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The Acquaintance Inference and Hybrid Expressivism

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Abstract. Sentences containing predicates of personal taste (e.g., “tasty,” “funny”) and aesthetic predicates (e.g., “beautiful”) give rise to an acquaintance inference: They convey the information that speakers have firsthand experience with the object of predication and they can only be uttered appropriately if that is the case. This is surprisingly hard to explain. I will concentrate on aesthetic predicates, and firstly criticize previous attempts to explain the acquaintance phenomena. Second, I will suggest an explanation that rests on a speech-act theoretical version of hybrid expressivism, according to which, in uttering “X is beautiful” speakers perform two illocutionary acts simultaneously: an expressive and an assertive one. I will spell out this suggestion in detail and defend it against objections. Considering puzzles related to the acquaintance inference will lead to powerful argument for a new version of hybrid expressivism in meta-aesthetics.

1. Introduction

It is widely accepted that utterances of simple sentences containing predicates of personal taste (e.g., “tasty,” “funny”) and aesthetic predicates (e.g., “beautiful,” “moving”) give rise to an *acquaintance inference*: they usually communicate that the speaker has firsthand experience with the object of predication. Take a look at the following examples:

- (1) Orange juice is tasty.
- (2) The new movie by Sofia Coppola is beautiful.

An utterance of (1) or (2) conveys that the speaker has tried orange juice (s. (1)) or has seen the movie (s. (2)). This is why uttering (1) or (2) while explicitly denying that you have experienced the object in question sounds very odd:

(1') ?? Orange juice is tasty, but I have never tried it (cf. Ninan 2014).

(2') ?? The new movie by Sofia Coppola is beautiful, it is such a shame that I have never seen it (cf. Robson 2012).

If you have not experienced the object in question, uttering the following modified versions of the sentences would be more appropriate:

(1'') Orange juice *must/will/is supposed to* be tasty, but I have never tried it.

(2'') The new movie by Sofia Coppola *must/will/is supposed to* be beautiful, it is such a shame that I have never seen it.

Thus, (1) and (2) give rise to the acquaintance inference and are also subject to an *acquaintance norm*—they can only be uttered appropriately if you have experienced the objects in question. Why do these principles hold? Different answers have been suggested in the literature. These suggestions have interesting consequences, for example, with respect to mechanisms about how evidentiality is encoded in language (s. Anand & Korotkova 2018, Ninan 2020), with respect to norms governing assertions and other speech-acts (s. Willer & Kennedy 2020, Franzén 2018), or with respect to the epistemology and metaphysics of the properties we ascribe to objects by using those predicates (s. Ninan 2014, Dinges & Zakkou 2021).

Besides the differences in terms of the consequences, the suggestions also differ in their focus of attention. Some set out to give a general explanation covering all predicates that give rise to the acquaintance inference (taste predicates, aesthetic predicates, appearance predicates, etc.; s. Korotkova & Anand 2018); others have considered aesthetic predicates as well as predicates of personal taste (Franzén 2018, Ninan 2014); and still others have restricted their focus solely on predicates of personal taste—either in their non-relativized (s. Ninan 2020, Willer & Kennedy 2020) or their explicitly relativized form (e.g., “tasty *to me*,” s. Dinges & Zakkou 2021).

In this paper, I will focus on aesthetic predicates. I will restrict my attention to utterances of simple sentences containing the non-relativized predicate “beautiful,” such as:

(3) X is beautiful.

I will use the term “aesthetic sentence” to refer to sentences of this form, and I will use “aesthetic statement” to refer to the utterance of the sentence.

The main reason for this focus is that there are interesting differences between aesthetic predicates, predicates of personal taste, and other predicates that give rise to the acquaintance phenomena (see McNally & Stojanovic 2017). In the face of these differences, I am unsure whether we should presuppose from the outset that a satisfying and unified explanation of the phenomena is possible. At any rate, in the present inquiry, I am not striving for a unified explanation. Instead, I am aiming for an explanation of the acquaintance phenomena with respect to aesthetic statements that explains the relevant linguistic data and is not in conflict with plausible views concerning the semantics of aesthetic predicates as well as the metaphysics of aesthetic properties. I will simply leave the question—whether my explanation can be transferred to other sentence-types—open.¹

My suggestion will build on the expressivist account suggested by Nils Franzén (2018). Franzén adopts an expressivist theory with respect to aesthetic statements and taste statements. According to expressivism, those statements do not belong to the illocutionary act of assertions, but to the illocutionary act of expressives (s. *ibid*: 676). In contrast to assertions, expressive speech-acts do not express a belief, but a non-doxastic mental state or attitude. According to this view, the aesthetic statement (3) is comparable to the exclamative: “Bravo!”

I agree with Franzén that by pointing to certain sincerity conditions of expressives, expressivism has the resources to explain the acquaintance requirement. However, expressivist

¹ The reasons why I also do not consider explicitly relativized aesthetic statements (such as “X is beautiful *to me/her/Sarah etc.*”) are twofold. First, just like the sentences mentioned above, explicitly relativized aesthetic sentences also show a different behavior from non-relativized aesthetic statements, so that I am not inclined to presuppose a unified explanation of acquaintance phenomena here either. Second, unlike relativized taste statements (“X is tasty *to me/her/Sarah etc.*”), explicitly relativized aesthetic statements are very rare and sound somewhat odd (see McNally & Stojanovic 2017: 31; for an early example of a comparable observation, see Kant (CoJ): § 7). Thus, I do not think that our intuitions with respect to these statements are stable and trustworthy enough to bare much theoretical weight.

views with respect to aesthetic statements face well-known and serious problems. In summary, these problems result from the fact that aesthetic statements behave very differently from an exclamative (such as “Bravo!”)—semantically as well as pragmatically. Thus, if these problems are not adequately addressed, the expressivist explanation is not a serious contender to the other explanations of the acquaintance phenomena offered in the literature.

In this paper, I will argue that these problems can be solved by adopting a hybrid expressivist theory. The version of hybrid expressivism that I am going to develop claims that, in uttering an aesthetic sentence, we perform two speech-acts simultaneously: an assertive and an expressive one. Through recourse to the *expressive* aspect, the acquaintance phenomena can be successfully explained, and through recourse to the *assertive* aspect, the problems of a purely expressivist position can be solved. Thus, focusing on the acquaintance requirement will lead to an interesting and well-motivated hybrid expressivist theory with respect to the meaning of aesthetic statements.

In section 2 I will clarify some terminology and preliminaries of the discussion. In section 3 I will assess different attempts to explain the acquaintance phenomena with respect to aesthetic statements and show why they are wanting. In section 4 I will elaborate on the suggested hybrid expressivist explanation and the resulting theory of aesthetic statements. I will discuss remaining problems with the account in section 5 and end the discussion with a short summary in section 6.

2. Terminology and Preliminaries

The acquaintance inference with respect to aesthetic statements says:

AI: Uttering a sentence of the form “X is beautiful” conveys the information that the speaker has firsthand experience with X.

This goes along with an acquaintance norm AN:

AN: Uttering “X is beautiful” is appropriate only if you have firsthand experience with X.

Before we investigate why AI and AN hold, we have to understand what those principles claim. To what types of objects does the variable “X” refer, and how is the notion “experience” understood?

It is important to realize that it is nonessential that “X” refers to artwork. AI/AN also hold for aesthetic sentences that refer to objects of nature or daily use:

(4) This mountain panorama/her bike/his voice is beautiful.

(4') ?? This mountain panorama/her bike/his voice is beautiful. It is such a shame that I have not seen/heard it.

This illustrates two things. First, all explanations of AI/AN that can only explain the principles with respect to statements that refer to artwork will be unsatisfying (s., for example, Robson 2015). Second, because (4) and (4') refer to visible as well as audible objects, the term “experience” covers perceptual experiences of different sense modalities. Furthermore, sometimes seeing a photograph of X might be enough to appropriately utter “X is beautiful,” and sometimes “X” might refer to an abstract object that is not experientially observable at all (e.g., a mathematical proof). Thus, “experience” in the formulation of the principles should also cover *indirect* perceptual-experiences (of different sense modalities) as well as *non-perceptual* forms of acquaintance.²

However, there is an important sense in which AI and AN have to be restricted. Predicates of personal taste and aesthetic predicates have an autocentric and an exocentric reading. In the following conversational context, an exocentric reading is triggered:

(5) A: How is Saba’s trip to London?

B: Great, she has seen a beautiful play.

B’s statement does not convey that B has seen the play. It is natural to assume that the play in question was one that *Saba* judged to be beautiful (perhaps by calling it “beautiful”), and B is tying

² For the purposes of this paper, I accept that seeing a photograph of X counts as perceptually experiencing X indirectly. Furthermore, note that objects of daily use are often tokens of certain types. In this case, uttering “X₁ is beautiful” is often appropriate, even though you have not seen the token X₁, but another token X₂ of the type. Thus, for the purposes of this paper, I will also accept that seeing a certain token X₂ of a type counts as an indirect experience of another token X₁ of that type.

her statement to Saba's judgment. Thus, B's statement is appropriate even though she has not experienced the object in question herself. This is commonly known as an exocentric reading (see Lasersohn 2005: 670). AI/AN does not hold for exocentric readings of aesthetic sentences. Until explicitly noted otherwise, I will, therefore, concentrate on autocentric readings in what follows.³

3. Previous Explanations and Their Shortcomings

3.1 The Implicature Account

In aesthetics, the linguistic acquaintance norm AN is well known (cf. Mothershill 1984: 160). However, in the relevant literature, the norm is often not investigated in its own right but in its relation to the so-called "acquaintance principle," an epistemic principle that does not concern the *utterance* of aesthetic sentences but the *justification* of aesthetic beliefs.

The epistemic acquaintance principle (roughly):

An aesthetic belief can only be justified via firsthand experience with the object in question (cf. Wollheim 1980: 233).

In aesthetics, the focus is often not on explaining AN, but on whether, via recourse to the linguistic norm AN, an argument in favor of the epistemic acquaintance principle with respect to beliefs can be formulated (s. Robson 2012, Hopkins 2000; 2011). Regarding AN itself, many authors in aesthetics quickly accept an implicature account, referring to the theory of implicatures developed by Paul Grice (1989). On this account, it is a conversational implicature of (3) that the speaker has firsthand experience with X. This is why uttering "X is beautiful" conveys the information that the speaker has seen X (see AI). And because speakers should not conversationally implicate falsehoods, the acquaintance norm AN is thereby explained as well (s. Budd 2003: 391; Hopkins 2000: 217; 2011: 145).

³ Whether exocentric readings of aesthetic statements generally give rise to a different acquaintance inference, so that they convey that the person to whom the aesthetic statement is tied to has experienced the objects in question, will be discussed in section 5.

However, as many authors have noticed, this account is unconvincing (s. Ninan 2014: 297, Franzén 2018: 671, Dinges & Zakkou 2021: 1189–1190). First, if p conversationally implicates q , then this implication can be cancelled by uttering “ p , but not q ” (s. Grice 1989: 39). However, uttering “ X is beautiful, but I have not seen it” is infelicitous (s. (2')). Thus, the acquaintance requirement fails the cancelability test for implicatures. Second, up to now no Grice'ian mechanism has been established, which would explain why the supposed conversational implicature is generated in the first place.⁴

3.2 The Epistemic Account

Assertions are governed by certain norms. Timothy Williamson (1996) argues for the following:

Knowledge norm of assertion: Assert p , only if you know that p .

Others consider this norm too strong and opt for something weaker (s. Schechter 2017):

Justified-belief norm of assertion: Assert p , only if you justifiedly believe that p .

If one of those norms is correct and we additionally accept the aforementioned *epistemic acquaintance principle* with respect to aesthetic beliefs, then AI/AN can be explained via the following argument (cf. Ninan 2014, Robson 2012):

- (a) If S is in a position to appropriately utter “ X is beautiful,” then S 's belief that X is beautiful is justified (see the *justified-belief norm* or the *knowledge norm* for assertion).⁵
- (b) If S 's belief that X is beautiful is justified, then S has made a firsthand experience with X (see the *epistemic acquaintance principle*).
- (c) Thus, if S 's utterance of “ X is beautiful” is appropriate, then S has a firsthand experience of X . Hence, AN applies to aesthetic sentences.

⁴ These two reasons speak against the view that the acquaintance inference is a *conversational* implicature. This still leaves open the possibility that it is a *conventional* implicature. I will come back to this in sec. 3.4, see fn. 7.

⁵ For the sake of argument, I will accept that justification is necessary for knowledge.

Notably, (a)–(c) explains the acquaintance norm AN, and the acquaintance inference AI can then be explained by pointing to the fact that we usually assume our conversational partners respect the norms of assertions.

This strategy has been criticized in various ways (s. Franzén 2018: 672–675; Anand & Korotkova 2018: 61–63; Dinges & Zakkou 2021: 1193–1195; Willer & Kennedy 2020: 28–29). For the purposes of this paper it is not necessary to rehearse all of these problems in detail. The most serious problem with the strategy is that it presupposes the *epistemic acquaintance principle* of aesthetic belief (see premise (b)). *Prima facie*, the following speaks against the principle: Assume that you and your friend have been of the same opinion, with respect to the question of whether certain objects are beautiful, more than a thousand times. Furthermore, assume that your friend tells you that a certain object X, which you have not yet seen, is beautiful and that, on the basis of her testimony, you believe that X is beautiful. Is this belief of yours justified? It is very plausible to assume that it is. This is especially clear if we do not presuppose a binary model of belief. Assume, before your friend tells you anything about X, your credence in “X is beautiful” is 0.5. Should your credence increase after your friend—with whom you have shared the same aesthetic opinion a thousand times—tells you, that X is beautiful? Yes—it would be irrational if it did not. And I see no reason to assume the new credence could not meet a certain threshold for justification or knowledge. If proponents of the epistemic account like to hold on to their explanation of AI/AN, they have to put forward additional reasons why such a threshold for justification of knowledge cannot be met.

Additionally, it is perfectly rational to act on aesthetic testimony. It is rational for you to go and see a movie because your friend or a critic told you that the movie is beautiful. And it is natural to account for the rationality of this behavior by claiming that you have testimonial justification for the belief that the movie is beautiful (s. for detailed discussion of this point, see, for example, Hopkins 2011, Lord 2016).

Thus, on closer inspection, the *epistemic acquaintance principle* with respect to aesthetic belief is at least questionable, and there seem to be plausible arguments against it. Furthermore, the

strongest argument in *favor* of the principle is useless in our dialectical situation. The strongest argument is an inference to the best explanation: Advocates of the epistemic acquaintance principle, with respect to aesthetic beliefs, also accept the linguistic acquaintance norm with respect to aesthetic statements AN. They argue that (a)–(c) is the best explanation for why AN holds. Because this explanation presupposes the epistemic acquaintance principle (see (b)), they conclude that this principle must be correct (s. Robson 2012). This strategy presupposes the linguistic norm AN to justify the epistemic acquaintance principle via an inference to the best explanation. Because this line of thought is an inference to the best explanation, its cogency depends on the question, whether there are other and better explanations for AN. Suggesting a better explanation for AN, one that does not rest on a questionable epistemic principle with respect to aesthetic beliefs, is exactly what this paper sets out to do.

3.3 The Entailment Account

According to the entailment account, uttering the aesthetic sentence,

(3) X is beautiful,

conveys that the speaker has experienced X because (3) *entails* that the speaker has experienced X. Thus, the acquaintance inference AI is explained. And because speakers are not supposed to say something that entails falsehoods, the acquaintance norm AN is thereby explained as well.

Dinges and Zakkou (2021) defend this view with respect to sentences containing explicitly relativized predicates of personal taste:

(6) This cake is *tasty to me*.

They start out by presenting a dispositional account. According to this account (6) is synonymous with:

(7) I am disposed to get gustatory pleasure when I eat this cake (see *ibid.*: 1189).

Eating the cake (under ideal conditions, i.e., not after brushing my teeth) is the manifestation condition and having gustatory pleasure is the manifestation of the disposition; however, (7) does

not entail that the speaker has tasted the cake. After all, dispositional properties can be instantiated, even though they have not been manifested. A glass can have the dispositional property of being breakable, even though it might never break. Thus, Dingens and Zakkou suggest that (6) does not refer to a disposition but to something they call “tendency,” where a tendency is a disposition that has been manifested (s. *ibid.*: 1195). So, in their view, (6) is synonymous to:

(8) I tend to get gustatory pleasure when I eat this cake.

According to their conception of “tendency,” (8) is only true if (7) is. But in contrast to (7), the truth-conditions of (8) demand the additional requirement that the disposition has been manifested, i.e., that the speaker had gustatory pleasure while eating the cake. Thus, (8) entails that the speaker tried the cake, otherwise she would not have felt the relevant gustatory pleasure. As (6) is synonymous with (8), (6) entails that the speaker has experienced the cake as well. This explains the acquaintance requirement.

Even though this might be an interesting suggestion with respect to the explicitly relativized predicates of personal taste, transferring it to aesthetic predicates is problematic. According to such an account, the aesthetic sentence (3) has the same truth-conditions as:

(9) I tend to get a certain kind of (aesthetic) pleasure when I experience X.

Therefore, it entails that the speaker has experienced X. I will specify four problems with this suggestion.

First, according to this view, “beautiful” refers to a special dispositional property, namely a *tendency* in Dingens and Zakkou’s sense. This property is instantiated only if a person has experienced X. As a result, it is metaphysically impossible that there are beautiful objects that nobody has seen. However, this is very implausible. It seems reasonable to suppose that there might be beautiful diamonds buried in a mountain somewhere that nobody has seen. Second, if the entailment view is correct, then a person who knows she has never seen X but believes that X is beautiful because her friend has told her so, either does not understand the term “beautiful” or is irrational. Given

what we said about the epistemic acquaintance principle, this is an implausible consequence. Third, if (3) is synonymous with (9), the following dialogue should be odd:

(10) A: X is beautiful.

B: No, that is false, X is not beautiful.

If (3) is synonymous with (9), then A and B would not be in disagreement in the sense that B denies the proposition that A is expressing with her utterance. Thus, using the explicit disagreement marker “No, that is false” should be odd. But using this marker is not odd at all. Fourth, if the entailment account is correct and we accept the standard semantics for negation, then the following sentence would be true only because I have not seen X:

(3*) It is not the case that X is beautiful.

This is counterintuitive. After all, as a consequence of this view, pointing to the fact that I have never seen X would be a sufficient reason to deny that X is beautiful. However, it seems unreasonable to believe that I have not seen X and that, *therefore*, it is not the case that X is beautiful. I conclude that the entailment account is not promising with respect to aesthetic statements.⁶

3.4 The Presupposition Account

The presupposition account holds that it is a semantic presupposition of sentences (1)–(3) that the speaker has experienced the relevant object in question (s. Person 2013, Anand & Korotkova 2018, Ninan 2020). This explains the acquaintance inference AI, and because speakers should not presuppose something false, the presupposition account can explain the acquaintance norm AN as well. Why is this explanation problematic?

Presuppositions are pieces of information that are not a part of the semantic content but are nonetheless associated with certain lexical items.

(11) Yoshi quit smoking.

⁶ Note that the fourth problem in particular also concerns the entailment account with respect to relativized predicates of personal taste. Dinges and Zakkou (2021: 1198–1199) try to solve this problem by arguing that negation in the corresponding taste-sentences usually only takes a narrow scope.

An utterance of (10) does not assert that Yoshi smoked in the past, but the use of “quit” triggers the presupposition that he has. In linguistics it is usually assumed that if a presupposition is not satisfied, then the relevant sentence is semantically undefined (i.e., it lacks a truth value).

Presuppositions project over a wide range of operations and embeddings. All of the following sentences presuppose that Yoshi smoked in the past:

- (12) Yoshi has *not* quit smoking. (*Negation*)
- (13) Yoshi *might* have quit smoking. (*Epistemic modal*)
- (14) *If* Yoshi quit smoking, *then* his parents are happy. (*Conditional*)
- (15) Has Yoshi quit smoking? (*Interrogative*)

An often recognized problem of the presupposition account is that the acquaintance requirement shows a very different projection behavior:

- (16) X is *not* beautiful. (*Negation*)
- (17) X *might* be beautiful. (*Epistemic modal*)
- (18) *If* X is beautiful, *then* I will buy it. (*Conditional*)
- (19) Is X beautiful? (*Interrogative*)

It is correct that AI projects over negation (see (16)), but in all of the other embeddings both AI and AN are lost. This contradicts the presupposition account (s. Ninan 2014, Franzén 2018: 672, Dinges and Zakkou 2021: 1191–1192).⁷

Recently, it has been suggested that we could hold onto the presupposition account by positing mechanisms that allow certain operators (e.g., epistemic modals) and certain embeddings (e.g., conditionals) to obviate the acquaintance requirement (s. Anand & Korotkova 2018, Ninan 2020). Unfortunately, space does not allow for a discussion of the various forms of this suggestion in detail. Thus, I will point to three general reasons why I still think we should look for alternative explanations of AI/AN.

⁷ Note that the same reason speaks against the view that the acquaintance inference is a *conventional* implicature. Because it is usually assumed that conventional implicatures exhibit the same projection behavior as presuppositions (s. Potts 2005).

First, as long as there is no systematic explanation for why some operators and embeddings have the effect in question and others do not, the proposal seems somewhat *ad hoc*. This is especially correct if—as Anand and Korotkova (2018) argue—the various operators do not always erase the acquaintance requirement. In combination with some predicates they seem to maintain the requirement and in combination with others they seem to erase it. Second, at least some of the suggested mechanisms that are supposed to be responsible for the obviation are confronted with difficulties (s. Dinges & Zakkou 2021: 1192–1193). Third, sometimes negation with the right kind of accentuation can be used as a metalinguistic critique of using the words that trigger the presupposition:

(20) A: Yoshi quit smoking.

B: It is certainly not the case that Yoshi *quit* smoking—after all, he never smoked a cigarette in his life!

In (20), B is criticizing A for using the term “quit,” even though the presupposition triggered by her use of the word is false. Presuppositions, which are triggered by certain lexical items, allow for this kind of metalinguistic critique.

However, aesthetic statements and the acquaintance requirement behave differently:

(21) A: X is beautiful.

B: ?? It is certainly not the case that X is *beautiful*—after all, you have never seen X.

B’s reaction in (21) is odd. With respect to aesthetic statements, negation and accentuation cannot be used by B to criticize A’s use of the term “beautiful” for the falsity of the alleged presupposition triggered by A’s use of the term. This speaks against the presupposition account both in its simple and in its more sophisticated form. Thus, it is reasonable to investigate whether an alternative explanation of AI/AN can be developed.⁸

⁸ Willer & Kennedy (2020) suggest an interesting theory that explains AI/AN via a combination of elements of the presupposition account with certain assumptions they put forward as expressivist, see Ninan (2020) for a comparable classification of their account. Due to space limitations, discussing the costs and benefits of their specific version of the presupposition account has to wait for another occasion.

4. Speech-act Pluralism and Dispositional Hybrid Expressivism

4.1 The Core Idea: Performing a Double Speech-Act

In speech-act theory, various types of illocutionary acts are differentiated. The following are relevant to our discussion:

Assertive acts: These acts are usually performed by uttering declarative sentences, for example, “This drink is cold.” These acts are descriptive in the sense that they aim to assert that something is the case, they ascribe a property to an object, and they express the corresponding belief—in our example it is the belief that the drink is cold.

Expressive acts: These acts are usually performed by uttering an exclamative, for example: “Brrr! How cold!” These acts are not descriptive, they do not aim to assert that something is the case but to express a non-doxastic mental state—in our example it is the phenomenal state of feeling cold.

Illocutionary acts are governed by sincerity conditions. The sincerity condition of an *assertive act* requires that the speaker entertains the belief she is expressing by the act. The sincerity condition of an *expressive act* requires that the speaker is in the non-doxastic mental state she expresses by the act. The corresponding rule is that you should utter “q” only if you are in the non-doxastic mental state expressed by “q.” For example, utter “Brrr! How cold!” only if you are in the phenomenal state of feeling cold, and utter “Ouch!” only if you are in the phenomenal state of feeling pain (see Searle 1969: ch. 3). It is because of these sincerity conditions and the corresponding norms that we are able to express mental states, such as feeling cold or feeling pain, by uttering certain types of sentences (s. Schroeder 2008a).

The explanation of AI/AN with respect to the aesthetic statements that I want to suggest rests on the following idea.

(3) X is beautiful.

With the sincere and literal utterance of (3), we perform two illocutionary acts simultaneously. We perform an *assertive* as well as an *expressive* act. The *assertive act* ascribes a certain property to an object X and expresses the corresponding belief. The *expressive act* expresses a complex phenomenal mental state M, namely the state we are in when experiencing a beautiful object. It is the same mental state we express by uttering the exclamative: “Oh, how beautiful!”

The expressive act correlated with (3) explains the acquaintance norm AN. It is part of the sincerity condition of uttering (3) that the speaker is or was in the non-doxastic mental state M that she expresses by uttering the sentence. The corresponding rule is: Utter “X is beautiful” only if you are or have been in the mental state M. However, to be in that state, the speaker must have experienced X. After all, the mental state she expresses is the state she was in while experiencing the object. Thus, (3) can only be uttered appropriately if the speaker has experienced X. This explains the acquaintance norm AN. Furthermore, we usually assume that the sincerity conditions of speech-acts are met, so the suggested line of thought also explains AI (i.e., it explains why uttering (3) usually conveys the information that the speaker has experienced X herself).

As mentioned in the introduction, this explanation is closely related to the expressivist account suggested by Franzén (2018). To spell out my proposal in more detail and to elaborate on its advantages over Franzén’s explanation, I will turn to the following questions:

- (a) If AN/AI is explained via the expressive aspect of aesthetic statements, why should we accept the suggested version of hybrid expressivism that claims that, in uttering an aesthetic sentence, we perform two illocutionary acts, an expressive *and* an assertive one? Why not simply accept expressivism?
- (b) If in uttering an aesthetic sentence, we perform an expressive *and* an assertive act, how are those acts related? What kind of property do we ascribe to an object in the assertive act so that this ascription goes along with the expressive act of expressing a certain non-doxastic mental attitude?

I will answer questions (a) and (b) in sections 4.2 and 4.3, respectively. In section 4.4, I will further elaborate on the property that is ascribed to objects in the assertive part of an aesthetic statement.

4.2 Hybrid Expressivism vs. Simple Expressivism

Very different theories go by the name “expressivism.” In the context of this paper, “expressivism” refers to a theory that is capable to put forward the specified explanation of AN/AI. This theory assumes that the utterance of an aesthetic sentence consists of nothing more than an expressive act that is guided by a certain sincerity condition. This characterization of expressivism still allows for various specifications of which type of mental state is expressed. Usually expressivists think that the mental state expressed by aesthetic statements is an affective state of liking, enjoying, or loving the looks or sounds of the object in question (see Franzén 2018, Blackburn 1993). In this view, “X is beautiful” is comparable to the exclamative “Bravo!”.

As previously indicated, I specify the mental state in question differently, namely as the phenomenal state we are in when we experience something beautiful. I will come back to this in the next subsection. However, irrespective of the exact nature of the mental attitude that is expressed, all variants of expressivism face serious challenges. I will restrict myself to three problems and argue that they can all be met by adopting the suggested *hybrid* account.⁹

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

- (i) If X is beautiful, then Erica will buy X.
- (ii) X is beautiful.

⁹ For an influential expressivist suggestion how to solve some of the following problems, see Gibbard 1990; for a thorough discussion of expressivist semantics, its prospects and problems, see Schroeder 2008c. There are also other theories put forward as expressivist that might be able to solve or circumvent the problems I am about to discuss. See, for example, Charlow 2014, Willer & Kennedy 2020. These theories, however, are not forms of “expressivism” as I understand the term here. Neither of those theories claims that an aesthetic statement is nothing but an exclamative, such as “Bravo”. Charlow (2014) models his expressivism on a semantics for imperatives, and I am unsure whether this account is transferable to aesthetic statements and whether it is able to explain AI/AN. Willer & Kennedy (2020) suggest a complex theory that explains AI/AN via combining elements of the presupposition account with expressivist elements (see Ninan 2020). As mentioned in fn.8, their theory would merit a detailed discussion, it is, however, not the form of expressivism, I focus on in the context of this paper.

(iii) Thus, Erica will buy X.

This argument is valid. However, no mental state is expressed by the aesthetic sentence that occurs as an antecedent in (i). This is confirmed by the fact that (i) can appropriately be uttered without the speaker having seen X. Thus, expressivists seem committed to the view that, while the meaning of (ii) is exhausted in the expression of a certain non-doxastic mental attitude, this does not hold for the aesthetic sentence that occurs as an antecedent in (i). Thus, from an expressivist point of view, the antecedent in (i) and the premise (ii) have different meanings. But if expressivists commit themselves to this view, they cannot retain the validity of concluding (iii) from (i)–(ii). This is the so-called Frege-Geach problem. The heart of the problem is the difficulty in developing compositional semantics within the framework of an expressivist theory, which explains the meaning of complex sentences via recourse to the meaning of their constituents (cf. Schroeder 2008b).¹⁰

If we take a hybrid approach, an easy solution to the problem is available. According to the suggested version of hybrid expressivism we perform an expressive *and* an assertive speech-act with the utterance of an aesthetic sentence. The validity of the argument (i)–(iii) can, in this case, be explained on the basis of the assertive part of the utterance. With aesthetic statements we express a non-doxastic mental attitude *and* also ascribe a certain property to objects. The descriptive part of the premise (ii) as well as the descriptive part of the antecedent of (i) are identical in meaning, they have the same propositional content. Thus, the validity of the argument (i)–(iii) is not threatened. In more general terms, with regard to the descriptive part of an aesthetic sentence, there are at least no principled difficulties for standard truth-conditional compositional semantics. Thus, hybrid expressivism circumvents the Frege-Geach problem.

In this context, it is helpful to consider another potentially problematic argument:

(iv) If X is exhibited in the gallery, then X is beautiful

(v) X is exhibited in the gallery.

¹⁰ For an influential suggestion how to solve this and related problems, see Gibbard 1990; for a thorough discussion of expressivist semantics, its prospects and problems, see Schroeder 2008c.

(vi) Thus: X is beautiful.

One might suspect that this argument still raises a difficulty for the hybrid approach. In the conditional (iv), the aesthetic statement occurs in the consequent, and with an utterance of (iv), we again do not perform an expressive speech act. Now, suppose we are justified in assuming that (iv) and (v) are true without having seen X ourselves. Maybe we are justified in (iv) and (v) through testimony. Thus, we can conclude from (iv)–(v) that (vi) is correct, i.e. that X is beautiful, without having seen X ourselves. Isn't this in conflict with the linguistic data and with hybrid expressivism? After all, the linguistic data seem to suggest that we cannot utter (vi) appropriately, if we haven't seen X. And according to hybrid expressivism, this is the case because by uttering (vi) we perform both an assertive and an expressive speech act, where the expressive act can be performed appropriately only if the speaker has experienced X herself.

Although it may seem so at first glance, argument (iv)–(vi) does not pose a problem for the proposed position. We have explicitly distinguished between *linguistic* acquaintance principles concerning aesthetic *statements* and the *epistemic* acquaintance principle with respect to aesthetic *beliefs*. The latter one claims that an aesthetic *belief* can only be justified via first-personal experience with the object in question (see section 3.1). We rejected this principle as implausible in subsection 3.2. In this sense, we can simply accept that a justification of (iv)–(v) also leads to the justified belief that X is beautiful (see (vi))—without the epistemic subject having experienced X. However, the following still holds: If a person has not experienced X herself, but entertains the belief that X is beautiful on the basis of (iv)–(vi), then she still cannot appropriately utter "X is beautiful". The reason for this is that with such an utterance she would not only perform an assertive speech act, she would not only ascribe a certain property to an object, but also an expressive one, she would express a certain non-doxastic mental state. And with respect to this expressive act the corresponding sincerity condition would not be satisfied.¹¹

¹¹ The speech-act theoretical version of hybrid expressivism suggested in this paper only concerns aesthetic *statements* and not aesthetic *beliefs* or *thoughts*—and, in light of the implausibility of the *epistemic* acquaintance principle with respect to aesthetic beliefs, it is designed to do so. This is an important difference to popular hybrid expressivist theories suggested in meta-ethics. Hybrid theories in meta-ethics try to hold on to the expressivist solution of the so-called

The second problem with simple expressivism in aesthetics concerns the use of explicit disagreement markers. We have already noted in subsection 3.3 that, from a linguistic perspective, the following dialogue is felicitous:

(11) A: X is beautiful.

B: No, that is false, X is not beautiful.

B's reaction might be unfriendly, but no linguistic mistake seems to be involved. However, if simple expressivism about aesthetic statements is correct, then B's use of the explicit disagreement marker, "No, that is false," should at least sound somewhat odd. After all, if expressivism is correct, then neither the sentence uttered by A, nor the mental attitude expressed by her utterance have a truth-value.

However, for a hybrid expressivist account, the use of explicit disagreement markers is not surprising. In uttering "X is beautiful," A is performing an expressive act as well as an assertive act of ascribing a property to an object and expressing a belief with a certain propositional content. Thus, the statement as well as one of the attitudes expressed by it have a truth value. Thus, by using the explicit disagreement marker, B is denying what A claims to be true. For hybrid expressivism the appropriate use of explicit disagreement markers is not problematic.

The third problem concerns certain retraction data. Suppose I utter "X is beautiful," and my attention is then drawn to the fact that I have unnoticeably ingested perception-altering drugs. In this case it seems appropriate and natural to retract my statement by saying, "Okay, maybe X is not really beautiful, but I enjoy how it looks/sounds right now." However, if an aesthetic statement is nothing over and above an expressive act, this kind of retraction would not be required. To see this, a comparison to the purely expressive act of uttering the exclamation "Ouch!" is helpful. In

motivational problem, without falling into the problems of a purely expressivist position (Frege-Geach problem, open-question problem, etc.). Given these two objectives hybrid expressivism in meta-ethics has to concern moral beliefs as much as moral statements. For a thorough discussion of this point and of hybrid expressivism in meta-ethics in general, see Schroder 2009. For an interesting defense of the view against Schroeder's concerns, see Copp 2014, 2018.

uttering “Ouch!” I do express pain. And even if someone points out to me that I have taken drugs that lower my pain tolerance, I am not at all required to retract this speech-act.

In contrast to simple expressivism, hybrid expressivism can easily explain this: In uttering “X is beautiful” we perform an expressive *and* an assertive speech-act. In the assertive act, we ascribe a certain property to X. It is widely accepted that the act of assertion is governed by an epistemic norm (*knowledge rule* or *justified-belief rule*, see subsection 3.2). If, after our statement, someone points out that our judgment as to the presence of the property is clouded by drugs, the epistemic norm of assertion is no longer satisfied and it is, thus, appropriate to retract the assertion. In summary, we can conclude: The suggested version of hybrid expressivism is capable of solving serious problems that confront simple expressivism.

4.3 The Relation of the Speech-Acts and the Dispositional Analysis of Beauty

The general point of illocutionary pluralism, namely that a speaker can perform a plurality of illocutionary acts via an utterance token in one unique speech-situation, is widely discussed and defended in speech-act theory (s. Johnson 2019, Lewinski 2021).¹² However, in addition to the cases discussed in these investigations, the focus on aesthetic statements points to a further example of illocutionary pluralism that has been overlooked thus far. The reason why we should accept that in uttering an aesthetic sentence we perform two illocutionary acts simultaneously, an expressive and a assertive one, is: The expressive part of an aesthetic statement explains the acquaintance norm AN as well as the acquaintance inference AI, and the assertive part allows us to circumvent problems of simple expressivism. However, even if we take this to be an interesting suggestion, we might still wonder how the expressive and the assertive act of aesthetic statements are related.

The non-doxastic mental state M expressed by the expressive part of an aesthetic statement can simply be specified as the mental state we are in when we perceive beautiful objects.

¹² For the difference between illocutionary pluralism and Searle’s (1975) analysis of direct and indirect illocutionary acts, see Johnson 2019: 1153–1155.

Admittedly, this is not as informative as the suggestion usually made by expressivists who specify the state in question as an attitude of liking or enjoying. But it has the advantage of being non-committal with respect to the exact phenomenological character of the mental state in question. Is it possible to perceive a beautiful painting or a beautiful melody without liking or enjoying it—maybe because the painting or the melody is beautiful but also corny or boring? This question seems valid and interesting to me, and in contrast to many expressivists, I do not want to commit to a negative answer from the outset. For the purposes of this paper, it is enough to characterize M simply as the non-doxastic, phenomenal state we are in when experiencing something beautiful.

However, according to the suggested version of hybrid expressivism, in uttering “X is beautiful” we perform an expressive *and* an assertive act. In the assertive act we ascribe a certain property to X. Which type of property do we ascribe to X so that the assertive act is accompanied by the aforementioned expressive act? I suggest the following answer. Beauty is a response-dispositional property, namely the property to evoke a certain kind of mental state M in subjects S under certain circumstances C. The mental state M is the manifestation of the disposition and perception of the object under ideal conditions (in the appropriate environment, with functional perceptual capacities, with the appropriate attention to certain details, etc.) is the manifestation-condition C. In the *assertive act* associated with the aesthetic statement, “X is beautiful,” we ascribe this kind of response-dispositional property to X. Thus, “X is beautiful” is true if and only if X has the dispositional property to evoke M in S under C. In the *expressive act* associated with “X is beautiful” we express exactly the mental state M that is the manifestation of the response-dispositional property, which we ascribe to the object X in the corresponding assertive act. This is how these two acts are related. This relation explains why the assertive act of ascribing a certain property to an object is accompanied by expressing a certain non-doxastic mental attitude.

With respect to the relation of the two speech-acts I, furthermore, suggest the following *simple principle*:

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

According to this principle, whenever “X is beautiful” is embedded in a context where the assertive act is absent, the expressive act is absent as well.

For example, suppose “X is beautiful” is embedded in the conditional “If X is beautiful, then p.” Uttering this conditional is not a performance of the assertive act of ascribing beauty to X and, just as the simple principle predicts, it is also not an act of expressing M. The same is true when certain operators are added to “X is beautiful,” such as: “X might be beautiful,” and “It is possible that X is beautiful.” Uttering one of these sentences is not an assertive act of ascribing beauty to X, thus, in accordance with (SP), the expressive act is absent as well.¹³

Because the linguistic acquaintance principles AN and AI depend on the expressive act performed by uttering aesthetic sentences, (SP) nicely explains the linguistic data that, in these embeddings, the acquaintance requirement of aesthetic statements is also absent:

- (22) If her new painting is beautiful, then I will buy it.
- (23) Her new painting might be beautiful.
- (24) It is possible that her new painting is beautiful.

None of the sentences (22)–(24) conveys that the speaker has experienced X. Thus, AI/AN does not hold with respect to (22)–(24). The suggested hybrid expressivist account combined with the simple principle (SP) explains why this is the case. For the purposes of this paper, principle (SP) frees us from the need to spell out a compositional semantics that explains why, in certain embeddings of “beautiful”, the acquaintance inference is lost. According to (SP), only assertive

¹³ It is interesting to note that this feature differentiates aesthetic statements from pejorative statements—for example, statements with the racial slur “n...r.” These statements also have a descriptive and an evaluative component. Some hybrid expressivists with respect to moral statements, therefore, emphasize, in favor of their view, that their form of hybrid expressivism is transferable to those pejorative statements (s. e.g., Boisvert 2008, Copp 2014). The suggested speech-act theoretical version of hybrid expressivism for aesthetic statements, however, cannot be transferred to pejoratives. Unlike aesthetic sentences, the use of a pejorative term is expressive of a contemptuous attitude even if the slur is embedded in a conditional (or other constructions in which the assertive act is absent).

acts in which it is asserted that a certain object has the property of being beautiful are accompanied by the expressive act of expressing a certain non-doxastic mental state M and, thus, exhibit the acquaintance inference.¹⁴

4.4. Further Remarks on the Dispositional Analysis

To explain the relation of the two speech acts associated with an aesthetic statement, I have suggested that, within the assertive act, we ascribe a response-dispositional property of beauty to an object. Is this dispositional analysis of beauty also plausible from a metaphysical perspective? Yes, it is. It is a widespread and reasonable assumption that aesthetic properties are neither fully objective nor fully subjective, and the dispositional analysis of aesthetic properties specifies and confirms this assumption. How so?

We correctly ascribe beauty to different objects. For example, we can correctly ascribe beauty to a mountain range, a painting, a symphony, a voice, or a sofa. Is it really plausible to assume that these different objects share an interesting objective, subject-independent property, namely beauty? This assumption is especially problematic if it is combined with the assumption that aesthetic properties are not fundamental properties but properties that supervene on the distribution of other, more fundamental properties. This is problematic because the above-mentioned objects do not seem to share a sufficient set of objective properties on which the property of beauty could be based. In consideration of this insight, it seems more plausible to assume that with “X is beautiful” we do not state that X belongs to the class of objects that share a certain subject-independent property but that X belongs to a class of objects that affect us in a certain way. In this sense, aesthetic properties do not seem fully objective.

¹⁴ It is a tricky issue to specify in detail when an assertive act is present. For example, is the assertion of “S’s belief that X is beautiful is correct” also an assertive act in which the speaker ascribes the property of beauty to X? I tend to think that it is and this is why the statement gives rise to the acquaintance inference as well. In contrast, in simply reporting what somebody else has said, like “S said that X is beautiful,” the speaker does not perform the assertive act of ascribing the property of beauty to X. Giving a full-blown theory of when assertive acts are present and when they are absent is, however, beyond the scope of this paper.

Note that it is not surprising that different objects evoke the same kind of mental response in us. The taste of vanilla and the taste of synthetically produced vanilla-substitute, for example, are realized by different chemical substances, yet both substances have the same (or at least a similar) effect on us—both evoke the same (or at least a similar) phenomenal taste impression. The same might be true with respect to beautiful objects. Even though they are different with respect to their objective, subject-independent properties, they might nevertheless evoke mental states of the same kind.

However, it is important to notice that beauty is only weakly subject-dependent. The *instantiation* of the property does *not* depend on the *existence* of humans and their experiences. The assumption that there are beautiful objects that no one has ever experienced is intuitively plausible. Thus, the aesthetic property of beauty does not seem to be strongly subject-dependent in the sense that its instantiation would depend on the existence of subjects and their mental life.¹⁵

These considerations support the dispositional analysis of beauty. According to the dispositional analysis, beauty is identical to the disposition to evoke a mental state M in subjects S under certain circumstances C. Thus, the property is not fully objective. It is subject-dependent in the sense that, to individuate the property, we have to refer to the mental state M of subjects. However, the property is not strongly subject-dependent. Its instantiation does not presuppose the existence of subjects capable of phenomenal experiences. After all, dispositional properties do not have to manifest themselves. We have already noted that a glass can have the dispositional property of being breakable, even though it might never break. Analogously, something can be beautiful, even though it might never evoke mental state M. Thus, the dispositional analysis specifies and explains why it is correct to take aesthetic properties as neither fully objective nor fully subjective. This speaks in favor of the dispositional analysis of aesthetic properties.

¹⁵ Another reason why beauty (as well as other aesthetic properties) is often considered neither fully objective nor fully subjective is related to Frank Sibley's work. According to Sibley (1959), aesthetic qualities somehow depend on non-aesthetic (objective) qualities; however, no amount of information regarding the latter would suffice for knowledge about the aesthetic qualities of the object. The classical source of the view that aesthetic judgments in general exhibit an interesting combination of objective and subjective aspects is, of course, Immanuel Kant (CoJ: §§1–22).

It is important to note that the proposed dispositional analysis leaves many questions unanswered: How can we specify the phenomenal characteristics of the mental state *M* in more detail? What idealizations are necessary with respect to the manifestation conditions *C*? Must the class of subjects *S* be restricted by further conditions? Should beauty ultimately be conceived as a single-track or multitrack disposition (cf. Manley & Wasserman 2008)? etc. etc. Fortunately, for the purposes of this paper, these questions need not be addressed. The hybrid expressivist explanation of AI/AN must say something about the connection between the two assumed speech acts and, in this context, I have referred to the dispositional structure of aesthetic properties. However, the suggested hybrid expressivist explanation of AI/AN is compatible with a whole set of specifications of the dispositional structure.

The same is true with respect to the semantics of the corresponding dispositional statement. According to the hybrid expressivist explanation, the assertive part of “*X* is beautiful” is synonymous to “*X* has the dispositional property to evoke *M* in *S* under *C*.” What are the exact truth-conditions of this sentence? The suggested explanation of AI/AN is compatible with various answers to this question. The only requirement is that the truth-conditions be spelled out in a way that allows us to hold onto the advantages of a hybrid over simple variants of expressivism established in subsection 4.2.¹⁶

5. Problems and Limits of the Account

In this section, I will address three objections with respect to the hybrid expressivist explanation of AI/AN. First, according to the hybrid expressivist account an utterance of “*X* is beautiful” expresses mental state *M*, the state we are in when experiencing something beautiful. This is

¹⁶ The explanation of AI/AN is compatible with invariantist or a context-sensitive semantics of the dispositional sentence. The latter would either restrict *C* or *S* via certain parameters—either of the context of utterance or the context of assessment (cf. Macfarlane 2014). As long as such a context sensitive semantics allows us to hold on to the advantages of hybrid over simple expressivism, it is not in conflict with the suggested explanation of AI/AN. However, if, for example, in the suggested semantics the context of utterance would restrict *S* to the speaker of the dispositional sentence, then such a theory would have the same problems with explicit disagreement markers mentioned in sec. 4.2 as simple expressivism.

comparable to an utterance of “Ouch!” that expresses the mental state of pain. The sincerity condition with respect to the latter statement demands that the speaker is in the state of pain *while* making the statement. However, the sincerity condition with respect to “X is beautiful” demands that the speaker is or *was* in M (see sec. 4.1). Thus, the latter allows for past experiences, and rightly so: There is no norm demanding to utter “X is beautiful” only if you experience X and, thus, are in M while making the statement. However, is it really possible to express a mental state you are not in *while* making the statement?

I think this worry rests false conception of what it means to express something. If you accept a causal account of expression and think that the mental state expressed by the statement “p” is the state that is causally responsibly for the statement, then it might be hard to see, how a mental state of the past could be expressed by “p”. However, as Schroeder (2008a) has convincingly argued this causal conception of expression is wrong. What establishes the relation of a mental state and a statement “p” is not a causal relation, but the norm corresponding to the sincerity condition. For “Ouch!” this norm says: Utter “Ouch!” only if you are in pain. It is because of the relation established by this norm that “Ouch!” expresses pain—even in cases where someone disregards the norm and utters “Ouch!” without being in pain. With respect to “X is beautiful” the norm says: Utter “X is beautiful” only if you are or *have been* in M. Since the expression relation is not established by a causal connection, but by a certain norm, there is nothing mysterious about expressing a mental state you are not in while making the statement. As long as the sincerity condition and the corresponding norm connects present as well as past mental states with the statement, the statement can express present as well as past mental states.

Second, it is correct that the suggested hybrid expressivist explanation for the acquaintance requirement works for autocentric uses of aesthetic sentences; however, it does not work for exocentric uses. This speaks against the account.

To understand this objection, take a look at the following conversations, the first of which has already been mentioned in section 2.

(25) A: How is Saba's trip to London?

B: Great, she has seen a beautiful play.

(26) A: How was Saba's trip to the museum?

B: She really enjoyed it. The architecture is great, and the pictures are beautiful.

It is natural to assume that the play and the pictures to which (25) and (26) refer were not judged to be beautiful by speaker B but were judged to be beautiful by Saba. Thus, these contexts trigger an exocentric reading of the involved aesthetic statements. In such a reading, the speaker ties the aesthetic statement to the judgment of another person (see Sec. 2). In those readings, aesthetic statements do not convey that the *speaker* has experienced the objects in question, but the person to whom the aesthetic statement is tied to. With respect to our examples, (25) and (26) do not convey that B has seen the play and pictures but that Saba has. So exocentric readings of aesthetic sentences give rise to a different kind of acquaintance inference. However, this inference is not explained by the suggested hybrid expressivist account.

I agree that the suggested account cannot explain the acquaintance inference as it correlates to exocentric readings of aesthetic statements. But I do not think that this raises a serious problem for the account. First, the account never set out to explain acquaintance phenomena related to exocentric readings. Second, these phenomena can be plausibly explained in other ways. In regard to (25), it is true that B's statement conveys that Saba experienced the performance. However, this is not because of B's use of the aesthetic term "beautiful" but because of her use of "see." B's statement simply implies that Saba has experienced the play. Next, consider (26), where B's statement conveys that Saba has experienced the pictures. I take this to be the case because we understand B's statement in (26) as a shorthand version of:

(27) She really enjoyed it. She said that the architecture is great and that the pictures are beautiful.

(27) makes it explicit that in (26) we are basically reporting what Saba has said. Saba's statement which we are reporting is: "The architecture is great and the pictures are beautiful." This statement

by Saba of course was governed by the sincerity condition for aesthetic statements that I have specified above. Thus, Saba's original statement as well as our report of her statement, gives rise to the inference that Saba's has seen the pictures. I assume that in all cases in which an exocentric reading of an aesthetic statement is triggered, an analogous explanation of the corresponding acquaintance phenomenon is available. Thus, the objection does not pose a serious challenge for the account.¹⁷

Let me now turn to the third problem. We have already noticed that the acquaintance inference AI and the corresponding norm AN project over negation:

(28) X is beautiful.

(29) X is not beautiful.

Notably, (29) as well as (28) convey that the speaker has experienced X, and both sentences are uttered appropriately only if that is the case. However, the hybrid expressivist suggestion is capable of explaining AI/AN with respect to (28) but not with respect to (29).

I accept this as the most serious challenge of the account. The hybrid expressivist explanation assumes that with aesthetic statements we perform two speech-acts simultaneously—an assertive and an expressive one. In the assertive act we ascribe a certain response-dispositional property to an object. And in the expressive act, we express the non-doxastic mental state that is the manifestation of the dispositional property. This seems plausible with respect to (28). In the assertive act, we ascribe the property of beauty, and in the expressive act, we express the mental

¹⁷ Please note that there is an interesting disanalogy between aesthetic- and taste-sentences in this respect. It seems easier to generate exocentric readings with respect to taste-sentences for which the third-person acquaintance inference cannot be explained in the way I did. Take a look at the following conversation. A: "I need new cat food. You have cats right? Any recommendations?" B: "X is tasty." B's utterance in the conversation clearly triggers an exocentric reading. B is not claiming that she finds the food tasty, and her statement does not give rise to the acquaintance inference that she, the speaker, tasted X. However, it gives rise to the inference that her cat (or at least some cat) tasted X. I accept that for this example my above-mentioned strategy does not work. After all, B's statement cannot be understood as reporting what her cat (or some cat) has *said*. However, I think it is very hard to find comparable cases with respect to aesthetic sentences. Take a look at the following dialogue. A: "My kids want to see a movie tonight. You have kids right? Any suggestions?" B: "X is beautiful." As far as I can see, it is simply unclear, whether with respect to B's statement an autocentric or an exocentric reading is appropriate. In the first case, the standard acquaintance inference is triggered and can be explained via recourse to the hybrid expressivist suggestion. In the second case, B's statement can be understood as reporting what her own kids (or some kids) have said, which explains the third-person acquaintance inference. One reason for the suggested disanalogy might be that with respect to taste we easily accept that sometimes different standards apply. This, however, is not obviously the case with respect to beauty.

state M, which is the state we are in when experiencing something beautiful. But what property is ascribed and what kind of non-doxastic mental state is expressed by uttering (29)?

The best answer seems to be that the negation in (29) has narrow scope. Thus, in (29) we ascribe the property of being non-beautiful (i.e., the property of being ugly) to X. Thus, (29) is synonymous to:

(30) X is ugly.

With respect to (30), an analogous story can be told as with respect to (28). In the assertive act, we ascribe the property of ugliness, and in the expressive act, we express the mental state M*, which is the state we are in when experiencing something ugly.

The problem with this answer is twofold. First, the answer presupposes that the property of being non-beautiful is identical to the property of ugliness, which might be incorrect. We could try to circumvent this concern by claiming the following with respect to (30): In the assertive act, we ascribe the property of *non-beauty*, and in the expressive act, we express the mental state M**, which is the state we are in when experiencing something *non-beautiful*. The problem is, however, that it seems less plausible to think of the property of non-beauty as a response-dispositional property with a particular mental state M** as its manifestation.

Second and more serious, the suggested strategy presupposes that the negation has narrow scope and can, therefore, not account for sentences in which the negation obviously has wide scope:

(31) It is not the case that X is beautiful.

Arguably, (31) is also subject to AI/AN. As far as I can see, within the suggested version of hybrid expressivism, this can only be explained by claiming that speakers get confused with regard to wide and narrow scope readings of the negated aesthetic sentences. Thus, speakers are not really aware of the differences between (29) and (31). It is certainly true that in some cases there is confusion on the part of the speakers with regard to wide and narrow scope readings of negated sentences

and that sometimes a wide scope reading is hard to get (s. Leslie 2008, Dinges & Zakkou 2021). Nevertheless, attributing this kind of error to speakers is a problematic consequence of the account.

6. Conclusion

Aesthetic statements give rise to the acquaintance inference AI and are subject to the acquaintance norm AN. Aesthetic statements, such as “X is beautiful,” convey that the speaker has firsthand experience with X and can, thus, only be uttered appropriately if this is the case (see section 1 and 2). Why does AI/AN hold? In section 3 I have argued that previous answers to this question are wanting. In section 4 I have suggested an explanation of AI/AN that rests on a theory of aesthetic statements, which I call “dispositional hybrid expressivism”. The theory states that, in uttering “X is beautiful,” speakers perform two illocutionary acts simultaneously—an assertive and an expressive one. In the assertive act, speakers ascribe a response-dispositional property to X. They claim that X has the dispositional property to evoke mental state M in subjects S under condition C. In the expressive act, they express the manifestation of this property, namely the mental state M. The reason why AI/AN holds is that the expressive act correlated with an aesthetic statement is, like all expressive speech-acts, governed by a sincerity condition demanding that the speaker is or has been in the mental state she expresses. Because a speaker can only be in M if she experiences the object in question, AI/AN holds.

I have argued that the suggested hybrid expressivist theory of aesthetic statements is superior to simple expressivism and also plausible from a metaphysical perspective (see sections 4.2 and 4.4). Additionally, I discussed three remaining problems and argued that at least two of them can be answered successfully (see section 5). Even though the suggestion has its difficulties, in light of the many concerns regarding alternative explanations of AI/AN, the theoretical cost-benefit ratio of dispositional hybrid expressivism seems acceptable. Thus, considerations related to certain acquaintance phenomena lead to a strong case for a particular variant of hybrid expressivism with respect to aesthetic statements.

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