Speculative Aesthetic Expressivism

Jon Robson
Neil Sinclair

In this paper we sketch a new version of aesthetic expressivism. We argue that one advantage of this view is that it explains various putative norms on the formation and revision of aesthetic judgement. We begin by setting out our proposed explananda and a sense in which they can be understood as governing the correct response to putative higher-order evidence in aesthetics. We then summarise some existing discussions of expressivist attempts to explain these norms, and objections raised to them. This will allow us to identify the pitfalls that a good expressivist explanation needs to avoid. Finally, we sketch our preferred version of aesthetic expressivism which includes as a crucial part a hypothesis concerning the distinctive expressive function of aesthetic practice. We then consider how this theory can explain the putative aesthetic norms whilst avoiding the previous objections.

In this paper, we sketch a new version of aesthetic expressivism. One advantage of this view is that it explains various putative norms on the formation and revision of aesthetic judgement. We argue that our sketch goes beyond extant versions of aesthetic expressivism (such as those discussed by Gibbard (1990), Hopkins (2001), Scruton (1976), and Todd (2004)) by explaining these norms in terms of an account of the distinctive function—not just of individual aesthetic judgements or assertions, but of the wider aesthetic practice of which they are a part. It is by reference to this wider yet domain-specific expressive function, we argue, that the particular norms applicable to aesthetic judgement-formation can be explained in a way that does not overgeneralize. In short, different expressive functions can explain different norms of judgement-formation; not all expressive discourses are equal.

We do not wish, here, to take a stand on whether the putative norms of aesthetic judgement we consider are genuine norms. Rather, our claim is conditional: if you think that these norms apply in the aesthetic case (and not in some others), aesthetic expressivism should be attractive to you, insofar as it can explain such norms (in a way that does not overgeneralize). Whether the antecedent can be discharged is a matter for another time.[1]

We proceed as follows. In Section 1, we set out the putative explananda and a sense in which they can be understood as governing the correct response to putative higher-order evidence. In Section 2, we summarize some existing discussions of expressivist attempts to explain these norms, and the objections raised to them. This will allow us to identify the pitfalls that a good expressivist explanation needs to avoid. In Section 3, we sketch our preferred version of aesthetic expressivism, which includes as a crucial part a hypothesis concerning the distinctive expressive function of aesthetic practice. We then consider how this theory can explain the putative aesthetic norms while avoiding the previous objections.

1 Although one of us has argued elsewhere that at least some of the putative norms are not genuine. See Robson (2014, 2019).

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1. A Kantian Puzzle

A famous Kantian puzzle in aesthetics concerns an apparent oddity when it comes to aesthetic disagreement (see e.g. Hopkins, 2001, pp. 167–169; McGonigal, 2006, pp. 331–333; and Kant *Critique of Judgement*, I.33). This oddity arises from the intuition that something like the following claims hold:

> *Autonomy:* It is never legitimate to abandon an aesthetic judgement, and adopt the opposing judgement, on the basis of counter-testimony from others.
> *Doubt:* It is legitimate to place less confidence in an aesthetic judgement on the basis of counter-testimony from others.
> *Re-examine*: It is legitimate to re-examine the object of one's aesthetic judgement on the basis of counter-testimony from others.

Regardless of how one spells out the details in these claims, a common thought is that this combination of features distinguishes aesthetic judgements from both ordinary empirical judgements—where the analogue of *Autonomy* does not hold—and from judgements of mere 'personal taste'—where the analogues of *Doubt* and *Re-examine* do not hold. So while, for instance, it is legitimate to abandon our (empirical) judgement that Saturn is closer to the Sun than Jupiter and adopt the opposed judgement based on the say-so of expert astronomers, it is not legitimate to abandon our (aesthetic) judgement that Holst's *The Planets* (1914-1917) is beautiful and adopt the opposed judgement based on the say-so of esteemed critics. Still, while a complete about-turn seems illegitimate in the aesthetic case, as Kant pointed out, 'The [aesthetic] judgement of others, where unfavourable to ours, may … rightly make us suspicious in respect of our own' (*Critique of Judgement* I.33), and may also legitimize the re-examination of the object of that judgement, something that contrasts with ('personal taste') judgements about whether, say, Lego is fun.[2] What stands in need of explanation, therefore, is why this peculiar combination of norms applies in the aesthetic case but not elsewhere. An important aspect of doing so is explaining what aesthetic judgement would need to be like in order for these features to hold.

In one sense, of course, the answer to this challenge is simple. Aesthetic judgement would need to be governed by norms that permit, on the basis of counter-testimony, decreasing confidence in your judgements and re-evaluation of their grounds, but which prohibit adopting opposing judgements on the same basis. This is unlikely to satisfy, though, and a more complete explanation would need to, inter alia, tell us what kind of state aesthetic judgements are, their role in agents' cognitive economy, and why they are governed by such an unusual combination of norms. The primary aim of this paper is to provide such an explanation.

Before doing so, it will be useful to get a little clearer as to the nature of these three claims. To begin, we should clarify that by 'judgement', we mean something like the mental correlates of assertion. That is, the mental state that someone is in when they (sincerely, and

2 As with our putative aesthetic norms, we will here take it for granted that these alleged features of empirical judgements and judgements of personal taste are genuine explananda (for discussion, see, e.g., Sundell, 2016). This assumption is not necessary for our primary aim, however, which is to explain the putative aesthetic norms within an expressivist framework.

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without linguistic or conceptual misunderstanding) assert some claim such as '*The Planets* is beautiful'. Of course, this is not the only usage of 'judgement' in the literature, but we believe it provides the best way of presenting the current debate in a neutral manner. Our usage allows us, initially at least, to remain agnostic between, inter alia, the view that aesthetic judgements are beliefs, some kind of expressivist approximation of these, some cognitive (or non-cognitive) experiential state (or disposition thereto), or some combination of these. We will not attempt to delineate what makes a judgement *aesthetic* here but will merely focus on paradigm cases involving artworks and standard evaluative aesthetic properties.

Next, we should clarify what we mean by 'testimony' and 'counter-testimony'. Our focus here will be on what is elsewhere called 'pure' testimony (Hopkins, 2011, p. 138)—that is, roughly, cases where we are invited to believe that *p* merely on the speaker's say-so, without their providing any additional grounds. Counter-testimony concerns cases of pure testimony that (apparently) directly *contradict* the agent's own assessment. Hence, like Hopkins, our primary concern is 'the epistemic force of the fact that others disagree with one, not the force of any arguments they offer for their view' (2001, p. 168). Also like Hopkins, the types of cases we are interested in are those where the agents providing counter-testimony are generally at least as competent in aesthetic matters as oneself and have used the same methods (roughly described) as oneself for forming their aesthetic judgements (2001, p. 168). One important complication here, in contrast to many cases where testimony is discussed in aesthetics, is that, in the cases we are considering, the agent will have already formed a judgement of the object in question and, we will assume, will have done so on the basis of straightforward first-hand acquaintance with that object.

Finally, we should say a little about the strength of our three claims. Let us start with *Autonomy*. As things stand, this looks like an entirely general claim about the illegitimacy of forming aesthetic judgements in certain ways, and some proponents clearly intend something of this kind. Most famously, Kant seemed to be intending something very general when he noted that if someone 'does not find a building, a prospect, or a poem beautiful, a hundred voices all highly praising it will not' lead them to adopt the opposing view since the fact that 'a thing has pleased others could never serve as the basis for an aesthetical judgment' (1790/2005, p. 94). Others are rather more modest in their claims, allowing that there are exceptions to the relevant norms. McGonigal (2006, p. 332), for instance, endorses autonomy in a restricted sense, according to which it is *comparatively rare* (compared to empirical matters) for counter-testimony to legitimize adopting the opposing judgement. A distinct dimension in which *Autonomy* can be weakened concerns the strength of criticism of forming aesthetic judgements on the basis of counter-testimony: a strict version says that such judgements are (always or most often) *illegitimate;* a loose version that such judgements are (always or most often) *problematic*, without necessarily being prohibited. One might add that such judgements are (always or most often) *more* problematic than comparative aesthetic judgements formed in some canonical manner or equivalent non-aesthetic judgements formed on the basis of testimony.[3] Still, there are limits to how much we can weaken things here and still capture the relevant intuition. We suspect, for example, that merely discovering that people are significantly more likely to lie when

3 Perhaps bracketing a few other 'problem cases' such as moral testimony (see Hills, 2013).

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it comes to aesthetic matters would not suffice to explain the peculiar oddness of forming aesthetic judgements on the basis of pure counter-testimony. Rather, the intuitive thought is that there is something peculiar to the nature of aesthetic judgements themselves that makes judgements formed in this way (at least tend towards being) problematic.

Turning next to *Doubt,* it is not always clear how far it is being claimed that it is legitimate to reduce our confidence on the basis of counter-testimony. Can we, for example, go so far as to abandon our initial judgement altogether (provided that we do not also adopt the opposing view)? We will assume that one should answer this question in the affirmative since it would strike us as odd to allow that we can reduce our confidence in our judgements to a significant extent but never so much as to abandon them entirely (think, for example, about cases where you significantly reduce your confidence in your most tentative aesthetic judgements).

One helpful way to think about our puzzle would be something like this. Aesthetic judgements seem to be rationally susceptible to a certain kind of higher-order evidence from counter-testimony. Such testimony provides *higher-order* evidence that our initial evidence and/or our judgement-forming response to it was faulty in some way, and hence can legitimize both reducing our confidence in our initial judgement (*Doubt*) and re-examining the grounds of that judgement (*Re-examine*).[4] In this way, aesthetic judgement seems to parallel empirical judgements and be disanalogous to judgements of personal taste. By contrast, in the aesthetic case, counter-testimony seems *unable* to perform its standard role as *first*-order evidence in serving as a basis for endorsing the opposed judgement. Here it mirrors judgements of personal taste but diverts from ordinary empirical judgements. Our task is to consider whether an aesthetic expressivist can successfully explain this apparently unique combination of norms.

2. Extant Aesthetic Expressivisms

Expressivist accounts in various domains have become increasingly prominent in recent years. The literature on moral expressivism is extensive, and expressivist views have also been proposed in areas as diverse as modality, epistemology, probability, and rationality.[5] It is surprising, then, to see how little attention has been paid to expressivism in aesthetics. Considerations of ethical expressivism (e.g. Gibbard, 1990) continue to include gestures towards extending such accounts into aesthetics, but it remains rare to see expressivism in aesthetics given detailed consideration. One notable exception is the debate we are focusing on in this paper, where discussions of expressivism as a solution are widespread. Indeed, almost all contemporary discussions of the Kantian puzzle give some consideration to expressivist responses. However, extant expressivist attempts to address that puzzle all appear to falter.

First, consider a very crude form of emotivism, according to which, claims about an object being beautiful or ugly are analogous to mere grunts of pleasure or pain. This

4 Note that this understanding requires only a minimal notion of 'evidence' as 'that which justifies, or is taken to justify, a specified judgement'. We take this to be compatible with some of the most influential 'non-evidential' accounts of testimonial warrant (see Wallbank and Reisner, 2020).

5 For example, Sinclair (2021), Divers and Elstein (2012), Chrisman (2007), Yalcin (2012), and Railton (1993).

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would seem to easily account for *Autonomy* since it is difficult to see what it would even mean for us to revise our grunt of pain into one of pleasure on the basis of testimony. That is where the good news stops, though, since such a view is not only independently implausible, it also falters in being unable to account for *Doubt* and *Re-examine*. It seems clear that counter-testimony (if such a thing is even possible on this account) would be unable to give us a reason to doubt our grunt of pain—what would it even be to doubt that?—or to re-examine its grounds (whatever that would be).

Let us quickly move on, then, to a more sophisticated form of aesthetic expressivism. According to Gibbard (1990, p. 52) 'aesthetic norms are norms for the rationality of kinds of aesthetic appreciation' and aesthetic assertions express acceptance of such norms. Aesthetic judgements are therefore states of norm-acceptance: to judge that *The Planets* is beautiful, for example, is to accept a norm that sanctions or prescribes aesthetic appreciation of *The Planets*. States of norm-acceptance are—quite generally—syndromes of tendencies to action and avowal: to accept a norm is to be governed by it and to encourage others to be so governed, for example through defending it in normative discussion (1990, 71–80). What is distinct about aesthetic assertions, on this view, is not the particular type of non-cognitive state they express—for, just like moral assertions, they express states of norm-acceptance—but the particular type of non-cognitive state that is *governed* by the norms accepted. In the moral case, what is so governed are emotions of guilt and resentment; in the aesthetic case, it is states of aesthetic appreciation.

There is a worry, though, about whether this view can explain *Autonomy*. The question here is whether there is an available explanation of why it might be considered illegitimate to form states of norm-acceptance on the basis of counter-testimony. Gibbard himself explicitly allows for the legitimacy of testimonially formed states of norm-acceptance in the moral case, claiming that 'When conditions are right and someone else finds a norm independently credible, I must take that as favoring my own accepting the norm' and that when 'under good conditions for judgment … others find a norm independently credible. Then that must favor the norm in my own eyes' (1990, p. 180–181). We suspect that Gibbard would want to extend such considerations to the aesthetic case. At the very least, it looks like a Gibbardian account would need to provide us with some additional reason why we cannot, in the aesthetic case, legitimately accept the relevant judgements on the basis of (counter) testimony.

One interesting feature of Gibbardian aesthetic expressivism is that it reduces aesthetic judgements to judgements of rationality—aesthetic judgements are a particular species of the wider genus of judgements of what 'makes sense'. In this, it is similar to the version of aesthetic expressivism canvassed by McGonigal, which likewise places aesthetic judgements within the wider class of practical judgements (2006, p. 348). According to McGonigal, for example, the judgement that something is beautiful characteristically commits us to accepting that 'we have reason to appreciate it' (2006, p. 340). By contrast, another set of expressivist views avoids the detour through states of norm-acceptance and practical judgements, instead linking aesthetic judgement more directly to a certain kind of aesthetic response or experience.

According to this family of views, then, an aesthetic assertion is the expression of an aesthetic response (see Hopkins, 2001, p. 175). Most members of this family couple this

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positive claim with a characteristic negative expressivist claim of non-cognitivism: that the target assertions do not express states that (attempt to) cognize a related domain of properties—that is, they do not express ('robust') beliefs with content characterizable by the sentences deployed.[6] Hence the corresponding judgements are not such beliefs. Thus the two main psychological claims of this family of views mirror two of the main psychological claims of moral expressivism, as follows:[7]

P1. Aesthetic judgements are not beliefs with aesthetic contents.
P2. Aesthetic judgements are (at least in part) non-cognitive aesthetic responses.

Different members of this family of views can be distinguished in terms of their account of the 'aesthetic response'. On a simple version, perhaps attributable to Scruton (1976), aesthetic judgements are a particular type of occurrent experience of the sort had when agents are in direct sensory contact with an artwork in some specified set of conditions, such as when considering it disinterestedly. On this view, aesthetic judgements will be illegitimate (perhaps even impossible) if the person making them is not currently responding to the artwork in the relevant way. To use Scruton's (1976) example: we cannot (legitimately) judge that a well-known piece of music is sad unless we are currently listening to it and having the aesthetic response of sadness.

This 'occurrent' type of aesthetic expressivism certainly explains *Autonomy*. On this view, an aesthetic judgement is only appropriate when an agent is having a particular occurrent aesthetic response—indeed, that response constitutes the judgement. Counter-testimony, cannot, by itself, provide that type of occurrent experience (since such testimony does not provide direct confrontation with the object of the judgement). Hence, we will be unable to, and a fortiori unable to legitimately, abandon our current aesthetic judgement and adopt the opposing view in the face of counter-testimony. (A corollary is that any aesthetic *assertion* agreeing with the counter-testimony will be inappropriate since it cannot sincerely express the corresponding judgement.) Counter-testimony is just not the right sort of thing to cause the cessation of one type of occurrent aesthetic appreciation, and give rise to a qualitatively different type, and these appreciative states are constitutive of aesthetic judgements, on the (oc)current view.[8]

However, this view has less success in explaining *Doubt* and *Re-examine*. Concerning *Doubt*, it is unclear what it means to place less confidence in an aesthetic judgement—if an aesthetic judgement just is an occurrent aesthetic response. Of course, if we specify (as

6 The position recently defended by Gorodeisky & Marcus (2018) is rather difficult to classify using the taxonomy we are proposing. In some respects their view seems in line with some of the expressivist views we discuss below but in others it is closer to the more well-known positions of 'realist expressivism' (Copp, 2001) and 'ecumenical cognitivism' (Ridge, 2006) encountered in meta-ethics. For some concerns about Gorodeisky and Marcus' position see Meskin and Robson (manuscript).

7 See Sinclair (2021), Chapter 4 Section 2. Gibbard's aesthetic expressivism is not of this type, since it does not hold that aesthetic judgements are (at least in part) aesthetic responses or dispositions to such responses—rather it holds that they are states of norm-acceptance governing such as responses or dispositions. Emotivism is also not of this type, insofar as it has no conception of a specifically aesthetic response.

8 See Hopkins (2001), p. 176. Compare Fletcher's (2016) explanation of the parallel of *Autonomy* in the moral case.

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Scruton and others do) that an aesthetic response is constitutively one formed in particular conditions (disinterestedness, for example), then one can be provided with evidence for thinking that what one might have otherwise assumed to be an aesthetic response is, in fact, something else—and counter-testimony may even provide such evidence. But to doubt that one's response constitutes an *aesthetic* judgement is not the same as placing less confidence in that judgement. Similarly, if one has reasons for thinking that one's response may not have been formed in the conditions constitutive of aesthetic responses (and if one was seeking a genuine aesthetic response), then one may find it legitimate to take steps to get into those conditions, which will presumably involve re-examining the object of one's (erstwhile aesthetic) response. But this is not re-examining the object of one's aesthetic judgement—rather it is reassessing whether one has met conditions for possessing an aesthetic judgement in the first place.

What we call 'occurrent' aesthetic expressivism requires, for aesthetic judgement, that the judge will actually be experiencing the relevant aesthetic response. Besides the above-noted difficulties in explaining the peculiar combination of *Autonomy, Doubt,* and *Re-examine*, this view faces well-known problems in explaining the legitimacy of aesthetic judgements formed on the basis of memory (see Budd, 2003, p. 391–392; Meskin, 2006 and Laetz, 2008, p. 357). A possible response to both problems is to move from the occurrent to the dispositional—that is, we can hold:

> P1. Aesthetic judgements are not beliefs with aesthetic contents.
> P2*. Aesthetic judgements are (at least in part) dispositions to non-cognitive aesthetic responses.

Since agents can possess dispositions to aesthetic responses without those responses being currently manifest, this avoids the problems of legitimizing aesthetic judgements formed in the absence of those responses. However, like aesthetic responses themselves, dispositions to such responses are still *normatively bare*: there is little sense of how they can be disagreed with, inappropriate, or ill-formed. Suppose, for example, that you and I are disposed to non-cognitively and aesthetically respond to *The Planets* quite differently: me with joy, and you with distaste. There is little sense (yet) to be made of the idea that these dispositions are in conflict—as opposed to just being *different*—or that either are inappropriate or ill-formed.

To address this difficulty, expressivists need to do more than move from the occurrent to the dispositional. A common thought is that aesthetic judgements involve not just dispositions to aesthetic responses, but also dispositions to demand or insist upon similar responses from others. For example, Hopkins, elucidating Kant's theory of aesthetic judgement, notes that: 'Despite being "grounded" in a non-cognitive response to the world, [an aesthetic] judgement … has one feature… in common with cognitive judgements. This is that it legitimately demands the agreement of everyone' (2001, p. 169). Likewise, Todd (also discussing Kant) notes the plausibility of what he calls 'strong normativity': aesthetic judgements make a demand of universal assent; in possessing aesthetic judgements, we believe that all others *ought* to agree by sharing the response or disposition involved (2004, p. 278).

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What is it to be disposed to *demand* that others share one's aesthetic responses or dispositions? Plausibly, this involves at least a disposition to make related aesthetic *assertions* in appropriate circumstances. For example, in asserting '*The Planets* is beautiful', one aim is to apply linguistic, discursive, pressure on others to adapt a similar view (a pressure intensified if one can adduce *reasons* supporting this judgement, though our focus will remain on pure testimony). This idea has general application beyond the aesthetic: to assert is to present a position, proposition, or stance as true—to-be-accepted by one's interlocutors. In the aesthetic case, this generates a view of aesthetic judgements with similarities to Gibbard's view of normative judgements: they are defined in part by dispositions to linguistic avowal where that avowal is one of the mechanisms by which we demand agreement from (or, more generally, put discursive pressure on) others. As Hopkins puts it: 'the legitimate demand for agreement in feeling [i.e. in aesthetic response] is woven into our practice of making [aesthetic assertions]' (2001, p. 177). On the current view, aesthetic judgements are not merely what is expressed by such assertions, rather the disposition to such assertion is partly definitive of the judgements themselves, which are thereby 'linguistically infused'.

This strongly normative feature of aesthetic judgements may also help explain more precisely which type of response counts as aesthetic. If aesthetic judgements are constitutively tied to a demand for universal agreement, and if that demand is ever legitimate, then the response involved can only be one that is capable of being universally shared (for it cannot be legitimate to demand a response from everyone if not everyone can share that response). Hence this type of expressivism naturally goes with the Kantian view that the distinctive aesthetic response is potentially shared by all, perhaps because it derives from the exercise of universal psychological capacities or is otherwise uncontaminated by partial concerns (see Hopkins, 2001, p. 170). More generally, on this view, aesthetic judgements are (at least in part) dispositions to non-cognitive aesthetic responses that can be shared by all, and the function of expressing such judgements in aesthetic assertion is in part to demand such universal agreement.

Again, this version of aesthetic expressivism appears to successfully explain *Autonomy* (although we will argue below that such appearances may be deceptive). Aesthetic judgements are (in part) dispositions to aesthetic responses and are therefore only appropriate (indeed, only possible) for someone who has such a disposition. Since counter-testimony cannot alter one's aesthetic disposition, it cannot make adopting the opposed judgement legitimate. As before, (pure) counter-testimony simply cannot, as a matter of psychology, generate the types of state that are necessary for (legitimately) making the corresponding aesthetic judgement.

In contrast with the previous case, however, this version of expressivism also promises a satisfying explanation of *Doubt* and *Re-examine*.[9] Consider first *Doubt*. According to the view we are currently considering, aesthetic judgements are dispositions to aesthetic responses *that can be shared by everyone*. Such judgements are (therefore) partially constituted by linguistic dispositions to expression, whose function is (in part) to demand that everyone else

9 Compare Hopkins (2001), p. 177.

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share such judgement. When one encounters a counter-testifier who is—according to the theory—demanding a *different* aesthetic disposition be shared by all, this is some evidence that the aesthetic disposition one is seeking to impose *cannot* in fact be shared by everyone, and hence that the disposition to demand it so—itself part of the aesthetic judgement—is illegitimate. In other words if aesthetic judgements are partly defined by the aspiration to universal assent, counter-testimony can legitimately shake our confidence in those judgements by providing some evidence that they *cannot* be universally assented to. And—in contrast with the previous version of expressivism—that lack of confidence can manifest in the degree to which one is prepared to demand that others share one's aesthetic dispositions. This also extends to an explanation of *Re-examine*. Again, if aesthetic judgements are partly defined by their aspiration to universal assent, when one encounters evidence (e.g. in the form of counter-testimony) that they cannot in fact garner that assent—that is, reason to examine whether those judgements are really of a type that can garner universal assent, for example by re-examining the object they are dispositional responses to.

Things are looking up for this dispositional aesthetic expressivism. However, as Hopkins (2001, p. 179–185) has argued, there is a serious problem looming. For the very same mechanisms that expressivism here deploys to explain *Doubt* and *Re-examine* threaten to undermine the case for *Autonomy*. The reasoning is as follows. Consider a situation in which my aesthetic judgement—for example that *The Planets* is beautiful, call this claim 'p'—bumps against counter-testimony from several musicologists, who all judge not-p. We have all listened intently to *The Planets* in conditions that are generally agreed to be beneficial for musical appreciation. Consider then the following 'fault-allocating' argument, all of whom's premises appear acceptable given the current theory, and yet is such that accepting its conclusion violates *Autonomy*.[10]

(1) I and my opponents disagree over whether p (I judge p, they judge not-p).
(2) One of us is at fault.
(3) They outnumber me, in general I and they are equally competent in matters of this sort, and we have all tried to access the same facts in the same way.

So

(4) It is likely that I am at fault.

So

(5) Not-p.

On this version of expressivism, (1) is clearly true. This disagreement is not a clash of *belief*, but—in line with expressivist accounts of moral or normative disagreement—involves a clash of attitudes or policies.[11] Similarly, the current expressivist view must endorse (2). According to the view, aesthetic judgements are dispositions to aesthetic responses *that can be shared by everyone*. But the confrontation with the counter-testifier is

10 The term 'fault allocating' and the argument that follows are taken from Hopkins (2001), p. 180 (the latter with some minor modifications).

11 See Stevenson (1948) and Sinclair (2021), Chapter 4.

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evidence that at least one of us is not in possession of such a disposition (i.e. that least one of our judgements is faulty). More generally, (2) must be accepted by any theory that seeks to preserve what Hopkins (2001, p. 173) calls 'warrant command' for a set of judgements. This is the idea that when judgements conflict, at least one of them lacks warrant (i.e. is in appropriate or at fault). By emphasizing the strong normativity of aesthetic judgements (the demand for universal assent), the current version of expressivism seems committed to warrant command: aesthetic judgements are aesthetic dispositions seeking universal assent and are therefore inappropriate if they cannot secure it. But the confrontation with the counter-testifier entails that at least one of us is not peddling such a disposition. Notice then that the very same elements—principally, the idea that aesthetic judgements are strongly normative—that helped expressivism explain *Doubt* and *Re-examine*—also support the acceptance of these first two premises.

Premise (3) seems obviously true given the nature of the case described, and the natural conclusion—(4)—is that I am likely the one at fault. But if I say p and they say not-p, and I am likely at fault, the obvious conclusion is (probably) not-p. But now we have a piece of reasoning that is cogent, cannot be rejected by the expressivist theory, and that leads to the conclusion that not-p—that *The Planets* is not beautiful. So it is legitimate to accept this conclusion on this basis. Hence, it is legitimate for me to abandon my original aesthetic judgement and adopt the contradictory one, in direct violation of *Autonomy*.

How might the expressivist respond? They may seek to revise their expressivism so that they are not committed to accepting all the premises of the fault-allocating argument.[12] Todd (2004) pursues this line, suggesting that premise (2) can and should be rejected by aesthetic expressivists. Todd traces the source of the problem to strong normativity—the idea that aesthetic judgements make a claim of universal assent—and proposes a weakening of this claim. On Todd's proposal, aesthetic judgements involve not dispositions to *demand* universal acceptance, but dispositions to *invite* sameness of response from others, by *encouraging* and *prompting* them to respond to aesthetic objects in the same way that one has. As Todd puts it:

> If a certain experience, response, or attitude is necessary for an aesthetic judgement, then the normative demand will consist of getting others to experience the relevant object in the same way, or to adopt the same attitude towards it. This, however, may entail that the agreement sought in aesthetic judgement be of a relatively weak kind, of persuading others to see or experience a certain object in such and such a way, rather than demanding that they ought to. (2004, p. 283)

As Todd notes (2004), this weaker normativity is, in fact, well reflected in the actual practice of aesthetic criticism, which typically takes the form of invitations to explore artworks. Most importantly for our purposes, though, because the discursive pressure

12 Another response might be to appeal to the earlier thought that, cunning arguments notwithstanding, we simply are not able to change our disposition on the basis of counter-testimony. However, it may simply be that we were mistaken about our own dispositions all along (and the argument here seems to provide good reason to regard this possibility as actual). Even if we take ourselves to have privileged access to our experiences, the same cannot be said for mere dispositions to experience.

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is no longer a demand of universal acceptance, it is no longer the case (on this view) that aesthetic responses are appropriate only if they can be universally shared. Hence, as Todd puts it 'there just is no one aesthetic judgement that will be the "correct" one. Indeed, there may be many incompatible but nonetheless appropriate aesthetic judgements in any given context' (2004, p. 288). Accordingly Todd rejects premise (2) of the fault-allocating argument: it is not the case that at least one of us is at fault, since many different aesthetic judgements can be appropriate.

This modification to dispositional aesthetic expressivism certainly allows the expressivist to resist the fault considerations argument, and thus rescue *Autonomy*. But it does so only at the expense of undermining the explanation of *Doubt* and *Re-examine* (see Hopkins, 2001, p. 174 and Gorodeisky and Marcus, 2018). For if the confrontation with the counter-testifier does not show that one's aesthetic judgement is in any way at fault, what reason could it provide to place less confidence in one's judgement, or to re-examine its grounds? In an encounter with a counter-testifier, the attribution of faultlessness to the opposing parties seems to undermine any legitimacy in either party questioning or re-appraising their judgement on the basis of that encounter.

3. Speculative Aesthetic Expressivism

Let us take stock. An occurrent type of aesthetic expressivism can explain *Autonomy* but not *Doubt* or *Re-examine*. A complex dispositional type can seemingly explain *Doubt* and *Re-examine*, but in the process, it undermines *Autonomy* by providing a legitimate route—through the fault-allocating argument—to abandoning one's aesthetic judgement and adopting the opposing one. One can resist this conclusion—as Todd attempts to—by denying that the disagreement entails fault, but by doing so one loses the explanation for *Doubt* and *Re-examine*. Aesthetic expressivism seems to have reached a dead end.

What is missing so far from this discussion—and we suggest, essential for an adequate aesthetic expressivism—is an account of the *function*, not just of individual aesthetic judgements or assertions, but of the entire aesthetic practice of which they are a part. As one of us has argued in the parallel case of moral judgements, it is only by understanding the functions of the wider practice that one can understand the norms that apply to the formation and revision of its core mental states.[13] The Gibbardian version of aesthetic expressivism mentioned above assimilated the function of aesthetic practice to the function of normative practice as a whole—roughly, on Gibbard's view, the function of interpersonal co-ordination. Todd's version of expressivism pushes against this in urging that aesthetic judgements possess a unique function and normativity but focuses on the function of *individual* aesthetic judgements rather than the function of the practice as a whole. Still, Todd's theory is suggestive and what follows can be taken to be a development of the parts of it we have described.

13 See Sinclair (2021).

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What then might be the function of our entire linguistically infused aesthetic practice—that is, the practice of thinking and speaking in aesthetic terms, of forming and revising aesthetic judgements, debating with others about those judgements, offering reasons for and against them, and so forth? Here is one hypothesis. The function of aesthetic practice is to promote, explore, discover, develop, refine, sustain, and lay down possibilities for shared acquaintance-based enjoyment of objects. Let's unpack this a little. Suppose—as seems plausible—that human beings are capable of a certain type of aesthetic appreciation of, or aesthetic response to, certain kinds of objects, where this involves direct acquaintance with those objects. Such responses are pleasurable in their own right, hence a source of value for us. But it is an additional pleasure to share such responses with others, to discuss and explore their basis, extension, and connections, and to refine them in light of prompts and suggestions from others. It may be too strong to say that human beings have a *need* for such shared explorations of acquaintance-based feeling, but such exploration is certainly a further joy in its own right and can lead to more valued—more refined—types of aesthetic response and appreciation, as well as bind us closer together in shared communities of feeling. On the current hypothesis, aesthetic practice answers to this need or at least helps us pursue these valued ends: it is a mechanism whereby agents explore the possibilities for shared communities and refinements of aesthetic appreciation.[14]

This general functional hypothesis can be embedded within an expressivist framework. This view still accepts the two core psychological claims of dispositional expressivism, as follows:

> P1. Aesthetic judgements are not beliefs with aesthetic contents.
> P2*. Aesthetic judgements are (at least in part) dispositions to non-cognitive aesthetic responses.

And here the aesthetic responses are acquaintance-based—responses formed on the basis of direct acquaintance with the object. The current view adds to these claims a semantic claim about aesthetic assertion, namely:

> S1. Aesthetic assertions have the semantic function of expressing aesthetic judgements.

As well as something close to Todd's claim about the function of such expression, namely:

> S2. The characteristic function of such assertion is to invite (rather than demand) similar aesthetic response from others.

But crucially, and distinctively, the current view embeds this account of the particular function of aesthetic *assertion* within a much broader account of the distinctive function of aesthetic practice as a whole:

14 For some discussions of the function of aesthetic practice along these lines, see Nguyen (2020) and Wallbank and Robson (2022).

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S3. The wider characteristic function of aesthetic practice is to promote, discover, develop, explore, refine, sustain, and lay down possibilities for shared acquaintance-based aesthetic responses.[15]

Suppose one was engaged in a practice that served these ends. We can then ask: What norms regulating the formation of aesthetic judgements would it make sense to adopt? In particular, does following the norms of *Autonomy, Doubt*, and *Re-examine* help serve these goals? If it does, then we have an explanation for why this set of norms applies to aesthetic judgements.

Consider *Autonomy* first. Suppose the function of aesthetic practice is as stated by S3. Further, suppose one accepted that it is legitimate to abandon an aesthetic judgement, and adopt the opposed judgement, on the basis of counter-testimony from others (i.e. one denied *Autonomy*) and, in a particular case, one did just this. For example, on the basis of his own careful listening, Arthur used to think that *The Planets* is beautiful but, based purely on the say-so of musicologists, he *now* thinks it is overwrought and indulgent. In fact, Arthur now goes about inviting this response from others, via aesthetic assertion (and perhaps other means). In such a situation, Arthur's aesthetic judgement is not well-placed to fulfil the distinctive functions of aesthetic practice. This is because, even supposing it were possible for Arthur to form, purely on the basis of counter-testimony, the aesthetic response he is now inviting others to share, the purely deferential manner of its formation would make it a poor basis on which would *explore*, *refine*, or *sustain* this response among a community. For instance, suppose Arthur is asked precisely why *The Planets* is overwrought, how it is that other works might avoid this defect, and whether its over-wroughtness totally undermines or merely denudes its fragility. Arthur can offer nothing in response to such questions, beyond the trite: 'Ask the musicologists'. By contrast, insofar as Arthur's original aesthetic response—expressed in his assertions that *The Planets* is beautiful—was formed purely on the basis of his own careful listing, he can at least begin to justify and explore this response with others—in part by introspecting its object-orientated origins, contours, and interactions with other responses. This gave him (at least the beginnings of) the resources to explain why *The Planets* is beautiful, how similar works might share some of the qualities that prompt this response, and how its beauty interacts with other of its (aesthetic) features—all resources that can help explore, refine, and sustain this response in Arthur and others. In this way, a judgement formed purely on the basis of counter-testimony seems ill-suited (and a judgement formed from reflective acquaintance well-suited) to serve the hypothesized purposes of aesthetic practice, in particular the purposes of exploring, refining, and sustaining communities of

15 Wallbank and Robson (2022) present some arguments for the value of inviting others to share our aesthetic responses. We are open to the possibility that a structurally similar account applies to the practice that includes judgements of personal taste, which may put some pressure on our earlier assumption that *Doubt* and *Re-examine* apply in that domain. The full details of the account for judgements of taste must wait for another occasion, but for the time being, we rest with the point that it is at least not obvious that exactly the same type of functional story applies in that domain, so it is at least not obvious that exactly the same norms of judgement-formation apply.

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response. Hence, it makes sense for agents engaged in a practice with those purposes to accept norms that frown upon aesthetic judgements formed on the basis of (pure) counter-testimony of others. In other words, it makes sense to accept *Autonomy*.

The norm of *Doubt* can be explained in a similar fashion. To begin, suppose one did not accept that it was ever legitimate to place less confidence in an aesthetic judgement on the basis of counter-testimony of others. Here, the level of confidence once places in aesthetic judgement can be understood in terms of how willing one is to revise it in light of new information and perspectives.[16] If Arthur is in no sense more willing to revise his judgement that *The Planets* is beautiful after encountering counter-testimony, then that testimony can never play a role in moving Arthur towards discovering a shared community of response with the counter-testifier. On the other hand, if encountering counter-testimony could sometimes make Arthur more willing to revise his aesthetic judgement, that testimony *could* play a role in discovering a shared community of response, albeit a role that is mediated by more direct reflection on the object of evaluation (as opposed to directly prompting a complete change of mind). For if the case in favour of object-orientated alignment of responses given in the defence of *Autonomy* is correct, there is value in seeking out shared communities of response, but that value is denuded if the responses cannot be explored, refined, and sustained—and these later functions require judgement-formation that is not purely deferential. Hence it makes sense for agents pursuing these values for counter-testimony to play *some* role in lowering confidence in one's aesthetic judgements without such testimony being able to play a *definitive* role in forming aesthetic judgements. In other words, it makes sense for such agents to accept *Doubt* (alongside *Autonomy*).

The explanation of *Re-examine* follows from these first two explanations. In light of the purposes of refining, exploring, and sustaining communities of acquaintance-based aesthetic response, it makes little sense for agents to form aesthetic judgements purely on the basis of counter-testimony (this was the key to the explanation of *Autonomy*). Still, in light of the purposes of finding *some* shared communities of response, it also makes little sense for agents to be completely insensitive to the counter-testimony of others (this was the key to the explanation of *Doubt*). The value of object-orientated responses, and the value of shared communities of response, are balanced in the norm of *Re-examine*. Agents who accept this way of regulating their aesthetic judgements can avail themselves of the obvious mechanism for finding such community (without falling into pure deference), namely mutual re-examination of the object of evaluation. Insofar as this mutual re-examination can be guided by the suggestions and framings of the counter-testifier (or critic) it can bring about a mutual alignment of aesthetic response, as well as means for exploring and refining such responses. Agents who do not accept *Re-examine* as a way of regulating their aesthetic judgements will close off this mechanism for securing some of the benefits of aesthetic practice. Hence, for agents seeking such benefits, *Re-examine* makes sense.

What of the fault-attributing argument that undermined the previous version of aesthetic expressivism—in particular, its explanation of *Autonomy*? Following Todd, our

16 Here we borrow Blackburn's (2006) account of confidence.

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version can reject the second premise of that argument: in an encounter with a counter-testifier, it does not necessarily follow that one of us is at fault. It may be, for instance, that there is no possibility of entering into a shared community of response with our counter-testifier, so any demand for shared response lapses, and we mutually move along. However, in contrast with Todd's view, the current version of expressivism can accept a closely related second premise: namely the claim that one of us *may be* at fault. In particular, *if* we and our interlocutor are potential members of a shared community of response, then one of us is at fault. If, on the other hand, there is no prospect of us entering into such community, neither of us is at fault. Fault is, so to speak, always relativized to potential future communities of shared response, and without knowing whether we and our interlocuter are in such a community, we cannot definitely assign fault. However, we can know that one of us *may* be at fault (because we *may* be members of such a potential community). And we can also know—following the other steps of the fault-allocating argument—that *if* one of us is at fault, it is probably us. This conditional thought in itself legitimizes doubt and re-examination on my part—for even though it is only a possibility, it makes sense for us to assume that one of us is at fault, because assuming the opposite would make us forego opportunities to explore a potential community of shared response with our interlocutor (and hence forego the benefits that such communities bring). In other words, it is because the function of aesthetic judgements is partly *speculative* (that is, they dispose one to 'put out' or air an aesthetic response, in the hope that others will either share it already or investigate possibilities for sharing it or something like it) that it makes sense not to dismiss counter-testimony as irrelevant but to explore possibilities for engagement and consensus (including re-examining the grounds of one's own responses). For all that, though, it remains the case that aesthetic judgements cannot fulfil the particular functions of aesthetic practice if they are formed on the basis of (pure) counter-testimony, meaning that *Autonomy* is not undermined.

In conclusion, if the version of aesthetic expressivism sketched above is along the right lines, we can explain the putative norms that apply to the formation of aesthetic judgements. This explanation proceeds not by reference to a claim about the non-cognitive constitution of aesthetic judgement, nor by reference to the claim about the particular function or normativity of aesthetic assertion but by reference to a much more general claim about the function of the entire discursive practice in which those judgements and assertions are embedded. It is worth noting that, on this view, the (expressive, non-descriptive) function attributed to aesthetic practice (seeking shared communities of acquaintance-based aesthetic response) is distinct from the (expressive, non-descriptive) function that moral expressivists typically attribute to moral practice (e.g. the mutual co-ordination of moral attitudes and actions). In fact, this is all to the good for expressivism, for this difference helps explain the *peculiar set* of norms that apply to the different (expressive) practices. In other words, expressivism need not be a monolithic one-size-fits-all approach to any particular discourse. A hypothesis of the *peculiar* expressive function of particular discourses can help explain their peculiar norms, hence, in this case, reaffirm the peculiar autonomy of aesthetic judgement. This is not, of course to suggest that an expressivist must be wedded to the claim that aesthetic judgements are peculiar in this way (indeed, we have already seen some expressivist views which are able to reject it). Our claim is merely that

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the expressivist *can* account for these putative peculiar features of aesthetic judgement. Whether they should *want* to do so is a question for another time.

Jon Robson
University of Nottingham, UK.
jonathan.robson@nottingham.ac.uk

Neil Sinclair
University of Nottingham, UK.
neil.sinclair@nottingham.ac.uk

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