincerity conditions (Searle 1969: ch. 3); included in the sincerity condition of (1) is that the speaker is in state M. This mental state M involves liking the appearance of X, and this is why uttering (1) usually conveys that the speaker likes the appearance of X. The additional assumption that an utterance of (1) also involves an assertive act saves the suggested explanation from the serious concerns associated with simple expressivism (sect. 7).

One problem with the suggested account is that it may appear *ad hoc.* If there are no other expressions that exhibit similar behaviour, it raises the question of why only aesthetic statements behave in the manner I am proposing. However, it is worth noting that in aesthetics, there is a commonly held belief that aesthetic judgments and statements belong to a highly distinctive class, which may necessitate a unique theoretical framework. Moreover,

---

nevertheless plays an important role in the explanation. The following explanation seems promising: Given the epistemic norm of assertion (Williamson 1996, Schechter 2017), we assume that in making the statement 'S believes that X is beautiful' the speaker knows or justifiably believes the proposition [S believes that X is beautiful]. We also assume that usually the speaker's reason for such a belief is S's sincere and literal utterance of 'X is beautiful'. According to hybrid expressivism this utterance of S is appropriate, only if S is in the mental state M that involves liking X. Thus, in some contexts we infer from the statement of 'S believes that X is beautiful' that S likes X.

it is important to emphasize that while the proposed approach might seem *ad hoc* in the sense that it is only applicable to aesthetic statements, it is not *ad hoc* in other aspects. The suggested account not only explains the linguistic data related to aesthetic statements, but also addresses epistemic puzzles concerning aesthetic judgments or beliefs, and integrates a plausible response-dispositional conception of aesthetic properties. Furthermore, the general idea of illocutionary pluralism, which asserts that a speaker can perform multiple illocutionary acts through a single utterance token in a specific speech situation, is widely discussed and defended in speech act theory (Johnson 2019, Lewinski, 2021). The considerations presented in this paper can be seen as shedding light on an overlooked instance of illocutionary pluralism, namely aesthetic statements such as 'X is beautiful'.

Acknowledgements

References

Anand, Pranav and Natasha Korotkova (2018). Acquaintance Content and Obviation. In Uli Sauerland and Stephanie Solt (Eds.), *Proceedings of Sinn und Bedeutung* 22, 55–72.

Beardsley, Monroe C. (1981). *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism.* Hacket Publishing.

Blackburn, Simon (1984). *Spreading the Word: Groundings in the Philosophy of Language.* Oxford University Press.

Blackburn, Simon (1993). *Essays in Quasi-Realism.* Oxford University Press.

Boisvert, Daniel (2008). Expressive-Assertivism. *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 89, 169–203

Bonzon, Roman (2009). Thick Aesthtic Concepts. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 67, 191–199.

Briesen, Jochen (forthcoming). The Acquaintance Inference and Hybrid Expressivism. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* (forthcoming).

Briesen, Jochen (2020). *Ästhetische Urteile und ästhetische Eigenschaften.* Klostermann.

Charlow, Nate (2014). The problem with the Frege-Geach problem. *Philosophical Studies*, 167(3), 635–665.

Charlow, Nate (2015). Prospects for an Expressivist Theory of Meaning. *Philosophers' Imprint*, 15(23), 1–43.

Copp, David (2014). Can a Hybrid Theory Have it Both Ways: Moral Thought, Open Questions, Moral Motivation? In Guy Fledger and Michael Ridge (Eds.), *Having it Both Ways.* Oxford University Press, 51–74.

Copp, David (2018). Realist Expressivism and the Fundemental Role of Normative Belief. *Philosophical Studies* 175, 1333–1356.

Danto, Arthur C. (2003). *The Abuse of Beauty: Aesthetics and the Concept of Art.* Open Court Publishing.

Dinges, Alexander, and Julia Zakkou (2021). Taste, Traits, and Tendencies. *Philosophical Studies,* 178, 1183–1206.

Eklund, Matti (2011). What Are Thick Concepts? *Canadian Journal of Philosophy,* 41(1), 25–49.

Fletcher, Guy and Michael R. Ridge (eds.) (2014). *Having It Both Ways: Hybrid Theories and Modern Metaethics.* Oxford University Press.

Franzén, Nils (2018). Aesthetic Evaluation and First-hand Experience. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 96, 669–682.

Freitag, Wolfgang, and Nadja-Maria Yolcu (2021). An Expressivist Solution to Moorean Paradoxes. *Synthese* 199, 5001–5024.

Gibbard, Allan (1990). *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings: A Theory of Normative Judgment.* Harvard University Press.

Gibbard, Allan (2003). *Thinking how to live.* Harvard University Press.

Gorodeisky, Keren & Marcus, Eric (2018). Aesthetic Rationality. *The Journal of Philosophy*, 115 (3), 113–140.

Grice, Herbert Paul (1989). *Studies in the Way of Words.* Harvard University Press.

Hirvonen, Sanna, Natalia Karczewska, and Michał P. Sikorski (2019). On Hybrid Expressivism about Aesthetic Judgments. *Grazer Philosophische Studien*, 96 (4), 541–568.

Hopkins, Robert (2001). Kant, Quasi-Realism, and the Autonomy of Aesthetic Judgment. European Journal of Philosophy, 9, 166–168.

Hume, David (1740/2000). *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Eds. David Fate Norton, and Mary J. Norton. Oxford University Press 2000.

Johnson, Casey Rebecca (2019). Investigating illocutionary monism. *Synthese,* 196, 1151–116.

Kant, Immanuel (1790/2000). *Critique of the Power of Judgment (The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant)*, Ed. Paul Guyer, Trans. Paul Guyer, and Eric Matthews. Cambridge University Press 2000.

Kyle, Brent (2013). How Are Thick Terms Evaluative? *Philosophers' Imprint*, 13(1), 1–20.

Kyle, Brent (2020). The Expansion View of Thick Concepts. *Nous*, 54(4), 914–944.

Lasersohn, Peter (2005). Context Dependence, Disagreement, and Predicates of Personal Taste. *Linguistics and Philosophy*, 28, 643–686.

Laetz, Brian (2008). A Modest Defense of Aesthetic Testimony. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 66, 355–363.

Lewinski, Marcin (2021). Illocutionary Pluralism. *Synthese,* 199: 6687–6714

Lord, Errol (2016). On the Rational Power of Aesthetic Testimony. *The British Journal of Aesthetics,* 56, 1–13.

Lopes, Dominic McIver (2018). *Being for Beauty.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Manley, David and Ryan Wasserman (2008). On Linking Dispositions and Conditionals. *Mind,* 117, 59–84.

MacFarlane, John (2014). *Assessment Sensitivity. Relative Truth and its Applications.* Oxford University Press.

Marques, Teresa (2016). Aesthetic Predicates: A Hybrid Dispositional Account. *Inquiry*, 59 (6), 723–751.

Meskin, Aaron (2004). Aesthetic Testimony: What Can We Learn from Others about Beauty and Art? *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 69, 65–91.

Muth, Claudia, Jochen Briesen, and Claus-Christian Carbon: (2020): 'I like how it looks, but it is not beautiful': Sensory appeal beyond beauty. *Poetics* 79.

Ninan, Dilip (2014). Taste predicates and the acquaintance inference, *Proceedings of SALT*, 24, 290–309.

Ninan, Dilip (forthcoming). An expressivist theory of taste predicates, *Philosophers' Imprint* (forthcoming).

Potts, Christopher (2005). *The Logic of Conventional Implicatures.* Oxford University Press.

Ridge, Michael (2014). *Impassioned Belief.* Oxford University Press.

Riggle, Nick (2021). Convergence, Community and Force in Aesthetic Discourse. *Ergo: An Open Access Journal of Philosophy*, 8 (47), 615–657.

Robson, Jon (2014). Aesthetic Autonomy and Self-Aggrandisement. *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 75, 3–28.

Robson, Jon (2015). Norms of Belief and Norms of Assertion in Aesthetics. *Philosophers Imprint*, 16: 1–19.

Robson, Jon and Neil Sinclair (2022). Speculative Aesthetic Expressivism. *British Journal of Aesthetics*. Online first: https://doi.org/10.1093/aesthj/ayac036

Scruton, Roger (2007). *Beauty*. Oxford University Press.

Schechter, Joshua (2017). No Need for Excuses: Against Knowledge-First Epistemology and the Knowledge Norm of Assertion. In Emma C. Gordon, Benjamin Jarvis, and J. Adam Carter (Eds.), *Knowledge-first: Approaches in Epistemology and Mind*. Oxford University Press, 132–159.

Schroeder, Mark (2008a). What is the Frege-Geach problem? *Philosophy Compass*, 3, 703–720.

Schroeder, Mark (2008b). *Being For. Evaluating the Semantic Program of Expressivism*. Oxford University Press.

Schroeder, Mark (2009). Hybrid Expressivism: Virtues and Vices. *Ethics*, 119, 257–309.

Searle, John R. (1969). *Speech acts – An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sibley, Frank (1959). Aesthetic Concepts. *The Philosophical Review*, 68: 421–450.

Sibley, Frank (1974). Particularity, Art and Evaluation. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volume* 48: 1–21.

Silk, Alex (2013). Truth Conditions and the Meaning of Ethical Terms. In R. Shafer-Landau (ed.): *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, Vol. 8. Oxford University Press: 195–222.

Starr, William B. (2016). Dynamic Expressivism about Deontic Modality. In Nate Charlow & Matthew Chrisman (Eds.): *Deontic Modality*. Oxford University Press, 355–394.

Todd, Cain (2004). Quasi-realism, acquaintance and the normative claims of aesthetic judgement. *British Journal of Aesthetics* 44, 277–296.

Väyrynen, Pekka (2012). Thick Concepts: Where's the Evaluation? In Russ Shafer-Landau (Ed.), *Oxford Studies in Metaethics* Vol. 7. Oxford University Press, 235–270.

Väyrynen, Pekka (2013). *The Lewd, the Rude and the Nasty: A Study of Thick Concepts in Ethics*. Oxford University Press.

Willer, Malte (2017). Advice for Noncognitivists. *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, 98, 174–207.

Willer, Malte and Christopher Kennedy (2022). Assertion, expression, experience. *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy,* 65 (7), 821–857.

Williamson, Timothy (1996). Knowing and Asserting. *The Philosophical Review*, 105, 489–523.

Yalcin, Seth (2012). Bayesian Expressivism. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 112, 123–160.

Yalcin, Seth (2018). Expressivism by force. In Daniel Fogal, Daniel W. Harris, and Matt Moss (Eds.), *New Work on Speech Acts*. Oxford University Press.

Zangwill, Nick (2001). *Metaphysics of Beauty*. Cornell University Press.

Zakkou, Julia (2021). Conventional Evaluativity. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, Online first: https://doi.org/10.1080/00048402.2021.2013264