

# Wassard Elea Rivista

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VIII<sup>th</sup> Wassard Elea International Symposium:

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## **Bad Taste, Good Taste, and Aesthetic Value**

Alan H. Goldman  
(College of William & Mary)

*Good Taste, Bad Taste.* We may take as a preliminary definition of taste in art, to be amended at our conclusion, that it consists in a general preference for certain kinds of works. Good taste is that which appreciates good or the best works, that which understands and prefers them to lesser works. Bad taste prefers lesser or bad works. Since appreciating an artwork is grasping its aesthetic value, those with good taste appreciate the greater value of the best works, while bad taste blocks the appreciation of the greatest aesthetic value. Because of this relation of taste to aesthetic value, we can use the most plausible account of good and bad taste, or clear examples of each, as a test for a theory of aesthetic value. The operation of good taste should maximize appreciation of aesthetic value as described in the correct theory of such value. And the difference between good taste and bad taste should indicate the nature of such value, missing as the target of bad taste and clearly present by contrast as the target of good taste. Here I will show that the clearest examples of bad and good taste confirm the theory of aesthetic value that I have defended elsewhere.

First, given my view of aesthetic judgment or evaluation, it is necessary to argue briefly that there really is such a thing as good and bad taste, that some tastes in art are really better than others. It might be said that this claim is implicitly part of our very concept of taste, but that is not conclusive, since the concept might not be completely coherent. Or it might be that the attribution of bad taste is simply a move in the war of social classes, a way of distinguishing for themselves those in the elite class. It is easy nevertheless for an objectivist about aesthetic value or a believer in aesthetic principles to give an account of bad taste, but I am neither. In fact I have argued against both objective value and aesthetic principles precisely by appealing to taste. Incurrigible or irreducible differences in taste even among most qualified critics calls into question the objectivity of evaluative judgments.

An objectivist and believer in principles will say that a person with bad taste prefers works that lack real aesthetic value or that violate sound

aesthetic principles. Genuine, or at least most interesting aesthetic principles, would link objective and non-aesthetic properties of works to proper evaluative judgments of them. They would say that if a work has such and such objective or non-aesthetic properties, it must be, or must tend to be, a good work. But, as noted, if disagreements in taste persist at every level of critical sophistication, there can be no such principles. If what is powerful to one critic is strident or grating to another, if what is graceful to one critic is weak or insipid to another, and if there is no way even in principle of settling such disputes, then those properties that underlie these opposed evaluative judgments cannot enter into aesthetic principles. Such principles would contradict one another in evaluative terms.

Nor, in the face of the best explanations for such disagreements can aesthetic value be an objective property of artworks, i.e. independent of subjective evaluative attitudes. If equally sophisticated and knowledgeable critics can and do disagree in these ways, if the best explanations for these disagreements cannot hold that one of the disputants simply gets it wrong, simply misses or wrongly attributes the value that is in the object, then that value cannot be objective. These critics, we said, are equally knowledgeable and attentive to the works. Why, then, would some of them simply miss the value that is simply there? The best explanations in these cases of disagreement will instead appeal precisely to irreducible and incorrigible differences in personal tastes.

It has been argued against this relativist position in regard to aesthetic value that if all disagreement in evaluative judgments of artworks boils down to personal differences in taste, there could be no explanation for why critics who disagree argue for their positions. In arguing for their judgments, they seem to presuppose that they are right and their opponents wrong, that there is an objective fact of the matter whether the object in question has aesthetic value and to what degree. Thus, a more detailed description of disagreement with its ensuing arguments tells against the relativist position rather than supporting it. And critics do argue. They seem to say implicitly that their taste is the correct one, that it enables them to appreciate the value that is really there in the object under dispute.

But the relativist has two replies to this opposing argument from the nature of disagreement in aesthetic evaluations reflecting differences in taste. First, as will be shown just below, it is still possible to make wrong judgments given the relativist claim that some disagreements are faultless. Some others can still be not faultless and simply mistaken, reflecting not ultimate differences in taste, but misapplications of one's own taste. Critics

can argue that their opponents instantiate the grounds on which such mistakes are made, to be described shortly. From the first person point of view, we want to make sure that our evaluations of works are not based on our having missed something of relevance in the works, and so we listen to criticisms that might point to such missed features. If we have missed relevant features of a work, our judgment might not reflect our own taste as preference for objects that have those features.

Second, even when there are no right or wrong positions in the dispute, even when the disagreement is faultless on both sides, there can still be an explanation for why a critic tries to persuade her opponent to share her taste, as exemplified in the particular judgment in dispute. Tribal instincts among humans are very strong, as evidenced all around us these days, and one way to identify members of one's tribe is through shared tastes in art among other areas. We are social animals who need to feel a sense of community with others and need to have our identities confirmed by others. Our identities are defined in large part by our values, aesthetic as well as moral and prudential, and our social needs are fulfilled by shared values that define cultures as well as communities. We need not be elitists in order to want to share taste with others with whom we identify or want to identify. And wanting to share taste involves wanting to convince others to share our judgments when at first we disagree.

Then too, our achieving agreements with our aesthetic judgments contributes to public support and demand for the kinds of works we appreciate, making it more likely that more works of the kinds we enjoy will be made available. Finally, the motive for seeing agreement might be benevolent, as when we argue with family members or friends. We want to share the positive experience or pleasure that we derive from the work. A positive experience that no one shares can be as regrettable as it is exhilarating. None of these motives implies that our judgments must be objectively true or false in order to make it worth arguing about them. We can want to share tastes and experiences toward which our tastes point us without thinking that everyone who does not share our taste is objectively wrong.

Thus, the existence of faultless aesthetic disagreements, even given the arguments that often accompany such disputes, supports a subjectivist and relativist position in regard to aesthetic value, one that recognizes ultimate differences in taste. But if the existence of differences in taste at every level of critical sophistication implies a subjectivist and relativist position in regard to aesthetic value and the lack of aesthetic principles of the most important kind, how can we claim that the taste of some people is better than

that of others? Must the relativist say that it is all a matter of what particular individuals prefer, of what subjective value they find in response to various works? If so, there would be an air of paradox, if not a genuine paradox. For, as noted, our very concept of taste includes the idea that there is both good and bad taste, that some people have better taste than others. How, then, can the appeal to taste show this to be false?

It does not. First, as noted, for all we have said about disagreement among faultless critics, it is still possible for actual observers of artworks to make wrong evaluative judgments about them. They will do so when they violate the standards implicit in their own tastes. This can happen when they are inattentive, fatigued, biased, in the grip of certain emotions, not knowledgeable of the kind of works in question, not capable of the relevant discriminations, i.e. not ideal critics or competent judges in Hume's sense.<sup>1</sup> In deciding whether to spend time attending to certain works, we seek out the opinions of those who generally share our tastes. (This again attests to the relativity of aesthetic value). But we dismiss their judgments of particular works when they suffer any of the disqualifying conditions just mentioned. We deem their judgments mistaken in those particular instances.

The kinds of arguments we encounter when people disagree in their aesthetic judgments supports this description of errors in judgment, errors that are themselves relative to individual tastes whose standards may be violated. Parties to disputes will point to features of works that their opponents might have missed, hoping that their opponents will react to these features in the same ways once they are recognized. The initial assumption is that taste is shared and that an error in judgment has occurred, although this assumption is defeated when there is agreement on all the relevant non-aesthetic properties but still aesthetic disagreement. Then it will be clear that the parties to the dispute are simply reacting in different ways to the same objective properties in the work, and that this is the source of their disagreement. The main point here is that errors in judgment are always possible for a relativist as well as for an objectivist, although these errors will be described differently by them.

But this possibility of mistaken judgments in particular cases is not yet the relativist's answer to the question of how he can acknowledge the existence of bad as well as good taste, since we noted that taste, bad or good, is a general preference for certain kinds of works. That a person through carelessness or ignorance can depart from her own general prefer-

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<sup>1</sup> "Of the standard of taste", *Essays*, Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1987.

ences in particular cases does not show that those general preferences can themselves be subject to criticism. That there are ultimate differences in taste still leaves it problematic to claim that some tastes are better than others. There may nevertheless be several ways of distinguishing better from worse taste other than appreciation of greater versus less objective value.

Mill's test, which claims that those who have experienced both higher and lower pleasures prefer the former, does not work when applied to differences in taste or pleasures. It implies that better taste distinguishes more and less worthy objects by preferring the former after experiencing both kinds. But my own sons prefer rock to classical music after lengthy exposure to both kinds. Others, of course, have the opposite preference after similar exposure. A related but more plausible method of drawing the distinction appeals to the direction in which taste typically develops and matures. Few if any listeners begin with a preference for Beethoven and Mahler and later come to prefer simpler kinds of popular music, while the converse progression is common. Few lovers of paintings begin with a preference for Constable and Turner and later, as their taste matures, come to prefer Kinkade.

We might also note which works within each genre are considered better, and then see whether the better works within each exemplify properties that are more often found in certain of the genres. If more complex popular musical works tend to be preferred, for example, a case could be made that classical works are better in being generally more complex. But this method of distinguishing better from worse taste in music is problematic on several counts. First, it is not at all clear that more complex popular works tend to be preferred by those who prefer popular music. Second, if as I have briefly argued here, there are no aesthetic principles linking objective properties to proper evaluations, a property such as complexity cannot in itself always tend to make works better. (More on complexity below).

Our best bet for meeting the challenge to our intuitions regarding better and worse taste, given a subjectivist and relativist account of aesthetic value, is to begin from examples of bad taste that we commonly recognize to be such and see whether they share some common properties acceptable to the relativist. These shared properties cannot be objective properties of the works, but they can still be relational properties, relations between objective properties and our typical reactions to them. To that survey of widely acknowledged examples of bad and good taste we now turn.

*Bad works, Good Works.* What kinds of works do those with bad taste prefer? If we simply say the more popular genres of music, visual art,

and novels, we not only beg many questions, but fail to acknowledge that there are excellent works within these popular genres, works by Alfred Hitchcock, Raymond Chandler, Danny Elfman, or Ennio Morricone, for example. We should instead single out works that are simply sentimental, merely melodramatic, deadly didactic, simplistic and shallow, or dull and derivative. These are widely recognized defects in artworks, or in works purporting to be art, and works that exemplify these defects without redeeming features are widely recognized to be inferior works. Even those people who prefer works of these sorts do not admit that the works they prefer are of these sorts. But bad taste is in fact attracted to works that have these defects.

Nevertheless, the method suggested above for generally distinguishing bad taste may not seem any easier to apply, having specified these widely recognized inferior targets of bad taste. Or, even if we can apply it disjunctively, this may not afford us understanding or an explanation of why bad taste is that which is attracted to just these properties. It may not be obvious that these defects have anything in common that explains their being targets of bad taste. Sentimental works are quite different from melodramatic or didactic ones, and dull and derivative works need be neither sentimental nor melodramatic nor didactic. Is there anything in common among these targets of bad taste?

We must note yet again, starting from the premise that tastes differ at the highest levels of critical sophistication, that there can be no principles linking objective or non-aesthetic properties to true or proper evaluations of works that have those properties. This conclusion might make it difficult to see how works exemplifying the defects mentioned above must be evaluated as inferior works. But a clue here is that the defect making properties mentioned above are not objective properties of the works in themselves, not independent of the ways we respond to them, but are instead response-dependent, and arguably aesthetic properties. The question is whether they have anything in common other than the fact that those with good tastes respond negatively to them, and whether what they have in common explains the opposed responses of those with good and bad taste. While this shared property cannot be objective, it can consist in the ways we respond to these objects with defects, and the ways we are prompted by the objects to respond, as opposed to the ways we are prompted to respond to works that do not have these defects. Once more, the property or the response, if it is to be explanatory, cannot be just a negative evaluation. So let us look more closely at these recognized faults in artworks.

Sentimental works blatantly appeal to our emotions without having any interesting cognitively grasped or imaginative content. The same can be said of melodramatic works, although the emotions appealed to will be different from those elicited by sentimental works, mainly pity in the one case and fear in the other. Usually, didactic works can be said to suffer the opposite defect. They preach in obvious ways to our cognitive faculty while leaving us cold emotionally and inactive imaginatively. Shallow, dull, and purely derivative works do not challenge or engage us in any way, offering at best mindless diversion. Of course we all sometimes need some mindless diversion, especially if we have been doing philosophy all day, but generally preferring such objects or evaluating them more positively than genuine art is still an example of bad taste.

It is then surprisingly easy to say what all these defective works have in common. They engage our mental capacities in a completely one-sided way or not at all. Even those faculties they do stimulate are not challenged in such a way as to prompt continuous and cumulatively rewarding engagement. Lacking subtlety, their appeal to these faculties, whether affective or cognitive, is blatant and obvious. One-sided and unchallenging attraction fades quickly, so that works that attract in these ways do not pass the test of time. Neither we nor future consumers of art want to return to such works again and again, as we do return to paradigmatic artworks. Even the one faculty that is at first engaged by such objects, whether emotion or cognition, can quickly lose interest and turn to other objects because of the lack of challenge to continuously engage or further develop one's response. Even beauty alone, which attracts our perceptual interest, can leave us cold if lacking anything else of interest.

Bad taste in other areas, whether it is preference for certain kinds of people, dress, or furniture and home decoration, is similar: attracted to the garish, loud, flashy, or maudlin, mushy, or gushy. In regard to garishness, Bill Bryson writes: "On Fifth Avenue I went into Trump Tower ... It was like being inside somebody's stomach after he'd eaten pizza". Bad taste sees that lobby in less pejorative terms, attracted to "all brass and chrome and blotchy red and white marble".<sup>1</sup> It is easily won over by the eye-catching first glance or fast impression, but likely to lose interest quickly and shift to other equally superficial objects. Good taste is more discriminating, both among and within objects. It is often focused on appreciation of less easily perceived, more understated, but also more durably significant traits or fea-

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<sup>1</sup> *The Lost Continent*, New York: Harper, 1990.

tures. It is focused more widely and more enduringly. It unlocks subtlety and condemns heavy-handedness.

Having outlined the kinds of objects that attract bad taste, it becomes easier by contrast to further characterize artworks that remain the focus of good taste. Instead of appealing in a narrow, obvious, one-sided way to only one mental faculty, be it affective or cognitive, these works have in common the simultaneous engagement of all our mental capacities – perceptual, emotional, imaginative, and cognitive – making the experience of them intense in a multi-faceted way. Think of viewing the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, hearing the final movement of Mahler's Second Symphony, reading the last chapter of *Moby Dick*. The pleasure of such experiences is not of the purely sensory kind, but the deeply satisfying feel of exercising our full mental capacities, meeting the gratifying challenge that such works present to our emotions, imaginations, perceptual and cognitive faculties all at once. Such experience takes time to develop, and its later stages build upon the attraction of the first encounter.

Because works that reward good taste present challenges to all these faculties, challenges that can or must be met gradually and cumulatively, these works continue to reward appreciation with multiple encounters. They have “enduring potential for gratification”,<sup>1</sup> i.e. they stand the test of time that shallow works fail. Later encounters with these works can be more rewarding instead of merely repetitious, as they deepen our understanding and appreciation of features we had not noticed in earlier encounters. Appreciation grows rather than fading with repeated scrutiny. Perception of sensuous qualities and structural relations, informed by cognition, enlarged by imagination, and eliciting emotional response, is the sort of experience that the exercise of good taste upon its objects produces. Good taste grasps the subtle, complex, and challenging, but such grasp takes time and improves with further exercise.

This is not to say that simplicity is always bad in an artwork or that complexity is always good. To say that would again contradict the claim that we lack the sort of aesthetic principles that the objectivist seeks. On the one hand, complexity can turn us off as well as on, the former when figuring it out is not worth the effort, given a lack of other aesthetic virtues or attractive features. On the other hand, the efficient use of material resources in simpler works can be appreciated both perceptually and cognitively. In the best

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<sup>1</sup> Jerold Levinson “Pleasure and the value of works of art”, *The Pleasures of Aesthetics*, Cornell UP, 1996.

symphonic music the most wonderful structures can be built from the simplest of phrases. And those painters who produced monochromatic or near monochromatic canvases took them to make profound statements about spirituality or about painting itself. Malevich writes: “The black square on the white field was the first form in which non-objective feeling came to be expressed. The square = feeling, the white field = the void beyond this feeling ... The suprematist square and the forms proceeding out of it can be likened to the primitive marks (symbols) of aboriginal man which represented, in their combinations, *not ornament but a feeling of rhythm*”.<sup>1</sup> That description is not simple, although the canvas appears to be so, indeed is simple in its perceived structure. I leave it open whether we are engaged by these canvases in the way Malevich describes; once more tastes will differ here.

My appeal to subtlety and complexity of challenge and response might also be taken to exemplify the kind of elitist attitude for which praise of good taste is often condemned. Such condemnations claim a sinister social origin and function for the concept. John Updike writes: “I think taste is a social concept and not an artistic one”,<sup>2</sup> and Pierre Bordieu, a main proponent of the view says: “nothing more infallibly classifies than one’s taste in music ... taste is first and foremost distaste, disgust, and visceral intolerance of the taste of others”,<sup>3</sup> i.e. a way of distinguishing oneself from those in the lower classes who lack such discerning taste.

In brief reply, good taste in certain genres of art does require extended experience and perhaps some training, but even in the latter case it depends more on education than intelligence or class membership, and it is certainly not linked, as some have claimed, to moral superiority. Great artists themselves, who certainly have good taste in their own fields, can make no claim to these other kinds of superiority or virtue: for every Verdi there is a Wagner. If anything, great artists, Gauguin being the prototype, in their single-minded devotion to their art, tend to be lacking in other virtues when the demands of their art come into conflict with other demands normally taken to be more pressing. And while connoisseurs of their works may not be so single-minded, there is no reason to suspect superiority in other areas in their case either. If no such claim to general superiority among those with good aesthetic taste is remotely plausible, contemporary sociological fact,

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<sup>1</sup> ”Suprematism”, R.L. Herbert (ed.), *Modern Artists on Art*, Prentice Hall, 1964.

<sup>2</sup> *Hugging the Shore*, New York: Knopf, 1983.

<sup>3</sup> *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, Routledge, 2010.

instead of supporting, provides a briefer and more convincing refutation of the thesis that taste in art exists only to solidify elitist separatism. We find both members of the upper class who wonder no less than others at modernist and post-modernist movements in art, and crowds of a half million who come to hear opera in Central Park. And, as Trump Tower so clearly illustrates, bad taste is certainly not restricted to the lower economic or social classes.

To return to the topic of the exercise of good taste upon worthy artworks, we can be somewhat more specific. Prompted by the attraction of good taste to multi-faceted challenging works, perception is guided by what Bence Nanay in a recent book calls distributed attention.<sup>1</sup> He writes: “in the case of some paradigmatic instances of aesthetic experience, we attend in a distributed and at the same time focused manner: our attention is focused on one perceptual object, but it is distributed among a large number of the object’s properties”. This kind of perceptual attention actively searches all perceivable properties for their relevance to the form, meaning, or value of a work. In other words, it is typically engaged both more broadly and intensely than usual, when in our practical pursuits we attend only to properties relevant to those aims. In attending to an artwork, broadly focused perceptual attention is required to grasp the formal coherence or incoherence of the work, for example. And such perception is suffused with memory of what was observed and imagination of what next might be encountered.

On the affective side, the attraction of taste to an object will typically depend on an emotional reaction to it. Perception remains intensely focused on the object in order to retain positive or resolve negative emotions. Such emotional engagement often derives from suspense or dramatic tension within an artwork. In more challenging works these tensions arise from more structurally elaborated relations among the elements of the works, whether musical phrases and chords, colors and shapes on canvases, or relations among characters and events in fictional narratives. In the case of fiction, emotional involvement requires imaginative and empathetic identification with characters and vicariously responding to their changing situations.

Perception and emotion are of course closely related. Not only is there the obvious point that things must be perceived before we can react emotionally to them, but reacting emotionally to these tensions and resolutions in works in all these genres is part of grasping the formal structures of

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<sup>1</sup> *Aesthetics as Philosophy of Perception*, Oxford UP, 2016.

the works as they unfold. Another part of grasping structure in the case of narrative fiction is cognitively discerning themes that serve both formal and substantive functions in both uniting diverse sections of narrative and conveying deeper truths to the reader. Grasping the formal structure of artworks in different genres in the kind of appreciation at which good taste aims typically involves a fusion of perception, cognition, imagination and emotion.

*Taste and Value.* My main argument began with what I hope is an uncontroversial characterization of bad taste based on widely agreed upon examples, from which a characterization of good taste and its typical objects was derived by contrast. I then described the sort of works to which good taste is attracted and the operation of taste in generating the kind of experience we have of such works. Since aesthetic value lies in this kind of experience, we can derive an account of aesthetic value directly from the description of the operation of good taste. Before drawing that conclusion, however, we can infer further description of the nature of taste itself. Seemingly different descriptions have been implicit throughout the course of this discussion.

I began by preliminarily describing taste as a general preference for certain kinds of objects, or, more specifically, certain kinds of artworks. But I then morphed into speaking of the operation of taste upon those objects it prefers, especially the objects to which good taste is attracted. Taste in this sense is not simply a preference, but a capacity for appreciating such objects, a capacity that can be exercised in such appreciation. It is therefore, as in Sibley's use of the term,<sup>1</sup> not just active in the choice of its objects, but in its operation or exercise, a way of actively engaging with its objects. But Sibley's description of such exercise is not quite correct. He held that taste as a capacity is required for perceiving aesthetic properties such as being graceful, moving, serene, dull, and so on, that it is always exercised in such perception. But while aesthetic properties can be characterized as those most relevant to an artwork's evaluation, Sibley is wrong in thinking that taste is always required in discerning them. Evaluative response might typically be a part of perceiving aesthetic properties, but one can see the gracefulness in an Olympic dive or skating routine without these activities appealing to one's taste or requiring its exercise. Even one who has not witnessed diving or skating before has only to look.

Equally telling, Sibley suggests no way of connecting these two senses of taste as preference and capacity. (You might have thought I was

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<sup>1</sup> "Aesthetic concepts", *Philosophical Review* 68, 1959.

just confusing them, not so!) The capacity to perceive aesthetic properties such as gracefulness has nothing to do with having good or bad taste or a certain set of preferences. But in fact there is a significant connection between these apparently different senses of the concept. Good taste in the capacity sense is required to appreciate the better sorts of artworks described above, its exercise necessary to meet the challenges that such works simultaneously present to all our mental faculties. Taste as a capacity refers to good taste, a capacity that it is good to exercise. Good taste is a capacity to appreciate good artworks, as well as a preference for them. We don't speak of bad taste as a capacity, or speak of a capacity to appreciate bad works of art or boring objects.

Taste as a capacity develops through its exercise, as do other capacities. It develops positively when taste prefers those challenging objects that test it. Endeavoring to appreciate challenging works of art develops the capacity to do so and to appreciate yet more challenging works. Meeting challenges to our perceptual and cognitive faculties develops the ability to make finer discriminations among structural elements in works and to grasp more intricate relations among them. Having our emotions stimulated in more varied situations develops the capacity to empathize with different characters and with more subtle and nuanced feelings. Such development indicates again why repeated encounters with great artworks results in deeper appreciation of them and deeper pleasure from them.

The exercise of good taste, I said, results not only in deeper appreciation of more complex works, but in a deeper kind of satisfaction or pleasure. When perception and cognition find intelligible structure after being challenged to do so, when intense emotions are aroused without threat to the subject, when imagination is stimulated to envisage new possibilities, and especially when all this happens at the same time in encountering novel objects and fictional worlds, the very rich experience that results is intensely satisfying. Such appreciation is an achievement often, we noted, requiring prior experience and training of the faculties involved, and achievements in themselves are rewarding. Good taste itself is not something we just have, but something we need to acquire and develop in order to make these rich pleasures available.

It is not hard to see that aesthetic value resides in this rich and intense experience that the exercise of good taste makes possible. In my earlier book and papers I described such experience involving the complete absorption of all our mental faculties as appearing to constitute a world unto itself, an alternative world into which we can briefly escape our ordinary affairs. This

is not the escape akin to sleep from turning our minds off in front of the TV, but that afforded by intense focus outside the scope of our ordinary affairs. It is common to speak of the fictional world of a novel and of the reader's vicariously occupying that world. Although that world is constituted by the set of propositions made fictionally true by the text, it is populated by more or less ordinary people, places, and objects, albeit fictional ones. It is far less common and intuitive to speak of the worlds of abstract artworks, such as symphonies. But the total involvement of serious listeners, losing themselves completely in the musical progressions, signals a sense in which the concept applies universally to great artworks. Good taste makes such alternative worlds accessible to us.

In earlier papers I also argued against formalist accounts of aesthetic experience that the operation of cognition in grasping themes that unite various elements in complex works into intelligible structures is inseparable from grasping the substantive theses that attach to these themes, and through this understanding to learning truths about the human condition. But in the context of a discussion of good taste as a preference for these weighty works, this emphasis on the cognitive side, and especially on the challenges that complex works present to us, may seem too cold and harsh as an explanation of the attraction of art to people of good taste, other than puzzle lovers and philosophers. It sounds like more work instead of pleasurable escape.

The remedy is a reminder that perception, imagination, and emotion must be involved as well in aesthetic experience, and that taste as a capacity encompassing all these faculties is most often attracted first to beauty and drama. The pleasure we experience from exercising good taste is not only that of meeting cognitive challenges and learning truths about ourselves and others, but includes those of empathizing and sharing experiences, as well as finding new imaginary worlds, and finally experiencing pure sensory pleasures, which should not be underestimated in music and visual art, but also exists in the rhythms of good writing. Good taste as a developed capacity enables all this. And once it has been developed, appreciation comes more easily and effortlessly.

I have provided full descriptions of such experience as the locus of aesthetic value elsewhere. What was new here was the derivation of this concept of aesthetic value from the concept of taste: first bad taste, then good taste, first taste as a general preference for certain kinds of works, and then as a capacity for appreciating aesthetic value. The appeal of certain objects to bad taste was characterized as one-sided (appeal to one faculty at

the expense of others), obvious, and often short-lived. The appeal to good taste by contrast was described as multi-faceted, typically more subtle and challenging to all our mental faculties at once. The exercise of good taste as a capacity is the simultaneous operation of all these faculties – perception, imagination, emotion, and cognition – in appreciating the works to which good taste as a preference is attracted. Finally, aesthetic value, as that which good taste apprehends and appreciates, lies precisely in such exercise and in the Aristotelian sort of pleasure we derive from it.

## **The Aesthetic Endeavour in an Age of *Halbbildung*. Some Questions about Taste**

Carsten Friberg  
(Independent scholar)

1. In the judgement of taste we demonstrate a sense for interpreting and making explicit our understanding of a community we belong to by evaluating and giving consent to what is considered as certain qualities. To discuss this matter we should move beyond determining concrete controversies about taste as well as the individual's expression of taste to explain why anyone should take a similar interest in a particular phenomenon which obviously is of no interest if taste is merely an individual's subjective response to something.

We acquire taste through education and learn to evaluate and appreciate specific cultural artefacts. A question is if this is merely a matter of learning by imitating hence performing a set of rules in accordance with others or if we should believe the judgement of taste to also prove that the one demonstrating good taste understands the values of a specific culture? Does good taste in any way also relate to a good character?

If the judgement of taste makes explicit one's cultural and social understanding it seems to imply a question of value; not aesthetic value related to aesthetic quality and a work of art, but norms implicit in evaluating something. The judgement of taste is not as such a normative judgement; but assuming that through the judgement of taste we express our relation to a set of norms present in the context of that judgement discussions about different characteristics of judgements of taste leave a question un-touched, namely

what world-interpretation goes beyond these specific discourses on the judgement of taste? Aesthetics and the judgement of taste then hold a particular position in philosophy; one where we should say, like Andrew Bowie, that “[a]esthetics matters not when it is a specialized discipline with its own agenda of questions, but rather when aesthetic issues re-veal aspects of other philosophical questions which do not otherwise become manifest”, (Bowie 2013, pp. 140 f).

2. Roger Scruton suggests in an article from 1998 entitled “The Aesthetic Endeavour Today” (pp. 217 ff) that it is crucial for aesthetic artefacts to relate to the Western cultural tradition otherwise significant questions of human existence are left unanswered or only answered in very insufficient ways by superficial and bad artistic works. To his suggestion I will add a question motivated by Theodor W. Adorno about how we can possibly relate to this tradition. Adorno does not share Scruton’s confidence in values in the classical Western tradition that modern arts and aesthetics are obliged to revitalise in contemporary forms. At least one thing gets in the way for Adorno, and that is how this same tradition could degenerate into the barbarism of Nazism.

To complicate the issue we cannot choose the all too simple solution and reject this tradition; we are necessarily part of it and have no alternatives but to understand how we carry it with us. What we can, and must, choose is to do it with an awareness of its barbaric potential – a potential that has proven not to be only a potential but very much the reality of Western culture.

This is what motivates me for asking what the aesthetic endeavour of today means if the culture of a cultivated aesthetic sense has proved to fail in such endeavours as experienced in the 20<sup>th</sup> century? A failure for which the notion *Halbbildung*, half education, as discussed by Adorno (1975, pp. 66 ff) can be used. How can such delicate sense of the aesthetic expressed in judgement of taste then be seen as anything but bad taste?

It places taste at a prominent position in philosophy of culture, education and society; it also calls for a more elaborate discussion of what we understand by taste and how taste is not an expression of a mere subjective and individual relation to something but of the individual’s integration into a community. We do have to ask if the forming of taste can prove to be a real cultural integration or if it only demonstrates a superficial performance of it. To what extent has one appropriated the cultural elements or is only appearing as a connoisseur but without a real understanding of the culture? And how do we judge between them?

Should my title suggest a critical approach to Scruton through Adorno I must prevent the false expectation of seeing them as combatants where I seek arguments in favour of one or the other. Besides, I believe Scruton is not without some insights in this matter. My aim is to use them for understanding what we should today consider to be implicit in discussing taste. Hence it is not a debate only between two philosophers but of a more general interest.

3. The first step to take here is to elaborate on what is meant by taste. Gadamer (1990, pp. 40 ff) draws attention to how the concept of taste in its 17<sup>th</sup> century origin by Gracián was more of a moral than an aesthetic concept characterising the true humanistic person, one who can balance the immediacy of the sensuous that can be refined with the distance of the spiritual approach. The distance to immediacy is what is considered freedom, to be free of needs; and the educated person is the one that can transcend personal needs to instead perform along needs of the society. So far this is a rather banal point; we become human beings by freeing ourselves from being slaves to our needs. It becomes of interest when these needs, and they are exactly needs hence they cannot be ignored, are refined. We cannot discuss our need for food, but what and how we eat is a matter of cultivation and a way of demonstrating which community we belong to. What we come to discuss as taste relates to a reaction formed by one's performance along a community by a discrimination made with the senses and such discrimination is not randomly made, hence it implies a form of rationality, the motivation for establishing a philosophical discipline about such matters called aesthetics.

Taste is not a matter of imitating others although it can be fortunate to do so and will prove a good approach in most situations. But imitation shows no signs of having appropriated what is imitated; knowing how to do, to blend in and perform along with others, is to know the means to fulfil something, however, as Scruton emphasises, knowing the means does not imply knowledge of the ends, (pp. 247ff). Likewise, Socrates could draw attention to how the Sophists knew well how to talk but not the true ends to the talks related to what is the good life which is not identical to what is good for achieving something. Later Quintilian tells us, taking it from Cato (*The Orator's Education* 12.1), that rhetoric is the good man skilled in the art of speaking which is not to use any means to fill the listeners ears with sweet and seductive words because such talking is no art, but the good character who knows what is the right thing to say. The problem about all the formulas in use like *beauté d'esprit*, *galanterie*, *bon gout* and *il bel*

*parlare* characterising the educated person, (cf. Schümmer 1955, pp. 121ff) is that speaking and acting tastefully may become separated from morals and that not everyone capable of demonstrating taste has a moral character. To speak with Kant we cannot know if the virtuoso of taste only knows how to play the game and not what is in it – if the virtuoso of taste also has a good character, (*Critique of Judgement* § 33).

4. Kant points at a problem Gadamer expresses his unease about: the aesthetic consciousness and separation, (pp. 87ff). The judgement of taste becomes separated from knowledge and becomes subjective when it is about how we relate to something. For Kant beauty loses its objective form of harmonious proportions in nature that tunes the soul to become only an ideal for the beautiful soul. An empiricist tradition's alliance with psychology will later take possession of subjective approaches in aesthetics and make the aesthetic experience (*Erlebnis*) central again later to be met with approaches emphasising the cultural context, (Dickie 2001, pp. 3ff.). Either approaches form a specialised attitude related to specific products of art and criticism endowed with independence because, with an echo of Hegel, the sacral has vanished from the art – the statue has become stone and the sacred grove is only a wood, (Hegel, 2, p. 290 (*Glauben und Wissen*)). The judgement of taste has been transformed into a demonstration of one's knowledge of the arts and art criticism and we may judge aesthetically without any thoughts about how art has its origin in relation to life. "To appreciate a work of art we need bring with us nothing but a sense of form and colour and a knowledge of three-dimensional space", Clive Bell writes in 1913, (p. 27). The beauty of the painting of the crucified Christ is not that he delivers man from sin but the artistic value.

It is this separation of art from its context enabling a cultural autonomous occupation with art for which the institution of museums is a strong exponent that Gadamer is uneasy about because art loses its place in the world it belongs to, (p. 93). Adding to this also the much influential idea of the genius according to which the artists does not understand the process of creation and the critique evaluates it based on an act of congeniality leads to an abstraction that for Gadamer ends in either a hermeneutic nihilism where artist and critic equally claim authority over the work or through an immediacy of an aesthetic, 'pointillistic' experience destructive to the unity of the artwork, (pp. 99ff). Instead Gadamer calls for the confrontation with art to be a matter of knowledge where we interpret the work in its historical context to experience (*erfahren*) its meaning – what it tells us. With Adorno we can say that "[a]esthetic experience [*Erfahrung*] is not genuine experience

unless it becomes philosophy”, (Adorno 2002, p. 131). We are confronted with a world in the art and bringing our world with us in this confrontation enable an understanding of ourselves (*Sichverstehen*); hence the judgement of taste is brought out of a role where it is isolated within an institution of exchange of judgements about art works and into questions of interpretation of our conditions of life.

5. We can abandon Gadamer here. His role was to establish an agenda for the Scruton-Adorno exchange which evolves around this separation of art from the world where the judgement of taste displays the attitude for a particular group of connoisseurs evaluating artistic quality and value. While Scruton and Adorno can share Gadamer’s concern the question is how to maintain a position where the development of a ‘true’ taste, i.e. one related to morals, is possible. To talk about a ‘true’ taste is here to refer to a distinction Scruton makes regarding modern art and culture.

Scruton criticises modern and postmodern art regarding a problematic separation of what he calls an aesthetic impulse, i.e. sensuous effect, from the spiritual impulse, i.e. the content. These two impulses are pulled apart in postmodern culture which is only a prolongation of a false idea of what it is to be modern: the idea that it is a rejection of everything old – to live as if we “stepped into the present from the future”, (p. 217). This idea has formed many forms of art with a thoughtless urge to transgress existing forms out of a fear of becoming obsolete and cliché. What may happen, and often happens, is the occurrence of blindness to how this obsession with creating shocks is only empty and boring and does in fact become a cliché. What should be done instead is what the true modernists do: to remake the forms and styles of art and to restore the old tradition, (p. 219). The modern artist must revitalise “the tradition within which the artist works, so as to bring the spiritual capital of our culture to bear on the present moment, and to show it as it truly is”, (*ibid.*).

True modernists, Baudelaire and Eliot are among the examples, are concerned with keeping this spiritual content of the tradition alive today. Alive is not in any conservatory or repetitive way but to give it a form of actuality and relevance. Scruton relates the spiritual to a religious content which must not be confused with religious doctrines or matters of faith; it concerns “experiences which form the bedrock of religion ... the vision of human life as mattering, and mattering more than can easily be said”, (p. 224). Perhaps we can with caution say it is about existential questions, though Scruton does not use that notion himself; about questions of human existence as they are contained in religious affairs, not because religion pro-

vides the true answers to them but because over centuries that is where such questions have been dealt with. The religious tradition may be seen as our source for interpreting questions we cannot do without; even if the interpretations may be false we should not simply discard them as we have no other language. Our religious and specific Christian tradition may today have outlived itself; we could agree with Nietzsche that Christian faith today has been lost, but at the same time that we cannot live without faith as without “[y]ou take away the power to perceive other and more important *truths* – truths about our condition which cannot, without the benefit of faith, be properly confronted”, (p. 225).

Scruton’s point is not that we have to come home to a Christian faith; it is a matter he can share with more contemporary philosophers including Adorno, that our way of thinking is formed by a tradition and we cannot think without it. Our language and the tradition we belong to frame what and how we can think hence a radical break away from the tradition is an illusion of the kind where we wish to speak of things we have no language for – the search and longing for something radical different tend to go wrong and throw itself into the arms of substitutions from New Age to fascism and communism, (p. 229). Walking the path of Christian faith is one “today overgrown with weeds, and leads only to abandoned ruins”, (p. 227) and for that reason we do not ask of art and aesthetics today to return to that tradition, but to find a way to make the content of this tradition alive and relevant for us.

This is more than a matter of having cultural products, especially art, to articulate such matters for us; it concerns the human spirit which “is an artefact: it comes into existence with the culture that expresses it”, (p. 234). If art and culture degenerates consequently human spirit does too. If art is substituted by kitsch what we get is a perverted world, “a heartless world in which emotion is directed away from its human target towards sugary stereotypes, permitting us to pay passing tribute to love and sorrow without the trouble of feeling them ... It is no accident that the arrival of the Kitschmensch on the stage of history coincided with the hitherto unimaginable horrors of trench warfare, of the holocaust and of the Gulag – all of them fulfilling the prophecy that kitsch proclaims, which is the transformation of the human being into a doll”, (pp. 235f).

6. This conclusion of Scruton’s may resonate with more themes also brought forward by Adorno. The quotation above points at our culture ending in different forms of barbarism, a topic for more of Adorno’s writing reflecting on how a culture formed by ideas of the Enlightenment could end

in the Holocaust. Another parallel is the degeneration of cultural artefacts into superficial and empty kitsch which deprives us of experiences and exercises a problematic influence on us. Scruton's upshots against popular culture where we find "clichés of form and expression, attached to sentiments so cheesy and fake, that we are never troubled by the thought that someone might seriously mean them", (p. 223) sounds like an echo of Adorno's comment on the cultural industry as "empty time filled with emptiness", (Adorno 2002, p. 246).

Ignoring to what extent Adorno later moderates this criticism and acknowledges that the effects of popular culture and the cultural industry are not only negative but could prove to be means for some societal changes and reflections, (cf. Bowie 2013, p. 149) we should say the cultural industry represents an example of the instrumental degeneration of our culture where the amusement of the products are never to give rise to any scruples about our existence but to refresh us in our daily work life through an escapism of empty dreams, (Adorno & Horkheimer, pp. 109; 113). It is anonymous in its character – as entertainment it does not invite the individual for a reflection on what it is to be an individual but only to go with the tide. "As individuals they are absolutely replaceable, pure nothingness", (p. 117).

Along with Scruton this gives us two questions, one concerning art, or emphatically true cultural products, and another with education of the citizen of contemporary societies which is what is implied by the aesthetic endeavour today.

Art for Adorno may at first hand seem to conflict with Scruton's perception when we learn from Adorno that art is a dynamic category that changes itself qualitatively by attacking what throughout its tradition has been considered its foundation and that art lives on by negating its own origin, (Adorno 2002, p. 2f). At the same time we also understand how this negation is no simple opposition like the blind opposition of some Modernists in Scruton's characterisation.

Although Adorno cites Rimbaud's *il faut être absolument moderne*, (p. 192) the matter is more complex. We should keep in mind that for Adorno the goal for modern art in a world where meaningful relations to things "increasingly are neglected when control and exploitation of nature and the associated commodification of the objective world becomes the dominant aim" (Bowie, p. 167) is to reflect "the extent to which such experiences have become lost, neglected, repressed or commodified in many areas of modern society, and so need new ways of being articulated and expressed", (*ibid.*).

New expressions do not discard tradition which lives on in the fundamental understanding of art's double character of autonomy and societal condition, *fait social*, (Adorno 2002, p. 5; 225ff); society is fundamentally embedded in tradition. For Adorno there is no escape from tradition hence questions of how we relate to its heritage today become urgent. If the barbarism of the Holocaust is one outcome of this tradition we must necessarily be aware of what invites us to take this horrible path and to prevent us from once again walking down it.

For both Adorno and Scruton rejecting the tradition is naïve and will represent a neglect that adds to the degeneration of our culture. A difference is that Adorno finds the barbaric element within the tradition while for Scruton it is a consequence of neglecting the tradition. With Adorno it becomes a question how the aesthetic endeavour Scruton points at can be pursued without a concern for the problematic heritage.

7. The spiritual, crucial for Scruton, is also what Adorno finds appearing in the artworks, (p. 86). Hence what we are confronted with is more than what is merely present – if not, it would just be an ordinary phenomenon. Art does not copy or reproduce the empirical reality; it has its identity in being something different from other artefacts and in forming an opposition or resistance to them, hence enabling something else to appear. This makes art give us interpretative difficulties which the popular culture does not; art can be hard to digest and to understand at all, (p. 7f; 120ff). What matters is to be confronted with something that asks of us to make an effort of understanding and by that means possibly enrich our minds, while “[a]musement always means putting things out of mind”. Enriching is not for contemplating but for learning how to relate to, face and in the end act on our reality in contrast to the cultural industry that only offers “escape, but not, as it claims, escape from bad reality but from the last thought of resisting that reality”, (Adorno and Horkheimer, p. 116). Amusement, enjoyment, and we can add from prevalent characteristics in many aesthetic discourses appreciation and pleasure, are all on a false track: “Whoever concretely enjoys artworks is a philistine”, (Adorno 2002, p. 13).

From the cultural industry and well into art itself we find today a weakening of the ideals of humanity however not a total weakening as “art's autonomy remains irrevocable”, (p. 1). Scruton as well has faith in an artistic enterprise that transcends the present community and provides us with an ability to act against the layers of culture that forms us for better or worse, (p. 9). The important question becomes how we move in the better direction which relates to the educational significance of art and humanities – the

element made apparent in the judgement of taste and which brings us back to the frame provided by Gadamer about the aesthetic consciousness.

Scruton, in an essay “On Humane Education” (pp. 237ff), criticises how humanities today are ill-treated due to a loss of understanding of how they are not studies for specific purposes and through a ‘relevance revolution’ have been subjects to transformations in their curriculum to become relevant to the modern world, (p. 242). This is fundamentally conflicting with the idea that “[t]rue education is the pursuit of useless knowledge”. Scruton and Adorno are in agreement to how destructive an instrumental view on arts and humanities is but not on the uselessness of knowledge to which Scruton says that “if we do not detach knowledge from its application, we shall never acquire it”, (p. 244). It leaves in the dark how we reflect on the expression of the human spirit in culture. Scruton leaves us with an impression of the act of reflection similar to an Aristotelian demiurge in its self-sufficiency unrelated to human existence. Even a free education of useless knowledge is an education for a human engaged in the world; for one who will pursue this knowledge to become human. The instrumental use of knowledge is one, and one necessary, form of reason, but consciousness is considered as relating thinking with the reality different from the thinking subject – of making experiences [*Erfahrungen*]. “Thinking, and making spiritual experiences [*geistige Erfahrungen*], I will say is one and the same”, (Adorno 1971, p. 116, my translation). Education, or formation [*Bildung*], is for Adorno related to a structure known from Hegel and Wilhelm von Humboldt.

Asking Scruton why classical education has been unable to prevent the degeneration of culture today he may answer that the effort of keeping the spiritual and aesthetic impulse together is one that is not widely made and a decline in culture and education has followed. But the strength of efforts and how widely, or little, distributed good education has been, are empirical matters; to say that good art and the truly educated were outnumbered does not address why someone juggling with discourses on taste and displaying an impressing knowledge of cultural artefacts, of art history, of literature, of music, turns out to be responsible for barbarism. As little helps the answer that those responsible were in fact not truly educated, it only states the obvious that people of good education behave well and those without do not. Whether Hermann Göring as an art collector also had a good understanding of art is not the question as little as claiming every educated German supporting the Nazis – or perhaps every educated British actively involved in colonialism – never had an understanding of the culture and the

arts they were educated in; it does not address the question Adorno raises: how such barbarism could appear in a culture perceiving itself as enlightened?

However, part of the answer is that the education has not been completed in the sense it has not created an individual capable of reflexion, self-determination and being a non-follower, [*Nicht-Mitmachen*] (Adorno, p. 93). The problem is the incomplete education and not a lack of education as the uneducated still has a sceptical approach to the world and the potential for being educated, (Adorno 1975, p. 77). The problem is when the educational system becomes instrumental to goals defining the human activity and humanities through a 'relevance revolution' making everyone act in accordance with these ends and learning to define themselves in relation to these ends. When the organisation of the world we live in becomes identical to the views of the world and we turn these views into ours the pressure on us becomes overwhelming and the education to maturity fails, (Adorno 1971, p. 108f). We become absorbed by the world and conform to it; we do not participate in it as autonomous individuals. We then lose our self and our social position as individuals to instead give up and conform to the environment and the others that we view not as others but only as an amorphous mass, (p. 97). An education resulting in conformity is a 'half-education', *Halbbildung*; one that makes us maintain our selves without having a self, (Adorno 1975, p. 88).

8. The similarities between them seem to stop where Scruton sees a decline in cultural artefacts and education while Adorno draws attention to an internal conflict within education which asks us to understand how the efforts of reading Homer and Shakespeare are not alone enough to become educated. We must understand that a non-adaptable element within reason should keep us awake from slipping into conforming too easily to authorities of classical culture; we must be aware it is a requirement of us and not a conflict with external interests.

Perhaps we could here draw on inspiration from Aristotle's ethics to understand how more elements are at work and the danger is of a one-sided view on how we relate to cultural artefacts. Like in his ethics we acquire our character through practice, and this practice depends on what we experience and learn. We learn, in a similar fashion, what to value and express our appreciation of in the judgement of taste by performing with people around us whom we will in the end act along with. This is all well, especially if we grow up among good people, but as humans we do more than just imitate

others; imitation does not make us different from animals. To be human is to act with reason.

In ethics we need to ask what is good, what is good for us and in the end what is the ultimate good for us. The parallel I wish to draw here concerns how it is not enough to have a good character; the moral person also needs to know what lies ahead of acts done and how they point towards what is the best – i.e. how they help us realising what we are. Similarly it is not enough to acquire a good taste and to engage in discussions about taste, about criteria for it, whether the objects discussed are the proper objects, i.e. art, and similar discourses in aesthetics. It only turns aesthetics into an advanced discourse on an isolated, technical issue that forms a consciousness, the aesthetic consciousness, but neglects the question of what this discourse is for beyond being the virtuoso of taste. The different discourses on taste concerned with defining art and characterising different attitudes towards art do little beyond discussing different rules for imitation within different communities. Or to push it to extremes we could ask if many discourses of taste are without spirit?

Like someone with a good character may demonstrate good conduct in most situations the educated in art and humanities will do the same but both of them should also be able to give an account of what they do beyond the obvious that they play a social game well. Playing a game well does not imply it is a good game. Scruton's answer seems to imply it is good when it relates to our cultural tradition; he does as well imply that reason must play an active role, having autonomy, to avoid being mere thoughtless repetition. But a question is, if this reason is capable of acting on its own how should we explain we got on the course we did, a course of losing grip of the spiritual and lose the good taste at sight to fall into mistaken judgement of valuing kitsch, popular culture and bad art? To be surrounded with true art seems not enough to save reason, so apparently reason should not be saved from the influence of the cultural artefacts, but rather be saved from itself, from laziness in its education to become mature – from becoming an aesthetic consciousness appreciating only artefacts detached from a broad cultural context. It should become mature and as mature understand there is a wider horizon on humanity to place the judgement of taste into.

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## **Tasting in Time: the affective and temporal dimensions of flavour perception**

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The aim of this paper is to explore some connections between flavour perception, emotion (and other affective states), and temporal experience. That there are significant connections between these three areas appears to be enshrined in commonsense wisdom, perhaps best expressed by the so-called Proust phenomenon. Smells and flavours have a remarkable power to bring back extremely vivid memories, vivid not just in terms of their imagery but in their emotional or affective resonance. This link to time and affect is not, however, exhausted by smell's power to resurrect potent memories, but is also evident in the distinctive way that flavours seem to be (like, arguably, emotions) intrinsically valenced, and in the essentially temporal way in which they are experienced.<sup>1</sup> This suggests that the connections between flavour, time, and affect are worthy of serious philosophical reflection, but also of empirical study. Indeed, empirical science has been paying increasing attention to the nature of flavour experience, as well as to the ways in which

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<sup>1</sup> These claims are clarified below, as will the distinction between smell and flavour.

affective states influence temporal perception.<sup>1</sup> Although such work is still in its infancy, there is enough evidence to lend support to certain philosophical claims about the nature of flavour perception that I will make here.

These themes will be explored around the deceptively naive-looking question: ‘if you like that taste of X and I do not, are we tasting the same thing X’? I suggest that the answer to this is rather more complex than might initially be thought but, roughly, I will eventually answer that if by ‘the same thing’ we mean the overall flavour profile of a complex sensory object, then the answer must be negative. I will approach the question by looking at some differences between how experts and non-experts ‘taste’ and examining the idea that *how* one tastes determines *what* one tastes. I will argue that there is indeed a relatively trivial sense in which one tastes the same thing, but that this is not an experience of flavour. In the process I will reject the view that there are real emergent flavour properties, a view which would provide us with a positive answer to the above question.<sup>2</sup>

The argument will turn on two claims that I shall articulate and defend in the following discussion. The first is that the perception of flavour is distinctive amongst our sensory experiences in being *intrinsically* valenced. The second is that flavour is also distinctive in being experienced *essentially* temporally. These two claims are, I argue, closely connected. Specifically, the particular way in which flavour is valenced depends upon the way in which it is temporally experienced.

Some preliminary notes are required before I begin. First, I will be using ‘flavour experience’ to refer to what I take to be the standard idea, influenced by contemporary neuroscience, that such experiences are, in the words of Barry Smith “the result of the multisensory integration of olfactory, tactile and taste impressions, modulated by the dynamic time course of a tasting event and the location of sensory stimuli in the mouth”, (Smith 2014: p.1; see also Auvray & Spence 2008). I will, however, talk at least as much about olfaction as about flavour experience so understood. The reason for this is two-fold: on the one hand, the relevant empirical studies I will draw upon all focus primarily on olfaction, rather than gustation and touch; on the other hand, olfaction plays arguably the largest role in flavour perception, or at least a role significant enough that we can draw plausible conclusions about flavour perception from concentrating on olfactory experience.

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<sup>1</sup> For an overview see Droit-Volet (2014)

<sup>2</sup> This realist view Barry Smith outlines in a number of places, see esp. Smith (2007).

Second, emotions are a subset of affective states, amongst which are included moods, and arguably also hedonic states such as pleasures and pains. I will talk sometimes of emotions and sometimes of affective states or experiences that are not emotions. Where the differences are important I will highlight them. By the valence of a state or experience I will refer to what some philosophers call the hedonic tone of the experience, basically the idea that they are (felt as) negative or positive; it is in some sense pleasurable or displeasurable to undergo the relevant experience. The notion of valence is in many respects unavoidably vague, but I hope it is clear enough to make plausible the claims I defend.

*The Empirical Evidence: time, odour, emotion.* In order to give some scientific grounding to commonsense wisdom, it is useful to begin by running, briefly, through some of the empirical evidence for the effects of olfaction on affective experience (and vice versa), of olfaction on temporal experience, and of emotion on temporal experience. I will deal with these in order.

*i. Olfaction and Emotion.* Other than the kind of anecdotal evidence alluded to above, there is ample empirical evidence – both psychological and neuroanatomical – that smell has important influences on mood and emotion, and conversely some evidence that the valence, intensity, and experienced duration of smell is influenced by these affective states. Moreover, there is strong evidence that the relation between olfaction and emotion results from overlapping cerebral processing structures belonging to the limbic system, particularly the amygdala.<sup>1</sup>

It is perhaps unsurprising, given that we generally find odours to be pleasant or unpleasant, that they are found to have some effect on our overall affective experience. Yet the range and efficacy of such influence is surprising, and the neural connections between emotional and olfactory processing are striking. In a number of studies, Herz and colleagues have demonstrated the various ways in which odours can be associated with, and in turn give rise to various positive or negative emotional associations. Herz (2005) has shown, for instance, that (i) the emotion paired with an odour

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<sup>1</sup> For an overview see the various papers by Herz listed in the bibliography. In an interesting study Cupchik (1995) asked subjects to associate odours or odour labels with emotional paintings. Later, they were presented with the odours or words and asked to describe the painting with which each had been associated. A higher degree of emotional tone was found in the recollections of paintings cued by odours than those cued by words.

becomes associated to the odour and ‘imbues it with meaning’, thus influencing hedonic perception; and (ii) an odour can elicit the emotion associated with its prior exposure and have a general impact on mood and mood-related behaviour. Thus, emotional odour-associative learning can explain both how odours come to be liked or disliked as well as how their presence can elicit emotion and influence thinking and behaviour. In one study, for example, children exposed to odours primed with negative emotional associations demonstrated a lack of motivation in completing certain tasks, thus appearing to show a marked effect of olfaction on mood, (2004b).

Such connections, moreover, seem to be indicated at the level of neuro-anatomy. A large body of data obtained in human beings and animals show that the amygdala participates in various aspects of odour processing, especially in relation to emotion and memory. In particular, during the experience of recollecting an odour-evoked autobiographical memory, Herz showed that the amygdala was more activated than with similar odours that did not evoke a memory, (Herz *et al.*, 2004a).<sup>1</sup>

Conversely, a range of studies show that affective states have an impact on odour valence. In one study, for example, Pollatos (2007) showed that after viewing unpleasant pictures, olfactory sensitivity was significantly reduced, and that pleasantness ratings were decreased subsequent to unpleasant, and increased subsequent to pleasant, picture presentation. Moreover, unpleasant picture presentation was accompanied by an increase in judged odour intensity. Noting that olfaction and emotion are fundamentally similar in terms of approach and avoidance mechanisms, Gil *et al.* (2009) remark that:

The fact that both olfaction and emotion have the same functional significance, in tandem with the uniquely direct neuro-anatomical connection between the olfactory system and the amygdala (Aggleton & Mishkin, 1986) suggests that there is a fundamental linkage between emotion and olfaction that no other sensory system shares.

*ii. Olfaction and Time.* Perhaps more surprising than the connection between odour and emotion, is that between odour and temporal perception and temporal processing. There is evidence that odour can distort estimates of temporal duration, that olfaction can represent temporal intervals, and

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<sup>1</sup> See also the papers by Zald (1997) and Soudry (2011).

even that it may involve its own *sui generis* timing mechanisms in processing information from olfactory stimuli. In short, olfaction is temporally determined and temporally sensitive.

Beginning with these last ideas, Gire (2013), in an overview paper, argues that both the olfactory and visual systems employ similar temporal coding strategies to convey information relative to active sampling and to effectively drive their target cells in sensory cortical areas. However, these two systems employ these codes to convey information that is uniquely suited to the processing demands of each system. Amongst the studies supporting this, Haddad (2013) argues that there is evidence for a relative time-based code in the olfactory bulb, while in an important study Park (2016) demonstrates that the capacity to accurately encode temporal information about sensory cues may be crucial for efficient olfactory navigation. Indeed, he suggests the existence of a mechanism for extracting and encoding temporal information from the sensory environment within the olfactory processing system itself. Concurring with these findings, Ache (2016) cites evidence that animals can use populations of rhythmically active or ‘bursting’ olfactory receptor neurons (bORNs) to extract and encode temporal information inherent in natural olfactory signals. He contends that:

by extracting temporal information inherent in the olfactory signal, olfaction is more involved in interpreting space and time than heretofore imagined. If this is the case, the olfactory system must have neural mechanisms capable of encoding time at intervals relevant to the turbulent odour world in which many animals live .... We postulate that bORNs represent an unsuspected neural mechanism through which time can be accurately measured, and that ‘smelling time’ completes the requirements for true olfactory scene analysis, (p. 662).<sup>1</sup>

So, there is evidence that olfaction employs its own distinctive timing mechanisms, and that these mechanisms can, at least in certain animals, allow the encoding of quite complex temporal information about the sensed odours and their stimuli. This fits well with other empirical work suggesting that olfaction is a far more sophisticated sense than has been hitherto as-

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<sup>1</sup> As might be expected, studies have shown that the accuracy of odour discrimination increases with the duration of imposed odorant sampling, and that the rate of this increase is slower for harder tasks, (Rinberg 2006).

sumed (primarily by philosophers) with impressive representational power and spatio-temporal orientational capacities.<sup>1</sup>

Olfaction is not, however, merely time-sensitive in these ways, it can have a distinct effect on time perception itself. In one interesting study, Zhou *et al.* (2017) demonstrated that odours can bias the subjective duration of visual objects without affecting one's temporal sensitivity. Specifically, Zhou's team demonstrated that a congruent odour, as compared with an incongruent one, stretched the perceived duration of the corresponding visual object without affecting temporal discrimination sensitivity. More generally, they conclude that the very process of sensory integration at the stage of object processing twists time perception.

Many other studies too seem to show that, in addition to modality-specific timing mechanisms, there are important cross-modal temporal influences. Wassenove (2008) offers a useful overview of these, citing evidence, for example, that the duration of an auditory interval is often judged as longer than the same interval presented in the visual sensory modality; and that subjective time dilation has been consistently found in auditory, visual and auditory-visual presentations for a visual stimulus increasing in size, and an auditory event increasing in frequency.

Although not focussed directly on odour processing, or the actual experience of flavour, a couple of studies have looked at the effect on perceived duration of pictures of pleasant or disgusting food. Angrilli *et al.* (1997) found that pictures of disgusting food lead participants to underestimate the duration of the pictures. And yet the disgust rating of the stimulus did not lead inevitably to temporal underestimation. For when the pictures represented mutilated bodies, they led to subjective time dilation i.e. subjective estimations of duration were longer than the actual duration of the stimuli. Ignoring for the moment the worry that the emotions aroused in each case (purportedly disgust) are not in fact the same, the authors suggest that two main mechanisms were involved in the effect of the emotional pictures on their participants' time estimation. Roughly, arousal and valence have different effects on temporal perception.

In short, the hypothesis is that the food pictures elicited low-arousal disgust and the other pictures (e.g. a mutilated body in the dirt) high-arousal disgust. The latter, but not the former, have a time dilation effect, an effect that is well-established by other studies (as I shall note below). Commenting on this, Gil (2009) argues that because disliked foods represent a poten-

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion see Todd (forthcoming)

tially greater danger to health, individuals must consider these foods more attentively. Disgusting foods thus capture more attentional resources than pictures of liked foods, and capturing attention in this way precludes attending to time. This makes time appear to ‘fly by’, leading to an underestimation of duration. In contrast, in high-arousal stimuli, emotional motivational mechanisms are involved.

*iii. Emotion and Time.* Sylvie Droit-Volet has been more responsible than anyone else for studying the effects of emotion on the perception and estimation of short durations using a variety of stimuli, including emotional faces, emotional scenes, and sounds.<sup>1</sup> Despite the diversity of these emotional stimuli, it has generally been found that high-arousal emotional stimuli are judged to last longer than either low-arousal emotional stimuli or neutral stimuli. In particular, the higher-arousal stimuli leading to temporal dilation (i.e. the perception of time as slowing down) are generally of negative valence, i.e. evaluated as negative or unpleasant, such as anxious or fearful faces, unpleasantly loud noises, or disturbing images.

According to one influential model of time-keeping in psychology, we keep track of time via ‘pulses’ that are emitted regularly by a ‘pacemaker’ and accumulate in a ‘counter’. Emotion-related lengthening effects can be obtained via two main mechanisms that operate on an internal clock: (1) an attention-switch mechanism and (2) an arousal mechanism that speeds up the pacemaker’s system. The distinction between the two is as follows. According to the attention-switch hypothesis, the emotion effect is added to the duration effect. More specifically, the attentional switch closes earlier, under the effect of emotion, and a constant number of pulses is added to the number of pulses accumulated during the processing of the stimulus duration. As the number of these early additional pulses is the same for all stimulus durations, irrespective of their length, the combined effect of emotion and stimulus duration is equal to the sum of their separate effects (i.e., an additive effect). According to the clock-speed hypothesis, the pacemaker rate increases with arousal and so the emotion effect multiplies the duration effect, such that the number of additional pulses increases with the length of the stimulus duration.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See the Droit-Volet references in the bibliography.

<sup>2</sup> As Doit-Volet notes: “This arousal-induced temporal overestimation has been documented in numerous studies that have manipulated the level of arousal by using click or flicker trains, by changing body temperature, or by administering drugs that modulate arousal by altering the effective level of dopamine in the brain. For exam-

There are many problems with the internal clock hypothesis, and the methodological set-ups involved to test emotional distortions of temporal perception. One is that it is very unclear what, according to it, attending to time amounts to. Another is that many studies suggest that emotions capture and consume attention. But in that case, attention to fearful faces ought to attract attention to the stimuli and, on the clock model, thereby make time speed up rather than slow down. It is not my concern to pursue these problems any further, although I shall return to the notion of attending to time later. Now, with the above empirical evidence in mind, I want to explore more fully the relationship that olfaction – and hence, ultimately, flavour – bears to time, emotion, and attention through considering the nature of expertise.

*Expertise and Temporal Tasting.* It has become something of a truism, for those writing about taste and expertise in the context of wine appreciation, that *how* one tastes affects *what* one tastes. When one tastes with knowledge and experience – of intentions, production methods, grape varieties, etc. – and with the concomitant levels of attentiveness required to discern all of the (non-evaluative, merely perceptual) properties relevant to forming descriptive and evaluative judgements, in some sense the taste of X changes. The expert's flavour experience is different from that of the novice.<sup>1</sup>

Arguably the most natural way of articulating this idea appeals to the fashionable notion of cognitive penetration; the various cognitive states – beliefs, knowledge, linguistic capacities, etc – constituting expertise, affect in some very direct way the nature of the actual resulting sensory perceptual experience(s). The beverage literally tastes different to the expert.

Nonetheless, this line of thought has been resisted, and the purported phenomenon of cognitive penetration denied. Some philosophers have argued that the apparent behavioural differences (e.g. the judgements made or descriptions offered) between novices and expert are the result of merely cognitive, and hence non-perceptual, changes in judgement or belief. Others have argued that the apparent differences can be explained solely in terms of

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ple, following the administration of dopanimeric agonists (methamphetamine or cocaine), participants either overestimate the elapsed interval or respond earlier, a phenomenon that is characteristic of an increase in the clock rate. By contrast, dopaminergic antagonists, such as haloperidol, produce a temporal underestimation as if the clock were running more slowly".

<sup>1</sup> For discussion see Todd (2010); Smith (2014).

changes in attention; roughly speaking, experts are simply better at paying attention, and pay attention to different features of the object.<sup>1</sup>

These strategies are different, yet it is helpful to target both at once, since it is plausible to assume that attentive differences are the result, at least in part, of the cognitive factors making up expertise. Although he does not talk much about cognitive penetration, the most relevant such sceptical account for our purposes is that developed in a number of papers by Barry Smith.

Smith cites evidence from the work of Dominique Valentin, which seems to show that wine novices can perform just as well as wine experts at perceptual discrimination tasks, they simply don't know they can. As Smith reports, before doing the tasks novices will say that they are no good at such tests, and afterwards, they typically believe they have done badly, although that's not the case. According to Valentin, the difference between experts and novices is due to knowledge. Experts know they can make such discriminations, and so are able to "*organize their knowledge better*" [italics mine], (Smith 2015).

In fact, I would be surprised if novices performed as well as experts on any but the simplest odour and gustation detection tasks, for the ability to put names to relatively unfamiliar odours and mixtures of odours in complex wines requires the kind of developed vocabulary that typically experts learn in order to organise their knowledge and attend better to their experiences.<sup>2</sup> Leaving this aside, however, Smith does offer an insightful account of what experts do with the sensory content of their experiences that they share with novices:

Without the knowledge to pose the questions we may be oblivious to the significance of the sensory impressions we are in receipt of as tasters ... In this way, the same sensory impact delivered to the expert and the novice can have different resonances. To one it discloses something about the wine, the wine making, the region and the vintage ... while to the other it imparts a particular pleasant or unpleasant mouthfeel ... In these

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<sup>1</sup> This is obviously a very rough and ready characterisation of an increasingly complex literature. See Stokes (unpublished ms) for other options and further discussion.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Smith "on the whole language can only shape and organize our knowledge or what is given in experience; it cannot create what experience does or doesn't disclose about the wine", (2015, p. 10).

ways, knowledge enables tasters to interpret their sensations as a guide to characteristics of the wines, and to set expectations that their sensory expectations can confirm or revise ... Knowledge changes what we can do with our sensations as we move from perception to judgment. It also allows us to organize and categorize our perceptions, to create expectations that make features of a wine stand out, and it allows us to probe our perceptual experience analytically: to note which items of a given category are present. In all these ways knowledge effects a change in the way experts and novices experience a wine, (2015, p. 6f).

Although subscribing to the idea that how one tastes affects what one tastes, it is evident that Smith thinks experts and novices share the same basic sensory perceptual content, or at least do to the extent that they are equally attentive. An important implication of this claim would seem to be the idea that although the valence of comparative flavour experiences may change, the underlying flavour itself remains the same. In other words, to use a slightly different kind of example, although I used to hate the taste of broccoli, and now I love it, the broccoli itself still tastes the same to me. It tastes of broccoli, and all that has changed is my liking for it.

I want now to argue that, as plausible as it may seem, this is not quite right, that even how basic sensory perceptual inputs are experienced in flavour perception is, in some sense yet to be determined, affected by a number of different factors. Hence, in some important sense the taste of broccoli itself is changed by the change in valence; the flavour is also deeply influenced by the essentially temporal way in which it is experienced, which in large part explains why experts do not taste – where taste is taken to be an experience of flavour – the same thing as novices. This will involve rejecting a particular account of the notion of flavour that lies at the heart of Smith's view.

I begin by turning to Smith's own illuminating remarks on the dynamic time course of flavour perception. Focussing on wine tasting, Smith argues that sustained concentration is required in part because of the fleeting, temporal stages involved in flavour perception as the wine travels across the palate:

Despite the short duration, the temporal dynamics of wines can differ considerably due to variation in alcohol level, quality of

the fruit and acidity, presence or absence of fine or coarse tannins. To appreciate the differences we need to attend to what happens when and where, and which features of a wine can co-occur, or owe their effects to their position in the overall temporal sequence. *We must concentrate on the sensations at each stage without impeding the overall experience...* [italics mine] What the attentive wine taster is trying, often in vain, to do is unpick the subtle workings of the brain in order to pull apart and lay bare the contributory features of touch, taste and smell through whose unique combination a well-made wine has its effect on us *overall*, [italics mine] (2015, p. 8f).

What in part demarcates expert from novice is the former's awareness of and ability to track the temporal unfolding of the wine's tastes and aromas, using cues to predict and form expectations about this development, dwelling on certain aspects with conscious attention or holding them in memory as part of the overall temporal experience.

Smith is, for independent reasons, a realist about flavour.<sup>1</sup> That is, he thinks that flavours are emergent properties, emergent from but not reducible to their underlying chemical bases. As such, in light of the previous remarks about temporal profile, he claims:

Flavours are the things that our varying and variable perceptions try to latch onto. Each flavour perception is merely a snapshot of a flavour, or of a flavour profile: something which itself evolves and changes over time ... Because there is a temporal dimension to flavours we cannot equate flavour with what anyone tastes at a given moment, (*op.cit.*, p. 21).

I think that this kind of flavour realism sits uneasily with the above remarks about the temporal evolution of flavour profiles, and that we ought to reject Smith's idea of flavours as emergent properties. To see this, let me delve into the temporal dynamics of flavour perception in a little more detail. It is helpful to focus initially on wine, but only in order to turn eventually to flavour perception more generally.

I have argued elsewhere that olfaction can represent source objects in virtue of the odours emitted, but that it is not transparent in the way that vis-

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<sup>1</sup> The view is developed at length in Smith (2007). For a discussion see Todd (2010).

ual experience is (or more precisely, can seem to us to be). We can, in olfaction, attend to odours *as such* and to their various ‘properties’ (e.g. intensity; ephemerality; subtlety, etc.) and when we do so we might claim that olfaction represents odours transparently. We are not, that is to say, aware of any other intrinsic properties (qualia) of our olfactory experience above those properties pertaining to the representational contents of such experiences, i.e. the odours. However, when we represent the source objects of odours, as is the case when confronted with a complex and structured odorous object like wine, we experientially represent those objects via the odours that constitute them in terms of a structured olfactory field.

One helpful way to think about this is via an analogy with imagery. We can imagine all sorts of things using imagery, where the imagery itself is not the object of the imagining, but rather the ‘mental paint’ in virtue of which we imagine those things; although, in cases where we are attending to an image, we could say that our imagining is transparent to that image.

Is the wine – considered either as the olfactory object-as-experienced or as the sum of the dispositional properties in the bottle – transparently represented via our perception of odours in olfaction? I’m inclined to think not, firstly because we are generally aware of the odours in virtue of which we represent their source object(s); secondly, because of the role that attention plays in our olfactory phenomenology. For similar reasons, I contend, neither are an object’s ‘real’ flavours transparently represented via our flavour experiences. Let me explain.<sup>1</sup>

One way to capture the nature of olfactory representational content is to look at recent work on the role of attention in perception. Studies have shown that when viewing certain figures, focussing one’s attention alternately on contrasting figures demonstrates an increase in the prominence or salience of those figures. Indeed, this feature of attentional focus should be evident from your everyday experience. Arguably, the kind of prominence or salience added to perceptual experience by attention is – and appears to us, at least on reflection, to be – a feature of experience rather than a property of the object perceived. Using a similar example but for different reasons, Sebastian Watzl (2011) has also argued that the prominence that is characteristic of an attended object is, unlike colour, not experienced as a property of that object, which it has independently of our attending to it. He characterises the nature of attention in the following way: “consciously attending to something does not just consist in being conscious of a certain

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<sup>1</sup> The following paragraphs are taken from my (forthcoming).

way the world appears to be (it has a partially non-attributive phenomenology)", (p. 153).

These observations are useful for considering the role that attention plays in the experience of temporality and ephemerality in wine. First, to the extent that odours are, indeed, relatively ephemeral objects, and odorous objects such as wine are experienced as temporal structures, olfaction in such cases requires more in the way of attentive resources than, for example, ordinary cases of visual experience. Indeed sniffing seems generally to involve more physical and psychological effort than looking. To that extent, therefore, the partially non-attributive role of attention should be more evident to us in the case of olfaction, and so too the relative lack of transparency involved in such attentive experience. Second, these features of olfactory experiences can lead us to pay attention to, and appreciate, the ephemerality of the experience itself. Some of these experiences are, I think, closely linked to the experience of absence.

Anna Farennikiova has recently defended the idea that we can have genuine visual experiences of absence, where: "visual experience of *O*'s absence consists in an object-level mismatch between *O*'s template [in the form of an image from memory or imagination] generated by visual working memory and a percept of the observed stimulus". The mismatch at issue here, and the relevant projected imagery, arise from certain expectations that we have about the world, and at least some such expectations require concepts and expertise, (Farennikova 2013, p. 444).

I think that wine tasting presents us with examples of olfactory experiences of absence. The temporal and quasi-spatial structure of wines are clearly capable of generating expectations, and in smelling a wine I may expect and project olfactory imagery that results in a mismatch. For example: I expect a certain wine to contain detectable oak, but I don't smell it; I smell a lot of ripe fruit that leads me to expect a big-bodied beast of a wine, but instead it turns out to be quite austere and restrained. Expert tasters can, as it were, smell and taste latent properties in a wine, detect how these might develop and mature and predict the ageing potential and olfactory development of the wine. If not identical to it, smelling latent properties or potential development is akin to, and certainly depends upon, smelling absence.

To illuminate this idea a little more, it is worth considering closely related observations about musical experience. Matthew Soteriou, for example, in discussing the phenomenon of hearing silence, cites C.B. Martin in suggesting that in order to experience the notes of a melody, you need to hear the absence outside it, where this experience itself is informed by mem-

ory and expectation.<sup>1</sup> And, conversely, Soteriou suggests that if the subject does not have an auditory experience of the silences between the sounds, then arguably the subject does not hear the temporal boundaries of the sounds. We need to experience the silence before a sound starts and after the sound stops in order to hear its stopping and starting.

Similarly, Elisabeth Margulis (2007), citing a range of empirical studies, argues that experiences of music during silent periods demonstrate the active, participatory nature of musical listening. Indeed, she claims, some experiences of musical silence induce in the subject episodes of “meta-listening”, in which the music seems to “purposefully place listening habits or beliefs on self-conscious display to the listener, weaving this into the fabric of the aesthetic object”, (p. 274).

Drawing on these insights, we can say that the olfactory experience of a temporally and quasi-spatially structured olfactory field, provided by an object such as wine, sets up certain expectations and patterns of attention that utilize memory and imagery, that are guided by the ephemerality of odours themselves, and that lend to our phenomenology something like the intentional characteristic of listening ahead, which we find in musical experience. As in musical experience, appreciation and understanding, the experiences of absence and ephemerality are closely linked in the olfactory experience of wine, and these also help us to attend to and appreciate the experience of ephemerality itself, (cf. Roberts 2015).

In these ways, the ever-changing nature of our flavour experiences, involving constantly changing patterns of attention, expectation, and surprise, is also a crucial source of the value of flavour representations. The awareness of ephemerality itself provides part of the basis for the pleasure of savouring involved in flavour experience, and I would argue that this awareness actually makes the representation and individuation of the odorous and gustatory components of flavour objects more pronounced, just because they are so ephemeral and thereby require such attentive resources.

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<sup>1</sup> The full quote: “Starting to experience in a certain way does not obviously entail experiencing something of a certain sort starting. I need to have now, as the first note begins to sound, an awareness that just before now I was aware of silence ... pips are presented to us as discrete only in virtue of each one being preceded and followed by a relevant silence. We have to be aware of this silence, this non-sounding, as such if we are to be aware of the discrete sounding pips. And the pips will be perceived as further apart or closer together in time depending on how long these silences are. Perceiving silence is not the absence of any awareness, but is itself an intentional achievement”, (Quoted in Soteriou 2011, p. 190f).

We take greater effort to secure such objects in our perception than is normally the case in vision. This may also in part explain why flavour experiences, for all their ephemerality, have such permanent places in our memory and exert such a profound impact on our affective lives.

Crucially, these observations about the complex temporal nature of our olfactory experience of wine can be extended to all flavour experiences. We can see this by contrasting odours, and flavours, with sounds. Here we come to the claims I promised to defend at the very beginning. Olfaction, and hence flavour perception, is (i) intrinsically valenced, and (ii) intrinsically temporally experienced.

First, unlike sounds, flavours are intrinsically valenced, even if the valence itself is not intrinsically fixed, as the empirical evidence suggests it is not – we tend to like or dislike flavours (or even to experience them as neutrally valenced) in a way that, independent of context, is inapplicable to sounds. That is not to say that we do not find some sounds pleasant or unpleasant (e.g. a fire alarm), but this is usually determined by dimensions such as intensity, timbre or (musical) context and says nothing about the sound itself. Although flavours too have these dimensions, their valence is not reducible to them.

Second, our experience of flavours is intrinsically temporal in the ways outlined above. Volatile odours, as the name suggests, have an essentially temporal profile, not merely in that they change through time, but in that they can develop through time. They change, trivially, in coming into being (and into awareness) and fading away; but they can also develop in taking on new properties, dimensions or aspects. An odour may start off as sweetly floral and then take on sharper floral or citrus aspects.<sup>1</sup> Arguably, sounds, in contrast, simply fade away, lose intensity, or blend into other sounds. There are, inevitably, some tricky issues here. How, for example, do we track the same odour or sound where its properties change? Perhaps sounds and odours do not differ significantly in these ways after all, since one might conceivably argue either that odours too blend into other odours, or that sounds can develop along more dimensions than I have implied.

Nonetheless, if we shift our claims from odours to the flavours of which they are component parts, I think it is plausible that flavour experiences are essentially temporal in a way that sound experiences are. Yet now, perhaps, the contrast or comparison ought rather to be between music and flavour, rather than flavours and sound. And this seems to me to be correct,

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<sup>1</sup> For more on the properties of odours see Sibley (2001).

although I would still maintain that the first claim about intrinsic valence stands true of flavours but not of musical experiences.

Clearly, much more could be said about these issues, but for my present purpose we need only to see how such observations might help us respond to the challenge that experts and novices in some sense taste the same thing whilst nevertheless tasting differently. What exactly is it that is supposed to remain unchanged in flavour profiles, that we are trying to accurately detect, no matter which methods of tasting we adopt? Smith's answer is: the emergent flavours. However, I think we can now see why this won't work.

*Valence, Flavour, Time.* The main reason for thinking that there are objective flavours – and not just their chemical bases – appears to be that we have a notion of, and behave in accordance with the idea that we can taste /smell more or less accurately, and that there are more and less optimal conditions – internal and external – for doing so. This entails the idea of there being a unified objective flavour profile. Recall the quote above:

*We must concentrate on the sensations at each stage without impeding the overall experience ...* What the attentive wine taster is trying, often in vain, to do is unpick the subtle workings of the brain in order to pull apart and lay bare the contributory features of touch, taste and smell through whose unique combination a well-made wine has its effect on us *overall*, [italics mine].

But this conception of overall objective flavour profiles is problematic, for two main reasons. First, flavours are constituted by intrinsically temporal components, by components that have temporal profiles – smells and tastes and our sensations of these – which change and develop over time. Although from one moment to the next we may latch onto, focus our attention on any one particular component – a particular odour or taste or texture – in what sense is that sensation we've latched onto *the* flavour of X? At best, it seems, any particular sensation we pick out might be thought to be merely a temporal part of the *overall* flavour profile of X. But what is this overall flavour profile? Whether we conceive of it as a perception-like unified impression of all the elements we've encountered while tasting, or rather as a judgement we make on reflection, it is unclear how we are to tell in advance that the temporal part we are tasting is a temporal part of the overall (future) flavour of X. Indeed, I suggest that for the case of complex

objects like wine, or a meal, this question is in fact unanswerable, because there is no identifiable, unified overall flavour or flavour profile; or at least none that can be described non-demonstratively.

It is important to stress that the worry here is not that flavour is *simply* a construct of the brain and therefore in some odd way entirely subjective. After all, such experiences are ultimately anchored in the chemical properties of the world and our own physiological make-up. This brings us to the second problem with Smith's conception.

As we have seen, there is empirical and anecdotal evidence to suggest that affective states like moods and emotions can influence the valence of perceptual stimuli, including odours, and can have distorting effects on subjective estimates of duration. If olfaction, and hence flavour perception, is intrinsically valenced and intrinsically temporally experienced in the ways I just claimed, one might expect it to be particularly prone to such effects. Moreover, since one of the features of expertise consists in paying attention not just to the time course of objects but also to one's own experiences – assuming that these can even be separated in the case of olfaction and gustation – this meta-level attention can also be expected to alter the temporal profile of one's flavour perceptions. Expert tasting, recall, will sometimes involve 'smelling ahead' and smelling absences, in line with clues and expectations: in short, this is a partly imaginative activity that will lend a different contour to the temporal unfolding of the expert's flavour experiences.

Of course, as Smith notes, experts try to separate out the distinct components of flavour and they also try to distinguish their own preferences and subjective impressions from the actual values and properties they take the object to 'really', independently possess. Ignoring questions about how feasible and successful such practices are, we must ask whether they require any appeal to emergent objective flavours and flavour profiles to explain them. I do not think so.

Both sides want to allow that there is genuine expertise in wine tasting and hence to allow that *how* one tastes affects *what* one tastes. They appear to disagree about the 'what', and to some extent about the 'how'. It is evident that the Smithian realist thinks experts and novices share the same basic sensory perceptual content, or at least do so to the extent that they are equally attentive. So, roughly, expertise affects how one judges, interprets, or evaluates one's flavour experiences but does not alter the literal taste and smell sensations that constitute these experiences.

It is not clear, however, that I must disagree with this. We need only appeal to the chemical properties the object actually possesses and the

psycho-physical properties of the relevant subjects. This will not ensure any law-like correspondence between chemicals and flavour experiences, but given enough similarity in psycho-physical profiles we can establish a notion of objectivity and take temporally determined profile descriptions to be more or less accurate or compelling.<sup>1</sup> After all, it is likely that basic chemical compounds and volatile molecules produce identical or similar experiences in physiologically similar human beings.

So, if a wine contains, for example, blackberry flavours – or more precisely, the chemicals responsible for such flavours – or the yeast *brettanomyces*, then experts and non-experts should both detect them and experience them in the same way. But now, here is the rub. As I have said, wine involves complex layers of chemicals and volatile compounds, the perception and discrimination of which is subject to their dynamic temporal profile and to the temporal act of tasting itself. In addition, in this act of tasting experts pay attention differently and to different things unfolding in time, including assessing their own sensory experiences, and possessing a trained vocabulary with which to do so. Two important things follow from this.

First, the way in which, for example, chemical substances like *brettanomyces* are manifested in sensory experience can differ depending on all of these aspects. Sometimes, in some wines, it will smell like sweaty leather, and in some others like spicy cloves or bacon. How it is experienced, then, will depend on a number of variables that may depend on expertise. Second, there is an ineliminable evaluative element here. On the one hand, taste and smell experiences are intrinsically valenced. On the other hand, their valence is both affected by and in turn affects the other constituents of the wine being experienced. So, for example, the *brettanomyces* in a Syrah wine from the Rhone is sometimes thought to be a wine fault and is evaluated negatively, but can sometimes introduce a pleasant savoury dimension to the wine that adds to its positive evaluation.

The challenge for the Smithian realist is this: underlying all of these possible experiential variations, what is it that is being tasted as the same by both expert and non-expert? The answer cannot just be ‘this chemical compound’, because that is not what is represented in the taste experience. Rather, they need to invoke the presence of *real* flavours, but flavours that are not simply reducible to their chemical bases. This would allow us to explain, as we must, why experts try to distinguish their own preferences and

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<sup>1</sup> For an extended discussion and defence of this see Todd (2010).

subjective impressions from the actual values and properties they take the wine to really, independently possess.

So, the sceptic must contend that in our flavour experiences we are able, at least in theory, to prise apart (mere) valence from (genuine) sensory perceptions and that our ability to do so depends on there being real flavours that our flavour experiences are caused by and correspond to. In this way, experts and non-experts will have (at least to some extent) exactly the same literal sensory taste and smell experiences, but their overall *cognitive* descriptions, ‘judgements’, or interpretations of them will differ.

Does this position make sense? I have my doubts, even if we allow the existence of real flavours. Note that the Smithian must describe the overall judgements made about their sensory experiences as cognitive rather than perceptual in order to avoid the possibility that they are cognitively penetrated in the way the non-sceptic would hold. But surely we are referring here to overall flavour *experiences* that are in large part perceptual and shaped by expertise. As such, it just cannot be that experts and non-experts taste the same thing if by ‘taste’ we are referring to these overall experiences of flavour.

Can we separate out from these overall experiences the individual tastes and smells that, the Smithian maintains, are experienced identically by experts and non-experts? On the one hand, this is a nebulous phenomenological issue, but if what I said above is correct, there is reason to think that these individual components of flavour experiences will themselves be affected by their place in the overall flavour profile of the wine, and hence no guarantee that they will ‘taste’ the same to experts and non-experts. On the other hand, I doubt that valence can be so easily prised apart from sensory perception.

Turning away from cases where expertise is irrelevant, and cases that do not involve complex temporally determined odorous objects like wine, can valence and flavour be prised apart, phenomenologically and metaphysically, in such a way as to make sense of the idea that you (or my past self) dislike broccoli, and broccoli nonetheless tastes the same to me (or present me), who likes it?

The first thing to say here is simply to note that, as I remarked above, the very temporal nature of olfaction and tasting itself, the volatility of its objects (odours), and indeed our own changing preferences across time, ensure that in some sense all flavour experiences – and all objects constituted by flavours e.g. food products, beverages, meals – have temporal flavour profiles. This seems to imply, effectively, that the idea of there being, say,

*the* (emergent) flavour of broccoli that we can, or can at least try to latch onto by isolating it out from our overall flavour experiences, is at best a fictional abstraction, both metaphysically and phenomenologically.

Perhaps a stronger response, however, is to note a fundamental ambiguity of reference in the question. In one sense, if we both take bites out of the piece of broccoli in front of us, we are in one sense tasting the same physico-chemical substance. This is merely trivial and, of course, not the sense of taste that interests here. We want to know about the flavour experience. If we discard the idea of real, objective emergent flavours, however, then what is it that we are tasting such that this ‘broccoli’ flavour can be prised apart from the valence – and other affective and temporal dimensions – that is an essential component of our overall flavour experience? What sort of property is it that we can track, from within the temporally unfolding flavour experience itself – and not merely from extraneous cues, such as those given by vision – as remaining the same across different temporal and affective flavour profiles? To put it another way, where and when is this broccoli flavour?

Frankly, I don’t know how to answer this question, but even if we concede to the sceptic here, and allow this possibility for some individual taste and smell sensations, I suspect that in complex sensory objects like meals and wines, valence will be too inextricably tied to the way sensations are experienced to prise them neatly apart. Of course, this is far from being a knock-down metaphysical argument against flavour realism of the kind that would provide an easy answer: it’s the broccoli flavour! Indeed, even if one rejects realism, one need only assume that some objects present unified, homogenous flavour profiles that remain stable through time, and that can be identified – no doubt through the possession of a particularly fine-grained phenomenology – independently of valence. I do not know how plausible such assumptions are, but give the considerations I’ve outlined so far, I remain sceptical.

Personally, in cases of my own changing tastes, it seems to me that the broccoli no longer tastes the same; and nor does it when I utilise various methods to taste it differently e.g. attentively, dwelling on distinct sensations and so on. But perhaps this merely shows that I am not very good at phenomenologically parsing out the various components of my overall flavour experiences. I cannot separate valence and flavour in the way required. Perhaps you are, or think you are, better able to do this than I am. Yet how

can you be sure your own affective states are not intruding on what you think is the affectless and a-temporally identifiable broccoli taste?<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Acknowledgements: tba.

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### **Broccoli di Natale con patate**

#### **Ingredienti**

#### **per 5 persone**

1,5 kg di broccoli

500 g di patate

sale

olio extravergine di oliva

peperoncino

aglio

Pelate le patate e tagliatele a cubetti, quindi lessatele insieme ai broccoli. A metà cottura, toglietele dal fuoco e fate soffriggere olio, peperoncino e aglio. Aggiungete broccoli e patate, lasciate stufare per quindici minuti.

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