

On the Limitations of Blind Tasting

Jonathan Cohen*

Blind tasting — tasting without knowing the wine’s producer, origin, or other details obtainable from the wine’s label— has become something of a fetish in the wine world. We are told, repeatedly and insistently, that blind tasting is the best, most neutral, least biased, and most honest evaluative procedure, and one that should be employed to the exclusion of non-blind/sighted tasting (which, in turn, is typically disparaged as confused, biased, or dishonest). Professional evaluators (e.g., the tasting panel of the *Wine Spectator*, the Grand Jury Européen, virtually every judging panel in competitive wine events) routinely advertise that they use blind tasting exclusively. Wine books and tasting manuals at all levels consistently emphasize the importance of blind tasting. Thus, Michael Broadbent, perhaps the most prolific author of tasting notes in history, writes that “It is my firm opinion . . . that to assess the qualities of a wine by tasting it completely blind, without any hint of what it might be, is the most useful and salutary discipline that any self-respecting taster can be given” (quoted in ?, 156). Or, again, Ronald Jackson, in his industry-standard textbook on wine tasting, asserts categorically that “Tastings should always be conducted blind, usually with only the names of the wine noted in advance” (?, 334).

I believe this is a mistake. Although blind tasting undeniably comes with some benefits, it also carries significant but insufficiently appreciated disadvantages relative to sighted tasting. It is my hope that recognizing these, rather than uniformly favoring blind tasting, will help us choose tasting procedures suited to our aims on particular occasions, and thereby better enjoy the full range of experiences available in our vinous encounters.

1 Why Blindness?

Before I begin to discuss the limitations of blind tasting, it will be useful to review the standard reasons offered in its defense.

Exclusive blind tasting is typically defended on the grounds that it controls for the undesirable distorting influence of extraneous (or, as I’ll say, “extrinsic”) factors — factors not inherent in the wine itself — on perception. This

*Department of Philosophy, University of California, San Diego, 9500 Gilman Drive, La Jolla, CA 92093-0119, joncohen@aardvark.ucsd.edu

motivation is expressed nicely by the editors of *The Wine Spectator*, who defend their exclusive adherence to blind tasting procedures in the magazine this way:

We believe that evaluating wines blind ensures that our tasters remain impartial and that our reviews are unbiased, with all wines presented on a level playing field. . . . Now, you may think that a conscientious taster should be able to ignore the influence of extraneous factors. But research has shown that it's not so easy. We are all very prone to a cognitive error called "confirmation bias," which plays a large, but largely unacknowledged, role in everyday judgment.

The distorting effects of confirmation bias are easy to demonstrate when it comes to wine. . . .

These kinds of experiments have been carried out many times, in many settings, but always with the same results: "Imaginary references" — especially producer names and price tags — significantly influence sensory evaluations. The only way for a scrupulous critic to guarantee unbiased judgments is to review wines in blind tastings (Marvin R. Shanken and Thomas Matthews, "Why We Taste Blind" *The Wine Spectator*, 30 April 2012, 7–8).

The thought here expressed is reasonable as far as it goes. Prior belief and other extrinsic factors do significantly influence perception. Moreover, we can often control for these effects on perception by removing the information source (say, the text on the bottle) that is the source of the extrinsic information. Thus, taking only one salient example, while beliefs about the expense of a wine are correlated with subjects' ratings of their enjoyment of that wine (?), some investigators have found that price and preference are *negatively* correlated(!), at least in non-experts, when preference is measured under conditions of blind tasting (without price information) (??). It is hard to avoid concluding from this pair of results that prior belief about the expense of a wine changes our perceptual assessments of it.¹ Similarly, the finding that tasters applied classic white wine descriptors (e.g., *golden, floral, fresh, pale, apricot, lemon, honey*) to a white wine presented under ordinary circumstances, but classic red wine descriptors (e.g., *plump, intense, deep, blackcurrant, cherry, raspberry*) to the very same wine after it had been surreptitiously dyed with tasteless and odorless red coloring (??) suggests strongly that beliefs about the color of a wine can significantly affect our gustatory/olfactory responses to it.

Moreover, if such results show that perceptually extrinsic factors *affect* subsequent perception, it is but a short step to the further conclusion that these factors *distort* or *bias* our perceptual experience. After all, the beliefs

¹Here I assume that individuals' preferences in this domain (as measured by self-reports by Goldstein et. al.) track ratings of the enjoyment (as measured by Plassman et. al. both by subject self-reports and by increases of neural activity in the orbitofrontal region of the cerebral cortex). I am also ignoring differences between the subject pools used in these two experiments. See ? for useful discussion.

at issue typically concern features that (plausibly) are not even accessible to perception — presumably the wine’s price, or year and location of origin are not among its literally perceptible qualities (although one can sometimes make an inference about these on the basis of whatever other qualities one does perceive). Therefore, if beliefs about these features significantly affect our perceptual interaction with wine (as they do), then it is natural to say that their effect is to prevent us from heeding what perception tells us.

If this is the problem that concerns you, it is easy to see why exclusive blind tasting can seem advisable. The thought would go that, by insisting on tasting blind, we can prevent tasters from holding beliefs about the wine’s price or origin in the first place, and so control for any possibly distorting influence grounded in the taster’s preferences for or against wines with a particular price or origin (etc.), or other perceptually extrinsic factors. And with these influences removed, the taster will be restored to a position from which she can be responsive to what perception has to say about the wine.

Unfortunately, there are a number of things wrong with the defense of blind tasting just outlined. I will argue that blind tasting cannot succeed in controlling for the influences it aims to screen off (§2), that it is not obviously desirable to have those aims in the first place (§3), and it can hide from us things that we want to discern when we taste wine (§4). If I am right, then we are served poorly as tasters when we restrict ourselves to conditions of blind tasting.

2 Factors Blindness Can’t Screen Off

First, I contend that blind tasting fails on its own terms — that it cannot screen off the extrinsic influences on perception that it aims to prevent. In particular, there are at least two important ways in which such extrinsic influences can affect perception even under the most stringent blind tasting conditions: one concerning alternate routes to belief, and another concerning perceptual contrast.

Consider the point about alternate routes first. As we’ve seen, blind tasting is intended to control for the effects of (perceptually extrinsic) belief on perception by hiding information sources (e.g., bottle shape, text on the label), and thereby preventing such beliefs about the wine from being formed in the first place. The problem is that there are other ways, consistent with blind tasting procedures, in which the relevant beliefs may arise and have just the sorts of effects on perception that blind tasting is designed to prevent.

Thus, suppose we are employing blind-tasting in the hope of screening off the influence of the prior beliefs of merlot-haters (as it might be) on their perceptual responses to a merlot-based wine. We invite such a merlot-hater to the tasting room, and she proceeds to sniff and swirl under blind conditions. She first tastes the wine (blind) at t_1 , and then begins to ruminate on its features — its medium weight and body, plum and berry flavors, fleshy mouthfeel,

low/medium levels of tannin, and the other qualities she perceived at t_1 . Putting this information together, she comes to believe at t_2 that the wine was made from merlot grapes. Suppose she then goes on to taste the wine again at t_3 , but now with the belief (formed at t_2) that the wine was made from merlot grapes, and with the standing dislike of wines of that varietal. The experience of this taster at t_3 is in relevant respects exactly like that of the taster who tastes the wine after reading its label: in both cases, prior belief affects negatively the taster's perceptual experience of the wine.

Blind tasting won't preclude this scenario, since, as described, the imagined taster forms the distorting belief at t_2 wholly from evidence that blind tasting allows (viz., from that supplied by her perception of the wine at t_1 , plus standing background belief).² What all this seems to suggest, then, is that blind tasting can't control for the effects of prior belief after all.³

I turn now to a second, and much more significant, concern about whether blind tasting can do what its proponents claim for it — a concern connected with the effects of perceptual contrast. Though the term covers much ground, perceptual contrast can be roughly described by saying that our perceptual responses to a stimulus are affected by contrasts with other items in the spatiotemporal vicinity.

Perceptual contrast is ubiquitous and much-studied (though much more widely discussed in relation to vision than other modalities). Just to give the flavor, figure 1 illustrates an instance of simultaneous lightness contrast in vision: although the two central patches depicted here are qualitatively identical, the perceptual system represents them as different because of the different ways in which they contrast in lightness with surrounding items.⁴ Similarly, in audition, we find that it is much easier to detect variations in pitch (say, while tuning a guitar string) by contrasting the target against other (simultaneously or successively perceived) tones.

²To be sure, there's a sense in which the bias by belief imagined here is less of a distortion of perception, since the belief is a result of broadly gustatory/olfactory perception of the wine as opposed to reading the wine's label. Nonetheless, the imagined scenario is one in which a taster's perception of a wine at t_3 is influenced by something other than that taster's perception of the wine at t_3 — viz., by a belief formed at a time earlier than t_3 .

³There is a separate possible motivation for blind tasting centering not on preventing extraneous sources of information, but on avoiding perceptual error. The worry would be that a taster who reads a label saying 'merlot' might more easily misperceive sensible characteristics of the wine — say, wrongly finding berry flavors where this quality is absent. But the point about alternate routes undercuts this motivation as well. For a blind taster whose ruminations on the qualities sensed at t_1 lead her to infer at t_2 that the wine is merlot-based can be just as susceptible to such misperception on tasting at t_3 as a sighted taster who reads 'merlot' on the label at t_2 and tastes at t_3 .

⁴Simultaneous lightness contrast plays a role in many classic visual illusions (e.g., the Hermann grid illusion, the Cornsweet illusion, Mach bands). Perceptual contrast is by no means restricted to the perception of lightness/brightness; within vision there are also simultaneous contrast effects for chromatic color, size, spatial frequency, orientation, motion, and speed, *inter alia*. Moreover, in addition to *simultaneous* contrast — contrast between simultaneously perceived items, there are also ubiquitous instances of *successive* contrast — effects of contrast between successively perceived items for each of these dimensions.

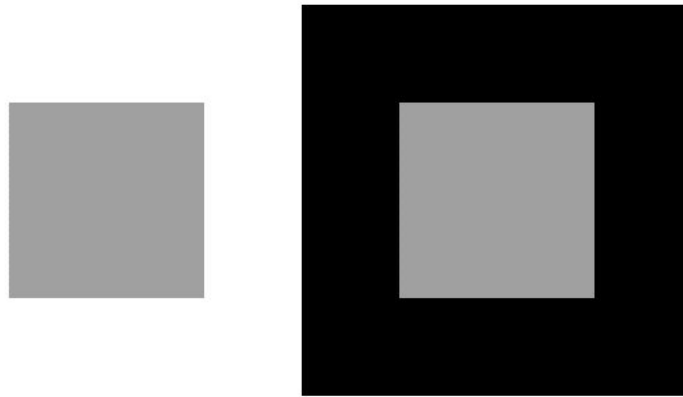


Figure 1: An instance of simultaneous lightness contrast: the central patches are qualitatively identical, but perception represents the one on the left as darker than the one on the right because of the contrast with surrounding items.

In these cases, the perceptual system reacts differently to objects depending on how they contrast with other items. Specifically, the perceptual system emphasizes contrasts between a target and other items perceived. This means that our perceptual reaction to a target shifts as a function of other perceived items: o will be perceived one way when perceived with o_1 and a different way when perceived with o_2 .

Unsurprisingly, perceptual contrast plays a role in gustatory and olfactory systems brought to bear in wine tasting (??), just as in other perceptual systems. Moreover, and also unsurprisingly, these effects are not merely hypothetical, but show up prominently, and in familiar ways, in the specific context of wine tasting.

Perceptual contrast explains why, for example, sweet wines strike us as less sweet when consumed with dessert foods (which are ordinarily sweeter than the wines) than on their own; presumably this is why we consume these wines with dessert rather than with the entrée (where they would seem so sweet that we would fail to notice much else about them). Similarly, the reason tasters progress from lighter and less rich samples when tasting a group of different wines is presumably to lessen the known effects of perceptual contrast. Perceptual contrast also explains why idiosyncratic features in particular samples are magnified when tasted in large groups of similar category, and tend to make the idiosyncratic instances seem unbalanced or out of proportion: thus, for example, as ?, 41 notes, chablis, with its modest levels of oak and accessible fruit, typically seems thin and over-acidic when tasted in the context of other chardonnay-based wines.

Perceptual contrast is relevant to our assessment of the alleged benefits of blind tasting because it shows another way in which, even under the most careful blind tasting procedures, our perceptual reactions to a sample can be influenced significantly by features of things other than that sample (e.g., by the higher levels of available fruit in the sample tasted just beforehand).

Of course, all the reasons for wanting to screen off the influence of belief on my current perception of *o* are equally reasons for wanting to screen off the influence of features extrinsic to the current perception of *o* on my current perception of *o*. Again, if my perception of a foil object *o'* at *t'* affects my perceptual reaction to *o* at *t*, this is just to say that perceiving *o'* at *t'* prevents me from taking in what perception tells me at *t* about *o* itself, which is just what we hoped blind tasting would prevent. Therefore, one who favors blind tasting because it offers hope of screening off such distorting influence of belief on current perception will also want to screen off the effects of perceptual contrast.

Alas, blind tasting is manifestly not up to that job. What distinguishes blind from sighted tasting is that the conditions of the former block some sources of information about the sample tasted (e.g., the writing on the label), and thereby block any influences on the taster's reaction to the sample that depend on those blocked sources. But perceptual contrast doesn't depend on the sources blind tasting blocks: it doesn't require reading a label or hearing testimony about a wine's provenance. Therefore, blind tasting won't prevent the influence of perceptual contrast on our perceptual reactions to a sample.

It would seem, then, that if the point of blind tasting is, as claimed, to control for influence on our perception of a target *o* by factors extrinsic to *o*, then blind tasting cannot be expected to do the job it is advertised to do.

3 Why Control?: Blindness and The Aims of Tasting

I have argued so far that blind tasting is incapable of controlling for the influence of extrinsic factors on our perceptual reactions to wine. But this invites a prior question: why should we hope to control for such factors in the first place?

That depends on what we are attempting to accomplish by tasting.

On the one hand, there are some kinds of tasting for which the goal of controlling for the extrinsic is perfectly understandable. Sometimes we taste in a way that requires imaginative projection from our own perceptual reactions to those of others. We taste in this projective way when, for example, we taste for the purpose of making recommendations to others (in writing up public tasting notes, when we act as sommeliers or competitive judges of wine, and when we make suggestions about wine to friends). In such cases, it is crucial that our own reactions to the wine, on the basis of which we recommend, are predictive of the reactions the wine will cause in other tasters. If not, it is hard to see why our recommendations would carry any force.

Given this need, it is easy to see why projective tasters will want to control for extrinsic influences on their perception (to the extent possible). The worry is, simply, that such extrinsic influences can easily fail to project. For even if we both taste the very same wine, extrinsic influences on our perception can differ. It could be, for example, that your perceptual response will be affected by the contrast with the sweet food you just consumed, or that my perceptual response will be colored by memories of the happy occasions on which I enjoyed similar wines in the past. To the extent this occurs, my experience will fail to project to yours and vice versa. Since we cannot in any practical way hold extrinsic influences fixed between tasters, and since they interfere with successful projection, a taster whose purposes are centered on projection will have reason to control for as many of them as possible.

That said, we must recognize that projective tasting is very much the exception rather than the rule. Most of us will never serve as judges in official or unofficial wine competitions; and even those who do serve as judges taste much more frequently in non-competitive settings. Some of us may sometimes offer advice about wine to others (perhaps most significantly to later time-slices of ourselves). However, I take it that this is not the main purpose almost anyone has in tasting, so is not the most significant element in shaping our perceptual interactions with wine.

But if most tasting is non-projective, then the motivations offered for controlling for extrinsic factors above — motivations that center on facilitating projection — are inapplicable.

Are there, then, other reasons, independent of the need for projection, for wanting to control for the influence of the perceptually extrinsic?

Perhaps we fear that, if we do not set aside extrinsic features — features that do not inhere in the wine itself — we may wrongly assign credit or blame to the wine, when, in fact, what drives our reactions (and so merits the credit or blame) is something else. Consider this analogy. Socrates's wife Xanthippe may be very beautiful indeed; but we wouldn't on that basis want to credit *Socrates* with beauty: on the contrary, the beauty of Xanthippe counts as, at best, an extrinsic feature of Socrates — the kind of feature of Socrates we would do well to ignore when assessing how Socrates looks. Similarly, then, if our goal in perceptually interacting with a wine is to focus credit or blame on the wine itself rather than some third party, we might strive for a procedure that ignores the extrinsic, and focuses exclusively on properties that inhere in the wine itself.

But there are two problems with the motivation just proposed. First, as reflection on the Socrates example itself suggests, extrinsic features often should *not* be set aside in assessing objects' properties. For there are many properties (plausibly including beauty/ugliness) that just amount to causing the right extrinsic reactions in suitably placed observers. Arguably, Xanthippe's beauty *just is* her capacity to cause appreciative (but extrinsic) reactions in suitable observers, just as Socrates's ugliness *just is* his capacity to cause non-appreciative extrinsic reactions. But if so, then while *some* properties extrinsic to Socrates (e.g., Xanthippe's beauty) are irrelevant to whether he is

beautiful or ugly, there are *other* properties extrinsic to Socrates (e.g., my non-appreciative reaction to his visage) that are essential to that question. (Nor are beauty/ugliness isolated cases. It is plausible that the joke's property of being funny just is its capacity to cause extrinsic humor reactions, that the situation's property of being embarrassing just is its capacity to cause extrinsic awkwardness reactions, and so on.) If tasting puts us in contact with properties that — like beauty, ugliness, humor, and embarrassingness — amount to capacities to cause suitable reactions in perceivers, then setting aside the extrinsic will mean being unable to decide whether things have those properties. And presumably that is not something we want to build into our tasting procedures.

The second problem with the motivation under consideration is that, again as the beauty example demonstrates, it's just false that taking account of extrinsic factors leads us to credit/blame the wrong targets. Yes, my reactions are extrinsic to Xanthippe; but they make it true that *she* is beautiful, not that I am. (Similarly: my reactions make it true that *Socrates* is ugly, that the *joke* is funny, that the *situation* is embarrassing.)

Thus, pending more convincing reasons for controlling for extrinsic factors in non-projective tasting, it would appear that blind tasting is unmotivated with respect to the vast majority of circumstances in which we taste.

4 What Blindness Doesn't See

If I am right, blind tasting is ineffective with respect to its own aims (§2) and undermotivated in most cases (§3). However, the situation is yet worse: I want to suggest that blind tasting positively prevents us from perceiving things we want to perceive in tasting wine. It does this because perceiving wine presents us with an extremely rich array of information within which individual features are easily overlooked unless we direct our attention appropriately. The problem is that, of course, directing attention in this way requires knowing where to look, and blind tasting is designed to put this knowledge beyond our reach. The upshot, then, is that blind tasting can prevent us from perceptually accessing features that we care about.

There are several kinds of cases, familiar to wine drinkers, that make this point vivid.

A first concerns, once again, the comparison between chablis and other chardonnays. As noted above, it is entirely typical that chablis stand out negatively when tasted blindly with other chardonnay-based wines. This is largely because the particular rewards of chablis are more subtle to the kinds of perceptual systems we happen to have than those of chardonnay-based-wines from warmer climates: the latter emphasize more prominent fruit and oak flavors, which are more easily discriminable by us. But it is not only true that chablis comes off poorly by comparison with those other wines. It is also true that, even when tasted on its own, the specific features that make chablis rewarding are less obvious than the corresponding features that make other

wines rewarding. Unfortunately, if a chablis is tasted blindly, under conditions in which the information needed to direct awareness onto those relatively subtle chablis-specific dimensions is hidden, then those dimensions are likely to be ignored.

When we taste blind, we (understandably) react most to features that are most easily discriminable by us — say, depth of color, intensity, oakiness, sweetness, and density. This will reward wines that are appealing along those dimensions, and will count against wines that are not. But, of course, wines that are not appealing along those dimensions can have much to offer on other dimensions — other dimensions that, under conditions of sighted tasting, we can know to attend to. If our goals in tasting, then, include exploration of the diverse wines in the world, and what they have to offer on their own terms, then we serve those goals poorly by relying exclusively on blind tasting.

A second, and related, example of how blindness can impede our aims in tasting wine concerns our ability to isolate particular dimensions of similarity or difference. Sometimes part of what makes a wine interesting lies in comparing it to other wines chosen for some specific purpose — a purpose that blind tasting typically obscures, as noted by Kramer in this example:

... within the vast area of Chianti Classico, there's a little nook that cradles three superbly distinctive Chianti Classico estates that all share a strong taste similarity: Castello della Paneretta, Fattoria Monsanto, and Isole e Olena. In a blind tasting, you may like one or another of this trio. But I doubt that even the most acute taster would spot the commonality among them in a large lineup. It's readily seen, though, when you knowingly serve them together (? , 26).

Importantly, the information about origin that is interesting in this case is helpful not because it adds to the array of perceptually available features of the sample, but because it directs attention to particular components already in that array but easily lost among the shuffle. To the extent that blind tasting prevents us from directing attention to potentially interesting similarities and differences between samples, it prevents us from appreciating this potentially available information.

Similarly, much of what is interesting about vertical tastings is the opportunity to locate what wines have in common and what distinguishes them. The vertical tasting is an opportunity to factor apart the components in our perceptual reactions against a known backdrop of what unites and what separates the wines. Suppose we know that the wines are alike in varietal composition and geographical origin, but differ in year. When we taste them, we direct attention to aspects of similarity in our perceptual reactions (which we are likely to attribute substantially to their shared composition/origin) and aspects of difference in our perceptual reactions (which we are inclined to attribute substantially to differences in weather/winemaking between the years in question).

Of course, this sort of factorization doesn't work except by reference to knowledge of what is held constant and not constant in the group. But blind tasting is designed specifically to deprive the taster of such a backdrop of knowledge; indeed, blind tasting prevents the taster from even appreciating the group *as* a group for which there is a backdrop worth having to structure perceptual attention. For this reason, the exclusive blind taster loses the ability to benefit from such comparisons as fully as tasters who employ a wider range of strategies.

There is another way in which blind tasting, by removing information about the categories in which the wines we taste fall, can fail to serve our ends in tasting. This is because whether and how the features of a wine affect our overall appreciation depend crucially on the category against which we carry out our evaluation. For example, the presence of petrol notes and acidity are standard (and, indeed, plausibly a virtue) in a mature Alsatian riesling, but non-standard (and, indeed, plausibly a flaw) in, say, a young California zinfandel. For the categories under consideration (mature Alsatian riesling, young California zinfandel) come with quite different contingent, historically conditioned norms that govern local winemaking practices and the profiles of the resulting wines. Given the different norms at work, the absence of petrol notes and acidity counts as a norm-violation for an instance of the one category but not the other.

However, blind tasting is designed to make unavailable information about the categories against which to evaluate particular wines and encourages us instead to assess those wines based wholly on what is in the glass. Since this sort of categorical information is crucial to assessing the features we perceive when we taste, the exclusive blind taster won't be in a position to carry out those assessments.

Indeed, there is a special case of the problem about blindness to category that involves the perception of absences in particular. An absence, like a present feature, can be positive relative to one category but negative relative to another: an absence of petrol notes and acidity is presumably a positive feature relative to the category of young California zinfandel, but is a negative feature relative to the category of mature Alsatian rieslings. As in the case of present features, then, the inaccessibility of category assignments to the blind taster will prevent her from making informed assessments turning on absences that are standard/nonstandard for the category. But the situation is in one way worse for absent features than it is for present features: it is in the nature of an absence that it is not ordinarily salient unless the perceiver is looking for it. If I don't know to look for the petrol notes and acidity in the sample I taste, then I ordinarily won't conclude from my perception of the wine I taste that those particular features are absent.

Once again, knowing the (geographical, varietal) category of the wine will often direct the taster's perceptual attention on the relevant dimensions, so the taster with this information will be in a position to respond to relevant absences. But because blind tasting is aimed at removing exactly the prior knowledge that would be helpful in directing attention in this way, it will

prevent perception from delivering information about potentially relevant absences.

A final example of a way in which over-reliance on blind tasting may prevent us from appreciating what there is to be enjoyed in wine has to do with the aging process. Because wines evolve in the bottle, there are better and worse (i.e., more flattering and less flattering) times to taste particular wines. Needless to say, we want to know something about a bottle's stage in its evolution in deciding when to open it. And, though this sort of timing is famously difficult, there are at least useful broad guidelines: some wines are expected to improve by more aging (canonically, classified growth Bordeaux), and others are not (say, Marlborough sauvignon blanc, much of whose enjoyment comes from the impression of freshness it conveys when young, but which fades).

This can also matter in the context of synchronic tasting. If we know the current stage of an expected evolution of a wine, this can change our evaluation of it when we taste on a specific occasion. For example, we would reasonably be more forgiving of a wine that strikes us as objectionably tannic if we thought its tannins would eventually soften (we might also regret having opened the wine too early).

But, because different wines evolve differently, it wouldn't make sense to react this way to just any wine. The propriety of our forgiveness for a feature depends on our beliefs about what kind of wine we are considering, on the trajectory it will trace out over time, and its current stage along that trajectory. Of course, blind tasting is designed to hide the information on which we base such beliefs, so will prevent us from making informed assessments of this kind. And once again, having clues about the stage of a wine's temporal evolution will make salient certain dimensions for perceptual evaluation — signs of successful or unsuccessful aging — that we might have otherwise ignored.

What all these familiar cases suggest, then, is that, if we insist on exclusively blind tasting, we thereby lose access to things we want to gain from our perceptual encounters with wine.

5 Conclusion

Although I have argued that blind tasting falls short in several respects, I nonetheless believe that it has a positive role to play in our enjoyment of wine.

Blind reactions and sighted reactions can reveal different things about wine that can be useful in different ways. In particular, and among other things, blind reactions to a wine can (sometimes) help us in isolating certain of its intrinsic features, and in making projectible predictions about the reactions of other tasters (including our future selves), while sighted reactions can reveal interesting features of the wine that will likely elude us under conditions of blind tasting. The only sensible reaction to this situation, it seems to me, is to abandon exclusive reliance on any one set of experiences, and instead to gather

a range of different perceptual reactions, exploiting each for the purposes it serves best.

The perceptual reactions available to a taster are many and varied. heterogeneous. Because there is potentially interest, and therefore value, in all of them, we would do well to adopt an ecumenical attitude toward tasting. We should taste blind, and we should taste sighted. We should taste wine by itself, and with many different foods. We should taste it with other wines of like and unlike types. We should taste early, and taste often.

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