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RETHINKING TASTE: WITTGENSTEIN BETWEEN KANT AND HUME

AGENDA

1. Introduction: the problem
2. The modern debate on taste
3. Wittgenstein's aesthetics
4. Wittgenstein on taste: two grammars
5. Conclusions

AWL (pp.38–40)

Whenever we get to the point where the question is one of taste, it is no longer aesthetics.

PFF §357

The theory of harmony isn't a matter of taste.

CV 17e

A present-day teacher of philosophy doesn't select food for his pupil with the aim of flattering his taste, but with the aim of *changing* it.

RPP I 362

How do I find the 'right' word? How do I choose among words? It is indeed as if I compared words according to fine discriminations of taste.

Working hypothesis: two grammars of taste

1. AN APPARENT PARADOX

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TASTE AS PREFERENCE

TASTE AS COMPETENCE

THE THESIS

Hume, "Of the standard of taste"



2. THE MODERN DEBATE ON TASTE

Taste as the criterion,
or canon to judge the
objects of sensibility

(Vauvenargues, 1746)

- Aesthetic judgements
- Faculty of sensibility



There is no standard
of taste like the canon
(the golden section)

- Reasons can count;
- Some tastes are better than others;
- Debate and disagreement on whether something is beautiful;
- Some of our aesthetic judgements coincide to a good extent

SUBJECTIVE ELEMENT

OBJECTIVE ELEMENT

THE ANTINOMY OF TASTE

SUBJECTIVE: grounded in the subject's
experience (*erfharung*)

SUBJECTIVIST: reduction of aesthetic
judgment to an individual's
psychological response.

OLD QUESTIONS, NEW QUESTIONS

HUME

Can we find a standard of taste that can function as an objective standard to discern between different tastes?

KANT

How can a judgement of taste be grounded in a subjective feeling of pleasure and pretend a universal and necessary validity without concepts?

WITTGENSTEIN

What do we do when we engage in aesthetic discussions?

3. WITTGENSTEIN'S AESTHETICS

KANTIAN ECHOES

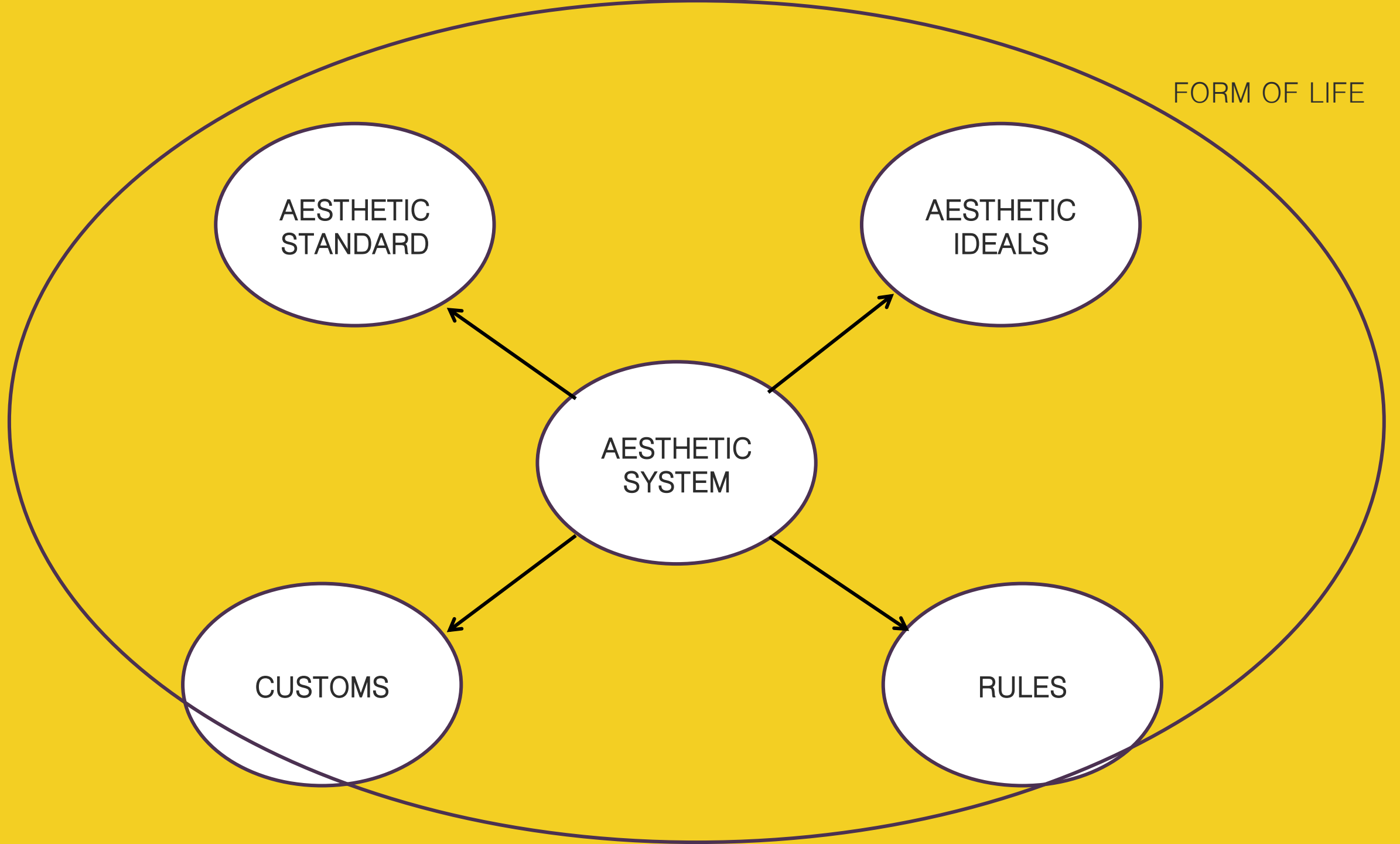
The sort of experiment we carry on to discover people's likes and dislikes is not aesthetics. If it were, then you could say aesthetics is a matter of taste. In aesthetics the question is not "Do you like it?" but "Why do you like it?" Whenever we get to the point where the question is one of taste, it is no longer aesthetics. In aesthetic discussion what we are doing is more like solving a mathematical problem. It is not a psychological one. Aesthetic discussion is something that goes on inside the range of likes and dislikes. It goes on before any question of taste arises. A statement about a visual or auditory impression, as against what causes it, need not be psychological. That a sorrowful face becomes more sorrowful as the mouth turns downward is not a statement of psychology. In aesthetics we are not interested in causal connections but in description of a thing.

NORMATIVITY OF AESTHETICS (normative language)

BEAUTIFUL VS AGREEABLE

ANTI CAUSAL–PSYCHOLOGICAL ACCOUNT

ANALOGY WITH RULE–GOVERNED PRACTICES



4. WITTGENSTEIN ON TASTE

TWO GRAMMARS

1. Taste as personal preference (kantian echoes)

"a matter of taste": what we like and dislike

Suppose you try the experiment: After this piece of music: Does it sound better now? Or now? Or now? This provides you with causal connection between set of notes & feelings of liking. Not necessarily. If this were all, Aesthetics would be a matter of taste (ML 9:26)

When we look at everything that we know and can say about the world as resting upon personal experience, then what we know seems to lose a good deal of its value, reliability, and solidity. We are then inclined to say that it is all "subjective"; and "subjective" is used derogatorily, as when we say that an opinion is merely subjective, a matter of taste. [...] We are up against trouble caused by our way of expression (BB p. 48)

(see also AWL, pp. 38–40, ML 9:14–15, LFM, lecture XI, p. 102, PFF §§357, 396)

2. Taste as competence (humean echoes)

A key passage: BB pp. 143–144

There is a kind of general disease of thinking which always looks for (and finds) what would be called a mental state from which all our acts spring as from a reservoir. Thus one says, "The fashion changes because the taste of people changes". The taste is the mental reservoir. But if a tailor to-day designs a cut of dress different from that which he designed a year ago, can't what is called his change of taste have consisted, partly or wholly, in doing just this? And here we say "But surely designing a new shape isn't in itself changing one's taste, --and saying a word isn't meaning it, --and saying that I believe isn't believing; there must be feelings, mental acts, going along with these lines and these words". --And the reason we give for saying this is that a man certainly could design a new shape without having changed his taste, say that he believes something without believing it, etc. And this obviously is true. But it doesn't follow that what distinguishes a case of having changed one's taste from a case of not having done so isn't under certain circumstances just designing what one hasn't designed before. Nor does it follow that in cases in which designing a new shape is not the criterion for a change of taste, the criterion must be a change in some particular region of our mind. That is to say, we don't use the word "taste" as the name of a feeling. To think that we do is to represent the practice of our language in undue simplification.

See also ML 9:3

When people say “This is a matter of taste”. Supposing I discussed with someone “What kind of flower will be the nicest in the window–box?”, the difference of taste needn’t be as simple as “I like this”, “You like that”. There can be discussion of all sorts of kind

Compare to Hume:

Though the beauties of writing had never been methodized, or reduced to general principles; though no excellent models had ever been acknowledged; the different degrees of taste would still have subsisted, and the judgment of one man been preferable to that of another; but it would not have been so easy to silence the bad critic [...] But when we show him an avowed principle of art; when we illustrate this principle by examples; [...] when we prove that the same principle may be applied to the present case [...] He must conclude, upon the whole, that the fault lies in himself, and that he wants the delicacy, which is requisite to make him sensible of every beauty and every blemish, in any composition or discourse. (p. 10)

HUME'S "DELICACY OF TASTE"

"Where the organs are so fine, as to allow nothing to escape them; and at the same time so exact, as to perceive every ingredient in the composition" (p. 9)

- A talent;
- "A delicate sentiment"
- Can be improved/educated through practice (observation, attention, deliberation, comparisons)

The good critic

Sound state of the organs of internal sensation

Delicacy of taste/imagination

Aided by practice

Makes comparisons

Free from prejudice

Possesses good sense

BECOMING ACCUSTOMED TO SEE, EXAMINE, WEIGHT SEVERAL PERFORMANCES

WITTGENSTEIN'S "CULTURED TASTE"

FINE TASTE

RPP I §362

How do I find the 'right' word? How do I choose among words? It is indeed as if I compared words according to **fine discriminations of taste**. This is too... this too...--that's the right one.

CULTURED TASTE

LA pp. 8, 9

The words we call expressions of aesthetic judgement play a very complicated role, but a very definite role, in what we call a culture of a period. To describe their use or to describe what you mean by **a cultured taste**, you have to describe a culture.

EDUCATED TASTE

CV 64e

Some people's taste is to an **educated taste** as is the visual impression received by a purblind eye to that of a normal eye. Where a normal eye will see something clearly articulated, a weak eye will see a blurred patch of colour.

THE “FACULTY OF TASTE” (CV 59–60E)

No creative	“The faculty of taste cannot create a new structure; it can only make adjustments to one that already exists. Taste loosens and tightens screws, it does not build a new piece of machinery”.
Makes adjustments	“Taste makes adjustments. Giving birth is not its affairs [...] (For this reason I believe that a great creator has no need of taste; his child is born into the world fully formed). Even the most refined taste has nothing to do with creative power”.
Makes things acceptable	“Taste makes things ACCEPTABLE”.
Refinement of sensitivity	“Taste is a refinement of sensitivity; but sensitivity does not do anything, it is purely receptive”.

WITTGENSTEIN AND HUME

Hume	Wittgenstein
Taste is cultivated through practice, comparison, delicacy, and experience.	Taste is acquired through training, practice, and participation in a form of life.
Psychological- causal account	Rejects such an account
The authority of the true judge ultimately rests on the refined operations of human nature and sentiment.	The authority of aesthetic judgment rests on mastery of rules and criteria internal to practices.
Sentiment is the foundation of taste.	Taste is a normative competence manifested in giving and recognizing reasons.

Relation work of art- public (focus on aesthetic judgement)

Appeal to rules and habits

No rigid distinction between aesthetic judgements and cognitive judgements

Masterpieces are not ideals (importance of context and specific historical period)

CONCLUSION

Taste as preference	What Wittgenstein excludes when he says aesthetics is not a matter of taste.
Taste as cultivated competence	What makes aesthetic discussion possible.
Rules and forms of life	What distinguishes Wittgenstein from Hume's psychology of sentiment.

Taste is not argued for. It is exercised

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THANK
YOU