Response-Dependence and Aesthetic Theory[1]

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Abstract: Response-dependence theories have historically been very popular in aesthetics, and aesthetic response-dependence has motivated response-dependence in ethics. This paper closely examines the prospects for such theories. It breaks this category down into dispositional and fittingness strands of response-dependence, corresponding to descriptive and normative ideal observer theories. It argues that the latter have advantages over the former but are not themselves without issue. Special attention is paid to the relationship between hedonism and response-dependence. The paper also introduces two aesthetic properties that lead to wrong kinds of reasons problems for aesthetic response-dependence: insightfulness and the capacity to change one's perspective. These properties do not have obvious parallels in the ethical domain, and so present an obstacle for response-dependence even in aesthetics. The paper ends by examining replies on behalf of the response-dependence theorist, ultimately suggesting that a restricted form of response-dependence is the most promising way forward for fans of such theories.

Keywords: aesthetics, response-dependence, ideal observer theory, hedonism, dispositionalism, fittingness, perspective

1. The Standard View

What has the aesthetician historically wanted out of a meta-aesthetic theory? Well, the aesthetician typically wants two things that are somewhat at odds. Hume (1777/1987) articulates them nicely. On the one hand, he says,

> Beauty is no quality in things themselves: It exists merely in the mind which contemplates them; and each mind perceives a different beauty. (230)

And on the other,

> Whoever would assert an equality of genius and elegance between Ogilby and Milton, or Bunyan and Addison, would be thought to defend no less an extravagance, than if he had maintained a

[1] This paper has benefited enormously from earlier feedback. Thanks to audiences at Boston University, University of Leeds, the London Aesthetics Forum, and the UBC/SFU working group, the Fit Fest conference, and especially to Chris Howard and Richard Rowland.

> mole-hill to be as high as Teneriffe, or a pond as extensive as the ocean. … [I]t appears an extravagant paradox, or rather a palpable absurdity, where objects so disproportioned are compared together. (230-231)

At the crudest level, the aesthetician wants both subjectivity and objectivity. To be a bit more refined, they want, on the one hand, something like metaphysical un-spookiness ("no quality in things themselves," "exists merely in the mind") and interpersonal variability in taste and preference ("each mind perceives a different beauty"). But on the other, they also want a standard of taste that ranks some aesthetic objects as being genuinely above others, regardless of individual preference and inclination.

To capture both sides, Hume defends an ideal observer theory: "If, in the sound state of the organ, there be an entire or a considerable uniformity of sentiment among men, we may thence derive an idea of the perfect beauty" (234). He goes on to articulate five criteria (delicacy of taste, practice, comparison, freedom from prejudice, and good sense) of an ideal observer and says that the "joint verdict of such… is the true standard of taste and beauty" (241).

This account falls under the umbrella of *response-dependence theories*. This label has been used in different ways and to different ends, but here I'll take it to label a class of theories according to which what makes it the case that an object possesses a certain property is that property's relationship to human responses. For a canonical example, a response-dependence theory of color would attribute redness to an apple in virtue of the fact that humans experience the apple as red under normal conditions. Notice that the response can be idealized in some respects. Here, normal conditions involve certain lighting, a functional visual system, and so on. Thus Hume's account, though it involves idealized observers and thus idealization conditions, falls under the response-dependence umbrella. Such accounts offer a tantalizing resolution to the above paradox by allowing for interpersonal variability (some do not in fact experience the apple as red) while presenting a non-spooky standard (they would if the conditions were right).

In the color case, color qualia are clearly the relevant responses. But what are the relevant responses in the aesthetic case? We can group species of aesthetic response-dependence accounts by their answer to this further question. The most natural thought, and the historically most popular one, takes pleasure of some kind to be the relevant response. Let's call these *hedonic response-dependence* accounts. Although Hume does not strictly commit himself to hedonism,[2] he without a doubt thinks of pleasure as playing an important role in determining the ideal judges' verdicts. Kant, similarly plagued by how to balance interpersonal variability with genuine standards of taste, argues that pleasure – specifically, disinterested pleasure – plays a central role in determining the beautiful. These two massive figures in the history of aesthetics have set the tone for much theorizing since then, and so it is unsurprising that hedonic response-dependence in one version or another has become the default view in aesthetics. A final note about such accounts: they are virtually always accounts of *beauty*, rather than other aesthetic properties like delicious, funny, charming, elegant, sublime, or aesthetically good (which I take to be the broadest term of aesthetic praise).

Aestheticians have thought that hedonic response-dependence theories were the best or only way to resolve Hume's tension. This paper will examine the prospects for response-dependence theories. I will

[2] The joint verdict could, for example, be based on preferences rather than the pleasure responses of ideal judges.

argue that they need not be accompanied by hedonism and will point out a few commonly overlooked aesthetic properties that pose a problem for response-dependence. This paper is not meant as a definitive rejection of response-dependence. It is rather meant to raise a few problems for response-dependence, and thus raise the costs (and to an extent, question the benefits) of accepting such theories, even in aesthetics where such accounts have historically looked very appealing.

2. Two Versions of Response-Dependence: Dispositions and Fit

As I characterize the response-dependence umbrella, it makes sense to distinguish within it two strands: the dispositional and the fittingness (or fitting attitude) theories. The most common version of hedonic response-dependence defended in aesthetics is dispositional.[3] That is, hedonic response-dependence is defended as the view that what it is for something to be beautiful is for it to be disposed to produce pleasure under certain naturalistically specifiable conditions. Fittingness theories, by contrast, are those that deem as beautiful those objects in response to which it would be fitting (or appropriate or merited) to experience pleasure.[4]

Let's first look at dispositional theories, which often rely on the color analogy discussed above.[5] This analogy is attractive because aesthetic properties, like color properties, seem closely related to perception, sensation, and experience. Furthermore, not only is there a tempting broad analogy, but there seems to be a way to move from a dispositional theory of color properties to a dispositional theory of full-blown aesthetic properties that involves incremental steps, none of which introduces any significant differences. These steps take us from color perception through gustation – literal taste – and on to canonical aesthetic properties. If we start with gustation, we can say that what makes something bitter is its disposition to taste bitter under normal conditions. Then, we could extend that slightly to say that what makes something delicious is its disposition to produce (gustatory) pleasure under normal conditions. Then, we could extend that slightly to say that what makes a painting beautiful is its disposition to produce (visual? disinterested? aesthetic?) pleasure under normal conditions. If successful, this argument, or sequence of arguments, will show that dispositional theories are just as plausible for colors as for full-blown aesthetic properties like beauty. But how plausible is each step?

Gustation is central to the first two steps because it seems to live at the intersection of the aesthetic and the purely sensory. The first step consists of purely descriptive gustatory properties. These range from the more literal, such as *sweet* or *bitter*, through the less literal, such as *floral*, *metallic*, or *creamy*, to the clearly metaphorical, such as *sharp* or *light*. Thinking about colors can make it seem as though purely descriptive sensory properties are also simple or obvious. But it might take a bit of training and cultivation of sensibility to determine whether a certain wine is light or to detect the difference in metallic flavor drunk from bottled versus canned Coca-Cola. But surely this makes no difference to the plausibility of a

[3] In addition to Hume (1777/1987) and Kant (1790/2000), see Sibley (1968), Wiggins (1987), Matherne (2020). Watkins and Shelley (2012) and Hanson (2018) both discuss this as the standard view, though both object to it.
[4] Recently defended in D'Arms and Jacobson (2000b), Jacobson (2011), Gorodeisky (2021). See also Patridge and Jordan (2018), who defend a fittingness theory for the funniness of jokes.
[5] For discussion, see also Schellekens (2006), and Simoniti (2017).

dispositional theory. To the extent that such an account of color properties is plausible, a corresponding account of descriptive gustatory properties is also extremely plausible.

The next step takes us to evaluative gustatory properties. We can helpfully divide these into thicker properties like *balanced, refreshing, bland, cloying*, and thinner ones like *delicious* or *tasty*. Thick properties we could attempt to specify as those disposed to produce gustatory pleasure, but with respect to some particular aspect of their taste. For example, what makes a dish balanced is that its different flavors and their respective strengths combine in a way that is disposed to produce gustatory pleasure under normal conditions. With thin properties, we could say that what makes a dish is delicious is that it is disposed to produce gustatory pleasure under normal conditions. We could be more specific here – maybe it's not just that it produces some gustatory pleasure but that it produces a certain minimum amount, or that it does not also produce gustatory displeasure. These modifications don't pose any serious problem.

What would the next step in our proposed sequence look like? It would take the dispositional analysis of evaluative gustatory properties and translate it into other, non-gustatory aesthetic properties. What makes a joke funny is that it is disposed to produce amusement under normal conditions. What makes a scene charming is that it is disposed to charm an observer under normal conditions. What makes a landscape sublime is that it is disposed to produce awe under normal conditions. And what makes a painting beautiful is that it is disposed to produce (disinterested) pleasure under normal conditions.

These might not sound so bad. And they might not seem like any real leap from the evaluative gustatory cases we were considering above. However, something important changed when we moved from purely descriptive to evaluative gustatory properties. The dispositionalist has to say that all of the conditions in terms of which they seek to define aesthetic properties are naturalistically specifiable. How to do this is relatively (though perhaps not completely) clear in the color and descriptive gustatory cases – we must not be jaundiced, or have our tongues coated with the residue of toothpaste or grapefruit juice, and so on. But it is more difficult for evaluative properties. One might think it doesn't simply require normal eating conditions and a well-functioning tongue (and nose), but also discernment and sensitivity and good judgment, where these things cannot be given a purely naturalistic specification. We must, instead, add something normative into the conditions. This problem is even more apparent for non-gustatory aesthetic properties. Plausibly, a landscape is not sublime merely when it in fact produces awe under normal conditions. It seems to require someone to be perceptive, sensitive, and reflective in order to recognize the sublimity – conditions which do not sound wholly descriptive.

The view I'm suggesting sounds very much like an ideal observer theory. Indeed, it sounds very much like Hume's ideal observer theory. His account suggests, at least on one reasonable interpretation, conditions that are not purely descriptive: *delicacy* of taste, freedom from *prejudice*, *sound* judgment and *good* sense. To the extent that we build anything normative into the conditions, we move away from dispositional theories as I have characterized them here. Let's call ideal observer theories that build something normative into the idealizing conditions *normative ideal observer theories* and reserve the term *descriptive ideal observer theories* for those whose idealizing conditions are purely descriptive.

One motivation for normative ideal observer theories is that it is plausible or at least *possible* that a great many perfectly normal people under perfectly normal conditions are mistaken about what in fact bears the evaluative properties in question. They can be mistaken about what is in fact balanced or what is in fact delicious. And a great many perfectly normal people under perfectly normal conditions can be mistaken

about what is in fact beautiful, even if they experience disinterested pleasure in response to the object. In contrast, it would be surprising if a great many perfectly normal people under perfectly normal conditions were mistaken about what things are red or what things are bitter. In fact, we typically find it disturbing when there is widespread experiential divergence on these matters (think of the infamous black-and-blue/white-and-gold dress), unlike in the case of evaluative properties. Furthermore, in the case of evaluative properties, we can often offer justifying or normative *reasons* in support of our aesthetic verdicts, where in the typical dispositional cases, we can only point to an *explanation*.

In contrast to dispositionalism, a fittingness account of 'balanced' will say that what makes a dish balanced is that it would be fitting to feel gustatory pleasure in response to its different flavors and the way their respective strengths combine. It will say that what makes a dish delicious is that it would be fitting to feel gustatory pleasure in response to eating it. Similarly, a joke's funniness ultimately depends on the fittingness of amusement, charmingness on the fittingness of charm, sublimity on the fittingness of awe, and beauty on the fittingness of (disinterested) pleasure.

Although they may look quite different, normative ideal observer theories are a species of fittingness theories. A normative ideal observer theory, in spelling out some or all of the conditions for when an observer counts as an ideal one, simply offers a bit more explanatory bulk than the very schematic fittingness theory. It tells us a little more about when responses are fitting. But it, too, ultimately says that the gustatory properties obtain in virtue of whether certain responses are fitting. And though different fittingness theories will cast, for example, the pleasure or the 'fit' relation differently, this is certainly true of variations in normative ideal observer theories, too. None of these variations are deep structural differences. Thus, as I present them, descriptive ideal observer theories are dispositionalist theories and normative ideal observer theories are fittingness theories. Both are response-dependence theories.[6] This is important because, though the distinction between dispositionalist and fittingness theories is readily apparent in their most popular formulations, the distinction between descriptive and normative ideal observer theories is not.

So far, fittingness theories have an advantage over dispositional theories. Fittingness theories capture ways that people can be mistaken which dispositional theories cannot. But there is one important disadvantage that fittingness theories face. It is not an objection to the theories as such, but a way in which they are less useful than dispositional theories in solving the Humean tension. As I characterize them, fittingness theories explain aesthetic properties in terms of the *fittingness* of certain responses (and normative ideal observer theories are one way of fleshing this out). These theories do not attempt to give an analysis or discuss the metaphysical status of fittingness itself. They only push the normativity around. So whereas dispositionalism necessarily offers a descriptive analysis of normative properties like beauty, fittingness accounts do not do this because the very concept of fit is normative.

Such a theory therefore leaves open an important metanormative question about the status of the (normative) fittingness facts. Is the fact *that it would be fitting to feel pleasure* itself non-naturalistic? Or can we give it a naturalistic reduction? One might go either way here. One might be a (reductive) naturalist about

[6] More precisely, the dispositional theories we look at here, which depend on *responses*, are versions of response-dependence. Also, I take no stance here on whether it is possible to offer a descriptive or normative ideal observer theory that is equivalent to any dispositional or fittingness theory.

fittingness facts – but such a fittingness view will reduce to a descriptive dispositional theory. Alternatively, crucially, one might also be a non-naturalist (or, perhaps, a non-reductive naturalist) about fittingness facts. On this latter view, fittingness accounts are not purely descriptive. This means that fittingness accounts do not and cannot *by themselves* satisfy the Humean demand for un-spookiness.[7]

For the aesthetician who likes response-dependence and is motivated by the Humean tension above, the fittingness theory may not be wrong, but it can only be a partial solution. However, if I'm right that a key motivation for response-dependence was its promised resolution of this tension, then this conclusion about fittingness theories is no small matter. Though they fare better than dispositional theories in their analysis of evaluative aesthetic concepts, they also lose a primary *raison d'être*.

3. Response-Dependence and Hedonism

There are additional worries for response-dependence accounts. In this section, we will examine whether hedonism's frequent pairing with such views poses any serious problems for them. It will not, though this common pairing also, maybe surprisingly, favors fittingness theories over dispositionalism. Then, in the next section, we will examine a very different class of aesthetic properties – one that does pose a problem for response-dependence.

Both theories have been thought to work best when supplemented by hedonism. Of course, some of the above analyses don't involve pleasure at all, but more robust emotional or emotion-like responses such as amusement or awe. But relatively thinner aesthetic properties like deliciousness and beauty have often been analyzed in terms of hedonic responses. The problem here is that aesthetic hedonism is not obviously correct. Aesthetic hedonism holds that the characteristic, constitutive, or appropriate response to beauty is some kind of pleasure.[8] This might be disinterested pleasure (i.e., pleasure divorced from any relationship to one's personal or pre-existing ends), sensory pleasure (of the kind one might feel when drinking a cool glass of water or stepping into a warm bath), formal pleasure (i.e., pleasure occasioned by the formal properties of the object, such as shapes and colors or pitches and duration), or pleasure individuated in some other way. I take these to be at least intensionally different ways to pick out aesthetic pleasure, if not also extensionally divergent. But though hedonism is historically popular, recently a spate of objections has been raised against the view.[9] To briefly note a few, there is the paradox of tragedy or the paradox of painful art: that some art is good or beautiful despite not producing pleasure in normal or idealized conditions (Smuts (2007)). There is the worry that it sounds completely sensible to say both that something is beautiful and that one doesn't like it (Hanson (2018)). And there is the worry that what makes a beautiful thing good or reason-giving cannot be fully explained by reference to the goodness or normativity of pleasure (Shelley (2010)). This is not the place to present a thorough refutation of hedonism, but I want to illustrate that hedonism is not as obvious as it may at first appear, and it would be good for response-dependence theories not to be committed to it. Fortunately, they are not.

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[7] Compare Gorodeisky (2021), who combines her hedonic fittingness account of aesthetic value alongside a tentatively "primitivist" account of that value: "a value that need not be analyzed further" (278).

[8] See fn. 2, as well as Beardsley (1982), Mothersill (1984), Matthen (2017), Gorodeisky (2021).

[9] See Van der Berg (2020) for an overview of recent defenses of and challenges to aesthetic hedonism.

The most promising way to retain response-dependence while moving past aesthetic hedonism, I'll argue, are with theories that invoke pro-attitudes. But before I come to those, I want to briefly examine two other possibilities. First, we might say that what makes something beautiful is that it disposes one to or is fitting to prefer it. But because this version builds in preference, it only offers comparative judgments rather than absolute ones. That is, we cannot explain the property *beauty* but only the relational property *more beautiful than* – or if we can explain *beauty*, we can only do so ultimately by way of *more beautiful than*. Second, there is a common variety of fittingness theory that analyzes value in terms of desires. According to these theories, what makes something good is that it is fitting to desire. These desire-based accounts fare slightly worse than other theories, I think, when it comes to aesthetic value. Is it true that what makes an aesthetic object beautiful or good that it is fitting to have some corresponding desire? What would it be a desire *for*? Possession doesn't seem right; we don't want to possess all beautiful objects. Perhaps a desire for a state of affairs in which that object exists or continues to exist? But there are transient works whose transience makes them all the better, and even then it's the state of affairs that comes out as good rather than the object itself. Perhaps a desire to engage with the object? But features other than beauty or aesthetic value can make desire for engagement fitting, it seems.

More promising for aesthetics are response-dependence theories that invoke pro-attitudes. The characteristic or fitting response might be something like appreciation. Such an account would hold that what it is for something to be beautiful is for it to either dispose audiences to appreciate it (dispositional) or for it to be fitting to appreciate it (fittingness).[10] We would of course have to spell out exactly what kind of appreciation is relevant, since if we want it to account for beauty or aesthetic goodness, we have to know how it is aesthetic as opposed to, say, moral.[11] And we have to say exactly what we mean by appreciation, since on some accounts, appreciation is more action-like and less response-like.[12] But that aside, this seems pretty good so far.

If we plump for this response-dependence theory, can we say anything about the choice between dispositional and fittingness strands, or between descriptive and normative ideal observer theories? I think so. The dispositional strand will say that what it is for something to be beautiful (say) is for it to dispose one to appreciate it under certain, descriptively specifiable circumstances. This looks even worse than the above dispositional theories. While it is somewhat plausible that an object's disposing us to feel pleasure could explain what makes it good, it is much less plausible to say that an object's disposing us to appreciate it could be what *makes it good*. Imagine an artwork that flatters its audience in some way, and so they are disposed to appreciate it. The dispositionalist now faces a dilemma. If the artwork is not good, the analysis fails because the disposition is present without the corresponding aesthetic property. If the artwork is good, we have the right answer but the wrong reason for it. Surely a more flattering artwork is not thereby a better one, but this view has a hard time explaining why. The general problem is that the dispositionalist relies on *correlations* between the object and one's reactions, but many things dispose us to appreciation that

[10] Here I'm assuming the standard use of 'appreciation' in aesthetics on which it is positively valenced, so that one does not 'appreciate' a disgusting meal in correctly recognizing it as disgusting.

[11] See Harold (2008).

[12] See, e.g., Cross (2017). But notice, too, that if appreciation is the core aesthetic response and it is fundamentally action-like, then the desire theory might look comparatively more attractive. Then, one might analyze beauty in terms of what it would dispose one or be fit for one to want *to do*.

are irrelevant to quality. Fittingness theories improve on this by requiring more than correlation: appreciation must *fit* the object.

We've seen that fittingness theories face fewer problems than dispositionalism. Dispositionalism loses plausibility when unmoored from hedonism, but hedonism itself is questionable. But this does not mean that fittingness theories are without fault. They face a related worry that has been addressed in detail elsewhere, but which I want to flag. The biconditional – that something is beautiful if and only if it is fitting to appreciate it – is very hard to deny. (Again, this puts them a step ahead of dispositionalism, whose corresponding biconditional – that something is beautiful if and only if it disposes us to appreciate it – is easier to deny.) No-priority views reject the priority of either side of this biconditional over the other. But fittingness views endorse the priority of the right-hand side: whenever something is beautiful, that is *because* it is fitting to appreciate. And that is something that we may want to reject. A familiar refrain from existing critiques of fittingness theories is that the value is not to be explained in terms of the fittingness of the response, but that the fittingness of the response is to be explained in terms of the value (or the properties that give rise to the value). In other words, there's a kind of Euthyphro problem here. Is appreciation fitting because the object is beautiful, or is the object beautiful because appreciation is fitting? The former seems the right answer, but fittingness theories appear to answer with the latter. One reply that its defenders sometimes offer is this: It is the lower-level properties or the nature of the beautiful object that explains why it is beautiful, as well as why it is fitting to appreciate it (Scanlon (1998, 391), Rowland (2019, 65ff.)). Though I think this is a quite powerful worry, it has received attention already in metaethical debates, and I think that the aesthetic domain has neither more nor fewer worries than ethics on this score. I will thus set this concern aside, since what I am most interested in are advantages or disadvantages for response-dependence theories that are distinctive to aesthetics.

4. A New Problem: Insight and Perspective

In many respects, the advantages and disadvantages of response-dependence theories are comparable in ethics and aesthetics. Many of the traditional worries for response-dependence theories translate seamlessly to aesthetics: the problem dispositional theories have accounting for evaluative properties and the Euthyphro problem, for instance. But aesthetics strikes most people as more amenable than ethics to response-dependence theories, to the point that some response-dependence views (whether for ethical value or for all value) are explicitly motivated by aesthetic examples (Wiggins (1998), D'Arms and Jacobson (2000b)). I suspect this is because it seems to many that aesthetics has to do with the senses, where ethics doesn't; that aesthetics is focused on experiences, where morality is focused on action; that aesthetics leans more subjective than ethics does, and that this collection of features renders aesthetic response-dependence more intuitively appealing. However, these assumptions aren't totally uncontroversial, and I and others have argued against these ways of thinking. But even if these aren't genuine disanalogies between ethics and aesthetics, that would only put aesthetics on a par with ethics as far as response-dependence theories go. Here, I am interested in a different kind of problem for response-dependence theories in aesthetics, in both its dispositional and fittingness forms. This problem does not, I think, have a ready equivalent in ethics. To see it, we need to look at two classes of more complex properties of artworks.

Let's call the first class of properties *insight* properties. In addition to being funny or beautiful, artworks can be insightful. They can help us understand ourselves and our relationships more profoundly, add dimension and texture to otherwise flat pictures of the world, reveal patterns and depths that we hadn't previously imagined. They can also be provocative, challenging our views and preconceptions of the world, and they can be thought-provoking, stimulating us to reflect on things previously unconsidered or overlooked. I group them together because they are all shades of the same phenomenon, where art offers us something cognitive that isn't quite reducible to propositional knowledge. Each of these is also a way in which art can be valuable. Although 'provocative' and 'thought-provoking' aren't obviously evaluative terms, we do in many instances use them to bestow aesthetic praise (in a way that we wouldn't simply, for example, point out how symmetrical or how blue a painting is). This isn't to say that art that has these properties is always good, all things considered, and certainly not that such art is always beautiful. But when present, they can be good-making features of artworks.

The second class of properties are *perspective* properties. Artworks can give us new perspectives and shift our existing perspectives. I take the concept of perspective from Elisabeth Camp (2017a, 2017b). She develops the notion in the context of metaphor and language, and I here want to broaden it to an important feature of art more generally. In describing perspectives, she offers the slogan that they "are tools for thought, not thoughts in themselves" (2017a, 79). We have, at any given time, a way of parsing and processing the information that surrounds us. We read people's gestures and sift emails for tone and significance, noticing and emphasizing some features while ignoring or downplaying others. But art can frame experiences in such a way that we are given new ways to process information. One might leave a theater after having watched some French new wave cinema and feel the smallest, most quotidian things to be suddenly infused with symbolic import and existential pregnancy. Or one might watch a lot of romcoms and start to see the world in terms of meet-cutes and dramatic declarations of love in the pouring rain. Less narratively rich artworks, too, may do this: Barbara Hepworth's sculptures help us see the spaces between objects, just as John Cage helps us hear the spaces between sounds.[13] A perspective, as Camp has it, is an interpretive toolkit, a hermeneutical lens. Art can also be valuable by possessing these perspective-shifting and perspective-enhancing properties. Indeed, like insightfulness, it is one of the things we take to be most centrally valuable about artworks. Art can express and communicate feeling; art can help us see through another's eyes. Platitudes like this can be read as articulating the fundamental (and fundamentally artistic) value of these perspective properties.

These two classes of properties pose a serious obstacle to response-dependence. In short, it is hard to see them corresponding to certain responses when we understand responses in the relevant sense. The remainder of this section will flesh out this argument, and the final section will point out ways that a response-dependence theorist might be able to move past this.

Before we look at the real problem, there is a prima facie worry: there is not always a single characteristic or most fitting insight or perspective to come away with. Compare awe and the sublime. Supposing that the characteristic response to the sublime is awe is perfectly compatible with the sublime *also* disposing us or making it fitting for us to have some other response. But those other responses cannot be part of what it is for something to be sublime, or else they too would appear in the analysis. Furthermore,

[13] Thanks to Samantha Matherne for raising this issue.

assuming this analysis, the sublime cannot dispose or make it fitting for us to have a response that is contrary to or precludes awe.

Notice how different this is for perspective properties. A French new wave film like Jean-Luc Godard's *Breathless* may turn us toward a world suffused with existential gravity, or it may, alternately, turn us toward a world that is suddenly lighter and sillier than before. A romcom like Nora Ephron's *You've Got Mail* may make us see a world of drama and destiny against which everyday love pales by comparison, or it may make us see a world where even those simplest loves can be the greatest (after all it's just two ordinary AOL users, not Romeo and Juliet or Paris and Helen of Troy). A novel like Toni Morrison's *Beloved* may leave you seeing the world more spiritually and ephemerally, thinking of things past and lives beyond this one, or it may leave you seeing the world more materially and earthly than before, attending to real, final deaths in the real, final ground. Artworks contain multitudes, and this isn't just a comment on the plurality of possible interpretations, but on the visions of the world they offer and teach us to see with. Similar remarks apply to insight as well: Existential works can help us recognize the true fallaciousness of human ambition, or instead recognize human resilience and ability to forge meaning.

This might seem to be a problem because not only do these examples involve multiple equally dispositionally likely or equally fitting responses, but they are *opposed* responses. Response-dependence theories necessarily rely on the characteristic or fitting attitudes to help unify and isolate the target properties. Something seems to have gone wrong if there are two equally fitting but contrary responses. In reply, the response-dependence theorist might analyze the property disjunctively, in terms of either eligible response. I think this reply is fine but has limited power to explain richer cases where there is no specifiable set of responses. A better reply holds that the property in question is not *perspective-p_1-producing*, but *perspective-producing*; not *insight-i_1-producing*, but *insightful*. That is, the property in question is compatible with the artwork producing *any* change in perspective at all or *any* insight at all. It's no problem that some licensed perspectives are incompatible, or that some licensed insights are incompatible.

There is a more serious problem, however, and it has to do with what counts as a response. There is a use of 'response' where we say that we respond to a question by answering it or respond to injustice by protesting it. This is not a response in the relevant sense. Response-dependence theories typically characterize responses as (a) attitudinal mental states that are (b) directed at the object in question. Paradigm response-dependence involves fearing the fearful, being ashamed of the shameful. They don't have to involve cognate terms, of course – we can also be amused by the funny and admire the good – but those are tidy examples. Notice that these are all psychological states (many are emotions) rather than actions, and that they are directed at the object in question. What does one fear? The object of fear, the fearful. What is one amused by? The funny joke. We can also extend this to mental states like desire, admiration, and appreciation. All of these attitudes are meant to be directed at the thing that is good or valuable.

Insight and perspective don't work quite this way. Insight is at least a mental state; our having an insight is obviously a thing that happens in the head, even if it is in some sense factive. We might also squint a bit and be able to see insight as a psychological attitude in the vein of the above examples. However, the other condition is not met. The insights delivered are not insights concerning the work itself. Though it's true that the work is the cause of the insight, and we therefore call the work (rather than the world) insightful, the insights themselves are directed toward the world outside the work. So we have a violation of

condition (b). Perspective, too, is plausibly in the head, even if it's very complicated. That said, to adopt a particular perspective is not exactly to enter into a particular mental state. It is rather to enter into what we might think of as a genus of mental states. Metaphorically, it is a frame of mind rather than a particular image in the frame. This itself might not be such a serious problem, but what it means is that these states, too, are not directed at the work itself but at the world outside it, and again a violation of (b).

This is the first wave of the problem. In reply, the response-dependence theorist may deny that they are committed to condition (b). Paradigm responses may happen to satisfy it, but that doesn't mean that responses of the relevant kind must do so. How then does the response-dependence theorist distinguish the preferred responses from everything else? This brings us to the second wave of the problem.

Let's focus first on fittingness theories.[14] An important distinction in thinking about fittingness is between two kinds of reasons to have a response. Some are reasons of the right kind, and some are of the wrong kind. Admiring a tyrant because he will hurt you unless you admire him is a *wrong kind of reason* to admire the tyrant. Admiring a tyrant because, though tyrannical, he is very loyal to his partner is a *right kind of reason* to admire him. Intuitively, the latter contributes to his being worthy of admiration (i.e., to his possessing the value in question), while the former doesn't – it simply makes it to one's advantage to admire him. Take also the case of morally dubious jokes. Justin D'Arms and Daniel Jacobson (2000a) argue that the moral reasons to not be amused by the joke do not affect how funny it is, since a joke can be hysterically funny but morally suspect. Their conclusion about jokes may not be right, but on this view a moral reason to be amused by a joke is the wrong kind of reason to be amused; it does not make amusement fitting. Again, this distinction is important for fittingness theories because it provides necessary clarification to when responses are fitting. And this matters because the fittingness of relevant responses determines when an object has the value property in question.[15]

Now, when a work is insightful (or offers us a new perspective), our reason to appreciate the artwork is because it will provide us with certain insights (or offer us a new perspective). In appreciating the work, I gain a new insight or perspective, and this is one thing that gives me reason to appreciate it. But this looks exactly parallel to paradigmatic examples of the wrong kind of reasons.[16] As with the tyrant, something about what the appreciation does for me is what drives my appreciation. If this is right, then the fact that an artwork is insightful or can produce a change in perspective is the wrong kind of reason to appreciate it. Insight and perspective properties therefore, on this view, cannot be ways in which an artwork is valuable. But surely this cannot be correct.

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[14] Thanks to Richard Rowland for helpful discussion of this point.

[15] To clarify, the 'reasons' terminology is not essential to fittingness theories, and thus neither is the letter of this distinction. Still, the spirit of it is essential, since a fittingness theorist needs some way of distinguishing fitting from unfitting (but otherwise good or desirable) responses. This is a common way of doing so, and the idea that guides the distinction is apparent enough, even if purists might prefer it framed without reference to reasons. Cf. Chappell (2012), Howard (2019).

[16] There are more technical, though controversial, ways of drawing the distinction that may be helpful for some readers. If one prefers to distinguish object- and state-given reasons à la Schroeder (2012), the fact that an artwork can provide insight and perspective speaks to a beneficial state it can produce, not to the object itself. Thus, they look like state-given reasons, which are the wrong kind of reasons. If we instead use the dual role conditions that Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen (2004) offer, then the insight or perspective we gain occurs in the intentional content of our attitude. Thus, it again looks like the wrong kind of reason.

Still, you could admire the tyrant, not directly because he will harm you if you don't, but because of his *grit* or his *moxie*, which is evidenced in his threats. Maybe insight and perspective properties are like that. I don't think this is quite right. Part of why you (rightly) appreciate the artwork is *that you gain insight* or *that you gain a shift in perspective*. Of course you may *also* appreciate the fact that the artwork is such as to afford new insights or perspectives, but that is not all that's going on. Imagine admiring a friend who will give you a nice gift if you recognize their generosity. A right kind of reason to admire the friend, it seems, is that they are generous (supposing that they indeed are). A wrong kind of reason to admire the friend is the very fact that they gave you a nice gift if you do so. But with insight and perspective properties, this is just the kind of analysis that I dispute. Here, the seeming wrong kind of reason really does look like a right kind of reason to appreciate the artwork. The problem, in sum, is that it is just quite hard for fittingness theories to capture the full range of aesthetic values.

Are dispositional theories better off? They do not make, nor do they need, any such distinction between the right and wrong kinds of reasons. But the corresponding problem for dispositional theories is that, in order to remain *response*-dependence theories, they need to explain when something counts as a response to the object as opposed to simply an effect the object produces. Think of a complex piece like *Sleep No More*, an interactive retelling of *Macbeth* in a New York warehouse-turned-theater. In this piece, participants enter the building and move freely through different rooms to uncover and piece together parts of the story. Responses to this might be discomfort, excitement, or appreciation. This is unlike non-response effects of this, which might include the feeling of cold, the experience of having one's vision obscured, or the sensation of having one's wrist grabbed by an actor. Without a condition that bears on the directedness of one's response toward the work, it is hard to see how to distinguish these. Compare color properties, the usual model of dispositional theories in aesthetics. What it is for something to be red is for it to produce the redness sensation in us, but in such a way that this sensation is *directed at it*. We wouldn't call a pill red just because ingesting it caused a redness sensation in us. We only call the pill red if it produces the redness sensation in us in by virtue of its surface reflectance properties under normal lighting conditions, i.e., only if *it looks red*. And one natural way to capture that is by saying that our red perception is directed at the pill or takes the pill as its object. So the dispositionalist must also embrace directedness, but directedness is what generates the problem that insight and perspective properties cannot be valuable. Thus, dispositionalism too faces a form of the insight and perspective problem.

A final note is in order. I have characterized all fittingness theories and many dispositional theories as species of response-dependence. But it may appear that, somewhere along the line, I lost the essence of what made response-dependence attractive to the aesthetician in the first place: the plausibility that aesthetic properties and therefore aesthetic value correspond to emotion or emotion-like, object-directed attitudes. This simple (but perhaps not naïve) view is the historically popular one, and it is for this reason that I have dismissed accounts that some metaethical response-dependence theorists find appealing: views on which actions count as responses. However, in discussing preference, desires, and appreciation the aesthetician may still see us as having strayed from that essence of plausibility in response-dependence. I do want to insist that the present theories are versions of response-dependence and that they are ultimately more defensible, albeit imperfect. But maybe what this reaction reveals is another point where these theories, once made more sound, end up losing something that motivated their existence in the first place.

5. *Ways Forward for Response-Dependence*

This paper has examined the prospects for response-dependence theories in aesthetics, suggesting that fittingness theories have an advantage over dispositional theories and pointing out which fittingness theories are best suited to explain aesthetic value. But the last section saw some aesthetic properties that make the case for aesthetic response-dependence look worse than the case for response-dependence in ethics. This is surprising in itself, since it is a way that aesthetic response-dependence, which seems intuitively even more attractive than response-dependence in ethics, is actually more difficult to accommodate. For those very captivated by the promise of response-dependence, there are three broad strategies for getting past insight and perspective properties.

First, the response-dependence theorist might just deny that insight and perspective properties are ways in which an artwork can be valuable. To lessen the blow, they might say that they're ways in which the artwork can be *instrumentally* valuable (akin to admiring the tyrant so he won't harm you), but not ways in which the artwork is intrinsically or finally valuable. While technically sound, this solution gives up the very strong intuition that these really are things that make the artwork better *qua artwork* and seems therefore best to avoid if possible.

One might, however, admit that these are ways that the artwork could be better qua artwork but hold that it is not thereby aesthetically better. They contribute to the work's artistic value, but not its aesthetic value. Such views are promising, but they rely on some of the same controversial assumptions and commitments that the D'Arms and Jacobson (2000a) view of jokes relies on. In particular, D'Arms and Jacobson commit themselves to a version of aesthetic autonomism, the view that the moral properties of a work cannot affect its aesthetic value. Response-dependence views that avail themselves of the current proposal have a corresponding but stronger commitment, one which says that the cognitive properties of a work cannot affect its aesthetic value. On this view, there would be a core of aesthetic value that is best accounted for by response-dependence, and everything else is an effect of that core set of valuable features. But they are not ways in which the artwork is itself valuable. This is, it should be noted, an even more extreme version of autonomism. Most philosophers of art are likely to reject this out of hand because this trail of thinking leads naturally (though perhaps not inexorably) to extreme formalism, the view that the only genuinely aesthetic properties are purely formal ones. This view faces problems so serious that virtually nobody holds it anymore.[17] As such, this option is also best avoided if possible.

Both of the above strategies work by arguing that insight and perspective properties do not contribute directly to aesthetic value. According to these options, response-dependence *does* explain all aesthetic value(s), but they achieve that result by shrinking the domain of the aesthetic, so that insight and perspective properties are no longer actually aesthetic properties. An alternative strategy instead shrinks the domain of response-dependence so that it remains the best theory for some – but not all – aesthetic value(s). This strategy is compatible with response-dependence being the best account of some properties, like the sublime (it disposes us to feel awe or merits awe), but it is at heart pluralistic, holding that

[17] A quick tour of those problems includes, for example, that it's very difficult to determine when a property counts as a formal one, that it's unclear what the formal properties are for art forms like literature, and that such restrictions on non-visual and non-auditory art forms are generally implausible.

response-dependence must work alongside other theories to explain the value of art and other aesthetic objects. Interestingly, it may be compatible with response-dependence being the best account of thin aesthetic properties, such as aesthetic goodness and perhaps beauty, but not all of the thicker evaluative aesthetic properties. Whether this approach works depends on how the thick aesthetic properties are thought to factor into the thin aesthetic properties, and whether we can specify the appropriate response to thin aesthetic properties (e.g., appreciation) without essentially appealing to the other range of aesthetic emotions and responses to thicker aesthetic properties. (For example, whether we can talk of appreciating the thunderstorm without feeling awe at its sublimity, or of appreciating the novel without having our perspective shifted by it.) Regardless of what we say about thin aesthetic properties, this strategy gives up on the promise that Hume-inspired response-dependence theories had of accounting for all aesthetic value and aesthetic normativity.

Because of the serious problems facing the first two strategies – which shrink the scope of the aesthetic in unappealing ways, it seems to me that the best way forward for the response-dependence theorist leaves us embracing response-dependence in at most a limited way. This may be unsatisfying to the Humean aesthetician who sought to resolve the tension between the spookiness and subjectivity through response-dependence. This does not mean that any standard of taste must in fact be spooky, but it means that, if there's a thoroughly non-spooky solution, it won't be response-dependence alone.

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