

The Aesthetic Properties of Wine^{*}

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ABSTRACT – In this paper we defend the claim that tasting a wine is a way of improving one’s epistemic standing towards it. To support this conclusion, we describe a scenario in which Clara the super-oenologist, who is omniscient about the natural properties of wine but has never herself sampled it, one day has a chance to try out a glass of L’Apparita 1985. Beforehand, Clara knew all the natural properties of that sample of wine. However, by tasting it she intuitively learns something new *about it*. To vindicate this intuition, we supply a metaphysical account of the properties of the wine with which Clara gets acquainted upon tasting it – its aesthetic properties – as *response-dependent* properties. We finally indicate that our account can be used to vindicate *some strains* of wine criticism from the charge of epistemic untrustworthiness.

§1. Clara the Super-Oenologist

Imagine that oenology achieved a much firmer knowledge of the chemical, biological, geological, environmental, and physiological constituents of wine – in brief, of the natural properties of wine – and of the way these interact with gustative organs and give rise to different gustatory experiences.¹ Let Clara be a distinguished representative of this

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¹ For a discussion of the prospects of scenarios akin to super-oenology, see also Noble (2006). The scenario we are proposing could remind one of the 2030 and 2015 scenarios depicted by Burnham and Skilleas (2012: 48-53). Our aim, however, is to study the epistemological insights provided by the experience of

scientific community, our *super-oenologist*. Due to somewhat unusual life circumstances, Clara was never able to sample a wine. That, however, did not prevent her from becoming the leading figure in her field. One day, she finally gets to try a glass of Castello di Ama L'Apparita 1985. As she approaches the tasting, she knows every natural detail of the setting and she can foresee in what manners the natural properties of the wine will affect her physiological state.² After having given the glass a gentle swirl, Clara sips a small mouthful from it, for a moment swirls it around, and then swallows the precious liquid.

Does Clara thereby learn something new about L'Apparita 1985?³

In this paper we aim to vindicate the view that Clara, upon tasting it, does learn something new about L'Apparita 1985. By doing so we aim to offer a new piece of theorization regarding the role of first-person experience in aesthetic judgments regarding wine. The topic is an old and vexed one. In recent years, authors such as Smith (2007: 44) pointed out the indispensability of first-person experience; on the other hand, Meskin and Robson (2015) questioned the existence of any necessary link between first-person experience and aesthetic judgment. Our essay takes another argumentative route. We focus on the metaphysical aspects that the aesthetic properties of wine should have in order to be discoverable only through first-person experience; hence, we offer a positive

tasting a wine, rather than to appreciate its ontological status. It should be further clarified that our aim is not to prove the reliability of Clara's testimony about the wine's properties, but whether the experience of tasting the wine improves *her* epistemic standing with respect to it. For additional recent discussion of testimony about taste see also Whiting 2015, Robson 2013, and Meskin 2004.

² We are here operating a simplification by assuming that L'Apparita 1985 is homogeneous with respect to its natural and aesthetic properties. This is obviously not the case: each bottle and its liquid content is a story of its own; moreover, the conditions of the wine in each glass may differ, no matter how slightly, due to differences in the conditions of each glass (e.g. temperature, tidiness). At the same time, our simplification is in keeping with current methods of evaluating and pricing wines (cfr. Borghini 2012); this may suggest that wine judgments concern properties that are stable across large samples; at any rate, it would be of little difficulty to adjust our analysis so to regard each bottle of wine, or each glass, as an entity of its own rank.

³ Clara's example may remind one of Jackson's color-blind scientist, Mary. This invites a misunderstanding about the question we are asking in this paper that we would like to pre-empt. In this paper we do *not* address the question whether Clara's subjective reactions, as she savors her sample of L'Apparita 1985, are identical with or supervene upon some physiological state of her body instantiated as a consequence of the ingestion of the wine. What we ask is whether undergoing those subjective reactions is a way for Clara to apprehend some testable property of L'Apparita 1985.

account of such properties. We shall also underline that in this work we focus on wine due to the longstanding tradition of aesthetic criticism that, within Western culture, paid homage to such beverage. Said tradition, arguably, greatly influenced the aesthetic criticism concerning other products. It is important – though it would take us too far from present concerns – to consider whether the fourfold distinction between aesthetic properties that we are suggesting here can be employed to study the aesthetic properties of products other than wine, such as tea, coffee, chocolate, whiskey, cheese, beer, olive oil, and, perhaps, foods of any sort.

In the sequel, we first articulate the reasons against the conclusion that Clara, upon tasting L'Apparita 1985, does learn something new about it (§2). Then, we delineate the most plausible strategy to dispel the air of paradox surrounding that claim. This strategy points to the right kind of properties to be identified as the object of Clara's new acquaintance. We propose two distinctions among these properties that are important for our purposes (§3) and supply a solution to the question raised by Clara's case, which appeals to response-dependent properties. (§4). We finally show (§5) that our account can be used to sketch a defense of some strains of wine criticism from the recurrent charge of being epistemically untrustworthy.

It should be emphasized that we operate on a reasonably modest reading of the epistemic notions central to our conclusion. Our suggestion is that during the tasting Clara is confronted with properties of the wine that are *anthropocentric*, in the specific sense that their distribution is not solely determined by what there is in the environment, but also by the nature of our sensitivity and by the way one thing interacts with another. However, we suggest (§4-5) that Clara's new knowledge is also, in two respects, knowledge of features of the wine that are objective. First, on the model we defend, the properties of wine with which Clara interacts are objective in the sense that their

instantiation is independent of the existence of subjects endowed with the relevant sensitivity. Secondly, they are objective in the related sense that they could be instantiated even if subjects endowed with the right sort of sensitivity had lost the capability to recognize that they are.

§2. Beyond Super-Oenology?

The question we are facing is whether Clara learns something new about the sample of L'Apparita 1985, after she tastes it for the first time. It is important to emphasize, right from the start, that any suitable affirmative answer to this question is subject to three constraints. To begin with, if Clara apprehends something *new* about L'Apparita 1985, there must be a property P that Clara wasn't in a position to detect or know about before the tasting, and that she comes to detect or know about for the first time after the tasting. Call this constraint *novelty*. A second constraint, which we propose to label *relevance*, is that it should be straightforward that the bearer of P is the sample of L'Apparita 1985 contained in Clara's glass. Call this constraint *relevance*. A third constraint, which we label *privileged epistemic access*, is that a sound epistemological story should be available to explain how it is that P is discoverable upon tasting, and also to explain how it wasn't discoverable by resorting to means of detection that Clara had at her disposal beforehand.

When *novelty*, *relevance*, and *privileged epistemic access* are in place, many properties prove unfit for the purpose of vindicating the intuition about Clara's alleged epistemic improvement. This includes any of the properties of L'Apparita 1985 that contribute to determining the character of Clara's gustatory experience. For example, take the properties of having a certain concentration of phenols x , an alcoholic degree y , and a degree of titratable acidity z . Although it is beyond dispute that these are properties of the

sample of L'Apparita 1985 contained in Clara's glass – so that *relevance* is clearly satisfied – these properties could not be the ones in relation to which Clara achieves a better epistemic perspective. For they clearly fail *novelty* and *privileged epistemic access*. Being omniscient in relation to the natural properties of the wine, Clara knew before the tasting about the tannins contained in the sample of L'Apparita 1985 and about their concentration; for the same reasons, she also knew how alcoholic and acidic the wine was. Moreover, savoring the wine is neither the sole, nor the most reliable way to detect those properties – lab analyses are a more reliable source, which Clara would have already accessed.

Since Clara has never tasted wine beforehand, her epistemic perspective undeniably improves as she swallows her sample of L'Apparita 1985. For before she didn't know *what it is like* to drink a wine with degree of phenolic concentration x , alcoholic degree y , and degree of titratable acidity z . This epistemic improvement meets *novelty* and *privileged epistemic access*, as it opens up a whole set of new properties that the tasting has disclosed to Clara. However, the epistemic improvement does not seem to meet *relevance*. Tasting the sample of L'Apparita 1985 is a way for Clara to get acquainted with what many philosophers would call the *phenomenal character* of the experience induced by the contact of a wine with degree of phenolic concentration x , alcoholic degree y , and titratable acidity z with her gustative organs. But, the bearer of these properties is not the sample of L'Apparita 1985. More plausibly, it is the experience of savoring it. So, even if the tasting puts Clara in a position to learn something new, it is something new about an experience of hers and not, as explicitly required by *relevance*, about the wine itself.

We seem to be at a loss. Clara's gustative experience seems to mark an important improvement in her epistemic relation to L'Apparita 1985. The explanation, however,

cannot be that the experience results from the causal interaction between certain of the natural properties of the relevant sample of wine and her gustative organs. The natural alternative – that Clara has learned what it is like to savor a wine with those natural properties – has turned out to be equally unhelpful. If no other property of the wine emerges to be identified as central to Clara’s epistemic improvement, then, the intuition that it ever occurred seems to be in danger.

We may begin to sense a way out of this impasse by paying due attention to the phenomenological side of Clara’s experience. There is something it is like to undergo Clara’s gustatory experience and we have already granted that Clara gets acquainted with it while savoring L’Apparita 1985. The phenomenal character of Clara’s gustative experience, however, does not seem to be what the experience is *about*. The gustatory experience is bound up with its phenomenal character in a way that a subject who underwent it could not fail to appreciate what it is like to have it. But, the experience itself is not about what it is like to have it. The subjective feeling is rather experienced as the way in which properties of things in the environment manifest themselves to our conscious mind as being instantiated outside of it. So, until now we have simply failed to look in the right direction. Clara’s epistemic improvement is obviously not about the properties that cause her gustatory experience; nor is it about the phenomenal character of this experience. Rather, it is about properties *of* the wine, but not the ones causing her gustatory experience. The next section is devoted to illustrating what these properties are. The sections to follow are then devoted to accounting for their peculiar metaphysical status.

§3. The Aesthetic Properties of Wine

A good way to introduce the properties we have in mind is to start with a classic passage from Hume's treatise *Of the Standard of Taste*. By way of illustrating what he means by "delicacy of taste," Hume reports (with some alteration) an episode from Chapter XIII, Part 2 of Cervantes's *Don Quixote*:

It is with good reason, says Sancho to the squire with the great nose, that I pretend to have a judgment in wine: This is a quality hereditary in our family. Two of my kinsmen were once called to give their opinion of a hogshead, which was supposed to be excellent, being old and of a good vintage. One of them tastes it; considers it; and, after mature reflection, pronounces the wine to be good, were it not for a small taste of leather, which he perceived in it. The other, after using the same precautions, gives also his verdict in favour of the wine; but with the reserve of a taste of iron, which he could easily distinguish. You cannot imagine how much they were both ridiculed for their judgment. But who laughed in the end? On emptying the hogshead, there was found at the bottom an old key with a leathern thong tied to it. (Hume, 1760)

Sancho's kinsmen exemplify the special sensitivity to what is "naturally calculated to give pleasure" which, according to Hume, is key to the special aesthetic experience that can be elevated to the rank of a *standard of taste*. What deserves emphasis, for present purposes, is however not the "delicacy of imagination" in itself, but the properties of the wine which Sancho's gifted kinsmen are especially attentive to. These, we submit, are among the properties that one should concentrate upon in the attempt to vindicate the intuition about Clara's epistemic improvement. We propose to call such properties the *aesthetic properties* of the wine. In this section we put forward some distinctions among these properties that are relevant for present purposes.⁴ In the sections to follow we lay down an account of the metaphysical nature of these properties, and show these properties to meet the three conditions laid down above of novelty, relevance, and privileged epistemic access.

Hume's passage suggests distinct varieties of aesthetic properties. On the one hand, there is the property that the wine in the hogshead is supposed to possess: the property of

⁴ The rich literature on the aesthetic properties of wine generated several distinctions among them. For some notable examples, see Burnham and Skilleas (2012), Todd (2010), Scruton (2010), Shapin (2012), Crane (2007).

being an excellent – or perhaps just a good – wine. We call these *evaluative aesthetic* properties of the wine. On the other hand, there are the properties grounding the expert judges’ cautious attitude. They detect additional features of the wine, which contribute to determining its aesthetic worth: its tasting of leather, in the judgment of the first, and its tasting of iron, in the judgment of the second. We shall call those *referential aesthetic* properties of the wine, for reasons that we are going to explain.

To call a wine excellent, or good, is to pay a compliment to it, implicitly to recommend its consumption as the potential vehicle of an aesthetic gratification, and implicitly to qualify a reaction of approbation of it as fit or appropriate (cfr. Bourdieu 1979, and the ensuing debate, for the social significance of evaluative aesthetic properties). Evaluative aesthetic properties also come in a derogative variety. To say that a wine instantiates a property of this kind – as, plausibly, the property of being a bad or a disgusting wine – is to denigrate it, implicitly to warn your peers against the disappointment potentially deriving from its consumption, and implicitly to qualify one’s possible reaction of approbation of it as unfit or inappropriate.

The other properties surfacing in Hume’s quote, rather than being genuine instances of the evaluative aesthetic properties of a wine, seem to be mere *determiners* of them. They seem, that is, to be the properties *in virtue of which* a wine counts as excellent or bad. One way to convey the difference would be to reserve the label “aesthetic” to the evaluative properties and to name them, after the function they exert, *aesthetically relevant* properties.⁵ This choice, we are aware, would spare us much unneeded

⁵ This seems to be, for instance, the choice of Burnham and Skilleas (2011), who distinguish the aesthetic attributes of a wine from its sensory qualities: the latter supposedly single out particular aromas and flavors, which – we conjecture – corresponds to the referential aesthetic properties of our account; the aesthetic attributes, instead, comprise those qualities of wine that are especially valued by more sophisticated drinkers, and plausibly overlap with our evaluative properties. In our account we distinguish four sorts of aesthetic properties of wines (see Figure 1), thereby offering a more articulated analysis than the one provided by Burnham and Skilleas. On a different note, it is worth remarking that, for research purposes that extend beyond the scope of philosophical inquiry, additional criteria for distinction among the

controversy. Since we aim to provide a unified account of both kinds of properties, however, we prefer to group them together also from a terminological point of view. Therefore, at least within the limited space of this paper, we propose to call also these properties “aesthetic”. To signal the difference, borrowing from Shapin (2012), we call them *referential* aesthetic properties of wine.⁶

The qualifier "referential" is meant to signal two features of these properties. Although the detection of the properties is, in some sense, partly constitutive of the aesthetic appreciation of a wine, they are disguised as natural – hence, they are disguised as not evaluative (cfr. also Sweeney 2008). Whether or not a velvety wine is positively or negatively valuable seems to depend, in addition to the features that can be detected by savoring it, on who the judge is, and on their taste and aesthetic standards (cfr. Bourdieu 1979, Bach 2007, Smith 2007, and Scruton 2010). So, one first negative feature of referential properties is that they *are not* evaluative properties: outside an appropriate frame of reference, to call a wine velvety is neither to pay a compliment to it, nor to denigrate it. On the other hand, to keep with the same example, whether or not a wine is velvety does not seem to depend on the judge’s taste and standards, in the same way in

aesthetically relevant properties of wine may be adopted, based for example on consumer’s preferences, wine prices, grape varieties, regions, and methods of production.

⁶ Here is how Shapin distinguishes referential properties from another family of properties – which he labels *evocative* properties (and which probably roughly correspond to what we call the *evaluative aesthetic* properties of the wine):

The more familiar descriptive vocabulary ranges, for example, from black currants (for cabernet sauvignon) to gooseberries (for sauvignon blanc) to lead-pencil, cedar and cigar-box (for clarets) – all of which seem (to me) fairly straightforward ways of linking tastes in one domain to familiar tastes in another. But then we encounter predicates like wet stones, tomato skin, brier, Provençal herb, fig paste, and blanched almonds – where the path to wine taste and smell from the reference descriptors is less apparent. Nevertheless, one can call this sort of vocabulary *referential* because the evident intention is reliably to describe the organoleptic characteristics of wine by *reference* to tastes and smells which are *really in* the wine and in the entities – fruits, minerals, herbs, animal substances etc. – to which comparisons are made. This is a very different sort of exercise from one which talks about the *powers* or *qualities* of wine or one which seeks to *evoke* the sensations of drinking wine by way of other modes of aesthetic experiences. (Shapin 2012: 51).

which the positive or negative aesthetic worth of a velvety wine does. So, a second, positive feature of the properties in question that the qualifier "referential" is designed to bring out is that they *are* – at least to a greater extent than the evocative properties of a wine – independent of the judge's taste and standards. Even outside any specific frame of reference, to call a wine velvety is – to a certain extent, at least – to describe it.

The passage above by Russell suggests that evaluative and referential aesthetics properties can be further articulated based on an orthogonal distinction. Some aesthetic properties are non-controversially related to the gustatory experience of the wine while others are more controversially entrenched with gustation and taste. For instance, acidity is closely connected to the gustatory experience, but price is arguably extrinsic to it. Moreover, some gustatory properties – like acidity – seem referential, while others – for instance, excellence – seem evaluative. Now, one could argue that price is part of the gustatory experience, and hence is aesthetically relevant *strictu sensu*, only by providing an argument for the cognitive penetrability of price into the gustatory experience. While we are not aiming to sort out the complex issue of which properties are genuinely here, we would like to provide space in our view for aesthetic properties being aesthetically relevant even when they are not gustatory or referential. We sum up the distinctions we are drawing in Figure 1 below.⁷

Figure 1. Four kinds of aesthetic properties of wine

	Referential	Evaluative
Gustatory	E.g. white pepper; wet stones; tannin; mineral; blackberries; cherries; almonds.	E.g. elegant; excellent; austere.

⁷ Whether there are evaluative non-gustatory properties is debatable: traditional or authentic may be good candidates (cfr. Borghini 2012 and Borghini 2014a).

Non-Gustatory	E.g. price; branding.	E.g. authentic; traditional.
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§4. The Aesthetic Properties of Wine as Response-Dependent Properties

It is a provisional result of the last section that the properties of wine with which Clara makes contact for the first time while savoring a sample of L'Apparita 1985 should be identified with its aesthetic properties. In particular, Clara contacts with gustatory properties of the wine, some of which are referential and some of which are evaluative. These properties, we argued, should not be identified with any of the wine's physical properties, nor with the subjective feelings that accompany Clara's first encounter with them. In this section we defend the suggestion that the referential and the evaluative aesthetic properties of the wine are response-dependent properties, namely dispositions, grounded in the wine's natural properties, to elicit experiences with a distinctive phenomenal character. To begin with, we introduce this kind of property by drawing a parallel with a conception of the nature of moral properties known as metaphysical sentimentalism (§4.1). Then (§4.2) we proceed to illustrate how the same metaphysical account can be applied to the specific case of the (referential and evaluative) properties of the wine. Finally (§4.3) we vindicate the intuition about Clara's epistemic improvement by contending that, once the referential and aesthetic properties of the wine are conceived of as response-dependent properties, they can easily be shown to meet *novelty*, *relevance*, and *privileged epistemic access*.

§4.1 Response-Dependent Properties: the Case of Moral Sentimentalism

Moral sentimentalists are united in believing that human sentimental responses such as approbation and disapprobation are what grounds ethics (Kauppinen 2013). Metaphysical sentimentalists, in particular, believe that our responses of approbation and

disapprobation metaphysically *determine* the moral facts and properties. The details of this view – corresponding to the manner in which this determination is supposed to take place – can be spelled out in different ways. Here is a series of increasingly less problematic proposals (Kauppinen 2014).

According to the simplest and least plausible conception:

(a) For X to be morally good (bad) is for X to be approved (disapproved) of.

This position is unoccupied, because it has some obvious shortcomings. Undetected actions are neither approved nor disapproved of. So, on the view under consideration, undetected actions, such as undetected murders or thefts, should lack moral properties. Moreover, (a) runs into trouble as soon as there is an X of which some individual approves and some other individual disapproves. Which one is the moral fact in such a situation? A way to pre-empt either shortcoming is to revise (a) in the following manner:

(b) For X to be morally good (bad) *for Y* is for X to have the disposition to elicit approbation (disapprobation) from Y.

By indexing moral goodness (badness) to some specific subject Y, the second problem is prevented from emerging. At the same time, the first problem is successfully dealt with by tying the moral goodness (badness) of X not to the responses it *actually* elicits in Y but to the responses it *would* elicit in Y, were Y to take a stance on X.

However, (b) renders moral disagreement impossible by definition. Moreover, it makes it (nearly) impossible for Y to be morally mistaken, as it is nearly impossible for Y, upon consulting her responses towards X, to be mistaken as to whether she approves

or disapproves of it. Thirdly, in close connection with the latter point, (b) implies that, if we were to develop, say, a pro-slavery sensibility, slavery would become morally good. However, the right thing to say seems to be that in those kinds of situations we would approve of slavery because we have become morally worse, not that slavery would have become morally good (Kauppinen 2014). These problems can be successfully dealt with if we idealize the subject Y or the conditions C under which they operate:

- (c) For X to be morally good (bad) is for X to have the disposition to elicit approbation (disapprobation) by idealized subjects Y in idealized conditions C.

It is important to elaborate on the terminological choice of referring to *idealized* subjects, which is significant for the subsequent analysis of aesthetic judgments about wine too. As it is, (c) does not commit us to a view where moral worth is evaluated against the judgments of an omniscient, infallible, and omnipotent being; rather, the idealized subject may be an actual agent with a formidably educated moral sensibility, or an agent that departs only minimally from an actual one, for instance by differing from the latter in only one trait of character.

By tying moral goodness (badness) to the responses of a subject that is the result of an idealization of actual subjects, the problem of impossible disagreement vanishes. Indeed, A and B engage in a genuine disagreement if they debate whether X is good (bad), for they debate on matters that are settled one way or another depending on whether the idealized subject Y would or would not approve of it. By the same token, (c) is compatible with the existence of moral mistakes, for one can disapprove (approve) of what the idealized subject would approve (disapprove) of. Finally, under (c) the objection based

on the pro-slavery sensibility can easily be handled by simply contending that, no matter what actual human subjects eventually come to morally approve of, the idealized subject would definitely not approve of it.

To say that moral properties are response-dependent in the sense of (c) is to say that they are *anthropocentric*: they are properties whose nature cannot be adequately understood unless in terms of the specific way in which our human sensibility is affected when we interact with the objects that instantiate them. These properties would be unintelligible if conceptually divorced from certain subjective responses of ours.

In the same fashion, it seems plausible to suppose that a wine's tasting of blackcurrant, its being crisp, or its being excellent are properties that would be unintelligible if conceptually divorced from the notion of a subject with a sensorial constitution like ours, undergoing gustatory experiences with a distinct phenomenal character when sampling the wine. So it seems plausible that the metaphysical nature of referential and evaluative properties of wines can be modeled on the example of (c). This is the task to which the next section is devoted⁸.

§4.2 The Referential and Evaluative Properties of Wine as Dispositional Properties

Let's start with the referential properties of wine, as exemplified by the property of being *crisp*. The general idea – introduced in the previous section with (c) – is that for something to possess a response-dependent property it is to possess the disposition to elicit a given

⁸ There is an important tradition, dating back at least to Locke, of accounting for the metaphysical nature of colour properties in dispositional terms. Some readers acquainted with this tradition might think that it would have been better to introduce our metaphysical account of the aesthetic properties of wine by drawing a parallel with these properties, rather than with the moral properties described by the metaphysical sentimentalists. One possible motivation for this protest is that, as it will become apparent in the section to follow, the aesthetic properties of wine are more similar to colours than to moral properties in that they are identified by qualitative subjective responses more than they are identified by purely evaluative responses. We agree that, under this respect, the aesthetic properties of wine resemble colour properties more than they resemble moral properties. Nonetheless, we believe that the latter properties offer a parallel with the aesthetic properties of wine which is more fit to convey their normative dimension.

response in subjects with certain traits that operate under certain specified conditions. Call R_C the characteristic gustatory experience of sensing a pleasing acidity in one's mouth, and let T and C stand, respectively, for the relevant human taster and the relevant sampling conditions. At a first approximation, we might then say that:

(c_C) W is crisp $=_{df}$ W has the disposition to arouse gustatory response R_C in human tasters T if sampled in conditions C .

Tasters T and conditions C , along with the *proviso* discussed in the previous section, must be conceived of as the result of an idealization of current tasters, and of current sampling conditions. However, for the purpose of generating a definition in keeping with the current practice of describing a wine in terms of its crisp taste, it suffices that T and C are idealized in small measure. Such a small idealization would guarantee that tasters T do not dramatically depart from our *current* average sensorial constitution, and circumstances C do not depart from the circumstances that are *currently* taken to be conducive to a fair and neutral assessment of a wine. When T and C are idealized in this way, (c_C) makes room for the possibility of mistakes about a wine's crispness, because actual tasters – as contrasted with their idealized counterparts – sometimes happen to deviate from the average sensorial constitution, and so sometimes happen to have unfitting responses when they sample a wine; in the same way, actual sampling conditions – as contrasted with their idealized counterparts – sometimes happen to differ from average conditions, and so to fail to be conducive to a neutral assessment. By the same token, when T and C are idealized in the way explained above, the property of being crisp is immunized against the possibility of losing the rigidity needed to count as an admissible property of things. Under some possible scenarios, L'Apparita 1985 may lose the

disposition to arouse R_C in average tasters under current suitable sampling conditions, and maple syrup may acquire it instead. The relevant scenarios must however involve a dramatic departure from T's *current* average constitution or current suitable sampling conditions. Current average tasters in current suitable sampling conditions do experience R_C , for instance, when they sample L'Apparita 1985 and do not experience R_C when they sample maple syrup. So, the envisaged scenario is not to be described, on (c_C) , as one in which L'Apparita 1985 is not anymore, and maple syrup has become instead, crisp. They must be described as circumstances in which average tasters have lost the capability of determining whether something is crisp.⁹

When we move from the referential aesthetic properties of wine to its evaluative aesthetic properties, the framework exemplified by (c) and (c_C) can be retained without altering it in any fundamental respect. An important qualification must however be stated.

The referential aesthetic properties of a wine, such as its crispness, and the evaluative aesthetic properties of a wine, such as its excellence or beauty, seem to differ in one important respect. The latter properties also seem to be unintelligible if divorced from the notion of a taster who is pleased by their encounter. And there is probably a distinctive experience of gustatory enjoyment – say R_E – that a wine, to the extent to which it is excellent, can be taken to have the disposition to arouse in current average tasters, when savored under suitable conditions. However, borrowing from Zangwill's terminology (2014), a wine's crispness and a wine's excellence (or beauty) differ because the first property isn't, and the second property is, "sociable." When a property P is sociable, our capability to appreciate that P is instantiated is constrained by our realization that something X cannot be *barely* P, and that if X is P it is in virtue of some other properties, not of the P-type, exemplified by X. Referential properties like having a crisp

⁹ In the last section of the paper we come back to this point, when assessing Clara's alleged epistemic improvement in terms of its testability.

taste are not sociable in this specific sense. The account conveyed by (c_C) above arguably points to an intimate connection between the natural properties of a wine PP_N and the disposition – grounded by PP_N – to elicit R_C under suitable conditions in appropriately idealized tasters. However, it is not a constraint on someone's appreciating a wine's crispness that one realizes that this property is intimately tied to the distribution of the wine's PP_N. It does not seem part of the phenomenology accompanying the appreciation of a wine's crispness that this property be experienced as somehow resulting from the causal interaction between one's *sensorium* and PP_N.

When we judge a wine to be excellent, on the contrary, we normally take ourselves to have a wealth of reasons for doing so which is hardly exhausted by our experiencing, in response to it, something like R_E. Typically, we justify our ascriptions of excellence to a wine in terms of the way it tastes – so, arguably, by mentioning the referential aesthetic properties we detect in it – and by mentioning the way in which the wine's different tastes and components blend together contributing to the wine's complexity and balance. So, the overall gustatory experience that typically underwrites – and that we take to justify – our assessment of a wine as *excellent* or *beautiful* is not typically exhausted by R_E alone (in the way, say, in which the gustatory experience that underwrites – and that we take to justify – our assessment of a wine as crisp appears to coincide with R_C alone.)

One way to take account of this difference might involve a small departure from the letter, though not from the general spirit, of the response-dependent account. One, in particular, might deny that a wine W's excellence consists in its disposition to arouse R_E in the relevant idealized tasters T in the suitable conditions C, and maintain instead that W is excellent to the extent that the relevant T, when savoring W on C, would *judge* on the basis of T's overall gustatory experience that W is excellent. An alternative way to take account of the difference advertised above is to grant that the wine's excellence is

constituted by its disposition to elicit R_E in the relevant idealized tasters T under the suitable conditions C . The viability of this strategy, which we tentatively pursue in this paper, depends on the assumption that R_E should be regarded as an emergent feature of the overall experience that characterizes our contact with a wine.

The emergence of R_E from the overall experience accompanying a wine's tasting could be understood on the more familiar model of beauty. Our appreciation of beauty is intuitively taken to depend on our appreciation of other features like its shape, the balance among its part, its overall harmony, etc. The idea, in particular, could be that it is *in virtue of* our experiencing responses like R_C that we end up experiencing the specific condition (e.g. sort of pleasure) that is key to our experiencing R_E . Bearing this qualification in mind, we can now proceed to define a wine's excellence as follows:

(c_E) W is excellent =_{df} W has the disposition to arouse gustatory response R_E in human tasters T if sampled in conditions C .

Some additional comment on (c_E) is in order before we move any further. As seen above, in §3, the referential aesthetic properties of a wine W and its evaluative aesthetic properties do not simply differ for their "sociability." On the one hand, the referential aesthetic properties seem *independent* of taste and standards. Whether or not a taster T happens to praise the acidity or the tannic character of a wine W is an independent fact from whether T detects acidity or tannic character in W . Our account of the nature of these and like properties is designed to preserve this intuition. For, on our account, W is acidic and tannic just on the condition of having the disposition to arouse certain gustatory experiences in tasters T , *whatever their tastes and standards*, provided that they possess

an average sensorial constitution and they sample *W* under conditions that are currently regarded as conducive to a fair assessment of it.

When we move to consider the evaluative properties of wine, there seems to be no corresponding intuition about their independence of the tastes and standards of a taster that our account should be able to preserve. Whether or not a wine *W* possesses, say, the evaluative aesthetic property of being an excellent wine seems to depend, above and beyond the referential aesthetic properties that can be detected in it, also on whether, by the standards accepted by the taster, a wine with those properties counts as an excellent wine.

This is not to suggest a form of relativism about the excellence or the beauty of wine. To get at a relativist picture, one must additionally argue that there is no principled way to assess one's possible standards of taste as being more or less correct, or accurate. On this point we want to stay neutral. The observation above, about the second asymmetry between the referential and the evaluative aesthetic properties of wine, signals that the tasters *T* mentioned by (c_E) must be taken as idealized along an *additional axis*: above and beyond having an average sensorial constitution, and above and beyond sampling a wine in conditions that are currently regarded as conducive to a fair assessment, tasters *T* must be conceived of as the ideal end-product of a specific *education* (whatever its specific content), as having learned and interiorized specific norms of appraisal (whatever they are), and as having come to endorse specific standards of excellence (again, whatever they are).

There are competing "schools" or "traditions" about the specific education, the norms of appraisal, and the standards of taste that should have been imparted to the idealized tasters mentioned by (c_E) if their responses are to be in keeping with a wine's excellence or beauty. Each school will arguably educate the taste of its trainees in ways

that do not necessarily converge with the way in which other schools will. So, it is to be expected that T1 and T2, as a result of their different background, will have acquired the disposition to experience the relevant emergent response R_E in different sets of conditions, namely when detecting different sets of referential aesthetic properties.

Depending on one's meta-theoretical inclinations, this can be taken to show that there is no such thing as *the* excellence of wine, but that there are as many excellences as there are schools and traditions of wine tasting. Perhaps, a radical conclusion in the neighborhood might also be that there are *none*. Alternatively, one who endorses (c_E) might believe that it determines a unique extension for the evaluative aesthetic properties of wine because there is just one correct school, and a wine should count as excellent just to the extent to which it would elicit the relevant responses in idealized tasters who have acquired the right dispositions. As said, these are additional concerns that are bound to emerge only when our account of the evaluative aesthetic properties of wine has been accepted. For the time being, let us then concentrate on the consequences of our account for the question that has occupied us throughout this paper. Does Clara increase her epistemic standing towards L'Apparita 1985, after all?

§4.3 Vindicating the Intuition About Clara

We can now show that Clara, upon tasting the wine, gets acquainted with properties *of the wine* of which she wasn't – *and could not have* been – knowledgeable otherwise than by savoring it.

It is plausible to suppose, to begin with, that if P is the response-dependent property of having the disposition to elicit the subjective response R in subject S under conditions C, S cannot be credited with knowledge of what it takes for something to be P

unless S has herself experienced R.¹⁰ As an example, take the property of being red and assume, for the argument's sake, that X's redness coincides with X's disposition to appear redly to subjects S with average constitution under suitable environmental conditions C. If the analysis above is correct, one cannot grasp what it takes for something to be red if one does not know what it takes to be appeared redly under the advertised conditions C.¹¹ *Novelty*, hence, is satisfied.

Secondly, if experiencing the relevant R is the only way for getting acquainted with the property P of being disposed to elicit it, then P cannot be known otherwise than by experiencing R. In our case: if an aesthetic property P of L'Apparita 1985 is the disposition to arouse R_X in T under C, there seems to be no other way for T to get acquainted with P other than by experiencing R_X. Thus, *epistemic privileged access* seems satisfied too.

Finally, if P is the disposition of X to arouse R in T under C, P is straightforwardly a (dispositional) property of X and of nothing else. In our case: if an aesthetic property P of L'Apparita 1985 is the disposition to arouse R_X in T under C, it is straightforward that P is a property of L'Apparita 1985, and of nothing else. *Relevance* is then also satisfied.

By savoring the glass of L'Apparita 1985, Clara thus improves her epistemic situation with respect to the wine by becoming acquainted, for the first time, with some of its aesthetic properties. These properties are new to Clara because they do not coincide

¹⁰ The memory of the experience, of course, is crucial too. This will emerge more clearly in the last section of the paper, where we discuss the importance of expertise to our proposal.

¹¹ Because our argument suggests that some dispositional properties of the wine coincide with some of its aesthetic properties, one may also take the argument to indicate that – in the oenological realm – we side with the philosophers that deny the possibility of transmission of aesthetic knowledge and justification by testimony (for some recent contributions to the debate see Meskin and Robson 2015, Whiting 2015, Robson 2013, and Meskin 2004). We must point out two important limitations of such a reading. We take acquaintance with a wine's dispositional properties to be a necessary condition for the possession of the concept of those properties. So, we are not opposed to the possibility that aesthetic knowledge and justification can be transmitted through testimony to someone who has already acquired by acquaintance the relevant concepts. Secondly, we do not make the commitment to analyze any aesthetic property, inside and outside the oenological realm, in dispositional terms; so, our account is obviously silent as to the possibility of transmission of knowledge and justification by testimony of non-dispositional aesthetic properties.

with the wine's natural properties, and could not have been detected otherwise than by tasting it.

The latter conclusion naturally triggers the additional question of which relation, if any, the aesthetic properties of wine do bear to the wine's natural properties, given that they do not seem to ally in any simple way with one another. By way of sketching possible answers to this question, we conclude this section by envisaging three types of relationships between natural and aesthetic properties. Jointly they suggest that, while it is possible that the aesthetic properties supervene on the natural ones, the supervenience cannot in general be captured by a law.¹² (i) In the most favorable scenario, an aesthetic property is *multiply realized* in several natural properties. The taste of vanilla, for instance, may be triggered by substances with different chemical structures. Analogously, gustatory notes – such as a peach note – in a wine could be multiply realized in different chemical structures. (ii) A second type of relationship involves *clusters* of properties. Consider the relationship between the natural property *tannic*, which can be measured by means of a laboratory analysis, and the referential aesthetic property *tannic**, which is detected when a wine feels tannic. Most traditions of wine judgment agree that *tannic** can vary independently of *tannic*. Two wines may be equally tannic while one is regarded as *tannic**, and the other as *non-tannic**; moreover, two wines can be equally *tannic** while having different sorts and concentrations of tannins. In this case, it seems that "tannic" and "tannic*" designate two clusters of properties. (iii) The third type of relationship is *shapeless*. For instance, the influential traditions of wine criticism so far developed have not seemed able to discover a reduction of excellence to any given property or cluster of properties. What seems to be the case is, rather, that there is an

¹² This is the reason why geographic indications for wines contain a mix of natural and aesthetic properties: despite the apparent claim that the *place* (declined as soil, climate, *terroir*, etc.) makes a difference, no law-like or straightforward tie between place and taste has been found to date. (cfr. Borghini 2014b).

indefinite class of referential aesthetic properties, and an indefinite class of natural properties, both of which may trigger the detection of excellence.

§5. Wine Expertise and Wine's Response-Dependent Properties

A vexed and central epistemological accusation affecting aesthetic judgments about wine is that wine judgments are made out of thin air and that wine experts are charismatic communicators, whose epistemic authority rests on a form of flattery rather than on justifiable opinions.¹³ In concluding this paper, we want to highlight the implications of the account of the aesthetic properties of wine we have defended in this paper for such a debate.

A common allegation is that expertise tends to be auto-referential at its core. As Hartelius puts it, "to be an expert [. . .] is to rhetorically gain sanctioned rights to a specific topic or mode of knowledge." (2011: 1-2) In the specific case of wine, the charge of auto-referentiality may and has been leveled on three distinct and correlated grounds. (i) The first ground is *arbitrariness*. Aesthetic judgments about wine are accused of being arbitrary, not just because they are anthropocentric (a feature that our account reckons with), but also because they are not in any clear way sensitive to the causal structure of the natural world. (ii) The second ground is a distinctive lack of *testability*. If aesthetic judgments are arbitrary, then, when Clara pronounces that L'Apparita 1985 is excellent, who could really prove or disprove such a claim? (iii) The third reason is that the acquisition of expertise is a *goal-oriented* process. As Majdik puts it, "the defining characteristic of "expert" and "expertise" is not bound (simply) to the possession of knowledge, or processes of knowledge acquisition or production, or connections to knowledge networks, but instead flows from problems that require resolutions." (Majdik

¹³ A good starting point for a discussion of the practice of wine criticism is Burnham and Skilleas (2012, Chapter 5).

2011: 276) Accordingly, the role of wine experts may seem to be more to guide consumers and to provide feedback and recommendations to producers, than to track any objective features in the wine (cfr. also Collins and Weinel 2011).

The concerns we just rehearsed are important and they have a long tradition. Some schools of wine criticism found an easy way around them: by distancing themselves from epistemic models relying upon justification, wine critics within those schools can argue that the worries rest on a misunderstanding. For instance, a literary approach to wine criticism emphasizes the creative and egocentric nature of aesthetic judgments about wine.¹⁴ Thus, from this perspective there is nothing to worry about if wine critics are auto-referential. That's how it should be.

Our account of the aesthetic properties of wine seems to make available the materials for a defense of wine expertise that is more compatible with the identification of a robust epistemic dimension to it. To begin with, we have argued that the properties with which wine expertise is concerned – the wine's referential and evaluative aesthetic properties – though anthropocentric, are nonetheless objective in at least a twofold sense. Whether or not a wine possesses them is independent of their being actually tasted by anyone; and, secondly, if a wine possesses these properties it would continue to possess them even if anyone, a distorted sensitivity having become dominant in the meanwhile, had lost the capability to recognize that it does. We have thus provided for the *metaphysical* setting required to vindicate the claim that (at least some of) the experts' pronouncements do track a reality, not entirely of our own creation, awaiting to be described.

More than this, the metaphysical account of a wine's referential and evaluative aesthetic properties we defended suggests a natural starting point for an *epistemology* of

¹⁴ Shapin (2012: 69-73) provides some notable examples of poetic wine criticism.

wine expertise. Suppose the genuine aspect P of a wine W that an expert taster T aims to describe coincides, as suggested within this paper, with the disposition to arouse certain gustatory responses R in idealized tasters in idealized conditions. In this case a suggestion about what can justify T's possible belief that W has P is the following:

(EXP) When T possesses the concept of property P, and T has no reason to suppose that the conditions under which T tasted W are abnormal in any significant way, T has justification for believing that W is P if T experiences R.

Arguably, when all these conditions are satisfied, T's possible opinion that W is P is successfully rescued from the allegation, reviewed few lines above, of just being thin air arranged opinion-wise.

The considerations just offered seem to point in the right direction. Of course our account could be finessed by providing a richer account of the array of abilities, extending beyond the mere ability to *detect* a property, which T needs to exercise in order to acquire a reason to believe that W is P. For instance, an expert must be able to *recognize* and *re-identify* her gustatory responses; moreover, T must possess the ability to reliably *compare* one with another several wines in terms of their aesthetic properties, and this involves having the ability to *remember* past gustatory responses, and to *reactivate* relevant memories for evaluative purposes. This richer account would be of considerable interest.¹⁵ However, it would lead us too far away for the limited space we have at our disposal. So, for the time being, we shall simply lay out some considerations about expertise that seem to speak for the feasibility of this more ambitious project.

¹⁵ A distinct question in the neighborhood is how to tell whether a taster does possess the abilities that make a taster a wine expert. Although the richer account would not touch on this distinct question we clearly would gain insight into it by understanding which abilities must be possessed by a wine expert.

Expertise has some uncontroversial dimensions to it that, instead of detracting to its credibility, naturally lend support to the claim that wine experts do acquire, display, and routinely exercise the kind of abilities required for their pronouncements to count as epistemically justified. Expertise has four dimensions: exposure, development, natural talent, and esotericity (cfr. Collins 2013). It is on the first two that the epistemic objectivity of wine expertise rests. An aspiring wine expert must pass through (be *exposed* to) some relevant experiences (e.g. guided tastings, blind tastings, visits to producers, seminars, readings); those experiences comprise an apprenticeship period, a *developmental process*, typically divided into separate stages (e.g. the different tasks that must be mastered in order to become an *itamae*).¹⁶ Exposure and development contribute to the formation and cultivation of a large number of abilities, involving memories that are both intellectual and endocorporeal. A wine expert must know how to properly perform a series of task, including: opening a bottle; serving the wine; swirling the wine in a glass; sniffing the wine; moving the liquid in the mouth; comparing a present tasting experience with selected past experiences. Regarding abilities that are more directly relevant for our argument, a wine expert must also be able to track her gustatory responses to wine. For instance, she must be able to re-identify wine colors, odorants, aromas, flavors, and characteristics. Thus, an expert will cultivate her ability to recognize those properties of wines that make them – say – acidic, tannic, or fruity as well as those properties that make them – say – innovative, excellent, or an appropriate expression of *terroir*.¹⁷

¹⁶ McCoy (2006), which addresses the rise of Bob Parker, one of the most influential contemporary figures in wine criticism, offers a hands-on example of the importance of exposure and development.

¹⁷ Parr, Heatherbell, and White (2002) argue that wine experts are abler than non-experts in detecting similarities of wine-relevant odorants because experts pair the same odorants more consistently than non-experts. However, in their experiment, experts and non-experts tend to be more alike with respect to their abilities in *naming* the odorants. The evidence, that is, is that experts have some form of endo-corporeal memory of the odorants that is not clearly paired with a semantic ability. Goldstein *et al.* (2008) bring evidence in favor of another important mismatch, namely that between wine price and non-expert tasters’

We can hence point to one strategy for dismissing the worry that wine expertise is – from the point of view of epistemic justification – ill-founded. Although the abilities developed by experts do not link natural and aesthetic properties by means of law-like regularities, there is a form of wine expertise that is not merely auto-referential, and that values the cultivation of abilities which are related with the response-dependent properties of wines in our account. When such wine expertise is cultivated in a dispassionate manner, there is no reason to deny that it may become an activity engaging the agents in a game that has a ground of objectivity.

rating. (It remains open, however, to what extent said mismatch speaks to the epistemic objectivity of wine expertise.)

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