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The Groundwork for Food Criticism: How Normative Aesthetic Judgments Are Possible with Regards to Tastes

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The Groundwork for Food Criticism: How
Normative Aesthetic Judgments Are Possible with
Regards to Tastes

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of Senior
Independent Study

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ABSTRACT

Issues of tastes and smells are often relegated to an ancillary or minor rank of importance in the domain of aesthetics, if recognized at all as legitimate objects of aesthetic inquiry and experience. This essay aims, firstly, to carve out a space of legitimacy for the aesthetics of tastes, and secondly, to clarify what aesthetic inquiry with regards to tastes must look like. In order for the above to be decisively established, the following positions will be argued for: (1) tastes are real, (2) our ordinary or scientific conception of what tastes are, upon which our reasons for doubting the possibility of successfully and reliably identifying tastes, is inadequate, (3) normative facts are objective and normative judgments are cognitive, and (4) aesthetic judgments and the relevant features of aesthetic objects are so and not otherwise in virtue of the aesthetic domain also being a normative one. This normativity is dual-aspectual: firstly, the reason(s) or justification for the presence of any one taste must come from the arrangement of other present tastes. When all justifications are in harmony, then the parts form a whole, such that to observe that a part is absent presupposes that it ought to be present. Secondly, the perception of an arrangement of tastes (or objects) as beautiful consists in the recognition of dignity (and consequentially the worthiness of the object of judgment as an object of desire for all rational beings) *in light of* the harmony noted in the description of the first aspect, and the recognition of this dignity means that we are disposed to behave in certain ways towards the object in question. The completion of these tasks will yield a model for all future food criticism.

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PREFACE

The literature on the philosophy of food is, at least at the moment, in its infancy. While a significant amount of work has been produced regarding the ethics of factory farming, the injustice of hunger and other forms of food-related poverty, etc., there exists only a small handful of books, anthologies, and articles that study food as its own philosophical subject rather than simply applying other philosophical work to it. Much of the motivation for this project comes from the observation of (and subsequent desire to fill) this vacancy. However, the general lack of real work in this area may also be due to a lack of respect; it is traditional for philosophers to view food and drink as base and unworthy of serious contemplation, for it is assumed that something that serves to fulfill one of our basic needs cannot at the same time be anything more than just that. Not only shall this assumption be exposed as mistaken, but hopefully, the philosophical rigor of this work will help legitimate the topic to the larger community of scholars; after all, it is not enough for a field to be worthy of our time and effort, but it must also be capable of capturing our interests. This likely will not happen, given the state of the discipline, unless it can be shown that the philosophy of food can meet the same standards of analyticity as ethics, epistemology, and so forth.

My deepest and sincerest gratitude goes to the venerable Dr. Garrett Thomson for his mentorship throughout this project; without his guidance, I wonder whether I could have produced a work of even half the quality of the present one. Tremendous intellect and learning notwithstanding, his compassion, understanding, and insight are a testament, I believe, to the power of philosophy to make not only intelligent, but *good* persons.

Lastly, my thanks to S. Roxie Freeman for believing in me.

INTRODUCTION

0.1: Introduction

This short introduction serves three simple purposes: (1) to briefly address two related problems in aesthetics that threaten the project's premature failure, (2) to defend food criticism as a worthy pursuit generally speaking, and (3) to enumerate what features of food criticism must be granted in order for it to function successfully. This list of features will constitute the structure of the following four chapters.

1.0: Early Problems in Aesthetics

In order to make aesthetic claims that are true, or at least not necessarily false, aesthetic realism must be presupposed. In other words, there must really be aesthetic qualities, objects, or entities in order to talk about them. Needless to say, the project of food criticism presupposes aesthetic realism. However, there exist two initial *prima facie* threats to aesthetic realism that must be defused in order to show that there is, in fact, room for the project at hand. First is the “problem of Taste,” and second is the allegedly mysterious ontology of beauty. Although they can be disentangled, they are certainly connected, for the first of these two problems has implications for the second (which shall shortly become clear).

1.1: Taste

“Taste,” in this context, is the capacity (or “faculty”) of making correct aesthetic judgments. Judgments about the world are objective iff they are true or false independently of the agent's mental states. The “problem of Taste” is about whether aesthetic judgments

can satisfy the demands of objectivity (and therefore qualify to be judgments at all).

Carolyn Korsmeyer writes in her book *Making Sense of Taste: Food and Philosophy*:

“The so-called problem of Taste, briefly, is this: Aesthetic reactions are subjective because they constitutively involve pleasure. Yet judgments about beauty and about the values of art are more important than are mere reports of subjective states, and so they demand shared standards of assessment. How can a philosophy of Taste acknowledge the subjectivity of the aesthetic response and also accommodate the more than subjective importance of judgments of Taste? How, in other words, can a subjectivist position avoid relativism and give the object of appreciation its due? These questions had particular urgency in eighteenth-century debate because of changing analyses of the ontological status of beauty.”¹

Philosophers in the previous century explained the distinction between cognitive mental states (judgment, belief, observation, calculation, etc.) from non-cognitive ones (attitudes, desires, wishes, hopes, pleasure/pain, etc.) on the basis of their directions of fit. Cognitive states like “belief” fit the world, whereas the reverse is true for non-cognitive ones. This direction of fit allows for *truth-functionality*. For example, if I believe that there are five chairs at the table, then when I see that there are in fact only four, I change my belief to reflect the world as it really is. Conversely, if I *wish* that there were five chairs rather than four, then I will make the world conform to my wish by making the necessary changes. But it would not make sense to say that my wish was either true or false – it is not a judgment.

The problem of Taste, then, is really the problem of how aesthetic judgments are even possible in the first place. Because they are judgments, they are supposed to be either true or false, and yet if aesthetics cannot be separated from subjective, non-truth-functional “pleasure,” then it seems that the notion of an aesthetic judgments is *at best* deeply

¹ Korsmeyer 46

paradoxical and *at worst* incoherent and impossible. Thus, we have the famous historical adage “De gustibus non est disputandum.”²

My response to this problem is twofold. First, I deny that we cannot in principle separate the notion of an aesthetic judgment from the feeling of pleasure (if not materially, then logically). In fact, if the objects of aesthetic judgments are to be objective (meaning that our judgments of them can be, in principle, mistaken), then that *requires* aesthetic judgments’ truth-value to be independent of our beliefs or feelings regarding those objects. Second, the idea that pleasure, enjoyment, or “liking/disliking” is truly subjective (here meaning *not* objective) and prior to reasons seems dubious. While it may be true that the notion of pleasure seems to have an essential phenomenological content that cannot be reduced to a more fundamental propositional content (and in that way it is natural to think that it cannot be “mistaken,” for it asserts nothing in the first place), not only are (or at least so I shall argue in the following chapters) some things are more worthy of our enjoyment than others, but also we always are capable of enjoying (as opposed to being gratified by) things *for* reasons. In this way there is a kind of rationality to enjoyment. In chapter four I shall argue that our enjoyment of an aesthetic object and rationality (the capacity for discerning and responding to reasons) are *not* mutually exclusive, as is often carelessly assumed; indeed, there is a strong connection between the two. Thus, we shall make heavy use (especially in chapter four) of the crucial distinction between “enjoyment,” a rational kind of pleasure that responds to reasons, and “mere gratification,” which is the pleasure that is *caused* in us by agreeable objects.

² “Taste cannot be disputed”

1.2: The Ontology of Beauty

If aesthetic judgments are to be truth-functional, then their objects must be objective. Aesthetic judgments are of objects (not necessarily a physical object, but an “object” as a thing that stands in a formal relation to another thing) specifically with regards to their *beauty*. The traditional problem of beauty is a semantic one: *what it even is*. We struggle to “point to it” in the same way that we would point to the four corners of a quadrilateral or the location of a car in a parking lot. We also experience great difficulty when attempting to measure the beauty of an object, yet meanwhile we measure the weight of a piece of iron ore or the distance between two land masses without a second thought. This leads some (mistakenly) to skepticism about beauty. Others, such as G.E. Moore, adopt suspect platonic ontologies in order to explain how judgments of beauty are possible.³ Both kinds of conclusions are dissatisfactory.

The following famous passage is originally from Ryle’s *The Concept of Mind*:

“A foreigner visiting Oxford or Cambridge for the first time is shown a number of colleges, libraries, playing fields, museums, scientific departments and administrative offices. He then asks ‘But where is the University? I have seen where the members of the colleges live, where the Registrar works, where the scientists experiment and the rest. But I have not yet seen the University in which reside and work the members of your University.’ It has not been explained to him that the University is not another collateral institution, some ulterior counterpart to the colleges, laboratories and offices which he has seen. The University is just the way in which all that he has seen is organized. When they are seen and when their coordination is understood, the University has been seen.”⁴

What Ryle hoped to illustrate in the passage was a *category error*: a mistaken application of a predicate to a subject. Although Ryle was concerned with the matter of ontological

³ Moore §115

⁴ Ryle 34

dualism rather than the ontology of beauty, I contend that the two problems are analogous, or at least similar in relevant ways.

The above conclusions (skepticism, Moore's Platonism, etc.) regarding the difficulty of identifying and measuring beauty are dissatisfactory because they result from a category error. Beauty is *not* a property in the same way that shape or mass are; it is *itself* not a discrete property of an object, separate from all the other properties. Therefore, we needn't require an ontology in which "beauty" itself exists as its own isolatable property (such as Platonism), nor must we assume that we need one in order to be realists about beauty. This is because "beauty" is a kind of *identity*, not a substance (and much more shall be said about this identity in the following chapters).

When we say "that is a chair," we don't say that it has a physical property of "chairness" (though perhaps Plato *would* mean to say this), but rather, we tell a story about its identity and function within a social world. It is *semantic* rather than purely ontological.⁵ My point is not that "beauty," like "chairness," is simply a matter of functionality, but rather that the application of the predicate need not presuppose some unique, corresponding quality or compositional component named "beauty." Thus, the question of whether "beauty" exists is the same kind of question as whether "clouds" or "armies" exist, and thus can be similarly answered in the affirmative.

⁵ In other words, we should reject the idea that if an object is beautiful, then after we fully deconstructed it and spread all of the parts on a table, we could pick up the "beautiful part" then reconstruct the object only without beauty. Thought experiments such as this one commit category errors, as well as mislead us into adopting extravagant ontologies.

2.0: On the Legitimacy of Food Criticism

It has traditionally been concluded that in the absence of an objective, isolatable quality called “beauty,” aesthetic judgments are thereby actually about the pleasure felt in the experience of the aesthetic object, such that to judge an object as beautiful requires an accompanying feeling of pleasure (Hobbes, Locke, Hume, Hutcheson, and even Kant arguably believed this to be true). Some philosophers (notably Mill but to some degree Plato and Kant as well) were sympathetic to *some* pleasures (such as those originating from the exercise of our “mental faculties”), while all others, such as those originating from our sensory experiences, were effectively condemned as base and neanderthalish.

Elizabeth Telfer notes that because gustation is, after all, a form of sensory experience (or at least essentially involves it), “some philosophers hold that it is unworthy to show a particular liking for the pleasures of food. In their view eating may be a good source of pleasure, but it is not a source of good pleasure.”⁶ Food is pleasurable, on this general view, only because of its *utility*. It is necessary for survival and consequently the pleasure (or more specifically, gratification) we get from eating is *merely* primal and evolutionary rather than being on a par with the pleasures of the intellect. Philosophers such as Plato (especially in *Phaedo*) further marginalize bodily pleasures by observing their tendency to interfere with “higher,” more worthy pursuits, such as achieving true belief and engaging in moral action.⁷

The difference in qualitative value of “higher” and “lower” pleasures notwithstanding, other philosophers have concluded that aesthetic judgments based on gustation and olfaction are, in fact, not even possible in the first place. The association of

⁶ Telfer 29

⁷ Brady 72

olfaction and gustation with “animal” gratification (or “agreeableness”) links them with the raw appetite, perhaps motivating philosophers like Kant to argue that they cannot be “disinterested” – a necessary condition (Kant claims) for all aesthetic judgment.⁸ Furthermore, since Kantian aesthetic judgments necessarily involve reference to the form or structure of their objects and not their hedonic valences, objects of olfaction and gustation cannot be objects of aesthetic judgment (or at least not in virtue of their smell or taste) – smells and tastes have no *structure*.⁹ Consequently, it might seem like the project of food criticism is doomed to failure: even if aesthetic judgments are possible, judgments of tastes and smells do not fulfill the relevant and necessary criteria thereof.

As noted earlier, Kant believes that food gratifies us because it connects to our interests;¹⁰ we crave food because it satisfies our hunger.¹¹ Brillat-Savarin holds that this overly simplistic view of enjoyment seems to only allow room for *gluttony*.¹² Consequently, he distinguishes “pleasures of eating” from “pleasures of the table.” While the former requires an appetite and interest, the latter is reflective and disinterested.¹³ This reflective state allows for pleasure, but it is the special, rational kind alluded to above, unlike the subjective, hedonic one assumed by Kant. We take pleasure in good food not because we actually prefer the taste, but rather, we recognize the taste as being *worthy* of such preference. It is enjoyable because it is judged to be good, and not the dogmatic reverse.

⁸ Ibid 73

⁹ Ibid 74

¹⁰ Notice, if you will, the difference between “Jacob *enjoys* coffee” and “brown sugar *gratifies* Jacob.” The “activity” of rational enjoyment and the “passivity” of causal gratification is reflected syntactically.

¹¹ Sweeny 54-55

¹² Ibid 57

¹³ Brillat-Savarin 182

I am willing to grant Kant's claim that aesthetic judgments make an essential reference to the object's structure and not merely any gratification caused by said object (though they surely have other components as well). However, I, like Emily Brady, think that the claim that tastes are without structure is simply false, and therefore there is no reason that food cannot be included in the aesthetic domain *in principle*.¹⁴ Furthermore, because the tastes of food have this structure, our engagement of food is, at least in this way, rational (here meaning *not animal*). Food criticism is a worthy pursuit partly because this structure can be an objective feature *in light of which* we enjoy the food. The food *may cause* pleasure (gratification in tasting the agreeable), but this does not exhaust the pleasure of food; at the same time, we *enjoy* the food because we recognize it to be worthy of our desire – a judgment rooted in the structure of the food's tastes. It is a rational pleasure – an aesthetic pleasure.

Telfer writes:

“[Mill's] argument that pleasures of food are inferior because they do not employ man's distinctive endowment [rationality] is very unsatisfactory. In the normal human being the pleasures of food do in fact employ man's distinctive endowment; they are quite different from those of a pig at a trough. The human uses his mind to appreciate combinations of flavours and textures, the suitability of the food for the season, the craftsmanship of the well-prepared dish, and so on.”¹⁵

She goes on to argue that food is worthy of our consideration for reasons beyond its tastiness or the pleasure it can bring us. She notes *eight* different ways in which food is meaningful and valuable for non-pleasure reasons including: religion, food's role in our

¹⁴ Brady 74

¹⁵ Telfer 31

personal identity, functional roles like celebration, expressions of friendship, love, and family, "exercises in civilization," and artistry.¹⁶

To Telfer's list, I wish to add that food, being an aesthetic object, has a kind of dignity that we should respect and take seriously.¹⁷ This dignity is the basis of the special rational enjoyment of food in addition to the mere gratification it can cause. This will be explained in far greater detail in chapter four.

3.0: The Presuppositions of Food Criticism

Food criticism is simply the *activity* of evaluative food by identifying, comparing, and explaining its quality (a particular form of beauty). The foundation of food criticism consists of four pieces that must be clarified and proved to be coherent if food criticism is to function as intended. Firstly, tastes must be shown to be real and not subjective in order to make judgments about them. Secondly, we must satisfactorily answer a number of residual problems with regards to the perception of tastes. Thirdly, it must be demonstrated that true normative facts are possible, for aesthetic judgments (such as "x is better than y," or "x ought to be paired with y whenever z is also present") have clear normative components. Fourthly and finally, we must demystify the nature of aesthetic judgments and aesthetic normativity, including their truth-conditions, psychology, and metaphysical commitments. Each of the following chapters is assigned to one of these respective pieces.

¹⁶ Ibid 37-38

¹⁷ The general notion of "dignity" is often understood to be a special kind of value that is beyond price. I will argue for a more specific understanding in chapter four.

CHAPTER ONE: A DEFENSE OF TASTE REALISM

0.1: Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to argue for taste realism. Taste non-realism (which forms a mutually exclusive dichotomy with taste-realism) rests upon the primary-secondary quality distinction, a representational theory of perception, and an absolute conception of reality. In refuting the latter three, I will conclude that taste-realism is true *Modus Tollens*.

The following is a familiar story: when talking about the “real” world, flavors, colors, sensations, and moral/aesthetic features are usually left out, or more technically, *eliminated*. The rationale behind their elimination is basically that they seem to disappear when their object is “placed under a microscope.” They are not part of the world *absolutely* conceived (which is to say from the perspective of a completed physics), and they are not intrinsic or true features of the objects of experience independent of appearances.¹⁸ An adequate account of such features would require an appeal to our idiosyncratic human perspective rather than the objective world as it is “anyway.”

The above story is a crude illustration of the primary-secondary quality distinction, or (loosely) following Putnam, the primary-secondary quality *thesis*.¹⁹ I intend to dismantle this thesis in order to *theoretically* allow for taste, color, moral, (etc.) realisms. After providing a more detailed examination of the primary-secondary quality thesis (and the theory of perception implicit within it), I will raise the following three objections: firstly, the PSQT relies upon a dysfunctional notion of resemblance. Secondly, the theory of perception (viz. the *representational* theory of perception rather than a *direct* one) that it

¹⁸ Putnam 41

¹⁹ Ibid 19

relies upon is inadequate, for not only does it require that experience is purely *passive* (something that Kant shows is impossible), but it also becomes logically untenable when it is combined with *any* form of empiricism, strong or weak. Thirdly and finally, the primary-secondary quality thesis implies an absolute or transcendental conception of reality which we have every reason to doubt. Certainly there are several other objections we could raise, but in the interest of time, I will limit this paper to the aforementioned three.²⁰

The primary-secondary quality thesis was arguably embryonically present in the philosophy of the ancient Greeks (such as Parmenides and Plato) who found it appropriate to distinguish between the real world (the world of *what-is*) and the world of mere appearances (*what-is-not*). However, the formal elaboration of this distinction in terms of primary and secondary qualities is usually credited to John Locke. It is not a mere metaphysical classification of properties. Rather, because the primary-secondary quality thesis (which I will henceforth abbreviate as ‘PSQT’) is both an account of the world that we experience and an explanation of experience, it implicitly contains several additional and logically reciprocal theses such as a representational theory of perception (henceforth abbreviated as ‘RepToP’) and a corresponding ontology (an “absolute” or transcendental one). Consequently, they must be understood together rather than piecemeal.

²⁰ For example, we could criticize the representational theory of perception on the grounds that it does not adequately allow for the *intentionality* of perception. We could also criticize the Cartesian consciousness that merely passive perception suggests on the grounds that it treats our ideas (perceptions) as essentially private. Wittgenstein shows us that objectivity presupposes publicity in the sense that if we cannot communicate our experiences, they could not be thought (or had) at all.

1.0: The PSQT-RepToP-Transcendental Realism Triple-Helix

It is easiest to begin with the RepToP. Held by John Locke and many other philosophers, it consists of four claims. Firstly, the *veil of perception*: we can only *directly* perceive our own ideas.²¹ Secondly, the Cartesian consciousness: to have a perception is to have an idea and vice-versa.²² Furthermore, if an idea is not present in one's immediate consciousness, then one cannot be said to have it. Thirdly, the possibility of *indirectly* or *quasi* veridical experience: our ideas (perceptions) resemble or represent the objective world on the other side of the veil of perception.²³ Fourthly, passivity: our ideas (perceptions) are *caused* by objects, such that objects imprint themselves upon us rather than us attending to them; "what [the mind] perceives, it cannot avoid perceiving."²⁴

Clearly, the idea that since our *ideas* (perceptions) are not the same as their causes (objects) already suggests the ancient appearance/reality distinction. However, if we can only perceive our own ideas, knowing whether our experiences are veridical becomes a hugely problematic (as Descartes shows us). Locke's PSQT allows him to resist Cartesian skepticism.

There are two kinds of ideas (perceptions) that, while being qualitatively/phenomenologically equivalent, are differentiated by their relevant causal histories. The first are ideas caused by *primary qualities*, which are the "matter in bodies" and therefore inseparable from the idea of the object as a whole.²⁵ Examples of primary qualities include spatial extension, texture, density – basically *physical* qualities. Locke

²¹ Locke II.8.23

²² Ibid II.1.9, II.9.4

²³ Ibid II.8.15

²⁴ Ibid II.9.1

²⁵ Ibid II.8.7

understands primary qualities to be, essentially, the powers in the object that cause their corresponding ideas, such that we can never perceive primary qualities directly.²⁶ However, this “veil of perception” is mitigated by the fact that the ideas caused by the primary qualities of objects actually resemble their causes: the properties of the objects themselves.²⁷ Our ideas of *secondary qualities* (such as color, taste, and sound) are *not* caused by the objects themselves, and therefore neither resemble their objects²⁸ nor are intrinsic parts of the object.²⁹ Rather, our ideas of secondary qualities are caused by the cooperation of the causal forces of primary qualities upon us. Thus, the former are fully (causally) explainable in terms of the latter. For example, the secondary quality *color* (the power to cause the idea of color in the perceiver) is caused by and reducible to the primary qualities of texture and molecular identity.

In order to see that the PSQT presupposes a RepToP, we need only compare the relevant features of each. The PSQT holds that properties are powers in the object that cause ideas/perceptions in us, and therefore implicitly affirms the RepToP, which holds that we can *only* perceive our own ideas rather than their causes. Furthermore, the PSQT explains that for our ideas/perceptions to be veridical, they must resemble or represent what is on the other side of the veil of perception, i.e. their objective causes, and therefore again presupposes the RepToP.

Contemporary versions of the PSQT held by (for example) Bernard Williams and J.L. Mackie remain more or less faithful to Locke’s original version. John McDowell (without *endorsing* the PSQT) formulates secondary qualities to be properties of objects

²⁶ Ibid II.8.23

²⁷ Ibid II.8.15

²⁸ Ibid II.8.23

²⁹ Ibid II.8.10

which cannot be “adequately understood except as true, if it is true, in virtue of the object’s disposition to present a certain sort of perceptual appearance: specifically, an appearance characterizable by using a word for the property itself to say how the object perceptually appears.”³⁰ Thus, secondary qualities are still understood as *powers* of the object to imprint itself upon us, and the ideas or impressions themselves of these secondary qualities are therefore *essentially* phenomenal, meaning that they cannot be understood without reference to what it’s actually like to experience first-hand. Contrariwise, *primary* qualities can be understood simply as qualities that do not satisfy the criteria for secondary-quality-ness: a primary quality is one that can be understood without reference to any disposition to cause certain ideas in the perceiver, and therefore an idea of a primary quality would presumably be *not essentially* phenomenal.

McDowell agrees with J.L. Mackie that “there would indeed be something weird (to put it mildly) about the idea of a property that, while retaining the ‘phenomenal’ character of experienced value, was conceived to be part of the world as objectively characterized,” and thus Mackie’s argument from queerness seems to have something to it.³¹ Because of this, “it is natural to think of the special perceptual apparatus involved in color vision as constituting a special point of view; and a generalization of this line of thought is what underlies the familiar philosophical thought that a description of the world as it really is would leave out the secondary qualities,” as they would fail to meet the criteria of objectivity.³² This is precisely the rationale behind most instantiations of material eliminativism and scientific reductionism.

³⁰ McDowell, “Values and Secondary Qualities” 133

³¹ McDowell, “Aesthetic Value, Objectivity, and the Fabric of the World” 115

³² Ibid 118

It is therefore easy to see how the PSQT implies an absolute conception of reality. Firstly, the primary qualities, i.e. the ones that are *not* essentially phenomenal, are the only real qualities. Secondly, those real qualities are located on the other side of the veil of perception; they are totally independent of all perception, which is to say, transcendental. Primary qualities such as density and spatial extension are knowable only through an impartial and perspectiveless science, and therefore the real world, or rather, the absolute one, is intelligible completely in scientific terms. Bernard Williams, who defends the absolute conception of reality and the objectivity (here meaning the alleged perspectivelessness) of science, even explicitly claims that any *correct* conception of reality would consist only of primary qualities.³³

David Hume shows us that when properly combined with empiricism, the RepToP leads us to a form of skepticism about the external world. Basically, Hume points out that a consistent application of empiricist principles requires denying that the second part of the RepToP, that our ideas actually resemble and represent the world, can be meaningfully asserted. This is because that transcendental world is radically epistemologically indeterminate. If (i) directly experiencing anything but our own ideas is impossible, and (ii) we can only meaningfully know what our experience by itself yields, then if there is any constancy to our perceptions, we cannot make sense of it by appealing to something *beyond* perception. To do so would require a special kind of knowledge yielded by neither sensory nor reflective experience.³⁴ If there is an objective world beyond our immediate perceptions, then we could only grasp at it through our imagination.³⁵ There is nothing

³³ Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* 241

³⁴ Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* 1.4.2

³⁵ *Ibid*

beyond experience itself, or, if there is, it is unknowable and unthinkable: in Kant's words, a meaningless, vacuous concept.

The support for these conclusions come from Hume's "Fork," which is developed in the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. All human knowledge belongs to one and only one of two mutually exclusive epistemological/semantic categories that Hume calls "relations of ideas" and "matters of fact" respectively. They are epistemological/semantic categories because they describe the two ways in which individual knowledge claims can be true or false. Relations of ideas are true based on "the mere operations of thought, without dependence on what is anywhere existent in the universe."³⁶ To think the negation of a true proposition of this first category, therefore, is to think a contradiction. Meanwhile, matters of fact are defined simply by their *not* being relations of ideas, which is to say that if something is true and is a matter of fact, its positive truth-value is not necessarily entailed by the meanings of the words themselves or their logical microstructures, but based on what is actually the case in the world. Because "the contrary of every matter of fact is still possible," reason alone is insufficient to determine the truth-value of the knowledge claim, and so we must turn to experience.³⁷

2.0: Critique of the Primary-Secondary Quality Thesis

There are four separate (though equally damaging) critiques of the PSQT and its implications. The first is McDowell's who, like Berkeley, attacks the notion of resemblance which is essential to the RepToP. The second, Kant's, demonstrates how any account of perception in which the perceiver takes an essentially passive role does not allow for

³⁶ Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* 4.1.20-27

³⁷ *Ibid*

objective experience at all. The third critique is my own (though it is indebted to Kant). I will argue that the RepToP must be combined with either “consistent empiricism” or “limited empiricism.” In the case of the former it becomes self-defeating, and in the latter, superfluous and otiose. The fourth and final critique is also McDowell’s, who attacks the absolute conception of reality implicitly assumed by the PSQT.

2.1: McDowell and the Notion of Resemblance

Remember that for Locke, the qualities that an object possesses are powers to cause ideas in us. The distinguishing feature of primary qualities is that their ideas, unlike secondary qualities, actually resemble their causes (intrinsic properties of objects), and therefore the veil of perception is partially circumvented. This notion of resemblance, however, seems highly suspicious to McDowell. Indeed, not only the resemblance between primary qualities and their ideas, but the possibility of a world being representable through ideas is what he attacks in his essay “Values and Secondary Qualities.”

McDowell argues that it is erroneous to think of the relationship between qualities and ideas as analogous to the relationship between the subject of a painting and the representational content of the painting itself.³⁸ Ideas are essentially phenomenal; the idea (perception) of *shape* is simply what it’s like to perceive shape, and the idea of *blue* is simply “what it’s like to see blue.” However, “no notion of resemblance could get us from an essentially experiential state of affairs to the concept of a feature of objects otherwise than in terms of how its possessors would strike us.”³⁹ If qualities are essentially non-phenomenal and ideas are essentially phenomenal, then it is deeply mysterious how an essentially non-phenomenal thing could be phenomenally represented at all. Consider this

³⁸ McDowell, “Values and Secondary Qualities” 137

³⁹ Ibid 138

sentence: “shape as we see it resembles shape as we *do not* see it.” The only option left, McDowell concludes, is to acknowledge that because our ideas of primary and secondary qualities are phenomenologically “on a par,” we must understand the primary and secondary qualities *themselves* in a similarly equal way, viz. that they are only intelligible in terms of how they are disposed to appear, and therefore would both fail the test for “objectivity.”⁴⁰

This comment is similar to a feature of Kant’s Transcendental Idealism, specifically with regards to the absolute, transcendental reality. To say that an idea (of a phenomenon) can represent and resemble an intrinsic quality beyond the veil of perception (noumenon) is to assert that the very notion of ‘noumena’ is *not* semantically vacuous, and that there is a contentful transcendental reality that that enjoys even a minimal epistemological connection to our objective experience. However, Kant argues that this is utterly absurd. Transcendental Idealism partly consists of the rejection of the idea that we can say or think anything meaningful about an essentially transcendental (or *noumenal*) reality (in agreement with Hume on this point). In other words, because the concept of ‘noumena’ suffers from a radical semantic vacuum, we cannot even assert that we cannot know noumena; to do so would imply that there is something that exists that, yet, we are necessarily isolated from. However, since this is exactly what is claimed by the PSQT, the PSQT is faulty.

2.2: Transcendental Idealism

It is Kant’s insight that the possibility of empirical knowledge and the assumption that we can only directly perceive our own experience (which is a fundamental and

⁴⁰ Ibid

indispensable assumption of the RepToP) are incompatible; if we accept one, we must reject the other. In other words, the RepToP implies *empirical idealism* and *transcendental realism* (for not only is the *real* world the one of essentially non-phenomenal, absolute things, but the appearances that we can never perceive beyond are false). Kant's Transcendental Idealism, being the negation of Transcendental Realism, is simply the rejection of the claim that empirical idealism is implied by the fact that objects and their appearances are inseparable *and* the affirmation of Hume's conclusion that the "transcendental" cannot figure meaningfully into our thought; our concept of noumena suffers from abject semantic poverty, and the transcendental reality is less than a ghost, necessarily empty and without content. These two conclusions require that we posit that the world conforms to our experience of it, rather than what had been traditionally assumed, that our experience conforms to the world. That the *phenomenal* or "empirical" world is the real one rather than the *noumenal/transcendental* one, are implied by the conclusion that the phenomenal world *must* have a necessary structure because *experience* has a necessary structure, which is made possible by the active role of the understanding in all possible experience (what Kant calls "spontaneity"). Experience necessarily consists of active judgments or discriminations and is impossible otherwise. Therefore, we must dispose of the RepToP entertained by the empiricists and replace it with a direct theory of perception. However, because the RepToP is logically tethered to the PSQT, a refutation of one is necessarily fatal for the other. What follows are Kant's arguments for Transcendental Idealism in adequate detail.

2.21: The Metaphysical Deduction

To ask for the pure concepts of the understanding is to ask for the means by which the understanding functions, for “concepts rest on functions.”⁴¹ These functions of the understanding are *judgments*, which determine (and indeed are inseparable from) all representations in relation to their objects.⁴² Thus, the synthesis of the manifold – the formation of a representation – is fundamentally an exercise of judgment.⁴³ From the various logical forms of judgment (quantity, quality, relation, and modality) we can arrive at the “transcendental structure” of all representations and therefore all experience, viz. the “categories,”⁴⁴ for each particular category is the pure concept underlying each particular kind of logical judgment; for every category there is an analogous judgment and vice-versa. Thus, that the categories constitute the *form* of the understanding (judgment) and that the understanding must judge in certain logical ways are flip sides of the same coin. The question, then, is how such pure concepts, the “subjective conditions of thought can have objective validity, that is, can furnish conditions of the possibility of all knowledge.”⁴⁵

In order to answer this, Kant must establish an *a priori* link between the understanding (judgment), and objective experience (which presupposed by the possibility of knowledge). He argues, in preparation for the transcendental deduction, that there are only two ways that *a priori* concepts could have a necessary connection to objects and their

⁴¹ A68/B93

⁴² The necessary structure of all representations are the twelve forms of judgment. Terminologically speaking, Kant probably should *not* have used the word ‘representation’ because it suddenly suggests that experience is indirect. That being said, given that representations are essentially judgments, and judgments constitute the necessary structure of experience, what we *ought* to understand by Kant’s use of the word ‘representation’ is actually just ‘experience.’ However, given that it is the terminology that Kant chose, unfortunate though it is, I shall continue to use it now that I have qualified it.

⁴³ A77-78

⁴⁴ A79/B105

⁴⁵ A89/B122

representations (which is to say, the *experience* of the objects). Either (i) objects alone enable representation and our experience thus conforms to its objects, or (ii) the reverse, that objects must conform to our experience because experience has a necessary structure, and anything that did not conform to this structure would not be a possible object of experience or even of thought. However, if the first were true then the consequent relation of the categories to the world would merely be *a posteriori*. Therefore Kant concludes that the second must be true, that representation enables objects and that objects must conform to the categories, the form of, or, the necessary conditions of experience.⁴⁶ Furthermore, if the object is representable, then it is knowable, and contrariwise if it is *not* representable, then it is not knowable.⁴⁷ Kant concludes that since representation is an act possible only through the understanding (and therefore of the categories), “the objective validity of the categories rests... on the fact that, so far as the form of thought is concerned, through them alone does experience become possible.”⁴⁸ The specific way this happens, though, has yet to be explained. This requires a demonstration of how the possibility of being experienced or thought (the representability) and the *objectivity* of experience presuppose each other, or in other words, the inseparability of objects and the possibility of the experience of them, and thus how the categories are the *a priori* conditions of all objective experience and the external world.⁴⁹

2.22: The Transcendental Deduction (B Version)

“Through the ‘I’, as simple representation, nothing manifold is given; only in intuition, which is distinct from the ‘I’, can a manifold be given, and only through

⁴⁶ A92/B125

⁴⁷ A93/B126

⁴⁸ Ibid

⁴⁹ A94/B126

combination in one consciousness can it be thought,” Kant writes.⁵⁰ Insofar as I am having an experience, I not only know *a priori* that it is *my* experience, but also that my experience isn’t given *by* me, but rather, *to* me, which is to say that my experience is non-subjective or is *of objects*.

“The transcendental unity of apperception,” writes Kant, “is that unity through which all the manifold given in an intuition is united in a concept of the object.”⁵¹ The TUAP can be divided into an objective and a subjective part. Kant calls the objective part the “original unity,”⁵² which is the necessary unity of the manifold of intuition given their reception through the pure intuitions of space and time and hence also the categories, while the subjective part, the “empirical unity,” is the necessary *possibility* of accompanying the manifold of intuition with an ‘I think,’ which is really just to say, the possibility of being *aware* that one is having an experience (and therefore that it is theirs). If it was not the case that the TUAP must be accompanied by the EUAP or its mere possibility, then we would be faced by the utter absurdity of possible representations (judgments) that could not be represent to ourselves, i.e. judged or thought.⁵³ The very possibility of this empirical unity, however, presupposes the conformity of the manifold intuition to the categories (the original unity), for ‘I think that...’ is a pure apperception and therefore an act of the understanding (the faculty of judgment through the categories), and the exercise of the understanding (which is the act of judgment) and the manifold’s unity are materially equivalent.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ B135

⁵¹ B139

⁵² B140

⁵³ B132

⁵⁴ B133, B140

The categories are applied to what is given through pure intuition through *judgment*, which Kant explains as “the manner in which given modes of knowledge are brought to the objective unity of apperception.”⁵⁵ This judgment is not analytic or made *after* the experience is had, nor is it the content of the experience itself. It is the *form* that the experience takes, expressed through the copula ‘is.’⁵⁶ What is asserted by the copula ‘*is*’ is that the contents of the judgment really “are combined *in the object*, no matter what the state of the subject may be.”⁵⁷ This combination is *determinate* and thus objective valid, for “determinate combination[s] of the given manifold” are simply what objects are.⁵⁸ In other words, that an object is a certain way (has determinate properties and relations) is necessary to the idea of an object, and the same is true for the reverse. Because the original (objective) unity of apperception is presupposed in the very possibility of the empirical (subjective) unity of apperception and vice-versa, the TUAP and objective experience are clearly two sides of the same coin. Furthermore, since all experience is necessarily subject to the possibility of being accompanied by the pure apperception ‘I think’ (an act of the understanding), all experience also must necessarily conform to the categories. The understanding, therefore, makes an invaluable and necessarily indispensable contribution to our experience, and thus the idea of passive experience (which is entertained by the empiricists and by the RepToP) is incoherent.

2.3: The Representational Theory of Perception and Epistemology

Earlier I wrote that an insight of Kant’s is that the possibility of empirical knowledge and the assumption that we can only directly perceive our own experience

⁵⁵ B141

⁵⁶ Ibid

⁵⁷ B142

⁵⁸ B137

(which is a fundamental assumption of the RepToP) are incompatible such that if we accept one, we must reject the other. In this third and final critique of the RepToP, I intend to fortify Kant's insight by showing that there is really no instance of the RepToP being viable. This is because one cannot simply adopt such a theory without also adopting a certain epistemology. I will establish a (provisionally) mutually exclusive dichotomy between two "epistemologies," and then show that when combined with the RepToP, they lead either to advanced skepticism or self-refutation.

Firstly, the dichotomy. I call "consistent empiricism" to be essentially Hume's Fork: that all knowledge must be classifiable as either "matters of fact" or "relations of ideas," and furthermore, that only "matters of fact" count as objective (here meaning "about the external world") and non-trivial. Therefore, all legitimately objective knowledge must be obtained through sensory experience. By contrast, "limited empiricism" is simply the negation of consistent empiricism: it is not the case that all knowledge must be either matters of fact or relations of ideas. While much of our knowledge *does* come from sense experience, there is a necessary possibility, even if only theoretical, of objective, non-trivial knowledge coming from other sources. While Hume's Fork is basically the opposition between the synthetic *a posteriori* (matters of fact) and the analytic *a priori* (relations of ideas), we may then understand limited empiricism to be simply the recognition that this is a false dichotomy, for there is a third, neglected disjunct: the infamous synthetic *a priori*. If consistent empiricism is essentially Hume's Fork, we might analogously understand limited empiricism as "Kant's Trident."

Hume's work shows that Locke is inconsistent in his empiricism, because consistent empiricism implies that we are not entitled to speak about what we cannot

directly experience, and therefore to talk about “primary qualities” as a powers that the object itself has to cause certain perceptions in us is nonsense. Now, the RepToP itself simply maintains that we can only experience representations of the world and not the world itself. Thus, we should be able to see that it is the RepToP *in combination with* consistent empiricism that takes us to the terminus of external-world skepticism, as Hume shows. It’s not simply that secondary qualities seem to have no place in the objective world, but furthermore, *primary qualities* are now under attack! Furthermore, we would be right to question whether there is even anything to the concept of an objective world semantically, because of just how radical our solipsistic disconnection is.

The RepToP and consistent empiricism are *usually* concomitant because if we can only perceive (perception being the having of an idea in one’s head) our own ideas, then any knowledge would come in the form of an idea. And if there are essentially only two kinds of ideas, those that represent the world and those that do not, then all knowledge would have to be of ideas that represent the world, which is simply to affirm some form of empiricism.

However, there is a second possible combination: the RepToP and limited empiricism. One question we might ask is whether such a combination also denies the possibility of objective experience and knowledge. *Prima facie*, the idea that we can only perceive our own ideas (which represent the objective world) and Kant’s Trident do not obviously contradict each other. Nevertheless, I argue that such a combination is unsustainable, because Kant’s Trident, if consistently entertained, implies the possibility of certain conclusions (such as Transcendental Idealism) which in turn defeat the RepToP, and therefore such a combination is self-defeating.

Under Hume's Fork, the sentence "my experience is veridical" would be nonsense, not only because the concept of veridicality is neither analytic *a priori* nor synthetic *a posteriori*, but also because objective experience, which is presupposed in "veridicality," is denied through skepticism. If we reject Hume's Fork and thus accept Kant's Trident, then we *can* make sense of the veridicality of experience, because such a concept would be synthetic *a priori*, and the possibility of objective experience is given through the negation of Hume's Fork. If I have a veridical experience, then I have an objective experience. But if I have an objective experience, then that means that I can experience an object. As demonstrated above, the possibility of experiencing objects requires that we understand them to be essentially *phenomenal* as opposed to *noumenal*. Because the RepToP treats objects as noumena, a veridical experience could not consist in *representational* content. Therefore, through a disjunctive syllogism, veridical experience must consist in *direct* experience. In other words, veridicality requires *both* the negation of a RepToP and Hume's Fork, and thus the acceptance of a direct theory of perception and Kant's Trident.

2.4: McDowell and the Absolute Conception of Reality

The PSQT implies an absolute conception of reality for two reasons. Firstly, the primary qualities, i.e. the ones that are *not* essentially phenomenal, are the only real qualities. Secondly, those real qualities are located on the other side of the veil of perception; they are totally independent of all perception, which is to say, transcendental. Primary qualities such as density and spatial extension are knowable only through an impartial and perspectiveless science, and therefore the real world, or rather, the absolute one, is intelligible completely in scientific terms.

John McDowell attacks the idea entertained by Williams and Mackie that qualities that cannot be “detached from the idea of an experience of an object’s seeming to have it,” such as “amusingness.”⁵⁹ The argument is a familiar one: the idea that objectivity or realness requires being essentially non-phenomenal (and thus a primary quality) presupposes an absolute conception of reality. However, we have several reasons to doubt such a conception, and therefore, we have many reasons to reject the idea that essentially phenomenal things cannot be objective or real.⁶⁰

2.41: Two Reasons for Doubt

After studying Kant’s Transcendental Idealism, we should already be suspicious of the absolute conception of reality, or for that matter, any system that purports to give a complete explanation of what is relative to our perception in fundamentally non-relative terms. Nevertheless, McDowell gives us additional reasons for doubting the tenability of such an explanatory project. According to McDowell, the absolute conception of reality, which does not allow for the realness of things that we cannot give account for except by appealing to how they appears to us, “owes what credentials it has, as the frame for all reflection about our cognitive relations with the world, to its explanatory aspirations.”⁶¹ Firstly, the absolute conception promises to be able to causally explain our subjective

⁵⁹ McDowell, “Aesthetic Value, Objectivity, and the Fabric of the World” 116

⁶⁰ By ‘objective’ McDowell means ‘absolute-objective.’ This is because McDowell is engaging Bernard Williams in his own terms. Williams means by ‘objective’ that which is independent of our perception in the *absolute* sense (here meaning that a thing can be considered objective if and only if an account of that thing would never require reference to ourselves *qua* perceivers, i.e. not essentially phenomenal), and therefore so does McDowell. I disapprove of McDowell’s seemingly complacent attitude towards the conflation of the “objective” with the “*absolutely* objective,” because it fails to explicitly recognize the false dichotomy: something could be objective and *relative* as well, i.e. what is essentially phenomenal. Nevertheless, I think that his analysis is correct. Any problems that this use of the word “objective” could have in relation to my own project would be superficial pseudo-problems, being based in mere terminological differences rather than substantively different conclusions.

⁶¹ Ibid 122

responses (i.e. appearances). Secondly, the idea of successfully differentiating between appearance and reality requires a model of science as transparent and perspective-free. McDowell offers reasons to doubt both of these, and thus further reasons to doubt the absolute conception of reality.

2.42: Regarding the Former

McDowell writes that “It seems to be an illusion to suppose that such an understanding [of appearances as being caused by what is real] could still be forthcoming after we had definitively left behind a view of the world that represents colors as properties things have. [...] in such a position, we would no longer understand what it was that we were supposed to be explaining.”⁶² The problem, as Williams notes, is how things are supposed to be related to something of which they are (supposedly) completely independent.⁶³ In order to be able to describe subjective responses’ phenomenological relation to the objective world, one would need to transcend the point of view in which those subjective responses are exclusively intelligible. Thus, “there is a general difficulty about the idea that we can firmly detach subjective properties from objects in the world... while retaining the thought that such properties ‘figure in our experience’, so that we can regard them as projected on to the world from there.”⁶⁴

Williams’ proposed solution to this problem is that one can “revert to the third person or objective point of view,” and thus enable one to say, for example in instances of pain, not “it hurts” but “it hurts for Jacob.”⁶⁵ McDowell points out that this suggestion is

⁶² Ibid 123

⁶³ Williams, *Descartes: The Project of Pure Enquiry* 244, quoted in McDowell, “Aesthetic Value, Objectivity, and the Fabric of the World” 123

⁶⁴ McDowell, “Aesthetic Value, Objectivity, and the Fabric of the World” 124

⁶⁵ Williams, *Descartes: The Project of Pure Enquiry* 295, quoted in McDowell, “Aesthetic Value, Objectivity, and the Fabric of the World” 124-125

yet insufficient, because such facts are inescapably “intelligible (third-personally, but all means) only at, or from, a sentient standpoint whose phenomenological character is sufficiently similar to that of the facts understood.”⁶⁶ That is to say, we can be third-personal about reporting experiences and their contents/objects while still failing to satisfy the demands of objectivity in the absolute sense; it is wrong to conflate the two, as Williams seems to have done.

2.43: Regarding the Latter

For science to promise us a transparent and perspective-free view of the world (which is, as Williams seems to understand it, the world behind mere appearances), it must posit a type of “‘Archimedean Point’ [...] from which a comparison could be set up between particular representations of the world and the world itself.”⁶⁷ Such a feature of science, according to its defenders, is what allows us to decide between competing explanations of natural phenomena, as well as serving as a kind of “ground zero” in which all scientific investigation could be securely grounded. But this is to claim, essentially, that we are able to circumvent the world of mere appearances and arrive at the world of the real through science because, to speak simply, we already have a foot in the door – something that seems to beg the question. In order to see that science does or does not successfully get to the real world, we must already be capable of a pre-scientific transcendental viewpoint. But this is supposed to be *enabled* by science, not *presupposed* by it.

Relatedly, as McDowell notes, the notion of which kinds of scientific methods yield determinate knowledge about the absolute world “is not prior to, but part of, one’s beliefs

⁶⁶ McDowell, “Aesthetic Value, Objectivity, and the Fabric of the World” 125

⁶⁷ Ibid 126

about what the world is like.”⁶⁸ And in order to be able to judge different methods of investigation as more or less effective and successful, which is to say, in order for science to “survive radical alterations in scientific theory,” the scientific ego must rely upon highly abstract notions such as simplicity, which themselves only acquire content when placed into the “context of some specific beliefs.”⁶⁹ McDowell concludes that there are, therefore, many reasons to doubt whether science can deliver on its promise to be completely perspectiveless. This conclusion doesn’t imply that transcendental realism is false *per se*, but rather, backs up Kant’s earlier claim that it is empty. If there is a transcendental world, it is certainly not accessible through science, nor any other related project.

2.44: McDowell’s Conclusion

This amounts not to a refutation of the idea that the strictly speaking non-empirical features of our experience are not actually independent of us – something that McDowell readily admits.⁷⁰ Rather, the point of showing that science could not possibly be perspective-free is to show that our conflation of the real with what is totally independent of us is not grounded in a transparent understanding of what actually is “real,” which is to say, in the world; our designation of the non-independent as unreal relies upon a faultily drawn line of demarcation. McDowell remarks: “if we can disconnect the notion of the world [...] from that notion of objectivity, then we make it possible to consider different interpretations of the claim that value is part of the world,” or more generally, that the essentially phenomenal and the real are not mutually exclusive.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Ibid

⁶⁹ Ibid

⁷⁰ Ibid 129

⁷¹ Ibid

We should see that the meaning of “objective” (though not in the way that McDowell uses it) is similar to Wittgenstein’s sense of “public.” The idea that a language is public requires that its users can misuse words or be mistaken about things – in other words, publicity requires defeasibility (the capacity of propositions to be wrong). For things to be objective, what is minimally required is that we can be mistaken about them, which presupposes that they are *at least* non-reducibly supervenient upon us. None of this obtains for what is strictly subjective. Subjective things are private, and thus we might question the extent to which we can even speak about them at all. They cannot be measured, we cannot be mistaken about them, and we cannot have knowledge of them. However, we *can* be mistaken about what is relative to us. As Kant showed, for us to perceive the world at all, it must conform to the necessary features of our experience (for otherwise it could not even be thinkable). Such a world would clearly, then, be relative and not absolute (for part of being absolute is to be independent and outside of *essential* relations). Thus, when McDowell concludes that we must disconnect the idea of realness from the absolute, he is also claiming that objectivity is not to be assimilated to what is independent of all relations and perspectives.

3.0: Conclusion

What has been shown is that any elimination of certain essentially phenomenal or relative features of the objects of experience from our picture of the objective, real world that relies upon the PSQT or any of its implications will be faulty. Consequently, it seems *plausible* that many of the essentially phenomenal features of experience (including tastes) are indeed objective and real. However, we must proceed with great care; we cannot

exclude the possibility of there being different, individual arguments in favor of the elimination of certain features of the objects of our experience *other than* the PSQT. For example, the incredible lack of agreement on matters of taste often tempt us (though, as I shall argue, mistakenly) into concluding that tastes cannot be real. Furthermore, even if tastes *were* real, we could not reasonably expect to reliably and successfully identify them. These problems, relating to the *perception* of tastes, will be examined in greater detail in chapter two.

CHAPTER TWO: THE PERCEPTION OF TASTES

0.1: Introduction

While the previous chapter's concern was the metaphysical status of tastes, this chapter is concerned with the *perception* of taste, particularly how we should not be discouraged by the fact that consensus is often difficult to establish. The sciences reveal numerous *prima facie* perceptual and epistemological problems thereof, such as the apparent *contextualism* of taste and the relative weakness and venality of the human tongue. These are not objections to a possible food-critical theory, but work in tandem to suggest that even if we had such a theory, its successful application would be practically impossible. Since we cannot reliably perceive the tastes of food, we couldn't know whether our assessments were ever correct or mistaken; we would always be blindly groping about. I shall answer this challenge by explaining not only how the specific nature of this ostensible disagreement is perfectly compatible with the veridicality of gustatory experience, but also by noting how the alleged problem is overstated. The only reason these observations appear to be *problems* is that our standard empirical, scientific understanding of taste is overly-simplistic for reasons that I will elucidate in due time. That being said, the "alternatives" to the materialist account of the perception of tastes such as phenomenology and the positing of qualia are not without their own problems. An adequate account of what tastes are will reveal the purported problems concomitant with the scientific understanding of tastes to be pseudo-problems, and therefore of no concern to us.

1.0: The Limitations of Tasting

There are two *prima facie* problems with the human sense of taste. Firstly, gustatory perception is *prototypical*, and therefore cannot reliably identify tastes. “Prototypicality,” in this context, refers to the fact that the way we describe our experience tends to conform more to the perceived category of which the object of perception is a member than the specific or particular aspects of that object. This phenomenon is well documented within the field of cognitive psychology. Because the relevant “prototype” that guides our perceptions is (often) contextually determined, it follows that our experiences of tastes are in general context-sensitive. Thus, it can be very difficult to come to agreements regarding the object of gustation, or at least *non-accidental* ones.

The second problem is the weakness of human gustatory ability. While we are very good at making discriminations (distinguishing between two or more different tastes), we often cannot successfully identify a taste when it is mixed with multiple other tastes. Furthermore, the relative strength of individuals’ sense of taste varies both naturally and genetically. Even if tastes are not *subjective*, it appears that we simply are not competent enough to successfully and reliably taste our food, and thus any possible use for food criticism appears moot.

1.1: The Contextualism of Taste

In a famous experiment, the French scientist Frédéric Brochet artificially changed the appearance of white wine to resemble red wine using a flavorless, odorless dye. Test subjects were then asked to taste and describe the wines, not knowing that they had been mischievously altered. The results of this experiment: “the real red wine was described from an olfactory and gustative point of view in classical red wine terms. Whereas the

white wine was described in usual white wine terms during this first experiment.”⁷² It was concluded that the gustatory perceptions of the subjects in the experiment were unknowingly but critically influenced by the color of the object.

Next, Brochet served his test subjects two glasses of wine at an interval of one week. Although both times the wines were, in fact, identical red Bordeaux superiors, the *labels* of the wines at the time of the second serving were switched to trick subjects into believing they were tasting a wine of far higher quality. The results of this experiment were perhaps even more damning than the earlier one. A simple analysis of the distribution of “positive” and “negative” descriptors given by each individual subject per taste of wine showed that not only was the second wine (the wine that was believe to be of a higher quality) *enjoyed* far more than the first, but the subjects also described the second as possessing far more delicious and excellent flavors than the first. It was observed that the subjects exhibited the phenomena of “perceptive expectation,” where what is perceived is simply the subject’s expectations.

While these experiments were conducted specifically with wine rather than another food, there is little reason to deny that our perception, or at least our gustatory perception, is not prototypical in other contexts as well. Such a thought is certainly demoralizing, for it seems to undermine any hope of correctly identifying what we taste. Furthermore, the issue is not merely epistemological, but perceptual. Brochet’s data show that the subjects actually had very different experiences of the same object of perception. This leads us naturally to the question of *what* we are tasting when we taste anything at all. Are tastes chemical properties of objects or something different? How can we make sense of their

⁷² Brochet 10

objectivity if we suffer from such an apparently unreliable, mendacious, and weak sense of taste as Brochet observed?

1.2: The Physiology of Taste

A normal human tongue has approximately 5000 taste buds, each containing roughly 50 to 100 receptor cells, each one with different sensitivities to different chemical stimulants. In addition to the natural variation of sensitivities to certain tastes between individual humans, our faculties are also influenced by maturation and genetics. For example, infants are extremely sensitive to sweetness, but do not appear to be sensitive to NaCl until several weeks after birth.⁷³ Individuals with two recessive alleles *tt* are “nontasters,” while individuals with one dominant *Tt* are medium tasters (the majority of humans) and ones with two dominants *TT* are known as “supertasters.”⁷⁴ The alleles seem to determine the quantity and distribution of taste buds on the tongue.⁷⁵

Taste buds respond to both the identity of the stimulant and the concentration (represented mentally as *intensity*). When stimulated, the receptors send electrical impulses to the brain. In addition to taste, smell (or olfaction) plays an important role in our taste-sensations, for the act of chewing and swallowing pushes odorants upward into the nasal cavity, a process called retronasal olfaction. Orthonasal olfaction (when we smell things through our nose) also can influence our experience, but to a lesser degree (because it is physically difficult to smell with our noses the very food we are simultaneously putting in our mouths). Furthermore, the other nerves in the mouth and esophagus respond to texture, temperature, etc. also contribute to the final product of the sensation of taste.

⁷³ Beauchamp et al. 1986

⁷⁴ Blakeslee 1932, Anliker et al. 1991

⁷⁵ Miller and Reedy 1988

The “basic tastes” account of gustation is that all of our gustatory experience is composed of atomistic, singular, unique tastes. As Erickson notes, a more specific version of the basic tastes account has been historically and culturally ubiquitous, viz. that there are *four* basic tastes to which everything we taste reduces: sweet, salt, bitter, sour.⁷⁶ More recently, this specific version of the basic tastes account has been challenged by “new tastes” such as “umami,” as well as the realization that flavors such as “metal” and “fat” do not seem to be reducible to any combination of the traditional four tastes. However, even if the new data show that the traditional four basic tastes account is clearly false, that isn't to say that the “basic tastes” account *generally* is wrong, for there could simply be more basic tastes than we have historically thought. The only thing that must be true in order for the basic tastes account to be technically correct is for there to be a finite set of tastes, and for the object(s) of every possible gustatory experience to be composed of at least one member of this finite set.

While the problem in the above paragraph was in regards to quantity of qualitatively discrete tastes, a related problem regards the specific the biomechanics of taste broadly speaking. The work of German scientist D.P. Hanig is largely responsible for the idea (which has been taken as given by many researchers thereafter) that there are only four basic tastes, because a map of the chemical receptors of the tongue reveal there to be four different (albeit overlapping) organizational zones (front, back, left side, right side), each being statistically more responsive to certain tastes rather than others.⁷⁷ To wit, the front tends to be more sensitive to sweetness, the back to bitterness, and the left and right sides to both saltiness and sourness. However, it has since been well-documented that our taste-

⁷⁶ Erickson 2008

⁷⁷ Hanig 1901

buds have multiple sensitivities (or are “broadly-tuned”), which is to say that it is theoretically possible that someone could have all but one taste bud removed and still be able to experience more than one unique taste.⁷⁸ The broad-tuning of individual taste-buds suggests that Hanig’s picture of the tongue is mistaken, for one needn’t have a “bitter molecule” on the back of the tongue in order to taste the bitterness.

1.3: The Neurology of Taste

Given the broad-tuning of human taste-buds, as well as the molecular complexity of what we eat, it would seem intuitive that we would be consciously perceiving a huge variety of different yet simultaneous objects when we taste our food. Furthermore, we don't just perceive tastes alone, but we also are aware of the smell, the texture, the temperature, and many other of food’s sensible features. The brain is not so easily overwhelmed by the quantity and complexity of this chemosensory stimulation because of a function known as “higher-order processing,” during which the brain effectively “filters” input from the various nerves in our bodies. Input from our taste-buds, the olfactory bulb, touch and vision data, and *hedonic valence* or agreeableness (thought to be supplied by the amygdala) are brought together in the brain’s orbitofrontal cortex and synthesized into a highly sophisticated representation of the sensory world.⁷⁹ This is made possible by the capability of the orbitofrontal neurons to process cross-modally, or rather, respond to inputs of different sensory origins. Additionally, possibly due to the link between hedonic valence and association/memory, the amount of pleasure we experience when tasting an object varies. This could allow us to account for the variety of preferred tastes across cultures and populations, viz. that preferences are environmentally and culturally conditioned.

⁷⁸ Erickson 2008

⁷⁹ Rolls 2004

Although we are sensitive to countless unique chemical stimuli, it is notably difficult for us to be able to successfully identify more than three or four unique elements of any given food-object.⁸⁰ This may start to give us reason to doubt whether we can have veridical experiences of food-objects at all, though it is important to note that while humans tend to be lousy at identifying particular chemical stimulants (*especially* in complex food-objects, which constitute the vast majority of gustatory experiences in ordinary life), it has been observed that we tend to be quite good at making simple discriminations, meaning that we can usually qualitatively compare different gustatory experiences and infer whether particular objects of gustatory experience were similar, different, identical, etc.⁸¹

Halpern notes that the corollary of the idea that we have only four (or some finite number) kinds of receptors (each kind being finely tuned to one specific taste) is that there exists a corresponding and similarly finely-tuned neuron (or neuron kind) responsible for processing the relevant inputs.⁸² This neurological account of tasting is the “labeled-line” account. An alternative to the labeled-line account is “across-fiber patterning,” which is extensively defended by Erickson. Essentially, rather than there being a finite number of neuron-kinds that handle exclusively one unique kind of taste, individual neurons are capable of processing more than one unique kind of sensory input from the taste receptors in the mouth.

⁸⁰ Erickson 1982

⁸¹ Morrot 2001

⁸² Halpern 2002

2.0: Critique of the Scientific Conception of Taste

The general picture of gustation drawn by the sciences is misleading in two ways. Firstly, the contextualism documented by Brochet and Morrot only has the problematic implications that it does because the *intentionality* of perception is ignored. Secondly, perhaps due (in part) to the sciences' empiricist heritage, the perception of tastes is construed as "atomistic," wherein we are confronted with discrete and non-reducible "simple" tastes that we must identify, similar to the late-empiricist picture of experience as consisting in the passive subject's bombardment by units of sense-data, as if experiencing the world were like viewing a *pointalist* painting. Furthermore, tastes themselves are typically assimilated to kinds of molecules, such that tastes, properly understood, fall within the jurisdiction of physics. Important to note, however, is that these criticisms do not target the sciences *themselves*, but rather how those observations and data are interpreted.

2.1: Intentionality

Intentionality is has traditionally been defined as a unique feature of certain mental states (such as perceiving, wishing, believing, and any others insofar as they have directions of fit), namely that they are *about* something. More specifically, intentional mental states represent their conditions of satisfaction.⁸³ The conditions of satisfaction are called the *content* of that intentional mental state, while whatever it is in virtue of which that those conditions are either satisfied or dissatisfied is the intentional *object*; I cannot *see* without seeing something as being a certain way, nor can I merely *believe* without believing that *something* is the case. Of course, not all mental states are intentional; clinical

⁸³ Searle 13

depression, for example, does not take an object. Others, such as moods, needn't necessarily be intentional, for it is possible for someone to simply feel happy or anxious for no particular reason. However, all of the mental states that we are presently concerned with surely *are* intentional.

Intentionality allows us to account for the veridicality of experience. Perceiving a yellow car and having a hallucination of a yellow car can be phenomenologically identical in the sense that both experiences have the same content. However, we would surely want to say that the former was veridical and the latter was not. Since the intentional content of perception is a representation of the success-conditions of the corresponding mental state, to have an intentional mental state is tantamount to knowing the conditions under which that mental state would or would not be veridical or correct.⁸⁴ Thus, my experience *that* there is a yellow taxi cab is veridical iff there really is a yellow taxi cab, and it is a “hallucination” otherwise.

We must be careful, however, not to conflate the mental state itself with its intentional content. If I were to say that “I believe that David Hume lives in a red house,” I am (1) reporting that my mental state is one of believing, and (2) stating that the content of that belief is *that* David Hume lives in a red house. Searle's helpful notation for this is “Belief(that ‘p’).”⁸⁵ The ‘p’ is in inverted commas because it is the *content* of the belief, rather than the *object*, and we must be careful not to confuse the two. Reifying the content of intentional mental states would mean that when I have a belief, for example, I actually have an object in my mind.

⁸⁴ Searle 39

⁸⁵ Ibid 31

If we understand mental events or contents (such as ideas, beliefs, experiences, etc.) to be objects, then we affirm the Cartesian conception of consciousness and a corresponding representational theory of perception that I refuted in chapter one. However, the arguments deployed in that chapter do not exhaustively describe how deeply flawed the Cartesian view of consciousness is. If all mental “things” are objects, then we cannot account for the possibility of experiencing the same object in different ways, nor, indeed, phenomenal experience at all; in fact, we require a content/object distinction in order to do this. Under the representational theory of perception, persons having objective experiences takes the traditional form of ‘ $a R b$ ’ where a and b stand for objects, and ‘ R ’ is a relation between them. For example, “Jacob sees the jar of olives.” However, what *cannot* be expressed is something like “Jacob sees that the olives are old and greenish.” The reason that $a R b$ cannot make sense of this is that “that the olives are old and greenish” is not an object, and therefore does not have properties which could cause the idea of “oldness” or “greenish” in our minds. At best, they would be properties *of* objects, but then they would be secondary and consequently eliminated by scientific reductionism. We should understand intentionality and the content/object distinction as being a kind of *antidote* to this, for not only does it allow us to make sense of sentences like “Jacob b ’s that ‘ p ,’” but it also allows the content of our experience to escape scientific reductionism or eliminativism, for it is fundamentally distinct from the object of experience.

Since the mental state, the intentional content, and the object of perception are all distinct, we can have different perceptual experiences of the same object; we can see it in different ways, or notice some aspects but not others. Searle’s example is Wittgenstein’s duck-rabbit. We can expect either a duck or a rabbit and therefore represent in our mental

states different success-conditions. Consequentially, we can explain why we experience the same object in different ways (as a duck or as a rabbit) by appealing to the different success-conditions of the intentionality of our perceptions, even though the object itself does not change.⁸⁶

Contextualism could be interpreted as suggesting that we do not really perceive objects as they are, but rather, as we expect them to be. In other words, contextualism motivates the empiricist thesis that we can only directly perceive our own ideas. This interpretation is mistaken because it fails to distinguish the *content* of perception from the *object* of perception; the fact that we cannot perceive an object except as being in a certain way does not imply that we cannot directly perceive said object.

2.11: Intentionality and the Aspectual Nature of Perception

Kant shows us that we must understand the structure of experience to be judgment. If gustation, i.e. the perception of tastes, is a form of experience, then that means its structure must also be that of judgment. Gustation, being therefore intentional, is also cognitive, and its intentional content allows for veridicality, which is precisely what is minimally required for objectivity of its intentional objects. Take, for example, the sentence “I taste lemon.” We have just reported a judgment of a taste, which we must not confuse with the actual taste of lemon itself. Such a confusion would be a conflation of the intentional content with then intentional object.

Understanding gustation to be an intentional judgment allows us to make sense of Brochet’s troubling observations that two people can taste the same wine and have two very different experiences of it, or judge it in competing ways under different tasting

⁸⁶ Ibid 56

circumstances. When we expect or attend to different aspects of the object of our experience, we are simply having a normal perception with a different specific intentional content. The fact that people report different gustatory features of food-objects upon tasting does not imply that tasting is *subjective* (meaning that the things they are perceiving are not actually in the object at all, but rather, in their heads), but rather, the apparent disagreement is only superficial; it is perfectly consistent with the inescapable intentionality of perception that we can have perceptions with varying content of the same object of perception, because intentionality leads us necessarily attend to some aspects of the object of perception and not others. Consider the possibility that two people in sufficiently similar perceptual conditions view the same yellow taxi cab, only to give two different reports. One says “I see that it is a yellow car with a checkered stripe,” while the other says “I see that it is an old taxi with mud caked into the wheel wells.” While the context of the perception may affect which aspects we attend to, that is by itself insufficient to demonstrate that those aspects we report are illusory or somehow less real.

2.2: Against Physicalism

Taste physicalism (not to be confused with taste atomism, the claim that there exist a finite number of discrete tastes that we experience in certain combinations) is simply the thesis, often entertained by scientists, that tastes are physical things. For example, “bitterness” is the presence of 6-N-Propylthiouracil. Allow me to dissect this thesis in a Wittgenstinian style.

A tube of seasoning spread from *Laura Santtini* is named “Taste #5 Umami Paste.” A caption under the brand label claims that umami is the scientifically confirmed *fifth* taste.

Suppose flavors are molecules. There are only five flavors, according to the sciences. Are there also only five molecules?

Some objects are said to have no taste. For example, water (H₂O) is flavorless. Why do some molecules have a taste, while others do not? Or rather, why *are* some tastes, while others are not?

How does the soup taste salty? Because of the presence of NaCl. But how does NaCl taste salty? In a sense, assimilating taste to molecules does not solve anything – it only creates homunculi problems of the following question: “how do things have tastes at all?”

If tastes are molecules, then the following sentence fragment is incoherent: “the taste of NaCl.” NaCl does not taste of salt – NaCl *is* the taste of salt! But then, surely the object itself, a grain of salt, is not identical with what it’s like to touch a piece of salt to your tongue. For the same reasons, to have an idea of a table is not to literally have a table inside of your head; the seeing of a house does not consist in tiny houses dutifully entering your eyeball and deftly flying straight to your brain.

A taste does not taste like something else, and the taste itself cannot (or rather, *should* not) be spoken about in terms of tastes. In other words, if tastes are molecules, then the taste of salt cannot be distinguished from salt itself. Thus the following absurdity arises: the sentence “what does salt taste like” is equivalent to “what does the taste of the taste of salt taste like?”

Perhaps we’re wrong to say that some objects are without tastes. Suppose *all* objects have a taste. But then, how do we account for the taste of iron if iron is neither salt, sugar, bitter, sour, umami, etc.?

It does not matter whether there are four tastes, five tastes, or five-thousand tastes. It does not matter if there is more than one molecule that corresponds to “salty.” If tastes are assimilated to physical things, then all of these problems will still arise. The rejection of taste physicalism means that tastes *per se* do not fall under the jurisdiction of the sciences.

2.3: Holistic Perception

The “holism of perception” is actually two different though related points: firstly and most straightforwardly, “tastes” are not discrete molecules, as is typically presumed by the sciences. Salt, sweet, bitter, etc. are not tastes, but *flavorants*. Tastes are not only far more complex – *the taste of peanut-butter, the taste of Aperol, etc.* – but the taste of any particular food is not necessarily reducible to some combination of basic flavorants like salty and sweet. We taste holistically (meaning that what we taste is not just a matrix of salty, sweet, bitter, and sour, but rather, a taste is itself a unity of multiple different aspects of an object including its temperature, mouthfeel, etc.) because our experience must consist of a synthetic unity. Secondly, when we perceive objects, we tend to perceive them *aspectually* – our attention is directed to some aspects but not others – and this is only possible if our experience is a synthetic unity. This second point requires more explanation than the first.

That our experience is necessarily a synthetic unity (from which the above two points directly follows), meaning that our experience does not consist of a matrix of individual sense-data, but is a fluid whole, is demonstrated by Kant (see chapter one). This unity can be dissolved, but only through a post-experiential act of *analysis*. To analyze an experience means to examine its individual aspects, or to decompose its phenomenal

features. It goes without saying that because analysis is *of* an experience, we require a synthetic unity to do so. This means that when we taste an object, we taste it (judge it to be a certain way) in a holistic way; we do not taste individual units of sense-data such as sweetness or bitterness (for this would be a pointalist or atomistic form of experience such as the empiricists maintained).

Our expectations focus our attention and influence what we consciously experience for two reasons. The first is that to expect something or to focus ones attention on something is, essentially, to look for it specifically, which is an act of analysis rather than synthesis. To expect or attend to something means to bring that particular aspect of the content of one's perception into the forefront in the EUAP (the conscious awareness that one is having an experience), which we then mistakenly interpret as constituting a different experience entirely rather than a different aspect of the experience. However, as Kant demonstrated, the experience itself, a synthetic unity, is enabled by and realized in the TUAP and not the EUAP. When I *describe* my experience, the EUAP may dissolve the synthetic unity into its parts through analysis, which may then be reported. Suppose a group of four sommeliers taste the same bottle of wine, and then describe it in four different ways. We cannot conclude, all other things being equal, that they had fundamentally different qualitative experiences (i.e. the synthetic unities were non-identical), but rather, we can easily account for such variation, for the discrepancies occur in the *analysis* and not in the *synthesis*.

Secondly, expecting and attending are *intentional* mental states which represent certain conditions of satisfaction, such as “that there is pear and not kiwi,” or “that the overall taste feels symmetrical and not lopsided.” Intentionality is an inescapable feature

of all perception, and therefore we *cannot* perceive food-objects “impartially,” meaning that we cannot simply experience the object without attending to some particular aspect of the content of our experience. Thus, we should be able to see that the “challenge” of prototypicality, viz. that we seem to only be able to view objects impartially and relative to the context of perception, is deeply confused. Indeed, our expectations influence the *content* of our experience, but only such that we attend to different aspects of the object. Furthermore, even if two wine-tasters really do report contradictory experiences, the content/object distinction shows us that it must be the case that one or both are mistaken.

3.0: The Phenomenology of Taste

So far I have argued for the position that tastes are *not* physical in the sense that what we the object of our gustatory experience cannot be reduced to a finite number of simple molecules in various ratios and combinations. In §2.2, I noted that not only the language we use to talk about tastes – *the taste of rosemary*, for example – but also the structure that our experience must have, entreats us to resist thinking that tastes can be deconstructed into individual physical units such as salt or sugar. Furthermore, the picture of gustatory perception that is implied by understanding tastes to be physical is passive, causal, and “pointalist.” Such an account of perception, whether gustatory or otherwise, was rejected in the previous chapter. Consequently, any purely physicalist account of what a taste is will be incomplete – as Thomas Nagel contends, the subjective, intensional,⁸⁷ or

⁸⁷ A sentence is extensional iff any of its terms could be replaced by a co-referential term *salva veritate*. An intensional sentence is one that fails the criterion for extensionality.

essentially phenomenal aspects of our experience systematically refuse to be reduced to the extensional and physicalist language of science.⁸⁸

3.1: Qualia

We may be tempted into thinking that tastes are non-physical, then tastes are *qualia*, i.e. intrinsic and essentially phenomenal “properties” of experience – the “what it’s like-ness.” Furthermore, the work done in the previous chapter may also support this conclusion, for there are no ontological problems with the reality of essentially phenomenal things. However, we must nevertheless resist this temptation.

It is wrong to assume that we must posit a unique phenomenal property (a *quale*) in order to make sense of the way in which we experience things. Surely experience has a subjective dimension – a “feel” that cannot be expressed except by a functionalist reference – but this can be done without positing qualia. For example, we can describe the subjective nature of the taste of peanut butter simply by saying “what one tastes when they eat peanut butter.” Even if the “qualia hypothesis” were necessary to explain this subjective nature of experience, it would still be deeply flawed in the following ways.

Daniel Dennett argues decisively in his paper “Quining Qualia” that the very idea of a quale is incoherent. Qualia have four fundamental features: they are (1) ineffable, (2) intrinsic to our experience, (3) essentially private, and (4) immanent or introspectively apprehensible. The problem with qualia, generally speaking, is that because they are supposed to be essentially private, we could not be mistaken about them.⁸⁹ Furthermore, because of this infallibilism, we cannot even be sure whether the quale that we taste when we take our *second* sip of coffee is the same as the quale that we experienced with the

⁸⁸ See Nagel’s paper “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?”

⁸⁹ Dennett 233

*first!*⁹⁰ If qualia could change without even the mere possibility of knowing, then they could not figure meaningfully into experience. They not only escape all description, but also are not possible objects of knowledge.⁹¹

3.2: What Tastes Are

Tastes are not physical properties, nor are they properties of a different sort of substance (such as “the mental” in a Cartesian sense). There is clearly something essentially phenomenal about them, for we cannot acquire the concept of any given taste except by experience. However, they are also objective, for clearly we can be mistaken in our attempts to identify certain tastes. Tastes must therefore be *relational* properties, for no other kind of property could accommodate all of these features. If tastes are relational, then it is meaningless to speak of tastes without also speaking of tasters in the same way that the notion of an unthinkable idea is absurd. A taste is, fundamentally, an objective *appearance*.

This understanding of tastes allows us to account for the relationship between the physical object and the content of our gustatory experience far better than any physicalist or mentalistic conception. For if tastes were merely physical, which is to say, *independent* of all appearances, then they could not actually be perceived. Yet if tastes were purely mental, then taste and material constitution would have to be independent; we could not say, for example, that the soup tastes salty *because* somebody added too much salt. Furthermore, the idea that tastes are strictly mental suggests the same Cartesian view of consciousness discussed briefly in the previous chapter, because to taste something is simply to have an idea and nothing more; we already have good reason to dismiss such a

⁹⁰ Ibid 237

⁹¹ Ibid 230

possibility. Meanwhile, if tastes are appearances, then they must be the way in which certain physical properties appear to us. Thus, we can balance the physical constitution of the object with the non-physical, subjective feel of the experience.

3.3: Levels of Description

I shall motivate the idea that tastes are objective appearances (and thus relative to yet not exclusively determined by the object's material constitution) by making an analogical appeal to levels of description in causal accounts of non-physical phenomena. I contend that if one accepts that there is nothing problematic about the objectivity of the phenomena named in the following examples, then one must also accept the legitimacy of the account of tastes as being appearances.

Firstly, let us distinguish between causal *relations* and causal *explanations*. Causal relations are forces between objects that are “indifferent to how we describe them.”⁹² They either do or do not obtain; *x* either does or does not cause *y*. Meanwhile, causal explanations are descriptions that attempt to render intelligible some succession of events. Davidson contends that an explanation renders a succession of events intelligible iff the effect can be “clearly and distinctly perceived through the [description of] the cause.”⁹³ This means, firstly, that while it may be true that everything has *some* cause, “it makes no sense to speak of explaining or understanding the existence or modification of anything except under one or another system of description.”⁹⁴ Secondly, explanations can be better or worse (the criteria thereof are explored in the following paragraph). Thirdly, Davidson holds that there is more than one conceptual system under which events are describable, such as “mental”

⁹² Davidson 307

⁹³ Ibid

⁹⁴ Ibid 306

and “physical.”⁹⁵ “The ideal of a comprehensive vocabulary in which complete explanations could in theory be given of any event,” he writes, “does not rule out the possibility of another, irreducibly different vocabulary in which alternative explanations of the very same events could be produced.”⁹⁶

In order to make greater sense of this idea, we might compare Davidson’s work with Searle’s. Different “conceptual systems” for Davidson are roughly the same as Searle’s levels of description. We might then think that for an explanation to be best, it must engage the relevant causal properties which belong to either one system or another (or are found in one or another level of description); the relevant causal properties depend on whichever level of description under which the *effect* in question is actually described and explained.⁹⁷ Consider the action of raising one’s hand. This action has a cause, but a mere identification of the cause may not be enough to render the event intelligible. In this case, it is because raising one’s arm is an intentional action with a corresponding intentional mental state. If we were to simply tell a story about the mechanical interactions of muscle tissue, the nervous system, and neurons in the brain, we could not, as Davidson says, clearly and distinctly perceive the effect. Clearly, to understand the event as an *intentional action* is to classify it under a certain conceptual system or level of description; if we appeal to an explanation at a different level of description, i.e. a molecular or physiological one, then we are giving an inadequate account as the causal properties appealed to are irrelevant. This is essentially the same analysis that Davidson offers of Spinoza, who writes in his *Ethics* that “the Body cannot determine the Mind to thinking, and the Mind cannot

⁹⁵ Ibid 308

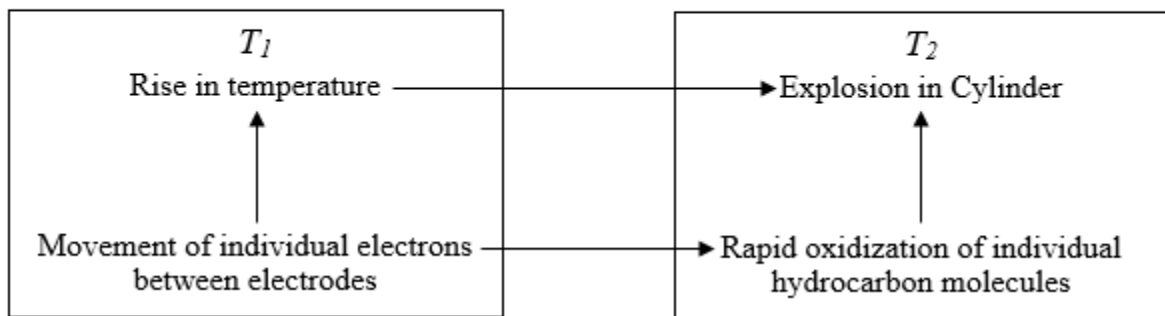
⁹⁶ Ibid 304

⁹⁷ Searle 117

determine the Body to motion.”⁹⁸ “We should take this to mean,” Davidson concludes, “that we cannot infer from a cause described in physical terms that a specific mental event will ensue.”⁹⁹ An adequate account of raising one’s hand, then, must appeal to causal conditions from the same level of description (for otherwise they would be irrelevant). We might, then, say something about the *reasons* I had for acting, my *belief* that raising my hand would accomplish some goal, etc.

For further clarification, Searle gives us the following two examples:¹⁰⁰

The Spark Plug



The vertical arrows indicate *realization* such that at T_1 the rise in temperature is realized in the movement of individual electrons between electrodes. Meanwhile, the horizontal arrows indicate *causation*, such that the rise in temperature at T_1 is the cause of the explosion in the cylinder at T_2 . T_1 and T_2 comprise one and the same event, yet this event can be described at different levels, as indicated by the vertical arrows.¹⁰¹ Because this first example seems more or less unobjectionable, Searle claims that there’s no reason that we should deny the second example:

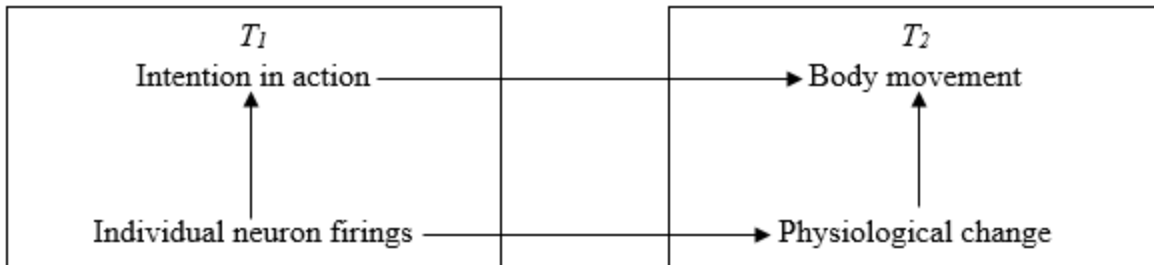
⁹⁸ Spinoza III.2

⁹⁹ Davidson 305

¹⁰⁰ Searle 269-270

¹⁰¹ Ibid 269

The Mind-Body Example



Building off of Davidson and Searle, I assert that tastes have a supervenient relationship to the physical properties of their objects. However, they are also essentially phenomenal, for they are not reducible to those physical properties. The only way to know a taste is to actually taste it (though perhaps we can imagine tastes by comparing them to others, such as when we describe the taste of grapefruit as “bitter and citrusy”). Furthermore, given the intentionality of perception, we can experience the taste(s) of objects in different ways, as well as attend to certain aspects of the taste(s) and not others.

4.0: Conclusion

I have attempted to show that the conventional scientific understanding of tastes and tasting is inadequate, and that therefore the problems that arise from it are moot. I have also argued that despite the falsity of overly-physicalistic accounts of taste, there are also accounts that do not give the physical enough credit. Given the intentionality and aspectual nature of perception, as well as the status of tastes as objective appearances that supervene upon a number of physical properties, we must acknowledge that the nature and perception of tastes is too complex to be challenged successfully by *prima facie* disagreement of tasters. Despite what sometimes feels to be insurmountable difficulty, we should feel

confident in our capacities to taste accurately, and therefore in the possibility of the success of the project of food-criticism.

CHAPTER THREE: ON THE POSSIBILITY OF NORMATIVE JUDGMENTS IN GENERAL

0.1: Introduction

In this chapter I shall defend the thesis that some tastes or combinations of tastes really may be better than others. This thesis is derivative of a more fundamental one, which is that normativity (whether conceived of as value, reasons, goodness, fittingness, etc.) is objective (and thus normative claims may be cognitive). Many if not all of the arguments against the objectivity of normative facts and the cognitiveness of normative judgments rely upon at least two premises: firstly, there is a strict dichotomy between evaluative and non-evaluative properties, and secondly, anything that is essentially relational, as opposed to being part of the world *anyway*, is neither objective nor real.¹⁰² As we saw in chapter one with Kant and McDowell, objectivity does not require the absolute, *contra* Williams. Furthermore, the very idea of an absolute world is untenable, or at the very least empty and otiose. I shall not revisit here the arguments for rejecting the second premise above, for this was already accomplished. Rather, I will undermine the first premise by appealing to instances of cognitive yet rationally evaluative concepts, which Williams terms “thick.”¹⁰³ If it can be demonstrated that thick evaluative concepts are indeed cognitive, while not being “factorable” into descriptive and prescriptive components as prescriptivism insists, then we will have accomplished our goal. If the fact-value dichotomy is false, then this means at least two things: firstly, it is false that mere or so-called “neutral” facts have a monopoly on what is real (or in other words, values can be objective and real). Secondly, there is nothing precluding facts from also being values or vice versa – in fact, to even use

¹⁰² Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* 138

¹⁰³ *Ibid* 140

such language in which the two are distinguished is misleading. I will conclude with a discussion of how we are to understand value if it is to be objective while simultaneously independent of the interests and desires that we have at any given time.

1.0: History

Values cannot be facts, and facts cannot be values; this is the claim of those who subscribe to the fact-value dichotomy. It is not merely a categorical logical assertion that the set of what is real and the set of values are mutually exclusive, but it is furthermore the claim that facts cannot motivate us to action. This will become important later.

The history of the fact-value dichotomy begins with David Hume. Implicit in his *Treatise of Human Nature* is the load-bearing semantic dichotomy between truth-functional and non-truth-functional sentences. Truth-functional sentences are those that are either “relations of ideas” or “matters of fact.” Non-truth-functional sentences are ones that are mere expressions of sentiment or “passions.” Hume begins Book III by asking whence our morality is derived or determined. If morality were determined by relations of ideas, argues Hume, then morality couldn’t motivate us. However, morality clearly *can* motivate us, therefore it cannot be determined by relations between ideas. The justification for the first premise comes from Hume’s belief that “reason is, and ought only to be, the slave of the passions,” and thus is “utterly impotent” motivationally speaking.¹⁰⁴ Hume moves on to deny the possibility of morality being determined by matters of fact. Rather than arguing, he challenges us to identify a virtuous or vicious event and “point” to the precise location of virtue or vice; we cannot. We can only identify passions, volitions, sentiments, etc., and

¹⁰⁴ Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* 2.3.3, 3.1.1

even then only when we turn our reflection inward.¹⁰⁵ In other words, we *project* the values (or normative properties in general) that we think we see.

Having argued for the foreclosure of the possibility of value-claims being truth-functional, Hume concludes that values must be mere expressions of passion or sentiment – a fundamentally non-cognitivist position. This is because (1) motivational mental states are essentially *sentimental* rather than truth-functional (as demonstrated above), and (2) the set of qualities that are real or objective are supposed to be exhaustively captured by the semantic dichotomy between relations between ideas and matters of fact, of which sentiments are neither. In other words, virtue and vice, like color, sound, etc., are mere ideas in the mind rather than qualities in objects.¹⁰⁶ Hammering one final nail into the coffin, Hume then explains that all that words such as “virtuous” or “vicious” do is express our attitudes toward something, such that “goodness is determined merely by pleasure.”¹⁰⁷

The idea that we cannot derive an ‘ought’ from an ‘is’ is a function of the implicit dichotomy between truth-functional and non-truth-functional sentences, which maps perfectly on to the [(relations between ideas/matters of fact)/sentiments] dichotomy. Since the two disjuncts are distinguished by truth-functionality, the relation between them must necessarily be one of logical indeterminacy – one cannot possibly imply another. This directly denies the possibility of there being objective value, because on such a view, the objective and the valuable are logically exclusive categories. Therefore the fact-value dichotomy must be destroyed if we are to have the possibility, even if only theoretical, of

¹⁰⁵ Ibid 3.1.1

¹⁰⁶ Ibid

¹⁰⁷ Ibid 3.1.2

having objective values, and thus of combinations of flavors that are objectively better or worse than others.

2.0: Critique of the Fact-Value Dichotomy

The fact-value (or cognitive-noncognitive) dichotomy, as mentioned at the beginning of §1.0, consists of two theses: (1) the denial that the world (what is real or objective) contains any value, and (2) that facts alone do not motivate us to action – we need desires or interests as well, which are fundamentally non-cognitive and subjective (attitudinal). In order to reject the fact-value dichotomy, we must simply reject each of its parts.

2.1: Refutation of Part One

There are two different though equally necessary points that must be made if our rejection of the thesis that value is not objective is to be both effective *and* complete. However, the first point has already been accomplished in the first chapter: the absolute conception of the world, one that consists of only primary qualities to the exclusion of values, is false. Aesthetic and moral qualities are two examples of value-qualities, and although they are relative to us rather than in the world “as it is anyway,” they are still objective. The rejection of an absolute conception of reality is partly the recognition that objectivity and relativity are in fact fully compatible.

The second point is the problem of what Williams calls “thick” concepts, i.e. concepts that are simultaneously evaluative and descriptive.¹⁰⁸ Examples include ‘unscientific,’ ‘cruel,’ ‘cowardly,’ ‘dangerous,’ ‘kind,’ etc. Such concepts clearly are

¹⁰⁸ Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* 140

“guided by the world,” such that we can be mistaken in their application (which is to say they’re truth-functional). For instance, we can be wrong about whether or not a person really is cruel.¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, because objectivity minimally requires the possibility of being mistaken, the fact that such words have public conditions of application clearly defies the fact-value dichotomy.

The prescriptivist, according to Williams, answers this challenge in the following way: thick concepts are “factorable” into descriptive and prescriptive/evaluative components. It is therefore possible, in theory, that with a different word or sentence, the world could be described in the same way but without the prescriptive/evaluative content.¹¹⁰ John McDowell and Hilary Putnam reply by denying that such concepts can always be factored; rather, the prescriptive and descriptive aspects are “entangled” and inseparable.¹¹¹ Putnam writes that “what is characteristic of [thick concepts]... is that to use them with any discrimination one has to be able to identify imaginatively with an *evaluative point of view*. That is why someone who thought that ‘brave’ simply meant ‘not afraid to risk life and limb’ would not be able to understand the all-important distinction that Socrates keeps drawing between mere *rashness* or *foolhardiness* and genuine *bravery*.”¹¹²

2.2: Refutation of Part Two

The second part of the fact-value dichotomy is that facts or ‘ises’ cannot by themselves sufficiently motivate us to action – only volition or sentiment can do that. However, we need ‘ises’ in order to correctly direct our action and not blindly grope about.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid 141

¹¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹¹ Putnam 37

¹¹² Ibid 39-40

In other words, the fact-value dichotomy presupposes the belief-desire theory of action. It runs deeper: because cognitive mental states are, roughly, *perceptual* ones (i.e. the ones that discover ‘ises’), it follows that cognition and volition are fundamentally disparate. In other words, cognitive mental states and motivational mental states (one that would presumably feature *values*) are mutually exclusive.

A perception of a state of affairs is a cognitive, intentional mental event. It is intentional because we must be able to formulate the content of our perception using an expression of the form “*I see that...*”, and it is cognitive because perception has a certain “direction of fit”¹¹³ that allows for truth-functionality (to wit, “mind-to-world”). Volition, desire, wishing, etc., meanwhile, are also intentional in the sense that they are directed at an object, but they are not cognitive and are not truth-functional. Their direction of fit is “world-to-mind.” Obviously, we can *observe* that somebody desires something and so the sentence “Jacob desires *f*” could be true or false, but the desiring itself does not correspond to the world in a truth-functional way. At best, it merely affects change.

In his paper “Virtue and Reason,” McDowell attempts to show that it is wrong to think of perceptual (and therefore cognitive) mental states as being independent from motivational (non-cognitive) ones. Often, instead of appealing to a “moral sensibility” (a

¹¹³ Elizabeth Anscombe, in §32 of her book *Intention*, gives the following explanatory example of the notion of “directive fittingness:” “Let us consider a man going round a town with a shopping list in his hand. Now it is clear that the relation of this list to the things he actually buys is one and the same whether his wife gave him the list or it is his own list; and that there is a different relation where a list is made by a detective following him about. If he made the list itself, it was an expression of intention; if his wife gave it him, it has the role of an order. What then is the identical relation to what happens, in the order and the intention, which is not shared by the record? It is precisely this: if the list and the things that the man actually buys do not agree, and if this and this alone constitutes a mistake, then the mistake is not in the list but in the man's performance (if his wife were to say: “Look, it says butter and you have bought margarine”, he would hardly reply: “What a mistake! we must put that right” and alter the word on the list to “margarine”); whereas if the detective's record and what the man actually buys do not agree, then the mistake is in the record.”

sense that allows us to perceive the relevant moral saliences¹¹⁴ of a given state of affairs), we explain actions through “practical syllogisms.” In such a syllogism, the major premise is a moral rule (presumably with an attitudinal explanation), the minor premise is the perceived state of affairs, and the conclusion is a judgment about how to act. For example, if we take the rule “protect all persons who suffer present, incipient, or future violence,” and we observe that one person is about to harm another, then we must conclude that we ought to protect the relevant person.

McDowell objects that this picture of moral psychology (in which cognitive and motivational mental states are independent) suggests that moral action is reducible to rule-following.¹¹⁵ However, any picture of moral psychology that is fundamentally rule-based must presuppose a kind of moral *sensibility* or *understanding*, and thus becomes self-refuting, for the moral sensibility is precisely what the rule-based theory is supposed to explain away.¹¹⁶

Wittgenstein shows us in the *Philosophical Investigations* that rules do not determine their own applications. Borrowing from Wittgenstein, McDowell argues that “if one attempted to reduce one’s conception of what virtue requires to a set of rules, then, however subtle and thoughtful one was in drawing up the code, cases would inevitably turn up in which a mechanical application of the rules would strike us as wrong.”¹¹⁷ If we are

¹¹⁴ “Salience” here means a fact about the world or some aspect of a state of affairs that also carries some rational significance such that a perception of it would figure (positively or negatively) into our reasoned actions.

¹¹⁵ McDowell, “Virtue and Reason” 148

¹¹⁶ McDowell’s point is basically a reiteration of Wittgenstein’s argument that rules cannot determine their own application, and therefore behavior (moral or otherwise) cannot be based on rules alone.

¹¹⁷ Ibid

to follow rules, then it would be a moral sensibility that enabled us to apply them successfully.

The alternative to the above account of reasons or saliences (or at least rational motivational forces) being essentially *internal* rather than objects of our cognitive, perceptual mental states is clearly that they are *external* and objective. The moral understanding or sensibility is the perceptual sensitivity to these saliences. A virtuous person sees a situation in a unique way: they see that a certain subjective response is required, and such a requirement *ipso facto* “silences” all possible reasons to act otherwise.¹¹⁸

McDowell negatively argues for this position by attacking the common “prejudice” which makes it seem implausible. It is simply not the case that there “ought to be a neutral external standpoint from which the rationality of any genuine exercise of reason could be demonstrated,” such as the practical syllogisms discussed earlier.¹¹⁹ That is, we should not assume that we can model what it is like to have a perceptual sensitivity to external reasons in a way that is essentially exclusive to such a point of view, and furthermore, the fact that such a thing is not possible does not give us any reason to declare the explanandum false. For example, the fact that a deaf person cannot know what a violin sounds like does not imply that the violin does not have a sound. The fact that we cannot model the nature of the perception of value in ways that are ultimately not capable of making such an experience intelligible does not imply that such experiences are not possible.

¹¹⁸ Ibid 146

¹¹⁹ Ibid 159

3.0: Internalism, Externalism, and Value

In the previous section I argued that values are objective and part of the world, i.e. independent of us. In this section, I will explain how to make sense of this claim. What does it mean for a value or a good to be objective? In other words, if normative claims are (at least partly) facts about the world, then what are the nature of these facts? In order to answer these questions, we must first introduce normative internalism and normative externalism.

3.1: Normative Internalism

Normative internalism, or more specifically *reasons* internalism, is not one thesis but a cluster of related theses about the relationship between our actions, choice architectures, motivations, and reasons. Generally speaking, any variety of reasons internalism will be a variation on the following idea: all possible reasons for action stand in some essential relation to our concomitant motivational states. The precise nature of this essential relation is differently accounted for by the many varieties of internalism (such as *counterfactual* internalism, *actual* internalism, etc).

David Hume stands in a grandfather-like relation to contemporary reasons internalism because of (1) his views on the psychology of action, and (2) his views on the relationship between reasons and passions. Fundamentally, he claims that only desires can motivate actions – beliefs alone are insufficient (something that McDowell and I rejected in the previous section). The conventional account of a reason is simply “a consideration that counts in favor of [or against] something.”¹²⁰ Thus, reasons must figure into our choice

¹²⁰ Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* 17

architectures through beliefs and beliefs alone.¹²¹ It follows that *reasons* alone are insufficient to motivate us to action, and that deliberate action is only possible through some combination of reasons and desires, and is irrational or nonexistent otherwise.

The internalist position is much more than the claim that reasons alone cannot serve as motivational grounds (though this does play an integral part). It is, rather, a thesis about the identity of reasons, viz. that a proposition *cannot* be a reason unless it stands in some essential relation to our motivations. Thus, Hume's famous claim that reasons are enslaved by the passions is interpreted as a particular manifestation of a larger claim that the identity of a reason is to interface in some subordinate way with our desires, guiding our action, as it were. Otherwise, the reason is not a reason at all, but merely a neutral proposition describing some aspect of the world. The following syllogism illustrates reasons internalism's larger view in the standard or "classic" way, as Williams conceptualizes it:

1. Reason to $A \supset$ motivation to A (central assumption of internalism)

2. All motivation \supset desires (Hume's belief-desire theory of action)

// Reason to $A \supset$ desire to A

The conclusion can then be transposed:

// \sim desire to $A \supset \sim$ reason to A

The "essential relation" of reasons to motivational states is thus clarified, at least formally. Following Williams, one only has reason to ϕ if ϕ -ing would advance some subjective purpose or interest.¹²²

¹²¹ This is further supported by the "rationality" of reasons, while desires are supposedly strictly non-cognitive.

¹²² Ibid 20

3.2: Normative Externalism

The rival of reasons internalism is reasons *externalism*, which, like internalism, is a cluster of strongly associated yet varying theses about the relation between actions, choice architecture, motivations, and reasons, rather than one particular doctrine. Generally speaking, however, reasons externalism is simply the negation of reasons internalism: *it is not the case* that all reasons must stand in some essential relation to motivational states, such that we can have reasons that don't "serve our passions." The thought is, more specifically, that *we cannot be responsible for the reasons we have*.

Arguments for reasons externalism could reject premise one (above). Rejecting premise two and claiming that both desires *and* beliefs can motivate, even if justifiable, wouldn't do any good, for then our conclusion would just read " \sim desire& \sim belief to A \supset \sim reason to A." This is problematic because many of us want certain obligations to apply absolutely (which is to say, to be *inescapable*), and externalism is purportedly compatible with this expectation through its denial that there is a necessary connection between having a reason and one's motivational states. "Escapability" is clearly a natural feature of the classic formulation of internalism discussed earlier, for reasons cease to apply to us as soon as we stop having the prerequisite desires – we are allowed too much responsibility for what reasons we actually have. If this is what externalism is supposed to ameliorate, then rejecting the second premise would be pointless, because we would still be responsible for what reasons we have (only with *beliefs* as well as desires making us responsible).

3.3: Clarifications and Distinctions

I contend that we should reject normative internalism and accept normative externalism. Before I present my arguments, I would like to make several clarifications and

distinctions. Firstly, internalism and externalism are not concerned with giving an account of the necessary structure of our decision procedures. Rather, they are concerned with the conditions under which a fact (such as “it is raining”) becomes a *justificatory* reason. In other words, internalism and externalism seek to provide formal and necessary criteria for the identity of all reasons.

Secondly, we must avoid confusing theories of rational choice or decision procedures with theories of normativity. The former describes, as it were, the way we ought to reason, or in a more austere, algorithmic sense, what choice is to be made in circumstances *C*. The latter, meanwhile, clarifies the circumstances under which obligations (both fragile and rigid) or, more weakly, normative facts appear, as well as their power over us. Consider the following question: “why be moral?” We can deconstruct the question into the following formulation: “why ought I to do what I ought?” I believe that there are actually two questions muddled up here: the first is a question about decision procedures: “what reason do I have to choose to do my duty?” The second is “why is my duty my duty anyway? Why is this “ought” an “ought” at all?” Obviously, both of these questions demand different kinds of answers; to even entertain the question originally posed would be to commit a category error.

Thirdly, let us distinguish *having* a reason from *being* a reason. To *have* a reason is for a fact or consideration, *regarded* as such, to be present in a deliberative consciousness. Meanwhile, to *be* a reason is simply to be a fact that counts in favor of something. Whether something *is* or *is not* a reason must be independent of our beliefs about it (on pain of subjectivism). For example, the fact that there is reason to take the proper medicine is not

created by the physician informing the patient that it will alleviate pain, but the physician tells the patient this so that the patient, now *having* the reason, will act accordingly.¹²³

Having a reason means that the agent's action could be explained by way of that reason. The patient takes his medicine because he knows that it will make him healthy again. But for the patient to have this reason also presupposes that the reason applies to the patient. If a reason could apply to us, then it *must* apply to us, even if we aren't aware of its applicability. Thus, while we can make sense of the having of a reason through its role in our action, we needn't treat reasons by themselves in the same way.¹²⁴ A fact is a reason regardless of whether someone has it, and therefore regardless of its role in our action (in this sense).

3.4: Critique of Internalism

Internalism, at least in its most general and traditional formulation being the claim that something counts as a reason *iff* it "interfaces" with a preexisting desire, seems to be muddled. Not only does it treat "what it is to be a reason" as "what it is to have a reason" (for a reason is just something that figures into our choice architecture, and therefore "reason-status" is entirely contingent upon our intentions/motives/wills), but it also thereby gets decision-procedure theory confused with normative theory. Obligations (fragile or rigid) or what reasons there are to *A* presuppose corresponding deliberative and motivational *mental states*. In other words, desires, wishes, and interests necessarily come *prior* to justifications, and the reverse is impossible such that talking about whether desires, wishes, or interests are themselves justified is incoherent.

¹²³ Raz 3

¹²⁴ Raz 4

Externalism avoids all of this muddling, because the idea that reasons could apply to us independently of our deliberative/motivational mental states not only implies that the identity of reasons is *also* independent of (makes no reference to) those same mental states (thereby keep *having* and *being* separate). If *r* can *be* a reason without presupposing a necessarily antecedent deliberative/motivational mental state, then that means that we can be under obligations independently of our choice-architectures (thereby avoiding the second muddled issue).

3.5: An Externalist Account of Value

In a short book review titled “The Unity of the Normative,” Tim Scanlon references a typical internalist understanding of “good” by Paul Ziff, in which “good” is analyzed as “answering to certain interests.”¹²⁵ Under standard internalist doctrine, reasons, goods, etc. stand in an essential relation to an agent’s motivational states such that the *absence* of those motivational states implies that the reason/goodness/etc. is not actually a reason or a good. All motivational states are necessarily *prior* to normative facts. “Escapability” is clearly a natural feature of the classic formulation of internalism, for reasons/goods cease to apply/exist as soon as we stop having the prerequisite desires – we are allowed too much responsibility for what reasons we actually have and what goods actually exist.

The claim that something is valuable can then be understood in externalist terms as a certain *worthiness* for particular actions, desires, etc., rather than a claim that they actually *are* desired or action-motivating: two things which we must not conflate.¹²⁶ Such a distinction is only possible if externalism is correct, for it requires a particular explanatory direction between a thing’s worthiness and the attitudes/actions that we take towards it,

¹²⁵ Scanlon, “The Unity of the Normative” 445

¹²⁶ Platts, *Ways of Meaning: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Language* 256

viz. that we desire it *because* it is worthy of our desire, and not the reverse, which would involve the desire being *prior* to the normative fact (as described above).

4.0: Conclusion

It is highly plausible that sentences such as “x is better than y” are not mere expressions of attitude, but that they may be cognitive and resist disentanglement into discrete “objective fact” and “subjective value” components, in addition to the value that they name being a real part of the world. That is not to say, however, that it is easy to determine the truth-value of such sentences, nor is it to say that there necessarily exist any such instantiations. In order to determine whether one food really is better than another, we require a theory of food criticism. Nevertheless, it is a clear victory for the project at hand that normative judgments (such as the ones that a food critical theory would) are cognitive ones.

Appendix to Chapter Three: A Critique of Kant’s Aesthetics

Hitherto I have drawn more than significantly from Kant’s work, but at this point I must distance myself. What I intend to do in this section is show why Kant’s aesthetics (or any Kantian aesthetics in general) do not allow for normativity, and therefore why Kant cannot adequately serve our purposes, at least not without several adjustments to the central concept (or *indeterminate idea*, rather) of “beauty.” Kantian moral theory is objectivist because in giving us an account of what morality consists in, we are then able to make moral judgments that are either true or false (in principle). Of course, Kant notes that introspection will never yield knowledge of our maxims, given that the autonomous will is

essentially noumenal and therefore not a possible object of experience or thought.¹²⁷ While this is an epistemological inconvenience, however, it does not impugn the objectivity of morality.

Kant's aesthetics, meanwhile, seems to be at best quasi-objective. In the first Critique, Kant demonstrates that underlying all judgments are concepts, such that the former are made possible in the first place only through having the latter. However, "beauty," for Kant, is nothing but an indeterminate idea, and judgments of taste are explicitly non-cognitive.¹²⁸ This raises the question of how judgments of taste are even possible, which Kant addresses in the antinomy of taste.¹²⁹ Nevertheless, his answer fails to satisfy those with stronger objectivist commitments. In concluding that judgments of taste and the idea of beauty refer "beyond the horizon of the sensible" to the noumenal world, we are left with the strangeness of judgments that seemingly cannot be mistaken; either we successfully judge an object to be beautiful, or we fail to make a judgment of taste at all. Stranger still, however, is that even successful judgments of taste, being non-cognitive, cannot be "knowledge-functional."

This is problematic for the intended normativity of the aesthetic. I have argued that normative facts are intelligible through and only through justificatory reasons. If Kant's aesthetics does not allow for reason-giving, then it would be at best unintelligibly normative (something that I have also argued is absurd), notwithstanding the non-cognitivism of the subsequent aesthetic judgments and normative claims.

¹²⁷ Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* 454

¹²⁸ Kant, *Critique of Judgment* 290, 340-341

¹²⁹ *Ibid* §56-57

Donald Crawford argues that despite the above strangeness, it is still possible to give an account of disagreement within Kant's framework. Disagreement is resolved through the comparison of reasons for judgment, and in doing so we might realize that our judgments were "impure," which is to say, failed to be executed in strict conformity to the formal necessary criteria of all judgments of taste, i.e. disinterestedness, contemplative and not determining, etc.¹³⁰ However, if the disagreement were capable of being resolved in this way, then it would have to be only *prima facie* disagreement. If a judgment of taste is just one executed in strict conformity to the criteria just listed, then impure judgments of taste are actually not judgments of taste at all. Disagreement, rather, seems to presuppose that two contradictory judgments of the same kind are being made.

Crawford would reply to this objection in two ways. He would first point out that we cannot have conclusive reasons (or *proof*) of our judgments of taste – a fact that follows from "beauty" being a mere indeterminate idea. Secondly, we *can*, in fact, give criteria for an object to be beautiful, but only criteria limited by the above inconclusiveness imposed by the necessary indemonstrability of judgments of taste. Those criteria would be, for example, whether or not the object in question is formally purposive. These two considerations are supposed to come together to show that two people can make disagreeing judgments of taste which can only be *partly* reconciled, but reconciled nevertheless by mutually endeavoring to identify whether an object is formally purposive. I believe that this reply fails, because if a person were already in the proper mental state to successfully execute a pure judgment of taste, then those discrepancies could not arise. The reason that disinterestedness is imperative for any judgment of taste, for example, is

¹³⁰ Crawford 507

because seeing objects as purposive would be impossible otherwise; the two really are just flip-sides of the same coin.

The original problem thus remains unsolved: we cannot give an account of a judgment of taste being in correct (in the sense that it is both true *and* justifiable) except by appealing to the very identity of what a judgment of taste is. Since any normative framework requires the possibility that justificatory reasons can be provided, it seems that Kant's aesthetics is therefore an inadequate ground for the type of normative aesthetics that I am concerned with. While I am not claiming that Kant is necessarily *wrong*, we must move on to a different theoretical framework that will allow for normative outputs.¹³¹

There exists further and perhaps more trenchant reason why Kant's aesthetics simply cannot accommodate normative claims – better yet, a reason with which Kant would arguably agree. He notes that the beautiful, “which is judged on the ground of mere formal purposiveness, i.e. a purposiveness without a purpose, is wholly independent of the representation of the good,” something that presupposes *objective* purposiveness.¹³² Any normative system, even Kant's, would make some essential reference to goods or ends or both, and so on that front Kant's aesthetics is automatically excluded on grounds of incompatibility.

I would like to pose the following question: at what point does the dichotomy between morality and teleology (as Kant understands them) break down and why? Kant writes in the *Grounding* that “an absolutely good will, whose principle must be a

¹³¹ The extent to which Kant's aesthetics is normative is a point of controversy among his interpreters; something that often hinges on how “subjective universal validity” is analyzed. However, the normativity discussed by Ginsborg and Ameriks is that of logical necessity, and not the kind that I am concerned with. Rogerson argues that the normativity of the subjectively universally valid *is*, in fact, moral, but his reading of Kant is shallow, naïve, and uninformed such that we ought to dismiss it.

¹³² Kant, *Critique of Judgment* 226

categorical imperative, [...] will contain merely the form of willing; and indeed that form is autonomy.”¹³³ Ted Cohen, in his short but insightful piece “Why Beauty is a Symbol of Morality” observes that because autonomy requires of the good will (or, rather, requires of itself) that it only takes ends which are not external to itself (upon pain of *heteronomy*), it can and must only take *itself* as an end.¹³⁴ Meanwhile, Kant writes in the *Critique of Judgment* that objective purposiveness (teleology), insofar as the end is external it is called *utility*, and insofar as it is internal it is called *perfection*.¹³⁵ Internal objective purposiveness (perfection) clearly *resembles* (if only partly) the free will, for it would have an end *internally* rather than bearing them from an external source. Kant elaborates upon the concept of (teleological) perfection in the following way: it is “the agreement of the manifold in a thing with an inner character belonging to it as its end,”¹³⁶ and then more lucidly, “so in order to represent an objective purposiveness [perfection] in a thing we must first have a concept of *what sort of thing it is to be*.”¹³⁷ I believe that there is adequate support for the notion that autonomy/morality and perfection/teleology break down at this very point.

However, Kant (1) insists at CJ 227 that objective purposiveness is not (empirically) knowable, (2) concludes at CJ 345-346 that judgments of perfection (as a way of escaping the antinomy of taste) would be “otiose and nugatory” as a function of them making essential reference to something supersensible, (3) says at CJ 360-361 that judgments of objective purposiveness can only be *reflective* (not determining) and even

¹³³ Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* 444

¹³⁴ Cohen 229

¹³⁵ Kant, *Critique of Judgment* 227

¹³⁶ *Ibid* 311

¹³⁷ *Ibid* 227

then only for the purpose of rendering the manifold of nature intelligible *by analogy* when our purely mechanical explanations fail us, (4) asserts the very concept of perfection to be “empty and indeterminate,”¹³⁸ and finally (5) argues that “to suppose a formal *objective* purposiveness that is yet devoid of any purpose, i.e. the mere form of a *perfection* (apart from any matter or *concept* of that with which it is to agree, even though there was the mere general idea of a conformity to law) is a veritable contradiction.”¹³⁹

The weakest point of the five above is (5), and pressing it could be fruitful. The thought that Kant’s framework of *Zweckmässigkeit* could be reconstructed through emergent aesthetic conditions of satisfaction (and that therewith we could make “objective, formal purposiveness” more plausible) is certainly an exciting one, for then the locus of the aesthetic domain would be the nexus of the moral and teleological domains. However, at the moment it is mere fanciful speculation – a lowly embryo with an uncertain and not necessarily promising future.

¹³⁸ Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* 443

¹³⁹ Kant, *Critique of Judgment* 228

CHAPTER FOUR: ON NORMATIVE AESTHETIC JUDGMENTS

0.1: Introduction

For Kant, aesthetic judgments are only quasi-objective. They do not admit of reason-giving, and instead of being cognitive (based on intuition), they are non-cognitive and based on *feeling*. The resulting “subjective universal validity” of aesthetic judgments (as opposed to genuine objectivity) gives the aesthetic domain a distinct *irrational*¹⁴⁰ character, and consequently reveals just how much Kant has actually conceded to Hume. However, I argue that this concession is unwarranted. Hume’s famous declaration that “goodness is determined merely by pleasure,” the ultimate ground of this irrational, “internalist aesthetics,” is mistaken.¹⁴¹ I am willing to grant that certain kinds of pleasure, as well as certain motivational states such as desire all figure into aesthetics in some way (for example, part of what it is to understand that something is beautiful is to see that it is worthy of desire, as well as to be disposed to *enjoy* it in addition to any mere gratification that it brings). However, Hume, Kant, and unfortunately many others have it backwards – these allegedly non-cognitive mental states are not necessarily independent of rationality.

The rationality of aesthetics is just this: there are any number of ways that we could take pleasure in an object (or arrangement of objects), but only one of these ways is compatible with aesthetic facts being objective and aesthetic judgments being cognitive. One can desire an object, or at least hold it to be valuable, because it satisfies a preexisting interest or need. But in these cases, any subsequent behavior with regards to that object would be grounded in that object’s *utility*. Furthermore, any pretending normative

¹⁴⁰ I mean “irrational” in the sense that reasons do not have any role to play; “feelings” are neither truth-functional nor are they sensitive to reasons.

¹⁴¹ Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* III.I.2

judgments of that object (whether x is better or worse than y , whether a pairs better with x than b , etc.) would be contingent upon those interests, needs, or desires. In other words, those aesthetic normative facts would not be facts at all, for they would be *escapable*. Such escapability is incompatible with aesthetic normative objectivity, because objectivity requires that whatever obtains does so independently of our beliefs or interests. Perhaps this was Kant's point in maintaining that judgments of beauty must necessarily be disinterested. (However, though surely aesthetic judgments cannot have interests or desires at their heart in the way described above, we must not conclude that desire and aesthetic judgments must be separated by an insurmountable barrier).

Another way that we could hold an object (or arrangement of objects) to be aesthetically valuable demonstrates the rationality of aesthetic judgments: that we judge an object to possess a certain *dignity*, and consequently judge it to be *worthy* of our desire. Any pleasure we take in the object, or for that matter, any aesthetically-minded behavior with regards to that object, is grounded in (rather than prior to) our rational engagement of that object. On this *externalist* account, aesthetic facts are not determined by our beliefs or interest. They are properly objective, and it is *possible* that we might be in proper agreement regarding such facts (though obviously not assured). Furthermore, any aesthetic normative facts that obtain must do so *for all rational beings regardless of their interests*. In other words, we cannot deny that x actually should be paired with y rather than z simply because we like the taste of xz better than xy . Aesthetic normativity must be inescapable in this manner.

The successful completion of the following tasks are necessary to support the picture I have developed above: firstly, I will explain how the aesthetic is normative.

Secondly, I will clarify the nature of aesthetic judgments. Thirdly, I will propose a metaphysics under which aesthetic judgments are possible.

1.0 Aesthetic Normativity

The idea that the aesthetic is normative should seem intuitively correct to us. Take the ordinary, mundane case of painting my kitchen. If I were to paint the walls black, would I have made a mistake? Or perhaps we would at least be willing to concede that there could have been a better, more appropriate color, given the purposes that a kitchen has, and given what we expect from/in a kitchen environment? Other examples: “this soup is too salty.” “This music is out of tune.” These claims are not claims about preferences, as some could object: to say that “this soup is too salty” is partly to express a preference for a particular salt-level, and also to say ‘yuk’ to the actual level of salt. I do not want to deny that the sentence that we are analyzing *cannot* mean this when uttered by any given person, but rather, it alternatively could express the idea that the soup is *supposed* to taste a certain way, and the way that the soup actually tastes is wrong (not morally, but rather, aesthetically). Furthermore, it seems unproblematic that the sentence “this soup is too salty” could be expressing any combination of the above propositions or attitudes (‘yuk’). Similarly, the sentence “this music is out of tune” could express the idea that the way it sounds causes me some displeasure, but it *also* could express the thought that it is *supposed* to sound a certain way, and the way it actually sounds is (aesthetically) wrong because it fails to achieve this. Obviously, what the sentence actually means in any given utterance is an empirical question, but the point that I am making, that aesthetics is a normative domain, is already one that appears in multiple, acceptable, intuitive ways in our daily life.

There is another class of examples that are even stronger, but also reveal something important about the phenomenology of aesthetic normativity. In section two of *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Hume discusses the famous and controversial phenomenon of “the missing shade of blue.” (Important to note is that I am using Hume’s example for an entirely different purpose than Hume himself. He wants to demonstrate the plausibility of a non-experiential source of ideas, whereas I am intending to motivate the thought that we observe aesthetic conditions in a normative way). When all the shades of the color blue are put in chromatic order and then one is removed, we are able to make three important observations.¹⁴² Firstly, that there is a color absent; a color that is *supposed* to be there! The fact that we can detect the *absence* of a color seems to presuppose the normativity in question, because it would not make sense to say that something is really absent if its presence wasn’t required (or at least implied) in the first place. Secondly, we can easily identify the relevant or *salient* features of the absent color which make it demanded in the first place (in this case, its hue).¹⁴³ Thirdly, we intuitively and naturally understand aesthetic normativity in terms of success conditions (I will come back to this point in §3). All that is required to understand how a given set of objects ought to be arranged (relative to the aesthetically salient features of those objects) is the perception of the actual, incorrect arrangement; we perceive states of affairs and infer “ideal” versions thereof, which we use like an overlay-measure.

¹⁴² There are a plethora of variations we could make to this example. Instead of there being a missing shade of blue, we could have a color that doesn’t belong, such as lime-green. Alternatively, imagine a line of pencils of equal length and sharpness, aligned so that all but one are parallel to each other.

¹⁴³ A feature is normatively salient if it could stand in a capacity to the particulars of the normative demand of the same conceptual system. I mean to exclude, through this wording, the possibility of (for example) colors demanding certain shapes or pitches demanding certain flavors; demands do not cross kind-boundaries.

1.1: The Autonomy of Normative Aesthetics

There remains one important observation that the example of the chromatic ordering of colors allows us to make. If we grant that “hue h is supposed to be present at location l ” (and I see no reason why we should not), then to what source does this normative fact owe its truth? If we were to explain hue h ’s absence by appealing to our expectations, then we would relapse into normative internalism (for the fact that h is missing is due to our unsatisfied desire that it be present). Were that to be the case, the normative facts would not be normative at all, but rather, authoritarian and subjective, for the valid predication of “good” or “correct” would entirely dependent upon the antecedent interests of the individual or a popular majority.¹⁴⁴

Let us turn away from combinations of colors to combinations of tastes. We could offer different criteria of correctness, such as “the best food is that which is *prepared* best,” or “the best food is that which is most authentic to its cuisine of origin,” etc. However, these food-critical theories, while not strictly subjectivist, still *impose* a standard upon the evaluand that answers to our expectations or interests. To say that a dish is prepared mistakenly is not subjective, but an objective measure of quality does not necessarily follow. Furthermore, there is the question of how we are to choose between these different possibilities without simply begging the question.

These considerations are intended to motivate the following thought: the justification for the normative fact that (returning to chromatic colors) hue h is required at location l is “internal” to the object, and makes no reference to our desires, demands, or expectations. Such a feature is necessary if these normative facts are to be objective. In

¹⁴⁴ Paul Ziff holds such a view of “good.” See Scanlon’s “The Unity of the Normative” 445

other words, aesthetic normativity is *autonomous* in the following sense: its correctness or incorrectness is determined purely by the relationships between its own features or components, and thus any justification for any particular aesthetic feature's presence or position cannot come from an external source. Thus, there is a sense in which a correct arrangement of objects is *self-justifying*.

The autonomy of aesthetic normativity allows us an escape from being forced to arbitrarily choose one externally assigned theory over another and thereby beg the question. Since the justification comes from the aesthetic object itself, that justification will, and indeed *must* obtain in all circumstances insofar as that aesthetic object remains itself. (The idea that aesthetic objects' normativity is autonomous in the sense that they justify *themselves* is puzzling; an explanation of how this is possible will be provided in §3).

1.2: Normative Hierarchy

Though not an objection to aesthetic normativity *per se*, one could make trouble by arguing that while it is certainly true that we use normative aesthetic language in everyday life, such language misleads us as to the *importance* of this specific normativity, especially when compared to the moral domain. This point appeals to the falsity of the *parity thesis*.

The central claim of the parity thesis, according to Richard Yetter Chappell, is that “any normative status that's applicable to acts can just as well apply to other possible objects of evaluation, from eye colours to climates.”¹⁴⁵ This means that “the normative domain is symmetrically structured, such that actions and eye colours are on a par when it comes to the ways in which we normatively assess them.”¹⁴⁶ The denial of the parity thesis

¹⁴⁵ Chappell 684

¹⁴⁶ Ibid 691

therefore is just the claim that not all normativity is equal because of normative asymmetry.

Chappell is correct in rejecting the parity thesis. However, I believe that he not only does so for the wrong reasons, but he also overestimates the implications of this rejection. Firstly, undergirding Chappell's argument is the thought that the principal structural seat of the normative domain is exhausted by forms of "rational output" such as action or belief, or generally, anything that has, in principle, some kind of rational architecture.¹⁴⁷ He explains that "one cannot possess one's eye colour for (normative) reasons, the way that one can believe, desire, and act for reasons. [...] While we can evaluate anything, against any arbitrary set of 'alternatives,' there is a special kind of normative assessment of rationally available actions that has no analogue for other (mere) evaluands."¹⁴⁸ This echoes a point that Scanlon makes: "it makes no sense to demand a reason in this sense [a consideration that counts in favor of something] for an event in the world that is unconnected with any intentional subject."¹⁴⁹ However, this cannot be correct; for something to have some rational architecture presupposes that it is subject to justificatory reasons, such that the latter is more fundamental than the former. If all that is minimally required for normativity is the possibility of *justification*, then there can be no question that the moral and the aesthetic are both normative in rational ways.

Secondly, if the moral and the aesthetic are not on a "normative par," that does not imply that one will always take "normative priority" over the other. Rather than there being "greater" and "lesser" normative domains, all that we really need to see is that the

¹⁴⁷ Ibid 694

¹⁴⁸ Ibid 695

¹⁴⁹ Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* 18

normativities are to some degree incommensurate. Aesthetic normativity is not meaningful for us in the same way as moral normativity (as will be discussed in §2), so the possibility of a clear normative hierarchy seems suspect.

The deeper question raised by Chappell's discussion of the parity thesis is whether the aesthetic and moral normative domains ever conflict or take priority in certain circumstances. To this, I am afraid that I have no answer (or at least none to which I am committed) other than that it doesn't seem self-contradictory upon a cursory consideration. Ted Cohen notes that there is a weak precedent for reducing aesthetics to morality,¹⁵⁰ while Carolyn Korsmeyer discusses whether morality and aesthetics can "collide" in the context of food.¹⁵¹ Despite the richness of this controversy, it lies outside of the ambit of the immediate project. All that is of concern for us at this time is that even if the normative domain is asymmetrical, this does not necessarily deflate the normative significance of the aesthetic.

2.0 Aesthetic Judgments

There are three fundamental features of aesthetic judgments that must be recognized. Firstly, they are objective. Secondly, they are normative. Thirdly, I contend that they involve the recognition of *dignity* or *worthiness* in their objects.¹⁵² This latter feature is of critical importance in understanding how aesthetic normativity is meaningful for us. There is a sense in which aesthetic norms are not *for* us (to better see this, compare

¹⁵⁰ Cohen 221

¹⁵¹ See Korsmeyer's "Ethical Gourmandism"

¹⁵² Despite the fact that these terms often appear together, resist any urge to treat them as inseparable. A thing is "worthy" if there exist reasons to desire it, while a thing is "dignified" if there are reasons to respect it (which involves not *merely* treating dignified things as means to an end).

the following normative claims: “one ought to not engage in exploitative practices.” “taste x ought to be present whenever taste y is present”). Because we are not the recipients, it would be absurd to suggest that we could somehow fail the normative claim that “ x ought to be present whenever y and z are also present.” The recognition of dignity and worthiness means that we are nevertheless affected by aesthetic normativity even if we are not necessarily the primary recipients of normative aesthetic claims.

2.1: The Faculty of Taste

McDowell understands “virtue” to be a perceptual capacity specifically sensitive to salient moral features of a given situation.¹⁵³ Furthermore, because virtue is a perceptual capacity, judgments of morality presuppose the exercise of a clear concept of morality. To have the concept of morality is not only, according to McDowell, to be able to discern the morally salient features of situations, but it is also tantamount to understanding how to respond to those observations.

I understand “Taste” (not to be confused with the “taste” of food) in precisely the same way: it is a perceptual capacity specifically sensitive to aesthetic conditions of satisfaction.¹⁵⁴ Being a perceptual capacity, Taste can be cultivated and honed. It is also capable of being mistaken, as well as influenced by external conditions (there are less than ideal conditions for exercising our Taste), which was discussed in chapter two. To have a well-developed faculty of Taste is to have a clear concept of beauty. To have this concept is to be able to judge successfully in accordance with it. To judge something as beautiful is, at least in part, to *recognize* the object of judgment as possessing a kind of dignity. The

¹⁵³ See McDowell’s paper “Virtue and Reason”

¹⁵⁴ In order to further distinguish the different senses of “taste,” “Taste” with a capital “t” will always refer to the faculty, while any lowercase “t” will refer to the tastes of food or the act of tasting (gustation).

recognition of dignity is to be disposed to behave in certain ways towards the dignified thing (whether object or person). Furthermore, because the concept of beauty (which underlies aesthetic sensibility) and the capacity for intentional action cannot be disentangled, it follows that the only beings capable of having the concept of beauty are those who are also rational agents.

The specific kinds of behavior to which a person with strong faculty of taste is disposed are functions of the necessary recognition of dignity. There are many conceivable kinds of action that take the recognition of dignity as their maxim, such as engaging in care-behavior like maintenance and cultivation, or simply treating dignified objects with respect. Perhaps most significant for us, however, is *desire*.

Given our normative externalism, we can say that dignified objects are *worthy* of (for example) being desired. A “desirability characterization” of such an object would make no reference to the subjective interests of any agent.¹⁵⁵ A person with a strong faculty of Taste is indeed predisposed to desire objects she judges to be beautiful, but the desire is *disinterested*: the desire is not grounded in the object’s utility, but rather, its *dignity*; it is desirable for its own sake, and thus it is worthy of the desire of *all* rational beings.¹⁵⁶ This does not imply that all rational beings *will* desire it.¹⁵⁷ However, if someone did not recognize the dignity of the object (which is the only thing referenced by its desirability characterization), they would nevertheless be in error, for its dignity must be objective.

However, this leaves us with an apparent puzzle: if at least part of what it is to make an aesthetic judgment is to recognize the object of judgment as possessing a kind of dignity

¹⁵⁵ Platts, *Moral Realities* 63

¹⁵⁶ For only rational beings are capable of desiring *for* reasons.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid* 69

or worthiness, and if that recognition consists in being disposed to behave in certain ways with regards to that object, then there would seem to be some inseparability of our cognitive judgments and our non-cognitive motivational states; the ghost of internalism has returned to haunt us. This puzzle clearly demands a solution given our other commitments.

2.2: The Rationality of Desire

The relationship between cognitive and motivational states is complex. More specifically, the relationship between reason and desire is complex. Internalism is attractive because it's intuitive that all action requires motivation. However, its appealing simplicity is actually under-sophistication: internalism requires that *all* motivation be antecedent to the reasons that exist, such that it is incoherent to say “you ought to have reason *r*” (see chapter three). The only reasons that we could have, even the ones that we are unaware of, are the ones that are subordinate to our motivational states: to suggest that we ought to have reason *r* (but don't) would also be to assert that we ought to have Motivational State *m*, but the possibility of such an assertion's coherence would require that motivational states are *not* prior to reasons. Since the possibility of such an assertion seems certain to me, I feel justified in rejecting internalism.

McDowell neatly points out that we should be careful when drawing the line between internalism and externalism; while internalism requires that motivation be prior to reason, externalism needn't require reason's total autonomy from motivation, such that “friction” between the two is impossible.¹⁵⁸ Rather, we should understand external reasons to be ones that, when considered “aright,” give rise to the appropriate sorts of

¹⁵⁸ McDowell, “Might There Be External Reasons?,” 111

motivations.¹⁵⁹ This way we can make sense of the “ghost” of internalism discussed above without actually resurrecting it.

The moral (or just generally, normative) realist needs the truth-conditions of normative claims to be independent from our subjective interests or psychological states. However, normative claims often purport to give reasons (or at least pro-attitudes) for action, belief, etc., which themselves (the actions or whatever) would seem to presuppose the relevant motivational states. This will not lead us back to internalism, at least necessarily, if we can give an externalist account of motivation. While pains (for example) motivate us because of their unique phenomenology, desires motivate us because they involve viewing the object of desire as *desirable*. Internalism implies that an object's desirability is solely a product of whether or not it is actually desired. Externalism, meanwhile, entertains the antithesis: something can be desirable whether or not it is in fact desired.¹⁶⁰

Normative realism is compatible with the thesis that all action requires some underlying motivational state if we hold that the recognition of desirability, a rational and cognitive process, can be prior to the motivational states which then give rise to action. Platts observes that “the logical independence of the desirability remains to give the motivation in the absence of any distinctive phenomenological quality. That it is the view of the content of the desire rather than its phenomenological quality that constitutes its motivating force still serves to yield an argument that desirability is prior to desire; it is merely that recognition of desirability brings desire with it.”¹⁶¹ When we desire, we desire

¹⁵⁹ Ibid 98

¹⁶⁰ Platts, “Moral Reality and the End of Desire,” §3, esp. 76-77

¹⁶¹ Ibid 77

that ‘p.’ We desire things under certain descriptions. This connects with McDowell’s thought that external reasons, when considered “aright,” give rise to motivation.¹⁶² Platts writes that “to recognize the obtaining of, say, some desirable moral feature in a possible state of affairs is to desire the obtaining of that state of affairs (though not just that). One cannot see the loyal, the courageous, and so forth AS the loyal, the courageous, etc., without desiring them.”¹⁶³ McDowell expresses a similar thought in “Virtue and Reason” when he describes virtues to be perceptual capacities whose underlying concepts not only allow an agent to make moral judgments, but whose possession sufficiently disposes the agent to behave accordingly. To truly and sincerely judge something as immoral is also to avoid it and discourage others with regards to it.

The only way aesthetic normativity can be inescapable is if the desirability characterizations make no reference to the agent’s motivational states, in which case, one has a reason to desire the object not because of its *utility*, but for its own sake (for its dignity).

2.3: The Connection between Dignity and Desirability

The recognition of the dignity of an object (and consequently the disposition to behave towards that object with a special respect of this dignity) arises from considering it “aright.” (What exactly it is to be considered “aright” will be explored in §3). Part of what it is for an object to be dignified is for it to be worthy of our desire. But for an object to be truly *worthy* of our desire and not *merely desired* (two things that are often conflated) is for it to be desirable independent of our interests – in other words, it is to be desired for its

¹⁶² McDowell inherited this thought from Williams.

¹⁶³ Ibid 80

own sake, and not *merely* for its utility.¹⁶⁴ Clearly, to desire an object because of its utility does not require the recognition of any dignity.

If there is any reason that an object could be desirable for its own sake (such that its desirability is never contingent, i.e. it is *always* desirable in this way), then this reason must be that its aesthetic normativity is autonomous in the way discussed above. It is out of this autonomy that an object's dignity arises, and hence its desirability (or rather, the possibility of desiring it for its own sake). In other words, the *only* way that an object could be desired disinterestedly (in which its desirability characterizations make no reference to our interests) is for it to be dignified, and this dignity is only possessed on the condition that the aesthetic object's normativity be self-justifying (that it be autonomous). But this suitability for disinterested desire (and therefore the desire of all rational beings) is precisely what it is to be worthy of desire. Therefore, the link between dignity and worthiness of aesthetic objects is that a necessary condition for being worthy of the desire of all rational beings is dignity (and thus autonomy), and a sufficient condition for an object's dignity is that it can be desired disinterestedly. To actually desire an aesthetic object for its own sake and not merely as a means to an end requires, at least in part, the recognition of the object's dignity.

¹⁶⁴ The "merely" here is doing quite a lot of work. I am suggesting that one could, in principle, desire an object because of its utility, *but at the same time* recognize it as desirable for its own sake, without contradiction. The same thought is expressed when Kant entreats us in the second formulation of the categorical imperative to always regard humanity, whether in one's own person or in the person of another, as an end and never *merely* as a means (*Grounding* 429)

3.0: Metaphysics of Aesthetics

Many philosophers are willing to grant that tastes are real. Some are also prepared to defend the claim that we can perceive them successfully. Nevertheless, food is still dismissed as a possible aesthetic object on the grounds that tastes (and smells) are without structure. Monroe Beardsley writes:

“We cannot, at least not yet, arrange [tastes and smells] in series, and so we cannot work out constructive principles to make larger works out of them. [...] there does not seem to be enough order within these sensory fields to construct aesthetic objects with balance, climax, development, or pattern.”¹⁶⁵

Besides the minimal structure that tastes have as a result of being possible objects of experience (see chapter two), appealing to emergent aesthetic conditions of satisfaction allows for tastes to have structure in Beardsley’s more specific sense.

It is a very strange claim that we perceive conditions of satisfaction. However, there more than enough examples present in ordinary life to support this claim (such as the chromatic colors). Consider as well the following, hopefully familiar cases: a single book on a bookshelf is upside-down. The traffic-lines on a road were painted over a manhole cover which was later rotated 35° off-center. A tiled floor was installed sloppily and many of the tiles don’t conform to the pattern. A cake is cut such that the vertex of the incisions is actually three centimeters away from the cake’s geometrical center. If one willing to grant these examples in which conditions of satisfaction are easily perceivable, then you should also be willing to accept the following: an F-natural in the key of E Major. The taste of tequila in a martini. Wearing 42R suit-jacket when you’re only 36R.

¹⁶⁵ Beardsley 99

The question is not *whether* we in fact perceive conditions of aesthetic satisfaction, but rather, how this phenomenon is possible in the first place. Firstly, we should not be thinking of these conditions as *components* of their objects. We also cannot think of them as metaphysically independent of their objects. The correct approach, I believe, is to understand them as *emergent*: they appear systemically within sufficiently complex systems.

Secondly, we should understand these emergent conditions of satisfaction as semantic rather than ontological. Conditions of satisfaction are not really distinct properties, but are “caused by and realized in” the actual properties and relations of any given object or arrangement of objects. A helpful analogy could be drawn between Searle’s discussion of the raising of his arm.¹⁶⁶ We would not want to say that the raising of one’s arm and the chemical reactions within one’s muscles were ontologically distinct. Rather, there was only one event, but we can describe this event in different ways, such that the former (the arm being raised) is “realized in” the latter (the chemical reactions). I contend that aesthetic conditions of satisfaction are analogous.

Eddy Zemach argues for a similar position in *Real Beauty*. Aesthetic properties, for Zemach, supervene upon non-aesthetic properties because we cannot describe one in terms of the other without losing something essential; they are fundamental and non-reducible. However Zemach claims (mistakenly, I think) that this supervenience owes its reality to the fact that we observe non-aesthetic features of objects “through a special medium: desire.”¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ Searle 268

¹⁶⁷ Zemach 95

Zemach's claim has distinct normative internalist commitments: presumably we are only capable of perceiving that something is beautiful if we have a particular antecedent desire or interest, and an object could be both beautiful and *not* beautiful solely because of what motivational and appetitive states the perceivers were in. Zemach acknowledges that this has an "irrealistic flavor,"¹⁶⁸ and continues to further reveal his internalism by claiming that "a mind that has no interests... cannot see things aesthetically," and "X is lovely only if we love it and desire to have X (in some way)."¹⁶⁹ I have already dismissed internalism as confused, and so because of this I also reject Zemach's position. The thought that objects can have emergent conditions of aesthetic satisfaction is entirely consistent with normative externalism, and we need not posit a special necessary relation between the objects and our mental states in order to justify their existence; such a maneuver implicitly points to some form of absolute realism, which was rejected in chapter one.

If we accept that aesthetic conditions of satisfaction emerge from the properties of their objects, then we can use a special language to describe how the satisfaction-conditions of different objects interact. For example, it is not nonsense to describe two flavors as agreeing, or a cluster of three pitches to be discordant. Our special vocabulary includes members such as "harmony," "unity," "coherence," "compatibility," "consistency," etc., as well as their antonyms, synonyms, and hyponyms. We can even speak of certain arrangements of objects "implying" other objects, such as in the case of the chromatic colors, or cleverly used negative-spaces. Something is "implied" if it would make an arrangement a unified or complete whole, and that whole is coherent if there are no

¹⁶⁸ Ibid

¹⁶⁹ Ibid 103-104

emergent conditions of satisfaction that are unsatisfied.¹⁷⁰ Consider the traditional Japanese aesthetic style of *wabi-sabi*. It is able to successfully conjure ideas of vacuums, asymmetrically, incompleteness, and imperfection though the judicious yet graceful exploitation of emergent conditions of satisfaction. We do not merely *feel* a sense of tranquil emptiness when observing a *wabi-sabi* temple, but we actually perceive the negative-space where a missing “puzzle-piece” is implied to be.

It is also clear that some objects can be aesthetically contradictory or at least inconsistent if their emergent conditions of satisfaction do not allow mutual fulfillment – such arrangements we call ugly.

3.1: The Grounds of Dignity

In the same way that we provide desirability characterizations, we could provide “dignity characterizations” – descriptions of the object in light of which it possesses its dignity. (Of course, because aesthetic desirability is only possible (so I have argued) in light of an object’s dignity, such a “dignity characterization” would really be an “*aesthetic* desirability characterization”). These dignity (or aesthetic desirability) characterizations would resemble the justification of an aesthetic object’s normativity, which I argued cannot be done by an appeal to outside expectations imposed upon the object. The justification for the presence or omission of any particular aesthetic feature from a whole cannot come from an external source, for if it were to, then its normativity would not be objective. If an aesthetic object is autonomously normative (in this sense), then it is also worthy of our desire (and other “respect-behaviors”) independently of any actual desire (or respect-

¹⁷⁰ “Implied” is in “scare quotes” because there is no implication in the literal sense. Rather, for something to be implied requires the possibility that we could perceive its absence from a whole. This language is a modification of Beardsley’s discussion of wholes, parts, and unity. See Beardsley 191-195

behaviors), for the possibility of these behaviors presuppose that the object need not be linked to interests. But to be worthy of this kind of behavior is precisely what it is to be dignified.

A particular arrangement of two objects is aesthetically normative (or justified) if and only if the emergent conditions of satisfaction of one of the objects are satisfied by the salient features possessed by the other object and vice-versa (they are *harmonious*). This is the way in which an aesthetic object is “self-justifying,” for none of its parts could be absent without that absence being clearly perceivable, and therefore presupposing that such presence is actually “implied.” Thus, a truly beautiful object, on my view, has emergent conditions of satisfaction which effectively are satisfied by itself. Furthermore, only objects that possess such inner harmony can be worthy of the desire of all rational beings, for only such objects satisfy the conditions for autonomous normativity (and for this reason, the overlap between worthiness of desire and inner harmony occurs *precisely* at the point of inner justification). Beautiful objects make demands or requests (in the sense that they have conditions of satisfaction), and the way that they automatically satisfy these demands simply by being themselves is the basis not only of their aesthetic normative autonomy, but also their dignity and consequently the possibility of taking them as ends in themselves (and not merely as means to ends) in our respect-behaviors and disinterested desire.

PREFACE TO ALL FUTURE FOOD CRITICISM

If the quality of food – its worthiness of our desire and respect, or in other words, its beauty – consists in the perfect harmony of the emergent conditions of satisfaction of its different tastes, then to engage in food criticism is to systematically and methodically identify these instances of harmony and disharmony. James Thurber’s famous cartoon, originally published in *The New Yorker*, reads “It’s a naïve domestic Burgundy without any breeding, but I think you’ll be amused by its presumption.”¹⁷¹ The caption is obviously a lampoon, yet the point is well taken – descriptions of food (or in this case, wine) can (and traditionally have) easily become comically literary and absurd. This is a clear example of food criticism gone wrong.

The parable of “the emperor’s new clothes” is often referenced with regards to the modern practice of food criticism. The claim is that of collective ignorance: all participating members are complete charlatans. However, while perhaps each individual is aware of their own ignorance, they simultaneously believe in the non-ignorance of the others. This results in a haphazard mock-community of “prisoners” trapped in a role, in perilous perpetuity, unable to escape the gridlock for terror of the possible, embarrassing revelation that they had, in fact, been merely pretending. Regardless of this assessment’s truth or falsity, it should bother us no more, for we now have a new, clearer picture of what it is that food criticism aims to do, as well as what is decisive in the accomplishment of that goal.

¹⁷¹ Thurber 338

Rather than making pedantic and loosely-associated observations about the minutia of a taste profile, we should aim to describe the way in which the tastes of food interact in a harmonious narrative. David Williams, wine-writer for the Huffington Post, writes:

“A really good tasting note will also give you a sense of something more elusive: of the wine’s flow and feel, of how the flavours dovetail both with each other and with the wine’s texture, of its context in nature and the world of winemaking. All the things, in fact, that make a wine worth drinking, and, despite the inevitable ridicule, talking and writing about.”¹⁷²

Naturally, sometimes this can be extremely difficult, but this is a problem of application, not of the theory itself. As a consolation, we can always control, at least to some degree, the conditions under which we taste. Furthermore, we can always learn or improve in our capacity to discern these relevant features in the same way that one learns to be a moral person by acquiring virtue through habituation. For example, we might study paradigm cases of good food in order to acquire a sharper concept thereof which can then better direct our criticism. The following examples, I believe, properly prepared and tasted under the right conditions, demonstrate an internal unity from which we can learn: certain kinds of nigari (such as tuna or snapper), coffee and chocolate tart, croissant and orange marmalade, gin and olives, egg yolk and fresh black pepper, etc.

“Good foods are more like rock gardens than paintings”¹⁷³ because of their necessary constitutive harmony and unity – all that is required to destroy the balance and symmetry is to remove one of its parts. Meanwhile, bad foods are ones that are constitutively chaotic and discordant: plain tofu and plain yogurt, lavender and chive, and salted romaine lettuce. Surely there are also some foods that are *neutral*, whose tastes are indifferent towards each other. Perhaps white bread and dried apricot, or cucumber and

¹⁷² Williams “A Cheeky Little Wine Column”

¹⁷³ My deepest gratitude to Dr. Garrett Thomson for this insight

boiled chicken. And what of foods with only one taste? In chapter two, I argued that a taste is a highly complex, multi-aspectual phenomenon, yet it seems at least logically possible that such a food could exist. What, if anything, could we say about them? Perhaps there may be reasons (even aesthetic ones) that make these objects worthy of our desire and respect. However, it is not food criticism, but a different sort of evaluative enterprise that rests upon different principles, possibly including competence, artistry, innovation, etc. Surely there is much more that could be said, but at a later time, and in a different project.

A final note: it should be observed that, because of the nature of normative aesthetic judgments, to engage in food criticism is not *merely* to identify beautiful objects with respect to their tastes. The perceptual capacity that allows us to attend to the tastes of food and see that they are beautiful, ugly, or otherwise, is also the same perceptual capacity whose correct exercise consists in the perception of reasons, whether for desire, action, or other kinds of behaviors. To truly engage in food criticism, then, is inseparable from being a discriminating eater, from refining one's faculty of Taste, and the *pursuit* of what is beautiful with respect to tastes. In other words, food criticism, much like philosophy in general, is not just a knowledge-yielding practice, but also one that informs and guides our everyday lives.

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