

The Philosophical Quarterly

Volume 60 • Number 239 • April 2010

CONTENTS

ARTICLES

Utilitarianism, Contractualism and Demandingness	Alison Hills	225
The Vice of Snobbery: Aesthetic Knowledge, Justification and Virtue in Art Appreciation	Matthew Kieran	243
What Are 'Natural Inequalities'?	Tim Lewens	264
Knowledge Ascriptions and the Psychological Consequences of Thinking about Error	Jennifer Nagel	286
The Least Discerning and Most Promiscuous Truthmaker	Jonathan Schaffer	307
Attention and Intentionalism	Jeff Speaks	325
The Mereological Constancy of Masses	Charlie Tanksley	343
'Partial Defeaters' and the Epistemology of Disagreement	Michael Thune	355
Plato and the Need for Law	Anthony Woozley	373

DISCUSSION

Anti-Symmetry and Non-Extensional Mereology	Aaron J. Cotnoir	396
---	------------------	-----

CRITICAL STUDIES

Hacker on Human Nature	Stephen Mulhall	406
An Empiricist regarding Science, an Empiricist regarding Representation	Bradley Monton	413

BOOK REVIEWS		418
--------------	--	-----

THE VICE OF SNOBBERY: AESTHETIC KNOWLEDGE, JUSTIFICATION AND VIRTUE IN ART APPRECIATION

BY MATTHEW KIERAN

Apparently snobbery undermines justification for and legitimacy of aesthetic claims. It is also pervasive in the aesthetic realm, much more so than we tend to presume. If these two claims are combined, a fundamental problem arises: we do not know whether or not we are justified in believing or making aesthetic claims. Addressing this new challenge requires an epistemological story which underpins when, where and why snobbish judgement is problematic, and how appreciative claims can survive. This leads towards a virtue-theoretic account of art appreciation and aesthetic justification, as contrasted with a purely reliabilist one – a new direction for contemporary aesthetics.

I. CHARACTERIZING SNOBBERY

It is important that being a snob is consistent with having true beliefs. It is not internal to the concept of snobbery that its judgements must be in error. Snobs can and do get aesthetic judgements right. Nevertheless there is a non-contingent connection between suspecting *S* of snobbery and suspecting that features extrinsic to proper aesthetic appreciation sway *S*'s judgement.

Suppose some coffee-drinkers take 'Illy' as a mark of good coffee. They scour local cafés and go only to places using the brand (whilst refusing to go to Starbucks). This may smack of snobbery, but it need not – as long as the object of appreciation is the taste of the coffee. In contrast another group behaves identically, but their appreciation of the coffee is driven by social reasons. In this case, unlike the first, the coffee is partly being appreciated just because it is Illy coffee. Why? These people desire to be the kind of person associated with the brand. It helps mark them off, in their own minds or those of others, as being one sort of person rather than another. The phenomenon is the same in more paradigmatic aesthetic cases. *S* may take it that something's being a popular musical or novel is a mark of its mediocrity as art. Whether or not *S* is being snobbish depends on how that factors into his appreciation. If *S*'s judgement that a work is artistically inferior stems

from the recognition that it is popular and the desire to set oneself above the herd, then *S* is being a snob.

What makes best sense of the above intuitions in a way that distinguishes snobbery from innocent critical appraisal? Snobbery involves appreciation and judgement driven by reasons which are external to appreciation proper – in particular, for the sake of elevating an individual's status with respect to some individual or group. Appreciation proper here is neutral concerning controversies about aesthetic or art appreciation, and allows that social and functional considerations may have an appropriate role in informing appreciation.¹ All that is required at this stage is the *prima facie* plausible negative recognition that social features such as a particular class or group's liking something are often irrelevant to its aesthetic value, and where this is so, appreciative activity issuing in judgement should not be thus driven. What is problematic about snobs is the fetishization of responses or judgement in order to enable them to feel or appear to be superior. Thus a formal characterization of aesthetic snobbery can be given in the following terms:

A snobbish judgement or response is one where aesthetically irrelevant social features play a causal role in *S*'s appreciative activity in coming to judge the value of *x qua* aesthetic object, so that how they are formed, along with any concomitant rationalization, is explained more fundamentally in terms of *S*'s drive to feel or appear superior in relation to some individual or group.

It is worth highlighting some virtues of this characterization. It makes sense of why we associate certain paradigmatic features with snobbery, while none the less suggesting why many of them are neither unique nor necessarily vicious. We associate baroque characterizations or obscure allusions with snobbery because they can be used as a means of asserting superiority. The perniciousness of snobbery does not consist in the assertion of superiority as such. Critics may be justified in highlighting the superiority of their aesthetic responses as compared with those of naïve appreciators. Rather, what is corrupting about aesthetic snobbery is that social considerations infect and distort the aesthetic response, judgement or claim made. The characterization captures both the self-aggrandisement integral to snobbery and, crucially, why we are and should naturally be suspicious of a snob's aesthetic claims. A snob's aesthetic appreciation or judgement is distorted by social considerations which are extraneous to proper aesthetic appreciation.

Snobbery's fetishization of responses or judgements as a means to claiming superiority with respect to some individual or group explains why we

¹ See S. Davies, 'Aesthetic Judgements, Artworks and Functional Beauty', *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 56 (2006), pp. 224–41.

have the pre-theoretic intuition that a snob's responses, judgements and pronouncements are not to be trusted. We suspect that where people are being snobs, they respond as they do, or believe what they believe, for the wrong reasons. If Alice likes Illy coffee or art-house films in part just because she wants to see herself as or to be seen as a certain type of person, then to the extent that this figures in her aesthetic responses, or underwrites her aesthetic judgements, she appears to lack internal justification for them. The social reason helps to explain her responses, but seems unable to justify them. Furthermore, she hardly seems to be in a legitimate position to make aesthetic claims, because her appreciation fixes on non-aesthetically relevant social features as if they themselves were the appreciable aesthetic features or straightforwardly justified the relevant aesthetic attributions. Snobbery seems to contaminate both appreciation and aesthetic justification.

It is worth drawing out analogies to intuitions elsewhere, such as our attitudes to prejudiced judgements and responses concerning people and their abilities. Where we suspect racism, we think that someone may be judging or acting for the wrong sort of reasons. If someone judges others to be inferior because they are black or immigrants, then to the extent that such attitudes drive his judgements and actions we think he lacks justification for them. Furthermore, to the extent that someone's claims are underwritten by racist attitudes we assume he is not in a legitimate position to make them. It is important to realize that the undermining of justification and of making legitimate claims can be tied to positive attitudes as well as negative ones. If people have an uncritical belief in the good qualities of their partners or children, we naturally look on their claims or the justification of their judgements with the same kind of suspicion. Competitive parents may eulogize the character and abilities of their offspring, but where we think their judgements are contaminated by the desire to see their children as 'the best', then so far as this holds true, we think they lack justification for their claims, and are not in a good position to make the claims so loudly trumpeted forth.

II. THE PERVASIVENESS OF SNOBBERY IN THE AESTHETIC REALM

An important upshot is the difficulty of telling the difference between aesthetic appreciation and snobbery. Whilst proper appreciation is concerned with doing justice to the work, snobbery involves making use of it for the sake of social demarcation. The aesthetic appreciator has to be able to pick out the relevant aesthetic features, apprehend them in the appropriate ways and bring to bear all sorts of relational considerations. The snob has to call

on many of the same capacities so as to be attuned to which markers set off the 'right' social signals. Furthermore, to do this well the snob has to attend to many of the same things and in the same sort of ways as proper aesthetic appreciators do. It is no good trying to be a snob about opera's superiority to musicals if one cannot talk convincingly about what makes a good opera and why. Thus aesthetic appreciation and snobbery overlap significantly in terms of the factors leading to deliberations, decisions and pronouncements.

This would not be a huge problem if snobbery were rare in aesthetic matters. Unfortunately it is endemic. The art world, broadly construed, is pervaded by snobbery. Art galleries constantly vie for status, discreetly and sometimes not so discreetly deciding whether someone is 'the right sort of person' to be sold work by a particular artist. An acquaintance of mine recently attended an invitation-only preview at a prestigious London gallery. Upon requesting a glass of champagne, she was asked to produce her invitation, before being condescendingly informed that those with mere VIP invitations were entitled only to red or white wine: champagne was reserved for VVIPs only. One has only to open the review pages of newspapers or music magazines to see that snobbery is far from limited to the visual arts. Reviews of literature, theatre, pop music, food, wine, interior design and fashion commonly make judgements of superiority ranging from wholesale dismissal of some category to talking patronizingly about provincial taste or *passé* styles. Artistic movements themselves are commonly taken up with snobbery. It is a standard feature of the coalescence of self-conscious artistic movements or groupings that they sneer at and deride those things they take themselves to be reacting against. It is not even as if such snobbery is limited to self-consciously 'high-brow' arenas. At any given time on some talk show or other the host can allude knowingly to a given pop band and their fans and the effect is a knowing chuckle from the audience – the implication being that we know 'their' type and feel superior to them. It is far from surprising, then, that much arts coverage and the conversation of the *cognoscenti* in any aesthetic arena is much taken up with gossip concerning what is in and what is not. People are commonly preoccupied with knowing what is the coming thing, what is hot or has fallen out of favour. Why? So that they can feel or show their superiority by being 'in the know'. This occurs along many different axes such as class and wealth, high- and low-brow, mainstream and alternative, scholastic and popular, new and old.

The explanation is partly given by the fundamental psychological drive in human nature for establishing and maintaining social status and identifications. We are essentially social animals. From an extremely early age and throughout our lives we define ourselves in part through our relations with others. This being so, in- and out-group identification as well as

intra-group hierarchical relations are central to our development and self-conceptions.² A primary generative mechanism for realizing the drive for social status is the definition of oneself as superior to some individual or group. Indeed, as psychological studies suggest this is particularly strong in societies where competition and individual self-expression are seen as centrally important.³ This helps to explain the drive towards snobbery.

Snobbery can exist in many domains. Indeed, the possibility for snobbery generally opens up wherever it appears that there is room for deference to experts. Why? Experts warrant deference, so if someone wants deference then they aspire to be or to look like an expert in something. If you cannot be an expert or cannot be bothered to try, then in order to obtain deference one solution is to pretend, by kidding yourself or others. In what follows I shall look at why the aesthetic realm may be particularly susceptible to snobbery. This will in turn underwrite the claim that we are in a rockier place with respect to aesthetic claims and justification. Why might the aesthetic realm be so susceptible to snobbery, and why might introspection often prove insufficient to reveal whether or not one is being a snob?

III. RELATIONALITY

Aesthetics depends to a much greater extent than morality upon relational knowledge which only the initiated can bring to bear. A work's aesthetic properties depend not merely on perceivable non-aesthetic ones but, further, upon which properties are standard, variable and contra-standard with respect to the relevant categories.⁴ Without relational knowledge, there are many representational and expressive properties of works that one would be unable to identify. It is not to be denied that relational knowledge can play an important role in ethical judgement. It is just that understanding and appreciating the ethical character of an action does not usually require drawing on so much historical and comparative knowledge. Indeed, creativity and originality are usually irrelevant in ethics, whereas they are central in aesthetics. Aesthetic appreciation requires attention to the distinctive problems artists set themselves and the individual ways in which they impose aesthetic form on subject-matter to achieve artistic expression. To

² The importance of social status and identification can be accounted for in various ways from evolutionary psychology to social theory and cognition; see D. Buss, *Evolutionary Psychology*, 2nd edn (London: Allyn & Bacon, 2000), ch. 12; D. Abrams and M.A. Hogg, *Social Identity and Social Cognition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999).

³ See M. Sherif, *Group Conflict and Cooperation* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966); R. Brown, *Group Processes: Dynamics within and between Groups*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).

⁴ See K. Walton, 'Categories of Art', *Philosophical Review*, 79 (1970), pp. 334–67.

judge an ethical action lacking in originality is hardly a criticism, whereas to claim that an artwork lacks originality is always a criticism. Judgements of creativity and originality can hardly be made without much historical and comparative knowledge within the relevant domain.

IV. THE REFINEMENT OF APPRECIATION

Appreciation comes in degrees, and its cultivation requires the development to a high degree of a huge range of perceptual and cognitive–affective capacities. Indeed, appreciation as such is open to ever greater degrees of refinement and discrimination. This is because what matters, aesthetically speaking (in contrast with morality), is the qualitative experiences afforded. Paintings, for example, are dense representations where any differences in the painted surface and how the subject is depicted are in principle open to scrutiny and may make an aesthetic difference. Hence, in principle at least, there may always be something further to notice which may affect our appreciation. Thus good art works tend to repay patient attention and we enjoy returning to them time and time again. Furthermore, works not only draw on our capacity to discriminate amongst elements in our experience, but cultivate flexibility of apprehension. Encapsulating a telling metaphor, using stylistic devices, or structuring a work to prescribe and guide our attention in particular ways often yields surprising or insightful interrelations between formal, expressive and cognitive aspects of a work. The more refined and flexible an appreciator one is, the more one is able to discern in and be rewarded by a (good) work in ways in which those relatively less discerning are not. Thus, at least in principle, anyone’s aesthetic judgement should always remain open to the possibility that there are features of a work which have not been discerned and which, if they were, might transform appreciation of it. The nature and degree to which this is so seems much greater than in the ethical case because it is the qualitative experience afforded that matters in art, and how it is constituted through the representational, expressive, formal and cognitive features of the work. Hence aesthetic judgement is always open in principle to being trumped by the claim of someone else to discern something further in the work.

V. THE ROLE OF PLEASURE

Relationality and refinement contribute to explaining why the aesthetic is particularly prone to snobbery, but it is only when these are combined with

the role of pleasure that we can explain why introspection is problematic in identifying snobbery in the first-person case. In the aesthetic case it is partly constitutive of an object's being valuable that appreciation is pleasurable, or at least gives rise to pleasure. Where pleasure is taken in engaging with a work, we have defeasible reason to value it and to judge that it is good. Given standard appreciators and conditions, broadly speaking defeasibility arises from two considerations. The first, as articulated above, concerns whether an appreciator is suitably informed and discriminating. The second concerns identifying the aesthetically relevant features and responding appropriately over time in the activity of appreciation. The trouble is, we are not very good at identifying in aesthetic appreciation when, where and why our pleasure is or may be a result of undue bias.

Our own responses and judgements are often driven by factors of which we are wholly unaware, and we know that individuals are extremely bad at identifying the determining influences upon their judgement. We engage in *post hoc* rationalizations all the time, since we are not even aware of the relevant subconscious processes at work in shaping our responses and judgements. This explains why, for example, commercial companies spend millions on certain kinds of market research and product placement. Studies testing implicit memory in advertising and films have shown that exposure to brand names influences familiarity with and preference for brands without explicit memory or even recognition of the relevant brand.⁵ Given that the subconscious priming of implicit evaluative attitudes is a strong predictor of attitude-related behaviour,⁶ it is unsurprising that exposure to brand placements affects implicit behaviour.⁷

The trouble is that the greater the complexity of the possible perceptual discriminations and appraisals which are potentially available, the more susceptible we are to subconscious framing and exposure effects. This is a particular problem in the aesthetic case (as contrasted with morality) since the end is appreciation. The internal goal of the practice is to create and appreciate works that yield ever greater and more complex rewards in discrimination and appraisal. Furthermore, because of the particular role that pleasure plays in grounding aesthetic judgements, we are more likely to misidentify evaluations as being appropriately aesthetically grounded. We naturally think that pleasure in appreciation springs from an object's being aesthetically good.

⁵ See M.A. Olson and R.H. Fazio, 'Implicit Attitude Formation through Classical Conditioning', *Psychological Science*, 12 (2001), pp. 413–17.

⁶ Fazio and Olson, 'Implicit Measures in Social Cognition Research: their Meaning and Use', *Annual Review of Psychology*, 54 (2003), pp. 297–327.

⁷ M. Yang and D.R. Roskos-Ewoldsen, 'The Effectiveness of Brand Placements in the Movies', *Journal of Communication*, 57 (2007), pp. 469–89.

Brochet's wine experiments bring this out well.⁸ In one experiment a white wine was decanted into two glasses and in one of them was dyed red. 54 oenology students were invited to give their appraisals of each. No one spotted the similarity. In another experiment involving 57 subjects, a middle of the road Bordeaux was decanted into a fancy *grand cru* bottle and a plonk bottle. Descriptions and appraisals diverged according to the different bottles. 40 subjects said the wine in the *grand cru* bottle was worth drinking; only 12 said the wine from the ordinary bottle was. It was the same wine.

It is not just financial status cues that have subliminal effects. In another experiment, James Cutting used commonly and rarely reproduced Impressionist paintings as slide backgrounds whilst teaching an introductory psychology course.⁹ He established independently that even though unable to recall having seen them before, students prefer more frequently reproduced images to more rarely reproduced ones. Throughout the course he used as backgrounds more rarely reproduced works at a much higher rate than those commonly reproduced. At the end of term students were asked to rate Impressionist works. Even though they had no reliable recall of whether or not they had seen the works before, they showed a marked preference for works most frequently used over the course. Even without conscious recognition, familiarity produces an increased positive affect.

The identification and appraisal of aesthetic qualities can be cued in ways of which we are not conscious, and it is easy to conflate pleasure gained from aesthetic appreciation with the pleasures of recognition and status. But in the aesthetic case we are particularly prone to being led astray by the role which pleasure plays in aesthetic judgement. It is a commonplace that the putative pleasure people take in appreciating an artwork gives them reason to value it and underwrites the judgement that it is good art. This would seem to be a desideratum of any adequate account of aesthetic value. This is in marked contrast with morality. Given that doing what is right and good often seems to have no such straightforward relation to pleasure, it is hardly a constraint on the adequacy of accounts of morality that pleasure must be construed as a reason to judge that some action is moral.

The difficulties of picking out defeaters in the first-person case are compounded in the third-person case by the aesthetic norms concerning first-person experience. Pleasure in appreciation is a fundamental ground of aesthetic value. Appreciating a work is a matter of apprehending aesthetically relevant features as realized in and through the work. Hence we

⁸ F. Brochet, 'Tasting: Chemical Object Representation in the Field of Consciousness', <http://www.academic-amorim.com>.

⁹ J.E. Cutting, 'The Mere Exposure Effect and Aesthetic Preference', in P. Locher *et al.* (eds), *New Directions in Aesthetics, Creativity and the Arts* (New York: Baywood, 2006), pp. 33–46.

naturally think that first-hand experience with a work, other things being equal, yields a stronger epistemic basis from which to make aesthetic pronouncements. This is not to claim that aesthetic judgements can only be made through first-hand experience of the work. It is just that the nature of aesthetic appreciation makes it much harder to challenge the pronouncements of others. Why? The lack of publicly available regulative norms in aesthetics means that it is hard to tell when and where someone's appreciation is appropriate or driven by snobbery.

In empirical cases, in mathematics or in philosophy, there are regulative norms open to public justification. Multiple biases in favour of technicality, apparent prestige or authority can in principle be exposed by various direct and indirect means such as experimentation, proof, argument and peer review. The means for doing so are far from perfect, but they are multiple and reasonably transparent. But this is far less true in the aesthetic realm where the regulative norm is first-person experience. On the one hand it is extremely difficult for anyone to put themselves in the position of an enlightened and discriminating appreciator for more than a couple of kinds of art. Hence we are often in a bad position to challenge via our own experience other people's pronouncements putatively arrived at through their experience. On the other hand the perception and apprehension of aesthetically relevant features in appreciating art works is not the kind of thing that is straightforwardly amenable to confirmation or challenge through argument.

Suppose Foolish Fred is a high school lad who works hard at learning about mathematics because he thinks it will impress the girls. He engages in mathematical investigations with the ultimate aim of getting girlfriends, but this does not prevent him from acquiring all sorts of mathematical knowledge. Indeed, it does not prevent him from knowing that he has lots of mathematical knowledge, even though it is difficult to distinguish those who are learning mathematics because they love it from those who are learning mathematics for carnal reasons. Almost all of Fred's mathematical judgements are guided by the right reasons, those which guide people who love mathematics for itself. It is not possible to do mathematics that well and not be guided by the right reasons. The mathematical analogue of the aesthetic snob is the lad who not only says that super-advanced calculus is for losers and group theory is where the deep thinkers are at, but endorses, say, the Pythagorean theorem merely because he knows the famous proof of it (but not because he or anyone else finds the proof cogent). In such cases there are ways in which snobbery is ineffective at achieving its aim unless guided by the right reasons, since it can otherwise easily be shown up. The norm of first-person authority in the aesthetic realm means that this is not so with the

aesthetic snob. Thus aesthetic pronouncements are much less amenable to public justification and much more epistemically opaque than empirical, mathematical or scientific ones. It is much easier to get away with being a snob in the aesthetic realm.

The multi-layered explanation given affords some reason to think that the sceptical challenge arises with greater force in the aesthetic realm, as contrasted with the ethical. Nevertheless it might be thought that the susceptibility of snobbery in the aesthetic case, as contrasted with the moral, has been overplayed. After all, there have been and are moral snobs. Someone may abstain from morally bad acts because he considers them 'lower class', 'common' or 'vulgar'.¹⁰ Indeed, to the extent that like Nietzsche in *On the Genealogy of Morals* we think there are connections between social power and moral judgement, and/or hold with Dancy that ethical judgement relies upon complex emotional and relational features, it might be thought that the ethical realm is as susceptible to snobbery as the aesthetic.¹¹

Yet the extent to which this is so hardly damages the claim made for the aesthetic realm. All it shows is that it may be plausible to think that the argument generalizes from the aesthetic realm to the ethical case, for similar reasons. It would be a significant result indeed if the argument showed that snobbery threatens to undermine justification and knowledge-claims in the ethical realm as well as the aesthetic one.

VI. THE CHALLENGE

The challenge which snobbery poses to aesthetic justification and knowledge-claims is fundamental. It seems that if we are judging or responding snobbishly, then we lack internal justification for aesthetic claims, and we are not in a legitimate position to claim aesthetic knowledge. Furthermore, in the aesthetic realm snobbery is pervasive, much more so than we tend to presume, and moreover it is very difficult for us to tell whether we or others are being snobbish. The conjunction of these propositions gives rise to the following claim: for any given aesthetic response or judgement, we do not know whether it is justified, nor whether we can legitimately claim that things are as it lays down.

If this is the epistemic situation we are in, the reasonable course of action seems to be to withdraw aesthetic claims. At best snobbery seems to underwrite agnosticism about justification and knowledge-claims in the aesthetic

¹⁰ I owe this point to Berys Gaut.

¹¹ J. Dancy, *Ethics without Principles* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004).

realm. At worst it might establish wholesale scepticism about them. We have a new sceptical problem about aesthetic justification and claims. If we are to resist this implication, we need to look for an epistemological story which pins down how justification, and legitimate claims to know, can survive in such a hostile environment.

It is worth making explicit here the assumption that snobbish aesthetic knowledge is possible, whereas in contrast, snobbish aesthetic justification is not. Although snobs believe what they believe for the wrong reasons, I am presuming that believing for the right reasons is necessary only for internalist justification, and furthermore that we can legitimately make claims to aesthetic knowledge only where we have internalist justification. Hence snobbish aesthetic claims are illegitimate, but even so may not be false.

It might additionally be thought that believing for the right reasons is necessary for aesthetic knowledge. If this were the case, then snobbery would pose a challenge not just to justification and claims to knowledge, but to the very possibility of aesthetic knowledge. It is worth pointing this out because internalists about knowledge endorse just such a claim.¹² Here is one way of formulating the challenge, given the assumption that aesthetic knowledge is internal (i.e., entails internalist justification):

1. $K(\text{if we are judging snobbishly that } p, \text{ then } \neg Kp)$
2. $\neg K(\text{we are not judging snobbishly that } p)$
3. $\neg K(Kp)$ [by closure, from (1) and (2)].

This does not straightforwardly undermine aesthetic knowledge as such, only knowledge of aesthetic knowledge (which is none the less a sceptical result). However, it might be thought that even if a (KK) principle (if one knows that p , then one is in a position to know that one knows that p) does not hold for knowledge in general, it nevertheless holds for at least paradigm cases of aesthetic knowledge. Wherever we get an instance of (KK) we can move from (3) to

4. $\neg Kp$.

Thus we would arrive at scepticism about aesthetic knowledge.

However, the fundamental challenge is this. The problem of snobbery in aesthetics forces us to address how we can know when, where and why our aesthetic responses or judgements are justified, and what conditions govern the legitimacy of making aesthetic claims. In order to make some headway in meeting the challenge I shall examine theoretical elaborations of

¹² See, e.g., R. Chisholm, *Theory of Knowledge*, 3rd edn (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1989); R. Feldman, 'Justification is Internal', in M. Steup and E. Sosa (eds), *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 270–84.

the premise that snobbery undermines aesthetic justification and claims to know. In doing so I shall not only go some way towards suggesting how the epistemic challenge should be met but also justify a new approach within analytic aesthetics.

VII. THE VICE OF SNOBBERY AND VIRTUOUS APPRECIATION

What, most fundamentally, distinguishes snobs from true appreciators? True appreciators care about their experience with a work for itself. Hence they approach a work with critical sympathy and ask if they are doing justice to it in their appreciation. Snobs, in contrast, appreciate or pronounce on some aesthetic object in so far as doing so enables them to appear socially superior with respect to some individual or group. Snobbery is an appreciative vice.

What is it to conceive of snobbery as an appreciative vice? According to Aristotle (*NE* 1105a 28–33), ‘virtuous acts are not done in a just or temperate way merely because they have a certain quality, but only if the agent acts in a certain state, *viz* (1) if he knows what he is doing, (2) if he chooses it, and chooses it for its own sake, and (3) if he does it from a fixed and permanent disposition of character’. Snobs fail to live up to the second condition: they do not value the object of artistic merit ‘for itself’. Ethical virtue requires the agent to choose the right or good action for the appropriate reasons. To act generously (i.e., exercise the virtue of generosity) one must choose the generous action for the very features that make it the generous thing to do. Appreciative virtue, by analogy, requires the agent to be motivated by those features of the artwork which make it an apt candidate for appreciation. The snob’s appreciation is motivated by other concerns, namely, the desire to appear superior, and thus falls short of virtue.

However, falling short of virtue is not sufficient to constitute a vice. What explains why snobbery is a vice rather than a mere failing? In ethics, the wrong motivation must be combined with someone’s living according to an incorrect view of the good (e.g., ‘Satisfy your appetites’, or ‘Look after number one’). In appreciation, snobbery is vicious because the problematic motivation explains why the snob operates according to a different and incorrect conception of appreciation and how aesthetic judgements should be made. A snob’s appreciation tracks social esteem.

A snob’s distorting motivational component, the desire to appear socially superior, explains the intellectual or deliberative errors to which snobbery is prone. Where aesthetic value and social esteem tend to diverge, the snob is the prey of processes like confabulation, over-generalization, selective focusing of attention, or even characterizations of *genre* against the evidence.

Snobs about musicals may claim, for example, that though they have seen a fair few, only a couple turned out to be worth bothering with – despite the fact that they have actually seen and enjoyed many more. Why? They are driven to deceive others or are prone to self-deception because what matters to them most is appearing to be the ‘right’ sort of person. What is wrong with the snob’s appreciation is the way in which it tends to track social markers, say, the price an artist’s work sells for, or where it is exhibited, and the ways in which the snob’s reasoning in appreciation and appraisal are driven by social considerations which are not aesthetically relevant. Hence a snob may rate highly a contemporary visual artist partly because Saatchi collects his work, or it has been exhibited at an achingly hip gallery in SoHo or Hoxton. Thus the snob’s character traits and dispositions stand in contrast with those of the true appreciator.

Snobbish judgements arise out of vice rather than virtue because at the most general level the motivation is wrong – the fundamental guiding desire is the desire for social esteem rather than appreciation of the work. This will no doubt be compounded, since given the snob’s fundamental motivation, the virtues germane to appreciation are probably not exercised appropriately, and the snob is the prey of corresponding vices. Hence it is a matter not just of having the wrong motivation at the most general level, though that is part of the fundamental explanation, but also of how the snob’s skills, abilities and dispositions are manifested in vice-ridden ways in appreciation. It might also explain why the snob is likely to possess other appreciative vices. A true appreciator is likely, amongst other things, to possess virtues such as courage, open-mindedness and imaginativeness. A snob, in contrast, may be cowardly, close-minded or formulaic in appreciation.

Even if many of the generative mechanisms or chains of reasoning involved in producing the judgements of the snob and the true appreciator are the same, the way in which snobbery is a vice explains why snobs generally tend towards error in a way virtuous appreciators do not. For what motivates snobs, and thus governs their processes of reasoning, is whatever most usefully marks out their social standing or aspirations. Thus in contrast with the virtuous appreciator, the snob’s aesthetic judgements and pronouncements are typically not justified.

Conceiving of appreciation in virtue-theoretic terms makes sense of why we praise the virtuous appreciator and condemn the snob. Proper appreciation is an achievement – it is grounded in the exercise of appreciative virtues. In contrast, snobs fail to appreciate a work *qua* aesthetic object properly because they are badly motivated and evaluate works according to incorrect criteria bound up with social esteem. Thus in appreciative terms, snobs are to be condemned. Furthermore, conceiving of snobbery as a vice

yields an account of where, when and why it lacks justification. Where one's motivation for social esteem corrupts one's appreciation, judgement or claims made, one lacks justification. The virtuous appreciator's judgements and pronouncements are thus justified in a way the snob's are not.¹³

VIII. AESTHETIC *ANGST* ABOUT RELIABLE SNOBS

Snobbery infects the appreciation or judgement appropriate to an object *qua* aesthetic object. Hence it tends to arrive at the wrong judgements, or where it arrives at the right ones this is a matter of accident or luck.¹⁴ Why, it might thus be asked, should we talk in terms of appreciative virtue and vice? What matters surely depends upon the reliability of processes, faculties or abilities from the general to the art-specific level.¹⁵ Motivation as such is irrelevant, since all that matters is whether a snob's appreciation is affected in a way that makes the underlying processes issuing in judgements and pronouncements unreliable. It makes sense to value reliable true beliefs as a goal, but not accidentally true beliefs, since we can aim at the former but not at the latter. In so far as we aim at reliably true beliefs, we can value in practical terms the realization or fulfilment of that end.¹⁶ Hence conceiving

¹³ The concern with appreciative virtue and vice here does not presuppose or entail commitment to the strong claim associated with Linda Zagzebski that knowledge itself is to be defined in terms of virtue: see L. Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind* (Cambridge UP, 1996).

¹⁴ Related but distinct principles insulating true beliefs from luck as a necessary condition for knowledge have been the subject of debate in the epistemology literature. E. Sosa, 'How to Defeat Opposition to Moore', *Philosophical Perspectives*, 13 (1999), pp. 141–54, argues for a safety principle according to which a true belief is so insulated iff the belief continues to be true in most nearby possible worlds in which the agent forms a belief about the relevant proposition in the same way as in the actual world. Duncan Pritchard argues in *Epistemic Luck* (Oxford UP, 2005) that the agent's true belief must be true not just in most but nearly all of the relevant nearby worlds; more recently, in 'Anti-Luck Epistemology', *Synthese*, 158 (2007), pp. 277–97, he suggests a weaker formulation according to which what matters is only that the belief must be true in all of the very close nearby possible worlds.

¹⁵ Sources from the literature in epistemology for this kind of thought include A. Goldman, 'What is Justified Belief?', in G.S. Pappas (ed.), *Justification and Knowledge* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1979), pp. 1–23, *Epistemology and Cognition* (Harvard UP, 1986), and 'The Sciences and Epistemology', in P.K. Moser (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Epistemology* (Oxford UP, 2002), pp. 144–76, for reliabilism as an analysis of justification; and F. Dretske, *Knowledge and the Flow of Information* (MIT Press, 1981), and R. Nozick, *Philosophical Explanations* (Harvard UP, 1981), for reliabilism as an analysis of knowledge. More recently Sosa, 'Intellectual Virtue in Perspective', in his *Knowledge in Perspective: Selected Essays in Epistemology* (Cambridge UP, 1991), pp. 270–94, A. Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (Oxford UP, 1993), and J. Greco, 'Agent Reliabilism', *Philosophical Perspectives*, 13 (1999), pp. 273–96, have built upon the central insight of reliabilism by anchoring it to the cognitive faculties of the agent. In the literature this latter variant of reliabilism often goes under the heading of virtue epistemology, since it puts the agent centre stage, in contrast with other forms of reliabilism.

¹⁶ M. Brady, 'Appropriate Attitudes and the Value Problem', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 43 (2006), pp. 91–9.

of the difference merely in terms of reliability still allows us to praise an ideal appreciator and condemn the snob.

However, matters are not quite so straightforward. After all, given the right sort of environment, a snob could in principle consistently and non-accidentally track the right aesthetic judgements and come to acquire internal justification. To put this in terms of one side of the epistemology debate, we might say that snobs possess knowledge wherever they reliably track true beliefs. Exactly how much knowledge the reliabilist attributes to the snob depends upon which version of the principle taken to insulate true belief as a condition of knowledge the reliabilist subscribes to, and how one is supposed to determine the relevantly close or very close nearby possible worlds. This is difficult, given that there are a huge number of close possible worlds varying in every conceivable dimension. Lewis gives some conditions in order of importance – (1) avoiding large violations of law; (2) maximization of spatiotemporal area; (3) avoidance of local violations of law (i.e., small miracles) – whilst stressing that it is unimportant for the worlds to agree in particular facts even though these may seem very important to us.¹⁷ Alternatively, it might be thought that the determination should be made bearing in mind the intuitive principle that the fewer the differences between them, the closer together are worlds differing in finitely many contingent aspects. Nevertheless, whichever principle is subscribed to, the intuition here is that there is something fundamentally disquieting about someone who reliably tracks the right aesthetic judgements for the wrong reasons. A snob's appreciative responses and judgements issue from a consistent but incorrect standard of correctness concerning social superiority – one which could be tangentially but reliably connected with true aesthetic worth.

The world portrayed by the sitcom *Frasier* may illustrate the point. Frasier and Niles Crane are incredible snobs. If there is Mongolian throat singing at the concert hall or a Château Margaux wine-tasting, they are obsessed by having to be there (and by who else will or will not get in). Suppose the cultural *milieu* of this fictional Seattle is such that its prime society movers are incredibly refined connoisseurs, and that there is a socio-economic explanation for this. Seattle, say, started to attract a cluster of expert aesthetic appreciators by its low real estate prices and the opportunities open to the artistically inclined. Over the years, as Seattle developed, those who came to gain places in high society tended to have fine taste. Thanks to their enculturation into the local environment, the Crane brothers reliably track the right aesthetic judgements (or at least are as good at doing so as the best

¹⁷ D.K. Lewis, *Counterfactuals* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1973), and 'Counterfactual Dependence and Time's Arrow and Postscripts', in his *Philosophical Papers*, Vol. II (Oxford UP, 1986), pp. 32–66.

appreciators in Seattle). We may grant that Mongolian throat singing is, aesthetically speaking, amazing, and wine from Château Margaux just is the finest. However, though the Crane Brothers' aesthetic judgements are right, at least some of the reasons which underwrite their judgements are either the wrong sort of reasons or underwrite these in the wrong sort of way. They like the singing because it is music from an obscure indigenous culture, and the wine in virtue of its originating from a renowned French vineyard. They take these features to be good-making features as such (as distinct from *prima facie* marks of value), because doing so marks themselves out as a particular kind of people. What explains why these reasons play the wrong roles in their aesthetic appreciation is the desire to see themselves as, and be seen by others to be, part of Seattle's exclusive high society.

Can the Crane brothers justifiably claim to have aesthetic knowledge? They do non-accidentally and reliably track the right aesthetic judgements, albeit for tangential reasons, and thus in the wrong sort of way. If all that is meant by asking the question is whether they get aesthetic judgements right and whether they can acquire justification, then the answer is 'Yes'.¹⁸ They can check their own pronouncements against those of the idolized critics in Seattle, and over time observe that these consistently converge. Hence they can acquire internal justification for their judgements and can come to be in a legitimate position to claim knowledge for themselves.

It might be objected that the fictional world of *Frasier* is far fetched. Perhaps the scenario of subjects reliably tracking aesthetic facts without aesthetic engagement is not a genuine local possibility for creatures like us, and the Crane method of deferring to the cultural big cheeses is not plausibly reliable. Yet the scenario does not presume that the Crane brothers have no aesthetic engagement at all. It is just that a large part of their aesthetic engagement is driven by heuristics that are governed by snobbishness. Deference to the cultural big cheeses ensures they have as much reliability and thus aesthetic knowledge as the best appreciators in Seattle. What they lack is the appropriate aesthetic experience and appreciation that underwrites the relevant judgements. This is no different from some everyday actual cases of appreciative snobbery. Wine drinkers, aspiring coffee drinkers and art world types often track or claim as their own the commendations of others in order to appear socially superior. Moreover, they can do so using markers such as rarity, branding or price that are

¹⁸ If the internalist is right, then even a reliable snob who tracks the right aesthetic judgements but for the wrong reasons does not have knowledge. The argument here just grants that reliably and non-accidentally tracking the right aesthetic judgements but for tangential reasons constitutes *bona fide* knowledge in some minimal sense. See Pritchard, 'Virtue Epistemology and Epistemic Luck, Revisited', *Metaphilosophy*, 39 (2008), pp. 66–88, for an illuminating account of the contemporary debate.

tangentially but reliably linked to appreciative value (at least reliably enough to afford some aesthetic knowledge). Where the desire for social superiority drives appreciation and appreciative pronouncements, snobs' appreciation is askew to the extent that it is driven by such extraneous factors, and yet apparently they can come to possess aesthetic justification, and legitimately claim aesthetic knowledge.

The Crane brothers and some everyday snobs possess aesthetic knowledge, can acquire justification and are in a position to make aesthetic claims. Nevertheless we are still suspicious of them *qua* aesthetic appreciators. Why? Where they arrive at the appropriate judgements, they do so parasitically for the wrong sort of reasons or because the reasons figure in the wrong sort of roles *qua* aesthetic appreciators. Hence to the degree this is so, though they may indeed possess aesthetic justification, there remains something fundamentally wrong with their appreciation.

In narrowly epistemic terms both a reliabilist and a virtue-theoretic account look as if they are going to say the same thing about aesthetic snobs. There may be nothing to distinguish an ideal appreciator's judgements from a snob's, narrowly construed in terms of warrant or justification. To the extent that the snob's responses and judgements are epistemically deficient, it might seem that this can be equally well captured by a virtue-centred or reliabilism-centred theory. However, if we consider whether the snob or the ideal appreciator responds and appreciates virtuously, there is a big difference. The virtue-theoretic account already contains an account of how the snob's judgements are epistemically deficient – of where and when they are. Furthermore, where the snob does manage to acquire warrant or justification, the reliabilist account remains silent, whereas the virtue account captures something important, namely, that despite possessing justification there is something fundamentally wrong with and blameworthy about the snob's aesthetic appreciation. A snob's judgement may be justified, but the problematic motivation infects aesthetic appreciation. The virtue-theoretic account thus looks preferable on the grounds of completeness and elegance of explanation.

Reliabilists may balk here. After all, they might object, aesthetic reliabilism does not and need not claim to give an account of aesthetic experience and appreciation. Indeed, properly speaking, it may remain entirely silent about such matters. The epistemology of aesthetics is one thing and the point behind the interest in and appreciation of the aesthetic is quite another. Why should we expect a unified account of the epistemological issues and those concerned with aesthetic appreciation?

There are two lines of thought which speak in the virtue theorist's favour here. First, even in cases where the snob is fairly well protected modally, the

point is that the degree to which someone is a snob is still epistemically speaking a bad thing. There is a range of values that pertain to knowledge, and one of them concerns the relationship between knowledge and how we arrive at it.¹⁹ It is one thing to arrive at knowledge via heteronomous deference to others, quite another to discover knowledge autonomously via the appropriate exercise of appreciative discrimination, skill and disposition. The latter is both more epistemically valuable and more of an achievement. At worst there remains something epistemically blameworthy about how the snob arrives at judgement, and at best the snob just lacks the praiseworthy autonomous relation to aesthetic knowledge that the virtuous appreciator has. The virtue-theoretic account captures exactly how and why this is so, whereas standard reliabilism does not. Secondly, unlike reliabilism, the virtue approach speaks to why we should care about aesthetic knowledge. What is the value of aesthetic knowledge? It is surely not just that the relevant judgements are true. After all, truth alone is insufficient to make aesthetic knowledge especially worthwhile. I may gain aesthetic knowledge by memorizing the names and dates of artists from entries in the *Oxford Dictionary of Art*. Yet expanding my knowledge in this way is pretty worthless unless there is some connection between such knowledge and how it may inform my appreciation. Suppose a Wall Street trader memorizes lists of vintages, regions, appellations and associated characteristics of wines, in order to appear superior in front of his boss. The upshot is that he buys, and discourses reliably about, the most expensive wines. He may have aesthetic knowledge and possess various reliable heuristics for arriving at it, but if it does not affect his appreciation he is missing something fundamental. What is missing is any proper connection between the possession of aesthetic knowledge and the point of it. He does not really know what it feels like to appreciate the wine as possessing the relevant characteristics in savouring the experience afforded. It is as if he is an aesthetic psychopath, constructing rules for judgement (albeit reliable ones) from the outside.

What matters is why we care about aesthetic knowledge. At least much of the reason why we do is not because we care about verdictive judgements as such but rather because of the ways in which judgements feed back into and (we hope) deepen proper aesthetic understanding, and thus appreciation. We typically want to know what the aesthetically relevant facts are, how they connect up and explain a work's aesthetic effects in order to facilitate our appreciation. This is why, as the virtue approach suggests but the reliabilist account does not, we should expect some basic connection between the epistemic and appreciative issues. Thus the virtue account is to be preferred.

¹⁹ See E. Sosa, 'Human Knowledge, Animal and Reflective', *Philosophical Studies*, 106 (2001), pp. 193–6.

There remains, however, a more difficult challenge to the virtue-theoretic approach.²⁰ We can distinguish judgement snobs from motivational snobs. The former have as a reason for judging an artwork to be good that making particular judgements about it enhances or maintains their social status. The latter judge an artwork to be good only if it is good: all their reasons for their aesthetic judgements about the work refer to genuine aesthetic properties of the work. Indeed, motivation snobs may be motivated to attend *only* to those artworks attention to which they believe will enhance or maintain their social status. Judgement snobs may judge that musicals are bad because popular; so they can be epistemically condemned for judging on the basis of an aesthetically irrelevant reason. In contrast, motivational snobs correctly judge operas and hold that some musicals are or might be better than some operas; it is just that they do not *listen* to musicals, because of their popularity. The motivational snob makes completely accurate aesthetic judgements, for the correct *autonomous* reasons. Why are motivational snobs not true appreciators who also happen to be snobs? Their epistemic position is as good as that of the non-snobish true appreciator. If they are true appreciators who, *qua* snobs, are not motivated to attend to a work for itself, then appreciation is not a virtue. Thus virtue-theoretic approaches to art are inadequate.

Motivational snobs, as characterized, are neither epistemically problematic nor guilty of appreciative vice. Indeed, the motivation to appear superior leads to the appreciative motivation to respond appropriately to the aesthetic features of those (kind of) works they choose to engage with. If this were not true, then the motivational snob would not be making the appropriate aesthetic judgements for the right sort of autonomous reasons. In other words, the snobbish motivation gives rise to the motivation to respond appropriately to a work's aesthetically relevant features. This is just what it is to attend to a work for itself. As long as the motivation to respond appropriately to a work's aesthetically relevant features is the governing end in the activity of appreciation, then the motivational snob is appreciating the work for its own sake, i.e., is appreciatively virtuous. What does this show?

Appreciative virtue consists in being motivated *in* the activity of appreciation to attend to, respond to and issue judgements in appropriate ways for the right sorts of aesthetic reasons. Furthermore, in the activity of appreciation it must come to be the governing motivation if the appreciative activity is to be virtuous. This may be so even if the motivational spring for engaging in the activity is something other than the internal end of appreciative reward, whether it is a desire to alleviate boredom, to improve the mind, to pass an exam, or indeed to appear superior. Appreciative virtue

²⁰ The worry has been raised by a number of people, but the following articulation of it is due to Berys Gaut.

does not require appreciation to be solely for its own sake with no other purpose. Indeed, it had better not be supposed to require this, given that many aesthetically appreciable objects are made for and often require appreciation in relation to practical or functional ends.²¹

Recognizing that this is so enables us to acknowledge the many mixed motives from which appreciative activity may spring, and the aesthetic bootstrapping effect they may have, whilst none the less respecting the crucial role that aesthetically virtuous motivation must play in governing the activity of appreciation if someone is to arrive at the appropriate judgements. Only if motivational snobs are consistently motivated by and pursue aesthetic ends in appreciative activity is it the case that they are in the same epistemic position as non-snobbish true appreciators. Thus a virtue approach looks the most promising in explaining exactly when, where and why snobbery is problematic, i.e., constitutes an appreciative vice.

Fair Frances may be motivated to avoid the work of Damien Hirst in favour of Richard Hamilton's, in order to appear superior. As long as her responses in appreciation are guided by an interest in a work's aesthetically relevant features, the motivation is unproblematic. However, wherever and to the extent that snobbish motivation is disposed to feed through into appreciative activity, so that aesthetically irrelevant social features play a causal role in forming the aesthetic judgements arrived at, it thereby constitutes an appreciative vice. Flawed Frederick condemns work by Jake and Dinos Chapman as cheap sensationalism. His drive to appear superior to those who go in for the Brit Art crowd causally explains why his appreciation fixes on the transgressive elements in the Chapmans' work without apprehending the ways in which it can be sculpturally playful. It also explains why Frederick makes the over-laudatory judgements he does about technically skilled but turgid naturalistic paintings. Frederick is guilty of appreciative snobbery, whereas Frances is not.

Does conceiving of appreciation in virtue-theoretic terms, and specifically treating snobbery as an appreciative vice, help to answer the fundamental challenge? In so far as we lack knowledge about whether or not we are virtuous in this regard, we lack justification for our responses and judgements, and cannot legitimately make aesthetic knowledge-claims. However, our position is far from irredeemable. I have provided an account of the vice of snobbery which explains why snobbish appreciation is fundamentally different from virtuous appreciation, and as an upshot of this, explains why snobbish responses and judgements lack justification when and where they do. This underwrites the characterization given of the kind of things we should be looking for with respect to snobbery (which was not available

²¹ See Davies, 'Aesthetic Judgements, Artworks and Functional Beauty'.

beforehand). We can understand what vices such as snobbery are like, thereby allowing us to detect and correct for them. We can come to know the degree to which we are snobs, in what respects our snobbery contaminates our appreciation, how it undermines justification or the legitimacy of our aesthetic pronouncements and which aspects of our character or habits of mind we should aim to correct. There is hope for us all. Education can rescue appreciation, aesthetic justification and appreciative claims (even though many people lack it).

IX. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR CONTEMPORARY AESTHETICS

The nature of snobbery poses a fundamental challenge to the epistemology of aesthetic justification and discourse. The force of the challenge arises from the recognition not just that snobbery is particularly pervasive in the aesthetic arena but also that it is often not obvious whether we are being snobbish, either in the first- or the third-person case. In attempting to show how this challenge can be met, I have given a story which outlines why aesthetic snobbery is an appreciative vice, why snobs lack aesthetic justification (where they do) and why we ought to withhold our assent from claims made by someone we suspect of being an appreciative snob. In doing so, I have gestured towards an account of appreciation which focuses on the virtues of the true appreciator. The ways in which the desire to feel or appear superior can connect up with and corrupt appreciation explains how and why a snob's judgements and claims lack justification and legitimacy, where they do. It also makes clear why even where snobs track appropriate aesthetic judgements they should not be praised for doing so – it is not the right sort of achievement for an aesthetic appreciator. More generally, this suggests that in contrast with contemporary philosophical aesthetics, any proper account of appreciation should aim to put centre stage something like character and the appreciative virtues.²²

University of Leeds

²² I am grateful for helpful comments from my colleagues at Leeds, those who attended presentations of this paper at Akureyri, Geneva, Gothenburg, Liverpool, London, Lund and Vanderbilt, and in particular from anonymous referees, Stephen Davies, Jamie Dow, Bryan Frances, Berys Gaut, Peter Goldie, Dominic Lopes, Andrew McGonigal, Aaron Meskin, Duncan Pritchard and Robbie Williams.