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Title: The Aesthetic Value of Diverse Beliefs

Area: Aesthetics and Epistemology

Abstract: This article has two aims. The first is to open up a line of inquiry into whether epistemic and aesthetic values interact, at the most general level. Does an overall increase in epistemic or aesthetic value in the world have an effect on the alternative value? The second, and more specific aim, is to argue that yes, it does. In particular, I argue that an increase in epistemic value would result in a decrease in aesthetic value, across two important dimensions. First, I argue that, if beliefs universally aligned with a commonly accepted epistemic principle – namely, *doxastic correctness* – then there would be less *aesthetic diversity* in the world. And second, I argue that, if beliefs universally aligned with doxastic correctness, then there would also be less overall *aesthetic value* in the world, at least in some important respects. (140 words)

Keywords: Belief; Epistemic Value; Aesthetic Value; Doxastic Correctness; Aesthetic Diversity; Belief Diversity

1. INTRODUCTION

Philosophers have long been interested in the intersection of epistemology and aesthetics. There have been many inquiries into the role that epistemic values play in aesthetic domains, such as art and literature;¹ and recently, there has been an increasing interest in the role that aesthetic values play in epistemic domains, such as science and philosophy.² This article shares a similar goal to these earlier inquiries: it is to assess the interaction that may (or may not) occur between epistemic and aesthetic values. The approach I take, however, is different. Rather than focusing on any particular case or domain in order to determine the extent to which epistemic and aesthetic values interact, I instead ask whether there are any general relations that hold between these two modalities of value. In this respect, there are two kinds of questions we can ask:

- (i) Would an overall increase or decrease in epistemic value in the world influence the amount of aesthetic value that exists in the world?

And conversely,

- (ii) Would an overall increase or decrease in aesthetic value in the world influence the amount of epistemic value that exists in the world?

To my knowledge, these more general questions about epistemic and aesthetic values have never been addressed in any detail. That is not to say that earlier inquiries into the relationship between these values have failed to reveal anything important about how we might answer them—they have (see esp. section 3.2). It is just that the issue hasn't been addressed from this perspective. One of the motivations of this article is thus to draw attention to this line of inquiry.³

The more direct aim of this article is to address the first of the above two questions. In particular, I argue that an overall increase in epistemic value in the world *would* have an effect on the aesthetic value that exists. My argument has two components. The first is as follows:

(P1) If beliefs universally aligned with the correctness conditions of doxastic correctness (i.e. the principle that a belief is correct if and only if it is true), then there would be less belief diversity in the world.

(P2) If there were less belief diversity in the world, then there would be less aesthetic diversity in the world.

(C1) Thus, if beliefs universally aligned with the correctness conditions of doxastic correctness, then there would be less aesthetic diversity in the world. (P1, P2, HS)

This component of my argument reveals that worlds which contained only true beliefs (which I call DC-compliant worlds) would have less aesthetic diversity than our own world (which is evidently not a DC-compliant world).⁴

The second component of my argument proposes a direct conflict between epistemic and aesthetic values. It is as follows:

(P3) If there were less aesthetic diversity in the world, then there would be less aesthetic value in the world (at least in some important respects; see section 4.2).

(C2) Thus, if beliefs universally aligned with the correctness conditions of doxastic correctness, then there would be less aesthetic value in the world. (C1, P3, HS)

This component of my argument suggests that a DC-compliant world would not only have less aesthetic diversity, but would also have less overall aesthetic value – as stated, in some important respects.

In the following sections, I defend both components of my argument. In sections 2–4, I defend premises 1–3, respectively. In section 5, I discuss two potential objections. And in section 6, I say something about what I take to be the philosophical significance of my argument. It is helpful before I proceed, however, to pause for a brief note on *aesthetic value*.

For the purpose of this article, I aim to remain as neutral as possible between different interpretations of aesthetic value. For the most part, I believe that that my argument should be amenable to both the formalists and contextualists about aesthetic value (with one possible exception, discussed in section 3.2).⁵ In addition, the concept of aesthetic value I am working with is not restricted to the fine arts. It includes all of the possible aesthetic products and experiences that we associate with everyday life. This concept of aesthetic value is thus central to the literature on *everyday aesthetics*.⁶ I have in mind, therefore, a very broad notion of aesthetic value. With that said, to the argument.

2. PREMISE 1: DOXASTIC CORRECTNESS AND BELIEF DIVERSITY

The aim of this section is to explain why the universal alignment of beliefs with the principle of doxastic correctness would restrict belief diversity. The principle of doxastic correctness is as follows:

Doxastic Correctness: The belief that p is correct if and only if p .⁷

This principle is widely believed to be fundamental to epistemology, in the sense that it can be used to ground many other important epistemic notions; such as rationality, justification, and knowledge.⁸ For this reason, I take doxastic correctness to reflect a central (perhaps *the* central) epistemic value; and I assume that the more our beliefs

align with doxastic correctness, the greater the epistemic value that exists in the world.⁹

In a broad sense, it is easy to see why DC-compliance restricts belief diversity. It limits the number of possible correct beliefs relative to all possible beliefs. And that is really the point: if the set of all true propositions were not smaller than the set of all true *and* false propositions, then doxastic correctness would serve no purpose. To demonstrate, consider the following example. Imagine that an inquirer is forming a belief about the topic *the height of the Eiffel Tower (to the nearest metre)*. Only one possible belief can meet doxastic correctness:

*p: that the Eiffel Tower is 330m.*¹⁰

In contrast, there is an infinite number of incorrect (or false) beliefs the inquirer might hold:

q: that the Eiffel Tower is 331m.

r: that the Eiffel Tower is 332m.

s: that the Eiffel Tower is 333m.

...and so on.

To not comply with doxastic correctness allows for more beliefs; i.e. the potential exists for much greater belief diversity. However, this potential alone does not yet imply that a DC-compliant world would,

as a matter of fact, have less belief diversity than our own. Whether that is true depends on what kinds of beliefs would (in fact) exist in a DC-compliant world and what beliefs do (in fact) exist in our own world. In other words, we must draw comparisons between worlds.

In drawing such comparisons, however, it is important to note that I aim to keep all other variables (besides beliefs) fixed across worlds, in so far as that is possible. These variables include, for instance, the population of believers in the world, general human interests, and the limitations of human cognition (e.g. that humans cannot hold an infinite number of beliefs). My argument is *not* that all conceivable DC-compliant worlds have less aesthetic diversity and aesthetic value than all non-DC-compliant worlds. Such a claim could be easily undermined by varying other factors, such as the population of believers in alternative worlds. My argument is that a DC-compliant world would have less aesthetic diversity and value than our own world *others things being equal*. This is a metaphysically weaker claim than the former, but it is still important for two reasons: (i) in keeping the other variables fixed, we can more clearly see that the interaction takes place between, specifically, epistemic and aesthetic values; and (ii) it helps to keep the focus squarely on this interaction *in our own world*—if my argument is correct, then greater belief-alignment with doxastic correctness would have a very real impact on our experience of the world.

Now, to compare worlds. Consider how, in a DC-compliant world, there could only be a single correct school of thought about any particular topic. That is the school that aligns its beliefs exactly with truth. In the above case, for instance, this school of thought about the height of the Eiffel Tower would include those that believe it to be 330m, and it would exclude all others. And this remains the case no matter what the topic is, and no matter how many propositions are contained in the set that defines the topic. If inquirers hold correct beliefs about the same topics, those beliefs are restricted to true propositions about those topics.¹¹ However, contrast this with how the beliefs in our world, in fact, are.

In our world, there have always been conflicting schools of thought about any topic. Surely, there are people in the world who hold false beliefs about the height of the Eiffel Tower. But, more to the point, there are people who hold (and who have historically held) conflicting beliefs about every major area of human interest: science, medicine, history, religion, politics, ethics, philosophy, etc., as well as all of the various subsections of those areas.¹² This is a clear observation from the history of human thought. Yet, consider what would be the case if doxastic correctness had prevailed. Given that a considerable number (and perhaps the vast majority) of beliefs that exist (and have existed) across the various areas of human interest are (and have been) false, there would be considerably less belief

diversity: all false beliefs would not exist (and would never have existed). That is to say, there would be no differing scientific beliefs, religious beliefs, philosophical beliefs, etc. Instead, there would always and only be a single set of beliefs about any particular topic – i.e., the set of true beliefs about that topic.

The implication is that, if our world was DC-compliant, then all of the belief diversity that – as a matter of fact – exists (and has existed), in virtue of people holding false beliefs, would be lost. Thus, as stated in P1, if beliefs universally aligned with the correctness conditions of doxastic correctness, then there would be less belief diversity in the world.

3. PREMISE 2: BELIEF DIVERSITY AND AESTHETIC DIVERSITY

The aim of this section is to demonstrate that there is a relationship between belief diversity and aesthetic diversity. There are two points I need to make clear. The first is how beliefs give rise to aesthetic value *at all*. The second is why this value is diversified in worlds with diverse beliefs. An example helps to motivate both of these points (I return to this example throughout the paper).

Barbara Sandrisser (1998), in a thought-provoking paper, explores the influence that traditional Japanese cultural beliefs (esp., those of the Shinto belief system) have had on traditional Japanese architecture.

In particular, Sandrisser draws our attention to the beliefs of the architects that design and build traditional Japanese common places, such as the shrines at Ise Jingū. The beliefs of these craftsmen are about, among other things, the sun goddess Amaterasu and her relationship to agriculture; about how spirits (or *kami*) inhabit trees and logs; and about how master craftsmen can communicate with and learn from individual logs during the building process (1998, 201–3). What Sandrisser is keen to emphasise is just how important these beliefs (and others like them) are to the design – and even to the very existence – of traditional Japanese architecture, and therefore to the aesthetic value that we associate with this architecture.

As Sandrisser writes, “...it is Shinto which laid the sacred *and artistic* groundwork for skilled craftsmen” (1998, 203, italics added). Sandrisser thus observes that there is a crucial relationship between the belief system of traditional Japanese architects and the aesthetic value that can be attributed to their work. These beliefs influence every part of the design and construction process of the shrines; from the general dedication of the shrines to Amaterasu, to more specific features of their construction. To give an example, once a tree has been felled, a specific amount of time is left to pass before it is hewn, to allow the spirit of the tree to escape (203). In this respect, it is not an overstatement to say that traditional Japanese architecture would not exist at all, if it were not for the Shinto belief system that

underwrites it.¹³ It is for this reason Sandrisser writes that traditional Japanese architecture is “an artistic act, infused with myth, *belief*, and spirit” (202, italics added).

The impression I want to convey with this example is that beliefs cannot be easily detached from the aesthetic value that they give rise to. It is also on the basis of this example that we can begin to be more precise about the relations that exist between beliefs and aesthetic diversity. There are two important relations to consider: (i) a motivational relation; and (ii) an experiential relation. It is through these relations that, I argue, greater belief diversity gives rise to greater aesthetic diversity.

3.1 The Motivational Relation

It is widely accepted that beliefs have a motivational property. The idea is that beliefs, when they operate alongside conative attitudes such as desires, cause intentional behaviour. This is the standard motivational account of belief.¹⁴ For example, when you go to the library to collect a book, the motivational force behind your action is (something like) the belief that the book is ready for collection, and the desire to collect the book. And while theorists disagree about whether belief’s motivational property is sufficient to characterise an attitude *as* a belief, most agree that beliefs are a necessary component of intentional behaviour.¹⁵

The motivational property of belief thus implies that beliefs have a role in motivating behaviours that produce aesthetically valuable products, in just the same way as they motivate other kinds of behaviours. This is what we see in the case of traditional Japanese architecture. The architects design and construct their structures in the way that they do because of their particular beliefs. Much like any other intentionally produced aesthetic works, the beliefs of the people who produce them are an essential part of the motivational force behind their behaviour. If there were no beliefs – such as beliefs about how to design the works, what style to adopt, what the content should be – there would be no intentionally produced aesthetic products. It therefore follows directly from the motivational account of belief that there is a kind of motivational relation between beliefs and aesthetic values.

Given the motivational relation, we can begin to see how diverse beliefs result in a kind of aesthetic diversity – which we might call *creative aesthetic diversity*. This diversity occurs because different beliefs motivate different behaviours. As Frank Ramsey (1931, 238) famously wrote, beliefs are like “map[s] of neighbouring space by which we steer” – and we might add that different beliefs (or maps) will steer us in different directions. To give an example: if you believe the book you want is in the office, and not the library, then, other things being equal, you will go to the office instead of the library. And

this also applies to behaviours that produce aesthetically valuable products.

First, reflect on how beliefs influence behaviour on many levels. If an artist plans to sculpt a bust, her beliefs about the process, the style, what content to include, how the content ought to be depicted, and about the limits of her own abilities, etc., will all have an influence on the final product. They might result in differences as radical as her sculpting a bust that represents the goddess Athena instead of the goddess Amaterasu; or as subtle as her sculpting a bust of Socrates with a moderately larger nose than what might have otherwise been the case. Different beliefs will result in different aesthetic outputs.

And second, we can appeal to how diverse beliefs have, as a matter of fact, led to creative aesthetic diversity in the world today. The diversity of beliefs that exist (and has existed historically) has, through the motivational relation, given rise to a vast range of aesthetic achievements. These include, for instance, those of traditional Japanese architecture; but they also include those of every other culture that has ever produced anything of aesthetic worth. Whether it is the idealistic realism of ancient Greece, the religious imagery of the middle ages, or the nihilistic aesthetics of internet meme culture today; whatever it happens to be, aesthetically valuable works of all ages and cultures have been produced against

a backdrop of culture-specific beliefs that have influenced the content, design, and style of those works.¹⁶

Now, contrast this with a world that lacks belief diversity. Take the following example: a world that is (and always has been) populated with people who hold exclusively Shinto beliefs. What would such a world look like? No doubt there would still be many great aesthetic achievements. There would, in particular, be a lot more Shinto inspired architecture and art in the world. But this ubiquity of Shinto aesthetics would come at a price. It would mean that all of the aesthetic works that have been (and ever will be) produced as the result of different belief systems – including, that is, all of those which in fact exist in the world today – would not exist. Belief diversity thus leads to creative aesthetic diversity, in the sense described, due to the motivational relation that exists between beliefs and aesthetic values.¹⁷

3.2 The Experiential Relation

The second way that beliefs influence aesthetic diversity is through the experiential relation. In contrast to creative aesthetic diversity, the kind of diversity I have in mind here might be called *interpretative aesthetic diversity*. The idea is that beliefs give rise to aesthetic diversity via their influence on our aesthetic experience. The basis for this suggestion derives from cognitivism about aesthetic

appreciation, which holds that knowledge of the world can enhance our aesthetic experience (Turner 2019).

The point I want to make, however, does not commit entirely to cognitivism. I do not want to make the stronger epistemic claim that *knowledge* enhances our aesthetic appreciation. Instead, I want to say that beliefs—quite independently of their veracity—influence our aesthetic experience. That is to say, different beliefs will give rise to different aesthetic experiences, other things being equal.¹⁸

To see why, imagine that two different people are visiting the shrines at Ise Jingū. One is a Japanese architect who fully accepts the beliefs of the Shinto tradition. The other is a secular historian, who has spent many years studying the history of Japanese culture. What will the aesthetic experiences of these individuals be like? Presumably, they will be quite different. On the one hand, drawing on his Shinto beliefs, the architect will feel a deep spiritual connection to the shrines, and this will affect his aesthetic experience. He will, in his way, experience a divine connection between the shrines and the sun goddess, between himself and the spirits who inhabit the shrines, etc. On the other hand, the secular historian will have quite a different experience. She will still have an appreciation of the aesthetic value of the shrines. And her experience will be informed by her knowledge of Japanese history; for instance, her knowledge of the significance of the shrines to the Shinto tradition, and of the expert craftsmanship of

the architects. However, in drawing on her secular beliefs, her aesthetic experience will not come with the same spiritual weight as that of the Shinto architect. This is not to say anything about which of the architect or historian will have a *greater* aesthetic experience: both can have rich aesthetic experiences. It is just to say that their aesthetic experiences will be *different* given their different background beliefs.

Now, it is here that my argument (arguably) shifts away from the neutral stance taken towards aesthetic value in the introduction. Given that the focus of the experiential relation involves diverse interpretations of aesthetic value (based on background beliefs), it is reasonable to suppose that this part of my argument aligns more naturally with contextualism (as opposed to formalism) about aesthetic value. This is true, on the surface. I do, however, think that on reflection this part of my argument should have appeal beyond mere contextualism. It should be persuasive to any theorist of aesthetic value that allows for the shaping of our aesthetic experiences through our background beliefs. This should, therefore, include all but the strictest of perceptual formalists—and perhaps even them. This is because even the formalists agree that aesthetic interpretations, which are in part based on our beliefs, change over time—and thus, we might conclude, also how those judgements influence our aesthetic experiences (for discussion, see Krukowski 1990, 127).¹⁹ With this caveat in mind, there are a couple of further

concerns that can now be addressed. The first is about the relationship between *experience* and *aesthetic experience*; the second is about the extent to which interpretive aesthetic diversity is available within uniform belief systems.²⁰

Regarding the first concern, it might be argued that *different experience* does not imply *different aesthetic experience*. In the above cases, the fact that the Japanese architect experiences a divine connection to the shrines does not imply that his *aesthetic* experience is different from that of the secular historian's. The differences in their experiences might be explained in entirely non-aesthetic terms; such as according to the different epistemic interests they take in the shrines.

In response, however, while it is true that many elements of their experience might be explained in non-aesthetic terms, it is difficult to see how a complete description of the differences in experience would not also make reference to aesthetic properties. Consider, for instance, how the individual aesthetic experience of the Shinto architect would change, if he were to discover that his own beliefs were incorrect. If asked to explain why he found the shrines so beautiful, at some point he would no doubt appeal to his spiritual beliefs about the shrines – their beauty is (at least in part) dependent on their (perceived) divine nature. While, in contrast, if the same architect were to discover that some of the shrines had *not* been constructed according to the proper principles of the Shinto

tradition – if they were, that is, a kind of forgery – he would no longer perceive them to possess the same kind of beauty. Indeed, he might even find himself disgusted at the shrines, given his new beliefs. The same is therefore true, I believe, across individuals. Different beliefs give rise to different experiences; and when those beliefs are related to aesthetic products, those differences in experience will be aesthetic differences.²¹

Moreover, the same point appears to apply across a wide range of beliefs and aesthetic experiences. For instance, we might consider how the beliefs of non-Shinto architects influence their aesthetic experiences of the shrines at Ise Jingū – perhaps they would have more of a specialist admiration for the craftsmanship. We might consider how the beliefs of other religious groups influence their experiences – perhaps certain fundamentalists, who believe all religious monuments to be sacrilege, would be appalled by the shrines. Or we might consider how the beliefs of conspiracy theorists – those who think that such monuments must have originally been built by giants or aliens – influence their experiences of the shrines; and so on. It is in this sense that different beliefs, each in their own way, give rise to different aesthetic experiences.

As for the second concern, it might be asked whether uniform beliefs really do reduce interpretive aesthetic diversity. This is because interpretation is often considered to be *indeterminate*, even within

uniform doxastic frameworks. Consider, for instance, literary theory—even in a DC-compliant world there might be multiple interpretations of *Macbeth* available that are all consistent with the facts. If this is the case, then a sufficient degree of interpretive aesthetic diversity might be generated in worlds that do not contain diverse beliefs.

Even with this potential indeterminacy in mind, however, I think it would be a mistake to think that the diversity of aesthetic experiences in worlds with uniform beliefs could be greater than in worlds (like our own) which contain more diverse beliefs. This is for two related reasons: (i) while there can be many indeterminate factors in artworks that permit of multiple interpretations, there also remain many factors that don't. For example, in the Shinto tradition there is no room for reinterpreting the status of Amaterasu among the gods. She is the sun goddess, and to interpret her as otherwise would be to hold a belief outside of the Shinto tradition. Similarly, in a DC-compliant world, to interpret Malevich's *Black Square* as a purple triangle would simply be wrong. So, while indeterminacy may exist within worlds of uniform beliefs, there are still considerable *determining* factors that limit interpretation and that are not present in worlds with diverse beliefs. And (ii) there are, for the same reason, vastly more interpretations available in worlds with diverse beliefs. The set of incorrect beliefs, relative to a standard of correctness (whatever that

standard is; the Shinto tradition, doxastic correctness, or otherwise), is much greater than the set of beliefs restricted by that standard. In a DC-compliant world, for instance, whatever the number of interpretations of *Macbeth* that are consistent with the facts, there are many more interpretations available that are not.

Of course, this problem of indeterminacy opens up many questions about the relative value of conflicting interpretations of aesthetic works. In a DC-compliant world, we might ask whether all DC-compliant interpretations of a work are equally valuable. And in a world of diverse beliefs, we might ask about the relative value of aesthetic interpretations based on false beliefs. However, insofar as diverse aesthetic *experiences* are at stake (as opposed to value *per se* – which is the topic of the following section), it seems clear that those in worlds with diverse beliefs will have access to a wider variety of aesthetic experiences than those in worlds with uniform beliefs – even with indeterminacy taken into account.

To summarise this section, if what I have said is correct, then belief diversity leads to aesthetic diversity. This is through both creative aesthetic diversity and interpretative aesthetic diversity. Thus, P2 is true. This further implies, in conjunction with my argument in section 2, that – as an instance of a world with less belief diversity – a DC-compliant world would have less aesthetic diversity than our own. In other words, we can conclude with C1 that, if beliefs universally

aligned with the correctness conditions of doxastic correctness, then there would be less aesthetic diversity in the world.

4. PREMISE 3: AESTHETIC DIVERSITY AND AESTHETIC VALUE

In this section, I defend P3: if there were less aesthetic diversity in the world, then there would be less aesthetic value in the world (at least in some important respect). First, I appeal to two thought-experiments in support of the general form of this premise. Second, I explain why the same reasoning applies in the particular case of a DC-compliant world (thus I defend the inference from C1 to C2).

4.1 *Two Thought-Experiments*

The first thought experiment is as follows. There are two possible worlds. In the first, there is nothing except a room with three copies of Michelangelo's *David*. In the second, there is the same room, but it contains three different items: a copy of *David*, the novel *Moby-Dick*, and the painting *Mona Lisa*. Which of these worlds is more aesthetically valuable? My intuition is the second. Why? It is at least in part because the second world has greater aesthetic diversity. If I had to live the rest of my life in one of the rooms, with no possibility of escape, I would choose the second. And one of my justifications – perhaps my main justification – for this, would be that the second world offers a greater aesthetic experience than the first, due to its

greater aesthetic diversity. It is not, of course, a straight-forward matter to weigh aesthetic values across worlds – as it never is, with any modality of value. But this first thought-experiment suggests that there is something to be said for the positive contribution that aesthetic diversity can make to aesthetic value.

The second thought-experiment pushes this intuition further. This time, the comparison is between our world and a world populated with believers in a single belief system. We can again use a world of people who hold exclusively Shinto beliefs. I argued in the previous section that this kind of world would have less aesthetic diversity. I now suggest that in virtue of this lack of diversity, it would also have less aesthetic value.

In support of this claim, consider the desires and preferences that we have—as a matter of fact—for different kinds of aesthetic experiences. Most of us enjoy taking in a wide range of aesthetic experiences. We enjoy travelling to different places and experiencing different cultures; we enjoy visiting museums to see different kinds of works with different aesthetic merits; and we enjoy reading a range of literary works, listening to a variety of music, etc. Indeed, we even enjoy aesthetic variety in our everyday lives: whether in our home or workplace, it is refreshing to change our surroundings at regular intervals, for aesthetic reasons. This suggests that having a variety of

different aesthetic experiences is important to us; it makes a positive contribution to our overall aesthetic experience.

Now, in *this* world—our world—we can satisfy our desire for aesthetic diversity, because a great deal of aesthetic diversity exists—and even if we do not always act on this desire (there can be overriding factors), the possibility to do so remains. However, in a world of exclusively Shinto believers, this possibility would be (relatively) limited. This is because there simply wouldn't be the same degree of aesthetic diversity in the world to give rise to the relevant experiences. There would still be, as discussed in the previous section, a great deal of aesthetic value in the world; but all of the value that derives from the aesthetic diversity that exists in *our* world would be lost. In particular, all of the aesthetic value that we attach to aesthetic diversity, which itself derives from the presence of diverse beliefs (both current and historical), would not exist. To my mind, this would make for a relatively dry and aesthetically less interesting world. It is in this respect, therefore, that a world that adhered to a single set of beliefs would be less aesthetically valuable than a world with more diverse beliefs.²²

4.2 DC-Compliance and Aesthetic Value

The final issue I want to address is whether the same reasoning applies in the specific case of a DC-compliant world. This requires us to inquire further into what such a world would really look like.

In a DC-compliant world, there would certainly be an increase in many modalities of value. There would be epistemic gains: perfect belief accuracy, improved rationality, and greater belief coherence, etc. It is also likely that there would be certain social and ethical gains; these would stem from increased consistency both within and between individuals (e.g. there would be less conflict). There would also be increases in some aesthetic values, such as those that we attribute to truth-oriented ideas and practices. For instance, the elegance of a mathematical proof or the beauty of an anatomical drawing. Nevertheless, a DC-compliant world would still, I hold, have less aesthetic value than our own world—at least along some important aesthetic dimensions. There are two points to consider, both of which focus on the positive contribution that *disagreement* (of belief) can make to our aesthetic experience.

The first involves a fairly direct contribution that disagreement makes to our aesthetic experience. It seems to me that the world *just is* more aesthetically interesting with people in it that do not all agree. It is interesting, for instance, to listen to people who have different

beliefs from our own (say, in the context of a discussion or a debate). And while it can be said that some of this interest is epistemic (we want to reach the truth), this is not always, or wholly, the case. We also enjoy learning about other people's beliefs simply because we are intrigued to find out what those beliefs are, regardless of whether we are likely to update our own beliefs accordingly. This might be when we listen to someone who has a different take on a historical event to ours, or a different perspective on some scientific notion, or a different religious view. It is interesting, in a broadly aesthetic sense, to know that we live in a world with people who hold different and conflicting beliefs. Indeed, as analytic philosophers, is our motto not: "No disagreement, no fun"?

Now, it might be objected here that I have, so far, completely ignored the negative implications of belief diversity. While disagreement can be interesting, it is also the source of considerable conflict. These conflicts might be as trivial as arguments between neighbours, or as extreme as wars between nations. These can, of course, result in extremely negative outcomes; both aesthetic and non-aesthetic. However, even as a result of this conflict, there is often an increase in *some* (strictly) aesthetic values – which brings me to my second point.

A world of conflict can be a very ugly and disturbing place; full of hatred, violence, and war. But in such worlds, we cannot overlook the increase of certain kinds of higher-level aesthetic values that

occurs. To understand, consider the aesthetic pleasure that we can, at times, derive from otherwise negative situations in the world. For instance, there is pleasure to be had in learning about historical wars, and the events that take place within those wars; stories of war heroes and bravery, of overcoming adversity, of comradeship, of crucial decisions that changed the course of history, etc.. Arguably, many of these kinds of events *can* only exist in the context of otherwise negative situations; and in particular, in virtue of the belief diversity that frames those situations.

But is the interest we take in these events really aesthetic, or is it epistemic? Perhaps we just want to know about them because we enjoy learning the truth. No doubt there is some truth to this, but it is not the whole picture. We clearly do not *just* take a dry epistemic interest in the truth. If this were the case, then we would take just as much interest in learning how many blades of grass there are in our neighbour's garden as we do in learning about a historical war hero. There must therefore be another factor at play – and I suggest that it is largely aesthetic. While disagreement can make the world an ugly place, the events that take place within the context of disagreement can make a positive contribution to our aesthetic experience at a higher level. For example, learning stories about war heroes is aesthetically pleasing in the sense that such stories can be *moving* or *touching*, etc. These kinds of higher-level aesthetic experiences exist

despite (or arguably because of) otherwise negative features of our experience.²³ It is thus these kinds of values I am referring to in P3 when I state that the world would be less aesthetically valuable *in some important respects*.

To stress: I am not at all suggesting that worlds with belief conflict are better than DC-compliant worlds *all things considered*. The price we pay for disagreement might not be worth it from an epistemic, pragmatic, or ethical perspective. My claim is just that, from a strictly aesthetic perspective, there is a dimension of aesthetic value that would be lost (or significantly reduced) in worlds that lacked belief diversity – such as DC-compliant worlds. If this is correct, then the implication through P3 holds, and we can conclude with C2 that: if beliefs universally aligned with the correctness conditions of doxastic correctness, then there would be less aesthetic value in the world.

5. OBJECTIONS

I now want to consider two important objections to my argument. The first concerns the aesthetic influence of non-doxastic attitudes; the second concerns the belief diversity that can be achieved *within* the parameters of doxastic correctness.

5.1 *Objection 1: The Aesthetic Role of Non-Doxastic Attitudes*

In essence, I have argued that worlds which hold beliefs fixed relative to worlds that have more diverse beliefs will have less aesthetic

diversity and value. It might be objected, however, that beliefs are not the only important attitude in this regard. Many non-doxastic attitudes, such as desires and imaginings, also have an important influence on aesthetic values. Recall, for instance, the “motivational relation” from section 3.1: it was noted that beliefs motivate behaviours *alongside* other attitudes, such as desires. This implies that those other attitudes are also a crucial part of the process. It might be suggested, therefore, that my argument gives too much weight to the aesthetic diversity and value that is achieved, specifically, by *beliefs*.

To this objection, there are two levels of response I want to make. The first is to remind you of the clause outlined in section 2: that in making comparisons across worlds, I aim to keep all other variables fixed, insofar as that is possible. This includes non-doxastic attitudes. In other words, my argument implies that worlds like our own but with universally true beliefs, would have less aesthetic diversity and value than our (actual) world, in virtue of those beliefs aligning with doxastic correctness. Holding these other variables fixed might be seen as both a weakness and a strength of my argument. It is a weakness because, as I mentioned earlier, it leads to a metaphysically weaker claim about the relationship between epistemic and aesthetic values. It is not the case that *all* worlds with belief diversity will have greater aesthetic diversity and value than *all* worlds with belief uniformity. However, it is also a strength, as holding other variables

fixed more allows us to more clearly isolate the interplay between epistemic and aesthetic values, with belief as the conduit. In this respect, my argument demonstrates that there is an interesting form of interaction that takes place between epistemic standards, when applied to belief, and aesthetic values, in worlds similar to our own. This raises some interesting philosophical questions, which I outline in the section 6.

However, for those worried about the metaphysical weakness of my argument, there is a second level of response I want to make. It seems plausible that there is an significant relation between beliefs and non-doxastic attitudes, such that beliefs are *also* fundamentally responsible for the aesthetic value and diversity that is achieved through non-doxastic attitudes. The idea behind this relation – which I call the *fundamentality relation* – is that the contents of beliefs are responsible for informing the contents of other attitudes, in a way that non-doxastic attitudes are not.

To explain, Paul Boghossian (2003, 41–45) has pointed out that an “asymmetric dependency” exists between beliefs and non-doxastic attitudes. Take, for instance, beliefs and desires. Boghossian observes that it is not possible to have the concept of desire without the concept of belief, yet the same is not true vice versa. It is possible to imagine a subject with beliefs and no desires, but not a subject with desires and no beliefs. In the former case, it seems coherent to imagine a

subject “who only has views about how things are, but no conception of how she would want them to be” (42). But in the latter case, it doesn’t seem coherent to imagine a subject who desires something, but who completely lacks beliefs about what it means to satisfy those desires. As Boghossian writes: “This does seem bizarre” (42).

But, we might ask, why does this asymmetric dependence exist? My answer is the fundamentality relation. It is because, at the core of our attitudes, beliefs stand as a foundation to our other attitudes; they inform the content of those attitudes. To give an example: you cannot desire to get a book from the library, if you don’t have beliefs about what a book is, what a library is, and what you want the book for, etc. Of course, your beliefs might be mistaken. Perhaps what you believe to be a book is, in fact, an elephant – in which case your desires are going to be extremely misguided. But the point is that, whatever your beliefs happen to be, their content is essential for informing the contents of your desires – which is also true of other non-doxastic attitudes. If we wish, imagine, hypothesise, guess, suppose, etc., then the content of those attitudes will necessarily depend on the contents of our beliefs. This is to such an extent that, without beliefs, it would not be possible to form other attitudes at all; they would lack foundation.

To fully analyse how the fundamentality relation operates would require a work in itself. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to agree

with Boghossian that an asymmetric relation exists between beliefs and desires; and it is arguably the case that the reason for this relation is that the contents of beliefs are necessary for informing the contents of other attitudes.

If this is correct, then the aesthetic diversity and value that can be achieved in worlds in virtue of diversified non-doxastic attitudes is itself dependent on beliefs. The fundamentality relation implies that diverse beliefs will lead to (relatively) more diverse non-doxastic attitudes, and more uniform beliefs will lead to (relatively) less diverse non-doxastic attitudes. Consider how, in a world with only beliefs about, say, cats, there could also only be non-doxastic attitudes which have propositions about cats as content. In such a world these attitudes might include, for instance, the desire to eat cats, or imaginings about cats with no ears, etc. However, the extent of the possible non-doxastic attitudes would be limited relative to worlds in which there were beliefs about e.g. cats *and* televisions. In this latter world, there could also be desires and imaginings about, say, cats watching television, which would not be available in the former world. For this reason, it seems plausible that the number of possible non-doxastic attitudes that exist in a world is, to a large extent, dependent on the number of beliefs in that world.

To return to the objection at hand, if this is correct, then the implications are twofold. To the extent that it is possible to imagine

worlds with widely diverse non-doxastic attitudes, then the aesthetic diversity and value that derives from those attitudes also derives, more fundamentally, from the beliefs that inform those attitudes. And alternatively, to the extent that limiting the diversity of beliefs in a world limits the available non-doxastic attitudes in that world, then it is to that same extent impossible to imagine worlds with diverse non-doxastic attitudes without also imagining such worlds with sufficiently diverse beliefs. In that case, the counterexamples to my argument, which appeal to the aesthetic diversity and value of non-doxastic attitudes, would not be possible.

5.2 Objection 2: Diverse Beliefs about Different Topics

A second objection is to point out that a significant amount of belief diversity, and thus the aesthetic diversity and value associated with belief diversity, can be achieved in a way that is perfectly consistent within the boundaries of doxastic correctness. This is when people hold only true beliefs, but across a range of different topics. Even though doxastic correctness entails that we should hold the same beliefs when those beliefs are about the same topics, it does not entail that we should all hold beliefs about the same topics. One subject might hold all true beliefs about the history of ancient Greece, while another might hold all true beliefs about astrophysics.

In reply, I want to emphasise (once again) that I am not making the claim that all conceivable worlds that align with doxastic correctness will have less aesthetic diversity and value than all conceivable worlds that fail to align with doxastic correctness. We can easily imagine a case such that, when we change another important variable, that claim would fail. This, however, is not the point I am trying to make. Rather, I am arguing that *our* world would have less aesthetic diversity and value than a version of our world in which all beliefs were (and had always been) true. To the extent that we can hold the other variables fixed – such as the general interests of people in the world – we can see that restricting beliefs, according to a principle such as doxastic correctness, would also restrict aesthetic diversity and value.

It is thus true that DC-compliant worlds can be conceived that have considerable belief diversity, due to individuals holding beliefs about a wide variety of topics. But if we compare our world with a DC-compliant world, while holding fixed both the kind and number of topics that people, in fact, hold beliefs about, then we can see that our world does, again – as a matter of fact – have greater belief diversity. That is to say, there is a greater variety of beliefs across the various topics that people hold beliefs about in our world, than there is (or would be) in a DC-compliant version of our world. To reiterate a point made earlier: every false belief that exists (and has ever existed)

in our world, across science, philosophy, religion, etc. would not exist, and neither would any of the value that we might attribute to those beliefs.

6. PHILOSOPHICAL SIGNIFICANCE

To close, I want to reflect on what I perceive to be some of the important philosophical considerations that arise from my argument. The conclusion of my argument is that DC-compliant worlds will have less aesthetic diversity and value than worlds similar to our own, but which have more diverse (including false) beliefs. This conclusion gives rise to questions about how we might think about the relationship between epistemic and aesthetic values, and about how this relationship might influence how we think about the normativity of belief.

One of the main considerations is that my argument provides us with a higher level perspective on the interaction between epistemic and aesthetic values that, many suggest, occurs in lower level domains. To give an example (one of many possible examples across art and science), James McAllister (1996) has argued that choosing scientific theories (at least in part) for aesthetic reasons can be rational; and a similar point has been extended to our preference for certain scientific experiments over others (Parsons & Rueger 2000). If what I have said is correct, then this kind of interaction should not be surprising.

Given that epistemic and aesthetic values interact at the most general level, we should expect to see them interacting in particular cases and domains. In this respect, my argument might serve as a kind of higher-level support for this kind of interaction, and as a motivation for further inquiry into such topics. We might ask, for instance, about the extent to which we are willing to trade epistemic value for aesthetic value in certain domains; and whether the extent of this trade-off is different between different domains (such as science, philosophy, and art). Under ideal circumstances, what is the right balance of aesthetic and epistemic value in the world?

In addition, my argument has important implications for how we might interpret the normativity of belief. The interaction between epistemic and aesthetic values might influence how we think about the normative force of doxastic correctness. In epistemology, it has proven extremely difficult to give a precise account of the normative constraints that doxastic correctness puts on belief. It is unclear whether the principle should be interpreted as, for example, a permission to believe all and only truths (Whiting 2010), an obligation to believe only truths (Shah 2003; Shah & Velleman 2005), or as an obligation to believe all and only true propositions that we consider²⁴—along with various other layers of interpretation.²⁵ It is possible, then, that the aesthetic limitations that result from aligning our beliefs with the truth might force us to reconsider how we

interpret the normative force of doxastic correctness. Does one formulation (such as a permission to believe all and only truths) allow for greater aesthetic diversity and value than another (such as an obligation to believe only truths)?

And finally, with such considerations in mind, we might begin to wonder whether there can be legitimate *aesthetic reasons* for belief. The fact that believing for epistemic reasons can undermine aesthetic diversity and value in the world might give us reason to explore the possibility that, at least on occasion, we ought (or perhaps may) believe for aesthetic reasons. This possibility would be immediately rejected by the evidentialists about reasons for belief. Nevertheless, there is a well-established and still evolving precedence in the literature for the idea that there can be legitimate non-evidential reasons for belief. The extent to which there can be pragmatic reasons for belief has long been a matter of debate;²⁶ and it has recently been suggested that there can be moral reasons for belief.²⁷ It is not too much of a stretch, therefore, to suppose that there is justification for adding aesthetic reasons to the list.²⁸ All of these considerations, assuming that my argument is correct, warrant further investigation.

7. CONCLUSION

This article had two aims. The broadest aim has been to open up a line of inquiry into the relationship between aesthetic and epistemic

values, at a general level. Does an overall increase or decrease of either of these values have an effect on the alternative value? The more specific aim has been to argue that yes, it does. Specifically, an overall increase in the epistemic value in the world would decrease the aesthetic diversity and value in the world. To close with a final example: it would be really boring if everyone agreed with this argument.

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¹ Such as the debates between cognitivists and anti-cognitivists about art. Cognitivists hold that we can gain knowledge from art (e.g. Beardsmore (1971), Nussbaum (1990), Graham (1995), Kivy (1997), and Green (2010)). Anti-cognitivists disagree, to varying degrees; see (e.g. Beardsley (1981), Stolnitz (1992), Lamarque & Olsen (1994), and Diffey (1997)). For an overview of these debates, see Gaut (2003; 2006).

² For instance, it has been argued that the aesthetic value of a scientific theory can influence its epistemic success (McAllister 1996); that aesthetic preferences can influence the epistemic value of scientific experiments (Parsons & Rueger 2000); that scientific training can influence our aesthetic experiences (Currie [forth]); and that the aesthetic value of a philosophical work can enhance its epistemic value (Aumann 2014).

³ What is the philosophical significance of answering these questions? I say more about this in section 6, after defending my position.

⁴ An alternative way of stating the antecedent of P1 (and consequently, the conclusions that follow) is in terms of universally true beliefs: “If all beliefs in the world were (and always had been) true...” This would highlight the tension between universally true beliefs and aesthetic diversity/value. I choose, however, to speak in terms of “universal alignment with doxastic correctness” to keep the emphasis on the tension that arises between, specifically, doxastic correctness — as

a commonly accepted epistemic principle—and aesthetic diversity/value. On either reading, the points I wish to raise remain the same.

⁵ For recent discussions of aesthetic value, see Shelley (2018) and Riggle (2024). For an interesting overview of formalism and contextualism in the context of the metaphysics of art, see Krukowski (1990).

⁶ For overviews of everyday aesthetics, see Leddy (2005) and Saito (2019). For a collection of papers, see Light and Smith (2005).

⁷ See e.g. Boghossian (1989, 2003); Engel (2007, 2013); Gibbard (2003, 2005); McHugh (2011, 2012); Shah (2003); Shah & Velleman (2005); Steglich-Petersen (2006), Velleman (2000); and Wedgwood (2002, 2007, 2013).

⁸ For instance, see Velleman (2000) and Wedgwood (2002). The same is true of epistemic warrant (Plantinga 1999), and epistemic entitlement (Burge 2003).

⁹ Of course, doxastic correctness might be mistaken, but it is not my aim to defend the principle here. I state it to demonstrate how—as perhaps the most widely accepted epistemic principle—having our beliefs meet its conditions would have implications for belief diversity—and later, for aesthetic diversity and value. There are various different interpretations of the principle: for normative readings, see Boghossian (2003), Engel (2013), Gibbard (2003, 2005), Shah (2003), Shah & Velleman (2005), and Wedgwood (2002, 2013); for teleological readings, see Velleman (2000), Steglich-Petersen (2006), and McHugh (2011). And for influential criticisms of these views, see Bykvist & Hattiangadi (2007; 2013), Glüer & Wikforss (2009; 2013), Owens (2003), and Shah (2003).

¹⁰ It is worth mentioning that because the Eiffel Tower is made of steel its height fluctuates. Due to thermal expansion, it can gain or lose up to 15cm depending on the weather. Rounding to the nearest metre should, however, avoid any problems here. Thanks to an anonymous referee for pointing this out.

¹¹ Roughly, we can define a topic as the set of all possible propositions about a situation (e.g. a place, person, or event) in the world. This would include all of the

possible true and false propositions about that situation. The set of correct beliefs would thus be a subset of this original set.

¹² Given that doxastic correctness is a universal principle, historical beliefs are just as relevant as contemporary beliefs.

¹³ Sandrisser relates the story of an elderly carpenter who passed the tradition onto his grandson. In turn, the carpenter instructed his grandson never to pass the tradition on further, unless he “found someone who could uphold all aspects of the tradition” –including the belief system. If such a person could not be found, then the “tradition should die” (Sandrisser 1998, 204–205).

¹⁴ This account has roots in Ramsey (1931). A classic development appears in Armstrong (1973). A recent defence is given in van Leeuwen (2009).

¹⁵ For discussion, see Velleman (2000)

¹⁶ These works need not be *aligned* with the relevant cultural beliefs; they can also be produced as an explicit rejection of a culture. Nevertheless, it would still be a belief—e.g. that there is something wrong with the relevant culture—that motivates the work.

¹⁷ It might be objected at this point that holding beliefs fixed and varying other (non-doxastic) attitudes, such as desires and imaginings, can also generate a significant degree of aesthetic diversity. After all, it is built into the motivational account of belief that beliefs work alongside other attitudes. This is an important objection, which I return to this objection in section 5.1. For now, I ask you to keep in mind that my argument aims to keep variables (besides beliefs) fixed across worlds, as I mentioned in section 2.

¹⁸ For a further discussion of cognitivism, see Currie (*forth*). Currie breaks cognitivism down into two independent theses: (i) that beliefs are partially responsible for aesthetic experiences, and (ii) that true beliefs enhance aesthetic experiences. My argument depends on the truth of (i), which my following example

in the text is intended to defend. I agree with Currie that (ii) is probably false, although I take no stand on that ie.

¹⁹ Strict formalists would of course argue that there is less value in incorrect aesthetic judgements (i.e. those based on false background beliefs); but they should still be willing to agree that diverse (and false) background beliefs give rise to aesthetic experiences – which is the point I aim to establish in this section. As to why diverse aesthetic experiences also increase the overall aesthetic value in the world, contrary to what the formalists might think, this is the topic of section 4.

²⁰ Thanks to an anonymous referee for raising both of these concerns.

²¹ My contextualist leanings are most clearly seen here. Keep in mind however that even the formalists can agree that our judgments, and thus (arguably) our experiences, of artworks can change with our beliefs. They would just have different ideas about the value of those judgements.

²² Approaching the issue with different motivations in mind, Alexander Nehamas (2007) raises a similar thought-experiment, and derives a similar sentiment:

“Imagine, if you can, a world where everyone likes, or loves, the same things, where every disagreement about beauty can be resolved. That would be a desolate, desperate world.” (83)

In fact, Nehamas later makes the bold claim that “Universal aesthetic agreement would mark the end of aesthetics” (86). The point I am trying to make doesn’t need to go so far as to appeal to the death of aesthetics; but, if Nehamas is right, that certainly wouldn’t harm my argument.

²³ Rafael de Clercq (2012) uses a similar explanation in the context of the aesthetic paradox of negative emotions. Why do we enjoy tragic fiction, even though it gives rise to negative emotions? According to de Clercq, it is because the emotions that arise from tragedy (such as *pity* and *sadness*), grant us access to higher-level aesthetic experiences (such as being *moved* or *touched*). I hold that the same is true in real-world situations. The disgust we feel at war, for instance, is part of what makes the positive events within the war so *powerful* (another of de Clercq’s higher-level aesthetic qualities).

²⁴ Wedgwood cited in Bykvist & Hattiangadi (2007, 280).

²⁵ For a detailed overview of the various interpretations, see McHugh & Whiting (2014)

²⁶ For a recent defence, see McHugh (2012, 2015)

²⁷ See Basu & Schroeder (2018); and Basu (2019).

²⁸ Papineau (2013) and Whiting (2021) both agree that there could be aesthetic reasons for belief.