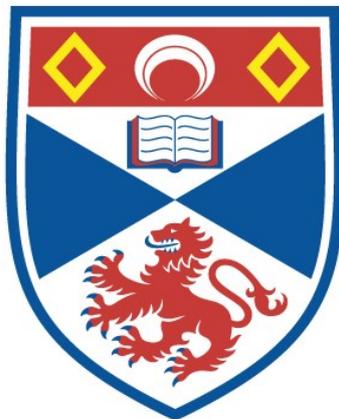


# **AESTHETIC ANTIREALISM**

**Brandon L. Cooke**

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD  
at the  
University of St Andrews**



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# **Aesthetic Antirealism**

**Brandon L. Cooke**

**Submitted in fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree  
of Doctor of Philosophy**

**University of St. Andrews**

**19 July 2002**



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## Statement of Candidate

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I, Brandon Cooke, candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of St. Andrews, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 71,916 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me, and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

This thesis is a record of work done as a research student in the period from September 1999 to August 2002 as a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, which I commenced after completing the requirements for the M.Litt. in the academic year ending August 1999.

signature of candidate

date 18 July 2002

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## Acknowledgements

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I would like to thank Berys Gaut and Sarah Broadie, my supervisors, for their patient guidance, their encouragement, and their support. Aislinn Batstone and Marcus Rossberg also deserve thanks for close, critical reading of substantial portions of the thesis, and for many insightful discussions surrounding the ideas therein. The camaraderie between the postgraduate philosophy students has made my made my experience here both enjoyable and rewarding. In this regard I should thank Raffaele Rodogno, Gerry Hough, and Kate Thomson especially. Above all, I should express my deep gratitude to my parents, for their love and support over the years.

## Abstract

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A puzzle is generated by two intuitions about artworks: 1. There is no *prima facie* reason to take artworks to be mind-independent objects; 2. Aesthetic judgments are objective. These intuitions seem to be in tension, for if artworks or their aesthetic properties are mind-dependent, how can aesthetic judgments be objective? The common solution to the puzzle lies in rejecting or revising one of the two intuitions. Typically, realists reject 1, and many antirealists reject 2. I develop an antirealist aesthetic theory that accommodates both intuitions, focusing on critical disagreement between epistemically optimal judges, realist difficulties with supervenience and response-dependence, the role of imagination in the experience of artworks, and the metaphorical quality of aesthetic discourse. The hallmark of realism, namely the mind-independence of aesthetic qualities, is an untenable commitment that yields an impoverished view of artworks. A cognitivist anti-realism is available which preserves the objectivity of aesthetic discourse and yields a richer conception of artworks and our interaction with them.

## Chapter 1

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The present enquiry starts with a puzzle generated by two intuitions:

1. Our experience of artworks is bound up with the particular thoughts we have of them.
2. Aesthetic judgments are objective.

The two intuitions seem to be in conflict. If artworks or their distinctive aesthetic properties are mind-dependent, then the discourse of aesthetic judgment would more plausibly be understood as subjective. If, on the other hand, aesthetic judgments really are objective, then the objects of those judgments had better be independent of one's thoughts about them.

The various positions in the realism-antirealism debate concerning aesthetics are usefully, if crudely, characterized by the various solutions they propose to the puzzle. Broadly, any realist position will accept *some* version of the objectivity claim, while rejecting or at least distancing itself from the mind-dependence claim. Some antirealist positions, arguably the majority of the better-developed ones, accept the mind-dependence of artworks, or at least of aesthetic properties, and reject or modify the objectivity claim. Those modifications typically involve the claim that aesthetic judgments in fact do not function as they seem to, but rather merely express a preference. This option does not exhaust the collection of aesthetic antirealisms; indeed, the aesthetic antirealism I will develop here accommodates both intuitions.

While the intuitions are taken as an entrée to the debate, they are of course not above scrutiny themselves. Here I provide only a rough and preliminary motivation. Artworks are artifacts or events, the products of human intentional activity. A rock cut away by a miner might be classed as an artifact, especially one cut by a miner who was momentarily bored with his work and focused his attention on cutting away the rock just so. But still, that rock would not strike anyone as a mind-dependent object. The intuition about artworks involves more than this kind of claim. Artworks are objects that admit of interpretation and questions of significance of a certain sort. The features of the miner's rock might be

significant in one sense, because its being laced with veins of gold means that the mine will be profitable. But the significance of artworks is not of this sort. Artworks *qua* art invite a certain sort or regard, one that involves the attribution of qualities like *intensity, grace, balance, sensuality, dynamism, triteness* and *melancholy*. A set of sounds that doesn't plausibly support qualities like these is just noise; where qualities like these are plausibly attributed we seem to fulfill a necessary condition for calling something an artwork. A complete physical and chemical description of the properties of the miner's rock would arguably omit any properties like the ones just listed. To attribute those, we need a necessary connection to intentionality of a certain sort, one aimed at imbuing or foregrounding these properties. But then the miner's rock, taken now as an artwork and so inviting a certain kind of regard, is a candidate mind-dependent object.

Arthur Danto's Gallery of Indiscernibles<sup>1</sup> makes this point nicely. Imagine a gallery displaying eight identical red square canvases on its walls. What differentiates these from the other are their title-indicated interpretations: *The Israelites Crossing the Red Sea, Kierkegaard's Mood, Red Square*, etc. The eighth is a mere object, not offered for any interpretative regard. The various interpretations differentiate the physically indiscernible canvases from each other, and provide a demarcation between artifacts that are artworks and those that are not. Following Danto, the first intuition incorporates the idea that interpretations are "functions which transform material objects into works of art."<sup>2</sup>

Why would a discourse about such objects be objective? There is a strong opposing intuition holding *de gustibus non est disputandum*. Is it not more plausible to think that the essential incorporation of interpretations into the very ontological fabric of artworks renders them radically sensitive to interpreters? Are there not other reasons, independent of this consideration, to think that aesthetic judgments are mere expressions of preference? This view quickly comes into conflict with the apparent character of aesthetic discourse. That discourse appears to be a normative one—to offer an aesthetic judgment invites a demand for supporting reasons. If a judgment is objective, it admits of reasoned improvement. This feature is at least a necessary condition for a discourse's being objective. Whether there are other conditions to be satisfied is part of the present enquiry. Further, aesthetic judgments also appear to aim at truth. The expressivist, who holds that aesthetic judgments are no

## *1: Introduction*

more than expressions of preference, owes us an account of what we are really doing when making these claims, and why we think they hold objectively. This view, I shall argue, ultimately proves incoherent.

The phenomenal character of our aesthetic experience is as of external objects or events with certain qualitative characteristics. Paradigmatically, these things are artworks, but landscapes, persons, and even abstract entities like theories and proofs are often taken as legitimate foci of aesthetic experience. That phenomenology, together with the normativity of aesthetic discourse, lends considerable intuitive appeal to realism as an underlying metaphysical framework in aesthetics. Realism centers on a thesis of mind-independence: the truth or falsity of assertions in a discourse is a matter independent of the beliefs of participants in the discourse. If a discourse is properly characterized as a realist one then when a well-formed assertion *p* is true, it is not because the associated belief that *p* is held, but rather, because some independent state of affairs obtains. This position promises to yield a direct route to objectivity in aesthetics. The familiarity and apparent ease of the route explain its overwhelming dominance within aesthetics. But further considerations of the subjective contribution to aesthetic experience lead one to reconsider those realist intuitions. Ultimately, a considered antirealist aesthetics can be demonstrated to preserve the normativity of the discourse while making better sense of our experience of artworks and at the same time generating less conceptual tension in our metaphysical commitments.

It is a striking and frustrating feature of the wider realism-antirealism debate that the meanings of the definitive claims of those positions are themselves in dispute. Realism comprises a wide range of positions that differently unpack and augment the core claim of mind-independence. Antirealism, most broadly defined<sup>3</sup> as the denial of that core claim, includes an even wider, if less well-developed, range of theory. Thus, an essential first task is to set out the various theoretical positions with the aim of drawing a workable border between realism and antirealism. There are a number of ways in which this might proceed, including (largely) semantic distinctions, (largely) ontological distinctions, global arguments of the kind found in historical debates between realists and idealists, and so on. Some of these projects lose sight of the aesthetic, resolving its status as a consequence of a stronger categorical conclusion. It is also questionable whether semantic and ontological issues can

always be neatly separated. The strategy here will instead largely parallel the realism debate in metaethics and ignore global arguments altogether. The primary motivations for this approach are first, that domain-specific antirealisms might be compatible with a wider, subsuming realism, and second, that the aesthetic and ethical domains as domains of value are often taken to be amenable to the same conceptual inquiry, and in a sense demand similar metaphysical explanations. There are two important disanalogies. Questions about will and motivation, though not eliminable, do not have the same crucial status in aesthetics as they do in ethics, and so will not be examined.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, questions about the role of metaphor and art theory and criticism play a much more prominent role in aesthetics than in ethics, and so will constitute a major point of departure from the metaethics-tracking approach.

At this point I should say more about the notions of ‘aesthetic quality’ and of ‘aesthetic judgment’ I shall be using. I follow Currie’s characterization<sup>5</sup> of an aesthetic quality as any property that can be cited as a reason for a judgment of aesthetic value. That said, many of the utterances I consider as aesthetic judgments are not judgments of value in any obvious sense. So we should understand an aesthetic quality to be the sort of thing that could in principle play a role in supporting a judgment of aesthetic value, even if it does not in actual fact. In some sense, I depart from much philosophical writing which takes judgments to be simple evaluations or predications. Examples of these include “Rachmaninoff’s late works are tough and concise”, “Shakespeare’s sonnets are indisputably great”, and “This Puccini aria is dreadfully saccharine”. Of course these are examples of aesthetic judgments, but judgments of the “X is F” form do not exhaust the category. I believe that the discussion of aesthetic judgment has suffered for taking this paradigm to be *the* model of an aesthetic judgment. Art critical writing is typically much more sophisticated than this. I include as aesthetic judgments remarks like: “That Miró’s imagination is ignited by its contact with the anatomy of sex takes nothing away from the purity of his painting”<sup>6</sup> and “[A Rothko painting] is almost a blank façade, an expanse of perhaps two or three colors which seem to have materialized from nowhere, like a mirage, instilling them into our sight”.<sup>7</sup> Both say something about artworks. In the first case, qualities are attributed to works partly through attributing qualities to the artist, and in the second, a vivid characterization is given which is

at best only indirectly predicative. An adequate theory of aesthetic judgment needs to provide an account of what is happening with these judgments as well as the simpler ones.

Hume argues that “a little reflection suffices” to show that aesthetic qualities do not lie in the objects themselves, but depend on the “fabric or structure of the mind.”<sup>8</sup> The antirealism I will advocate shares this thought. The central task I shall undertake is two-fold: the negative project examines the motivations for realism and exposes two critical shortcomings, while the positive project shows that one species of antirealism is not vulnerable to these shortcomings, and possesses other theoretical virtues. The latter project is more daunting than the former, as the antirealist seems to have a weaker grip on objectivity. Though I will examine this assumption, I take it as a starting point that objectivity is a feature of aesthetic discourse that must be preserved, though in the course of the investigation the notion of objectivity may well require some qualification and adjustment.

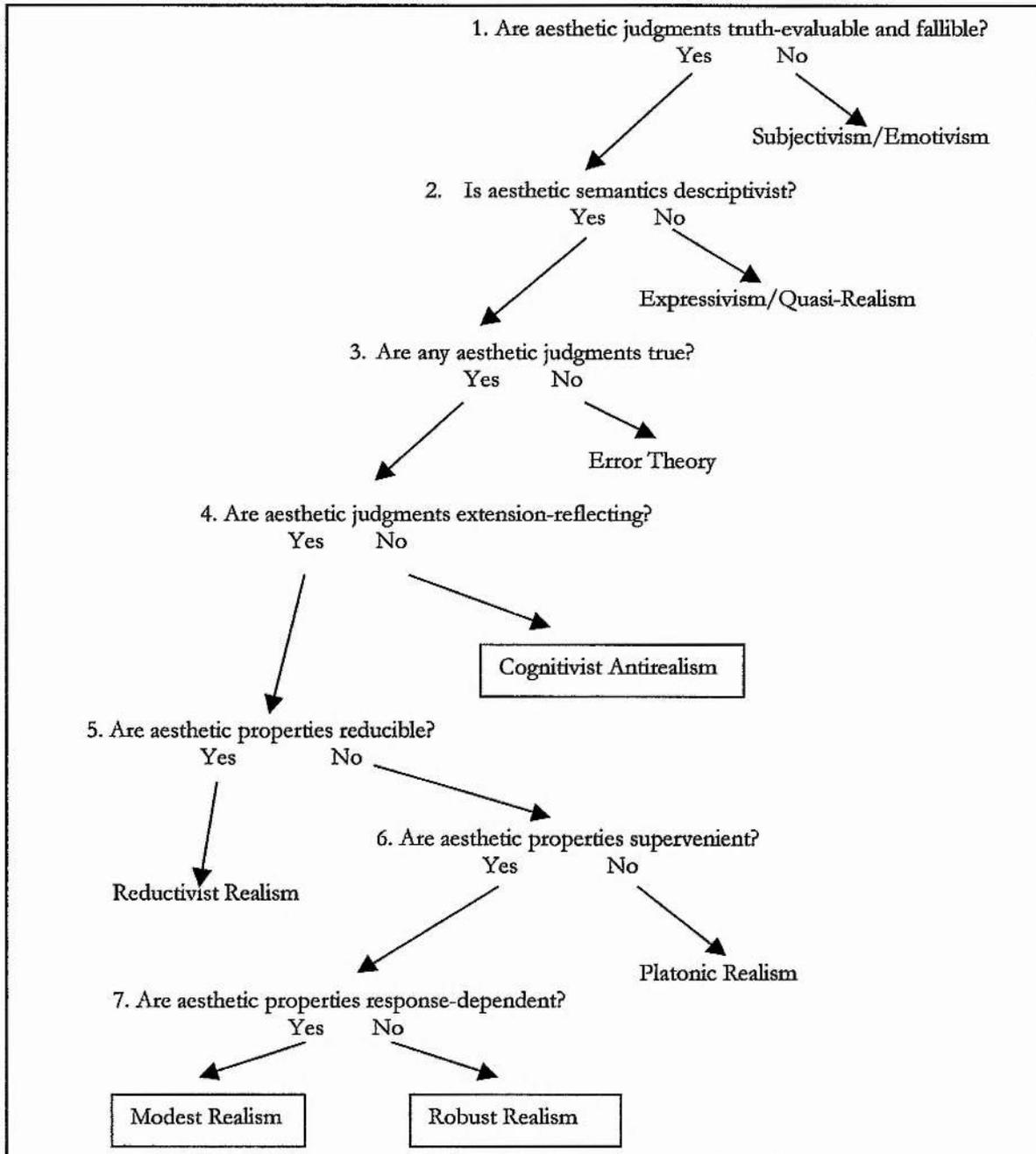
It is possible to clarify the various “meta-aesthetic” positions by developing a taxonomic structure with definitive yes-no questions at each of its nodes. The yes-no questions bear both on the semantics and ontology of the domain, and the positions can then be understood in terms of their respective answers to these questions. Of course, there are other ways of distinguishing the positions involved, but the taxonomy here will be employed to make the distinctions salient to the present inquiry.

The default for all of the arrowed paths is that they are open. It is important to recognize that negative arguments against particular routes do not in every case constitute impenetrable barriers, but rather resistances of varying strengths. Conversely, positive arguments for other routes are not to be seen as rail tracks, making the conceptual path obligatory, but as conductors, again in varying strengths, which make those paths more easily traversed. Understanding the project in this way is meant to forestall the thought that some position in the debate can be eliminated via disproof, though the strength of resistance in moving to it will show the high conceptual stress involved in the series of moves. On the other hand, positive arguments will not establish a position reached by a highly “conductive” route to be true (and the others false), but only abductively strong or weak. High conductivity does correspond to a high degree of cognitive virtue that warrants accepting a position until the

## 1: Introduction

taxonomic network itself becomes a candidate for revision or until further arguments can show that the various resistances and conductivities in the offered network should be revalued. These principles give the acceptability conditions for theories in the present inquiry.

### Taxonomy of Meta-Aesthetic Theory



## 1: Introduction

In giving arguments that develop the resistances and conductivities of the different branches of the network, three positions will emerge as the most plausible “meta-aesthetic” contender theories, two of which are realist and one which is antirealist. The two realist positions share the claim that aesthetic properties are real (in other words, that aesthetic predicates are to be taken literally in the sense that the aesthetic predicate has a corresponding property) and are non-reductively supervenient on non-aesthetic properties. They differ in their understanding of the core realist mind-independence claim: following Gaut, *robust aesthetic realism* holds that the truth of aesthetic judgments is independent of the judge’s counterfactual mental states; *modest aesthetic realism* that they are merely independent of her actual mental states. In terms of properties, the modest realist takes aesthetic properties to be response-dependent, while the robust realist claims they are response-independent. The antirealist position that emerges and will be developed as the most plausible one is cognitivist antirealism. Aesthetic judgments are truth-apt and enjoy some degree of objectivity. True aesthetic judgments are extension-determining, and not extension-reflecting. In other words, truth in aesthetics is constituted by best judgments. Best judgments are those which satisfy a large body of norms, which themselves are open to revision and rejection for any particular judgment. Many of those norms license particular warranted imaginings of artworks, imaginings which are recorded in judgments. So it is crucial to distinguish the sophisticated view that truth is constituted by best judgments from any simple performative model of truth being stipulated. The positive arguments I shall adduce for this claim include consideration of the language of art criticism and art theory. I argue that an examination of these sub-species of aesthetic discourse shows that the distinctively aesthetic qualities named in our judgments are mind-dependent; that is, that they are qualities of objects and events subject to imaginative construal.

It is a common objection against antirealism that it inevitably slides into a strong relativism or worse, skepticism. Relativism seems to be a likely consequence of the definitive antirealist claim that there are propositions of indeterminate truth value; it seems a necessary consequence of a modified antirealism that admits true contradictions. Under classical logic, a true contradiction entails the truth of any assertion at all. This is the principle of explosion: from a contradiction, anything follows. Explosion is a serious problem, as it seems to leave little room for notions of normativity or, indeed, rationality. One remedy for

this situation is to relativize the truth predicate or evaluative predicates, to critical communities, speakers of the same language, or to individuals, which is the position of subjectivism. I shall argue that while there may be a case for relativism, it is not mandated by antirealism, as there are alternatives to conceptual modifications of truth. Skepticism threatens because of the antirealist's metaphysical modesty—if we are at best agnostic about aesthetic properties, what anchor could there be for the truth of aesthetic judgments? If we cannot know whether our judgments are true, we are mired in the skeptical tar-pit. But in fact the realist is in no better position here, because it is an essential feature of realism that truth may outrun our capacity to know at any time. No matter how high we stand on the epistemic slope, there is always the possibility that the key fact remains out of our line of sight. And so skepticism lurks close at hand for the realist, because she can never assume that she has all the facts in, and so must take her judgments as provisional. It is possible to introduce skepticism at any point in the taxonomy by posing the question, “Is the truth (or status, in the case of subjectivism) of aesthetic judgments knowable?”, to which the skeptic of course replies in the negative. Since the skeptical worry is equally one for the realist and the antirealist, it will not help decide the argument either way, and so I will say little about it. I begin the investigation with shorter arguments against the more implausible realist and antirealist positions, leaving the bulk of my discussion to a comparative assessment of the three contender positions. The negative program consists of a set of arguments against realism that raise worries about supervenience and the realist proposals for diagnosing cases of irresolvable critical disagreements, and about realist ontology, with a focus on the thesis of mind-independence. Realism generally can be understood as the denial that truth is dependent on our epistemic capacities. In other words, there are mind-independent facts, and our thoughts and assertions are true in virtue of their correspondence with these facts. Truth can come apart from ideally justified belief. Statements we make about the qualitative character of our aesthetic experience aim at truth and thus carry an implicit demand of agreement, and it is always legitimate to ask for reasons in support of those statements. Those reasons often have the form of a pointing out of other, typically non-evaluative, qualities of the work, such as loudness, voicing, and tempo in the case of a musical work. This feature of aesthetic discourse has led to the adoption of supervenience as the formal relation that gives content to that justificatory practice. Supervenience is often expressed in the formula: “No aesthetic difference without a non-aesthetic difference.” Parsing this

formula yields two claims: (i) a *metaphysical claim* of property relation, that aesthetic properties are dependent on and emergent from non-aesthetic properties, and (ii) an *epistemological claim* of constraint on judgments, that two experientially indiscernible objects must be attributed the same aesthetic properties and hence the same aesthetic value. Supervenience is standardly taken as an *a priori* principle. How might the realist *justify* that principle if challenged? One candidate valid argument for supervenience can only be given if an antirealist conception of truth is adopted. This raises a dilemma for the aesthetic realist: either give up supervenience to maintain realism, or give up realism. Additionally, I give independent arguments that the notion of supervenience is deeply troubled and quite possibly incoherent. Without a viable and coherent expression of the supervenience claim, the realist project is deeply threatened.

Problems with supervenience independent of its alliance with realism suggest that aesthetic antirealism is better off without it. The antirealist then must give an account of the ground of our aesthetic judgments that makes sense of the normativity of the discourse. Such an account is available, by applying Crispin Wright's minimalist framework to aesthetic discourse. Minimalism denies that truth is "intrinsically a metaphysically heavyweight notion—the mark of some specially profound form of engagement between language, or thought, and reality—for which certain areas of assertoric discourse, whatever internal discipline they manifest, may simply not be in the market."<sup>9</sup> According to Wright, assertions in a discourse are apt for truth when they have the right sort of syntax and discipline. I show that aesthetic discourse has these needed features. But the applicability of the minimalist theory of truth does not yet show that truth is constituted by best judgments, or to put it in metaphysical terms, that aesthetic qualities are mind-dependent. That point is established by examining the function of art theoretical and critical discourse. This claim may look suspiciously like an equivocation between aesthetic predicates and aesthetic qualities or properties. But although it has the hollow ring of an analytic philosophical slogan, it remains true that the character of aesthetic discourse is going to be our best indicator of the nature of the substance of aesthetics. That discourse comprises the language used, if never quite effectively, to capture the phenomenology of our interaction with artworks. And to the extent that the language we manifest corresponds to our inner experience in the concert hall or gallery, the language-based investigation aims to shed light on that experience as well.

The realist must accept this strategy, as it is an implication of the correspondence theory of truth to which she is committed. Even the antirealist who claims truth-aptness for a particular discourse must accommodate at least the platitude (q.v. Wright) that *in some sense to be made explicit* truth is correspondence with facts.

It may seem obvious that much of the language used to describe non-representational art—abstract painting and absolute music especially—is necessarily metaphorical. Without representational content, we are left with only the critical language of formalism, but our pervasive use of expressive predicates like *sad, troubled, lusty, triumphant*, and so on, outruns the attempt to restrict discourse to those terms sanctioned by the formalist. This is not merely a feature of the language used to describe our experience; the phenomenology of artworks includes palpable affective qualities. And here a simple-minded but truly challenging question emerges: how can a non-minded object bear such expressive properties? When the question is raised in this way, it is easy to see that representational artworks are open to it as well. The realist must be able to explain away the presence of metaphor if she is easily to traverse the arrowed path from 4. to 5. in the taxonomy. Predicates must correspond to properties, and any weakening of that correspondence weakens the case for any kind of realism. I argue that the correspondence is weakened by the fact that many aesthetic predicates do not directly refer to real properties, but are instead to be interpreted as metaphorical ascriptions. The modest realist seeks to accommodate the contribution of the experiencing mind to artworks by tagging aesthetic properties as response-dependent, and this move might look like a substitute for the metaphor claim. But if this is part of the motivation for the claim, then it really amounts to pointing away and then putting the coin in the other hand. Response-dependence and metaphoricity are not at all incompatible. In fact, there had better be *some* sense in which aesthetic qualities are response-dependent if normativity is going to be preserved. Furthermore, the response-dependence thesis rests on an analogy drawn between aesthetic qualities and secondary qualities like color, which I shall argue is a rather strained one. The realist, modest, robust, or otherwise, must engage with the issue of metaphor directly. I shall further argue that modest realist attempts to admit metaphorical predicates as the correspondents of “ineffable” properties is a disingenuous move, and one that is incompatible with realism.

Thus, the argument for metaphor is meant to increase the resistance to any realism while simultaneously providing a core of the argument for antirealist cognitivism.

The realist who concedes that many aesthetic predicates are metaphorical may object that this situation is just as bad for the antirealist who wishes to preserve objectivity. For if metaphors are understood as open-textured conceptual structures, it would seem that *any* judgment could in principle be justified, and so the antirealist aspiring to some notion of objectivity is pushed back to subjectivism. Indeed, this seems to be the happy conclusion of many postmodern theorists. I take that kind of cynical, anything-goes subjectivism to be no more defensible or desirable than what Hume calls the “vulgar” subjectivism of *de gustibus non est disputandum*. Both species are in considerable tension with the strongly normative quality of aesthetic discourse, and so I take it to be a prime task for the antirealist who pushes the metaphor line to show how subjectivism is to be avoided. To that end, understanding what norms discipline the practice of aesthetic judgment is a requirement for the development of a complete antirealist cognitivism.

Thus far my introductory remarks have concerned the predicates corresponding to aesthetic qualities like gracefulness, vibrancy, joyfulness, and balance. I have said little or nothing about “overall” predicates of aesthetic merit or demerit, such as “good”, “bad”, and so on. Some philosophers mark the difference between these two as one of descriptive versus normative predication, though this distinction seems indefensible. Others have labeled these two categories as “thick” and “thin” concepts, noting the evaluative aspect of predicates in the former list. I will not devote much space to arguing that this latter conception is the better one, and I will focus mainly on thick concepts in what follows. My reasons for doing so include the fact that any overall predication of good or bad demands a defense given in terms of other predicates from the former list, and so it stands to reason that an investigation into those concepts is the more fruitful one. Also, while “good” and “bad” seem to be straightforwardly thin in their apparent lack of descriptive content, other predicates which might be offered as subspecies or variants, like “bold”, “powerful”, “sublime”, “derivative”, “insincere”, and “bland” betray their more descriptive commitments rather quickly. So it seems that the first category is more fundamental, more interesting, and vastly larger than the thin language of approbation and its opposite.

What is at stake in the contest between realism and antirealism? First, antirealism of the cognitivist variety leaves room for principled critical disagreements without recourse to relativism. It is a commonplace in the artworld that critics and artists, each with strong claims to optimal judge status, disagree. On the realist view, at least one of the parties to such a dispute *must* be wrong, as there is a determinate, if inaccessible, fact of the matter. Many of these disputes, however, do not suggest any eventual resolution, and so many realists are drawn into a pluralist relativism. The disputants are not *really* in disagreement, because the critical vocabulary in which they make and defend their judgments is incommensurable. The harshly negative judgment of the Marxist critic is true-for-Marxist-critics and the mildly positive judgment of the formalist critic is true-for-formalist-critics. But this seems too high a price to pay for the sake of truth-aptness. What happens when critical schools have internal divergences? Such splitting of opinion makes both subjectivism and a kind of despairing skepticism real threats, because as long as we are willing to chalk up disagreements to incommensurable critical schools, or whatever other relativizing parameter we like, it will always be an open question whether we *should* make such an attribution or just declare someone wrong. The cognitivist antirealism I shall argue for aims to accommodate the practice of reasoned disqualification of some aesthetic judgments, while at the same time preserving a logical space for contradictory and true judgments in very specific circumstances.

What is at the root of the realism debate is a question about which of two conceptions of art to adopt. The aesthetic realist commits herself to a conception of artworks as akin to the objects of scientific enquiry. The experience of art, under this conception, is one of detection, discovery, or investigation. We engage with an artwork, immediately experiencing many of its qualities as the artwork is presented to us, and strive to discern those features that are not immediately apparent. Once we have done these things with the artwork at hand, we have discovered the work's properties. This process may take a long time—indeed, it may never be completed. But the properties of the work are no less determinate than those investigated by physical science, and this gives aesthetic discourse its objective character. The role of imagination in the experience of art is limited, for the realist, to discovery and appreciation, but plays no constitutive role.

## 1: Introduction

The aesthetic antirealist conception of artworks, on the other hand, takes them to be foci of imaginative activity. The artwork serves simultaneously to invite and constrain imaginative activity. Some of those imaginings can be properly said to be right, and some to be wrong. And those imaginings that are licensed are properly taken as partially *constitutive* of the artwork's ontological character. Specifically, imagination results in the imposition or projection of a foreign conceptual structure onto the art object. Qualities not inherent to the artwork are, through imagination, experienced as such, and come to form a proper part of the artwork. This conception straightforwardly accommodates the two puzzle-generating intuitions of the mind dependence of aesthetic qualities and the objectivity of aesthetic judgments.

It also takes leave from the majority philosophical view but returns philosophical theory to the commonsense artistic view. A typical source of frustration with artists is that they seem to be infuriatingly evasive or maliciously enthymematic with explanations of their own works. But more often than not, a simple explanation fails good art. In opening up the space for the constructions of the imagination, art is returned a great deal of complexity and subtlety that many realist views seem to take away. In identifying a vast range of the content of art as metaphorical, cognitivist antirealism supplies a set of criteria for the value of art. Rich metaphorical structures in artworks, in virtue of their openness and suggestiveness, reward continued and repeated contemplation; simple, pat metaphors will not, and the artworks instantiating those will not stand the test of time. It has long become a cliché that each successive experience of a particular good artwork is slightly different than the last. Still, there is truth in the cliché, and a mind-dependent status for aesthetic qualities yields a straightforward solution to the wonder of how this is so. On the realist view, the experience of individual artworks might well resemble a dull marriage, over time becoming an easily predictable experiential traffic with a fixed set of independent properties. But the same Homer who pleased in Athens and Rome, and in the Paris and London of Hume's day, pleases still, though in a sense he is very much a changed and changing man. And while realism is the dominant philosophical position in aesthetics, antirealism seems to be the intuitive view of arts practitioners and thus merits some consideration. If those practitioners

operate with a better model, there are still many difficulties to resolve, some of which concern the positive project of the present enquiry.

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981) 1.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*, 39.

<sup>3</sup> The broad characterization here misses at least one theory (J.L. Mackie's error theory) which, for other reasons, I wish to include under the antirealist banner.

<sup>4</sup> Note, however, that not all ethical judgments are motivating, and conversely, some aesthetic judgments are. For example, judgments about other's poor character seem not to motivate the judge, except in a negative sense. The judgment that something is aesthetically good or beautiful may motivate us to seek it out or to preserve it from destruction.

<sup>5</sup> Gregory Currie, *An Ontology of Art* (London: Macmillan, 1989).

<sup>6</sup> Clement Greenberg, "Miro and Masson" (20 May 1944), in Meyer, Peter, ed. *Brushes With History: Writing on Art from The Nation, 1865 – 2001* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press/Nation Books, 2001) 205.

<sup>7</sup> David Anfam, *Mark Rothko: Catalog Raisonné* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998) 11.

<sup>8</sup> David Hume, "The Skeptic", in his *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund: 1985) 164-165.

<sup>9</sup> Crispin Wright, *Truth and Objectivity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995) 24-25.

## Chapter 2

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Having mapped out the various positions that model the metaphysics of aesthetic judgment, I will in this chapter present arguments against a number of positions inadequate to that practice. After clearing the ground of the debate in this way, I shall move on to consider the more promising theories in the following chapters.

### 1. Antirealist Non-contenders: Subjectivism

Three of the non-contender theories are antirealist: subjectivism (emotivism), expressivism or quasi-realism (the terms shall be used interchangeably), and John Mackie's error theory. The first two positions are non-cognitivist, and share a number of serious, well-known difficulties.

As a pre-theoretical view, subjectivism enjoys a healthy, widespread existence. Though common-sense thinking is by no means unified in its conception of the claims of value judgments, the idea that aesthetic judgments obey only the law of *de gustibus non disputandum* is widespread. While philosophical work certainly goes beyond a mere recording of intuitions, this common-sense view has been endorsed and given theoretical reinforcement by much philosophy. Mary Mothersill claims that "...all attempts to force aesthetics into the mold of ethical theory must end in paradox and confusion. The two have, as it were, different centers of gravity."<sup>1</sup> While ethics is lawlike in nature, even in its pre-theoretical, practical form, aesthetics is a domain taken by what Hume calls "the vulgar" to be radically subjective. What I find aesthetically satisfying, and what you find aesthetically satisfying, depends heavily on our individual make-up. In the end, on this view, aesthetic judgments are no more than mere expressions of preference, and as such, it is meaningless to ask whose judgment is the right (or better) one. But this picture misses much of the story. "Common sense is content with its *de gustibus* motto until the moment it is challenged by some outrageous claim, and then[in Hume's words,] 'the natural equality of tastes is quite forgot.'"<sup>2</sup> At that moment, the common-sense approach betrays its inconsistencies.

However, while pre-theoretical subjectivism appears inconsistent, it remains to be seen whether a revisionist philosophical subjectivism might not be defended. Such a project

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would be revisionist at least in respect of Hume's observation of the reaction to the outrageous critical claim. The subjectivist at least carries the burden of explaining why we deliver such responses when, if subjectivism is true, all judgments stand on equal footing. This practice also brings out a more subtle problem, namely, the problem of explaining the seeming truth-aptness and meaningfulness of critical claims as merely an appearance.

Subjectivism holds that aesthetic judgments are not truth-apt; that is, they are not the kind of sentences that can bear truth values. Truth-aptness might be seen as the bare minimum condition that must be satisfied in order for a sentence to bear a truth value. "Truth conditions" can be parsed as that state of affairs in the world in virtue of which a sentence is true or false. The notion of truth conditions represents a greater metaphysical commitment than truth-aptness. Minimally, though, a truth-apt sentence "p" will satisfy the equivalence schema: "p" is true iff p.

The label "subjectivism" applies to two distinguishable theoretical species. The first is a kind of relativism to the individual. Statements like "this melody is playful" are to be understood as an abbreviated way of saying "this melody is playful *to me*". Any statement predicating a quality to an artwork implies a relativization of the predicate to the speaker, if subjectivism is true. The second species of subjectivism holds that aesthetic judgments, despite their predicative appearance, only serve to express an attitude toward the grammatical subject of the judgment claim. This is the emotivist position, advocated by the logical positivists. The motivation for such a view is the notorious claim that only sentences meeting the criterion of the verification principle are meaningful. Of moral sentences, A.J. Ayer writes:

The presence of an ethical symbol in a proposition adds nothing to its factual content. Thus if I am to say to someone, 'You acted wrongly in stealing that money', I am not stating anything more than if I had simply said, 'You stole that money'. In adding that this action is wrong I am not making any further statement about it. I am simply evincing my moral disapproval of it. It is if I had said 'You stole that money,' in a peculiar tone of horror, or written it with the addition of some special exclamation marks.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, an "aesthetic symbol" adds nothing to the meaning of a sentence in which it occurs, but rather serves only to flag a pro or con attitude—typically, toward the referent of the grammatical subject of a declarative sentence. And so a claim such as "This melody is

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playful” in fact expresses the thought “I like this melody,” but does not assert the content that the melody is playful.

What is striking about this view is the tight connection it creates between truth and meaningfulness. Aesthetic sentences are meaningless, and so neither true nor false. There is a thin, derivative sense in which such sentences are meaningful, as reports of attitudes that are held and may result in observable behavior. But the emotivist project is concerned with holding a contrast between stating and expressing. If we agree with the critic who says a certain melody is playful, we are not agreeing that a particular state of affairs obtains; rather, we are signaling our having the same pro attitude toward that melody and nothing more.

Why do aesthetic judgments fail to be fallible if the radical relativist species of subjectivism is true? On the plausible assumption that we cannot be mistaken about our own preferences, as long as we speak sincerely, we can never be wrong when we offer an aesthetic judgment, because we are merely reporting our individual preferences. So all sincere aesthetic judgments are true, making for a very trivial discourse indeed. Disagreements on this view are such only in appearance.

The motivations for adopting a philosophical subjectivism about aesthetic discourse arise from both epistemic and metaphysical considerations.<sup>4</sup> The epistemic concern that lends support to subjectivism is more sophisticated than the mere fact that more people prefer the mawkish landscapes of Thomas Kinkade (Figure 1<sup>5</sup>) to the more nuanced scenes painted by Edward Hopper (Figure 2). Rather, it gains credibility from the observation that preferences in art and critical predilections seem highly dependent on individual sensibilities. The metaphysical worry is that no set of aesthetic properties ever seems sufficient to guarantee the aesthetic value of a work, nor does any set of non-evaluative properties seem sufficient to determine some particular aesthetic property. So in a sense, subjectivism affirms both the impossibility of specifying in some neutral way when an artwork does warrant a certain evaluation, as well as the inappropriateness of disqualifying a simple preference.

There are several considerations that show subjectivism in aesthetics to be utterly indefensible. The subjectivist must deliver satisfactory answers to at least five questions; I will argue that she cannot adequately do so.

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- i. Is feeling necessarily connected with evaluation?
- ii. Can aesthetic feelings be distinguished from non-aesthetic feelings?
- iii. How finely grained can non-aesthetic feelings be?
- iv. Why does preference expression *exhaust* the use of aesthetic judgments?
- v. How are ostensibly assertoric aesthetic sentences distinguished from truly assertoric ones?

I shall examine these questions in turn.

(i.) Feeling is not necessarily connected with evaluation in the direct way that the subjectivist claims. There is no difficulty in my asserting on the one hand, the striking aesthetic demerits of 1950's science fiction B-movies, while non-ironically expressing my enjoyment of the very same. Conversely, I can acknowledge the artistic greatness of Mozart's orchestral works, while at the same time displaying my apathy toward or even mild dislike of them. Still other clear examples of aesthetic judgment do not obviously manifest any expression of preference. Take for example a remark on Barnett Newman's pictures (see Figure 3):

the stripe in Newman's works functions as a 'two-edged line, pushing or splitting apart the areas on either side of it, yet simultaneously or conversely holding them together.'...if we read Newman's pictures while looking upward, 'the bands bond the adjacent areas together'; but when our eyes travel downward, 'the bands divide or push them apart.'<sup>6</sup>

This critical assessment is unquestionably a judgment as opposed to a mere report of presentational features. The lines of Newman's paintings do not literally push, pull, hold, or split—this passage is an instance of interpretation, not just description. Yet it is unclear what pragmatic role—expressing either like or dislike for the work or the specific pictorial element—is to be assigned to it as the correct translation.

These examples show that it is possible to maintain a preferential attitude in opposition to the valence of an evaluation, as well as to offer an evaluation without manifesting any obvious preference. The subjectivist might essay the following explanation of the former case: while I may profess a general aversion to Mozart's symphonies, my acknowledgement of their greatness amounts to the manifestation of a pro-attitude toward them. It just so

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happens that I maintain conflicting attitudes toward the music in question. This is a plausible response, as it is no failure of rationality to hold conflicting attitudes. This explanation, however, becomes strained if we imagine that my aversion to Mozart is extremely strong but I maintain my reasonableness. Then, no matter how much I dislike Mozart, if I am musically literate, suitably informed about the musical genre at hand, and sincere, I should have to concede the artistic merits of his work. If I say only of a particular movement that it has a restrained playfulness, and a high degree of formal unity, I may not be telling the whole story of my attitude toward the music, but the direct connection between utterance and preference that the subjectivist asserts seems to be lacking.

In the latter case, where a judgment is made but no preference is easily discerned, the utterance-preference connection seems even more tenuous. The subjectivist might claim that although it is open to argument just what preferential attitude the critic has towards Barnett Newman's paintings, there is a preference all the same. It is true that the critic might have some preference, but the claim that the judgment amounts to a preference assertion when there is no clue as to how we might determine even the valence of that preference begs the question.

The question-begging is more sharply marked out when we consider what other function the critic's utterance appears to serve: of offering a meaningful claim that we can assess as right or wrong, simply by going to the paintings ourselves and seeing how the critic's remarks accord with our own experience. We have no such court of appeal in the case of preference expressions—in other words, if the critic is merely expressing a like or dislike of the paintings, there is nothing to be gained by confronting the artwork itself. The subjectivist now owes an explanation of why we engage in such misguided practices

(ii.) Wittgenstein writes in the *Philosophical Investigations*: "Won't it become a hopeless task to draw a sharp picture corresponding to the blurred one? ... And this is the position you are in if you look for definitions corresponding to our concepts in aesthetics or ethics."<sup>7</sup> But a blurred picture is something different still from an empty one. While we may not be capable of drawing a boundary around aesthetic discourse, we recognize paradigmatic concepts and sentences in the discourse: those invoking notions of beauty and ugliness, expressiveness,

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profundity, unity, and so on. The subjectivist claims that aesthetic sentences are mere expressions of feeling or preference. Either those feelings are of the same sort as non-aesthetic feelings or they are not. If not, then in engaging in aesthetic discourse we make use of a great deal of empty though apparently differentiable concepts. This picture is consistent with the subjectivist view, though it merely postpones the explanatory task to questions (iv) and (v)—why the role of aesthetic judgments is solely the expression of preference, and this despite the appearance of being properly assertoric.

On the other hand, if they are held to be the same sort, the subjectivist faces a different problem. Feelings—understood as occurrent emotional states—are individuated in part by their intentional objects. And in order to identify the intentional object of an emotion, a reference is necessarily made to the concomitant beliefs about the object. A dog evokes fear, and is that feeling's intentional object, paradigmatically (in part) because the dog is *believed* to be dangerous. Beliefs are susceptible of truth or falsity, and so there are legitimate considerations of appropriateness in a wide range of feelings. Because “mere” feelings themselves involve beliefs, the unadulterated non-cognitivism that would neatly separate affect from cognition is not available even in these basic emotional responses. If aesthetic feelings are indistinguishable from non-aesthetic ones, the former will share this cognitive aspect of the latter. The subjectivist might further limit the functional role of aesthetic sentences to the expression only of preference—of signaling like or dislike of varying degrees, but nothing more. This move, however, also shifts the burden to questions (iv) and (v), and, if aesthetic feelings are of a type with non-aesthetic ones, calls for a revisionist account for the full range of belief-involving expressions of feeling generally.

(iii.) Much ink is spilled over whether a certain passage is funereal or starkly melancholy, or whether a poem is revelatory or “merely” profound. On the preference expression interpretation of subjectivism, it is difficult to understand how such finely grained concept words are to be translated. A poem might be better artistically for being funereal, so the (presumably) negative valence of that predicate is no reliable indicator of the valence of the preference expressed. More to the point, there is no principled way to establish relative preferences between predicates such as “funereal” and “starkly melancholy” independent of context. Either could be a greater contributor to the overall merit of the artwork. The

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judgment (say, by the artist at the time of creation) as to which quality will be more effective is highly dependent on the other features of the artwork. So too the judgment by the critic as to which predicate better captures the feel of the finished product. In other words, the practice of making such fine distinctions between aesthetic qualities is subject to assertibility constraints. Should the subjectivist reply that a relative preference is implicit in the different applications of two such predicates, she again runs into the question-begging counter-objection to question (i).

If subjectivism is to be interpreted as a thesis about feelings rather than mere preferences, a different set of problems arises. Aesthetic judgments here are understood as expressions of feelings. A natural way to take this claim for judgments employing expressive predicates is to understand these as announcing one's affective response to the artwork. To pronounce a scherzo as "mischievous" is to announce the arousal of a feeling of mischievousness in oneself.

This is the basic idea of the arousal theory of expression. That theory has a number of well-rehearsed objections; for present purposes it is enough to mention two related ones that aim at the primary subjectivist thesis. In the discussion of question (i), I argued that feeling does not have a direct, necessary connection to evaluation. So, *a fortiori*, the deployment of an expressive predicate need not signal the occurrence of the same emotion in the critic. Indeed, it is a common experience to mark out an emotional quality in a work without feeling the same emotion—the hallmark of Bouwsma's "dry-eyed critics"<sup>8</sup>. The second, related objection is that such an account misrepresents the phenomenology. Particularly with the dry-eyed critic, it is the artwork that is experienced as having some emotional quality, and not oneself in the presence of the artwork.

But even these objections concede too much to the subjectivist by taking the battle to her turf. Whatever plausibility is gained for subjectivism by examining the use of expressive language in single instances vanishes when we ask for subtle distinctions between two closely related predicates. Consider the difference between *maudlin* and *mawkish*. Both are species of sentimentality, and both typically generate responses ranging from mild irritation to contempt or disgust. Part of the way in which the differences in these concepts are marked

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out, however, is belief-based. Paradigmatically, to be maudlin involves some measure of blamelessness—a person's sentimentality is often said to be maudlin when he is drunk. Mawkishness is simply a sickening sentimentality. To assign "maudlin" rather than "mawkish" requires the possession of a belief about some mitigating factor. Even more directly belief-dependent is the judgment whether to label an artwork "profound" or "revelatory". As Gaut expresses it, "to say that a work is profound involves claiming that it tells us something non-obvious and explanatorily important about matters which we believe are of central significance to our lives."<sup>9</sup> And though it should be granted that "revelatory" is often applied too generously, its careful use signifies something stronger than profundity—of revealing something deeply important and surprising that was previously secret or hidden. To use one of these rather than another is partly to assert a belief about the status of the particular idea expressed. In general, if fine-grained aesthetic predicates are legitimate constituents of the discourse, viewing them as mere expressions of feeling will be inadequate for their differentiation. For that, it is necessary to appeal to the varying beliefs implicit in their use.

(iv.) No one would deny that many aesthetic predicates do carry illocutionary force. Whatever else they might do, the predicates "strident", "shrill", and "impotent" typically serve to express an aversion to their (grammatical) subject. The subjectivist, of course, holds that this is the only function of aesthetic judgments. Wright contends that "if the positive account offered by an expressive theory nowhere goes beyond what an opponent would acknowledge as aspects of the 'pragmatics' of the relevant class of utterances, then that theoretical obligation remains to explain why it is that these pragmatic aspects actually *exhaust* the use of the relevant sentences and are not merely consequences of their possession of a genuinely assertoric role. Historically, this obligation has not, by and large, been met."<sup>10</sup> The subjectivist cannot merely be a naysayer. What, then, are some of the motivations for holding that the pragmatic function is exhaustive?

The root motivations for this view come from Logical Positivism, but that set of views can be considered to be decisively defeated. More recently, Blackburn offers two related considerations for the view. Blackburn's arguments feature in a somewhat different context, in defense of a thesis, quasi-realism, that holds that aesthetic (and moral) sentences are

merely expressive, but still truth-apt. Blackburn's quasi-realism shares with subjectivism the view that the pragmatic function of aesthetic sentences is exhaustive, so I shall consider his arguments in this context—if they help the case for quasi-realism they would do so for subjectivism as well, on this issue. The first consideration is an appeal to explanatory power: *given* that aesthetic sentences express attitudes, “if we see the remark[s] as having no truth-conditions the philosophy improves; so let us see the remark[s] as expressive rather than descriptive.”<sup>11</sup> The trouble with this appeal is, again, that many unquestionably aesthetic sentences do not obviously express an attitude—recall, for example, the passage on the dynamic effects of the vertical lines in Barnett Newman's paintings. If that passage is to be taken as a purely expressive remark, it is not at all clear what attitude it should be understood as expressing. Putting aside the larger questions of truth-conditionality versus truth-aptness, it just seems false that the Newman passage is merely an expression of feeling, since we can go to Newman's paintings and judge whether the remark accords with our own experience or not. In other words, we can see if the remark *describes* our experience as well as that of the critic's. This, however, is just the function that non-cognitivist accounts deny to aesthetic language. Blackburn's second thought is that “it does not matter at all if an utterance is descriptive as well as expressive, providing that its *distinctive* meaning...is expressive. [...] It is the *extra import* making the term evaluative as well as descriptive, which must be given an expressive role.”<sup>12</sup> But again, as I argued above, even if we restrict our interest to clearly preference-expressing sentences, it is clear that the identification of the distinctive content will involve truth-evaluable beliefs. An affect/belief gap cannot be maintained in the way required by subjectivism.

(v.) The task of demarcating merely apparent assertoric sentences from actual ones looks to be a deeply prejudicial one. The sentences under suspicion are identifiable only by their subject matter; the syntax of the suspects, like that of innocent assertions, allows “for instance, a full range of tenses, appraisal as “true”, “false”, “exaggerated”, “justified,” and so on; they may feature embedded in the ascription of propositional attitudes; and they admit of compounding under the full range of logical operations.”<sup>13</sup> It may be open to the subjectivist to apply a revisionist interpretation to the everyday use of truth predicates and their kin for these sentences. What is more problematic is the necessity of banning certain classes of sentences if the revisionist project is to be carried through.

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To start with, while statements such as “The canvas surges with primordial energy” must certainly be admissible as paradigmatic aesthetic sentences, second-order sentences of the form “It is true that the canvas surges with primordial energy” cannot be. Nor can belief ascriptions such as “Her critical naivete leads her to believe that the canvas surges with primordial energy.” The first order sentence, remember, is not true or false (except perhaps in some thin sense), but merely expressive of an attitude. The first problematic sentence explicitly presents the same thought as true, and the second one explicitly asserts that someone holds a belief, and implies that said belief is false. Either the sentential operators attributing belief and indicating truth, as well as the principles of conversational implicature, work differently in aesthetic discourse or not. If they work differently, then the subjectivist owes a revisionist account of these features. If one cannot be given, then the subjectivist is forced to ban the offending sentences from proper aesthetic language.

This problem is brought into sharp focus by Peter Geach’s article “Assertion”<sup>14</sup>, the kernel of which has become known alternatively as the Frege Point or the embedding problem. Geach’s target is moral expressivism, but an aesthetic analog can be drawn. The Frege Point is that “a thought may have just the same content whether you assent to its truth or not; a proposition may occur in discourse now asserted, now unasserted, and yet be recognizably the same proposition.”<sup>15</sup> So any account that disallows the use of sentences to mean in unasserted contexts is to be avoided. Geach argues that if moral sentences serve only to express a non-truth evaluable attitude, there is no way to explain their role in the antecedent of conditionals.

An aesthetic example can be extracted from Addison’s satirical remarks on the faddishly celebrated *opera seria*:

...an established rule, which is receiv’d as such to this day, that nothing is capable of being well set to Musick that is not Nonsense. This Maxim was no sooner receiv’d, but we immediately fell to translating the Italian operas; and as there was no great Danger of hurting the Sense of those extraordinary Pieces, our Authors would often make Words of their own, entirely foreign to the Meaning of the Passages they pretended to translate.<sup>16</sup>

And from these, the following inference<sup>17</sup> can be constructed:

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1. The use of coloratura on nonsense words is an artistic defect.
2. If the use of coloratura on nonsense words is an artistic defect, then *The Beggar's Opera* is in this respect artistically better than *Giulio Cesare*.
3. Therefore, *The Beggar's Opera* is in this respect artistically better than *Giulio Cesare*.

The antecedent of (2), 'the use of coloratura on nonsense words is an artistic defect', is unasserted, and therefore expresses no attitude. But if the modus ponens inference here is to be truth-preserving, the constituent propositions must preserve their meanings in all the premises of the argument. On the subjectivist account, this plainly fails to happen, as 'the use of coloratura on nonsense words is an artistic defect' in (1) *merely* expresses a con-attitude toward a certain musical style, and so the argument above equivocates.

For an emotivist of Ayer's ilk, the worry raised here is really not one at all—if aesthetic sentences are meaningless anyway by virtue of their use of aesthetic concept words, then they certainly would not play any proper role in inferences. But for a subjectivist who grants some thin meaning to aesthetic sentences, this worry is a real one. At the very least it suggests that the sentences cannot figure in unasserted contexts, and thus subjectivism rules out even simple deductive patterns of reasoning. So the purely expressive use of aesthetic sentences trumps the seeming propriety of their assertoric application. Moreover, we often deliberate over, for example, whether or not a composition is lively or chaotic. But this practice implicitly involves us in truth-talk by way of what Bob Hale calls the *transparency property*: to think, wonder, etc. whether p is the same thing as thinking, wondering, etc., whether it is true that p.<sup>18</sup> The subjectivist not only cannot accommodate the Frege point, but also needs to supply a revisionist account of the transparency property.

Simple subjectivism, then, is an inadequate theory. Feeling and evaluation are not tightly connected in the way required by subjectivism. Any feelings evinced by aesthetic judgments are distinguishable in part by their cognitive content, and so the sharp affect/belief dichotomy invoked by the subjectivist is untenable. Many judgments do not, or at least do not obviously, express an attitude or feeling. And the claim that aesthetic sentences have only a pragmatic role is unsupported and belied by a wide range of truth-bearing uses.

## 2. Antirealist Non-contenders: Quasi-Realism

Simon Blackburn's quasi-realism is the most sophisticated and contemporary version of expressivism, and so I shall confine my discussion of expressivism to his theory. Quasi-realism is a semantic project tied to a particular metaphysical view, which Blackburn calls projectivism, after Hume. In his *Enquiry*, Hume writes:

[Reason] conveys the knowledge of truth and falsehood: [Taste] gives the sentiment of beauty and deformity, vice and virtue. The one discovers objects as they really stand in nature, without addition or diminution: the other has a productive faculty, and gilding or staining all natural objects with the colours, borrowed from internal sentiment, raises in a manner a new creation.<sup>19</sup>

Blackburn develops Hume's metaphors into a distinct metaphysical conception of value properties (even if Hume would not share that conception). "Genuine, observed" properties impinge on our senses, and on that basis we project other properties back onto our representation of the world. In so doing, we manifest "habits, emotions, sentiments, and attitudes", about which we can theorize; we also construct value concepts, which adds to our description of the world, and we take the world to contain these projected properties or states of affairs.<sup>20</sup> Blackburn's projectivism holds, *contra* Mackie, that projection does not involve error. If true, it need not entail that our evaluative practice is illegitimate. Quasi-realism is the semantic theory that centrally holds that even if projectivism is true of a domain, there is nothing improper in the ostensibly realist language of its corresponding discourse. In other words, grant that there are no objective aesthetic properties. The quasi-realist aspires to hold onto the assertoric character of aesthetic discourse all the same.

Blackburn offers three considerations in favor of the projective theory: its ontological economy, its better explanation of supervenience (compared with realist views), and its better explanation of the connection between judgment and action (compared with cognitivist views). For all its metaphysical attractions, however, Blackburn's metaphysics is too underequipped a theory to do the work he wishes it to do. Independently, quasi-realism fails to live up to its promise because of its inadequate response to the Frege Point, and because it involves an unwarranted assumption about attitude convergence.

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The metaphysical issues first. Blackburn's theory is an improvement over subjectivism in that values are not explanatorily dependent on attitudes. That is, a poem is not profound merely in virtue of my feeling or exclaiming it so. Blackburn distances himself from idealists and anti-realists who place mind-dependence at the center of their respective theories. He states: "...when a commitment is...independent of our minds and their properties, the projectivist can conform to ordinary claims that it is. He does not need to deny any of the common-sense commitments or views about the way in which their truth arises."<sup>21</sup> It seems, then, that the projectivist follows the common-sense categorization of facts under mind-dependent and mind-independent headings. Certainly it is the ambition of quasi-realism to preserve the familiar second-order talk of an evaluative discourse. What grounds an internalist discourse like aesthetics or ethics is a realm of natural facts or states of affairs on which the evaluative supervenes. So the metaphor of projection, Blackburn writes, "needs a little care."<sup>22</sup> Only natural properties and our responses to them figure in the reason-giving practice of defending judgments of value. Blackburn explicitly denies that value judgments are statements about the judge. "We should not say or think that were our sentiments to alter or disappear, moral facts would do so as well."<sup>23</sup> The point can be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to aesthetic judgment. This account, however, makes it unclear just what the unique claims of quasi-realism are. Blackburn wants at once to give a theory of value judgment that gives roles both to natural properties and our responses to them, and at the same time to hold that should our particular responses change *en masse*, there would still be the same set of moral and aesthetic facts attached to the objects of our experience.

There are two possibilities here. First, that whatever our sensibilities, we can somehow find our way to the aesthetic facts. In this case a theoretical account of our responses to natural properties is superfluous. But persons or groups with diminished sensibility—say, an island of colorblind persons—will not be able to find their way to a great number of aesthetically relevant facts. It also seems true that a sufficiently different, though non-diminished, sensibility bars access as well, as in the case of Western readers of Japanese literature who do not typically experience *amae*. That feeling of dependence on group membership for one's well-being and identity is often positively valenced in Japanese literature, and indeed is characterized as 'sweet' in its manifestations outside literature. But that same concept is quite opposed to the individualism of Western literature, and Western readers commonly

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find the group dynamic stifling. In cases like this, the judgments we render are highly sensitive to the responses we bring to bear, and so a theory of judgment requires some account of the sensibilities involved.

The second possibility is that a shift in our sensibilities disables us, preventing us from getting at the fixed aesthetic facts. If aesthetic facts were fixed, then such a shift would be a disability, in the same way that a perceptual defect causing us consistently to misrepresent some aspect of the world would be. But what evidence is available for the claim that there is or could be a beauty no one could ever properly appreciate? There is no good reason to postulate qualities or objects to which we have in principle no direct or indirect experiential access within aesthetics as much as anywhere else. Ultimately, it is difficult to see just how the projectivist/quasi-realist view is a position distinct either from realism or subjectivism. The claim that value judgments encode a response to experienced features of the world does not, ultimately, fit with the claim that should the pattern of responses shift or disappear, the aesthetic facts would remain the same.

Blackburn's exposition of quasi-realism<sup>24</sup> centers on the expressivist rejoinder to Geach's challenge. Blackburn argues that in forming a conditional statement with an evaluative proposition as its antecedent, we are working out the implications of a certain commitment.<sup>25</sup> A priority of any evaluative discourse that denies subjectivism is the endorsement of some viewpoints and the rejection of others. In moral language, we call endorsed views 'admirable' or 'virtuous', and reject others with 'crude', 'moralistic', or 'misguided'. So too with aesthetic views: 'sensitive', 'refined', 'philistine', 'crude', or 'curmudgeonly'. What is expressed in the conditional, according to Blackburn, is an attitude toward a pair of attitudes, and that complex attitude is itself evaluable as admirable or not. So a sensibility that pairs 'the use of coloratura on nonsense words is an artistic defect' with '*Giulio Cesare* is artistically better than *The Beggar's Opera*' does not signal a logical inconsistency but an attitudinal one, one that licenses our denouncing it. Quasi-realism, then, responds to the Frege Point by holding that the validity of the inference lies in the constraint on the sets of attitudes that may be held consistently.

There are two significant difficulties with this strategy. First, it makes it obscure how the conditional is to be interpreted. “It is clearly crucial that we should be able to understand attitudinal inconsistency independently, without falling back on ‘descriptive’ inconsistency (impossibility of joint truth).”<sup>26</sup> After all, quasi-realism denies a descriptivist semantics for the discourse to which it applies. There is, then, some interest in the proper interpretation of the conditional. Blackburn sketches a semantic theory which features attitude operators  $H!(x)$  and  $B!(x)$  which express pro- and con- attitudes respectively, and have non-expressive descriptions as their scope. The expressive conditional is taken to have the structure  $H!([B!(p); [B!(q)])]$ . In other words, we applaud the compound of disvaluing nonsense coloratura together with a disvaluing of an artwork that features it. Blackburn wants to read the relationship of the two attitudes as ‘q follows upon p’. This interpretation, however, is not available to the quasi-realist. Hale objects that “the problem was, *inter alia*, to explain how we come to speak conditionally of our commitments—the theory loses all interest if it merely sneaks in conditionality in an unfamiliar guise.”<sup>27</sup> An alternative interpretation is thus called for. Should the expressive conditional be read as ‘p combined with q’, then “the trouble... is that it is unclear in what way precisely the combination of attitudes in question is supposed to be inconsistent.”<sup>28</sup> For again, there is no option of taking p and q to be truth-apt propositions, so there is no direct way of showing them to be incompatible. The quasi-realist requires a further set of inferential principles for that task, and any such introduction would be alarmingly ad hoc jury-rigging.

The quasi-realist has here a second serious problem. The quasi-realist, recall, wishes to retain legitimate talk of truth. To call a judgment true would be to signal its being a member of some “‘best possible set of attitudes’, thought of as the limiting set which would result from taking all possible opportunities for improvement of attitude.”<sup>29</sup> The trouble here is that Blackburn is not entitled to the premise that there is, for a given object of judgment, a unique limit on which attitudes converge. Though he argues that “we are constrained to argue and practice as though the truth is single”<sup>30</sup>, it does not follow from this there is a unique best possible set. Indeed, it is often the case that art-critical judgments cite convincing reasons in support and yet conflict with one another. It is possible to see both judgments as divergent but equally defensible, and then the invocation of a unique limiting

set is question-begging, even under a constructivist account of truth. Ultimately, the worry still remains that the expressivist rejoinder to Geach's argument is inadequate.

### 3. Antirealist Non-contenders: Error Theory

It is not obvious, based on semantic considerations, that the error theory (taken in isolation) proposed by John Mackie is an antirealist one.<sup>31</sup> Realism involves two central claims: assertions in the discourse are determinately true or false, and are so in virtue of some mind-independent entities. Mackie argues that the second condition is simply unfulfilled—that there are no truth-makers for aesthetic (and moral) discourse. Statements in that discourse, then, are truth-apt but always false by default.

Mackie claims that values are not objective, not “part of the fabric of the world”, and means to include not only moral values but also “aesthetic ones, beauty and various kinds of artistic merit.”<sup>32</sup> He refers to his position as a kind of value “skepticism”, but it is really an atheistic, and not an agnostic, view of value properties generally. His arguments treat moral value directly, but, he writes, “clearly much the same considerations apply to aesthetic and to moral values, and there would be some initial implausibility in a view that gave the one a different status from the other.”<sup>33</sup> Grant the analogy. Mackie's arguments for his error theory are basically two in number: the argument from relativity and the argument from queerness.

The argument from relativity is really just a slightly more carefully expressed version of common subjectivism or cultural relativism. “The argument from relativity has as its premiss the well-known variation in moral codes from one society to another and from one period to another, and also the differences in moral beliefs between different groups and classes within a complex community.”<sup>34</sup> Mackie goes on to argue that while there are also divergences in scientific opinion, these can be explained by insufficient evidence one way or another; there is no need to countenance scientific relativism. But in the moral (and in the aesthetic) domain, “it is hardly plausible to interpret...disagreement in the same way. Disagreement about moral codes seems to reflect people's adherence to and participation in different ways of life.”<sup>35</sup> Presumably disagreement over aesthetic questions will reflect

allegiances to different cultural traditions or critical schools. Mackie sees the causal connection between evaluation and object to be the reverse of the scientific claim – object connection. For example, “people approve of monogamy because they participate in a monogamous way of life rather than that they participate in a monogamous way of life because they approve of monogamy.”<sup>36</sup> This of course is the Euthyphro contrast, but Mackie simply offers no argument for reading it with Euthyphro rather than with Socrates. There is no reason to accept the skeptical conclusion based on the mere basis of diversity. What is needed is a “domain-specific account of why diversity of opinion impeaches all opinion”<sup>37</sup>; without it, the skeptical conclusion is unwarranted. Mackie’s argument (charitably so dubbed) is paradoxically self-refuting if true, for there is considerable diversity of philosophical views on the very topic of Mackie’s enquiry. But, “since we do not think that philosophical opinions are caused by philosophical facts, we do not conclude from the diversity of philosophical views...that no positive philosophical thesis is sound.”<sup>38</sup>

This way of identifying the failure of the argument from relativity moves right into Mackie’s second argument, the argument from queerness. “If there were objective values, then they would be entities of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the universe. Correspondingly, if we were aware of them, it would have to be by some special faculty of moral [or generally, value] perception or intuition, utterly different from our ordinary ways of knowing everything else.”<sup>39</sup> His further arguments for this picture rely on the alleged implausibility of the inclusion of inherently motivating moral facts or properties in a physicalist ontology. The connection between judgment and action is less clear in the aesthetic case, but the issues about motivation need not be broached to see the flaws with this argument. The argument from queerness, shifted to a metaphilosophical thesis, is patently self-refuting as well. Mackie implicitly holds to an austere physicalism, such that only those things that stand in causal relations to other things can be admitted to the ontology. But this quite obviously does not apply to philosophical claims, nor to logical or mathematical ones. If the argument from queerness were true, then we could admit no proposition from any of these domains as true, a conclusion that Mackie would doubtless wish to avoid.

### 2.3: Error Theory

Consider a (provisional) distinction between the *raw object* and the *art object*. The raw object is the mere sequence of sounds, paint on canvas, print on paper, in other words, the mere physical object or event corresponding to the art object. The art object is the object of aesthetic experience, differentiated by interpretation, contextual knowledge, and so on. The raw object is a merely physical instantiation of the abstract art object, though at least some such physical instantiation is of course necessary if we are to experience the artwork.

Mackie's conception allows only for true propositions at the raw object level, the level of empirical explanation. But if the argument from queerness is to be rejected on the grounds that it prohibits too much, then there is no reason to suppose that it shows that truth-apt aesthetic discourse should be limited to the raw object level, either.

#### 4. Realist Non-contenders: Platonic Realism

Mackie's view represents a kind of antirealist counterpart to platonic realism in its insistence that if judgments are objective, they could only be so in virtue of some strongly mind-independent facts or properties which were somehow part of the fabric of the world. Indeed, he claims that "Plato's Forms give a dramatic picture of what objective values would have to be."<sup>40</sup> Mackie denies truth to all aesthetic judgments on the ground that nothing akin to platonic forms is available to secure their truth. Are there any positive arguments to be given in favor of platonic realism?<sup>41</sup>

It should be noted here that the conception of platonism investigated here is a modern one, where the properties in question are strongly mind-independent and do not supervene on other properties. If aesthetic values or qualities were platonic forms, then objectivity of judgment is easily accounted for: judgments are true just when they correctly represent an artwork's participation in one or more forms. Since the forms are completely mind-independent, such a judgment represents not a state of the judge's mind, for instance, but a strongly objective state of affairs. Such a metaphysical picture is too implausible despite the easy route it offers to objectivity, however. The forms are "most naturally characterized in negative terms. They are non-spatial, non-temporal, non-sensible, non-relational, non-perspectival, and invariant."<sup>42</sup> As such they are also both causally and conceptually

independent of any features of the spatio-temporal world. But this radical independence is not at all reflected in the practice of rendering, defending, and questioning aesthetic judgments. Take the following example, this passage on Cézanne's *Railway Cutting* (Figure 4):

Bounded below by two horizontal strips of land, which permit no entry into the scene, the picture is rigorously divided into three equal sections centred around the prominent railway cutting and signal-box. The strict, ternary design is reinforced by the heavy application of bold, localized hues and the rhyming curves of the hill, cutting, and mountain, which mark the broad divisions of the landscape. [...] Cézanne appears here...to transcend the furious passions of his youth and suddenly gain a measure of his future strength. It is hard to think of an earlier landscape of comparable size and ambition that is so unburdened of pictorial fact or so condensed in expression.<sup>43</sup>

If the platonic metaphysical conception were the correct one, any appeal to descriptive features of the painting, such as its division into three well-defined spatial planes, or to the depth and placement of color, would be quite out of place in defending its strength or density of expression. The painting would have those strictly through its participation in the forms of Pictorial Strength and Pictorial Expression. Such a status is altogether independent of whether we might so identify it, but our doing so cannot depend on our being sensitive to composition or color, or for that matter, to the picture's place in Cézanne's *oeuvre*. Aesthetic discourse, then, would consist largely of noting the presence of certain qualities, without appeal to other considerations, and critical disputes would be little more than gainsaying.

The platonist, then, owes us a different kind of error theory, one that accounts for the peculiar practice of noting features irrelevant to the real aesthetic properties of the work. Why do these features seem relevant when in fact they are not? Why do we take ourselves to be providing reasons for our judgments when we really have changed the subject? Platonism gives too little regard to the actual practices surrounding the production and experience of art, and so should be rejected as bad metaphysics. Any interesting metaphysics will be both revisionary of some and conservative of other intuitions we hold. Platonism, though, errs in interposing too great a distance between our actual practices (including our thoughts about those practices) and the way things *really* are (according to platonism). Mackie's assertion that only platonic values could deliver objectivity amounts to a philosophical scare tactic. It remains open to consideration that whatever is objective must be mind-independent in such a strong sense.

## 5. Realist Non-contenders: Reductionist Realism

Reductionist realism is a substantial improvement on the platonic conception, directly acknowledging the role of citing other facts in defense of proffered aesthetic judgments. It also shares the discomfort with aesthetic talk that motivates both emotivism and Mackie's error theory.

Reductionism, like these, is an Archimedean project, seeking to make talk of aesthetic qualities respectable by going outside aesthetics. In general, reductionism involves some problematic domain, a second domain to which it can be reduced, and a set of bridge laws that specify the translation of sentences between the two. Aesthetics, to someone sympathetic to Vienna Circle positivism, seems problematic because its properties would either be ontologically queer or require a special faculty for their detection. Because artworks are standardly instantiated by a material object or a (reasonably) well-defined event, the obvious reductive domain to choose is the domain of natural properties. Such an aesthetic naturalism, including the necessary bridge laws, would secure objectivity for aesthetic discourse via the objectivity of natural, scientifically observable properties. Classing reductionism as a realist position may seem mistaken, as the historical variations—verificationism, phenomenism, and formalism, to name a few—were staunchly anti-realist. Its classification one way or the other requires some further theoretical commitments. Since strong reductionism claims there are identity relationships across the two domains involved, and since the common-sense view of one of those domains (here, natural properties) is realist, the position may well be labeled a realist one. Very little of what follows turns on the difference in any case.

Propositions about natural properties, those that figure in scientific investigation, can be justified "ultimately by their role in explaining observations...."<sup>44</sup> Natural properties are admitted to the ontology just when they figure in the best possible explanation of observable phenomena. Naturalistic discourse is an ostensibly neutral one, since the status of its entities is open to empirical investigation, and this neutrality is a great part of the appeal of aesthetic reductionism. So the distinctive claim of naturalism is that facts about aesthetic qualities can be construed to be facts about natural properties. The appeal of this claim is its removal of

## 2.5: *Reductionist Realism*

an ontological discomfort and its provision of an easy route to objectivity. And if principles of craft are in use (e.g. to express melancholy, use a melody with sustained notes in a minor key and a slow tempo), some obvious candidate bridge laws are at hand. Aesthetic reductionism, however, shares many of the same critical difficulties with its parallels in ethics and the philosophy of mind.

If reductionism is true, then suspicion of aesthetic discourse is unfounded. Grant for the sake of argument that M (the aesthetic property of melancholy) consists in the natural property set NS: {slow tempo, simultaneous pitches in a particular array, ...}. This is a substantive identity claim. There would be no difference, then, in what two people assert if one claims that only these natural properties produce M or warrant the judgment that something has M, and the other says that M is identical with NS. The first of these looks like a critical claim within aesthetics, while the second one aspires to a neutral stance. But the first assertion is no more suspicious than the second, since they have the same meaning. If all along aesthetic talk was translatable into natural property discourse, then there should be no special worry about the use of aesthetic language.

Furthermore, it remains an open question whether M is identical with NS. Indeed, critical disputes often focus on these sorts of matters—whether a passage expresses melancholy or is dull and lifeless, in virtue of the same musical attributes. It is a remarkable feature of aesthetic discourse that many predicates within it have oppositely valenced counterparts: bold vs. strident, vibrant vs. garish, delicate vs. limp, restrained vs. bland. These predicate pairs are often applied to the same (arguably) non-evaluative sets of properties. If the parties to the dispute agree on the same presentational features of the artwork in question, then reductionism seems much less plausible, for apparent want of a specific bridge law that would settle the dispute.

The problem of multiple realizability also arises here. Melancholy, or gracefulness, will, of necessity, be realized differently in a painting than in a poem or sonata. The reductionist might respond that we need only identify medium-specific properties, and specify different bridge laws and natural property sets for each. But the problem remains, even within one narrowly-defined artistic genre. A claim that a work exhibits gracefulness might be

## 2.5: Reductionist Realism

supported by noting the delicacy of contour, and the interplay between compositional elements and narrative content, such as the rounded female curves and erotically suggestive placement of the hands in Picasso's *La Reue* (Figure 5). Alternatively, the unnaturally elongated features and static, upright posture of one of Modigliani's portrait sitters (Figure 6) exudes a very different kind of gracefulness, but gracefulness nevertheless. In semantic terms, the reductionist also owes an account of the translation from representational predications ("static, upright posture"), quasi-technical predications ("delicate contours"), to name but two kinds, to some more basic vocabulary—and it is less than clear that such a translation would continue to be meaningful or useful for the purpose of describing the quality of the experience of the artwork. Were the reductionist to propose a work-specific classification of aesthetic properties, then the position becomes an entirely trivial one.<sup>45</sup>

The intuitions behind naturalism are two: aesthetic judgments are defended by reasons invoking natural qualities, and the set of all natural properties is both ontologically and explanatorily exhaustive. The first alone does not entail naturalism; it is consistent with other realist and indeed more than one antirealist position. Alone, it does not entail naturalism because explanations of aesthetic judgments do not invoke *only* natural qualities. The trouble is that the second intuition is never really validated. Reductionism offers to give a natural-property characterization for aesthetic properties, which are multiply-realizable. This means that the truth of a single aesthetic property claim relies on the truth of innumerable many sets of (possibly) infinitely many true natural property statements. And as Dummett argues, "there is therefore no guarantee that there exists in the language the means of expressing the infinite disjunction of infinite conjunctions that would, if expressible, render the statement of the disputed class in terms of the vocabulary of the reductive class."<sup>46</sup> Aesthetic sentences, for all their purported suspiciousness, are expressible. The inexpressibility of a translated sentence does not falsify reductionism, but there is very little reason to accept a theory whose characteristic outputs are in principle inexpressible, especially if these outputs are the only basis for accepting the second naturalistic intuition.

The prejudice behind reductionism is the same one that motivates Mackie's view: any ontologically admissible entity would have to play a role in the best causal explanation for our experience. But as I have argued, this stringent requirement would bar not only

unreduced aesthetic talk, but also mathematical, logical, and philosophical claims, to name three. There is a real puzzle about these claims, and about what makes them true, but the aspiring reductionist in practice makes assertions in each of these domains. So reductionism is self-refuting in exactly the same way, and should be rejected.

## 6. Summary

I have canvassed three non-realist and two realist positions that seek to give an account of the nature of aesthetic judgment and found them unsatisfactory. All of them share the suspicion that aesthetic discourse must be made respectable by metaphysical grounding in some neutral, less controversial, domain. For subjectivism and quasi-realism, the grounding domain is that of human desire and feeling. For Mackie's error theory and platonism, the ground is in a strongly mind-independent realm of values. And for reductionism, the ground is the domain of empirical properties. The project of grounding aesthetics in pure preference makes nonsense out of much of the discourse, and relies on false premises, such as a neat split between belief and emotion. The other three prejudice the debate by insisting on a standard of objectivity that either makes values inaccessible or responsible to a causal explanatory test that rules out other discourses with the same clumsy sweep.

In short, I have argued directly from the syntax and discipline of aesthetic discourse, and indirectly by undermining alternative views, that aesthetic discourse is truth-apt and descriptivist, and that there is no in principle barrier to the truth of some statements within it. Returning to the taxonomy diagrammed in Figure 1, three positions remain. If not all aesthetic judgments are extension-reflecting, then cognitivist antirealism gives the best theoretical explanation of aesthetic judgement. If they are all extension-reflecting, then the properties to which they refer are non-reducible and supervenient, leaving two realist positions: modest and robust realism. I turn to an examination of these latter two next.

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Mothersill, *Beauty Restored* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984) 170.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid* 188. The quote occurs in a grossly uncharitable reading of Hume's essay "Of the Standard of Taste", yet it does capture the quickness with which *de gustibus* claims are sometimes given up.

<sup>3</sup> A.J. Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic* (New York: Dover Publications, 1952) 107.

<sup>4</sup> Pre-philosophical subjectivism is driven largely by an unargued-for egalitarianism and deep suspicion of "elitism".

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix 1 for color images of the numbered figures.

<sup>6</sup> Jack Flam, "Space Men", review of *Paths to the Absolute*, by John Golding, *New York Review of Books*, 26 April 2001, 14.

- <sup>7</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (New York: Macmillan, 1953) §77.
- <sup>8</sup> Bouwsma, O.K., "The Expression Theory of Art", William Elton, ed. *Aesthetics and Language* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1959) 73-99.
- <sup>9</sup> Berys Gaut, *Moral and Aesthetic Evaluation*, Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1991, 119.
- <sup>10</sup> Crispin Wright, "Realism, Antirealism, Irrrealism, Quasi-Realism", *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 12 (1988) 30.
- <sup>11</sup> Simon Blackburn, *Spreading the Word* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1984) 170.
- <sup>12</sup> *ibid*, 170.
- <sup>13</sup> Crispin Wright, "Realism, Antirealism, Irrrealism, Quasi-Realism" 31.
- <sup>14</sup> Peter Geach, "Assertion", *Philosophical Review* 74 (1965) 449-465.
- <sup>15</sup> *ibid* 449.
- <sup>16</sup> from *The Spectator*, 1711, quoted from Jacques Barzun, *From Dawn to Decadence* (New York: HarperCollins, 2000) 328.
- <sup>17</sup> It does not matter whether the premises are true, as the issue at hand is the validity of the inference, for the testing of which we may assume the truth of the premises.
- <sup>18</sup> Bob Hale, "The Compleat Projectivist: Critical Notice of Simon Blackburn's *Spreading the Word*", *Philosophical Quarterly* 36 (1986) 79.
- <sup>19</sup> David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, rev. P.H. Nidditch, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975) 294.
- <sup>20</sup> Simon Blackburn, *Spreading the Word* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1984) 181-2.
- <sup>21</sup> *ibid* 218.
- <sup>22</sup> *ibid* 219 n.1.
- <sup>23</sup> *ibid*.
- <sup>24</sup> As presented in *Spreading the Word*; Blackburn develops the view in response to critical pressures in subsequent work, though he seems to stick to the central tenets of the view as initially presented.
- <sup>25</sup> Simon Blackburn, *Spreading the Word* 192.
- <sup>26</sup> Bob Hale, "The Compleat Projectivist" 73.
- <sup>27</sup> *ibid* 74.
- <sup>28</sup> *ibid*.
- <sup>29</sup> Simon Blackburn, *Spreading the Word* 198.
- <sup>30</sup> *ibid* 201.
- <sup>31</sup> That Mackie's position is an antirealist one comes out in his positive theory.
- <sup>32</sup> J.L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (London: Penguin Books, 1977) 15.
- <sup>33</sup> *ibid*.
- <sup>34</sup> *ibid* 36.
- <sup>35</sup> *ibid* 36.
- <sup>36</sup> *ibid*.
- <sup>37</sup> Ronald Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth: You'd Better Believe It", *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 25 (1996) 113.
- <sup>38</sup> *ibid* 113-114.
- <sup>39</sup> Mackie 38.
- <sup>40</sup> *ibid* 40.
- <sup>41</sup> I use 'platonic' rather than 'Platonic' as a label for the view under consideration to indicate that it is not Plato's, but rather one which employs a modern metaphysics on the model of Plato.
- <sup>42</sup> A.E. Denham, *Metaphor and Moral Experience* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000) 29.
- <sup>43</sup> Richard Verdi, *Cézanne* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992) 55.
- <sup>44</sup> Gilbert Harman, *The Nature of Morality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) 9.
- <sup>45</sup> These considerations might well motivate a supervenience claim. But this is not the reductionist project, and arguments in the next chapter challenge the viability of a supervenience claim generally.
- <sup>46</sup> Michael Dummett, *The Logical Basis of Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991) 323.

## Chapter 3

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In the previous chapter, I argued that a number of philosophical theories of aesthetic judgment were untenable, largely on the basis of considerations of coherence with our beliefs about language, artworks, and our various interactions with them. The conclusion of that set of arguments was that aesthetic judgments are truth-apt and descriptivist. In other words, some substantial notion of truth applies to aesthetic judgments, whether that be one of warranted assertibility, minimalist truth, or of truth conditions. At least the notions of truth and falsity are not misplaced. And the content of judgments describes something that is the case, rather than merely signaling one's preference.

In this and the next chapter, I examine the two realist positions that meet these desiderata, and avoid the difficulties of platonism and reductionism. While acknowledging that a neat separation is a methodological artificiality, this chapter focuses on primarily epistemological difficulties with modest and robust realism; the next on primarily ontological problems. The strategic claims of this chapter are:

1. If true, the supervenience thesis is trivial and does not usefully explicate the practice of giving and defending aesthetic judgments. Most likely it is incoherent.
2. Supervenience can only be asserted by realists *a priori*, as an argument for its justification seems to require an antirealist notion of truth.
3. Granting the supervenience claim as a priori true, it follows that there can be only one true comprehensive aesthetic judgment of an artwork.
4. Pluralism is not a viable realist response to disagreements.

Before presenting arguments for these claims, it is necessary to characterize the basic epistemological claims of realism, as well as the supervenience claim. I shall then address the four strategic claims in turn.

### 1. The Trouble With Supervenience

Realism in general holds that assertions are true or false in virtue of some mind-independent facts. The Principle of Bivalence is defended in Dummett's early writing<sup>1</sup> as the distinctive and essential commitment of realism. That view has been challenged, however, and bivalence is now considered to be non-committing, except in the special cases of intuitionistic logic and discourse about the past. An idealist could, with an adequate error theory of how we are to interpret assertions which seem to represent conditions "in the world", conceivably hold that all assertions are true or false. Realism needs bivalence, if it needs it, to obtain for a particular reason, *pace* Dummett. The truly essential commitment of realism is the thesis of mind-independence, which can be understood in two ways, yielding the two species of realism under investigation here. Robust Aesthetic Realism (RAR) holds that the truth of aesthetic judgments is independent of the judge's counterfactual mental states; Modest Aesthetic Realism (MAR) that they are merely independent of her actual mental states. In terms of properties, the modest realist takes aesthetic properties to be response-dependent, while the robust realist claims they are response-independent.

One way to understand the difference between the two is via this thought experiment: grant that *beauty* is an aesthetic property. Grant further that in the actual world, Michelangelo's *David* is beautiful. Imagine a possible world in which Michelangelo never existed. Now imagine an object created through some natural process which is identical in its physical qualities to what we know in our world as Michelangelo's *David*. If no one in that world found the object to be beautiful, it would be all the same, if RAR is correct. Even if the object were never perceived throughout its entire history, it would still be beautiful. MAR is somewhat more careful: the object's beauty is marked counterfactually. So, if MAR is true, it is *a priori* that the object is beautiful if and only if it were so judged by a certain class of observers under certain conditions. The class credentials and the observation conditions are to be specified. But it is important to note that the judgment does not make it the case that the object is beautiful—in other words, the judgment does not play a constitutive role in the object's being beautiful.

In both cases, the robust and modest realisms, there is an expectation of convergence, and the direction of explanation of that convergence is from the object to the judges. The object

### 3.1: *The Trouble With Supervenience*

is (or would be) judged to be beautiful *because* it possesses the property of beauty. Our judgments converge because we do or would stand in the right sort of relation to that property—we have the right epistemic access in virtue of our own faculties and the background conditions in which we encounter the object. Indeed, the tempting metaphor to use is that, in the right circumstances, we *are receptive* to the object's beauty. In the previous chapter, however, certain senses of that metaphor have been ruled out. As in the moral case, we want to avoid a theory that posits aesthetic properties or values as entities of a *sui generis* platonic sort. At best, talk of a "sense of beauty" should be understood as yet another metaphor. On the other hand, it has been argued that reductionism is a less than promising theoretical project. Yet, it is crucial for the realist account that aesthetic qualities be independent of mental states. The now orthodox way of satisfying these requirements is by invoking supervenience.

Judgments are defended, rejected, and revised by the giving of reasons. This reason-giving feature of aesthetic discourse reinforces the intuition that aesthetic discourse is objective. Supervenience is the orthodox formalization of this reason-giving practice. Our claim is that supervenience is the wrong logical relation for describing the way judgments are supported.

Supervenience is a two-component claim that, throughout the philosophical literature, has been formulated in a number of different ways. Generally, it asserts a metaphysical dependence relation between non-aesthetic and aesthetic properties, that there can be no difference in aesthetic properties without a difference in the non-aesthetic base properties. The supervenience claim also has a more streamlined epistemic version: there cannot be different true aesthetic judgments without some corresponding difference in the non-aesthetic base—'no aesthetic difference without a non-aesthetic difference.' This constraint on aesthetic judgment entails that disagreements about the aesthetic value of a particular object necessarily indicate that at least one of the disputants is in error.

Much art-critical practice concerns describing artworks in ways that grant us experiential access beyond merely apprehending its presentational features, and this is done largely by indicating other features of the artwork in question. Take, for example, Mondrian's *Composition with Blue 1935* (Figure 7). Jerrold Levinson writes: "The painting is an

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understated but masterly study in color and tone, line and mass, figure and ground. The resulting artwork has a pronounced air of *tranquility* and *strength*.”<sup>2</sup> What follows when we ask for reasons in support of such a judgment is what motivates the claim for supervenience. A prevailing intuition is that tranquility and strength in the Mondrian are somehow *determined* or *dependent* or *emergent from* or *realized in* or are manifest *in virtue of* non-aesthetic, presentational properties. One might object at this point that there is no principled distinction to be made between the aesthetic and non-aesthetic features of an artwork. Granted, that is a legitimate worry, but here I want to assume that in particular cases we can mark out, say, *elegance* as an aesthetic quality and *blue* as a non-aesthetic (if aesthetically relevant) quality, even if we are unable to do so in general, or for all possible experiential features. Supervenience formalizes the intuitions about the etiology of *Composition with Blue*'s tranquility and strength. Levinson adduces the following in support of his critical assessment:

There is the rectilinearity of the primary lines and their extending from border to border. There is the strict parallelism or perpendicularity of all lines in the picture. There is the specific deep blue of the colored square, and its positioning relatively low in the picture. There is the slight off-centeredness of the colored square and of the main vertical line that forms its western face. There is the roughly two-to-one spacing ratio between the three horizontal lines. There is the particular shade of background gray on which the blue-black configuration rests, contrasting strongly with the black of the lines and gently echoing the cerulean blue of the square. All these are crucially relevant to the painting's achievement of tranquil strength, and to its avoidance, say, of dynamic density, gentle grace, or muted melancholy. Confirmation of the specific effectiveness of these features in the present case can be had by imagining alterations in them and trying to envisage the effect at the aesthetic level. There will invariably be such an effect. It would not be the same painting, aesthetically speaking, if there were minor lapses from rectilinearity, if the blue square were darker in hue or less saturated, if the square or dominant vertical were exactly on-center, and so on.<sup>3</sup>

To offer reasons in support of the aesthetic judgment offered, the judge must of course invoke presentational features of the artwork, otherwise the claim would appear like one offered by a platonist or subjectivist. On the other hand, the reasons given will not guarantee, in a lawlike way, the presence of certain aesthetic qualities. Reductionism is not a contender for an adequate theory of judgment, as I have argued in Chapter 2, Section 4. The supervenience relation, then, formalizes the dependence of one property type on another without holding their strict entailment.

- Let  $\alpha$  be an aesthetic property;  $\{\alpha_i\}_n$  be a set of aesthetic properties containing particular properties  $\alpha_1, \alpha_2, \dots, \alpha_n$ .
- Similarly, let  $\beta$  be a non-aesthetic property,  $\{\beta_i\}_n$  be a set of aesthetic properties containing particular properties  $\beta_1, \beta_2, \dots, \beta_n$ .
- Let  $x$  and  $y$  be artworks.

If  $\alpha$  supervenes on  $\beta$ , then<sup>4</sup>

$$\mathbf{S1:} \quad \Box[(\exists x)(\beta x \wedge \alpha x) \rightarrow (\forall y)(\beta y \rightarrow \alpha y)]$$

but it is not the case that<sup>5</sup>

$$\mathbf{R:} \quad \Box[(\forall y) \beta y \rightarrow \alpha y]$$

So necessarily, if there is something both  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$ , then anything  $\beta$  is also  $\alpha$ . There may in fact be nothing both  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$ . There may also be some possible world  $\omega 1$  in which something is  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$ , while in a different possible world  $\omega 2$  nothing that is  $\beta$  is  $\alpha$ . Denying **R** means that  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  are not linked rigidly (and so it is not analytic that anything  $\beta$  is  $\alpha$ ). What **S1** can be taken to express is a “ban on mixed worlds”<sup>6</sup>: we cannot in the same possible world have something which is both  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  and something which is  $\beta$  but not  $\alpha$ .

The Modest Realist is committed to the truth of **S1** and the denial of **R**. Eddy Zemach<sup>7</sup> seems to argue for a stronger version of supervenience, namely **R**, the strong claim that the holder of **S1** wishes to resist. Notice that  $\mathbf{R} \rightarrow \mathbf{S1}$ , so any arguments that support the denial of **S1** will also support the denial of **R**. The bulk of the arguments in this chapter raise difficulties for **S1**, but I wish here briefly to consider why Zemach believes that **R** obtains, and what is faulty with his argument. I characterize the holder of **R** as a robust realist, because Zemach, as a robust realist, holds **R** as well as the strong mind-independence thesis I examine in Chapter 4. However, it seems possible to hold the latter without holding the former, and vice versa. Nothing in my argument turns on these possible variations in commitment, though.

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Zemach writes “ ‘X is A because it is N’ says that, necessarily, if X is N, it is also A.”<sup>8</sup> This is **R**, stated in Zemach’s terms. He continues, “It is a meaning-rule that ‘X is N’ implies ‘X is A’. Such rules are the basis of art criticism: critics cite nonaesthetic descriptions of X and derive, by these rules, statements about the aesthetic features of X.”<sup>9</sup> But this just seems wrong. Citing non-aesthetic features is not a first step in applying some rule that transforms non-aesthetic predicates into aesthetic ones. To be sure, the rhetorical function of citing features is to support critical verdicts, but this does not suggest that a rule is being applied. He claims that “gaudiness, for example, stands in logical relation to the nonaesthetic property of showing pure, bright colors.”<sup>10</sup> But if this is true, it also seems true that showing pure, bright colors also licenses the attribution of boldness, gaiety, liveliness, and many other qualities. One test for the adequacy of **R** is in this thought experiment: can one imagine a possible world in which something has features  $\{\beta\}_n$  which license the attribution of  $\alpha_1$ , and another where they license a different attribution,  $\alpha_2$ ? If so, then the entailment relationship does not hold necessarily.

One easy way for the entailment to fail is that there is a possible world where *no* aesthetic qualities result from the presence of  $\{\beta\}_n$ . On an antirealist account, this could happen in a possible world where there are no valuers. The realist, though, plainly will not admit this situation as a failure, since properties are to be mind-independent. There is however still another simple way the entailment can fail, and that is by varying either the other properties of the work, or by varying the context. The color palette of a fauvist painting (Figure 8) might be gaudy when employed in a more realistic painting, but the use of broad patches and swathes of color to foreground relationships of form and color, somewhat unhinged from their representational use, seems to block the appropriateness of the term ‘gaudy’. Similarly, the very features of a Mondrian that support the judgment of being innovative, elegant, and dynamic, would support a judgment of insipidity and derivativeness were they to feature in a late-20<sup>th</sup> century appropriation of de Stijl. *Pace* Zemach, this shows that merely attending to a small set of presentational features will be inadequate, and that context needs to be considered. But this concession also undermines the strict entailment across all possible worlds expressed in **R**.

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Most proponents of the supervenience relation hold to **S1** rather than **R**. As I showed previously, **R** entails **S1**, and so considerations against **S1** also argue against **R** (assuming that there may yet be reasons for holding that stronger view). One way of interpreting the supervenience claim is as equivalent to claiming the identity of indiscernibles. That claim is that if two artworks are identical in every respect, then they have the same aesthetic properties. Of course this claim is trivially true, and if this is how supervenience is to be understood it is of no interest. But in fact **S1** claims more than this triviality. Greg Currie maintains that “if a thesis of aesthetic supervenience is to be of interest it should (a) specify conditions the co-exemplification of which ensures the sameness of aesthetic value, and (b) specify conditions that numerically distinct works are capable of satisfying.”<sup>11</sup> These conditions should give sufficient conditions for the emergence of aesthetic properties given the presence of a well-defined set of non-aesthetic properties—this is what is expressed by the right-hand side of the main conditional of **S**. I suspect that Currie is correct in holding that these conditions cannot be satisfied in a non-trivial way for aesthetics.

A number of thought experiments can ground this suspicion. A first attempt at specifying the class of non-aesthetic subvenient properties  $\{\beta\}_n$  might give the physical properties of an artwork, such as the color, size, and spatial distribution of pigments in a painting, or give the physical properties of the instantiation of a performed artwork, such as the sequence of frequencies of a string quartet. But Danto’s Gallery of Indiscernibles shows that this candidate for  $\{\beta\}_n$  underdetermines the aesthetic properties of the artworks in question. Perceptually identical artworks are differentiated by contextual facts, including titles, position in a certain cultural and art-historical context, and facts about the history of the particular object. What differentiates *Red Square* from *Nirvana* in Danto’s example are the titles (at least); by hypothesis the physical objects are indistinguishable.

Borges’ story “Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote” provides another example that refines the loose intuition of supervenience. Menard is a symbolist writer at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century who, not by simple copying, but rather by a kind of extreme method acting, sets out to write selections which coincided word for word with sections from *Don Quixote*. The narrator of the story is a literary critic who identifies the contrasts in style and meaning

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between the two *Quixotes*. He writes:

It is a revelation to compare Menard's *Don Quixote* with Cervantes'. The latter, for example, wrote (part one, chapter nine):

...truth, whose mother is history, rival of time, depository of deeds, witness of the past, exemplar and adviser to the present, and the future's counselor.

Written in the seventeenth century, written by the "lay genius" Cervantes, this enumeration is a mere rhetorical praise of history. Menard, on the other hand, writes:

...truth, whose mother is history, rival of time, depository of deeds, witness of the past, exemplar and adviser to the present, and the future's counselor.

History, the *mother* of truth: the idea is astounding. Menard, a contemporary of William James, does not define history as an inquiry into reality but as its origin. Historical truth, for him, is not what happened; it is what we judge to have happened. The final phrases—*exemplar and adviser to the present, and the future's counselor*—are brazenly pragmatic.

The contrast in style is also vivid. The archaic style of Menard—quite foreign, after all—suffers from a certain affectation. Not so that of his forerunner, who handles with ease the current Spanish of his time.<sup>12</sup>

Of course Borges' fantasy relies on our entertaining the possibility of carrying off a project like Menard's. At least, though, it doesn't seem like a logical impossibility, even if it is quite likely a practical impossibility. Taken as a thought experiment, Borges' narrator offers judgments that certainly accord with our intuitions about the two *Quixotes*. Though identical in title and text, they must have different aesthetic properties, which in this case arise from the difference in historical context. Now to account fully for its total aesthetic property set, the subvenient property set must include historical facts as well, innumerably many of them.

Borges' story shares a moral for supervenience with the case of the painter Hans van Meegeren. Van Meegeren painted a number of fake Vermeers, including one titled *Christ at Emmaus* (Figure 9), which was sold to Hermann Göring and earlier judged by art historian Abraham Bredius to be Vermeer's masterpiece. To be sure, that judgment rested on a false belief, but positively valenced aesthetic properties were predicated of the painting while the belief held. If after the facts came to light, and those aesthetic evaluations changed (ostensibly becoming closer to the truth), then it must be true that aesthetic properties depend also on facts about origin as well. This being the case, the account of supervenience in S1 runs into trouble. Let  $\beta_{JV}$  be the property of being painted by Vermeer in Delft over

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time  $t_1$ , and let  $\beta_{HV}$  be the property of being painted by Van Meegeren in Delft over time  $t_2$ , and assume that each of these properties is satisfied uniquely or not at all. Let  $\{\alpha\}^1$  be the aesthetic properties attributed to the painting when it was believed to be a Vermeer, and let  $\{\alpha\}^2$  be the aesthetic properties attributed to the painting when its true origins were known.

The change in judgment of *Christ at Emmaus* can be formalized as the change from:

$$S1_{JV} \quad \Box[(\exists x)(\beta_{JVx} \wedge \{\alpha\}^1x) \rightarrow (\forall y)(\beta_{JVy} \rightarrow \{\alpha\}^1y)]$$

to:

$$S1_{HV} \quad \Box[(\exists x)(\beta_{HVx} \wedge \{\alpha\}^2x) \rightarrow (\forall y)(\beta_{HVy} \rightarrow \{\alpha\}^2y)]$$

This account is troublesome because it represents the aesthetic properties of the painting as either entirely resting on its origin by Vermeer's hand in Delft in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, or entirely on that of van Meegeren's in Delft in the 20<sup>th</sup>. This in fact will also be true for any subvenient property which is necessarily instantiated only once if anywhere.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, if the supervenience base is widened in the ways it needs to be to account for aesthetically significant differences in titles, historical facts, and facts about origin, to name only a few, supervenience moves toward being entirely trivial. If the subvenient base expands to the point of uniquely specifying individual artworks, then no insight is gained into the practice of attributing gracefulness both to Modigliani's portrait and to Picasso's. And the only way to avoid this counter-intuitive consequence, that *all* of an artworks aesthetic properties supervene on any one unique non-aesthetic property of the same is to stipulate that the relation must be expressed as the complete set  $\{\alpha\}$  supervening on the total non-aesthetic description  $\{\beta\}$ . This version gives us no grip on understanding why judgments of particular aesthetic qualities invoke just *these* non-aesthetic features rather than some others.

It might be thought that S1 somehow does not capture the intuitive notion of supervenience, as expressed in the slogan "No aesthetic difference without a non-aesthetic one". The worry is that otherwise, aesthetic qualities become 'free-floating.' The intuition can be expressed formally by

$$S2 \quad \Box[(\forall x)(\forall y)(\alpha x \wedge \sim \alpha y \rightarrow \sim(\beta x \wedge \beta y))]$$

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Where  $x$  and  $y$  are numerically distinct artworks. **S2** says that, necessarily, if two works do not share the same aesthetic properties, then they must have different non-aesthetic properties. It cannot be the case that the same object can be rightly judged to have different aesthetic properties. But **S2** is equivalent to **S1**.<sup>14</sup> The former does, then, express the intuitive notion, and so the problems surveyed are not the result of improper formulation.

Finally, the advocate of supervenience might retreat to a claim of global supervenience: necessarily, any two possible worlds which are identical in respect of their non-aesthetic properties are identical in their aesthetic properties. The supervenience claim, put this way, has been transformed from a claim about the aesthetic properties of individual objects to a conceptual claim purporting to show that aesthetic properties are not free-floating, and that they are dependent on or emergent from some indefinite range of purely non-aesthetic properties. It is instructive to note the way in which the positivist prejudice against aesthetic concepts, sustained by Mackie's argument from queerness, finds a form in this very thin claim: though we concede that we cannot say in virtue of what *specific* non-aesthetic properties these *specific* aesthetic properties are manifest, it surely must be that the *totality* of aesthetic properties necessarily depend on *only* non-aesthetic properties. Global supervenience, then, is a much weaker claim even than the identity of indiscernibles. If the totality of non-aesthetic properties includes properties of temporal and spatial location, then on any account of identity what the global supervenience claim amounts to is that necessarily, any two possible worlds which are identical have the same properties. The uselessness of this claim needs no further comment.

The global supervenience claim is most likely not even coherently formulable. The reason for this is that it requires a neat and principled distinction between aesthetic properties and non-aesthetic properties. Indeed, every version of the supervenience claim requires such a distinction. Regrettably for the friend of supervenience, such an *a priori* distinction is not available for aesthetics. The reason is simply that, in principle, any property is potentially an aesthetic one. At the outset of this enquiry, I avoided the question of which predicates were distinctively or essentially aesthetic. Of course there are many which we recognize as typically aesthetic in certain contexts: predicates like 'elegant', 'graceful', 'beautiful', and the like, applied to artworks. But I contend that it is not possible, in any metaphysically

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innocent way, to mark out those predicates (or more generally, descriptions) which exhaust the aesthetic domain and are exclusive to it. Art historical practice shows that predicates and critical descriptions move from aesthetic to non-aesthetic uses, and vice versa. This is not a fact about change over time only; critics in one historical moment can and do disagree whether particular features are aesthetic or non-aesthetic. Richard Wollheim provides a number of useful examples. He cites

the grammaticality of Shakespeare's sentences, which has over history been regarded as a matter primarily of philological interest. Recently, however, critics have suggested that the syntactical incoherence of certain speeches, in e.g. *Macbeth*, may be of significance as expressive of deep and disordered trains of thought....<sup>15</sup>

Presumably the critics who reject the suggestion might well maintain that the defective grammaticality is not a negatively valenced aesthetic property but not even an aesthetic property at all. An important way that concepts move from non-aesthetic to aesthetic uses comes from changes in critical practice. Such a transformation should not be possible if the non-aesthetic properties are mind-independent. In other words, it should not be the case that just by changing our practices of thought and talk, a non-aesthetic property of a work could become an aesthetic one. But here too numerous examples abound. To take another from Wollheim:

...we might consider the free brushwork that frequently enters into the backgrounds of Titian or Velasquez [Figures 10, 11]. To the eyes of contemporaries, these liberties, when not actually offensive—and we have the hostile commentaries of Vasari on Titian, even of Diderot on Chardin [Figure 12]—might have had, at best, a representational justification. Even to Reynolds the merit of Gainsborough's 'handling' [Figure 13] was that it introduced 'a kind of magic' into his painting, in that all the 'odd scratches and marks', which were individually observable close to, suddenly at a certain distance fell into place and assumed form. But since the turn that painting has taken since, say, Manet, these passages would now have a further, and more intimately aesthetic, significance for us, in their simultaneous assertion of the sensibility of the artist and the materiality of the painting.<sup>16</sup>

Supervenience might at last be saved simply by stipulating which qualities are aesthetic and which are non-aesthetic. But this would yield a theory ultimately out of line with art critical practice, which in the end is what a theory of aesthetic judgment is in the business of describing.

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Currie's requirements of an interesting supervenience claim both remain unfulfilled. The first, that it specify co-exemplification conditions that ensures the sameness of aesthetic properties, fails because there are frequently additional features of one artwork that defeat its having the same property as a similar artwork. This fact also shows the failure of the second requirement, a specification of conditions that distinct works are capable of satisfying. This is not met because the aesthetic properties of an artwork seem uniquely determined for any artwork where a forgery or fake is a possibility. Securing the aesthetic properties of the original then requires a total specification of the subvenient properties to ensure uniqueness. But even this move, or the thinnest global supervenience claim, in fact turn out to be incoherent because the distinction between aesthetic and non-aesthetic properties cannot be maintained in any non-stipulative way. Supervenience, then, is utterly inadequate to the task of characterizing our aesthetic judgments. It is an incoherent thesis and is best omitted from a theory of aesthetic judgment. Rejecting supervenience does not amount to rejecting the practice of invoking qualities in support of aesthetic judgments. That would necessitate an error theory about our practices. Objectivity requires, it seems, this reason-giving feature of aesthetic discourse. The claim is simply that supervenience is the wrong logical relation for describing the way judgments are supported.

## **2. Justifying Supervenience**

If indeed supervenience is a troubled theoretical notion, the arguments that follow will be superfluous. But even on the generous supposition that supervenience may yet be salvaged, other problems remain. Both robust and modest realism hold that aesthetic qualities are supervenient on non-aesthetic ones—neither reductionism nor platonism are viable realist options. But what grounds are there for holding the supervenience claim? I have shown that merely the defending of aesthetic judgments in non-aesthetic terms is insufficient to establish supervenience as the correct relation. Supervenience is meant to capture our practice of defending aesthetic attributions in terms of other, non-aesthetic qualities. But there is no direct inference from the fact of this practice to the claim that the relationship between the aesthetic and non-aesthetic qualities cited is one of supervenience in the technical sense discussed here. In Chapter 6 I shall develop an alternative relationship that captures the practice and is not vulnerable to the objections made here. In this section, I

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argue that the realist can only assert supervenience *a priori*, because what looks like the most plausible justificatory argument for supervenience invokes an antirealist conception of truth, and so is something to which the realist is not entitled.

Realism can be understood as a “thesis negating that truth is conceptually dependent on our capacity for knowledge.”<sup>17</sup> Anti-realism (concerning truth in a given domain) might then center on the claim that an assertion is true if and only if it is justified under ideal conditions. This still allows for a difference between justification and truth<sup>18</sup>, but the connection between them is tighter for the antirealist. The antirealist need not hold that truth is the ideal limit of warranted assertibility, though someone who claimed this would certainly be an antirealist.<sup>19</sup> For the aesthetic realist, the possibility remains that a critic might be in an epistemically optimal position, and satisfy all the norms and standards of correctness appropriate to critical discourse, and yet still be mistaken in her critical pronouncements. So ideal justification is not sufficient to guarantee truth. But it is this conception of truth that is needed to justify supervenience. The realist argument for supervenience might run as follows:

- Let  $A(x)$  be an aesthetic judgment of an artwork  $x$  invoking aesthetic properties  $\{\alpha\}_n$ , so the judgment  $A(x)$  is made iff for all  $\alpha \in \{\alpha\}_n$ ,  $x$  is judged to instantiate  $\alpha$ .
- Let  $\{B(x)\}_n$  be the set of assertions about  $x$  invoking non-aesthetic properties  $\{\beta\}_n$ , so for each  $\beta \in \{\beta\}_n$  there is a corresponding assertion  $B(x)$ .

- (1) Assume that of a given artwork  $c$ , aesthetic judgment  $A(c)$  is true.
- (2)  $A(c)$  is a normative judgment supported by reasons  $\{B(c)\}_n$ .
- (3) Let the same set of non-aesthetic predicates contained in  $\{B(c)\}_n$  apply to another artwork,  $d$ , in the absence of defeater predicates  $\{D\}$  for the relevant aesthetic judgement  $A(d)$ :  $\{B(d)\}_n \ \& \ \sim\{D\}$ .
- (4) Therefore, the aesthetic judgment  $A(d)$  is true.
- (5) Therefore, aesthetic properties  $\{\alpha\}_n$  supervene on non-aesthetic properties  $\{\beta\}_n$  invoked in  $B(d)$ .

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There are a number of problems with this line of argument. They lie with (2), and with the move from (3) to (4). What (2) amounts to is a claim that aesthetic judgments rest on non-aesthetic predicates *and nothing else, including other aesthetic predicates*. But that claim is out of line with practice. Consider Mondrian's *Composition with Blue* again. Levinson gives a good catalog of non-aesthetic features that do seem to warrant the predication of tranquil strength. But that might not be enough to convince everyone. He might have to go further and cite the painting's spartan elegance and its structural balance to shore up his claim. Levinson himself concedes that other aesthetic attributes are relevant: the "background carries with it a certain airiness, the deep blue square a decided coolness. Further, the structural relationship of the two colors yields a sense of harmony. Finally, the configuration of four lines and a square, in its particular proportions and positionings, makes for a notable degree of stability and balance."<sup>20</sup> These aesthetic qualities, together with the more clearly non-aesthetic ones, together contribute to the impression of tranquil strength. So the purity of the supervenience base is corrupted. If the base for tranquil strength includes both aesthetic and non-aesthetic qualities, we seem to have a web of interconnections between experiential qualities—aesthetic and non-aesthetic—rather than one property class supervening on the other. A related worry about the dramatic width of the subvenient property base has already been suggested, namely, that aesthetic qualities are negative condition-governed.<sup>21</sup> Having a large red square and a smaller yellow rectangle are defeaters for the tranquil strength of *Composition with Blue*, as is the presence of many more black lines. So too is having a portrait of Miss Venezuela in the upper right corner. It seems then that to get the supervenience relation right demands that the base include not only all the properties of the object and the relevant properties of its context, but also the complements of all the properties that might get in the way of our various judgments. The notion of relevance for the properties in the latter two groups is blatantly question-begging. Also, this new supervenience base is far too wide to be informative about the experienced aesthetic qualities and their relations to other various attributes, as I argued in the previous section.

The defender of supervenience might hold on to a minimal version of its claim: necessarily, an aesthetic change can be effected only if there is some non-aesthetic change. This is equivalent to Blackburn's formulation of supervenience as a ban on mixed worlds. This version might seem to meet the worry about the impurity of the supervenience base. If we

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first invoke other aesthetic properties to justify the one in question, we have a further burden to justify those, ultimately in non-aesthetic properties. But the minimal version runs into trouble when we examine a datum of the artworld, namely, critical disputes. There are plenty of real-world instances of critics who are, apparently, optimal viewers of works of art who disagree in their aesthetic pronouncements. Here is one example, a dispute between two distinguished students of Mark Rothko's (Figure 14) works:

Dr. Francis V. O'Connor: "While it is the glowing, ovoid areas of color that the eye first embraces in a typical Rothko, it is useful to become aware of how they are contextualized with often dramatically emphasized horizons -- and borders....They define a horizon gestalt between the areas of color; the borders [mark] the peripheral limitation of our normal view of any horizon. We thus float at the center of a prospect that falls out as below us, before us and above us -- the artist leaving us to our own associations, but determining within his formal structures, the extent of the world he wants those associations to inhabit. Thus, ...Rothko's compositions present a radical abstraction of the planet in cross-section from below the viewer's feet up, the internal light of that world proves it welcoming warmth or abject negation, as befits the artist's moods. At the end of his life, the last, sad, bipartite images [Figure 15] leave us with a single horizon between the black of space and the earth's lithic interior -- all place of human grace on the surface under the sun having slipped away from his despairing reach."<sup>22</sup>

And the contrary view:

Dr. David Anfam: "Rothko's utter disregard for nature in itself has become so obvious that it is hard to imagine any serious commentator again raising the landscape comparison." Rather, a Rothko painting is a kind of oracle which, though a kind of visual riddle, veils intangible senses behind a "simple" fronts. "It is almost a blank façade, an expanse of perhaps two or three colors which seem to have materialized from nowhere, like a mirage, instilling them into our sight. The initial impression might approach a blur were it not fixed by a spartan design which echoes the shape of the rectangular object that supports it. This foundation, the material ground, coexists slyly with the air of illusion breathed by the image."<sup>23</sup>

How are the two views to be reconciled? On the realist account, at least one of the critics must be mistaken—but who? Presumably, we can attend to the features each of them points out in support of his judgment. Although they are writing about the same work and so, we can assume, share access to the same non-aesthetic qualities, they do not share the same aesthetic experience. Indeed, the presence of irreconcilable disputes between optimal critics strongly suggests that the aesthetic qualities are relational. In the example I've just given, it's not at all clear that we can dissolve the problem by building in a "normal perceivers in normal conditions" clause. Relativism might exert some pull now, though as John Bender

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points out, relativist supervenience comes to “a trivial, and epistemic, constraint of consistency upon rational judgments. It amounts to saying that from identical sets of features used as a basis for evaluation, and from the same evaluative standards, the same evaluative conclusion rationally follows. Notice that this is true irrespective of what metaphysical relations, supervenience or otherwise, might connect the grounding properties and the inferred property.”<sup>24</sup> Supervenience will be easily violated merely by bringing ourselves into alignment with a different optimal critic. If relativism is denied, it still is the case that the judgments stemming from those different impressions inescapably involve the differing sensibilities of the two critics. Given all the measures we might build in to ensure epistemic optimality, there seems to be no principled way to decide who is in error. And without such a pronouncement, we have an example of a shift in aesthetic properties with no attendant shift in non-aesthetic ones. To say that one of the critics is wrong without any specific reasons why simply begs the question in favor of the supervenience claim.

Finally, the move from (3) to (4) is illegitimate. All that (3) allows is that the judgment **A(d)** is justified—all the possible supporting reasons are available for that judgment as for the true judgment **A(c)**. But even at the ideal epistemic limit, where no improvements on the judgment are attainable, the possibility remains that a critic might be mistaken in her pronouncements. So ideal justification is not sufficient to guarantee truth—it does not permit the denial that the critic is possibly wrong. Unless we add in the anti-realist definition of truth as the ideal limit of justified belief between (3) and (4), the conclusion for supervenience will not follow. One might object that the argument proposed is no more than a schematization of the definition of supervenience, not a real argument for it. Perhaps this is so, but that criticism is more appropriately directed at the advocate of supervenience, since the slogan “No aesthetic difference without a non-aesthetic one” is meant as an argument, one which gets its rhetorical force by first inviting challengers to refute it by counterexample and then denying that disagreements between optimal judges are real counterexamples. The problem is that the slogan loses any force without the anti-realist truth definition, since what it amounts to is a mission statement about the justification of assertions, rather than a thesis about property relations. If this argument represents something that the realist would accept, then it seems she is forced to give up supervenience or give up realist truth. And since the realist alternative to supervenience renders the

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practice of normative aesthetic discourse nonsensical, the burden has been shifted to the realist to find a stronger line of argument in support of supervenience.

Indeed, the predominant approach for realists about value has been to assert supervenience *a priori*. One can legitimately ask for a motivation for such an assertion. A typical reply is that it is part and parcel of our understanding the vocabulary of value properties that such vocabulary is used "to mark distinctions among the descriptive way things are."<sup>25</sup> Drawing an analogy between the use of 'baldness' and the use of ethical vocabulary, Frank Jackson writes:

If someone asks: Why does baldness supervene on hair distribution? the answer is that the *a priori* nature of the supervenience tells us that the explanation is that 'bald' is a word for marking a distinction among kinds of hair distributions. I think we should say that we should say the same for the ethical vocabulary: it is an implicit part (if it were explicit, the matter would not be philosophically controversial) of our understanding of ethical terms and sentences that they serve to mark distinctions among the descriptive ways things are.<sup>26</sup>

The difficulty with the analogy between baldness and ethical (or aesthetic) concepts and their corresponding terms is quite simply that while 'baldness' could mean nothing else besides a (vague but recognizable) sparseness of hair, there is no obvious and well-defined shortlist of descriptive features for the application of value terms. It is true that in deploying such value terms, there is a burden on the user to be able to identify other features in support of her use if asked. But that is not yet a strong enough feature of the use of value terms to warrant the claim that the relationship is one of supervenience. It may be granted that in calling a particular melody 'graceful', what licenses that attribution is a delicacy of voicing in the woodwinds, restrained dynamics, and a *sostenuto* melodic line with well-defined phrase endings. To say these descriptors (and others) are part of the meaning of 'graceful' would at best be correct only in this specific application. It is better to say that these descriptors are grounds for the attribution of 'graceful'. As I have argued above, it first of all cannot be the case that the relationship between 'graceful' and the listed features holds *a priori*, because gracefulness can be realized in all sorts of ways, and having said features cannot guarantee the appropriateness of applying 'graceful' to the melody, even given an instance where a work is graceful and has the features cited. We must, in every instance, attend to the work to

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decide. No list of features will tell us whether the melody is graceful or not, which would be the case if the supervenience relation held *a priori*.<sup>27</sup>

Furthermore, there is no direct inference from the fact that certain other features are adduced in one's attribution of gracefulness to the claim that the relation is supervenience. At best we have the fact that said features license the attribution, and that gracefulness somehow is dependent on them. But supervenience is not the only relation of dependence. It will be a major component of my arguments for cognitivist antirealism in Chapter 6 to show how the dependencies between aesthetic concepts and other features of artworks can be given a theoretical account that does not involve supervenience. But supervenience is not the only game in town, and in any case does not even correctly capture the intuitions that its less formal expressions are advertised as doing.

### 3. Supervenience and True Judgments

I shall argue in this section that if supervenience is granted as an *a priori* truth, at most one comprehensive aesthetic judgment of any artwork can be true. Here I ignore the preceding difficulties with supervenience to show that any aesthetic judgment can be true only if it is comprehensible within a single 'total' judgment of the work. If this is true, then in cases of critical disagreement, no more than one of the disputants can be correct. Any disagreement must be accounted for in terms of some epistemic shortcoming—either ignorance, inattention, or insensitivity. Such a conclusion bars a position that holds great appeal for the realist, namely critical pluralism.

Aesthetic judgments may register an evaluation in a thin sense—a painting is good, for example. Many more judgments employ 'thick' predicates with both an evaluative aspect and a descriptive one—holding a melodic passage to be delicate or effete, say. In a different sense, any predicates, even 'thin' ones, are descriptive of some real state of affairs, on the realist account. And of course not all aesthetic judgments are of the form of directly predicating something of an artwork (i.e. 'This x is F'), but instead highlight various features of the artwork in order to form some indirect attribution (e.g. the Rothko criticisms above). Any realist theory (and some antirealist ones) take aesthetic sentences in the indicative mood

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to describe states of affairs, or to pick out particular properties. Now, some judgments may describe only parts of an artwork, while others instead attribute 'overall' qualities, to the work as a whole. The former should be conjoinable or comprehensible within a single judgment (schematically, something like 'x is F' and 'x is H' and ...). This 'total' or 'comprehensive' judgment will then be a kind of inventory of all the aesthetic qualities of the artwork. Why does supervenience legitimize at most one comprehensive aesthetic judgment? Grant that the account of supervenience formalized in S1 (and also S2) may yet be salvaged. In order to avoid the counter-intuitive consequence that all of the aesthetic properties of some artwork will supervene on any one of that artwork's unique non-aesthetic properties, we must stipulate that any supervenience claim will concern the *total* or complete set of non-aesthetic properties. That gives

$$\mathbf{S1'}: \quad \square \forall \beta [(\exists x)(\{\beta\}x \wedge \alpha_x) \rightarrow (\forall y)(\{\beta\}y \rightarrow \alpha_y)]$$

which is to say that any particular aesthetic property supervenes on the total non-aesthetic property set of  $x$ . Alternatively, the stipulation might be expressed as

$$\mathbf{S1''}: \quad \square \forall \beta \forall \alpha [(\exists x)(\{\beta\}x \wedge \{\alpha\}x) \rightarrow (\forall y)(\{\beta\}y \rightarrow \{\alpha\}y)]$$

stating that the complete set of aesthetic properties supervenes on the complete set of non-aesthetic properties of  $x$ . Either version may be a plausible way to avoid the unique property objection. Both are trivial in just the way identified at the end of section 1. Because S1' and S1'' both require the subvenient base to be the total set of the artwork's non-aesthetic properties, and because independent considerations necessitate a base widened beyond just the physical properties of the artwork, there will be no common way for numerically distinct artworks to instantiate the same aesthetic properties. This, of course, is one of the central explanatory desiderata of the supervenience claim. So if supervenience (either S1' or S1'') is true it is explanatorily impotent.

There is at least this significant consequence: at most one comprehensive judgment of an artwork can be true. Because aesthetic judgments are truth-apt descriptions of particular states of affairs (on the realist account), they can be understood as, in a sense, an inventory

of the present aesthetic properties. Presumably, this is the metaphysical analog of a judgment's being responsible to the artwork. Judgments should only attribute to the artwork qualities that it has. In particular, they should not attribute a quality and its complement (in exactly the same way). Although supervenience is not identification or reduction, it cannot be the case that the right-hand side of the main conditional be both  $\beta \rightarrow \alpha$  and  $\beta \rightarrow \sim\alpha$ . And since the account we have after reckoning with the unique property objection, S1' or S1'' specifies that the entailment obtains only between the total non-aesthetic property set and one or all aesthetic properties, a judgment must be internally consistent. That is, the comprehensive judgment cannot incorporate both the claim that a certain property obtains and that it does not.

This is hardly a surprising thought if aesthetic discourse is a descriptive one, but it imposes a constraint on the range of aesthetic judgments that can be taken as true. If two judgments (total, or of the same part of an artwork) are contradictory, at most one of them can be true. The other must be disqualified as false, the result of error or epistemic shortcoming, or the disagreement must be explained away as a merely apparent one. This is a basic commitment of realism (in fact it is also a commitment of platonic realism and reductive realism as well). The consequence of this commitment is that, for the realist, endorsing a plurality of divergent aesthetic judgments of an artwork will only be possible with significant theoretical overhaul.

#### 4. Critical Pluralism

Critical pluralism is, roughly speaking, the view that a multiplicity of divergent judgments about an artwork can in some sense be appropriate or correct. These judgments could take the form of interpretations, attribution of specific aesthetic qualities to an artwork, or even overall assessments of a work's aesthetic value. Consider the following two examples:

1. Wordsworth's poem "A slumber did my spirit seal..."

The so-called Lucy poems have generated a great variety of divergent and apparently incompatible interpretations, this poem perhaps more so than most. Among them:

- a. "the girl, who to her lover seemed a thing that could not feel the touch of earthly years, is caught up helplessly into the empty whirl of the earth which measures

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and makes time. She is touched by earthly time in its most powerful and horrible image.”<sup>28</sup>

- b. “[the] last two lines succeed in effecting a reconciliation between the two philosophies or social attitudes [of humanism and pantheism]. Lucy is actually more alive now than she is dead, because she is now a part of the life of Nature and not just a human ‘thing’.”<sup>29</sup>
- c. “...to represent ‘spirit’ by the feminine pronoun was well within the usual usage of his verse.”<sup>30</sup> “...there is nothing novel in the suggestion that the ‘slumber’ which ‘scaled his spirit’ was indeed that trance-like state which he usually described in terms of sleep or of dreams....”<sup>31</sup> And so there is no Lucy and the poem is not about death.

#### 2. Manet’s painting *The Execution of Maximilian* (Figure 16)

- a. “It was by its ambivalence, by the studied lack of dramatic rhetoric or moral signposting, that Manet’s purely ‘artistic’ [painting] could function politically. Its detachment and its open-endedness, a distinctively Parisian language of opposition to Napoleon’s empire, set up this image of Maximilian’s fate...as an icon of the perils of imperial and dynastic ambitions.”<sup>32</sup>
- b. “[the painting is a field] with Manet himself—Manet as painter-beholder—at once everywhere and nowhere.. As a victim of the jury system...he belongs with Maximilian and the two generals. At the same time, as an aggressor against the public...he is aligned with the firing squad, which would give ironic force to the oft-repeated charge that his attempts to draw attention to himself at any cost were tantamount to discharging a pistol at the Salon.”<sup>33</sup>
- c. “A priori, death, coldly, methodically dealt out by a firing squad, is unfavorable to indifference: it’s a subject charged with meaning, giving rise to violent feelings, but Manet appears to have painted it as if insensible; the spectator follows it in that profound apathy. [...]the text is effaced by the painting. And the meaning of the painting is not the text, but the effacement.”<sup>34</sup>

Add to these examples the dispute between O’Connor and Anfam about the proper regard of Rothko’s paintings discussed above. In each of these three cases, the set of judgments offered is inconsistent. If there is no way to disqualify all but one party in each of the critical disputes, they represent an intolerable situation for the realist. Realism is the thesis that assertions are true or false in virtue of some mind-independent facts. Except perhaps in cases of vagueness, realism disallows the possibility that asserting a set of true judgments could involve asserting  $p$  &  $\sim p$ . But the critical disputes here each involve judgments entailing the denial of the others, much in the same way that asserting that an object is blue entails the assertion that it is not orange. These are not instances of vagueness. In other

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words, the assertion of the conjunction of the judgments involves asserting a contradiction. It is essential for the realist somehow to dissolve the contradiction, to explain it away as merely an appearance. Failure to do so makes an antirealist theory of aesthetic judgment all the more attractive.

Critical disagreements are ordinarily resolved by appealing to the artworks and inspecting the epistemic credentials of the critics involved. Oftentimes, it is possible to identify some mismatch between the presentational features of the work and the judgment. We might also become aware of some consideration that undermines the authority of the judgment, say, for example, that a particular critic is hostile to representational painting, or finds political significance everywhere. The situation that motivates the critical pluralist view is different. Here, we have exhausted the enquiry into the qualifications of the disputants and find them all satisfactory, and the various judgments in play all accord with our own experience of the artwork. Thus, the judgments are all apparently true and in conflict, and that conflict cannot, on the face of it, be explained away by some epistemic shortcoming.

This scenario is a real feature of the artworld. Critics with apparently optimal epistemic credentials do contradict one another. And given their apparent optimality, we have no principled way to settle the dispute. Critical pluralism (CP) advertises a way to defuse the disagreement that does not force us to choose a most qualified critical disputant, and so to sustain a set of incompatible but individually plausible judgments.

Unfortunately for the realist, pluralism entails either relativism or antirealism. The main consideration for this claim is that dispelling the appearance of contradiction requires either revising the semantics of judgments (while preserving their descriptive character) or assimilating them to different critical aims. If this is true, then the realist has three options: abandon pluralism and insist that there is at most one correct judgment or interpretation of an artwork; endorse relativism, or reject realism. I will begin by examining relativism and how it might be brought to bear on the kind of disputes described above. Finding that unsatisfactory, I will look at two different antirealist solutions to the problem. Then I take up a pluralist account that purports to maintain realism and avoid relativism. I will show this theory unable to avoid relativism or antirealism.

**a. Pluralism and Relativism**

Relativism is a popular move in aesthetics, and its most extreme variety, subjectivism, enjoys a healthy life in and out of the philosophical enterprise. It is a tempting position for a number of reasons philosophical and otherwise. We witness the great number of irreconcilable disputes. We know that others like different things than we do, and that others, in distant cultures, may value differently or may even have quite different ways of encountering the world. With high-level art criticism, a good deal of the 'observational evidence' is very clearly theory-laden. And there just doesn't seem to be the same feeling of urgency with critical disagreements that we experience in the ethical case—art is not often a matter of life and death. This is not the place to consider general arguments for or against relativism. Instead, I wish to focus specifically on the sort of disputes I've been discussing, disputes between critics who may have different sensibilities, but who share a language, a broad range of values, and indeed a form of life.

Relativism is a truth or value predicate-altering theory. Instead of truth *simpliciter* we assert only truth-in-W where W could be a critical school, a community, speakers of the same language, and so on. Similarly with value predicate relativism—"good" is understood as "good according to standards of W". Subjectivism is a special case of relativism, where W ranges across individuals. At the core of relativism is the notion of incommensurability. Disputes between members of different W groups aren't really disputes, because the apparently conflicting claims p and  $\sim p$  are in fact p-in-W(1) and  $\sim p$ -in-W(2). There is no disagreement because there is no shared standard across W domains of what truth or value is.

Relativism of either the truth- or value-predicate altering variety will allow the realist to avoid admitting a true contradiction. In cases where divergent judgments are separated by great cultural or temporal gaps, relativism may even seem plausible. For many in the West, Chinese opera may be a difficult experience, by our standards cacophonous and shrill, but by Chinese standards lively and beautiful. And though we can understand the significance of the use of ultramarine in Quattrocento painting (Figure 17), perhaps we just don't register the difference between more and less expensive varieties in the way a contemporary Italian

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would, and so our evaluation of the painting will differ from his.<sup>35</sup> While these sorts of gaps make relativism plausible, I want to suggest that in the examples given above, it is considerably less so, for the very reason that neither the temporal or cultural gaps are in evidence. So even if the realist is happy to embrace relativism, it is difficult to see exactly how the relativism is to be spelled out in many real disputes.

If we want to give the three disputes, over Manet, Rothko, and Wordsworth, a relativistic treatment, a good first question to ask is: relative to what? We should start by trying to specify the relational variable *W* in these cases, whether considering truth or value relativism. If no plausible candidate emerges, then so much the worse for the relativist move. In each of the three example disputes, the critics involved do share a language and a form of life. Nothing in the judgments encapsulated here, nor in the reasons given for the judgment, supports a subjectivist rendering of those judgments. There is something incoherent in the idea of giving reasons in support of a purely subjective claim. The reader of art criticism takes these reasons back to the artwork, to find out whether they accord with the presentational features of that artwork, its art-historical context, and perhaps some theoretical notions of art interpretation. Our interest in the critics' claims is their possible illumination of the artwork, and not merely a testimony of the critics' subjective responses.

It is worth noting that in the West, a range of art critical theories has been on offer at least since the ancient Greeks. So we might consider, in parallel to some relativistic arguments from Kuhn, that what we experience in the artwork is relative to the theoretical apparatus which structures that experience. An art critical theory, then, is a sort of framework within which judgments can be compared as true or false, but makes inter-theoretical comparisons inappropriate. Taking particular critical theories for the relational variable *W* doesn't remove the difficulty, though. The advocate of an art critical theory is often engaged in showing alternative theories to be inadequate—less illuminating, based on groundless assumptions of autonomy of the text, or on the reliability of the historical record in establishing artistic intentions, or on the problem of adverting to intentions where several people are involved in the artistic process. The test of theoretical adequacy, though, is always one of coherence with our beliefs about what art is, how we are to experience it, and our wider knowledge of the human world, together with a continued interest in enhancing the aesthetic interest in the

works. It is my contention, then, that unlike the Kuhnian account where we have incommensurable representations of a domain of experience, in the art critical case we regularly make cross-comparisons with a view to balancing all these factors. This activity would be utterly beside the point if there were truly no common language or criteria of adequacy between them. But in fact all critical theories must be responsible to these basic considerations, shifting and vague though they might be, so the choice of theory as the relational variable *W* does not dissolve the disagreement.

**b. Asserting and Entertaining “As-If”**

There is no doubt still some room for the relativist to maneuver, but the worries I’ve raised may make an alternative position more attractive. One might accommodate a plurality of incompatible judgments by seeing those judgments as doing something other than stating truths. Critical judgments, then, are imperatives, prescribing one to “Imagine that...” the content of the judgment is the case. Alternatively, judgments could state truths, but are to be read as elliptical expressions for “It is appropriate to imagine that...” the content of the judgment is the case. In either case the judgment is an “as if” statement, an injunction to imagine as if *X*, or a claim that imagining as if *X* is warranted. This approach is developed by Roger Scruton, and is alluded to by Matthew Kieran and Steven Davies.<sup>36</sup> Call the view that judgments are imperatives to imagine the *command view*, and the other the *warrant view*. I claim that both successfully dispel the appearance of contradiction, but require abandoning realism.

Under the former account, when Anfam writes that a Rothko painting is a mirage-like oracle which seems to veil hidden meanings behind its simple composition, his judgment should be taken as a command to imagine the painting in this way. Anfam does not assert that the painting is an oracle, but commands us to think as if it were one. Similarly with O’Connor’s judgment that the painting is an abstracted landscape—this is an elliptical expression for “Imagine that the painting is an abstracted landscape.” While we may have practical difficulties satisfying differing commands at once, the difficulty is at most a practical and not a logical one. “Imagine that *p*” and “Imagine that  $\sim p$ ” might strain our cognitive powers were we to obey both at once, but there is no contradiction in prescribing both. It is enough for the purposes of this discussion to note that the command view is an antirealist one.

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Commands are not truth-apt sentences, and so apparently assertoric sentences—aesthetic judgments—fail to satisfy the representational role accorded to them under realism. While the command view solves the problem of admitting a contradiction, it is an unsatisfactory theory in other ways. Could there be any constraints on commands to imagine? On what grounds might we rule out a command to imagine Rothko's painting as a Marxist social polemic? Ruling out *outré* critical judgments is certainly something we want to be able to do if we are to avoid subjectivism. This task, though, seems impossible without bringing in considerations of truth. The command view also is vulnerable to the Frege-Geach problem of embedded contexts. If aesthetic judgments serve only to express non-truth evaluable prescriptions, there is no way to explain their role in the antecedent of conditionals. So while the command view solves the contradiction problem, it comes at an unacceptably high price.

What of the warrant view? Certainly it solves the contradiction problem as well. Again the key word is 'imagination'. The warrant view has us read Anfam as asserting that "it is appropriate *to imagine* that the painting is an oracle". This is importantly different from a claim that substitutes 'to believe' for 'to imagine'. We need not think that the content of the judgment is true of the artwork. But then, the warrant view is also antirealist. For while judgments may be true or false (based on whether they are appropriate or not), imagination seems more a matter of what we take the artwork to be than what the artwork is. And so even if bivalence is preserved, aesthetic judgments won't be true purely in virtue of some mind-independent state of affairs. Rather, truth rests on some appropriateness of fit between our imaginings and the artwork.

Proponents of this sort of move maintain that it does not entail that all judgments are equally worthy. Manet's painting has been given a formalist analysis by Sandblad<sup>37</sup> which has been widely rejected, because the formalist approach makes no account of the narrative content of the artwork, which seems highly significant to our aesthetic experience. That content is made more salient by the title (consider the difference if it were titled *Composition in Blue*) and, oddly enough, by the apparent moral indifference of Manet's depiction. Just how we determine those salencies is going to vary from case to case, and will always be a subject for spirited discussion. A critic who found in Rothko's *Light Red Over Black* a critique

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of bourgeois values and a celebration of the liberation of the working class would not be taken seriously, though if he produced some lost set of the artist's diaries which showed his communist sympathies, the story might be different. Even in this hypothetical case, the legitimacy of the Marxist interpretation would not be secured; critics insisting on the autonomy of the artwork might exclude this sort of biographical evidence, and Rothko himself insisted, perhaps paradoxically, that he was happy to allow *any* meaning someone attributed to his work. The proponent of aesthetic judgments as statements of appropriate imaginings, then, need not tolerate any judgment as acceptable. In general, the same constraints of being attentive to the work and to the various conventions of art critical practice will govern which ones are good and which bad.

The advantage of such a view is clear—we can imagine an artwork as having all sorts of qualities without worrying about the truth-status of conflicting judgments, as under the view the conflict is only an apparent one. We can imagine *Light Red Over Black* as now an oracle, and shift our imagining to see it as an abstracted landscape. I see two difficulties with this proposal. One is that we seem to want some linguistic markers that indicate how we are to take sentences within aesthetic discourse. Surely some sentences will be assertoric—sentences about the provenance of a painting, the form of a sonata, or indeed a summary of the facts of the editorial choices that collected six of Wordsworth's poems into "the Lucy poems". A possible solution to this worry might begin by giving a speech-act account of aesthetic utterances, where in some cases the utterance meaning and the utterer's meaning are identical (e.g. successful factual statements), and in others come apart (e.g. judgments enjoining us to imagine something). No syntactic markers will help us to make such a distinction; that is a pragmatic task.

The second difficulty is related to the first. It is not clear that *outré* judgments, such as the communist reading of Rothko, can be so easily dismissed if we weaken the role of truth by tying it only to the appropriateness of various imaginings. As long as such judgments accord with the features of the work, other considerations will be less helpful in disqualifying them. One might appeal to the fact Rothko had no interest in communism, but there is a very influential set of art critical conventions holding that any appeal to actual or hypothetical artistic intentions is illegitimate. If art critical theories form part of the conventions that

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allow or disallow judgments, then some other theoretical arguments are needed against the anti-intentionalists. If those are lacking, it seems that if an *outré* interpretation enhances the aesthetic interest of an artwork, we may lack a valuable resource—a substantial notion of truth—to rid ourselves of it. And this line of thought goes as well for less extreme examples: both Brooks' and Bateson's interpretations of "A slumber did my sprit seal" rest on a significant falsehood, that the poem refers to Lucy. But both interpretations generate some interest and enhance the poem's richness. Both interpretations have long since become canonical. Witness too the continued interest in psychoanalytic criticism of film and literature, long after the scientific theory has been discredited. I am not entirely sure that basing an interpretation on a falsehood, or a collection of them, is inappropriate where the experience of art is concerned. But it is hard to see how we might decide, once we deny ourselves the notion of truth in judgments for anything stronger than the suggestion view. More troubling, it is hard to see how a determined advocate of subjectivism might not win her case. Again, these difficulties may well not be insurmountable. The important point is that construing aesthetic judgments as statements about appropriate imaginings is an unquestionably antirealist way to dispel the appearance of contradiction.

#### c. "Relativism" and Antirealism

Joseph Margolis offers yet another solution to the problem that makes CP an attractive view.<sup>38</sup> He proposes a "relativism" that explicitly overhauls the truth predicate in a way that holds on to the assertoric character of aesthetic discourse. It is not in fact relativism, and it is unsatisfactory, but the spirit of his program moves us, I think, in the right direction if we take inarbitrable disputes to be a datum of aesthetic discourse. The appeal of CP rests on its squaring critical disagreements with a more basic commitment to realism. In general, realism is the view that (non-vague) assertions are determinately true or false in virtue of some mind-independent facts. Antirealism is simply the denial of that view; such a denial is only the basic material for a wide range of theoretical positions. Within aesthetics, the datum of critical disagreement is for some a motivation for some antirealist view, but the friend of CP rather wishes to acknowledge the disagreements while holding on to realism.

Margolis moves from a recognition of this datum through the truth that there are coherent many-valued logics to advise that we reject the Principle of Bivalence for aesthetics. (*It is*

possible to adopt a multi-valued logic *and* maintain bivalence, but Margolis is explicitly not taking this route.<sup>39</sup>) He offers this as “the essential alethic motivation for a viable relativism [that] is not itself a form a relativism”<sup>40</sup>. This is all right so far. But with the rejection of bivalence, and with the specific refusal to award any judgments with the predicate *True*, Margolis moves into antirealism. Once that commitment is in place, all talk of relativism is superfluous, since antirealism can (though need not) explicitly accommodate true contradictions and so eliminate any need to explain them as merely apparent contradictions.<sup>41</sup> And nowhere does Margolis short-list any candidates for the variable *W* to which the truth predicate is to be relativized.

Why then, does Margolis’ specific proposal strike me as unsatisfactory? The logic Margolis recommends would have the predicate *False* but no predicate *True*; rather it would have “truth-like” predicates including *Plausible*, *Apt*, *Reasonable*, and so on. He makes this choice because he wants to treat truth and falsity asymmetrically, which allows judgments to be false (“as not according with pertinent evidence”<sup>42</sup>) but does *not* allow them to be true (“since retaining truth would lead inevitably to contradiction”<sup>43</sup>). I find it surprising that Margolis resists an antirealism allowing true contradictions, since I think that they are entirely consistent with his ontological conception of artworks. For our present purposes, it is only necessary to highlight that radical as his proposal is, it is in a way not radical enough. In failing to make peace with the metaphysical implications of antirealism, his relationship with the truth-predicate becomes an uncomfortable one. He denies *true* as an available predicate in an admittedly assertoric discourse, but the price of that denial is of course adopting some kind of error theory about just what it is we’re doing when we say “It is *true* that Manet’s painting refers to the artist himself.” That consequence is, as I have argued in Chapter 2, a rather ugly one, and so I think we’re better off to avoid it by allowing the value *true* in whatever logic we adopt.

#### d. Realist Pluralism

Up to this point, the approach to dispelling contradictions among critical claims has involved either relativizing some of the predicates involved, re-interpreting the language of judgments, or most radically, revising their logic. The latter two are antirealist, because they reconstrue judgments as non-descriptive, or as descriptive partly of the activity of our minds, or because

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they explicitly reject bivalence and the predicate *True*. Relativism, on the other hand, may allow one to retain a commitment to realism<sup>44</sup>, but it will nevertheless be unpalatable to many realists for other reasons.

Robert Stecker argues<sup>45</sup> that a commitment to (non-relativist) realism can incorporate pluralism by introducing a distinction between truth and acceptability. Truth can only be awarded to one comprehensive judgment, or to its conjuncts. Acceptability, though, may be conferred on those judgments that meet other critical aims. These judgments are “neither true nor false”<sup>46</sup> but rather acceptable relative to some critical aim. So critical monism (the view that there is but one true comprehensive judgment) is compatible with critical pluralism. The three examples given above are *prima facie* candidates for this kind of treatment; at most one judgment from each is correct, but perhaps others may be deemed acceptable based on their satisfaction of some yet-to-be specified critical projects.

There are two needs to be met in Stecker’s compatibilist project: a distinction between true and false judgments, and a distinction between acceptable and unacceptable judgments. On the face of it, any judgment could be evaluated for its truth and for its acceptability; a false judgment may be acceptable in that it satisfies some legitimate critical project, while a true judgment may be unacceptable because “it doesn’t explain what puzzles us about a work. It gets bogged down in matters we regard as trivial rather than getting to the heart of the matter.”<sup>47</sup> So the distinctions mark off judgments into categories that are overlapping but not mutually exclusive.

There is an *ad hoc* quality about these distinctions that borders on incoherence. Stecker says that acceptable judgments are neither true nor false. He casually modifies this later<sup>48</sup> to allow that they can either be false or neither true or false. True judgments can also be unacceptable. But surely all true judgments can’t be unacceptable. If acceptability lies in the satisfaction of some legitimate critical aim, then at least some true judgments must also be acceptable. So acceptable judgments can be true, false, or neither true nor false. And unacceptable judgments can be true or false, but apparently *cannot* be neither true nor false (because they don’t meet the minimal acceptability conditions). Acceptability needs some

further characterization if we are to be able to know when the neither-true-nor-false option is available.

What then, makes an interpretation (or generally, a judgment) an acceptable one? Judgments can be acceptable, though not necessarily true, "because they satisfy criteria of acceptability which have nothing to do with [their] truth. Such interpretations may aim at enhancing the aesthetic value of a work, or at making the work more relevant to the interpreter's contemporaries, or at just offering an interesting way of reading the work."<sup>49</sup> He goes on to say that not just any judgment is acceptable, because acceptability requires consistency with at least some facts about the artwork. But if this is Stecker's solution to the problem of inconsistent judgments, it is not a realist one at all. First, in pronouncing (at least some) acceptable judgments neither true nor false, he rejects bivalence in order to accommodate a plurality of them with consistency. Furthermore, what legitimates judgments is their being warrantably assertible. The conditions for warrant here include consistency with some facts about the artwork and the legitimacy of the critical project served. But the realist who wants to hold on to pluralism should do so because the judgments within the plurality hold in virtue of something stronger than their assertibility. So where Stecker is a pluralist he is an antirealist. And by insisting on reserving the value *true* for at most one judgment, he is only a realist when he is a critical monist. The compatibilist option is untenable. Realism cannot allow the joint truth of the example critical claims without introducing a relativism that, at least in these cases, seems unprincipled.

## 5. Chapter Summary

Both the modest and the robust realist hold that aesthetic properties supervene on non-aesthetic ones, and that supervenience captures much of the practice of defending aesthetic judgments. As I have argued, however, the intuition is utterly uninformative if true, because it says nothing about how specific aesthetic qualities arise or emerge from specific non-aesthetic ones. At best we have the trivial assertion that the total array of aesthetic qualities depends on the total array of non-aesthetic ones. This is no more than a denial of platonism and reductionism. What a supervenience account should provide is an explanation of when certain aesthetic judgements are licensed and when they are not, and supervenience plainly fails to deliver this. Most likely, the supervenience thesis is utterly incoherent.

### 3.5: Chapter Summary

Worse still, supervenience must be asserted as an *a priori* thesis by the realist. The faith in the legitimacy of such an assertion surely lies in a more basic commitment to some version of physicalism, and the same sort of worry that drives others into non-cognitivism, namely, that aesthetic qualities could not be anything but occult unless somehow constituted by natural properties. Should the realist be asked to justify her adherence to supervenience, she encounters a dilemma, in which she can only justify supervenience by invoking truth as warranted assertibility.

Even if these two problems can be dealt with in a satisfactory fashion, the realist is left with a strong commitment to there being but one correct comprehensive aesthetic judgment for any given artwork. That commitment is called into question by the fact of irresolvable critical disputes throughout the artworld. Pluralism dissolves such disputes while upholding realism only if it is in fact relativism. I have argued that relativism is unsatisfactory as a solution to a great many disagreements, and so the realist commitment stands in opposition to an art critical practice that hosts a great many of these disputes. Indeed, it is often taken to be criterial of great works of art that they support a wide range of judgments and interpretations, including some inconsistent with one another. The realist disallows this, and consequently, diminishes the explanatory appeal of her theoretical position.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, in "Realism", *Truth and Other Enigmas* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978) 145-165.

<sup>2</sup> Jerrold Levinson, "Aesthetic Supervenience", *Music, Art, and Metaphysics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990) 149.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> The formulation is from Blackburn, *Spreading the Word*, but supervenience is frequently formalized in this way elsewhere.

<sup>5</sup> This second relation, a rigid linking between  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$ , is a stronger claim than supervenience. Supervenience does not enable one to infer that something is  $\alpha$  when it is  $\beta$ ; rather, when one knows that something is both  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$ , one can be sure that another thing that is  $\beta$  is also  $\alpha$ . See Blackburn, *Spreading the Word*, 183-184.

<sup>6</sup> Blackburn, *Spreading the Word* 184.

<sup>7</sup> See especially his *Real Beauty* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1997) 96-112.

<sup>8</sup> Eddy Zemach, *Real Beauty* 102.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Greg Currie, *An Ontology of Art* (London: Macmillan, 1989) 79.

<sup>12</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*" in *Labyrinths*, Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby, eds. (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1962) 43.

<sup>13</sup> This observation is due to Crispin Wright, review of *Spreading the Word*, by Simon Blackburn, *Mind* 94 (1985) 316-317.

<sup>14</sup> See Appendix 2 for proof.

<sup>15</sup> Richard Wollheim, *Art and Its Objects*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980) 88-89.

- <sup>16</sup> *ibid* 89.
- <sup>17</sup> Dalia Drai, *Supervenience and Realism* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 1999) 46.
- <sup>18</sup> See Crispin Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, especially 18-29. From 24: "Nothing can deserve the title of a truth predicate unless it coincides in normative force with warranted assertibility but is potentially divergent in extension."
- <sup>19</sup> See Paul Horwich, *Truth* 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).
- <sup>20</sup> Jerrold Levinson, "Aesthetic Supervenience" 149.
- <sup>21</sup> This terminology is introduced by Frank Sibley in his "Aesthetic Concepts", *Approach to Aesthetics: Collected Papers on Philosophical Aesthetics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001) 1-23.
- <sup>22</sup> Francis O'Connor, , electronic review of Mark Rothko exhibition at the National Gallery of Art, 1998 (URL: <http://members.aol.com/FVOC/archive.html>).
- <sup>23</sup> David Anfam, *Mark Rothko: Catalog Raisonné* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998) 11.
- <sup>24</sup> John Bender, "Realism, Supervenience, and Irresolvable Aesthetic Disputes", *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 54 (1996) 373.
- <sup>25</sup> Frank Jackson, *From Metaphysics to Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) 125.
- <sup>26</sup> *ibid* 125.
- <sup>27</sup> See John MacKinnon, "Heroism and Reversal: Sibley on Aesthetic Supervenience" for an argument that the negative-condition governed feature of aesthetic qualities or concepts tells against a supervenience claim.
- <sup>28</sup> Cleanth Brooks, "Irony as a Principle of Structure", 1949, in *Literary Opinion in America*, ed. M.D. Zabel (New York: Harper and Row, 1962) 736.
- <sup>29</sup> F.W. Bateson, *English Poetry: A Critical Introduction* 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London: Longman's, 1966) 59.
- <sup>30</sup> Hugh Sykes Davies, "Another New Poem by Wordsworth", *Essays in Criticism* 15 (1965) 138.
- <sup>31</sup> *ibid* 156.
- <sup>32</sup> John House, "Manet's Maximilian: History Painting, Censorship, and Ambiguity", Juliet Wilson-Bareau, ed. *Manet: The Execution of Maximilian* (London: National Gallery Publications, 1992) 108.
- <sup>33</sup> Micheal Fried, *Manet's Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996) 358.
- <sup>34</sup> Georges Bataille, *Manet* (Geneva 1955), quoted in Fried, 354.
- <sup>35</sup> See, on this point, Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 11.
- <sup>36</sup> See Roger Scruton, *Art and Imagination* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974); Matthew Kieran, 'In Defence of Critical Pluralism', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, vol. 36 (1996) 239-251; Stephen Davies, 'Relativism in Interpretation', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 53 (1995) 8-13.
- <sup>37</sup> Nils Gösta Sandblad, *Manet: Three Studies in Artistic Conception* (Lund: Publications of the New Society of Letters, 1954).
- <sup>38</sup> Joseph Margolis, 'Plain Talk About Interpretation On A Relativistic Model', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 53 (1995) 1-7.
- <sup>39</sup> For example, Prior's suggested interpretation of a four-valued logic as 1 = true and known to be true; 2 = true but not known to be true; 3 = false but not known to be false; 4 = false and known to be false. See Susan Haack, *Philosophy of Logics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978) 213.
- <sup>40</sup> Margolis, "Plain Talk About Interpretation" 3.
- <sup>41</sup> This point is fully developed in Chapter 6, Section 4.
- <sup>42</sup> Margolis 6.
- <sup>43</sup> *ibid*.
- <sup>44</sup> Though this is not uncontroversial. If "good" is in fact "good according to the standards of X", in what way do our thoughts not play a value-constituting role in the formulation of standards which are incommensurable across the values of X? I leave this point to the side here.
- <sup>45</sup> Robert Stecker, 'Art Interpretation' *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 52 (1994) 193-206.
- <sup>46</sup> *ibid* 194.
- <sup>47</sup> *ibid*.
- <sup>48</sup> *ibid* 195.
- <sup>49</sup> *ibid* 194.

## Chapter 4

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In this chapter, I take up largely metaphysical problems associated with the two realist positions left standing at the end of Chapter 2. In the previous chapter, I argued that supervenience was a deeply troubled notion, so much so that modest aesthetic realism and robust aesthetic realism risk losing one of the core theses that distinguish those positions from platonism and reductionism. That may appear to be a largely metaphysical issue, and indeed it is. But its interest lies also in the purported contribution it makes to the analysis of aesthetic judgments: what are they, what counts as a good supporting reason for them, and how are we to understand the appearance of conflict between them?

In this chapter, I examine more straightforwardly metaphysical issues, taking up supervenience only toward the end. Whereas robust and modest realism share much the same epistemological problems, the metaphysical issues are quite different. The strategic claims of the chapter are:

1. The argument for the primary quality status of aesthetic qualities rests on a confusion between truth-conferring and warrant-conferring properties.
2. The analogy between secondary qualities and aesthetic properties is significantly flawed.
3. Response-dependence is a retreat from the realist thesis of mind-independence, one that may or may not undermine the general project.
4. Maintaining response-dependence as a realist tenet requires a viable notion of supervenience, which previous arguments have shown to be unavailable.

Before undertaking the arguments for these four claims, it will be useful to give a more careful account of realism and of mind-independence.

### **Realism Revisited**

Up to this point, I have been working with a serviceable but still rather crude notion of realism. Realism represents a commitment to the truth or falsity of assertions in a discourse being a matter independent of the beliefs of participants in the discourse. In other words, when a well-formed assertion  $p$  is true, it is not because the associated belief that  $p$  is held, but rather, because some independent state of affairs obtains. A very rough sketch of

realism in some area of thought is given by Pettit, as being “the doctrine that certain entities allegedly associated with that area are indeed real.”<sup>1</sup> But this characterization is far too crude to be helpful, even as a slogan. It gives rise to the prejudice of antirealism as a claim that in some domain we are under some kind of widespread, systematic illusion or error about the contents represented by our thought and discourse. What is needed is an account of what it is to be real in some technical sense. Indeed, Pettit goes on to provide such an account. Here I will survey Pettit’s account<sup>2</sup> as well as Crispin Wright’s<sup>3</sup>. In doing so I am aiming at a better understanding of what is preserved of realism if aesthetic qualities are given a response-dependent treatment, and how much the core realist tenets must be compromised, if at all, in moving away from a response-independent treatment.

Pettit writes that a survey of the non-realist theory demarcates realism as the commitment to three theses:

1. The Descriptivist Thesis (DT)
2. The Objectivist Thesis (OT)
3. The Cosmocentric Thesis (CT)

What are the claims of these thesis, and how do they mesh with the taxonomy I have been using thus far? DT is the claim that “participants in the discourse necessarily posit the existence of distinctive items, believing and asserting things about them.”<sup>4</sup> Moreover, it is necessarily knowable *a priori* by anyone who would count as understanding an assertion that a description fails (i.e. the assertion is false) in the absence of the items posited by the description. Bringing DT into alignment with our taxonomy shows that its denial leads to expressivism or quasi-realism. Pettit also identifies reductionism as an opponent of DT.<sup>5</sup> On this point, our taxonomy is misleading in marking reductionism as descriptivist; at the level of the controversial discourse, the claim is that there are no *distinct* entities posited by the discourse, because all the entities of that discourse can be reduced to or identified with those posited by the reduction level. So there is a sense in which one might see DT as satisfied by reductionism, though not straightforwardly. At any rate the important observation is that all three of the serious contender views (cognitivist antirealism, RAR, and MAR) all incorporate DT. It is a necessary but not sufficient commitment for realism.

OT is the claim that “the objects posited exist and have their character fixed independently of the dispositions of participants in the discourse to assert and believe things about them”.<sup>6</sup> This is a two-part claim and so can be opposed in two ways. Denying existence to the discourse’s posits delivers an error theory; by DT assertions are true when the right state of affairs obtains, and the error theorist accepts this thesis but denies that the right state ever obtains. Following the taxonomy from top to bottom, we are now left with cognitivist antirealism as the only non-realist position, and indeed what distinguishes this view from the realist views below it is the claim that while DT holds, the entities which aesthetic judgments posit are not independent of our knowing. Here a potential confusion resides in the word ‘objectivity’. Pettit uses it to signal mind-independence, and this is not to be entwined with the use of ‘objectivity’ to characterize judgments. The former has its roots in the notion of objecthood. The latter, recall, associates with judgments their improvability by the giving of reasons, and the idea that there are better and worse judgments. The judgment-related sense of objectivity has no necessary logical connection to the object sense used by Pettit and others.

Finally, Pettit’s CT, is an epistemological thesis and thus not always included among the core realist claims. CT holds that “error and ignorance are always possible with regard to the substantive propositions of the discourse. It is possible...that participants are wrong about all and every substantive claim in the discourse.”<sup>7</sup> Implicit in this thesis is the allowance for the possibility that every participant is wrong about one, many, or even all the substantive claims comprised by the discourse, and this is so under epistemic conditions ranging from the actual to the normal to the ideal. So the ‘always’ in the statement of CT above should be taken in the strongest sense possible. As Pettit notes, it may seem redundant to assert CT as a realist thesis independent from DT and OT. It is usually taken to be the case that mind-independence carries implicitly a commitment to CT. Pettit holds, however, that it is not inconsistent to claim DT and OT while denying CT. Such a view would involve, additionally to the first two theses, that the error or ignorance of the discourse’s posits is *a priori* impossible at some limit. One such view, according to Pettit, is the ‘interpretationist’ view that “the referents of any [substantial] discourse...are those entities which it most flattering to the discourse to take as its referents: those entities such that participants can be held to say more true things about them than anything else.”<sup>8</sup> This view resides in the logical space

formed by affirming only the first two realist theses, but it is difficult to see just what the corresponding theory of aesthetic judgment would be. And outside aesthetics, what might such a discourse look like? One possibility might be a highly circumscribed discourse of first-personal avowals: statements of one's own intentions, beliefs, and desires. Given a certain understanding of these mental entities, it might be plausible to consider a discourse about them to obey DT and OT but not CT. But this case seems to be a special one, and the only one where such a combination of theses is possible. This combination only works for this discourse because of the particular subject matter of the discourse, and the logical relation holding between that discourse and its referents. In any other discourse, I maintain that CT follows from the joint affirmation of DT and OT, and is part and parcel of an aesthetics-appropriate realism *a la* Pettit. Realism, then, on his account, represents a commitment to the conjunction of DT, OT, and CT; they are (jointly) necessary (and only jointly) sufficient for any position identified as a realist one.

At this point a distinction between trivial and non-trivial senses of 'mind-dependence' should be noted. Trivial examples include self-conscious avowals, such as "I think that the vase is delicate", third-person assessments of belief, such as "He thinks that the vase is delicate", or statements about minds or mentality, as in, "She has a beautiful mind." I take it to be unnecessary to qualify the notion of mind-dependence so as to exclude these trivial cases. The interesting sense (and the one I intend by the unqualified term) is one in which apart from the obvious trivial cases, the state of affairs posited by an utterance is in a significant sense constituted by something like the beliefs attendant to the utterance. Roughly, it is the thought that thoughts of 'x' play an extension-determining role for 'x'. A discourse in which thoughts played such a role would violate Pettit's CT. The more fraught question is whether Modest Aesthetic Realism, which takes concepts to be response-dependent, employs a distinct notion of mind-dependence. This question anticipates a central argument of this chapter; much more is needed before that question can be properly addressed.

Wright's characterization of realism is given in very different terms than Pettit's, though a common core can be identified. The distinction between antirealism and realism has historically been confused with the distinction between non-cognitivism and cognitivism.

The latter contrast is between (cognitivist) theories that hold sentences in a discourse to be proper assertions and to have truth-values, and (non-cognitivist) ones that deny either or both of these things. But non-cognitivist theory does not exhaust the logical space of antirealism. An antirealist can maintain that a discourse is genuinely assertoric, and that the assertions can have truth-values. The conception of truthful assertions as representing the facts is a platitudinous one, and so one that makes no metaphysical commitments either way in the debate between realists and antirealists. To state the platitude, even in metaphysical terms such as ‘judgments fitting the facts’ or ‘corresponding to reality’ does not yet give a substantial, committing, content. “Antirealism”, says Wright, “is now properly identified with the view that, with respect to a particular region of assertoric discourse, nothing further can be done to substantiate the representative aspect of the notion of truth beyond what is accomplished by the platitudinous connections with normativity. Antirealism thus becomes the natural, initial position in any debate.”<sup>9</sup> The push to realism comes with the satisfaction of criteria indicating that the antirealist conception is too thin a metaphysics for the explication of our discourse-related practices.

Wright develops four ‘constraints’ such that each is “a sufficient condition for the propriety of a move away from [antirealism].”<sup>10</sup> In other words, if the constraint is taken to hold for some discourse, the need for a realist account becomes evident. These constraints, then, characterized as they are, fit less neatly into the taxonomy of Figure 1; some of them cut across it. A look at Wright’s constraints will prove useful, however, particularly as one of them serves to mark out Modest Aesthetic Realism from a close but antirealist relative.

Wright’s constraints are (possibly in descending order of decisiveness):

1. Evidence-transcendence (ET)
2. Cognitive Command (CC)
3. Best Explanation (BE)
4. Order of Determination (OD)

I survey each of them briefly in turn. Evidence transcendence would, if satisfied, clearly decide the case for the realist. It corresponds with the strong interpretation of Pettit’s Cosmocentric Thesis. If aesthetic discourse were evidence-transcendent, the possibility always remains open that everyone could be wrong about a particular judgment, or about all

of them. It would have to be possible that all of us who find Miro's paintings playfully insightful were mistaken, that no matter what practices we engaged in to improve our judgment, the truth about his art would remain beyond our (and his) grasp. Some aesthetic realists, notably Eddy Zemach (whose views I examine below) hold on to a notion of truth that involves ET. But realism need not invoke this strong conception. In particular, is it not at all clear that the Modest Aesthetic Realist invokes ET. It is possible that MAR motivates its move to realism on the basis of a weaker constraint on the operative notion of truth. But note that, if my associating Pettit's CT with ET is correct, then a modest realist theory has compromised the notion of mind-independence in some way. This of course is the reason for labeling MAR as 'modest'. What needs to be examined is how much this can be compromised and still be a realist view.

Cognitive Command is formulated as a suitably realism-committing notion of convergence. The latter figures centrally in much of the debate between realism and antirealism, though as Wright argues, convergence is often formulated in a way that is non-committal between the two. Of course, if the realism at hand is underpinned by an evidence-transcendent conception of truth, then a further constraint of convergence would be superfluous. For convergence as it is usually expressed holds that if a sentence is true, then appropriately situated parties to the discourse would agree that the sentence is true. And so a realist discourse exhibits this tendency of convergence on true statements. ET is stronger because even if there were convergence, there is still no guarantee that there has been convergence on the truth; *ex hypothesi* the truth may outrun all available evidence according to ET. On its own, convergence is too loosely formulated to mark out the reasons for truth as suitably realist ones. Wright accordingly casts convergence as cognitive command: "it is *a priori* that disagreements, when not attributable to vagueness, are ultimately explicable in terms of cognitive shortcomings; specifically, some material ignorance, material error, or prejudicial assessment."<sup>11</sup> Is the discourse of aesthetic judgment such that truth is constrained by cognitive command? It seems that the realist who wants to defend a pluralist position, in spite of the arguments offered in Chapter 3, does not hold aesthetic discourse to be so constrained. If critical pluralism is the thesis that there are instances where conflicting judgments can all be true, then the disagreement cannot be understood as arising from cognitive failures. The realist could either accept this charge and insist that cognitive

command does constrain truth in aesthetics, or she could see the conflict as signaling what might, in Hume's language, be called a 'blameless disagreement'. This could involve a relativizing of the judgments, and one favored candidate for the relativizing parameter is sensibility. 'Sensibility' is again a loose term, but it is worth considering whether a response-dependent realism represents this sort of move, and further, whether it will succeed. I take up these questions below.

Wright's third constraint, Best Explanation, is another that has received confusing treatment in the debate. Crudely, the idea is that truth is constrained by BE in cases in which if one thinks  $p$  to be true, the best explanation for that thought is that  $p$ . Why do you believe that the water is dangerously cold? Because it is—because were you to dive in, you would feel a pain in your chest, feel your muscles harden, and feel the need to get to shore immediately. The best explanation for your belief is that the properties of the water caused you to have it. There has been a tendency in the literature to see BE as requiring truth-conferring entities to stand in a *causal* relation to judges, but this is a mistake. The intuition is very strong that  $1 + 2 = 3$ , and few believe that we hold the belief in virtue of standing in a causal relationship to a realm of mathematical objects. Putting aside the arguments for mathematical constructivism for the purposes of the present illustration, BE says that we believe that  $1 + 2 = 3$  because  $1 + 2 = 3$ , that the best explanation for our so believing is that it is the case. At any rate, one who held  $1 + 2 = 3$  to be true because of some independent facts would have to make such an account plausible. It is not at all clear that aesthetic judgments are so constrained. Again, it is of course true that were truth constrained by ET or CC, the weaker BE falls out as a corollary. But if these are not asserted as holding, so, say, we allow for blameless disagreements, it seems difficult to understand how to fill out a BE constraint. If Anfam and O'Connor disagree about the interpretation of Rothko's paintings, and we resist the thought that this dispute signals the cognitive shortcomings of at least one of them, in virtue of what is the truth of their judgments to be explained? Of BE in general, Wright states, "What is important for this particular constraint is that the states of affairs which we regard our judgments as reflecting enjoy a *width of cosmological role*, as it were, sufficient to force us to regard their role as truth-conferrers in more than minimal terms."<sup>12</sup> What this means is that, were truth in aesthetics constrained by BE, then not only must it be the case that the best explanation of the truth of our judgments is that they represent artworks as

bearing certain aesthetic properties. "There must be more things which are so *because* of the obtaining of such states of affairs than the formation in us of certain beliefs."<sup>13</sup> Wright gives a nice example that brings out the contrast between statements whose truth is quite plausibly understood as constrained by BE<sup>14</sup>, and those for which the intuition is not nearly as strong.

Compare the Wetness of These Rocks, and The Wrongness of That Act. Reference to the wetness of the rocks can, uncontroversially, contribute towards explaining at least four kinds of things:

- (1) My perceiving, and hence believing, that the rocks are wet.
- (2) A small (prelinguistic) child's interests in his hands after he has touched the rocks.
- (3) My slipping and falling.
- (4) The abundance of lichen growing on them.

The wetness of the rocks can be ascribed, that is, each of four kinds of consequence: cognitive effects, precognitive-sensuous effects, effects on us as physically interactive agents, and certain brute effects on inanimate organisms and matter. By contrast, the wrongness of that act, though citing it may feature in a vindictory explanation of my moral disapproval of the action, and hence of the further effects on the world which my approval may generate, would seem to have no part to play in the *direct* (propositional-attitude unmediated) explanation of any effects of the latter three sorts: precognitive-sensuous, interactive, and brute.<sup>15</sup>

So the question to ask here is, what else is so because the Rothko canvas is an abstracted landscape, or because it is an enigmatic oracle? It is extremely difficult to give any answer besides various other beliefs. If aesthetic discourse is realist, it is not because its truths are constrained by BE.

The Order-of-Determination constraint is the one of greatest interest to the theoretical debate in aesthetics, as it is closely linked to the idea of response-dependence.<sup>16</sup> OD "intuitively...marks the distinction between classes of statements about which our *best* opinions—opinions conceived by subjects and in circumstances which we think of as cognitively ideal for statements of that kind—(partially) *determine* the extension of the truth predicate among them, and classes of statements our best opinions about which at most *reflect* an extension determined independently."<sup>17</sup> If aesthetic judgments fall into the latter group, then the case for realism seems a strong one. The historical genesis for this contrast is of course the *Euthyphro* dialogue, in which Euthyphro asserts that something is pious because the gods love it (where 'because' has the constitutive sense), against Socrates who argues that the gods love those things because they are pious. The force of the argument is

that the concept of piety is logically prior to the pro-attitudes of the gods. Read in this way, the *Euthyphro* seems to offer a simple contrast between a simple projectivism and an equally simple detectivism. But the picture is more complicated than that. Secondary qualities are taken to be paradigm candidates for this sort of treatment. Understood as dispositions of things to elicit certain responses in subjects, secondary qualities might be roughly characterized in the following way (taking the color red for example):

x is red iff x appears red to normal perceivers under normal conditions

The latter sections of this chapter take up the secondary quality analogy and response-dependence in detail, and so I put them to one side for the moment.

### 1. Response-Independence

Robust Aesthetic Realism (RAR) is distinguished from its Modest counterpart in holding that aesthetic qualities are independent of our responses. In Lockean terms, RAR characterizes aesthetic properties as primary qualities, while MAR as secondary. To call aesthetic properties primary qualities is to say that those properties have their nature independent of any experiencing subjects and invariant across experiential conditions. If all aesthetic properties were response-independent, objectivity would easily be secured (skeptical worries aside). A painting's elegance, a poem's triteness, or a concerto's stirring bravado would be there for anyone to detect, and once detected, would be the same for everyone who did. Thus, there would be no worry about the meaning of aesthetic predicates, since their successful use would require only the detection of their corresponding properties—additional questions about an individual's epistemic credentials, or about the conditions of experience would be superfluous. Judging these artworks aesthetically would logically be no different than, say, determining that this book has a mass of 2.5 kilograms.<sup>18</sup> We could be wrong about the measurement due to inattention, or a faulty measuring device, but we would be right to expect anyone else, regardless of their particular sensibilities or environments, to arrive at the same measurement. Any divergences would simply be wrong.

### Aesthetic Properties of Theories

Eddy Zemach offers an argument<sup>19</sup> that aims at the conclusion that some aesthetic properties are primary. Such a conclusion would lend considerable support not just to

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realism, but to its robust subspecies. Under the Lockean conception of the primary/secondary quality distinction, primary qualities are those whose nature is independent of the subjective conditions for their qualitative character. So while blueness implicates a certain perceptual apparatus and observation conditions in its specification (even an ostensive one), primary qualities are perspective-invariant. The primary/secondary quality distinction certainly has a troubled history, and there is a real question as to whether we can name any properly primary qualities. Zemach's argument, however, does not seem to involve itself in these issues. Rather, he argues that in some sense, at least *some* aesthetic qualities are basic response-independent constituents of the universe. Throughout I have been examining only aesthetic features of artworks, but of course if it were true that aesthetic properties were instantiated in the natural world, then it would be a short argument to establish their residence in artworks.

Zemach points out quite rightly that the acceptability of a scientific theory depends in part on its aesthetic merits. What seems to have encouraged the gradual acceptance of the Copernican model of the solar system over the Ptolemaic model was not its predictive power—indeed, until the formulation of Kepler's Laws, the Copernican model was a worse predictor than the dominant one. The Ptolemaic system was incredibly complex, and required numerous epicycles to explain the appearance of retrograde motion and other seeming anomalies. Rather, theoretical simplicity and elegance encouraged the acceptance of the Copernican model, which over time was vindicated as a better one. In general, according to Zemach, "unity, simplicity, scope, elegance, dramatic power (prediction), all of them aesthetic virtues, make them believable. Now, if a theory's beauty is what justifies believing it is true, then some aesthetic propositions need to be true in order for us to be justified in believing any other proposition is true."<sup>20</sup> He goes on to provide a reductio against the view that there are no aesthetic properties. "If no aesthetic properties exist, then all attributions of beauty are false, and thus the theory that denies the reality of aesthetic properties is not beautiful. But a non-beautiful theory is unworthy of acceptance."<sup>21</sup>

Zemach's argument is unsuccessful. His sample list of aesthetic virtues is not limited to the aesthetic. Dramatic power, for instance, is a prejudicial re-construction of theoretical or predictive power. More importantly, even granting the claim that a theory's aesthetic merits

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make it that much more believable, the move to the claim that such a theory is true requires a further premise—that of the set of competitor theories, the most beautiful one is the closest to being true. And that premise is simply false. Without that premise, all Zemach has given is an argument for acceptability, which on the realist conception, is insufficient to establish truth. A great many mathematical results can be given a number of proofs, and while it is the case that the more elegant and simpler ones will typically become canonical, they are no more or less true than the others. What Zemach calls the aesthetic virtues of unity, simplicity, and elegance overlap with broader coherence constraints on theory formulation and acceptance. Zemach asserts that “our theoretical constraints are all aesthetic: there are no other criteria for judging theories.”<sup>22</sup> To the objection that coherence is not an exclusively or purely aesthetic quality, Zemach might respond that we do indeed delight in the discovery of new coherences, and in the activity of bringing our beliefs into coordination with one another. But if this is what makes coherence a purely aesthetic quality, Zemach seems to be involved in a confusion, one analogous to the psychological hedonist’s, as exposed by Butler. Butler rightly claims that while we do take pleasure in performing all sorts of actions, this in itself does not show that pleasure is the end at which we aim in all those actions. So the mere presence of pleasure is insufficient to establish that we only act to experience our own pleasure. Similarly, that we take delight and find aesthetic merit in theoretical coherence does not establish that aesthetic considerations are the only ones in theory formation. Coherence can be non-evaluatively characterized as a term of degree: given two domains of belief statements, one is more coherent than another only when it contains fewer logical contradictions. Of course coherence as analyzed here cannot be an adequate criterion of the epistemic worth of a domain, since a domain might be more coherent than another simply by containing far fewer, or only one, belief statement. But it remains the case that aesthetic delight is at best an accompaniment to, and not an intrinsic component of, theoretical coherence.

Zemach’s view is actually rather complicated. He contends that all aesthetic properties are tertiary, and further that some of those are primary. This claim requires unpacking. Zemach draws a three-fold distinction: “*primary properties* are properties of noumena (real things); *secondary properties* are properties of phenomena (appearances of real things to minds); *tertiary properties* are properties of significant phenomena (phenomena mediated by interest).”<sup>23</sup>

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Zemach's claim that some tertiary properties are also primary seems to mean that that interest-mediated phenomena are identical with properties of 'real things', that is, are strongly mind-independent. How can this be so? He writes that we perceive an object as having certain aesthetic properties only if we perceive it conatively. But the phenomenology of such a perception does not locate the quality in us, but in the object we are perceiving. Still, the observation involves "desire perceptually interpreting nature"<sup>24</sup>; "specific aesthetic properties are then phenomenal properties of desire-constituted aesthetic objects...".<sup>25</sup> So on Zemach's account, our desires (or more generally, our interests) play a constitutive role in our qualitative experience of things regarded aesthetically. This appears to be a straightforward antirealist rendering of aesthetic qualities, because not only are the aesthetic qualities we meet in experience available only when we have certain interests, but because those interests play a role in forming those aesthetic qualities. To take two of his examples: an object is "ostentatious or gaudy only if it satisfies a desire for self-assertion and self-aggrandizement. Sublime and awesome things are only those that are mightier than we are, things that may harm us and that we cannot force to comply with our desires."<sup>26</sup> One can ignore the obvious errors in the necessary condition for gaudiness and ostentatiousness; what is important here is the logical structure and the fact that what fills in the necessary condition is a contingent set of desires and interests. This sort of tertiary property story seems to be a concession to the antirealist challenge. How Zemach aims to avoid an antirealist conclusion is by noting the role of subjective interests, but then continuing on to establish an identity between some of these and the purportedly primary aesthetic properties of nature, as expressed in true scientific theories. But without Zemach's conclusion about the properties of scientific laws, it is hard to know in some non-question begging way when we could identify our desire-mediated phenomena as also being something strongly mind-independent. It does not, for instance, debar the conclusion that the properties of scientific theories themselves are tertiary.

## **2. The Analogy With Secondary Qualities**

The problem with which I initiated this project arises from the clash between two intuitions: that artworks seem to be mind-involved entities and that our aesthetic discourse is purportedly objective. By far the most influential approach to handling this tension is to

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draw an analogy between aesthetic properties and secondary qualities. The experience of color is, on our best understanding, something that is ineliminably subject-involving, and yet it seems entirely proper to mark out color judgments as right or wrong, better or worse. The evidence from our practice, then, is that we take there to be a fact of the matter. And so our discourse can be objective, if not in the strongly mind-independent sense.

The analogy is a troubled one, however. The matter is complicated by the fact that the analogy is drawn more or less tightly by different thinkers. Some, most notably John McDowell, draws a tight analogy in claiming that the epistemology of aesthetic properties is like that of secondary qualities, that in some sense we directly perceive the aesthetic properties in the same way we look and see that something is blue. Others, including Mark Johnston, use the analogy loosely, at a very abstract level, suggesting that the logical structure of aesthetic (or moral) concepts is akin to that of colors, while abstaining from any commitment to the similarities or differences in their epistemology. In understanding the analogy, then, it is necessary to examine the particular work it is intended to do, as some disanalogies will constitute objections more obviously to the tighter analogy than to the looser one.

On the appeal of the analogy, McDowell writes: "Shifting to a secondary quality analogy renders irrelevant any worry about how something that is brutally *there* could nevertheless stand in an internal relation to some exercise of human sensibility. Values are not brutally there—not there independently of our sensibility—any more than colours are; though, as with colours, this does not stop us supposing that they are there independently of any particular experience of them."<sup>27</sup> Embedded in this motivational sketch is an assertion of the sort of mind-independence specific to MAR as opposed to RAR. Values, including aesthetic properties, need not be independent of a perceiver's counterfactual mental states, but only of her actual, occurrent ones to be sufficiently mind-independent for realism. The analogy is supported by at least three considerations. First, sensitivity to aesthetic properties and secondary qualities can be refined through training and critical practice. Second, aesthetic properties and secondary qualities supervene but are not reducible to other properties. And third, the experience of both is of an external object presenting itself with a

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certain quality, though reflection and investigation reveals that quality to have a dispositional nature.

Clearly, however, the tight analogy is strained. While it is true that the judgmental capacities for aesthetic qualities and smells and colors can (at least to some degree) be improved by training, in the case of aesthetic qualities, such training or cultural influence is necessary for proficient discrimination. It seems that without some familiarity with the appropriate artistic genre and the possession of an adequate stock of critical vocabulary (and not just these), identifying the elegance of a Beethoven string quartet or the bathetic quality of a patriotic poem will not be possible. Sensitivity to colors and smells, on the other hand, are basic to normal human functioning. While perhaps only color experts can name a great number of the hues in our human color space, even persons lacking abstract words for colors are demonstrably able to distinguish between unique hues and to group color samples into groups of like resemblance.<sup>28</sup> And while it is also true that our perception is inextricably linked to our higher cognition even in the color case, the necessity of training and experience in the identification of aesthetic qualities gives higher (i.e. more self-aware) cognition a much larger role to play. Granting that aesthetic predicates refer to properties, it is clear that aesthetic properties must be different from color properties. Sibley points out that “whereas there is nothing about the way a thing *looks* that makes it look blue, there are all sorts of visible features that make a thing look, or are responsible for its looking graceful (though their presence does not *entail* what they are responsible for).”<sup>29</sup> So the logical structure of aesthetic concepts is very different from that of secondary qualities.

Despite their dissimilarities, secondary qualities and aesthetic qualities at least have a resistance to explanation by supervenience in common. The friend of the tight analogy says that aesthetic qualities supervene on a wide range of non-aesthetic properties, just as colors supervene on physical properties of surface reflectances and incident light. Where this claim is baseless assertion in the former case, it is straightforwardly false in the latter. For supervenience (expressed either as S1 or S2) to be respected for color, the subvenient base needs to include facts about the observer—simply indexing their correct application to normal observers and normal conditions will not do, as these cannot be specified to give a univocal sense of ‘color’. Also, even holding all these factors fixed, we need to be able, for

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instance, to account for differences in use of the material; gold appears greenish when used as a filter but reflects a reddish color.<sup>30</sup> Also, the phenomenon of color metamerism—the changing of colors due to changes in lighting conditions—destabilizes the thought that the ‘true’ color of an object is that which is seen under bright daylight. If two objects match in color under incandescent lighting, but not in bright daylight, the identification of the latter as the standard conditions is purely stipulative. The case for color supervenience looks like that for aesthetic properties—if it can be formulated so as to come out true, what results is an entirely trivial case-by-case specification which gives us no interesting supervenience thesis.

Supervenience is meant to capture the way aesthetic judgments are justified. But it plays no such role in the case of colors, smells, tastes, or other secondary qualities. If a critic found Horst’s photographic portraits to show a cool and inaccessible beauty, we might well ask for reasons in support of the judgment. If the critic were unable to give them, we would not accept his judgment, and it might not be improper to suggest that he did not understand the meaning of his own critical pronouncement. His inability to cite reasons would call his competence as a critic into question. On the other hand, it is almost never the case that we are able to provide justificatory reasons for secondary quality claims in the same way. The nature of justifying response for the critic’s judgment takes the form “it is in virtue of x, y, and z that I find it to have a cool and inaccessible beauty”. But it is no part of being competent to judge something’s being red, or tasting acidic, that we must be able to say why. So the analogy is in a sense misaligned here. Supervenience is meant to capture the practice of making aesthetic judgments (and from that draws its metaphysical claim) but has no analog for secondary quality ascriptions. What supervenience may well capture in the secondary quality case is an arguably trivial thesis about property relations, where in the aesthetic case we have reasons to think that without an argument by way of the practice of judgment, we have no independently viable property relation thesis. In other words, in the case of secondary qualities supervenience at best captures a trivial property relation which does not figure at all in our assertions. In the case of aesthetic qualities, supervenience at best trivially captures the practice of making and defending assertions, and only via that practice says anything about properties.

If these two analogical connections—the influence of training and supervenience—are severed, a third connection remains. What seems true of both secondary qualities and aesthetic features is that they are experienced as ‘out there’, though in an important sense the sensibilities of experiencing subjects are deeply implicated in their character. So while the tight analogy, claiming the epistemology of the two kinds of qualities to be comparable, is untenable, a looser analogy may well hold. This analogy, recall, takes both secondary qualities and aesthetic qualities to be response-dependent.

### 3. Response-Dependence

Modest Aesthetic Realism (MAR) holds aesthetic properties to be response-dependent. Secondary qualities are advanced as paradigmatic entities of this sort. If red is a response-dependent property, then formally,

**RD(red):** *a priori* ( **x** is **red** iff **x** would look **red** to standard observers under standard conditions)

and generally, for some secondary quality **F**,

**RD(F):** *a priori* ( **x** is **F** iff **x** would look **F** to standard observers under standard conditions)

A number of features of this characterization bear mentioning. The definition is given counterfactually. A red thing need never actually be observed, but if it *were* then it would have a certain appearance. This is signaled by the locution ‘would look’ as opposed to ‘looks’. Secondly, the quality of the look is indexed to standard observers under standard conditions. This makes **red** a normative concept. The judgments of the color-blind, or of those looking under ultraviolet lighting, should not fall within the extension of ‘red’. And the definition is an *a priori* one. What this means is that, if the standard conditions are met and a standard observer experiences phenomenal red, then she cannot be wrong in her judgment that the thing before her is red. Under the stipulated conditions, there is no room for error or ignorance.

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So far, drawing an analogy between aesthetic properties and secondary qualities by way of this model is non-committal on the issue of the epistemology of either—whether the two cases are similar or dissimilar. Having moved through the claims for the tight analogy and found them wanting, one might hold on to a loose analogy, which asserts that aesthetic properties are analogous to secondary qualities only in this very abstract sense, that the logical structure of the concepts is response-dependent. Such an account “would not itself be an account of the ontology or meaning or of content. It would imply that the truth about meaning and content cannot outrun our idealized dispositions to grasp that truth.”<sup>31</sup> Clearly such an account rules out the first three of Wright’s individually sufficient conditions for adopting a realist metaphysics. What would motivate the adoption of realism given the response-dependent account of aesthetic properties is the right sort of story about the order of determination constraint. In Pettit’s terms, it appears that while DT and OT can be maintained alongside a response-dependent treatment, CT is going to come under some strain. But before investigating these two related worries, it is important to note a key difference between the response-dependent structure of secondary qualities and that of aesthetic properties.

That difference is this: let  $\alpha$  be some aesthetic property. MAR holds that

**RD\*( $\alpha$ ):** *a priori* ( $x$  is  $\alpha$  iff  $x$  would be experienced as having  $\alpha$  by ideal judges under ideal conditions)

The shift from standard (or normal, in an alternative but equivalent formulation) to ideal observers and conditions is motivated by a collection of related concerns. (note: **RD\*( $\alpha$ )** talks of ideal *judges* rather than ideal *observers*; this contrast is intended only to avoid confusion with ideal observer theories) We take judgments of redness to be part and parcel of a normal person’s conceptual capacities. That ability is in some sense a basic one. Judgments about aesthetic properties, on the other hand, do not seem basic in this way. The epistemic credentials required to judge the elegance of a string quartet include not only normally functioning hearing but a good deal of specialized knowledge of the musical artform. Ideal conditions are specified here because, unlike judgments of color, aesthetic judgments are

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sensitive to things like our occurrent emotional states, our interest in the artwork before us, and so on. The roots of this account lie in Hume's seminal essay, "Of the Standard of Taste", and philosophers following Hume in giving what has been developed into the response-dependent account have not diverged much from Hume's criteria for ideal judges. Hume writes, "Strong sense, united to delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by comparison, and cleared of all prejudice, can alone entitle critics to this valuable character; and the joint verdict of such, wherever they are to be found, is the true standard of taste and beauty."<sup>32</sup> I take up this account in detail in the following chapter. The response-dependent treatment of aesthetic properties avoids talk of something like a "joint verdict" of judges meeting the specified criteria. Indeed, it seems that even if only one judge were to meet the criteria, her judgment would suffice to identify the correct application of the aesthetic predicates in question. Those criteria, expressed in contemporary terms, might include: knowledge of the art historical context and other instances of the genre of the artwork; a lack of bias toward or against the artwork, the artist, or even closely related entities like the patron or the commissioning body; a sensitivity (however this is to be unpacked) to either the non-aesthetic bases of aesthetic properties, or to those properties themselves; and perhaps a well-developed critical vocabulary. Ideal conditions would likely include, though not be limited to: an environment where the phenomenal properties of the artwork were most easily discriminated; an absence of distraction; adequate time to study or experience the artwork; and so on.

One issue that arises immediately in making a shift from normal to ideal judges and conditions is the following: is 'ideal' meant as some abstract, possibly unattainable limit, or is it rather to be understood as something like the best one might plausibly be expected to achieve, optimal yet realizable in practice? A little reflection serves to show that it must be the latter. Consider the case where 'ideal' means not realizable, in the same way that an ideal surface is a frictionless one. Such a notion is useful as a theoretical notion, but cannot be realized in practice. We might be interested in such a notion when we wish to determine the gravitational constant, and undertake to do so by measuring the time it takes for a ball to roll down an inclined plane. One source of inaccuracy in our results will be the friction between the inclined plane and the ball—our theoretical equation (if we are beginning physics students) only tells us how time and distance are related. We can reduce the inaccuracy by

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reducing the friction between the surfaces, but we cannot eliminate it entirely. The response-dependent treatment of aesthetic properties is meant in part to explain critical disagreements by way of a substantive (if open-ended) specification of experiential conditions. If the ideal judge in  $RD^*(\alpha)$  is ideal in the sense of being very remote from actual human capacities, then the explanatory usefulness of the account is vitiated. If two actual and seemingly well-qualified critics disagree, one insisting that a Bach prelude is leaden while the other claims it to be stately, and 'ideal' is used in the remote sense, then it could be difficult to explain the disagreement in terms of one critic's not approximating the ideal. Such a remote idealization also creates a gulf between our quotidian uses of an aesthetic term and its philosophical analysis according to  $RD^*(\alpha)$ . And the remote idealization moves the constraint on truth from the weakest on Wright's list at least to the stronger Cognitive Command constraint. Here, recall, it is *a priori* that disagreements are to be explained in terms of some sort of cognitive shortcoming on the part of at least one disputant. Further still, if the conception of an ideal judge becomes quite remote from present human capacities, the realism at hand shifts to one employing the strongest, evidence-transcendent, conception of truth. Either of these constraints eliminates the possibility of an account of aesthetic properties that incorporates a subjective component. But after all, this was the initial motivation for adopting a response-dependence theory, and so  $RD^*(\alpha)$  must be more carefully spelled out if response-dependence is to satisfy its own desideratum. For this reason, then, 'ideal' should not be taken to mean something analogous to the frictionless surface, a theoretically useful but in practice unattainable standard. Rather, it should connote a high but humanly possible standard, which I will signify with the contrastive label 'optimal', giving

$RD(\alpha)$ : *a priori* (x is  $\alpha$  iff x would be experienced as having  $\alpha$  by optimal judges  
under optimal conditions)

So, to amend Johnston's slogan, the truth of aesthetic property ascriptions cannot outrun *optimal* dispositions to grasp that truth. But if  $RD(\alpha)$  is to be at all substantial, the particular criteria for judges and conditions need to be specified, even if that specification is open-ended. As has often been pointed out in the discussion of response-dependence, if the specification opens up into 'whatever it takes' to satisfy the biconditional, then it becomes

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entirely vacuous. This is again the problem Hume considers in “Of the Standard of Taste” in a different guise. It is a live question whether the optimality specifications can be given in a non-circular fashion. I leave this issue to the side for the moment.

But what is most germane to the present discussion, whether such an account indicates a realist or an antirealist interpretation<sup>33</sup>, is whether the judgments under optimal conditions play an extension-determining or extension-reflecting role; that is, are optimal judgments constitutive or reflective of the aesthetic qualities of the artwork? Wright’s fourth and weakest constraint on truth that would support the move to a realist account is order-of-determination (OD). The basic idea is that, where the ‘emphasis’ of the biconditional is on the left-to-right arrow, then the property in question is sufficiently independent of our best responses and a realist theory is indicated; whereas if the ‘emphasis’ is right-to-left, then our best responses play an extension-determining role and an antirealist theory is needed. The motivation in mining  $RD(\alpha)$  for such an emphasis is much more obvious than the way in which one is to be found. Wright argues<sup>34</sup> that one way to do so would be to provide a substantial specification of the optimal conditions and judges such that any occurrence of  $\alpha$  in that specification would be given only in an intensional, rather than an extensional, way. Only if this can be done will Wright’s desired contrast be available, if the following objection due to Johnston is to be answered:

To put it as a dilemma: either one should aim to characterize strict one-way response-dependence, in which case the concept [ $\alpha$ ] in question should be banished from the specification of the response as well as from the specification of the conditions of the response, or one should abandon the idea of an order of determination and allow (but of course not require) the concept [ $\alpha$ ] to figure both in the specification of the response and in the specification of the ideal conditions of the response.<sup>35</sup>

The first option is essentially the aim of the reductionist project. Under this option, the right-hand side of the biconditional would give only a characterization of the experience of  $\alpha$  that in no way referenced the concept, as well as optimality requirements on judges and conditions the satisfaction of which would guarantee a correct judgment, without directly requiring optimal judges or conditions to be the ones yielding a judgment of  $\alpha$ . I have argued in Chapter 2, Section 5 that the reductionist project is a non-contender for aesthetic qualities. So the second horn of the dilemma is forced upon us. One point should be noticed immediately. If a reductionist account is unavailable, it is difficult to see the

plausibility of Johnston's parenthetical 'but of course not require' clause. The idea here seems to be that we could exercise as an option the freedom to reference  $\alpha$  on both sides of the equation. But should we decide not to—because we are not required to do so—are we not back on the first horn of Johnston's dilemma? Denying the prospect of reductionism requires us to take the second horn and drop the parenthetical clause.  $RD(\alpha)$  requires a conception of interdependence of the specifications of the concept and the optimality constraints on its being signaled.

Wright's response to Johnston is difficult, but for the purposes of the present enquiry it may safely be ignored. What matters is an easier target. If Johnston has provided an adequate characterization of  $RD(\alpha)$  and the different interpretations available within that characterization, the options are either to understand  $\alpha$  as essentially incorporating our best responses, or (if Wright can demonstrate the possibility for any particular case) to see those responses as *purely* extension-determining—that is, the truth of judgments is constituted by best responses. The purely extension-reflecting possibility was eliminated with the abandonment of reductionism and platonism as live options. But both of the two available options for a response-dependence view are mind-dependent conceptions. This much is acknowledged, perhaps, in the modesty of modest aesthetic realism. But now the question must be pressed: if aesthetic properties are essentially mind-dependent, in what way is MAR a realist view?

#### 4. Realist Mind-Dependence?

With the more carefully worked out picture of realism, the pair of realism and mind-dependence seems more than an almost certainly fractious marriage, but a marriage all the same. The two are theoretical contradictories. The burden is unequivocally on the would-be matchmaker to justify the possibility for a harmonious union between the two. Johnston writes that "precisely because of *interdependence* there is no implication of content or meaning being constituted out of the contents of attitudes."<sup>36</sup> But this is not clear. Put to one side the prejudicial use of 'attitudes'—it is far from clear that only attitudes as contrasted with beliefs can play a meaning-constituting role. Johnston's claim is bizarre coming as it does after his assertion that  $RD(\alpha)$  does not give the content of the meaning or the ontology

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of an aesthetic property  $\alpha$ . Quite simply, the response-dependence account stands apart from both meaning and any sufficiently committed ontological view. The realist who wants to marry response-dependence to realism needs some further premise.

Pettit acknowledges as much in his admission that any response-dependence treatment looks as if it compromises his Cosmocentric Thesis (CT), which again is the claim that error and ignorance are always possible with regard to the substantive propositions of the discourse. Aside from special cases like a discourse consisting only in first-personal avowals of beliefs, pains, and the like, CT follows by implication from the Descriptivist and the Objectivist theses. And so if CT is violated, then the joint assertion of DT and OT will fail, and the account on offer will fail, without further shoring up of the arguments, to be a realist view at all. I claim now that the response-dependent account of aesthetic properties fails to conform to CT, and is therefore incompatible with a broader realist theory.

Pettit sees the need to deal with two issues if realism is to be reconciled with an account of properties that essentially implicates our responses to them. Both issues go directly to the objection that such a characterization violates CT, and both seem to function as necessary conditions on holding on to realism. The first is a condition of ontic neutrality. Even if response-dependence introduces an anthropocentric conception of a class of properties, we must still be able to say plausibly that “there are certain kinds of entity we recognize that are, as we might put it, intrinsically important kinds, not just kinds that are important for the way they engage with us. [...] Not only does it allow us to speak of discovering independent facts, it also lets us speak of discovering independent kinds.”<sup>37</sup> If ontic neutrality is to be respected for aesthetic properties, it should be plausible to imagine other species marking out a Modigliani portrait, an Edward Weston photograph (Figure 18), and the prose of Kawabata as all exemplifying a graceful beauty. Why should we imagine this to be so? The issue is made all the more acute by the fact that these three examples, though all might be said to possess graceful beauty, exemplify it in very different ways. Graceful beauty seems less an independent kind than a linguistic label that brackets a disparate assortment of presentational features. Ontic neutrality seems even less plausible for aesthetic qualities when we consider a somewhat more complex art critical judgment. In a review of the New

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York debut of Wayne Thiebaud's still life paintings (Figure 19), Max Kozloff writes:

Thiebaud paints with all the virtuosity of Manet or Morandi, although undoubtedly his world is harsher and less humane than theirs. His surfaces are juicy (the sign of a constant appetite for paint), but his thought is arid. As magnetic specters of our most immediate commerce with matter, these images remain self-sufficient.

Nevertheless, he satisfies one of the age-old principles of the still-life tradition: that a practitioner discover some virtue, not in inanimate objects as such (most elements of visual experience may have that virtue), but in the *isolation* of the inanimate object. He invests many of our poor nutrients with a sardonic, bright pathos, partially because of this isolation. After seeing a Thiebaud, one can no longer walk into a hamburger stand with the same casual familiarity.<sup>38</sup>

If aesthetic properties are optically neutral, then the union of the 'juiciness' of the painted surface with the 'arid' thoughts displayed (meaning, perhaps, the conceptual simplicity of the painting *qua* artwork), or the sardonic, bright pathos of the objects depicted, would somehow be plausibly thought of as picking out features which figured in the accounts of experience of creatures very different from us. Such a perspective-free salience is difficult to imagine. Appreciating Thiebaud's paintings in this way requires not just a sense of irony, and a sense of the celebratory element that coexists along with the ironic, but possession of a rich sets of associations with cultural objects in specific connotative contexts. The very idea that these qualities signal independent, even natural, kinds, looks very much like the platonic account the modest realist is so labored to avoid.

The second necessary condition for maintaining realism is epistemic servility. This is the idea that "in trying to get things right in [an] area of discourse, even if we are normally functioning and normally or ideally positioned subjects, we have to strive to get in tune with an independent authority: we have to do the sort of thing that would make no sense with trying to get [dictatorial claims as to what is the case] straight."<sup>39</sup> Just what are the things we do to get in tune? Typically, we seek the judgments of optimal critics. But what if we ourselves are optimal critics? What alignment must we undertake to bring ourselves into contact with the sardonic, bright pathos of Thiebaud's still lives? It strains plausibility to imagine that his paintings have this apart from, among other things, a certain art critical practice of approaching still lives with the background assumption that isolating an object in a painting frames its having some virtue. To find the pathos we must bring ourselves into

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line with an authoritative convention that suggests we are to presume some virtues of the object represented, or to presume that it has some virtues. But that is altogether different from a bringing ourselves into line with something that is the case in some mind-independent sense. This activity would be something like detecting the virtues or valuable aspects without any appeal to convention, social or allegorical significance, or to specific art-related practices. When we approach Thiebaud's paintings, the question "Why should I be interested in looking at just this slice of pie, or this tray of sweets?" suggests itself, but only for viewers situated in the right cultural context. And without a sense of that question and its possible answers, something like the pathos of those things is not something we can hope to have any access to at all.

One way in which the modest aesthetic realist might give a plausible account both of ontic neutrality and epistemic servility is by insisting that, though perhaps many of our aesthetic concepts are culturally-bound in some sense, the properties they pick out are supervenient on something more plausibly conceived of as independent of our thoughts. Indeed, it seems that the only way for the advocate of response-dependence requires a supervenience thesis to effect the marriage with realism. Natural (or at least non-aesthetic) properties are, most of us take it, independent of our individual and cultural perspectives, and are the sort of thing which legitimates talk about 'getting something right' in representing them in our discourse. Though there are strong scientific arguments against conceiving our color discourse as robustly representative, the intuition that it is nevertheless is quite strong. But this is because we do understand color to be dependent on a wide range of physical factors—so some kind of property dependence thesis seems intuitively rather plausible. On the other hand, the supervenience of the aesthetic on the natural is closer to an article of faith. In the color case we can conduct scientific experiments to discover the relations between physical properties and our experiences, but such relations in no way enter into our judgment-giving practices. Conversely, the features of our reasons-giving practices constitute the only motivation for advancing a supervenience claim for aesthetic judgments. Of course, this claim is made more plausible by the fact that most of us are good physicalists—we wish to avoid positing occult properties wherever possible. And the worry is that we cannot have objectivity without some stable set of mind-independent properties, so the supervenience of aesthetic properties is asserted as an *a priori* thesis. But I have argued that this thesis is either trivial or

false. If it is false, then, response-dependence loses its anchor in a mind-independent realm. Pettit's CT fails and by modus tollens the joint assertion of DT and OT fails to be true. If supervenience is trivial but true the results are no less disappointing for the realist. Recall that the trivialized supervenience thesis came to the claim that the aesthetic properties of *just this* artwork supervene on the non-aesthetic properties of *just this* artwork. No claim is made, then, that graceful beauty indicates either the same property or the same subvenient base for the Modigliani portrait and the Weston photograph. Wedding this supervenience claim with  $RD(\alpha)$  infects response-dependence with the same triviality. The response-dependent account, then, merely marks out, say, graceful beauty of this unique sort as being picked out under optimality constraints that very likely will vary from artwork to artwork. Response-dependent aesthetic properties, then, would become strongly indexical. There would be no principled talk about the reasons we apply the same language to artworks by Weston, Kawabata, and Modigliani.

The need for a workable supervenience claim is all the more acute in light of criticisms of the alleged *a priori* nature of the conceptual structure of secondary qualities. The point of asserting these concepts to have such a nature is to rule out the possibility of global error—the truth of judgments about secondary qualities cannot outrun ideal dispositions to judge. But the role played by the *a priori* claim in  $RD(\alpha)$  is considerably stronger. Paul Boghossian and David Velleman argue that such formulations “misappropriate whatever *a priori* truth there may be in the relevant biconditionals.”<sup>40</sup> Even if there are privileged conditions for judgments of secondary qualities, that fact alone supports only the much weaker biconditional

$x$  is to be described as  $F$  iff  $x$  would look  $F$  to standard observers under standard conditions.

“Even philosophers who regard colour experience as globally false, for example, will nevertheless want to say that some colour experiences are correct in the sense that they yield the colour attributions that are generally accepted for the purposes of describing objects in a public discourse.”<sup>41</sup> The point is that the stronger biconditional might seem true only because it is mistaken for the weaker one involving description. In any case there is good reason to think that that fact about our concepts and the way they figure in our thought and discourse license at best the weaker biconditional above about descriptions and not the

stronger about “the way things really are”. The point is much like the one about supervenience—inasmuch as supervenience claims are grounded in reflection on the nature of our judgment-giving practices, supervenience should be understood as (as best) capturing a feature of that practice. A further premise, that our discourse represents real properties, is required to move from the claim about practice to the claim about property dependence. So too with the move from describing color experiences to marking them as properties of things. Though the weak conditional has some intuitive appeal as an *a priori* claim, there seems to be no good reason, without further argument, for taking the property claim as an *a priori* truth. If Boghossian and Velleman’s criticism is not met directly, a further premise about property dependence—supervenience—is needed to move us from a claim about talk to a claim about properties.

The conclusion, then, is that without supervenience there is no independent justification for asserting response-dependence as a *realist* account of aesthetic properties. I argued in Chapter 3 that supervenience is either incoherent or trivially true. If incoherent, then supervenience is not available to secure the ontic neutrality and epistemic servility needed to maintain the Cosmological Thesis. And if it is true but trivial, Modest Aesthetic Realism becomes an anemic theory with very little explanatory power. An adequate theory of aesthetic judgment must be found elsewhere.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter began with an argument for Robust Aesthetic Realism, the view that aesthetic properties, or at least a significant portion of them, are strongly mind-independent. This view would require that even if there were no minds, there would be aesthetic properties. Even in the happiest circumstances, such counterfactual arguments challenge our powers of careful intuition. The argument considered here, however, is fatally flawed in its attempt to arrive at the strong conclusion by examining the way in which our scientific theories are formed. Though it seems a default position to hold that what our theories represent is a mind-independent order, there is no argument from acceptability criteria of theories to properties of things. A beautiful, elegant, or dramatic theory cannot be taken to show that

the reality represented by the theory is in any way beautiful, elegant, or dramatic, independent of any possible thoughts about it.

More typically, the sensible realist will not deny that our aesthetic concepts necessarily implicate our responses in their characterization. The Modest Aesthetic Realist maintains that aesthetic properties are independent of a particular judge's actual mental states, but not counterfactual ones, by striking an analogy with secondary qualities. These latter, though involving our responses, are represented by normatively constrained discourse, and are broadly taken to have some anchor in mind-independent reality. However, the tight analogy, taking the epistemology of aesthetic qualities to be the same as that for secondary qualities, fails to hold. The question remaining then is whether or not a formal characterization, a loose analogy, is still connects the two. But this question is a detour from the crucial issue for this enquiry—does such a characterization preserve a sufficiently realist mind-independence? The answer is no. Without a workable account of supervenience, there is no reason to assert that though response-dependent, aesthetic properties still fall within the boundaries of realism. Realism and response-dependence may yet be conjoined, though only if the supervenience thesis is the trivial claim about individual works only. But such a realism lacks any sort of explanatory power. The questions to be addressed are in virtue of what are our aesthetic judgments objects objective, and how do we account for disagreements between optimal judges. Realism initially looks well-suited to provide an answer to the first question—our judgments are objective because there are mind-independent properties which our judgments represent. Ultimately, it is the failure of realism to provide an adequate answer to the second question that undermines our faith in the answer to the first. In the end, the explanatory promise of aesthetic realism goes unfulfilled.

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<sup>1</sup> Philip Pettit, "Realism and Response-Dependence", *Mind* 100 (1991) 588.

<sup>2</sup> As developed in "Realism and Response-Dependence."

<sup>3</sup> As developed in his "Realism: The Contemporary Debate—W(h)ither Now?", Crispin Wright and John Haldane (eds), *Reality, Representation, and Projection* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 63-84, and refined in his *Truth and Objectivity*.

<sup>4</sup> Philip Pettit, "Realism and Response-Dependence" 589.

<sup>5</sup> So too with instrumentalism, though there is no (workable) aesthetic version of that theory.

<sup>6</sup> Philip Pettit, "Realism and Response-Dependence" 590.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid* 592.

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- <sup>8</sup> *ibid* 593.
- <sup>9</sup> Crispin Wright, "Realism: The Contemporary Debate—W(h)ither Now?" 69.
- <sup>10</sup> *ibid* 73.
- <sup>11</sup> *ibid* 72.
- <sup>12</sup> *ibid* 76.
- <sup>13</sup> *ibid* 76.
- <sup>14</sup> Wright seems to prefer 'width of cosmological role' to capture his reworked version of the best explanation constraint.
- <sup>15</sup> Crispin Wright, *Truth and Objectivity* 197.
- <sup>16</sup> So named by Mark Johnston, "Dispositional Theories of Value III", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, suppl. vol. LXIII (1989) 139-174.
- <sup>17</sup> Crispin Wright, "Realism: The Contemporary Debate—W(h)ither Now?" 77.
- <sup>18</sup> Mass has often, though of course incorrectly, been cited as an example of a primary quality. For the moment, grant that it is for the sake of analogy.
- <sup>19</sup> In his *Real Beauty* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1997).
- <sup>20</sup> *Real Beauty* 109.
- <sup>21</sup> *ibid*.
- <sup>22</sup> *ibid* 69.
- <sup>23</sup> *ibid* 103.
- <sup>24</sup> *ibid* 104.
- <sup>25</sup> *ibid* 105.
- <sup>26</sup> *ibid*.
- <sup>27</sup> John McDowell, "Values and Secondary Qualities", *Mind, Value, Reality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998)
- <sup>28</sup> C.L. Hardin, *Color for Philosophers* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1988) 41.
- <sup>29</sup> Frank Sibley, "Objectivity and Aesthetics", *Approach to Aesthetics: Collected Papers on Philosophical Aesthetics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001) 74, initial emphasis added.
- <sup>30</sup> C.L. Hardin, *Color for Philosophers* 69.
- <sup>31</sup> Mark Johnston, "Dispositional Theories of Value III" 126.
- <sup>32</sup> David Hume, "Of the Standard of Taste", *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund: 1985) 241.
- <sup>33</sup> Alan Goldman uses this response-dependence structure to underpin an antirealist theory of aesthetic judgment, one which also makes use of supervenience. It seems, then, that Goldman holds that the supervenience of the aesthetic on the non-aesthetic does not constitute an adequate anchor to some set of mind-independent properties, or at least not adequate enough to make such a view realist. I have argued from the position that a workable supervenience in these terms might well entitle the view to the realist label. See Alan Goldman, *Aesthetic Value* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995).
- <sup>34</sup> Crispin Wright, *Truth and Objectivity* 120-124; also 132-135.
- <sup>35</sup> Mark Johnston, "Objectivity Refigured: Pragmatism Without Verificationism", in Crispin Wright and John Haldane (eds), *Reality, Representation, and Projection* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) 125.
- <sup>36</sup> *ibid* 126.
- <sup>37</sup> Philip Pettit, "Realism and Response-Dependence" 616.
- <sup>38</sup> Max Kozloff, "Thiebaud" 5 May 1962, in Meyer, Peter, ed. *Brushes With History: Writing on Art from The Nation, 1865 - 2001* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press/Nation Books, 2001) 292.
- <sup>39</sup> Philip Pettit, "Realism and Response-Dependence" 616.
- <sup>40</sup> Paul Boghossian and David Velleman, "Colour as a Secondary Quality", *Mind* 98 (1989) 84.
- <sup>41</sup> *ibid*.

## Chapter 5

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Up to this stage, the arguments offered have been primarily negative ones. I have attempted to show that a number of philosophical theories of aesthetic judgment have been inadequate to the task of providing an acceptable metaphysical and semantic account of our art-related thought and talk. In the chapters remaining, I shall develop a theory that, I contend, best captures those practices. I suggested at the outset that the various theories on offer can be seen as responding to an apparent tension between two beliefs about artworks: first, that our judgments about them are objective in some substantial sense, and second, that the distinctive qualities of artworks are bound up with our thoughts about them. Thus far, all of the theories examined have treated the two intuitions as in tension with one another, and have sought to revise one of the intuitions. To reiterate my primary goal: I claim that there is logical space for a theory that accommodates both intuitions. Doing so will not involve denying one of the intuitions as misguided, but rather revising some other of the attendant notions underlying a theoretical understanding of our practice of aesthetic judgment.

In this chapter, I wish to survey one historical position that occupies the same logical space as the view I develop. Various reconstructions of Hume's aesthetic theory have been conscripted to a number of very different contemporary views, including Simon Blackburn's quasi-realism, Alan Goldman's supervenience-reliant antirealism, Eddy Zemach's Robust Aesthetic Realism, and many others. I am not interested here in the question of Hume's true metaphysical allegiance. My interest in investigating Hume is to show how an antirealist theory can coherently maintain both the claim that aesthetic properties are not 'in the world', independent of our thoughts regarding them, together with the claim that our aesthetic judgments can be truth-apt and cognitive. In this respect, Hume anticipates the kind of view I develop in Chapter 6.

How can a survey of Hume's aesthetic theory illuminate a project in analytic philosophy? I think it is best to be modest about the expected gains from such an examination. The right cautionary note is struck by Michael Ayers, in a review of Jonathan Bennett's books *Learning From Six Philosophers*: "Within every great philosopher a perceptive analytic philosopher is struggling to get out. Bennett is there to help."<sup>1</sup> Ayers' ironic comment serves as a reminder

that the projects of philosophers in previous centuries differed from contemporary analytic ones. So it would be a mistake simply to assimilate the concepts and arguments of Hume to this project. It would also be a mistake to assume that because Hume wrote in English that he uses his words in the same way we do. Hume's arguments are unclear and equivocal in many places. Applying a principle of charity, it is possible to clarify and extrapolate from Hume's express views, but the results of this activity must be considered Humean, not Hume's. Bearing these caveats in mind, I shall consider in detail what Hume says about aesthetic judgment, paying special attention to the arguments supporting the location of Hume's view in cognitivist antirealist territory. Doing so will also require examining reconstructions of Hume<sup>2</sup>. My main interest, again, is to show what a historical view of this variety looks like, to identify difficulties that a contemporary view must avoid, and to flag promising lines of argument.

Any complete discussion of the logical space in which I wish to situate aesthetic judgment must also include Kant. Kant holds that aesthetic judgments are subjective but universal. He rejects the view that aesthetic judgments are strictly rational, as well as the view that they are merely expressions of feelings. His theory clearly is to be placed under cognitivist antirealist ones in my taxonomy. However, I will not discuss Kant's thought in any significant detail. Kant treats the subject of aesthetic judgment directly in the 'Analytic of the Beautiful' in his *Critique of Judgment*. Many commentators on Kant's aesthetics have treated the Analytic as a free-standing essay on aesthetics. But this is a mistake. Kant's development of the theory of aesthetic judgment needs to be situated in the larger context of arguments running through the *Critique of Judgment* and the *Critique of Pure Reason*, and so an adequate treatment of his views would take us far from the immediate concerns of this enquiry. Secondly, Kant is overwhelmingly concerned with judgments of the form 'This is beautiful [or ugly]'. While such judgments according to Kant have the same logical status I have urged for judgments of particular qualities, the analysis of judgments of beauty is much less amenable to an approach that has principally involved the content and use of aesthetic judgments. The word 'beauty' in Kant's usage never signals an aesthetic disvaluing, and for that reason would function as a 'thin' aesthetic concept; our investigation has focused exclusively on 'thick' concepts and avoided discussion of strictly evaluative ones. Finally, Kant's obsession with system leads him to some very strange views about artworks. For

Kant, what constitutes beauty is a certain formal quality that promotes the free play of the imagination and the understanding. But because formal attributes exhaust the ground for judgments of beauty, Kant claims of paintings that “The colors which light up the sketch belong to the charm; they may indeed enliven the object for sensation, but they cannot make it worthy of contemplation and beautiful.”<sup>3</sup> Any theory which explicitly holds that the color of painting is aesthetically irrelevant rightly arouses suspicion. No doubt there are re-interpretations available to the dedicated neo-Kantian, but such a project is a significant undertaking, and ultimately unnecessary for the present purpose, which is to explicate a historical theory that can be categorized as cognitivist antirealist. So now I turn to Hume.

### 1. Aesthetic Value and Aesthetic Qualities

Hume’s theoretical account of the epistemology of value is deeply dependent on his philosophical understanding of mind. In a certain sense, that account is the one demanded if his claims about mind are to be sustained. Crudely, the mind as a “theatre of perceptions” will lead to certain conclusions about how the phenomenology and epistemology of value must be if it is to be importantly different from the Rationalist mind that can determine necessary truths by the exercise of reason alone.

In an obvious sense, we stand at great advantage over Hume, who could not have anticipated and thus philosophically accounted for developments in cognitive psychology and neurobiology that have radically redirected and accelerated work in the philosophy of mind. Rather than discard Hume’s thought on the basis of an outmoded model of mind, it may be useful instead to look to Hume as offering an explanatory model. Setting aside the shortcomings of the foundation, the test of adequacy of his value epistemology will be how well it captures the experience of value.

Hume has little to say about the nature of aesthetic judgment in the *Treatise* or the *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* apart from what he says about ethics. The bulk of his purely aesthetically directed thought is to be found in the essays “Of a Standard of Taste,” “Of the Delicacy of Taste and Passion,” and “The Sceptic.” But Hume quite clearly considers the

### 5.1: *Aesthetic Value and Aesthetic Qualities*

epistemology of beauty and good to be of a kind with one another, and so the discussion will assume that what applies to ethics applies *mutatis mutandis* to aesthetics.

Antirealism is often understood to entail a commitment to noncognitivism. That is, if aesthetic value is *not* real in the strong sense which incorporates the metaphysical claim of mind-independence, then aesthetic judgments must be mere expressions of preference or attitude. This route, if followed, does indeed place the objectivity of judgment at great theoretical distance. But the antirealist need not take that path; antirealism and cognitivism are not mutually exclusive. The importance of Hume's thought to the present discussion is that it develops a cognitivist view that denies much of the realist position while still coherently maintaining the normativity of aesthetic discourse. To be sure, Hume's discussion is couched in the language of sentiment. This fact has led many, including Simon Blackburn, to construe Hume as a non-cognitivist. But this seems incorrect, as Hume takes pains to reject the view that "the difference...is very wide between judgment and sentiment".<sup>4</sup> The view that Hume is opposing is one that would limit judgments of reason to making claims about independent facts, while confining expressions of sentiment to be purely subjective. Even if a judgment may express a preference, the content of that judgment need not be limited to that function—it may assert something about its object as well. The crux of Hume's position is that "there are certain qualities in objects, which are fitted by nature to produce [the feelings of beauty and deformity]."<sup>5</sup> Those qualities are arguably not themselves aesthetic qualities. Hume's use of terms such as 'beauty' and 'deformity' might seem consistent with their interpretation as thin predicates in our sense, so the feeling expressed in a judgment may be purely evaluative. But close reading of Hume's essays shows this interpretation to be incorrect. The aesthetic theory that originates in Kant, is modified by Schopenhauer, and has contemporary adherents, treats 'beautiful' and its cognates as thin or purely evaluative predicates. If this were Hume's usage, then the main target of his arguments is a theory of judgments of aesthetic *value*, while ours is a theory of judgment of aesthetic *qualities* (and only indirectly one of aesthetic value). This would pose difficulties for our investigation because aesthetic qualities (in our sense) would not be marked out even in a case-by-case manner from non-aesthetic ones, or they would be superfluous to Hume's account. However, the correct interpretation of Hume requires the abandonment of the thin predicative use of 'beauty', 'ugliness', and their cognates. In several

places in “Of the Standard of Taste”, Hume refers not to beauty *simpliciter* but to the “beauties and blemishes” of individual works. He also writes of “species of beauty”, “excellences” of performance and particular characters of “each excellency”, which possess a specific quality and degree. Specific examples of such beauties or excellences include expressive qualities (e.g. tenderness, passion), formal qualities (e.g. conciseness, simplicity) moral qualities (e.g. the “want of humanity and decency” in the ancient poets, the inflammatory religious views in some French tragedy), and so on.

In other words, Hume’s use of ‘beauty’ and ‘beauties’ might seem consistent with our contemporary use of ‘aesthetic qualities’, with one possible significant difference. Hume seems to hold that as “certain terms in every language...import blame, and others praise”,<sup>6</sup> specific aesthetic qualities will essentially be positively or negatively valenced. So it would not, on Hume’s view, be coherent to say that something is graceful while also pronouncing it bad. Current thinking on this point is of two minds. Some, like Levinson, maintain that ‘gaudy’ might not necessarily indicate either a disvaluing on the part of the critic, or a demerit of the work itself.<sup>7</sup> Others follow Frank Sibley<sup>8</sup> in holding that the evaluative aspect is inextricable from the concept, and to value or see as meritorious a quality that might in other instances be called ‘gaudy’ calls for a different concept altogether, such as ‘bold’. Hume unequivocally falls into the latter camp. So on his account, critical disputes will not take the form of an opposition of valuing where the descriptive content is uncontroversial. To give an example, critics will not disagree by finding something gaudy but disagreeing in the valence of their estimation of it. They will either disagree that the quality is gaudy or something else, disagree in their relative valuing of it, or whether it is present or not. I will take up the significance of this view later. For our immediate purposes, it must be noted that clearly Hume allows a role for thick aesthetic predicates, which would be out of place in a non-cognitivist theory of judgment. Unfortunately, Hume’s use of ‘beauties’ is deeply ambiguous—in the next section we will see that Hume shifts between locating the beauty in the object and locating it in a complex object comprising the object and our responses to it.

## 2. Objectivity and Sentiment

Much of the contemporary debate centers on whether or not Hume is a non-cognitivist, a projectivist, an emotivist, a radical relativist, and so on. The imposition of these labels on Hume is anachronistic of course, as is talk of Humean “aesthetics”. But just as there is some usefulness in talking about Hume’s “aesthetics”, so is there some use in at least assessing the validity of the claims of those who would appropriate Hume to their faction. In this section I examine Hume’s theory of judgment to see how it accommodates the intuitions that launched this enquiry. I will also attempt to tease out Hume’s ideas, or at least Humean ideas, on the ontology of aesthetic value and aesthetic qualities.

Hume develops a sense theory of value, one that is importantly different from that of Francis Hutcheson, whose work Hume saw as a step in the right direction away from the theological rationalists Malebranche, Montesquieu, and Wollaston. For Hume as for Hutcheson, moral and aesthetic worth are determined in some way by sentiment. Hume defines virtue “to be *whatever mental action or quality gives to a spectator the pleasing sentiment of approbation; and vice the contrary.*”<sup>9</sup> He has the explicit goal of repudiating Rationalist theories of moral epistemology, a fact that must be kept in mind especially when trying to precipitate his philosophical claims from his rhetoric. “Taste” is the term he most often uses to name that faculty or capacity for judging value, though it unclear whether he means this in a strictly functional way or something specifically biological. He delineates the boundary between reason and taste in the following passage, which is worth quoting at length, as it suggests most of the concerns salient to attempts to categorize him:

[Reason] conveys the knowledge of truth and falsehood: [Taste] gives the sentiment of beauty and deformity, vice and virtue. The one discovers objects as they really stand in nature, without addition or diminution: the other has a productive faculty, and gilding or staining all natural objects with the colours, borrowed from internal sentiment, raises in a manner a new creation. Reason being cool and disengaged, is no motive for action, and directs only the impulse received from appetite or inclination, by showing us the means of attaining happiness or avoiding misery: Taste, as it gives us pleasure or pain, and thereby constitutes happiness or misery, becomes a motive to action, and is the first spring or impulse to desire and volition. From circumstances and relations, known or supposed, the former leads us to the discovery of the concealed and the unknown: after all circumstances and relations are laid before us, the latter makes us feel from the whole a new sentiment of blame or approbation.<sup>10</sup>

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It is easy to see how this passage, and others like it, lends support to the reading of Hume I wish to resist. Taste as a “productive faculty” is most obviously interpreted along antirealist lines. The apparent sharp dichotomy between taste and reason, where the latter involves truth and falsehood, suggests that truth is not an applicable notion for the former—the central claim of emotivism. And if truth is not an applicable notion, and value is stained with the colors borrowed from within, then it is hard to see how radical relativism cannot be Hume’s position.

Hume holds benevolence to be a virtue because it engenders an immediate feeling of approbation. However, he declines any temptations of a reduction of virtue to pleasure. In his essay “The Dignity or Meanness of Human Nature,” Hume explicitly rejects the suggestion that felt pleasure is what makes a trait a virtue: “The virtuous sentiment or passion produces the pleasure, and does not arise from it.”<sup>11</sup> The attendant pleasure is a necessary byproduct of the manifestation of the virtue, not what constitutes its being virtuous. Hume makes a careful distinction between that rejected possibility and a virtue as a pleasure-causing trait. The goodness is not derivative from the pleasure felt, but indicated by the fact that the trait necessarily engenders a certain pleasure when it is displayed. So here Hume is in fact closer to Hutcheson than some interpretations would suggest. The difference between the two is that Hutcheson identifies the feeling as approbation (the counterpart to condemnation, both of which are the fundamental moral ideas), where Hume takes it to be a probably more primitive pleasure. Hume also admits a wide range of virtues, each with its own particular character but all producing this simple pleasure; Hutcheson holds that benevolence is the only virtue, other traits being various species of it.

Hutcheson takes approbation and condemnation to be simple ideas, and because he accepts Locke’s doctrine that every simple idea can only be received by a corresponding sense, he is committed to asserting the existence of a moral sense. The moral sense is an internal sense, as contrasted with perceptual senses, which provide information about physical objects. Hutcheson takes the moral sense (as well as the internal senses of beauty, honor, and sympathy) to be some sort of mental capacity to produce ideas (i.e. approbation and condemnation) in response to perceptual stimuli. Objects of approbation and condemnation are, in essence, Lockean secondary qualities.

Many readings of Hume fall into error by claiming that he gives a secondary quality account of value. “Euclid,” Hume writes, “has fully explained every quality of the circle, but has not, in any proposition, said a word of its beauty. The reason is evident. Beauty is not a quality of the circle.... It is only the effect, which that figure produces upon a mind, whose particular fabric or structure renders it susceptible of such sentiments.”<sup>12</sup> This sort of claim, which Hume often makes about beauty and virtue, lends itself to either the projectivist interpretation or to a secondary quality interpretation. He certainly wants to maintain that the quality appears or is thought “to lie in the object, not in the sentiment,” the explanation being that “the sentiment is not so turbulent and violent as to distinguish itself, in an evident manner, from the perception of the object.”<sup>13</sup> The experiencing subject plays a crucial generative role—an object has no beauty or virtue in the absence of a mind fitted to produce the corresponding sentiment.

But that claim does not commit Hume to a Lockean secondary quality model. Hume criticizes the primary/secondary quality distinction in the section of the *Treatise* entitled “Of the Modern Philosophy” (Book I, Part IV, Section IV). Secondary qualities are mind-dependent; they are “nothing but impressions in the mind, deriv’d from the operation of external objects, and without any resemblance to the qualities of the objects.”<sup>14</sup> Hume’s “modern philosopher” concludes from this that with “the removal of sounds, colours, heat, cold, and other sensible qualities, from the rank of continu’d independent existences, we are reduced merely to what are called primary qualities, as the only *real* ones, of which we have any adequate notion. These primary qualities are extension and solidity, with their different mixtures and modifications....”<sup>15</sup> The “modern philosopher” would allow principled talk only of primary qualities. The suggestion that values (or aesthetic qualities) are analogous to secondary qualities in this sense would serve the subjectivist, the expressivist, and the error theorist equally well. The first two would get the premise that value is really entirely in the mind, and the last would get the premise that there is no external object about which our evaluations are either true or false. However, Hume gives what he rightly sees as a “very decisive” objection to the Lockean distinction. He recommends (as the first step in a *reductio*) that instead of explaining “the operations of external objects” in terms of the primary/secondary quality distinction, “we utterly annihilate all these objects, and reduce

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ourselves to the opinions of the most extravagant scepticism concerning them.” The implied absurd consequence is obvious—we cannot, for instance, “conceive extension, but as composed of parts, endow’d with colour or solidity”<sup>16</sup>. Attempting to define solidity without recourse to other concepts of bodies cannot be done. Hume concludes that the distinction cannot be maintained if we are to have any ideas of matter at all. “If colours, sounds, tastes, and smells be merely perceptions, nothing we can conceive is possest of a real, continu’d, and independent existence; not even motion, extension and solidity, which are the primary qualities chiefly insisted on.”<sup>17</sup> The distinction is neither useful nor sustainable. There is not a privileged class of qualities such that only judgments implicating them alone are truth-apt. And while Hume does compare value to colors, tastes, and smells, he just as readily compares judgments of value to judgments of shape and size. The latter comparison figures prominently in a lengthy discussion about the rational correction of the vagaries of perception and the need to take the general view in evaluative practice.

Hume writes that taste “has a productive faculty, and gilding or staining all natural objects with the colours, borrowed from internal sentiment, raises in a manner a new creation.”<sup>18</sup> This is compatible with the quasi-realist claim that value is entirely internal to the evaluating subject, but perceived as if it were a property of the objects in view. What is notable about the quasi-realist thesis is that it implies that a certain understanding of moral practice is false. An agent takes qualities of internal sentiment to be qualities of objects (where “objects” is used in a wide sense that includes physical things, acts, and persons), but this reassignment is mistaken. However, the core of Hume’s theory is compatible with a response-dependence account—that while our evaluative judgments of objects rely on the sentiments to which they give rise, there is still some quality of the objects that is suited to produce those sentiments in minds. Tony Pitson suggests that Hume may be “operating with an oversimple dichotomy between the properties which belong to objects, and those which belong to perceptions. It is as though he has moved from the premise that beauty and virtue are not *absolute* properties of the objects concerned, to the conclusion that they must therefore belong, as such properties, to perceptions themselves.”<sup>19</sup> Such a move actually contradicts Hume’s position on the Lockean primary/secondary quality distinction. If Hume is committed to the idea that all we can experience, and so have knowledge of, are so-called secondary qualities, the dispositional character of aesthetic qualities should not force a

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quasi-realist view on him. Elsewhere he acknowledges this very point. Noting the comparison of aesthetic and moral qualities with “sensible” qualities and the suggested threat to descriptivism therein, he writes:

this doctrine, however, takes off no more from the reality of the latter qualities, than from that of the former; nor need it give any umbrage either to critics or moralists. Though colours were allowed to lie only in the eye, would dyers or painters ever be less regarded or esteemed? There is a sufficient uniformity in the senses and feelings of mankind, to make all these qualities the objects of art and reasoning, and to have the greatest influence on life and manners. And as it is certain, that the discovery of the above-mentioned in natural philosophy, makes no alteration on action and conduct; why should a like discovery in moral philosophy make any alteration?<sup>20</sup>

The last sentence signals Hume’s recognition of the fact that if aesthetic or ethical qualities are unreal (meaning that judgments involving them are not descriptive), then not only ethical and artistic practice but science too is based on a mistake. Even if qualities depend on our minds, we can still talk about those qualities in principled ways that admit the notion of a shareable standard of truth. Here Hume explicitly reveals why he thinks this is possible: because of the uniformity in the makeup of humankind. Hume is very much a man of his age in relying so optimistically on such a claim. It proves to be a key premise of Hume’s theory that most likely cannot be sustained, and its failure will bring the theory it is built upon down with it. I shall return to this issue later.

Annette Baier makes much out of Hume’s rejection of the primary/secondary quality distinction and its implied correspondence with the objective/subjective distinction. Mackie famously assimilates the two, his argument from queerness amounting to the claim that value must be of an ontological kind with “scientific” properties if value judgments are to be objective. Baier rejects this picture, offering instead something she suggests might be called “internal realism”:

The human mind does have a great propensity to spread itself on external objects, but in moral evaluation the “internal sentiment” with which it gilds is spread on *internal* not external objects, since it is some human minds and characters that are “gilded” with the impartial mind’s approbation of them.... There need be no illusion of something “out there” when in fact it is really “in here.” The character traits *are* “out there,” in the people in whom they are found. The “gilt,” or approval, is in the approvers, but their actual approbation makes a real difference to the approved persons....<sup>21</sup>

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Baier sees Hume as a realist because, *contra* Mackie, the gilded objects of sentiment are real, even if internal. The objects of Humean moral evaluation are psychological entities: dispositions, habits, qualities of character. This is so far not inhospitable to a wider projectivist theory. After all, though the objects of evaluation are real, the sentiment is still internal to the approver, and if the sentiment provides whatever ontological mooring there is for moral value, then the projectivist thesis remains standing. Baier tries to undermine this by claiming that the approval makes a real difference to the approved, but this does nothing to undergird any sort of objectivity for moral judgments about distant acts or persons, and still less for aesthetic judgments of inanimate objects.

David Wiggins appropriates Hume's ideas to construct a different understanding of the gilding phenomenon, one which seems to deliver a stronger conception of objectivity. He writes that "there is something in the object that is *made for* the sentiment it would occasion in a qualified judge, and it brings down the sentiment upon the object as so qualified."<sup>22</sup> This is the relation between the judging subject and the object judged that Hume develops most consistently in "Of the Standard of Taste." The (crude) projectivist stance is a strongly relativist one, because if value is purely internal to the subject and freely projected, then there is no constraint on where one might project certain values. Indeed, it is difficult to see how such a projectivism is more than a slicked-up subjectivism. Hume adduces a host of empirical counterexamples to the relativist: "The same Homer, who pleased at Athens and Rome two thousand years ago, is still admired at Paris and at London."<sup>23</sup> This could be coincidental and thus consistent with the projectivist stance. Hume's explanation of this agreement contradicts that view: "...the beauties, which are naturally fitted to excite agreeable sentiments, immediately display their energy; and while the world endures, they maintain their authority over the minds of men.... Some particular forms or qualities, from the original structure of the internal fabric, are calculated to please, and others to displease; and if they fail of their effect in any particular instance, it is from some apparent defect or imperfection in the organ."<sup>24</sup> Again, it is very unclear that the forms or qualities which Hume says are calculated to please or displease are aesthetic ones or non-aesthetic ones on which the aesthetic ones are somehow dependent. In a discussion of the sources of blameless disagreements among critics, Hume writes that

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One person is more pleased with the sublime; another with the tender; a third with raillery. One has a strong sensibility to blemishes, and is extremely studious of correctness: Another has a more lively feeling of beauties, and pardons twenty absurdities and defects for one elevated or pathetic stroke. The ear of this man is entirely turned toward conciseness and energy; that man is delighted with a copious, rich, and harmonious expression.<sup>25</sup>

What is unclear in this remark, and many others like it, is what Hume takes to be the ontological status of qualities such as energy, harmonious expression, and tenderness. In places he seems to locate them in objects, from where they excite various sentiments of praise or its opposite. And yet, he suggests that disagreements can also take the form of disputes over the very qualities experienced in artworks:

There are certain terms in every language, which import blame, and others praise; and all men, who use the same tongue, must agree in their application of them. Every voice is united in applauding elegance, propriety, simplicity, spirit in writing; and in blaming fustian, affectation, coldness, and a false brilliancy: But when critics come to particulars, this seeming unanimity vanishes; and it is found, that they had affixed a very different meaning to their expressions.<sup>26</sup>

Here, the thought is not that critics will value the same qualities differently, but rather, their disagreement concerns just in virtue of what other features the predication of 'elegance' or 'simplicity' is warranted. Hume's solution to such disagreements is, in the majority of cases, to determine just who among the critics are "true judges", that is, who possesses "delicacy of taste, whether we employ these terms in the literal or the metaphorical sense."<sup>27</sup>

The key to giving a consistent reconstruction of Hume's view of the ontology of aesthetic qualities is again to be found in the characterization of the taste being a productive faculty, which gilds and stains and "raises in a manner a new creation". Hume insists that aesthetic judgments are cognitive—they are truth-apt and represent states of affairs. Hume resists two opposed views of what those represented states are: either pure states of subjective preference or subject-independent reports of worldly facts. If aesthetic qualities are those creations 'raised up' by way of sentiment's staining of natural objects, then aesthetic qualities are complex entities which as it were straddle the mind/world distinction. They are neither separable from empirical properties nor from our feelings about them. Instances of aesthetic or moral qualities, then, comprise some feature or complex of features of the experienced object along with the sentiment to which they give rise within the experiencing

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subject. The relationship between the objective features and the sentiment produced crucially involves the constitution of the subject—an embodied mind—but the subjective element does not exhaust the ontology of value. The sentiment is fitted to some feature or features of the object, and so divergence in judgment is explicable in terms of the capacity of subjects to experience the relevant objective features.

Now the crude projectivist/subjectivist reading of Hume begins to unravel. Hume cannot be taken as claiming simply that, since taste gilds external phenomena with internal sentiment, we can ignore the value-neutral experiential realm and look only to the qualifications of judges in determining the difference between good and bad evaluative judgments. Since there are some features of the experiential realm that are “naturally fitted to excite” internal sentiments, it is possible to talk meaningfully about those features in conjunction with their corresponding sentiments. The fact that there are features corresponding to particular sentiments negates the possibility that subjects might freely project their sentiments where they please. Certain sentiments are appropriately paired with certain experiential qualities, and the notion of appropriateness means that truth may be predicated of value judgments. The implicit agreement-demanding nature of value judgments, then, is neither an expression of emotion nor a mere prescriptive speech act. Rather, it is a substantive claim that the object in question is fitted to a certain reciprocal sentiment; that is, it stands as an appropriate member of the extension of a certain value concept. That value concept has a particular affective component. In an instance of “wilful murder,”<sup>28</sup> the vice is not to be located within the features of the event alone. The moral qualities of that act are partly to be found within one’s “own breast”, where one “find[s] a sentiment of disapprobation.” Properly speaking, the concept *wilful murder* is an evaluative one and so demands the affect corresponding to the sentiment of disapprobation. To experience value is just to have the right sentiment. The experience of value on Hume’s account is different from other experiential kinds. The mind, rather than “merely surveying its objects” in the case of value-neutral (e.g. “scientific”) phenomena, “feels a sentiment of delight or uneasiness, approbation or blame, consequent to that survey; and this sentiment determines it to affix the epithet *beautiful, deformed, desirable or odious*. Now, it is evident, that this sentiment must depend upon the particular fabric or structure of the mind, which enables such particular forms to operate in such a particular manner, and produces a

sympathy or conformity between the mind and its objects.”<sup>29</sup> Thus value is neither what the subjectivist claims it to be—a purely internal mental state—nor is it what the realist claims it to be—an external property of a mind-independent sort. But again there is an ambiguity in Hume’s view, one that might still give support to the quasi-realist reading. He says that “when you pronounce any action or character to be vicious, you mean nothing, but that from the constitution of your nature you have a feeling or sentiment of blame from the contemplation of it”<sup>30</sup>, which appears to be close to the quasi-realist’s view. Like the quasi-realist, Hume clearly holds that our practice is not deeply misconceived: “Nothing... can concern us more, than our own sentiments of pleasure and uneasiness; and if these be favourable to virtue and unfavourable to vice, no more can be requisite to the regulation of our conduct and behaviour.”<sup>31</sup> For Hume, value qualities are not independent of judges in any strong sense. It is unclear whether Hume is properly taken as locating value entirely within one’s sentiment or in a complex that comprises the sentiment and the object of judgment (as the gilding metaphor would suggest). Reading him in the former way makes his theory of judgment quasi-realist, and not cognitivist antirealist. The question remains then, whether we can continue plausibly to interpret Hume in the latter sense without too much strain. If we are able to do so, there may yet be some light shed on a way in which the two starting intuitions might be accommodated.

### 3. Judgment and the Problem of Circularity

Hume notes that conventional wisdom maintains that *de gustibus non est disputandum*, but were someone “to assert an equality of genius and elegance between Ogilby and Milton”<sup>32</sup> her sentiment would be pronounced “absurd and ridiculous.” Truth and falsity, or at least appropriateness and inappropriateness, are properly predicated of evaluative judgments. What grounds correctness of judgment is in some sense a social construction, a convergence of evaluative judgment based on the attributes of individuals who correct the defects of their idiosyncratic experiential capacities by the employment of reason. But Hume controversially also claims that certain non-aesthetic qualities have a specific fit to the fabric of human minds, such that properly constituted judges will reliably attribute the same aesthetic qualities to the same cases. This uniformity of human nature underpins Hume’s arguments for the objectivity of aesthetic judgment. Such a thesis does not sit well with our modern

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conceptions of humanity. I will conclude this section with a discussion of Hume's reliance on a uniform view of human nature. But Hume is not so crude as to believe that all persons have equal claim on the aesthetic facts of the matter. Only certain "true judges" can claim to issue aesthetic judgments that are reliably taken to be true. It is their joint verdict which in some sense is the true standard of taste.

Like Hutcheson, Hume holds that value relates to a sentiment that is common to all humans, though individuals possess it in varying degrees.<sup>33</sup> That sentiment is normative in terms both of the objects it picks out and the verdicts rendered of those objects. Because sentiment is possessed by all humans, moral and aesthetic judgements bind those capable of making them. "...[T]he sentiments, which arise from humanity, are not only the same in all human creatures, and produce the same approbation or censure; but they also comprehend all human creatures; nor is there any one whose conduct or character is not, by their means, an object to every one of censure or approbation."<sup>34</sup> For Hume, the possession of the sentiment for value places humanity within a common perspective, internal to which evaluative judgments have objective validity.

Hume is notoriously tricky on the standard of correctness of judgment he offers, as the texts surveyed so far appear to sustain two independent models. One is an external standard, developed most thoroughly in "Of the Standard of Taste," and centering on the epistemic credentials of "true" judges of value. It is external in attempting to say something about the realm of value from outside that realm. This approach has the aims of 1) supplying a criterion of truth and falsehood (or appropriateness and inappropriateness) for evaluative judgments by means of 2) specifying the epistemic qualifications of those best suited to attribute value reliably, and thereby 3) providing an epistemic indicator of value for the less qualified judges, by means of which they might refine their own sensibilities. The second standard is internal in that the verdicts of true judges play a more strongly constitutive role in the attribution of aesthetic qualities. This view is hinted at in "Of the Standard of Taste", but receives greater development elsewhere in Hume's writing. Both internalist and externalist interpretations are antirealist, though realists have tried to reform the externalist Humean view to support their own positions. I examine the externalist position in this section, and take up the internalist reading in the following one.

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There are at least two significant problems with the externalist standard, the second much more radical in its implications. The first is an apparent circularity in Hume's specification. If the joint verdicts of true judges constitute the standard of taste, then their judgments will indicate which objects exhibit certain qualities, for example, *elegance*. But true judges will not be the only persons offering verdicts; others will suggest that the object in fact does not exhibit elegance but *awkward restraint*. Whose judgment is better? How do we identify so-called "true" aesthetic judges? True judges are those whose critical verdicts are correct at least most of the time. This answer appears on first examination to lead us into a justificatory circle from which we have no escape. True aesthetic judges are identified by their critical track records—that is, how often their judgments about artworks are correct. How are we, the less-than true, to know if any particular judgments are correct? Why, by asking a true judge, of course. And now the circle is formed.

This circular account is held by a number of commentators to keep Hume's aesthetic theory from getting off the ground at all.<sup>35</sup> In "Of the Standard of Taste," Hume takes up the project of finding a rule "by which the various sentiments of men may be reconciled; at least, a decision, afforded, confirming one sentiment, and condemning another."<sup>36</sup> Hume takes it as a datum that people often disagree on their valuing of artworks; one finds powerful what another finds bombastic, and so on. His task is to spell out the characteristics that true aesthetic judges must possess in order to make correct judgments of value, with the idea that we might resolve at least many of such disputes by examining their epistemic credentials. Five characteristics are essential to the rare character that bestows the status of true judge: "Strong sense, united to delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by comparison, and cleared of all prejudice, can alone entitle critics to this valuable character; and the joint verdict of such, wherever they are to be found, is the true standard of taste and beauty."<sup>37</sup> All this seems reasonable enough. But the worry of circularity arises again when we consider how we are to determine if the necessary attributes are present in a candidate judge. For it seems that the only way to do that is by looking at the critical pronouncements she makes. Given that we are undecided about whether a melodic passage is monotonous or unified—indeed this is what we want the critic to clarify for us—we seem to be unable to assess the correctness of the critic's claim.

It is worth backing up here and pointing out that Hume sees his account as resolving a conflict in our thinking about aesthetic judgments. On the one hand, Hume writes that

There is a species of philosophy, which ...represents the impossibility of ever attaining any standard of taste. The difference, it is said, is very wide between judgment and sentiment. All sentiment is right; because sentiment has a reference to nothing beyond itself. ... [N]o sentiment represents what is really in the object. ... Beauty is no quality in things themselves: It exists merely in the mind which contemplates them; and each mind perceives a different beauty.<sup>38</sup>

This view is a widespread common sense idea, which has gained philosophical support from non-cognitivist theorists. It is important to note that Hume identifies this view but does not identify *with* it. Although he will maintain that sentiment is centrally involved in the aesthetic experience, he need not, and indeed does not, come out on the side of the non-cognitivist. Hume wants to give equal consideration to the thought that we do have a real sense that some works are aesthetically better than others. In his words:

Whoever would assert an equality of genius and elegance between OGILBY and MILTON, or BUNYAN and ADDISON, would be thought to defend no less an extravagance, than if he had maintained a mole-hill to be as high as TENERIFFE, or a pond as extensive as the ocean. Though there may be found persons, who give the preference to the former authors; no one pays attention to such a taste; and we pronounce without scruple the sentiment of these pretended critics to be absurd and ridiculous. The principle of the natural equality of tastes is then totally forgot, and while we admit it on some occasions, where the objects seem near an equality, it appears an extravagant paradox, or rather a palpable absurdity, where objects so disproportioned are compared together.<sup>39</sup>

Hume wants to extract what is right in the former claim, without accepting the stronger claim, which is certainly not entailed by it. What is right, on Hume's account, is that there is a subjective contribution to the location of value. But that claim does not warrant the conclusion that *all* value is merely a projection of subjective preference, as Hume underscores by way of the *reductio* against the natural equality of taste.

Hume's project in "Of the Standard of Taste" is, given the premise that the spectator makes some constitutive contribution to the aesthetic features of some object, together with the premise that there is something correct behind at least coarse-grained qualitative rankings of artworks, to develop criteria for identifying correct aesthetic judgments. Appropriately,

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those criteria refer back to the subjective contribution to value. Hume's is not the only theory attracting the charge of circularity. It seems that any ideal judgment or ideal observer theory will as well. The problem is in fact more pressing in these instances because of the constitutive role assigned to the judgments. Ideal observer theories take the following form:

*An object O has aesthetic quality Q iff an ideal observer would so judge it.*

Note the constitutive role expressed by the "only if" direction of the biconditional. An ideal observer theory will also give the attributes of the observer which, since they typically include characteristics like "omniscience with respect to non-evaluative facts", would exclude all of us from ideal observer candidacy. Since this kind of ideal observer theory posits a truly ideal observer, it seems we have nothing against which we can compare our judgments. For more realistic ideal observer theories, which do not make use of supernatural abilities and would more appropriately be called optimal observer theories, we come up against the same problem of circularity that critics attribute to Hume's model. Looking at the "if" direction of the biconditional makes it clear that our individual judgments may only be coincidentally correct. They might, however, be more than coincidentally correct. We may give the same answer as the optimal judge, and presumably our answer will not be a simple pronouncement, but one for which we can provide some measure of justificatory accompaniment. But now, in order to settle the question of which justifications are the appropriate ones, we seem to be in need of some way of identifying an optimal judge. The circularity of the account seems to emerge again. So this is a problem posed not just to Hume, but also to any proponent of an ideal (or optimal) judgment theory.

Peter Kivy proposes a way to break the appearance of circularity in Hume's model.<sup>40</sup> His thought is that we should be able to characterize at least some of Hume's five critical essentials in terms that do not refer to artworks. If it is possible to give, if not a non-evaluative definition at least a non-art critical definition, Hume will have escaped the circularity. Kivy argues that, while some of the criteria seem inescapably circular, not all of them are. In particular, the attributes of a *practiced* sensibility and experience with comparisons are defined circularly. Hume writes that "nothing tends further to encrease and improve this talent [the faculty of taste] than *practice* in a particular art, and the frequent survey or contemplation of a particular species of beauty."<sup>41</sup> The notion of a practiced sensibility, then, seems to play an especially important part in the identification of true

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judges. Obviously practice with anything will not do, since the motivation for this feature is that it yields familiarity with the aesthetically relevant features of specific genres, and thus increases the reliability of judgments of works in those genres. Experience in making comparisons refers directly to artworks in the same way. What a candidate judge must have some experience in making comparisons between are “the several species and degrees of excellence,” as well as with “estimating their proportion to one another.”<sup>42</sup> And while this seems an eminently sensible stipulation for Hume’s true judge, on a straightforward reading it seems to fail to neutralize the worry about circularity. For these two attributes, we are unable to determine whether anyone has them unless we possess prior knowledge of the relative quality of some collection of artworks. But of course, this is what we were hoping to learn from the critic. However, the practiced sensibility criterion might be given a better showing by considering the role of the canon in forming and reflecting a standard of taste. Given a body of artworks, each of which is widely agreed to be of high aesthetic merit, we can establish as a non-evaluative fact whether an individual has or has not spent a significant amount of time in the study and contemplation of these works. We can also establish whether her judgments are in agreement with the judgments marking these works as canonical. This account, if we remain faithful to Hume, might well break the circle, but would deliver a rather conservative judgeship. We also need to be told when we are to accept a judgment that diverges from the canonical, and Hume’s account only provides the two sources of blameless disagreement. Surely great art critics, ones we might well consider to be true judges, will offer divergent judgments which nevertheless impugn their true judge status. Hume’s test might allow for some divergence from the canon without threatening that status, but the range of divergence allowed seems too narrow. In particular, it gives little help in deciding whose judgments to accept for very novel artworks. Perhaps, then, Hume can escape the charge of circularity, but only by delivering a theory that is unsatisfactory in other ways. Moreover, the appearance of artworks, even artworks antecedently judged as canonical, in the analysis of the concept of true judge is unsatisfactory to some. Can the concept be unpacked without reference to artworks?

Kivy believes that the other three attributes—strong sense, delicacy of taste, and freedom from prejudice—can be cashed out in ways that make no reference to artworks. Delicacy of taste could be attributed to someone “not on the basis of his critical judgments but rather on

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the basis of his general emotional reactions to non-aesthetic situations.”<sup>43</sup> This claim is premised on the thought that delicacy of taste can be tightly linked to delicacy of passion. This move is one that Hume would block, however. The effect of delicacy of passion is to make one “extremely sensible to all the accidents of life...”<sup>44</sup> The delicacy of taste resembles the other species in that it “produces the same sensibility to beauty and deformity of every kind, as [the other] does to prosperity and adversity, obligations and injuries.”<sup>45</sup> Both have the effect of enlarging “the sphere both of our happiness and misery, and make us sensible to pains as well as pleasures, which escape the rest of mankind.”<sup>46</sup> But it is explicit in his account that he not only thinks the two capacities are independent of one another, but also thinks that we should assign very different values to them. “[N]otwithstanding this resemblance, delicacy of taste is as much to be desired and cultivated as delicacy of passion is to be lamented, and to be remedied, if possible.”<sup>47</sup> By “remedied” he surely means cured in the very same sense that to cure a disease is to rid oneself of it entirely. That he takes the two to stand relatively independent of each other is also clear: “Whatever connexion there may be originally between these two species of delicacy, I am persuaded, that nothing is so proper to cure us of this delicacy of passion, as the cultivation of that higher and more refined taste, which enables us to judge of the characters of men, of compositions of genius, and of the productions of the nobler arts.”<sup>48</sup> So not only are they independent capacities, but we can cultivate one to exorcise the other. Kivy’s suggestion about the escape from circularity on this point will not do the trick. Noël Carroll points out that furthermore, delicacy of taste also makes reference to normatively ranked artworks or aesthetic qualities. “A critic proves to have delicacy of taste by noting fine shadings in tones, colors, and meanings, in the course of commenting on acknowledged accomplishments of a given artform.”<sup>49</sup> The circularity remains.

Carroll and Kivy both agree that strong sense and freedom from prejudice can be spelled out in non-circular, non-art referring terms. This may be true. But notice that even if it is granted that such a definition is available, the worry about circularity is not eliminated. By saving some but not all of the attributes, we are left with an incomplete set of criteria for true aesthetic judges, unless of course we wish to drop the required set to the two that admit of the right characterization. The conjunction of strong sense and freedom from prejudice

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alone is not sufficient for true judge status. This means that the circularity charge must be answered in a different way if Hume's model is to be defended.

Such an answer, one that does not begin by cashing out the true judge's attributes in some unacceptable way, is available, says Hume. What is desired, ultimately, is an answer to questions of the form, "Is artwork X better or worse than artwork Y?", where such answers will include some reasons in support of the answer. The reason we look for such an answer in the first place is, presumably, because we cannot offer an answer of our own with anything approaching certainty. If we grant what seems to be reasonable, that Hume's criteria for judges are partly circular, then there is the appearance that we have no way to validate one critic's judgments over another. But this appearance is built on the assumption that we are only entitled to accept statements as true (or justified) when we can fully inspect their epistemic credentials. The worry that we cannot do this for at least some aesthetic judgments is a reasonable worry to entertain. The way to dispel the worry is by taking the route of understanding the claims of candidate judges as testimony. What this means is that the specific statements of judges, say, "Beethoven's 5<sup>th</sup> Symphony is far superior aesthetically to his 8<sup>th</sup> Symphony," can represent a transmission of real knowledge to the rest of us provided that the judge *knows* this fact. And our belief based on the testimony of the judge is justified provided that we have justification for taking the judge to be credible.

This account may arouse some suspicion. It is also worth noting, as Carroll points out, that Hume himself seems to disallow the possibility of testimonial knowledge, or of any non-inferential knowledge. Hume should not hold this position. The suspicion of testimonial knowledge is warranted only to the extent that one is unaware of the frequency with which we take testimony as reports of truths. On a day to day basis, we operate with an implicit presumption that the people we speak with are sincere and knowledgeable, unless we have good reason to believe otherwise. We might call this the Presumption of Testimonial Truth. This presumption is not just a heuristic for our going about the world, a sort of economy of epistemological effort. It is also fundamental in our acquisition of language and concepts, and essential in linguistic communication. As Michael Dummett writes,

Thoughts are of their essence communicable; whether or not more than the most rudimentary thoughts are possible for those without language, *our* thought is shaped by the means for communicating it that we start to acquire

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in infancy. This means, not only that the experiential basis of knowledge must consist in *our* experience, not in *my* experience, but that experience can be characterized only as the experience of a common world inhabited by others as well as me; it is intrinsic to our grasp of language that we take testimony as contributing to our stock of information.<sup>50</sup>

So we do have a real epistemic dependence on testimony that goes beyond our claims to knowledge of specialist disciplines (e.g. higher mathematics, medicine, auto mechanics) to the root of our ability to think and communicate. We can disqualify statements merely on the grounds of their being testimonial only on pain of losing these abilities.

That is not at all to say that we have no grounds for disqualifying at least some testimony. To return to Hume's model: We have just discovered a young up-and-coming artist, Damien Wurst. His artistic genre, Conceptual Vivisectionism, is also new and unfamiliar. We want to know if his work has aesthetic merit. We have our own ideas, of course, but we realize that we may not know all the tenets of the Conceptual Vivisectionist manifesto, or understand what the genre is reacting against. Or perhaps the delicacy of our passion is too great to prevent some kind of prejudicial aesthetic verdict against the artistic display of animal parts (or of animals in parts). What do we do? We seek out the purported experts in this area.

The claim about the epistemological legitimacy of testimony as knowledge is not meant as a suggestion that once we find those experts writing about Wurst's work, we can go no further in justifying our beliefs about it. Hume's model in "Of the Standard of Taste" attempts to give us the resources to do just that. Unfortunately for his account, Hume's proposal for identifying the judges whose testimony we should accept as true will not ultimately work. The proposal works on the following sort of model: Let us say that there are a number of critics writing about Wurst. One of them is something of a kingmaker in the artworld, but when we learn that he owns a gallery where Wurst's pieces are shown (and, he likely hopes, sold), we might be justified in disqualifying his judgements on the grounds that they are not free from prejudice. Another critic absolutely despises Wurst, but he is really a music critic who occasionally dabbles in criticism of other artforms. We can write him off for failing to have practice and ability to draw comparisons in the relevant genre. Two more critical opinions are available, and they are in utter disagreement. As far as we can tell, they both

pass the tests that the other two fail. It also seems that both appreciate the subtleties of the way in which Wurst's Conceptual Vivisectionist artistic statement is made. And from their respective writings, they both appear to have "the same excellence of faculties which contributes to the improvement of reason, the same clearness of conception, the same exactness of distinction, the same vivacity of apprehension"<sup>51</sup> which constitute strong sense. Whose judgement is right?

Hume proposes a kind of test we could in principle apply to the candidate true judges. His test is formed from an analogy with a story from *Don Quixote*. He recounts Sancho Panza's story of two kinsmen, who shared with him a hereditary ability to judge the qualities of wine. His kinsmen were asked for their opinion of a wine of good vintage. One affirms the good qualities of the wine while noting a taste of leather, which compromises the quality, while the other approves of the wine while at the same time saying that the easily detectable taste of iron stands in the way of his fuller approval. The kinsmen were laughed at for their verdicts, but once the cask was drained, a leather thong tied to a key was discovered. Hume thinks that because there is a "great resemblance between mental and bodily taste"<sup>52</sup> an analogous model for the determination of true judges can be provided. Hume thinks that the chemical metaphor can be extended to aesthetic qualities. He says that "as these qualities may be found in a small degree, or may be mixed and confounded with each other, it often happens, that the taste is not affected with such minute qualities, or is not able to distinguish all the particular flavours, amidst the disorder, in which they are presented."<sup>53</sup> What delicacy of taste is, then, is specifically the capacity to perceive even the smallest amount of a quality, and to identify all the qualities presented. So when we have two judges who seem to have an equal claim on true judgeship, but disagree in their particular judgments, Hume suggests the following test: Apply the "general rules of beauty" to form a set of test cases<sup>54</sup>. The judges will be presented first with obvious and simple instances of the quality in dispute. Assuming they agree in their pronouncements, successive cases will be presented which also have the disputed quality, only to a lesser degree or in combination with other qualities that might confuse the judgment. So essentially determining the true judge is a matter of determining who can make the finest discriminations of the quality in question. The first candidate who cannot judge a quality determined to be present by the examiners' initial application of the general rules of beauty fails the test, and is not a true judge.

Seeing the test described in detail clearly shows the inadequacy of the external version of Hume's theory. Hume is conflating two notions of delicacy of taste. One is as Hume describes, the ability to discern small quantities of various qualities. But since taste is explicitly defined as that faculty which gilds and stains natural properties with sentiment, delicacy of taste is the capacity for the right sort of hedonic response. Hume denies the possibility that the two can come apart. In his discussion of blameless disagreements, the source of those disagreements is identified with a difference in sentiment, owing either to one's individual make-up or to one's cultural membership. Even these differences do not allow for a dispute to take the form of two judgments agreeing on the present quality but pronouncing it to have opposite valence. Hume writes that the "young man, whose passions are warm, will be more sensibly touched with amorous and tender images, than a man more advanced in years, who takes pleasure in wise, philosophical reflections concerning the conduct of life and the moderation of the passions. At twenty, Ovid may be the favourite author; Horace at forty; and perhaps Tacitus at fifty."<sup>55</sup> What is not in dispute between the old man and the young man is whether Ovid's images are tender and amorous, or whether these are anything but positively-valenced qualities. The dispute only concerned the relative ranking such qualities are to be given relative to others, such as the soberness and reflectiveness to be found in Tacitus. Hume's reason for thinking this is again the idea that certain words essentially import blame or praise. But this is not true of all aesthetic predications. It is very often indeterminate what evaluation is being made on the basis of a critical comment. Formal qualities like balance, stability, or odd ungrammaticality can appear in contexts where they have positive, negative, neutral, or indeterminate evaluative connotations.

A further problem with this model is that, as I have argued against the subjectivist, it is not necessary to be in any particular affective state at all to determine the salient aesthetic qualities of an artwork. Hume's theory is not (consistently, anyway) non-cognitive, because judgments are not merely reports of preference, but it suffers from the fact that it holds the subjective contribution to aesthetic experience<sup>56</sup> to be purely affective. But there is no direct connection between affect and aesthetic qualities. It seems, *contra* Sibley, that in certain contexts we might take gaudiness to be a positive feature, while still holding it to be

### 5.3: *Judgment and the Problem of Circularity*

gaudiness and not boldness we are experiencing. Similarly, it does not seem implausible that—perhaps in a lesser writer than Ovid—tenderness could easily be taken as negative or neutral. Indeed, in some cases it is conceivable that the natural features which might cause a certain predictable human response might well, together with that response, have an aesthetic quality valenced in opposition to that response. Our Conceptual Vivisectionist might have the express artistic aim of exciting our natural revulsion at seeing a dissected animal, with a view toward making some political or social statement. In that case, it would be a positive aesthetic feature of such a work that it produced negative responses in its viewers.

It also seems strange to think that aesthetic qualities are essentially the sort of thing that can come in quantifiable degrees. Of course it is true that we do make comparisons of the form ‘this is more graceful than that’. In contrast, recall the critical characterization of Rothko’s paintings as a kind of oracle which, through a kind of visual riddle, veils intangible senses behind a “simple” front. This quality, though perhaps not neatly expressible in a predicate, seems a properly aesthetic one. And yet, it is not at all something that could come in degrees. Either the painting is appropriately characterized as oracular or not. Here too is an example of an aesthetic quality that does not connect in any obvious way with human evaluative responses.

Hume’s overarching philosophical project is a naturalist one. He believes that only a uniformity of human nature will allow a defensible claim of objectivity to be made for aesthetic discourse. He believes further that such a uniformity in fact obtains. Hume allows for only two sources of critical disagreements which are blameless and cannot be debated: “the different humours of particular men; the other, the particular manners and opinions of our age and country.” The reason Hume takes these particular sources to be exceptions is that they both arise from some deeply-rooted aspect of our individual sensibilities. Of the first sort of difference of opinion, the one exemplified by the young man’s preference for Ovid and the old man’s preference for Tacitus, Hume writes that “it is almost impossible not to feel a predilection for that which suits our particular turn and disposition. Such preferences are innocent and unavoidable, and can never reasonably be the object of dispute, because there is no standard, by which they can be decided.”<sup>57</sup> About the second sort of

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difference, Hume has in mind instances the English or the French displeasure at comedies such as *Andria of Terence*, or *Clitia of Machiavel*, which in their reservedness is more suited to ancient Greek and modern Italian audiences. Hume says that “a man of learning and reflection can make allowances for these peculiarities of manners; but a common audience can never divest themselves so far of their usual ideas and sentiments, as to relish pictures which in no wise resemble them.”<sup>58</sup> But having said this, it is evident that Hume should acknowledge a stronger role for cultural facts in aesthetic judgments.<sup>59</sup> Hume’s remarks here lend themselves to the view that it is not just natural features of artworks but also their cultural associations and contexts which affect the sentiments excited in audiences. And his account seems oblivious to another realm of facts which are absolutely essential to the formation of aesthetic judgments, namely, art theoretical facts. Hume seems to take for granted that the genres of comedy and tragedy are well-defined with respect to one another, and does not address the fact that many critical disputes turn on questions of the proper genre identification of specific works. Surely facts like these underpin aesthetic judgments, and again are just not the sort of thing which one can detect in a way analogous to what the oenophile does. Hume’s account is fatally inadequate on this point when we consider contemporary conceptual works, such as the Conceptual Vivisectionist ones. A certain body of art theory is needed in order to get so much as an entry into a proper appreciation and understanding of such works. And so the relation of natural properties which are somehow fitted to excite the sentiment in certain uniform ways is an incomplete picture. Cultural and art-theoretical facts also play a determining role in our aesthetic judgments. Hume’s externalist conception of the aesthetic experience as involving only feelings, and of aesthetic qualities as incorporating only those feelings and natural properties, fails to capture our art-related practices. This interpretation does occupy the cognitivist antirealist space but is unsatisfactory on other grounds and must be abandoned.

#### 4. The Euthyphro Question, Again

It is not clear whether the joint verdict of true judges is meant to be indicative or constitutive of evaluative merit or demerit. The dominant interpretation is the indicative reading. In Anthony Savile’s words, “Of the Standard of Taste” is “a contribution to the theory of aesthetic evidence, not to the theory of aesthetic nature.”<sup>60</sup> But his model of value as

comprising objective features and subjective sentiment lends itself to a constitutive interpretation. That issue plays a central role in the internal standard model of judgment, which stems from theoretical commitments Hume makes primarily in the *Treatise* and the *Enquiries*. Those commitments, if maintained, force Hume to abandon a merely indicative role of the verdicts of true judges, and show that the constitutive reading of the external standard collapses into the internal standard. This internal, constitutive interpretation seems to be a cousin of the response-dependence account of aesthetic qualities.

The internal model develops from two premises. The first is that “though it be certain, that beauty and deformity, more than sweet and bitter, are not qualities in objects, but belong entirely to the sentiment, internal or external; it must be allowed, that there are certain qualities in objects, which are fitted by nature to produce those particular feelings.”<sup>61</sup> This is the claim that value is both mind- and world-involving. The second premise is that evaluative judgments admit of truth values—that is, what distinguishes a good judge from a bad one is a matter of rightness of judgment. Both of these figure in the external interpretation surveyed in the previous section. One of the conspicuous failings of that view was that cultural and social practices were accorded an improbably weak role in the constitution of aesthetic qualities. With that sort of caveat in mind, David Wiggins spins out an evolutionary story of sorts to show how evaluative critical practice develops around socially shared <quality, response> pairs<sup>62</sup>, such as <funny, amusement>. Where we end up when a culture has reached a sufficient degree of sophistication is this: certain <quality, response> pairs become established, and without undermining the general stability of the associated concept, both the quality and the response become contestable, each in terms of the other. That is, attributions of an evaluative predicate (or more generally, responses) are open to critical challenge about whether the requisite quality for the attribution is present. Additionally, disputants are licensed to question what responses are rightly linked with particular qualities. Within a given value, our critical practice can maintain disputes and revisions of the mind’s role in terms of the world, and of the world’s role in terms of the mind, without losing a conceptual grip on the value itself.

Having put this internal standard in place, Wiggins argues that the typical critical claim will take the form of, for example, “genuinely *funny* things are things that *amuse* because they are

*funny*”, another apparent circularity is removed by understanding that “this ‘because’ introduces an explanation that both explains and justifies.”<sup>63</sup> The idea is that although the specification of judges and true judgments is circular, there is space for disputing what things fall under the extension of the quality concept, and who is a suitable judge of the quality. Disputes about the correctness about either member of the evaluative <quality, response> pair are resolved in just the very way that Hume says is the only real way available: to produce the best arguments that their invention suggests to them. A central requirement for *evaluative* concept possession is, again, standing in the right affective relationship to the object of the concept, one of Hume’s central themes which is echoed by Wiggins. “If a property and an attitude are made for one another,” he writes, “it will be strange for one to use the term for the property if he is in no way party to the attitude and there is simply no chance of his finding that the item in question has the property. But if he is no stranger to the attitude and the attitude is favorable, it will be the most natural thing in the world if he regards it as a matter of keen argument what it takes for a thing to count as having the property that the attitude is paired with.”<sup>64</sup>

The central claim of “Of a Standard of Taste” is that aesthetic character is as the joint verdict of true judges pronounces it to be. With the Euthyphro contrast in mind, we might ask: what is the sense of that ‘is’? It indicates either a constitutive or indicative claim. The dominant interpretation is for the latter, which places true judges in the role of discovering value and making true attributions of value concepts. The direction of judgment is from world to mind—some experiential feature warrants a particular attribution. But value is both subject- and object-involving, and so an indicative reading must mean that judges are discovering things not just about objects (the usual understanding in talk about “rules of art”) but also about subjects, specifically, which qualities pair up with which sentiments. But the only plausible way in which judges could make these true attributions (of concepts to subjects) is if some version of psychological nativism were true. That is, since judges cannot inspect the conceptual contents of other minds, their attributions can be correct only if the concepts in question—those “discovered”—were innate. But this is something that Hume’s empiricism famously denies. That leaves the constitutive interpretation as the only alternative. Taken as a whole, Hume’s more general theoretical claims might be seen to force the constitutive, internalist standard of value. The anchoring of response is partly

taken up by some (if not Hume's exactly) epistemic specification of the constructors of value. That can take place nowhere else but within the social sphere. Artists can introduce new value concepts or revise existing ones by showing that novel ways of seeing are properly valued, or that *strident* and *dissonant* can fall under the extension of *beautiful*. Similarly, moral exemplars can literally make *industry* a positive moral value concept, or dissolve the virtue of *piety*.

Wiggins' account is in many ways a commendable revision of Hume's theory. It addresses the objection raised for the internal reading that the role of social and cultural practice is underrepresented. However, it suffers from some of the same problems as the internal view. Most crucially, it attaches qualities to affective responses. As I have argued before, the affective does not exhaust the full range of responses to aesthetic qualities. And Wiggins' theory introduces a new problem: if what we respond to are aesthetic qualities, then although our responses are tied to them in deep ways, the account seems to have ontologically divested those qualities of the affective responses. On the internal reading, what aesthetic qualities are most plausibly interpreted as are complexes of *natural* properties and affective responses. The beauty of a circle is not a property of the circle independent of our responses. Taste raises up a new creation—staining the circle with our affective responses, and it is that created quality which we label beauty. Beauty incorporates both the mind-independent properties of the circle and our affective responses. Wiggins' account, on the other hand, has the judge responding to an aesthetic quality that is perhaps keyed to a certain reliable affective response, but does not essentially incorporate that response. His choice of examples shows this—a paradigm <quality, response> pair is <funny, amusement>. While he says that things are funny because they amuse, the way in which the quality is named seems to give it a status as funny independent of the response. In any case Wiggins' reconstruction of Hume is faithful in its ambiguous treatment of aesthetic qualities. Sometimes they are treated as funny, odious, tender, and so on, apart from our responses, and so primitive, and other times they are complexes arising from the interaction of our responses to independent qualities. Wiggins, like Hume, seems to slide between quasi-realism and cognitivist antirealism. If cognitivist antirealism is to be distinct from quasi-realism, it needs to tell a story about why judgments are not merely expressions of attitudes. Telling this story will involve us in properly locating aesthetic qualities.

## 5. Chapter Summary

In investigating the several theories of aesthetic judgment, the focal points have been the intuitions of the objectivity of aesthetic discourse and the mind-dependence of aesthetic qualities. Hume's theory is the first among those surveyed which does not seek to explain away one of the intuitions as somehow mistaken; rather, it accommodates both of them. Ultimately, Hume proves to be deeply ambiguous on the status of aesthetic qualities, and on the function of aesthetic judgment. One way of reading Hume is largely consistent with a cognitivist antirealist view. Hume's, "beauties", "excellences" seem to correspond to what we call aesthetic qualities, and are complex entities incorporating features of objects or events together with certain warranted affective responses. Aesthetic qualities are mind-dependent, and so the canonical aesthetic judgment, "That artwork is F", where F is an aesthetic predicate is not a statement about the artwork detached from any human responses. Judgments are objective because it is possible, says Hume, to determine a class of true judges whose judgments are privileged as true, but whose membership in that class is answerable to independent criteria. Because Hume's view reconciles the two intuitions, it is properly classed as a cognitivist antirealist theory.

Unfortunately, this interpretation of Hume is not consistent with much of Hume's writing. In contrast to the reading just summarized, Hume often seems to say either that the beauties are things we respond to, and so are somehow characterizable independent of those responses, or that our judgments are simply expressions of approbation or condemnation. The first view is realism, inadequately worked out, and the second is quasi-realism. So in the end, Hume's theory does not turn out to be one that can be comfortably appropriated by any of the contemporary factions. There may yet be some Humean insights that would aid in constructing an adequate theory of aesthetic judgment.

A view that accommodates the two starting intuitions is appealing for the simple reason that it allows us to retain much of our ways of thinking about aesthetics, and avoids attributing error to our practices. But plainly Hume's account is not a sustainable view, even with these merits. Hume optimistically attributes a uniformity to human nature of a much stronger sort

than we could sustain alongside our greater knowledge of the diversity of human life. Hume also gives little to no role to cultural factors, including, quite significantly, art critical practices. Many of the aesthetic judgments we make and encounter in our everyday lives would be nonsensical without an attendant art theoretical enterprise. Clearly, then, a plausible cognitivist antirealism—judged not only on its accommodating the two intuitions but on capturing the range of art-related practices—cannot rely on an implausible view of human nature, and cannot ignore cultural factors. In the next chapter, I attempt to develop just such a theory.

<sup>1</sup> Michael Ayers, “But what do they know?” *Times Literary Supplement* 14 June 2002, 6.

<sup>2</sup> There is an important exegetical issue regarding the proper relationship between the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry* in Hume’s thought. The best understanding of Hume’s view is to be arrived at by giving priority to the ideas in the *Enquiry*, and reading the *Treatise* in its light, rather than the converse. The dominant interpretive approach takes the *Treatise* as more central to Hume’s thought. Because Hume says little about aesthetics in either of these works, I hope to have elided this issue. In any case, as I shall make clear, projecting Hume’s thoughts onto contemporary philosophical discussions inevitably involves major reconstruction. So we should not let ourselves think that the results of such a project deliver Hume’s views on our problems.

<sup>3</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment* (14.7 Ak. 225 B 61).

<sup>4</sup> David Hume, “Of the Standard of Taste,” *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1985) 268.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid* 273.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid* 266.

<sup>7</sup> Jerrold Levinson, “Aesthetic Properties, Evaluative Force, and Differences of Sensibility”, Emily Brady and Jerrold Levinson, eds., *Aesthetic Concepts: Essays After Sibley* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001) 64–66.

<sup>8</sup> See especially his “Aesthetic Concepts”.

<sup>9</sup> *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, Appendix 1, 289.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid*, 294.

<sup>11</sup> In his *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1985) 85.

<sup>12</sup> “The Sceptic,” *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1985), 165.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid* 165.

<sup>14</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge and P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., 1978), 226.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid* 227.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid* 228.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid*, 227–228.

<sup>18</sup> *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, Appendix 1, 294.

<sup>19</sup> Tony Pitson, “Projectionism, Realism, and Hume’s Moral Sense Theory,” *Hume Studies* 15 (1989), 69–70.

<sup>20</sup> “The Sceptic,” 166 n 3.

<sup>21</sup> Annette Baier, *A Progress of Sentiments* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 194–195.

<sup>22</sup> David Wiggins, “A Sensible Subjectivism,” reprinted in *Moral Discourse and Practice*, ed. Stephen Darwall, Allan Gibbard, and Peter Railton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 231.

<sup>23</sup> David Hume, “Of the Standard of Taste,” *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1985), 233.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid*, 233.

<sup>25</sup> David Hume, “Of the Standard of Taste” 281.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid* 266.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid* 273.

<sup>28</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 468–469.

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- <sup>29</sup> David Hume, "The Sceptic", 164-165.
- <sup>30</sup> *A Treatise of Human Nature* 469.
- <sup>31</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>32</sup> "Of the Standard of Taste", 230-231.
- <sup>33</sup> see, for example, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 272.
- <sup>34</sup> *ibid.*, 273.
- <sup>35</sup> See, in this regard, Peter Kivy, "Hume's Standard of Taste: Breaking the Circle", *British Journal of Aesthetics* 7 (1967), 57-65; and Jeffrey Wicand, "Hume's Two Standards of Taste", *Philosophical Quarterly* 34 (1984), 129-142. The two standards I am investigating are not Wicand's two standards, but David Wiggins's.
- <sup>36</sup> "Of the Standard of Taste", 229.
- <sup>37</sup> *ibid.*, 241.
- <sup>38</sup> *ibid.*, 240.
- <sup>39</sup> *ibid.*, 230-231.
- <sup>40</sup> Peter Kivy, "Hume's Standard: Breaking the Circle", *British Journal of Aesthetics* 7 (1967) 57-66.
- <sup>41</sup> "Of the Standard of Taste", 237.
- <sup>42</sup> *ibid.*, 238.
- <sup>43</sup> Kivy, 62.
- <sup>44</sup> David Hume, "Of the Delicacy of Taste and Passion", *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, Eugene F. Miller, ed. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1985), 3.
- <sup>45</sup> *ibid.*, 4.
- <sup>46</sup> *ibid.*, 5.
- <sup>47</sup> *ibid.*, 5.
- <sup>48</sup> *ibid.*, 5-6.
- <sup>49</sup> Noël Carroll, "Hume's Standard of Taste", *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 43 (1984), 190.
- <sup>50</sup> Michael Dummett, *The Seas of Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 471.
- <sup>51</sup> David Hume, "Of the Standard of Taste" 240-241.
- <sup>52</sup> *ibid.* 273.
- <sup>53</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>54</sup> Of course this step is open to the common criticism that there are no such rules. This is, however, the first step in Hume's test for true judgeship. Hume might be read here as making reference to an antecedently given canon, but this interpretation would require some supporting argument and exegesis.
- <sup>55</sup> David Hume, "Of the Standard of Taste" 281.
- <sup>56</sup> I use this locution without any suggestion that there is a definitive 'aesthetic experience', rather, I use it merely to indicate the experience of artworks which could be characterized by the issuing of a judgment with a certain content.
- <sup>57</sup> "Of the Standard of Taste" 281.
- <sup>58</sup> *ibid.* 282.
- <sup>59</sup> Sarah Broadie has suggested here that presumably Hume is mainly concerned with the transmission of aesthetic standards within a given culture—i.e., he is playing the role of a tastemaker. She further suggests that he would not likely recognize a sub-culture as a serious cultural possibility.
- <sup>60</sup> Anthony Savile, *Kantian Aesthetics Pursued* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), 80.
- <sup>61</sup> "Of the Standard of Taste", 235.
- <sup>62</sup> Actually, Wiggins writes in terms of <property, response> pairs, but for independent reasons not developed here I wish to argue in terms of qualities, because property talk seems to bias the inquiry in the direction of metaphysical realism, whereas quality talk is intended to entail no realist or antirealist commitments.
- <sup>63</sup> Wiggins, 234.
- <sup>64</sup> Wiggins, 234.

## Chapter 6

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In the previous chapter I argued that while Hume's antirealist theory of judgment avoids many of the problems of realist theories, it rests on unsustainable premises. I shall now develop an antirealist theory which is in some respects inspired by Hume's, but which does not rely on Hume's assumptions about human nature, the fittingness of certain qualities, or a dichotomy between reason and desire.

Rather, my approach will be to give a wide berth to issues in the philosophy of mind and to focus instead on extant art theoretical and critical practices. Any theory of aesthetic judgment must have something to say about the status of the discourse associated with these practices. The discourse comprises data to be given a general interpretation by the theory chosen. These data are given very different treatment by the various theories surveyed. In many cases, there is an underlying general view about what must be the case for an assertoric sentence to be apt for truth. That view is that assertoric sentences are representational of particular states of affairs, and such sentences are true just when the representations correspond in some sense with those states. For realists, those states are independent of our myriad thoughts<sup>1</sup> representing them, and so the discourse enjoys a strong objectivity. Subjectivists, error theorists, and reductionists also hold to this picture of truth-aptness, but for differing reasons find the substantive predicates of aesthetic discourse suspicious and in need of treatment. The subjectivist in essence holds that aesthetic judgments serve only to express individual preferences, and so are either true only of their utterers or are merely disguised exclamations with no truth value. Error theorists claim that no entities exist which could be the referents of aesthetic predicates (or alternatively, that there are no facts which are the referents of aesthetic judgments), and thus aesthetic sentences are all false.<sup>2</sup> And the reductionist can attribute truth only because the suspicious predicates can be reduced to empirical, natural, or in any case non-suspect language. The quasi-realist is a special case. Her argument proceeds from a certain ontological picture of the world which does not include aesthetic qualities, and a desire to preserve an entitlement to attribute truth and falsity to aesthetic judgments. These features, together with the same representational conception of assertions, lead the quasi-realist to the view that aesthetic judgments are expressions of attitudes toward particular objective facts. This view necessitates a revision of

the syntax of judgments, with the damaging consequences already discussed. I wish to begin by denying the claim that truth-apt assertions are representational in anything more than a platitudinous sense. Like the realist, however, I maintain that we should begin from a position that presumes that participants in the discourse are at least mostly correct in what they take themselves to be doing as participants. Typically, aesthetic judgments are assertions, which means they are implicitly asserted as being true. Also implicit in judgment making is a readiness to give supporting reasons upon demand. And while some judgments are defended with reasons explicitly offered as reasons only for the judge, the paradigm judgment is supported with reasons offered as convincing evidence for the judgment. Any adequate theory should accommodate these implicit tenets of aesthetic discourse, and move away from them only in light of sound philosophical arguments. It is a virtue of the theory I develop that these tenets are preserved to a greater degree than on any other antirealist view surveyed here, and at a lower theoretical cost than on any of the realist ones.

My theory is cognitivist aesthetic antirealism. I shall also refer to it as cognitivist antirealism, with the understanding that its application is only the aesthetic domain. In previous chapters I have given arguments which served to undermine the case for realism and other varieties of antirealism. Of course, a theory cannot be accepted merely because it sidesteps the same problems. So here I argue for the following claims:

1. Well-formed aesthetic judgments are truth-apt, but in virtue of minimalist truth-theoretic criteria.
2. Many aesthetic sentences, including judgments and theoretical/critical claims, show artworks to be mind-involving entities. This is manifest most clearly in art-theoretical and metaphorical aesthetic discourse.
3. Correctly understanding some aesthetic sentences as metaphorical provides the key to solving the problem of expression.
4. The mind-dependence of aesthetic qualities delivers a satisfactory explanation of irresolvable critical disagreements.

Defending an antirealist theory involves dealing with a range of issues that are much more easily addressed by the realist. These include:

- A. In virtue of what do judgments converge, if aesthetic qualities are mind-dependent?

B. What constraints serve to demarcate true judgments from false ones?

C. Is antirealism revisionary of any pre-theoretical intuitions about art?

I shall address questions A. and B. in the course of motivating claims 1 through 4. I will reserve a discussion of C. for the concluding chapter.

### 1. Truth in Aesthetics

In his *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, Hume writes that taste “has a productive faculty, and gilding or staining all natural objects with the colours, borrowed from internal sentiment, raises in a manner a new creation.”<sup>3</sup> Hume’s metaphor nicely captures the metaphysical alternative I suggest is superior to the realist view. The image of gilding and staining has lent itself to a number of different interpretations, most notably Blackburn’s quasi-realism. I think it is largely an exegetical question whether Hume is more properly assimilated to a non-cognitivist view like Blackburn’s or a cognitivist one as offered here. In fact I think a convincing argument can be made that Hume has been misread when he has been taken to be a non-cognitivist in our sense. But the exegetical issues are not important here. To recast Hume’s picture in our terms, I claim that truth in aesthetics is constituted by our best judgments. In other words, those best judgments play an extension-determining role for the substantive predicates of aesthetic discourse.

The most fundamental differences between my view and Blackburn’s quasi-realism are that I take aesthetic discourse to be a genuinely assertoric one, and one that does not involve supervenience in any way. To say that De Kooning’s female figure paintings from the 1960’s (Figure 20) “became frank instruments of sex—lustfully enticing, yielding yet demanding, and cruelly anxiety provoking. . . [and] although they allude to Baroque and Rococo nudes, they are distorted by obsessions with the body and its functions, by desperate passions, psychological quandaries, and ferocious appetites that the old masters usually preferred not to depict”<sup>4</sup> is to claim that in some sense these things are the case. Certainly the sentence appears to assert. Under non-cognitivism, such a sentence is taken in fact to be an expression of preference masquerading as an at least partially descriptive sentence. But there is no good argument to the effect that the pragmatic function of expressing preference exhausts the use of such sentences, or even is a necessary feature of them.<sup>5</sup> The burden on

the non-cognitivist is to give some independent argument why this is so, and it must not rely on the claim that aesthetic language is non-descriptive or otherwise defective, because this move would be question-begging. I contend that no such satisfactory argument is available, and in the absence of one we should be content that the appearance of assertion is a reliable one.

If claims like the one about De Kooning's paintings are assertions, they present their asserted contents as being true. If truth in aesthetics is constituted by our best judgments, how are we entitled to talk of truth? According to Crispin Wright, a discourse that "deals in assertoric contents"<sup>6</sup> allows for a genuine truth predicate. What determines whether a discourse is properly assertoric? It should be so reckoned "just in case its ingredient sentences are subject to certain minimal constraints of syntax—embeddability within negation, the conditional, contexts of propositional attitude, etc., and discipline: their use must be governed by agreed standards of warrant."<sup>7</sup> Aesthetic sentences do figure in all these syntactical roles. And the sentences, which I have called judgments or critical claims, are indeed disciplined by standards, some internal and some external to the discourse.

Those standards or constraining norms are multifarious and shifting. One critical claim might well be accepted when it conforms to some subset of the norms, while another might be accepted for very different reasons. The norms themselves are introduced, modified, and withdrawn as our art-related practices develop. And the content and application of those norms will always be a contested realm for art theorists, critics, and artists. But it is clear, from even a casual survey of art critical writing, that aesthetic discourse is disciplined by norms. A paradigmatic approach to unseating some critic's claim is by demonstrating that her judgment does not somehow respect one or more of the discourse's norms. What are some of those disciplining norms? Aesthetic judgments should be responsible to a work's presentational features. They should conform to admissible myths and critical canons (e.g. a judgment about Tiepolo's *Immaculate Conception* (Figure 21) had better cohere with the relevant Catholic theology, and a judgment about Bacon's *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion* (Figure 22) needs to be interpreted under much the same constraints).

Judgments should also take account of practices of medium and genre (e.g. an acceptable judgment of Bacon's painting should reflect that the format of the triptych is, historically, a

format for Christian altarpieces, and should interpret the painting in light of its titling as ‘studies’). Aesthetic judgments should provide a coherent way in which the artistic design of the work can be construed (e.g., taking note of the way a musical theme is recapitulated, or is re-presented in a different voicing). They often aim at providing an interpretation that maximizes significance or interest. Judgments also reflect successfully realized intentions of the artist. Questions about intention very clearly show that the overriding concern in issuing judgments is with standards of warrant, and not some stronger conception of truth. Many art critical judgments are rejected on the grounds that an artist never intended, or could have intended, something which stimulates critical analysis. So for example, aesthetic judgments deriving from reading “dark Satanic mills” in Blake’s poem “Jerusalem” as a damnation of the Industrial Revolution have been widely rejected on the basis of anachronism. But reflecting the artist’s intentions is not necessary for acceptance of a judgment. Leni Riefenstahl’s films have been judged frighteningly beautiful by critics who rightly see the glorifying representation of Nazi strength as evil and terrifying—this in spite of the fact that the filmmaker herself surely did not believe that the Nazi vision of humanity was evil. Similarly, an influential interpretation of Andy Warhol’s silkscreens (Figure 23) holds that they are ironic takes on the banality of celebrity, showing the way in which, by repeating an image of a face over and over again, an individual becomes a hollow icon. This view, though, flies in the face of the fact that Warhol courted celebrity and probably should not be seen as doing anything like cultural commentary. His attitude toward the commercial was more celebratory than cynical.

The standards of warrant for aesthetics also include considerations about the competence of critics. Some of these factors include the same characteristics that identified optimal critics: familiarity with the work and its art-historical context, properly functioning senses, a reasonable lack of prejudice, an adequate repertoire of critical concepts, and so on. Though again these considerations amount neither to necessary nor sufficient conditions on an admissible judgment, they are at least criterial, and a lack of a good number of them in a critic would certainly make her judgments likely to be rejected as false. Hume’s account holds truth in aesthetics to be the joint verdict of true judges. Our theory differs formally in that while criteria for judges are in effect, they do not suffice to mark out the collection of true judgments. It might well be the case that a judgment could be accepted as true even

when the issuing judge failed to meet Humean criteria, so meeting judge-related criteria is not strictly necessary for a judgment to be true. On the other hand, it is not logically sufficient either—merely demonstrating one's optimality as a critic does not guarantee the truth of one's judgments, as they might fail to satisfy other, work-related, norms.

On our view, truth as correspondence to the facts is merely platitudinous. It is not informative to say that a judgment is false just when it does not correspond to the facts, especially when a great many facts are, on this account, constituted or given by the practice itself. So there are no convenient and metaphysically substantial slogans that capture the distinction between true and false judgments. True judgments are those that fall into the category of best opinions or best judgments. False ones are outside this category, though I remain agnostic on the issue of bivalence. Bivalence might well best capture our practices, in which case 'best judgments' and 'non-best judgments' are mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive categories. Or there may properly be more than two truth values for aesthetic discourse. It might be thought that what it is for a judgment to be false is for it to contradict one or more norms of the discourse. But this is not quite right. It is more accurate to see false judgments as not conforming to, or not satisfying, a sufficient number<sup>8</sup> of norms. I return to these and related concerns in Section 4. It is enough to say here that aesthetic judgments at least admit of the values *True* and *False*.

The norms of aesthetic discourse are public ones, shared by a community of persons who value art and its attendant practices. Reasons given in support of a judgment are reasons for acceptance in light of one or more norms. It is this reason-giving practice, and the shared nature of the norms it reflects, that renders the discourse an objective one. This sort of objectivity is, admittedly, a less robust one than that enjoyed by, say, discourse about medium-sized material objects. But our judgments about art can be principled, communicable and shared, and taken seriously as the kind of assertions they appear to be, even without a very strong conception of objectivity.

I have not sought to defend minimalism as a theory of truth in general. My claim is conditional: if minimalism is a viable theory of truth anywhere, then it certainly has applicability to aesthetic discourse. In Chapter 4 I argued against stronger conceptions of

truth on independent grounds. But I rejected the claim that there is no truth in aesthetics. Aesthetic judgments do exhibit the right grammatical form and are governed by a collection of norms which provide standards of warrant, even if individual norms make different contributions to the sanctioning of different judgments.

## 2. Aesthetic Discourse and Mind Dependence

It seems then that aesthetic discourse has the features needed to legitimate a role for truth. How is the account on offer an antirealist one? I claimed that best judgments play an extension-determining role for the substantive predicates of aesthetic discourse. That is, the distinctive predicates of aesthetics are mind-dependent entities. I believe that this is manifest in at least two kinds of aesthetic language: art critical theory and the great share of art criticism that is metaphorical.<sup>9</sup> The mind-dependent status of aesthetic qualities is explicit under cognitivist antirealism. Recall that modest aesthetic realism takes aesthetic qualities to be response-dependent. This alone is inadequate as a realist view, because it does not show how aesthetic judgments represent some mind-independent properties, or alternatively, how aesthetic judgments are true in virtue of some mind-independent facts. The modest realist anchors aesthetic judgments and qualities by means of supervenience, which claims a logical relation between the mind-dependent aesthetic domain and a distinct mind-independent one. I have argued that this account is not viable. Cognitivist antirealism differs importantly from modest aesthetic realism in that it holds that a great many aesthetic qualities are the result of apt imaginings. These imaginings are apt in part because they are responses to presentational features of artworks, but their results—aesthetic qualities—are not “out there” simply to be detected by the right sort of subject.

Art theoretical language makes the experiencing subject’s contribution explicit. Consider the function of scientific theories. They have the function of describing, explaining, and predicting phenomena. Art theories seem to do nothing of the sort. Jacques Rivière, endorsing the Cubist movement, writes in 1912 that painters must eliminate light and perspective from representation. “...the painter, instead of showing the object *as he sees it*—that is to say, dismembered into bright and dark surfaces—will construct it *as it is*—that is to say, in the form of a geometrical volume, set free from lighting effects.”<sup>10</sup> Clearly Rivière is

not giving a philosophical account of the essential elements of painting, but rather arguing that Cubism is the rewarding program in painting to pursue—and consequently, is telling us how we are to construe a cubist canvas as we stand before it. Much art theory plays just such an instructive role. It supplies guidance in identifying the features salient to a proper experience or understanding of the artwork, tools for interpretation of the presentational features, and very often these tools and indications supply a framework for evaluation of the kinds of artwork covered by the theory. In short, art theory might be seen as a set of instructions for engaging with an artwork in a certain way. What does engaging with an artwork mean? In the case of cubist paintings (Figure 24), engaging with an artwork means seeing the marks on the canvas not merely as a jumble of lines; and not as arcane runes, and not as a perspectival depiction or a collage or a puzzle. Rather, the theory tells us that we are to interpret the paint on the canvas as representing something like an exploded view of a collection of objects, their various surfaces laid out flat on the picture plane. Engaging in this way means trying to see the painting in accordance with the theory, which is not something we accomplish merely by standing passively in front of the canvas and taking in visual impressions. We see the painting in the prescribed way via an act of imagination. An accepted theory supplies instructions for doing certain things with artworks in our imagination, and the language which we use to capture the resulting experience is, then, a description of an artwork subject to a particular imaginative construal.

Take a second example: Malevich's writing on suprematist painting. A sample from his *From Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism: The New Realism in Painting* is instructive.

Only with the disappearance of a habit of mind which sees in pictures little corners of nature, madonnas and shameless *Venuses*, shall we witness a work of pure, living art. [...] The new realism in painting is very much a realism in painting, for it contains no realism of mountains, sky, water... Until now there was a realism of objects, but not of painted units of colour, which are constructed so that they depend neither on form, nor on colour, nor on their position relative to each other.<sup>11</sup>

The passage is highly polemical, and is incoherent in the way that it describes the salencies of suprematist paintings as units of color constructed so that they do not depend on color or form. But it is possible to extract a coherent spirit of the passage, which tells us just what it is we are to direct our attention to when we stand in front of a painting such as his *Suprematist Painting*, 1916 (Figure 25). Malevich's remarks answer a crucial question that is

likely to arise in a newcomer to such artworks: why did the artist offer *this* for our regard? The question is most obviously manifest in encounters with novel artworks, and with abstract works, but a minimally sophisticated spectator reasonably entertains the question in the presence of representational works of art, realistic fiction or theater, and in general artworks that seem to resemble more closely the “everyday” world. It is a question about significance—what is the significance (to me, to my life or my experience right now, to the artist) of a painted array of squares and rectangles, or of a painted arrangement of pastries, or of a 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch still life (Figure 26)? For the suprematist composition, Malevich’s theoretical remarks supply that answer, or at least the beginnings of one. We are told how to construe the artwork. In this case, we must avoid any temptation to see the canvas as representing a cluster of buildings from above, an assortment of blocks moving through space, or indeed anything at all. If we are to take Malevich seriously, we might even try to see the painted forms as transcending their defining shapes and colors. Doing so involves an act of imagination, one constrained by the theory. And it is only under that constrained imagining that the salient aesthetic features are manifest. The theory, then, gives a description of the object imaginatively construed; it (partially) describes the artwork *qua* artwork.

Many critical remarks work similarly. Of course, the line between art criticism and art theory is extremely vague, as is the lines between those two sub-discourses and that of art history. Nothing here depends on being able to make such a distinction—I use them as labels for varieties of aesthetic discourse which can typically, or paradigmatically, be categorized as playing primarily evaluative, explanatory, or narrative roles. But many examples are multifunctional. Just as theory typically has the function of telling us what the proper construal of a certain collection of artworks is, so can critical remarks tell us how to construe individual ones, or works by a particular artist, and so on. Nothing about the painted surface of a DeKooning canvas signals the rich content ascribed to it in the remark above. If we missed the title as we passed the painting in a gallery, we could very well miss the fact that the painting depicts a woman. But even if we allow more time and attention to the canvas, our attention might focus largely on the formal qualities of the painting, and our expressed judgments would reflect that. The critical/historical statement that the painting depicts a woman who is an instrument of sex—“lustfully enticing, yielding yet demanding, and cruelly

anxiety provoking”<sup>12</sup> provides both content and constraints to our experience of the painting. Approaching the canvas with this critical judgment in mind will result in a very different experience of the painting. Rather than marking out the frenetic and quasi-organic twisting of color, the critic’s remark licenses a host of narrative and psychological attributions—that we are seeing a woman—maybe an archetypal woman rather than a particular woman—about which something deeply ambivalent is expressed. These qualities are not supervenient on the presentational features of the canvas, or on those plus facts about its history and that of the artist. To borrow Hume’s metaphor again, they are “raised up” by the imagination in possession of those facts, in confrontation with the painting, and guided by the critic’s judgment. Judgments must be guided by ‘what is there’, what I have referred to as the presentational features of the artwork, but these features typically underdetermine the aesthetic qualities as represented in aesthetic discourse. The artwork as described in critical language is a much richer object than the physical object or event with which we engage.

### 3. Metaphor and Expression

That much art theory and criticism plays an extension-determining role in aesthetic discourse is perhaps more obvious than in the special case of metaphorical language. Irving Sandler writes this of Jackson Pollock’s “drip” paintings (Figure 27): “Lashed together into an interlace, his lines constitute an expansive web of forces, suspended in front of the passive canvas plane. These overlapping skeins produce a sense of space projecting out from the picture surface. . . . Because of the energy with which Pollock’s field is charged, augmented by its large scale, it seems to expand, thereby suggesting extensions beyond the picture limits into infinity and evoking in the viewer a sensation of boundlessness—and this even though the webs rarely touch the edges.”<sup>13</sup> Sandler’s remarks certainly have the form of assertions<sup>14</sup>, and it seems that we can go to Pollock’s paintings ourselves and make a determination about the truth of his claims. But note that much of what he says cannot be true in any literal sense about Pollock’s canvases. The dripped and splattered lines aren’t forces, and nothing is suspended in front of the picture plane. Characterizing the canvas as “passive” seems redundant—of course the canvas can’t in any way be active—until we see the point of such talk as effecting a difference between the lines and splashes of paint and the surface to which

they are applied. Sandler is offering a rich metaphor that implicates our imagination and structures our experience of the painting.

One way to deny the metaphorical quality of these sentences is to posit special art-critical senses for them. This is a suspicious move, though, especially in light of the fact that our experience of the painting relies on the literal senses of the concepts which have been assimilated to Sandler's comments. His comments about Pollock's drip paintings are characteristic of a vast range of critical, theoretical, and "pre-critical" talk about art generally. We routinely predicate movement, feeling and mass to music, rhythm and muscularity to literary prose, and energy and agency to paintings. These predications, though sometimes opaque, are often comprehensible by others and in general do not immediately draw attention as somehow defective. And yet, we know that without special art-critical senses for these attributions, they could not literally be true of their objects. It is certainly true that some metaphors, in certain contexts, might well be true literally. After all, it is literally true that no man is an island. I do not want to suggest that the test for a sentence's non-literalness is its falsity or meaninglessness when taken literally. But I do maintain that the falsity or meaninglessness of a sentence when taken literally signals the possibility that it is metaphorical.

Why is this important? In the taxonomy of theories of aesthetic judgment, the status of some attributions as literal or metaphorical marks the divide (once we have moved down the tree by eliminating non-contender theories higher up) between realism and anti-realism. Recall that the realist holds that aesthetic judgments are representational in the sense that predicates pick out properties of objects independently of our thoughts. Just as a true assertion corresponds to a state of affairs that obtains independently, and in particular independently of that very assertion, so too does a predicate correspond to a property. This is what is meant by saying that judgments are extension-reflecting. If it turned out that a collection of well-formed aesthetic assertions were metaphorical sentences, they would not refer in the right sort of way to mind-independent states of affairs, or their predicates would not correspond to properties realistically conceived. This would be damaging to but not yet decisive against the realist. If, however it could be established additionally that metaphorical assertions were true only in virtue of an imaginative construal of their (grammatical) subjects,

the battle would be won for the antirealist, for a very large collection of aesthetic judgments. In what follows I shall demonstrate that this is the case.

I shall focus on a special class of metaphorical assertions: those which predicate expressive qualities to artworks. I do so because these assertions are easily identified and analyzed. I do not mean to suggest that the only instances of metaphor in aesthetic discourse are predications of expressive qualities. It is also important to keep in mind that, despite the presence of innumerable dreary examples in the philosophical literature of the form 'X is F', the variety of metaphor, aesthetic and otherwise, is far richer than this. I return to this point later. For the present, I wish only to indicate that if even these simple predications turn out to be problematic for the realist, the more complex instances of metaphorical assertions will be at least as troublesome.

Expressive qualities are by and large qualities of human emotions and moods, such as sadness, melancholy, joyfulness, pensiveness, and so on. In the development of philosophical aesthetics, the idea that these qualities are ascribed metaphorically represents an attempt to improve on earlier expression theories, in particular the artistic expression theory and the arousal theory. The former makes what is expressed a function of the artist's feelings at the time of artistic creation, while the latter makes it a function of what feelings are properly elicited from spectators. Both of these ancestral views are deeply problematic, and I shall not consider them here<sup>15</sup>. For the present discussion, we need only notice that these views are not true to the phenomenology of art—when we call a melody triumphant, we do not take ourselves to be ascribing that quality to the artist or to ourselves, but rather to the music itself. So the debate between realism and antirealism over this issue turns on the sense in which such an ascription is properly understood.

Noel Carroll<sup>16</sup> outlines the argument for the theory that these qualities are "possessed" only metaphorically as follows:

1. If artworks (and part of artworks) possess expressive properties, they do so either literally or metaphorically.

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2. If artworks (and parts of artworks) possess expressive properties literally, they must be the kinds of things that can bear mental properties.
3. Artworks (and parts of artworks) are not the kind of things that can bear mental properties.
4. Therefore, artworks (and parts thereof) do not possess the properties literally.
5. But artworks (and parts of artworks) do possess expressive properties.
6. Therefore, artworks (and parts thereof) possess expressive properties metaphorically.

Premise (5) is one that nearly everyone accepts, at least for *some* artworks or parts thereof, regardless of their stance on the argument as a whole. This is the phenomenology of artworks that I cited earlier. This premise, it seems, can safely be fixed for the moment. (2) is the claim that mental properties require a mind to bear them, and (3) is the claim that artworks don't have minds. (4) follows by modus tollens from (2) and (3), and the conclusion follows from (1), (5), and (4). Carroll denies the implication in premise (2), and while not exactly denying (3), claims that the modus tollens fails because artworks also can bear mental properties literally both because some non-minded entities are suitable bearers of mental properties and because many ostensible instances of metaphorical possession are in fact literal ones.

Premise (3) seems difficult to deny. After all, neither paintings, sonatas, poems, nor films have minds, so it seems a near tautology to claim that they can't bear mental properties. Carroll doesn't think that these things do have minds, though he does think that some artworks or elements thereof do bear mental properties. In fact, of artistic representations of sentient beings he seems not only to hold that they can, but necessarily must, bear mental properties. For instance, he claims that fictional TV show and film characters represent sentient beings, and by virtue of their being such representatives, they do bear mental properties. The same would apply to any artwork incorporating the representation of a sentient being. He rejects the possible move of denying mental property-fitness on the basis of the characters' fictionality, since the class of expressive artworks also includes nonfictional documentaries which concern real persons.

It is not clear why Carroll thinks this is a good argument. He seems to rely on a notion of representation that is much stronger than the idea of one thing standing in for another. It is certainly not true that a representation of some object must possess *all* the attributes of the object to fulfill that role. A photograph can serve as a representation of the Queen of Denmark without possessing all her attributes. It can even serve as a representation of certain attributes of hers without possessing those specific attributes itself—by depicting her wearing a crown it can represent her queenship without itself being a queen. So a representation need not be a literal exemplification, not even in part. Those two concepts are independent of one another. For purposes of the fiction, or even of experiencing the documentary as a factual report, it is enough that we take the right images as representing a person who is Buffy the Vampire Slayer or Adolf Hitler. It hardly ever is the case that we mistake a representation for the thing it represents. We don't believe that Adolf Hitler is in our living room when we are in fact only watching a documentary of the Nuremberg rallies. Neither do we recoil from Kendall Walton's B-movie green slime<sup>17</sup>, believing it to be an existent and imminent threat. And yet, there must be *something* about these images that make them appropriate as representations. I have argued that a representation *qua* representation need not literally possess any of the relevant qualities of its referent.

Premise (2) holds the following: If artworks (and parts of artworks) possess expressive properties literally, they must be the kinds of things that can bear mental properties. What sets this claim apart from the one just examined is the *literal* possession. Carroll wants to object that it is not necessary for something to bear *mental* properties in order for it literally to possess *expressive* properties. This claim severs the link between the expression—some particular perceptible manifestation—and what it is understood to express, that is, a real mental state. Carroll says that in describing a person with head and shoulders drooped as sad-looking, “we are not speaking metaphorically, but literally. We are offering a literal description of the way in which she looks to us.”<sup>18</sup> But what of representations of persons, or the innumerable non-sentient things which we also seem to characterize in this way? He goes on: “Similarly, when we call the weeping willow tree sad (sad-looking)<sup>19</sup>, we are offering a literal description of its perceptible configuration. Somehow, probably by resemblance, the tree reminds us of the characteristic appearance of sad people.”<sup>20</sup> According to Carroll, the

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attribution of sadness to the willow is literal, insofar as it exhibits features that bring to mind certain human affective qualities.

Carroll's calling the attribution of sadness to the willow a *literal* one strains the meaning of the word. It is correct to say that the willow looks sad, in the sense of correct that ties to imagination. Now, though, we have moved into metaphorical language. In calling the tree sad we highlight certain features of the willow which are amenable to descriptions like the ones given of characteristic expressions of human sadness. Seeing a person with a drooping posture and downcast eyes, we make a reliable judgment that this person is sad. But this judgment is only warranted because of a large collection of background beliefs about persons and the behavioral manifestation of their moods. Note that calling a willow drooping is only licensed on the basis of a comparison with trees with rigid branches. It is not as if the 'droopiness' of a willow is anomalous (for willows) and in need of some explanation in the way that a drooping human posture is. The route to calling a willow sad moves through an underlying imputation of similarity, that of physical disposition. So the attribution of sadness is based on a claimed similarity which is itself a matter of imputation. Carroll argues that metaphors like "The willow is sad-looking" are dead metaphors. It may have been the case that to say this about the willow was once a novel use of language. But that novelty is long passed, and the word "sad" has acquired a fixed and literal use that means something other than a certain emotional state. This is more or less the view of Donald Davidson, who offers a deflationary account of metaphor in "What Metaphors Mean"<sup>21</sup> He advances two related claims relevant to the present discussion: first, that "a metaphor doesn't say anything beyond its literal meaning," explaining the metaphor's peculiarities with a psychological-causal theory; second, that many ostensibly metaphorical terms are really *dead* metaphors, former metaphors that have acquired fixed and entirely literal meanings. The Davidsonian view is implicit in Carroll's argument, so is worth refuting in detail.

Davidson agrees with many of his opponents in accepting the commonplace that no metaphor can be paraphrased without remainder. Metaphors are open-textured entities, which means that a single paraphrase or even an indefinitely large set of paraphrases will not exhaust the meaning of the metaphor. It is not the case that in understanding a metaphor

we do so by constructing such a paraphrase set. In grasping a metaphorical statement, we are pointed to certain features foregrounded or framed by the metaphor, while other features are hidden from us. That very foregrounding opens up certain avenues of cognitive association, along which the relevant predications can be made with no determinate limit.

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the sense of inadequacy, or worse, of the pat paraphrases that are so often proposed in theories that take metaphor to be an indirect statement of resemblance. To call someone a tail-wagging lapdog of privilege is not simply to make an assertion of his enthusiastic submissiveness. Even a pat metaphor deserves better than this, and such an analysis is not essentially improved by tacking on an open-ended list of further dog-predicates that may possibly be part of the metaphor's meaning. Hence it becomes attractive at this point to insist that the comprehension of the metaphor involves *seeing* this person as a lapdog, and in some detail, experiencing his dogginess. *This* is what a successful metaphor pulls off, and this image-making quality is what lies behind both the force and the unparaphrasability of poetic metaphor.<sup>22</sup>

But it is the very notion of the in-principle impossibility of giving a set of literal paraphrases for a metaphor that motivates Davidson's claim that metaphors have no special meaning or specific cognitive content. Davidson gives a brutally causal account of how metaphor works. Scrupulously avoiding talk of metaphor as "implying", "saying", "meaning", or "asserting", Davidson talks instead of "working", "effecting", "provoking", and "inviting". Davidson, in opposing what he sees as the sole cognitivist view of metaphor as some kind of coded message, writes: "Joke or dream or metaphor can, like a picture or a bump on the head, make us appreciate some fact—but not by standing for, or expressing, the fact."<sup>23</sup> So there is some non-cognitive psychological explanation for our apprehension of metaphors. But this cannot be so, for if it were true, then there would be no constraints on the understanding of metaphor. In moving metaphor out of the space of reasons and into the space of causes, we become unable to say that if "Juliet is the sun" makes me think that she is large, massive, and gaseous, that I am somehow wrong. Davidson can't even say I'm wrong to think, in response to the metaphor, "Where's my sunscreen," particularly if I regularly respond in this way to the sentence in question. Metaphors cannot, on the Davidsonian view, *ever* be misinterpreted. But though the open-endedness of metaphor entails that two differing judgments about a metaphor need not demonstrate a failure of cognitive command, it surely just isn't correct to take Romeo's metaphor in this way. The fact of metaphor's

unparaphrasability only threatens the cognitivist position if meaning or correctness are taken to apply only to a well-defined, closed content. But the cognitivist need not, and should not accept, that restriction. Content without closure is a perfectly respectable and arguably a much more plausible notion. The claim about dead metaphor is also one we can resist. The Davidsonian maintains that there cannot be metaphorical truth—and of course he holds that metaphorical sentences are literally false (though this is not correct, either—while many metaphorical *predications* are false when taken literally, most metaphors are in fact nonsensical so taken). But if it is granted that metaphors die, when they die “the relevant expression acquires a new literal meaning and accordingly gets an additional dictionary entry. This would be inexplicable, or at least arbitrary and odd, if the metaphor had previously had no sort of meaning at all.”<sup>24</sup>

Davidson’s theory of metaphor has been enormously influential in the philosophical literature, in and out of aesthetics. It is also deeply flawed. A full survey is not possible here. It is enough that Davidsonian arguments fail to damage the argument for the metaphorical status of predications of expressive qualities to artworks. That the argument stands is a welcome result, as it preserves our common-sense intuitions about such qualities and their essential relation to minds, while also asserting the propriety of our aesthetic ascriptions. I shall round out this discussion of metaphor in aesthetic discourse with a very brief sketch of a contemporary theory of metaphor, Roger White’s<sup>25</sup>, which nicely shows the role of the imagination in metaphor.

Nearly all influential theories of metaphor treat it as an instance of construing one thing in terms of the properties of another. White’s theory is no exception. Where it differs is in a two-sentence analysis of metaphorical sentences. This analysis avoids the problems that arise from either positing a special metaphorical sense, and with it a species of metaphorical truth<sup>26</sup>, as well as the sheer implausibility of denying that metaphorical sentences have any content or meaning, as Davidson holds. On White’s view, a metaphor is a sentence, one that can be analyzed as “the conflation of two other, grammatically analogous sentences. . . .”<sup>27</sup> The two-sentence structure that underlies a metaphorical sentence makes clearer both how understanding a metaphorical utterance involves the imagination, and how that imagining is constrained. “One of these sentences, the primary sentence for the

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metaphor, is a sentence that would give a literal description of the actual situation. The other sentence would give a description of a situation with which the metaphor invites us to compare the actual situation. As a result of such a conflation, we are invited to explore a network of similarities and dissimilarities between the two situations, and to see the one situation in terms of the other situation, to see it as if it were the other situation.”<sup>28</sup> The business of analyzing a particular metaphor is a complex and laborious one, and the results of such an analysis are open to interpretive dispute. For instance, it is often unclear whether words in the metaphor belong to the primary sentence vocabulary, that of the second, or to both. One of White’s simpler examples<sup>29</sup> comes from *Othello*:

*Iago:* Heere he comes.  
As he shall smile, Othello shall go mad;  
And his unbookish Ielousie must construe  
Poor Cassio’s smiles, gestures and light behaviours  
Quite in the wrong.<sup>30</sup>

White looks at the curious expression “his unbookish Ielousie must construe...quite in the wrong.” Using underlining to mark words in the primary vocabulary, and italics to mark the secondary vocabulary, White construes the metaphor in the following way:

His unbookish Ielousie must construe poore Cassio’s smiles, gestures and light behaviours quite in the wrong.

White thinks that one of the interpretive questions posed by the metaphor is, “In what way is *unbookish* ‘connected with’ *construe*?”<sup>31</sup> The answer given by his analysis is that “the word ‘construe’ is a word that describes *both* Othello interpreting Cassio’s behaviour, *and* the person translating a book with whom Othello is being compared.”<sup>32</sup> White’s analysis delivers the primary sentence “His uncultured jealousy must construe poor Cassio’s smiles, gestures and light behaviours quite in the wrong”, which gives a literal description of the situation. The secondary sentence, “The unbookish schoolboy must construe the Iliad quite in the wrong”, is formed by making appropriate substitutions into an open sentence formed from the secondary vocabulary, “Unbookish *x* must construe *y* quite in the wrong.” Iago’s sentence invites the comparison of Othello’s situation with that of a schoolboy who is unskilled in the reading of books. This metaphor suggests the staggering number of points of comparison that can be packed into a short metaphorical sentence. The truth value of the metaphor is partly a matter of the truth value of the primary sentence, but it is also a matter

of the appropriateness of the secondary sentence to the situation. The same holds for art critical metaphors.

If we are to judge whether Sandler's comments about Pollock's drip paintings are responsible to the work, we must determine whether it makes the painting coherent and worthy of our aesthetic regard by construing it as an endlessly expanding energy field. 'Being an endlessly expanding energy field is not supervenient on the presentational properties, but construing the painting as such is a response to and a structuring of them. An alternative art critical metaphor might well capture the features of the painting, but construe them in a different way, and so impute very different properties to it. The boundless energy of Pollock's paintings isn't simply there to be detected, but is experienced by way of an imaginative seeing-as. Though it is partly in virtue of the properties of the canvas that our imagining works, the qualities marked out by Sandler are largely imputed to the painting. This imputation is not, however, a merely subjective report or recommendation. It is constrained by both the features of the painting and the general norms that discipline art critical discourse. So art critical judgments can enjoy a certain kind of objectivity, such that judgments can be marked out as true or false, better or worse, and can be refined or rejected by the giving of reasons.

Note again that although my remarks here have focused on expressive qualities, the role of metaphor in aesthetic judgment is much wider. We also encounter expressions like "a graceful line,"<sup>33</sup> "brash colors," "elegant composition", and "tightly-knit interplay of voices," and we typically do not encounter these metaphors in isolation but rather within larger metaphorical structures that function to bring our experience at least partially into alignment with that of the critic. And again, those metaphorical structures are not just collections of metaphorical predications. White's theory of metaphor makes clear how non-predicative metaphors, such as Anfam's calling a Rothko painting a kind of oracle, involve an imaginative construal of the painting. In imagining the painting in this way, certain aesthetic qualities are manifest. We are not detecting independent "oracle-qualities", but taking the painting to have the same kind of function in our imagination. And if Anfam's claims satisfy the norms that determine best judgment status, they mark out a way in which our imaginings contribute to the proper aesthetic features of the artwork. Unlike other realms of discourse,

metaphor seems to be an ineliminable feature of the aesthetic. Perhaps many apparently metaphorical sentences are instances of *catéchresis*—uses of language that serve to fill lexical gaps. But it would be a mistake to think that all aesthetic metaphors were *catáchretic*. The aptness of so many art critical metaphors is striking precisely because the artworks seem so much more vivid when construed in the way the metaphor indicates.

Zangwill believes that the pervasiveness of ineliminable metaphor in aesthetic discourse and experience is no evidence for antirealism. He writes that “it may be that our thought about certain aesthetics properties, or our experience of them, can only be linguistically experienced by means of metaphor. But it might be the properties which such metaphors cause us to notice are real and that the noticing has realistic content.”<sup>34</sup> In other words, metaphor serves to draw our attention to real properties in the mind-independent sense, but which cannot be described given our linguistic resources. Such properties would be ineffable.<sup>35</sup> Zangwill’s reply on behalf of the realist will not do. It relies on the Davidsonian causal account of metaphor which I have already argued against. But is it possible to make a case for ineffable properties once that account is rejected? Zangwill draws a comparison with phenomenal experience: “in trying to describe the smell of coffee, we run up against the limits of literal language. Thought, however, is not so bound. We can think of the smell of coffee without difficulty.”<sup>36</sup> This analogy shows that the argument for ineffability misses the point. It is true that if we are simply trying to represent the smell of coffee, we might be able to do no better than say “It has the smell of coffee” before we run into metaphorical language. If the role of metaphor is not simply to make us notice something, but rather to invite us to construe something in a particular way, then our experience of the thing is not an experience of its mind-independent properties, but of the thing filtered by our taking it to have certain other properties. When I describe someone as a tail-wagging lapdog of privilege, we are not struggling against the limits of language, but telling my interlocutor to “[see] this person as a lapdog, and in some detail, [experience] his dogginess.”<sup>37</sup> Glen Mullin relays this anecdote about John Singer Sargent:

A story is current that a lady once asked him if he really had the power to rend the veil that conceals the hidden deeps of personality. Sargent is reported to have scoffed at the suggestion, replying that if there was a veil to be removed all he could do was paint the veil. This, of course, sums up the truth of the matter. Sargent merely was a consummate and dispassionate reflector of what he saw.<sup>38</sup>

Mullin does not describe Sargent as a mere reflector because a more precise literal expression is unavailable. He is imputing mirror-like qualities to Sargent to say something about his art (Figure 28), different things altogether than he might say were he to call him a magnifying glass, an X-ray machine, or a clairvoyant. So too with the veil in the story cited. And the function is much the same in metaphorical sentences directly about art, as in “[Sargent] never achieved the vibrant color chords which knit all the elements of a composition together in the painting of the supreme colorists.”<sup>39</sup> This wonderful mixed metaphor, again, is not seizing on some aspect of our experience of Sargent’s paintings that eludes our description. Surely we could say that Sargent’s paintings do not use color in a way that articulates the formal features of his compositions and unites them into a coherent whole.<sup>40</sup> Mullin, in asserting something about Sargent’s art and its unfavorable status *vis a vis* the colorists, makes his thought more vivid by construing colors as musical chords, which are arranged in a larger harmonic structure. Moreover, these chords themselves have some physical attributes, namely, being knit together. Zangwill greatly misrepresents the imagistic force of these metaphors by putting them in the role of pointing to ineffable properties. What makes them apt is that it strikes us as insightful or useful to construe Sargent’s paintings as lacking certain musical and physical qualities. The qualities indicated by a metaphor are not ineffable, but imputed, even if there are standards of aptness for such imputations. An apt metaphor is not a case of language fumbling toward thought. It shows the mind spreading itself on the world.

A pressing question remains: just what is it that makes a particular metaphor apt? If the judgment sentence is metaphorical, then it does not represent properties of the artwork in the way that a literal sentence is understood as doing. The question can be approached obliquely, by asking why some metaphors seem so compelling while others are patently inapt? The explanation is surely a heterogeneous one. Some metaphors are highly conventional both in the sense that they are grounded in a set of discourse-related practices and in the sense that they are arbitrary. Other metaphors seem to have a deeper relation to the things of which they are predicated, as in the connection between colors and moods, or in the connection between visual shape and imagined motion.<sup>41</sup> These may be rooted in facts about human experience, bodies, or shared ways of processing information. The

important point for our purposes is that whatever their origin, whatever the grounds for their appropriateness are, these seeming cross-domain construals are indeed metaphors and not descriptions of properties as the realist conceives them.

#### 4. The Logic of Aesthetic Judgment

In Chapter 3, Section 4, I examined the phenomenon of irresolvable critical disagreements. These present a dilemma for realism: accept no more than one judgment as true, without a defensible criterion for doing so, or accept more than one, and assert a contradiction. I discussed the various critical pluralist attempts to escape this dilemma, and found them all unsatisfactory. It is an advantage of the cognitivist antirealist theory that while it preserves objectivity, it has a plausible story to tell about why we often accept as true multiple and conflicting judgments about artworks without thereby failing to be rational. This story requires a paraconsistent logic, which specifically allows the possibility of true contradictions. That may seem a great price to pay, but it allows our theory to capture a greater share of art critical practice compared to the alternatives. Other antirealist views explain away the appearance of contradiction by revising the syntax of aesthetic discourse, claiming that apparently assertoric sentences serve merely to express preference or are never true. Realist views either must dispel the appearance of contradiction by holding at least some of the disputants in error, even in the absence of specific, theory-independent reasons, or must reconstrue the dispute as a collection of relativized views. All of these solutions are unsatisfactory for reasons I discussed in Chapter 3, Section 4. Now I shall outline an antirealist proposal for understanding these disputes.

The entire discussion of critical pluralism has been grounded on a *prima facie* discomfort with bivalence. That principle would have us hold that in any of the high-level critical disputes we've had in mind, at least one of the disputants is wrong. Now, that explanation is certainly still available, but if we wanted to avail ourselves of it across the board, we wouldn't give critical pluralism a second look. That theoretical pull toward critical pluralism shows that we are not prepared to find error in every critical contradiction, but as I have shown, critical pluralism makes a false promise of giving us our disagreement and robust truth as well. At least, that is true of pluralism situated in a larger realist metaphysics. And as pluralism is

theoretically redundant in an antirealist context, we avoid much confusion by doing away with it and trying better to understand what aesthetic antirealism involves. If we want to understand aesthetic judgments as assertoric, and lack a principled way of disqualifying optimal critical disputants, we need a logic that accommodates them. The antirealist need not, but can, go further: some artworks—not all, but some—seem correctly to admit contradictory predications.

I have argued that the descriptive character of aesthetic discourse is to be preserved, and further, that we want to be allowed to call some judgments true—the ones which have the right syntax and are governed by the disciplining norms. But if we are not to disqualify any of the claims in the examples, does that not force us to accept the truth of any aesthetic judgment, and so a trivial conception of truth? The answer is no. What drives the worry is the principle of explosion: from a contradiction everything follows ( $(p \ \& \ \sim p) \rightarrow q$ ). In classical logic, this is a valid principle, and has been deployed within aesthetics to show that two contradictory critical judgments cannot both be true. Compatibilists like Stecker, who want to forge a reconciliation with monism, wield this to argue that necessarily  $\sim(p \ \& \ \sim p)$ . Conversely, it seems consistent with more radical forms of postmodernism to argue that *if* we accept that there are some true contradictions, we must gleefully accept *any* truth claim for the same reason. The stereotypical “anything goes” conclusion follows as soon as the antecedent is granted, and it seems that a pet postmodernist project is to establish that antecedent.

A promising route for the antirealist who wants to let stand the intuition that some conflicting aesthetic judgments are individually true is to adopt a non-classical logic. Margolis has moved the debate in this direction, though he deliberately avoids a logic with the value *true* apparently because he wants to avoid explosion. However, there are many logics that are paraconsistent—that is, they are not explosive. Dialetheism is the view that combines an endorsement of some paraconsistent logic with the claim that there are some true contradictions.<sup>42</sup> I suggest that this logical and metaphysical package is what we are after in aesthetics. We may well want to admit both Bataille’s and Fried’s claims about Manet’s *Execution of Maximilian* as true, even in the face of obvious contradiction—one that we no longer need to explain away. We certainly want to disqualify critical verdicts like the Marxist

interpretation of *Light Red Over Black* as false. A paraconsistent logic can allow both the admissibility of some contradictory judgments and the rejection of others. Apart from considerations specific to aesthetics, rejecting the principle of explosion is less counter-intuitive than one might suppose. Importantly, explosion makes relevance a hollow notion.

Greg Restall points out that

circumstances in which contradictions are true seem to be necessary in the evaluation of counterpossible conditionals (“If I squared the circle with ruler and compass then I would be famous” seems true while “If I squared the circle with ruler and compass then Queensland would win the Sheffield Shield...next year” seems false). Commitment to a contradiction does not seem to rationally compel (or even to make rationally *more plausible*) commitment to absolutely everything whatsoever.<sup>43</sup>

Indeed, it rather seems that were someone to accept the truth of every proposition whatsoever given a discovery that she was committed to the truth of a contradiction, we would likely pronounce her irrational. But one might still think that the domain of circumstances in which contradictions are to be admitted as true is very limited, to special cases like counterpossible conditionals, or to set-theoretic and semantic paradoxes. The adoption of paraconsistent logic for aesthetic discourse might seem opportunistic.

The proposal that a paraconsistent logic is the best one for capturing the logic of aesthetic judgment is not a cavalier one. It is motivated by the account I have put forward for aesthetic qualities as essentially mind-dependent. If aesthetic qualities are those which are experienced when an artwork is subjected to a certain imaginative construal, then there should be little intuitive opposition to the idea that true judgments could reflect contradictory experiences. For it certainly does not strain conceivability to hold that we can imagine a thing in a variety of incompatible ways. I have suggested<sup>44</sup> that Scruton’s theory in *Art and Imagination* helpfully offers a similar way of explaining critical disagreements by understanding aesthetic experience as a kind of ‘seeing-as’. Recall, however, that it does so by revising the language of the discourse in way that generates as many difficulties as it is meant to solve. Scruton holds that “it follows from the fact that the condition for the sincere acceptance of an aesthetic judgment is an experience that an aesthetic judgment can be sincerely made only by someone who experiences its object in the appropriate way.”<sup>45</sup> Broadly, I am in agreement with Scruton here, but I deny the conclusion that he draws from this, that “in this case it is perfectly acceptable to describe the judgment...as an expression

of the experience.”<sup>46</sup> In other words, at least many aesthetic judgments lack truth conditions—“to agree to an aesthetic description is to ‘see its point’.”<sup>47</sup> I have argued throughout that the better position is that to agree is to accept as true. If this is so then cognitivist antirealism requires a logic that accommodates jointly true and contradictory judgments. Note that I am not proposing that aesthetic judgments should be understood as carrying an implicit “operator” clause in front of them. One such proposal might be, for an aesthetic judgment ‘p’, that the implied sentence really is “It is appropriate to imagine ‘p’.” This move would obviate the need for a paraconsistent logic to describe conflicting true pairs of judgments. The reason I resist this explanation is that I take Hume’s gilding metaphor quite seriously. What a judgment is about, what it describes, is an object or event construed in a certain way. If the contrual is warranted (where warrant means satisfying enough norms of the discourse), then the judgment describes a complex object: the canvas or sequence of sounds or words, given coherence and interpretive significance via an act of imagining. Just as no revision of the syntax of judgments is needed, no implicit operator clause is needed, because the judgment comprehends the imagining along with its object. So a paraconsistent logic is required after all.

It is true that we do not have adequate grasp of the details of the specific logic needed for aesthetics, but that is just an indication of a needed research program. It is simply question-begging to assume that classical logic is the one “true” logic. In recommending a paraconsistent logic for aesthetic discourse, I am neutral about the status of logics in other discourses. Which logic we choose to capture our reason-giving art critical practices is going to be, ultimately, determined by all the usual features of theory choice. Two of those are consistency and agreement with the data. If truth-apt contradictions are treated as real data, and not merely apparent data, we do well to reject classical logic for a paraconsistent one. If we wish to reject the data as false, we are owed a convincing relativism or error theory. There is good reason to doubt we will get either.

The most obvious objection to the dialethic proposal is that holding contradictory beliefs is a failure of rationality. One might accept that explosion should be rejected only conditionally, for example, as in “Were I to endorse a contradiction, I would reject explosion rather than accept all propositions as true. But luckily I don’t endorse any contradictions.”

Or one might, as I have suggested already, propose that the domain of cases in which explosion is to be rejected is very small and composed only of logically peculiar propositions. But there are two things to notice in response. The first is that rational people do knowingly hold contradictory beliefs, all of which are not to be explained away or fenced into a bestiary of arcane logical creatures. The mathematician holds, in finding the derivative of a function, that the differential interval is both zero and infinitesimally small but non-zero. The theist believes that God is good but still utterly beyond our comprehension (that is, God has knowable attributes but is also unknowable). These beliefs might be challenged on other grounds, and the contradiction may even by itself flag a need for some further investigation, but it would be too quick merely on this basis to take the mathematician and the theist to be irrational. The second point to notice is that even if they do hold contradictory beliefs, they don't thereby commit themselves to accepting the truth of any other proposition. These are just the features we need in aesthetics if we want to allow some contradictory judgments to stand while also ruling out *outré* judgments. Stecker is quite right to say that the advocate of a non-classical logic for aesthetics owes us two things: first, a particular logic must be proposed so it can be examined before we buy into it; and second, an argument must be given that this logic has a real application to critical practice.<sup>48</sup> Certainly the details of that dialethic logic that reflects our art critical practices have yet to be filled in. My argument here has, I believe, paid that second debt. The project now should then be to find the best logic for our purposes, and not to lie on the Procrustean bed of classical logic.

Define quasi-validity as follows: "an inference is quasi-valid if it involves essentially only extensional connectives and quantifiers, and is classically valid but dialetheically invalid."<sup>49</sup> Priest proposes the following Methodological Maxim (M): "Unless we have specific grounds for believing that the crucial contradictions in a piece of quasi-valid reasoning are dialetheias [i.e., true contradictions], we may accept the reasoning."<sup>50</sup> It is part of the function of M to give some loose operating principle for determining just when we are to admit a contradiction as true. Since the admission of a contradiction has to be based on content-specific reasons and not just logical form, and since the burden is on the advocate of admission to show why a specific contradiction is true, the frequency of such an admission should be relatively low. In terms of aesthetic discourse, M tells us that we are only to accept contradictions when there are specific positive arguments in their favor. When we

lack specific arguments to that effect, M tells us that classically valid inferences are acceptable—including reductio and disjunctive syllogism arguments. Contradictions are admitted as true only when the propositional conjuncts of the contradiction satisfy many of the norms that discipline assertions in the discourse generally.

But if we reject explosion as a valid rule of inference, and we understand many aesthetic properties to be the product of imaginative imputation, can we rule out any judgments as bad ones, even if we maintain M? This objection is a specific version of a general objection to theories broadly labeled 'projectivist'. If our judgments are not the detection of mind-independent properties, what stops us from projecting qualities freely and arbitrarily? The objection is not much more than a simple-minded scare tactic. Consider the following two sets of critical remarks on Cézanne's early painting entitled *Small House at Auvers* (Figure 29):

Verdi: "The picture is characteristic of Cézanne's Auvers landscapes in its spontaneous handling and varied brushwork, as in the unassuming nature of its motif. Out of this, however, Cézanne wrests a unity and richness of colouring, together with a sequence of formal correspondences, which anticipate the achievement of his *Houses in Provence* a decade later." "Its handling is also considerably bolder than [earlier works on the theme], particularly at the right, where Cézanne has worked the greens of the hills into the tops of the trees and introduced a sequence of parallel strokes which serve further to link foreground with distance. In their strength and regularity these add emphasis to this portion of the picture, echoing the hues of the rocky ridges at the left and counterbalancing the weight of the buildings below them."<sup>51</sup>

Also taking note of the curious vertical strokes on the right side of the canvas is Geist, who arguably gives a much more imaginative account of the painting.

Geist: Especially ambiguous are the parallel vertical bands of pink on the right. Only vaguely suggestive of rows of plantings, these striations seem to float above the field rather than describe something in them. Just below these regularly spaced brushstrokes is a clump of greenish-white shrubbery that extends to the left, where it turns upward, almost touching the corner of the white house. When the pink striations are seen together with the shrubbery, they make the back of a large right hand that seems to reach up over the field. This field has three large divisions: a broad expanse sloping up from the right to the left side; a triangular wedge which enters from the right; and a narrow curving section between the wedge and the sky. These three areas adumbrate the pelvic region of a recumbent woman: the lowest being the left thigh; the uppermost, the top of the right thigh; and between them, the pubic triangle. At the sharp angle of the pubic region are two elliptical green shapes, one on the other, whose presence in the landscape is difficult

to justify from a geological, botanical, or horticultural point of view. But they make anatomical sense when seen as the labia of the genitals. The cryptomorphic hand on the right seems to be reaching toward this configuration on its left, the canonical place of Hortense [Cézanne's wife]. The phallic tree athwart the expanse of blue sky—most of which is on the right—is a sign of Cézanne's continuing fixation on his mother, which is ineradicable and is manifested, as usual, in proximity to an image of Hortense."<sup>52</sup>

No doubt the latter commentary is one we should want to disqualify. But, the objection goes, without a basic logical law and the faith that our judgments represent mind-independent properties (and without supervenience), what tools do we have to disqualify Geist's judgments? The answer is quite simple: the judgments can be rejected via the exercise of the very norms that discipline aesthetic discourse. We do not stand in need of additional metaphysical equipment to help us in that task. One way, then, would be to argue that Freudian analyses generally are to be rejected, because they have been scientifically rejected (and so would debar an interpretation invoking subconscious intentions), and because there is little reason to believe they were part of Cézanne's beliefs at any point in his life. While Geist's judgments do have a certain *frisson* and perhaps therefore heighten our interest in the painting (a minor Cézanne made more significant?), that norm must be balanced against more general ones about plausible beliefs. And while he is probably correct to say that the vertical strokes do not play any clear-cut representational role, given what we know about the development of Cézanne as a painter, Verdi's judgment that the ambiguous bands serve a formal, painterly purpose constitutes a better explanation. Geist also shows the psychoanalyst's penchant for finding significance in the periphery, but such an approach ignores the interest of the central compositional elements that Verdi's more workmanlike and less salacious account acknowledges. So too with other conflicting judgments. The grounds for accepting and rejecting individual judgments are provided by the norms of critical discourse. Those judgments satisfying enough of them, and are expressed in the right grammatical form, can be classed as "best judgments" and so taken as true.

## 5. Chapter Summary

Aesthetic judgments are not true in virtue of some mind-independent facts. But they are truth-apt. What confers truth-aptness on a particular judgment is that it is expressed in a

grammatical form that allows for embedding in the antecedent of a conditional, and in propositional attitude contexts, and so on. In other words, aesthetic judgments take the form of indicative sentences, and I have argued in Chapter 2 that these sentences are properly indicative, not just apparently so, as the expressivist and subjectivist claim. Truth in aesthetics is not unconstrained; it is not a game of “anything goes”. There are a host of norms which discipline aesthetic thought and talk. None of the individual norms is timeless; the body of norms is amorphous and shifting. Norms are modified, added, and removed over time, as a result of new experiences, new developments in criticism, and new conceptions of the role of artworks in our lives.

Antirealism has been given a catchphrase characterization as a claim about mind-dependence. Specifically, aesthetic qualities are claimed to be mind-dependent. They are not “out there”, simply to be detected by the right sort of persons. Rather, they are those saliencies that arise from imaginative construal of the object presented to us. This claim gains support from an examination of the role of art theory and art criticism. Art theory and criticism very often plays an ontologically constitutive role for artworks. In a sense they provide instructions for the correct apprehension of an artwork, and at the same time can provide a description of the artwork when experienced according to those instructions. The ineliminable presence of metaphor in our characterizations of artworks is telling. Metaphor is essentially a construal of one thing in terms of another. The experience of an artwork as exemplifying emotional qualities, other qualities of persons, or more generally properties of the sort that artworks could not conceivably possess, is a matter of taking the work to have them; we impute qualities marked out in metaphor rather than detect them.

The mind-dependence of aesthetic qualities removes a significant barrier to a solution to the problem of irresolvable critical disputes. Realism must hold that in such cases, at least one party to the dispute is mistaken, or it must relativize their judgments. Other non-realist theories dissolve the contradiction by revising the grammar of aesthetic judgments. Cognitivist antirealism, because it holds aesthetic qualities to be mind-dependent, can plausibly hold that contradictory judgments may be true as well. But taking aesthetic judgments to be truth-apt requires the adoption of a non-classical logic to capture the rules of inference in aesthetics. Appropriate logics are available. Paraconsistent logics allow the

## 6.5: Chapter Summary

assertion of a contradiction without commitment to the truth of every proposition. More work needs to be done here, of course, but there is no argument on the basis of logic for excluding the propriety of true contradictory aesthetic judgments.

These claims are merely the core theses of a metaphysics of aesthetics. It is clear that if these claims can be maintained against the challenges I have considered, many consequences follow. The treatment of metaphor here suggests a solution to the problem of expression which must be more fully worked out. Adopting a paraconsistent logic has implications for the normative standards of warrant. The theory also has implications for the debates over intention in interpretation. And there are deep and interesting questions about the grounds for acceptable metaphors: why, for example, are certain colors or chord sequences typically construed in terms of certain emotions? All of these are questions generated by the theoretical core I have argued for here. In the following chapter, I will conclude with a recapitulation of the arguments surrounding the realism/antirealism debate, and highlight some of these less abstract issues that arise as a consequence. Two questions will be of special interest: how does a resolution to the realism/antirealism debate bear on pre-philosophical beliefs about artworks—do any of those beliefs need revision in light of a particular metaphysical position? And what, if any, are the practical consequences of endorsing a metaphysical position for critical practice?

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<sup>1</sup> Independent of actual thoughts for the modest realist, and independent of counterfactual thoughts for the robust realist and the platonist.

<sup>2</sup> Though perhaps they should, if the error theorist is correct, be counted as meaningless.

<sup>3</sup> David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, Appendix 1, 294.

<sup>4</sup> Irving Sandler, *The Triumph of American Painting* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970) 136-137

<sup>5</sup> The DeKooning passage, for instance, expresses no obvious preference.

<sup>6</sup> Crispin Wright, "Comrades Against Quietism: Reply to Simon Blackburn on *Truth and Objectivity*", *Mind* 107 (1998) 185.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Of course, this 'sufficient number' clause is indeterminate. This, however, just reflects real practice. Whether a judgment satisfies a sufficient number of norms is itself a proper topic of debate within aesthetic discourse.

<sup>9</sup> Much of the not-quite critical everyday language used to characterize art also makes heavy use of metaphor in the same way. My remarks focus on examples from criticism, though my chosen focus should not be taken to imply a claim that metaphor is a feature exclusive to criticism

<sup>10</sup> Jacques Rivière, "The Present Tendencies in Painting", in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, *Art in Theory 1900-1990* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992) 185. The original piece appeared in *Revue d'Europe et d'Amérique*, Paris, March 1912.

<sup>11</sup> Kasimir Malevich, *From Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism: The New Realism in Painting* (1916), in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, *Art in Theory 1900-1990* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992) 166-174.

<sup>12</sup> Irving Sandler, *The Triumph of American Painting* 136-137.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid* 114-115.

<sup>14</sup> Lest it be objected that metaphors cannot be used to assert, one should note the pervasiveness of metaphors with assertive functions in everyday contexts: “Early attempts to bury Arafat ended up resurrecting him.”; “Clinton was a political cuckoo, adroit at stealing ideas from his opponents’ nests.”

<sup>15</sup> There are more recent versions of these views that seem to avoid many of the obvious objections to their simple ancestors. Guy Sircello, in *A New Theory of Beauty* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975) updates the artistic expression theory, and Derek Matravers in *Art and Emotion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001) provides a nuanced reworking of the arousal theory. Sircello and Matravers may avoid many of the objections I offer here, or give equally compelling alternative accounts. However, the point remains that their views explain only expressive qualities, while the metaphor interpretation I argue for has much greater explanatory power, giving a uniform account of expressive qualities, qualities of human movement (e.g. gracefulness), and so on.

<sup>16</sup> Noël Carroll, *Philosophy of Art* (London: Routledge, 1999) 95-96.

<sup>17</sup> Kendall Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990) 195-204.

<sup>18</sup> Noël Carroll, *Philosophy of Art* 100.

<sup>19</sup> It is obviously mistaken to assume that sad and sad-looking mean the same thing.

<sup>20</sup> Noël Carroll, *Philosophy of Art* 100.

<sup>21</sup> Donald Davidson, “What Metaphors Mean”, *On Metaphor*, ed. Sheldon Sacks (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 29-45.

<sup>22</sup> Richard Moran, “Seeing and Believing: Metaphor, Image, and Force” *Critical Inquiry* 16 (1989), 90.

<sup>23</sup> Donald Davidson, “What Metaphors Mean” 44.

<sup>24</sup> William Lycan, *Philosophy of Language* (London: Routledge, 1999), 212.

<sup>25</sup> Roger White, *The Structure of Metaphor* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996).

<sup>26</sup> The genesis of my commitments on the issues associated with metaphor in art is in Goodman’s discussion of metaphorical exemplification in his *Languages of Art*. While it has many attractions, Goodman’s view suffers, as do so many theories of metaphor, from its taking predications of the form ‘X is F’ to be the paradigm of metaphors. Goodman also seems to require a distinction between literal truth and metaphorical truth.

<sup>27</sup> Roger White, *The Structure of Metaphor* 80.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *ibid* 62-80.

<sup>30</sup> William Shakespeare, *Othello* IV, i, ll 7ff.

<sup>31</sup> *ibid* 77.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> It is frequently maintained, without argument, that ‘graceful’ and ‘elegant’, to take two examples, are literal art-critical predicates. On the metaphor view, the former could be understood as a construal as a human movement, while the latter could signal a similarity to human posture or demeanor. Just how they are to be understood, of course, depends on the context. A painting might be elegant in virtue of its balanced composition and muted palette. A melody might be elegant in virtue of its long but well-articulated notes and its stately (a further metaphor!) tempo.

<sup>34</sup> Nick Zangwill, “Metaphor and Realism in Aesthetics”, *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 49 (1991) 61.

<sup>35</sup> The usage is mine, not Zangwill’s.

<sup>36</sup> Nick Zangwill, “Metaphor and Realism in Aesthetics” 60.

<sup>37</sup> Richard Moran, “Seeing and Believing: Metaphor, Image, and Force” 90.

<sup>38</sup> Glen Mullin, “John Singer Sargent” 29 April 1925, in Meyer, Peter, ed. *Brushes With History: Writing on Art from The Nation, 1865 – 2001* (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press/Nation Books, 2001) 144.

<sup>39</sup> *ibid* 145.

<sup>40</sup> Of course, this paraphrase is not entirely free of metaphor, either.

<sup>41</sup> Kennedy and Merkas have conducted experiments that show remarkable similarity between the depictions of motion drawn by the blind and by the sighted, as well as in the associations made between line contours such as jagged or smooth and emotional qualities. See John M. Kennedy and Cynthia E. Merkas, “Depictions of motion devised by a blind person”, *Psychonomic Bulletin and Review* 7 (2000) 700-706.

<sup>42</sup> See, for example, Graham Priest, *In Contradiction* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987); Graham Priest, Richard Routley, and Jean Norman (eds), *Paraconsistent Logic* (Munich: Philosophia Verlag, 1989); and Greg Restall, “Laws of Non-Contradiction, Laws of the Excluded Middle, and Logics”, <<http://www.phil.mq.edu.au/staff/grestall/cv.html>>.

<sup>43</sup> Greg Restall, “Laws of Non-Contradiction, Laws of the Excluded Middle, and Logics” 5.

## 6.5: Chapter Summary

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<sup>44</sup> In Chapter 3, Section 4, b.

<sup>45</sup> Roger Scruton, *Art and Imagination: A Study in the Philosophy of Mind*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (London: Routledge, 1982) 56.

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *ibid* 57.

<sup>48</sup> Robert Stecker, 'Relativism About Interpretation', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 53 (1995) pp. 15.

<sup>49</sup> Graham Priest, *In Contradiction* 137.

<sup>50</sup> *ibid* 145.

<sup>51</sup> Richard Verdi, *Cézanne and Poussin: The Classical Vision of Landscape* (Edinburgh: The National Galleries of Scotland, 1990) 87.

<sup>52</sup> Sidney Geist, *Interpreting Cézanne* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1988) 120-121.

## Chapter 7

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I have concluded my arguments for cognitivist antirealism as the theory of aesthetic judgment that best resolves the apparent tension between the two opening intuitions. In what remains, I shall survey the arguments given against alternative views, and in favor of our view. In doing so, I now wish briefly to look at some consequences of the various theories examined. It might be thought that as a theory takes an existent set of practices as both a subject for investigation and something to be held more or less fixed in that investigation, theories are practically inert. This seems to be the idea behind a common understanding of Wittgenstein's remark that philosophy "leaves everything as it is."<sup>1</sup> But this thought is mistaken. The dual role of facts about practices is a basic fact about any sort of interpretive activity, and no more a call for humility on the part of philosophy than for any other activity in which appearances are to be preserved and understood somehow.

Metaphysics has long been the object of philosophers' suspicion in that it has often seemed of no import whatsoever to the way we conduct our quotidian lives. Contemporary metaethics seems to have inherited the same questionable features, and if the parallel discussion in aesthetics were as well developed, no doubt it would also receive the same mistrustful regard. I believe that this is manifest in the willingness with which so many—including many who might even feel great urgency about problems in philosophical ethics—will avow a subjectivist stance in aesthetics. But the suspicion, actual or hypothetical, is unfounded. Reflection on our practices colors the conduct of those same practices. This is no less true in our art-related practices than elsewhere. I contend, then, that the metaphysical account of the status of aesthetic judgments bears on our critical practices, on our considered responses to critical discourse, and ultimately to our experience of art. I have structured the discussion of aesthetic judgment around two questions: the status, objective or otherwise, of aesthetic judgments, and the status, mind-independent or otherwise, of the ground of those judgments. The various ways of answering those two questions resulted in seven distinct theoretical positions.<sup>2</sup> So it should be no surprise that the adoption of one of these positions would deliver not just a theory of aesthetic judgment, but some corollaries concerning the proper understanding of art critical practice, and the nature of the work of art. In

summarizing the arguments of our enquiry, I offer some views on what those different corollaries might be.

The negative project of this investigation comprised Chapters 2 through 4, and supported the case for cognitivist antirealism by elimination of the alternative views. Among contemporary aestheticians, two views—modest aesthetic realism and robust aesthetic realism—exhaust what might be considered the current orthodoxy. The other views covered in these chapters do have their adherents, though most of them have other issues in the center of their sights. Usually these other issues are metaethical ones, and the argument for folding aesthetic issues into the position tends to be that aesthetics, like ethics, is concerned with value. It is true that there are gains to be made from exploiting this parallel—indeed, that has been one of the approaches of this project—but the lack of engagement with art-specific concerns is evident in the clumsy way aesthetics is dealt with in these particular discussions. Chapter 2, then, is a ground-clearing project of dealing with views that are not plausible contenders for a theory of aesthetic judgment.

The first of these non-contenders is, interestingly enough, the most commonly avowed pre-theoretical view: subjectivism. This pre-theoretical *de gustibus* subjectivism is often betrayed, when its professor is confronted by an outrageous evaluative claim. But philosophical subjectivism might not fall in the same way. The label picks out two different views. One is a radical relativism, that appends ‘to me’ or another appropriate indexical to aesthetic judgments. So aesthetic judgments are not properly understood as “X is F” but rather, “X is F to me” or “X is F to her”, and so on. The second subjectivist view takes aesthetic judgments to be merely expressions of feelings or attitudes toward the artwork judged. On this view, judgments are at best meaningful only in a thin sense, in which they report attitudes held. But the standard emotivist line is that aesthetic judgments are to be contrasted with, say, scientific sentences, in that they express rather than state. For the emotivist, aesthetic sentences are meaningless, and so neither true nor false. Under the radical relativist view, aesthetic judgments fail to be truth-apt because they do not satisfy the equivalence schema.

It turns out, then, that subjectivism of both varieties can be dismissed on the basis of unsatisfactory answers to five questions:

- i. Is feeling necessarily connected with evaluation?
- ii. Can aesthetic feelings be distinguished from non-aesthetic feelings?
- iii. How finely grained can non-aesthetic feelings be?
- iv. Why does preference expression exhaust the use of aesthetic judgments?
- v. How are ostensibly assertoric aesthetic sentences distinguished from truly assertoric ones?

Answering these questions requires a level of attention to actual art-related practices to which the subjectivist does not rise. Her view can be dismissed as a crude and prejudicial one. Many critical judgments simply do not have any evaluative content, and many evaluative judgments are opposed in valence to the actual preference held by the judge. So there is no direct connection between utterance and preference. The subjectivist's answer to the second question relies on a neat separation of affect and cognition, but such a separation is not in fact available for feelings outside the aesthetic domain. Feelings understood as occurrent emotional states are individuated in part by their intentional objects, and so there is a strong connection to cognitive states such as beliefs, which of course are truth-apt when expressed as propositions. So the subjectivist's categorization of aesthetic judgments as expressions of feeling does not establish that they are thereby truth-inapt. The subjectivist's theory also does not give a satisfactory answer to the third question. It is unclear how we are to distinguish, as preferences, between predicates such as "revelatory" and "profound", or between "funereal" and "melancholy". Moreover, predicates such as these are used with judgments to assert beliefs. Preference expression cannot exhaust the use of judgments, for the reasons just given: even feeling terms can be used to assert, and many truly aesthetic sentences do not express any attitude. Finally, the distinction between non-assertoric aesthetic sentences and assertoric sentences elsewhere is a prejudicial one. Surely, aesthetic sentences in the indicative mood appear to have all the needed syntactical features to function as assertions. In particular, they can be embedded in propositional attitude ascriptions and can function as antecedents of conditionals. When an aesthetic judgment functions this way in a modus ponens inference, the inference fails to be truth-preserving because the embedded aesthetic judgment merely expresses an attitude, according to the subjectivist. This means that subjectivism rules out simple deductive reasoning within

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aesthetics. This might not seem to be problematic, since aesthetics is purported to be a domain of feelings and preferences, and not of reasons and beliefs. According to the subjectivist, the person who fails to accept a *modus ponens* inference involving an aesthetic sentence is not guilty of any rational failure at all. In addition, the subjectivist has no reason to accept the conclusion of such an inference. It could be argued that it would be irrational for the subjectivist to do so.<sup>3</sup>

Subjectivism is plainly an untenable view. The subjectivist also places an incredibly burdensome project upon our shoulders. Our civilizations include a great many people who have all the appearances of giving reasons for their judgments about artworks, and even indeed for the preferences they hold toward them. This fact lends support to the view that aesthetic judgments are in some sense objective. We often give reasons to bring others to share our judgments, and are dismayed or incredulous if that does not happen. If subjectivism were true, our dismay and surprise would be the result of a confrontation with our misunderstandings about our own practices with the fact that there are no aesthetic facts. Eventually, this continued confrontation should reach a critical threshold, beyond which we would come to our senses and give up the practice. Not only would critics stop issuing judgments about artworks, art schools and conservatories would stop educating students in the way they now do. At the ridiculous extreme, everyone could be said to be an artist as long as he or she so declared, and anything they produced would be no better or worse an artwork than any other. Artworks could not be the kinds of things that made assertions about morality or human nature. They would only be the occasion for sighs of ineffable feeling. In short, were subjectivism true and we came to know that, we would have to concede that our lives had been deeply misunderstood, and we should have to begin making the necessary reconfigurations to our shared understanding.

Blackburn's quasi-realism and Mackie's error theory force the same project of revision upon us, if to a lesser degree. Quasi-realism takes a metaphor from Hume, that of taste as a productive faculty, which gilds and stains natural objects, and reshapes it into a semantic/metaphysical theory of value. According to the theory, we project properties onto our representations of the world on the basis of its objective natural properties and our habits, emotions, sentiments, and attitudes. Just because we do so does not mean that

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practices of valuing which thereby arise are in error. We are perfectly entitled to realist uses of language regarding these practices. Blackburn's theory suffers some of the same shortcomings as subjectivism. It just is wrong to say that all aesthetic judgments involve attitudes or the expression of preferences. So the semantic theory Blackburn supplies to avoid objections to subjectivism is not appropriately applied to a great many aesthetic judgments. Blackburn holds that talk of truth, for the quasi-realist, is principled because there is some limiting set of attitudes on which judgments converge given all possible opportunities for improvement. This premise, I have argued, is not one Blackburn can invoke given the tools available to him. The quasi-realist also fails to deal with the worry raised for all non-cognitivist theories by the Frege-Geach point. In the end, Blackburn's view is unstable between subjectivism and some variety of realism. And inasmuch as it tends to subjectivism, so do its corollary views on the nature of aesthetic discourse and of artworks.

Mackie's error theory is easily dealt with. His arguments from relativity and from queerness both depend on implausibly strong requirements for objectivity. Mackie argues from the fact of diversity in judgment to the conclusion that truth in aesthetics is relative. But what is needed is a domain-specific argument showing why mere diversity entails relativism. If asked, a large sample of people would give a nearly equally large number of different answers to the question, "Exactly how many stars are there?" Surely diversity among those answers does not warrant the conclusion that the truth about the number of stars is relative. Mackie thinks that a relativist conclusion here does not make sense, but then it seems blatantly question-begging to state that it does in the aesthetic case. Objectivity does not require unanimity. Neither does it require radically mind-independent facts. The argument from queerness holds that only very queer metaphysical entities could constitute objective values. We would require some special faculty of intuition in order to become aware of them. Mackie claims this because he also holds that only things which stand in causal relations can be admitted to a respectable ontology. If there are no entities of the right sort, then aesthetic judgments can only be false. But this argument, if effective, involves great collateral damage, including mathematical, logical, and philosophical assertions. This means that Mackie's argument from queerness is self-refuting.

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It is difficult, then, to imagine a world in which Mackie's error theory was true. It might also look quite a lot like the subjectivist's world, with the difference that once people (no doubt through the counsel of philosophers) came to see that their practices were in error, they should give them up. Mackie thinks that in spite of the error in conception, we continue with moral practice because of the survival-related benefits it confers. What is the benefit of continuing with a misconceived aesthetic practice? One might propose, for instance, that there was some benefit to our well-being conferred by deceiving ourselves about the nature of our art critical practices. But it is hard to see what this could be, especially in light of the high value we place on the veridicality of our representations of the world in other domains.<sup>4</sup>

In Chapter 2, I also discussed two realist non-contenders. One of these, platonic realism, shares Mackie's view that if aesthetic judgments are objective, they can only be so in virtue of some strongly mind-independent facts. On this view, objects would have aesthetic qualities even if there were no one to experience them. But this view is really an implausible extreme. Aesthetic qualities are so often bound up in our particular valuing and conventions. It seems nonsensical to claim that a melody pushes with insistent and impatient urgency if there are no beings who can be insistent and impatient and would predicate such qualities to a non-minded thing. Platonic realism also renders our practice of giving reasons in support of our judgments gratuitous. If a poem is tender, it just is tender, and there is nothing more to be said. The platonic realist's conception of objectivity (which is also Mackie's), is unnecessarily strong, and gives no regard to the way actual art-related discourse is conducted.

The second realist position I considered in Chapter 2 was reductionist realism. That view shares the same prejudice that motivates Mackie's error theory, that any ontologically admissible entity would have to play a role in causal explanations. Reductionism seeks to explain suspect aesthetic discourse in terms of some other respectable domain, most typically, the empirical. If reductionism were true, there would be bridge laws connecting aesthetic properties to non-aesthetic ones. But while there do seem to be "rules of craft" in the various artistic media, there seem to be no rules of the sort the reductionist needs. Also, if reductionism were true, then aesthetic judgments need not be viewed suspiciously, for they would have the same meaning as a sentence or set of sentences in a respectable domain.

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Artists would be in the business of discovering the natural properties that would deliver the exact effects they desired to achieve in their works, and could reliably reproduce them just by making use of their discoveries. Indeed, it would seem possible to give context-free empirical-term descriptions of artworks which would be translatable into an inventory of their aesthetic qualities. Such a scenario would also provide a comfortable route to objectivity but seems wildly implausible.

All five of the non-contender theories share the suspicion that aesthetic discourse must be made respectable by metaphysical grounding in some neutral, less controversial, domain. All five are greatly at odds with the way aesthetic discourse and artistic practice are conducted. The philosophical reasons for rejecting these views only gain strength from considering how their truth would yield scenarios so misaligned with ours.

In Chapters 3 and 4, I examined in detail two views that preserve the appearances to a much greater degree. Both modest aesthetic realism and robust aesthetic realism hold aesthetic judgments to be objective, but they handle the mind-dependence intuition differently. Modest realism takes aesthetic qualities to be independent only of the judge's actual mental states (but not counterfactual ones), while robust realism takes them to be independent even of counterfactual mental states. To put it more carefully, these two theories hold in particular that the truth of a judgment *p* is independent (in one or the other sense) of the judging that *p*. Both theories claim that aesthetic properties supervene upon non-aesthetic properties, and so in Chapter 3 I presented a number of arguments against supervenience. I showed that the supervenience thesis if true is trivially so, and does not usefully explicate the practice of giving and defending aesthetic judgments. For several reasons it seems most likely that the thesis is incoherent. Even if it can be repaired, supervenience can only be asserted by realists *a priori*, as an argument for its justification seems to require an antirealist notion of truth. But supervenience is not a phenomenon with an independent claim of factuality. Asserting it *a priori* is not metaphysically innocent. Even allowing this (and note the generosity of such a move, as it already requires us to grant that the basic notion can be fixed), it follows that there can be only one true comprehensive aesthetic judgment of an artwork. This puts realism at odds with our common practice of countenancing multiple and conflicting judgments about artworks.

Chapter 4 took up the different conceptions of mind-independence invoked by modest and robust realism. Robust realism, in taking aesthetic qualities to be strongly mind-independent, suggests a primary quality account of them. However, I showed that the argument for the primary quality status of aesthetic qualities involves a confusion between truth-conferring and warrant-conferring properties. So there is no convincing argument for robust realism, especially as other 'robust' views—platonist realism and reductionist realism—have already been rejected. Turning to modest aesthetic realism, the way mind-independence is specified there suggests an analogy between secondary qualities and aesthetic properties. The analogy is highly strained. What can be preserved of it comes in the response-dependence analysis of aesthetic qualities. Response-dependence really is a claim that the response of a class of ideal judges is inextricable from the content of the quality itself. As such it is not on its own sufficient to establish modest realism as a realist view. What it seems to require is, minimally, a necessary connection to a realm of mind-independent properties. This is the function of the supervenience claim, to connect aesthetic properties to empirical ones. But the arguments of Chapter 3 showed that the notion of supervenience was fatally flawed, and so the realist's anchor to mind-independent properties is not available for her theory.

Realism in general seems well-equipped to explain why we think our judgments are objective. It is because there are aesthetic properties which are in some sense independent of our thought and talk. These properties are represented in true aesthetic judgments. But realism cannot explain why we countenance conflicting views about artworks. Disagreements are always to be explained in terms of ignorance or error—we can never allow that a judgment  $p$  and a judgment incorporating the claim  $\sim p$  both be admitted as true. On the realist account, what critics do is detect qualities of artworks and map them out for us. The experience of art, under this conception, is one of detection, discovery, or investigation. We engage with an artwork, immediately experiencing many of its qualities as the artwork is presented to us, and strive to discern those features which are not immediately apparent. The features immediately available include perceptual properties like color, shape, volume, pitch, and other low-level sensory properties which depend on the receptive capacities of the experiencing subject and the background conditions. These relational properties can be given a counterfactual analysis in terms of ideal perceivers and conditions,

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and so a purely subjectivist view is avoided. Other properties, like the art historical context and the content of representational works, might be immediately apparent features to experienced critics, but could be learned by the inexperienced. And still other features, like the form of the final movement of a symphony, might become apparent as the music unfolds, or might require successive hearings to make out. Similarly, the scansion of a poem might be something that requires some trial and error experimentation. Different basic meters might be suggested throughout the poem, and we will have to try to harmonize those meters and their violations with the poetic meaning to arrive at the correct scansion. A novel might have a character who often speaks ironically, and we may have to read further before we can determine if a stretch of dialogue was literal or ironic. And the symbols used in an allegorical painting might require a good deal of research before we can determine the proper interpretation of the figures before us.

Once we have done these things with the artwork at hand, we have discovered the work's properties. This process may take a long time—indeed, it may never be completed. There may, on the realist's story, be properties of artworks which we never come to know. The realist conception, then, takes artworks to be akin to the objects of scientific investigation. An intuitive difficulty with this conception, though, is the much greater readiness with which we allow contradictory judgments of artworks to stand, as compared with contradictory empirical statements. This readiness, if taken at face value, should cause discomfort for the realist. If we are fervently beholden to the view that artworks are fully determinate things in all their aesthetic qualities, this discomfort will be mild or non-existent, because we can always doggedly maintain that at least one party to a conflict is wrong—even if we can never find out. If, on the other hand, we are more agnostic about the determinateness of an artwork's properties, or are reluctant always to find a single right verdict, the discomfort becomes great. I believe that agnosticism and not fervent belief is the stronger intuition.

Chapters 5 and 6 develop positive considerations for a theory of aesthetic judgment. In 5 I examined Hume's theory of judgment, which might plausibly be updated and reconstructed to yield a cognitivist antirealist theory. Such a theory would, recall, accommodate both the intuition that judgments are objective and that aesthetic qualities are mind-dependent. Hume's theory proved to be unsatisfactory in the end. It avoids many of the problems

mooted for the other theories examined, but relies on unsupportable premises. Hume's thought shows the fashion of his age in claiming a uniformity of human nature. This uniformity, together with Hume's view that certain qualities are fitted by nature to produce specific responses in us, explains the objectivity of judgment. No one now would accept such an explanation, I believe. So the task of Chapter 6 was to explicate the core claims of a contemporary theory which accommodated the starting intuitions without falling back on bad anthropological or psychological claims.

There I argued that truth is constituted by best judgments, where the notion of best judgments was unpacked as their satisfying sufficiently many of the norms disciplining aesthetic discourse. I provided some real-world examples of aesthetic discourse which could not be comfortably explained along realist lines. Art theoretical discourse and art-related talk employing metaphor both show the essential involvement of the imagination in the experience of art. What the distinctive terms of aesthetic discourse refer to, aesthetic qualities, are not "out there" to be detected, but rather are the result of warranted imaginative construals of painted canvases, sequences of sounds, texts, and so on. Berys Gaut suggests that "criticism at its best...is a kind of second-order art, an art comprised of observations about other forms of art. Like first-order art, it has constraints on success, and requirements to get it right, to imagine well."<sup>5</sup> I would go further than this. On my theory, what the best criticism, that which we would count among best judgments, does for artworks is imbue them with aesthetic qualities. Part of what it means to confer best judgment status on a critical remark is to grant that the metaphorical connections it forges and the salencies it establishes are proper attributes of the artwork. This is not to say that great criticism does not have independent literary value—very often it does. But when it satisfies the norms of aesthetic discourse, it also has a very intimate relationship with its corresponding artwork, much more intimate than a bystander's description would be.

The cognitivist antirealist conception takes artworks to be foci of imaginative activity. The realist might ask, "Why do we need an external object at all"? Why not simply call our imaginings artworks? Saying that the set of properties of an artwork is partially constituted by the warranted imaginings of the subject does not amount to effacing the artwork *qua* external object or event. A newcomer to Bach's fugues is invariably awestruck by the

## 7: Conclusion

complexity of the counterpoint, of the way Bach resolves harmonic and thematic problems simultaneously, and seemingly against incredible odds. But Bach famously said that working within the complex formal requirements of the fugue was liberating—it provided the constraints that gave significance to his compositional choices. Indeed, the problems he solved were problems he set for himself, given the intricate rules of the game. Without those rules, there would be no fugue, only amorphous groups of sound.

The physical painting, the literary work tokened by a text, and the instantiation of a musical work—the object or event corresponding to the artwork—serves simultaneously to invite and constrain imaginative activity. Some of those imaginings can be properly said to be right, and some to be wrong. One revisionary aspect of cognitivist antirealism is the ambiguity it introduces for the word ‘artwork’. One sense is the usual one meaning the paint on canvas, a piece of cast bronze, and so on—the physical object before us in the gallery or event type instantiated in a performance. The additional sense introduced by our theory is of the work in the first sense subjected to warranted imaginative construal. The first sense is often used as a kind of shorthand for the second sense. We talk about the aesthetic qualities of a work, and point at the canvas, but the painting only has these qualities when we do something with it in our imagination. This ambiguity is not problematic, as long as we maintain an awareness of it. To ignore it in philosophical contexts might push one toward realist theories, with all their attendant difficulties.

Any philosophical view with the slightest measure of interest is not purely descriptive. That philosophers might attain an explanation of “the way things *really* are” is a misleading conceit. Karl Popper conceived of philosophy as a mode of inquiry that took some problem as a starting point, some apparent conflict in our experience or our conceptualizing that, for the moment at least, does not admit of some empirical means of resolution. How to understand what art is, and what we do with it, is this sort of problem. The conflict that gives rise to it is between the experience of an artwork as some kind of external, independent object, and the role we standardly accord the imagination in the experience of art. Any philosophical proposal for a solution involves making choices: what data to fix, and treat descriptively, and what data to reject or modify as arising from some conceptual confusion. The realist conception—artworks as scientific objects—rejects the mind-dependence of the

aesthetic qualities and revises our thinking of the role of imagination. The antirealist conception, in taking artworks to be foci for imaginative activity, bolsters the starting intuition of mind-dependence. The realist now owes us a convincing error theory—why do we take imagination to play a substantive role in the experience of art when her conception tells us that it is wrong to think so? The realist might avoid shouldering that burden by giving the imagination a lesser role to play, a heuristic one that aids in revealing the artwork's true features. But this is just turning a blind eye to the importance of imagination in the experience of art.

This is not to say that cognitivist antirealism has no promises to keep. As I stated in the previous chapter, the proposal that a paraconsistent logic is preferable to classical logic for capturing the way aesthetic discourse works is not a trivial one. We need to explore just what it means to accept a contradictory pair of judgments as true, and when we can, if ever, reject a judgment  $p$  on the basis that we have already accepted its negation. And if we accept the judgments of two critics, who independently judge  $p$  and  $\sim p$ , and so implicitly accept ( $p$  &  $\sim p$ ) does this pull the imagination in opposite directions at once? I believe these concerns can be addressed. The tallest hurdle is one that our practice shows us already to have cleared: that we do accept contradictory judgments of artworks as true. I have argued that the only plausible explanation for this datum is that aesthetic properties are mind-dependent. Imagination, not taste, is the productive faculty that gilds and stains. Best judgments serve to direct the imagination in imbuing artworks with their distinctive aesthetic qualities. I opened this project with two intuitions that are almost always perceived as conflicting: that artworks and their distinctive qualities are dependent on our thoughts, and that our aesthetic judgments are objective. The cognitivist antirealist conception of artworks alone allows us to hold both.

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<sup>1</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (New York: Macmillan, 1953) §124. There are other interpretations of §124 that do not take it to assert a strongly non-revisionist role for philosophy as an activity.

<sup>2</sup> There may well be more possible views, though our taxonomy seems to exhaust the range of contemporary views that are or might be (with varying degrees of plausibility) held.

<sup>3</sup> See Cian Dorr, "Non-cognitivism and Wishful Thinking", *Noûs* 36 (2002) 97-103 for such an argument.

<sup>4</sup> This is part of the point of the experience machine objection to classical utilitarianism.

<sup>5</sup> Berys Gaut, "Metaphor and the Understanding of Art", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* (1997) 241.

Appendix 1: Color Plates

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Figure 1: Thomas Kinkadee, *The Village Lighthouse*, 2001

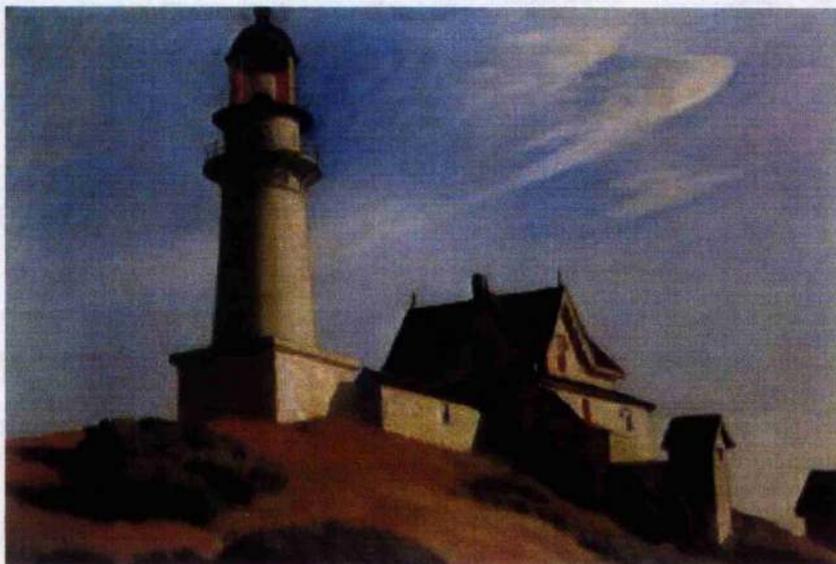


Figure 2: Edward Hopper, *Lighthouse at Two Lights*, 1929

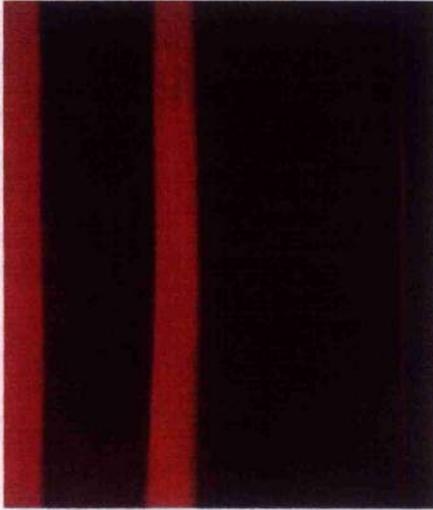


Figure 3: Barnett Newman, *Adam*, 1951-2



Figure 4: Paul Cézanne, *The Railway Cutting*, 1869-1870

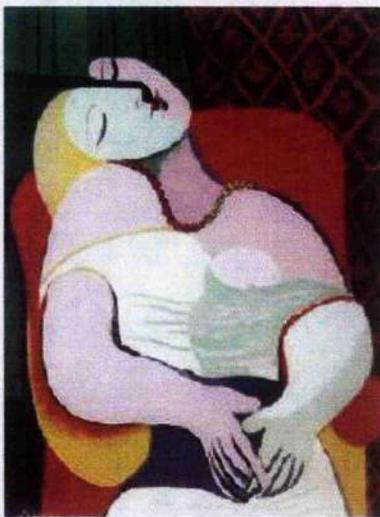


Figure 5: Pablo Picasso, *La reve*, 1932



Figure 6: Amadeo Modigliani, *Girl with a Polka-Dot Blouse*, 1919

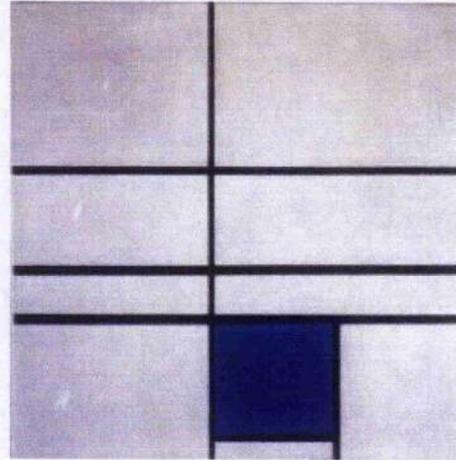


Figure 7: Piet Mondrian, *Composition with Blue*, 1935



Figure 8: Henri Matisse, *Le bonheur de vivre*, 1905-1906

Figure 9: Hans VanMeegeren, *Christ at Emmaus*





Figure 10: Titian, *Diana and Actaeon*, 1559



Figure 11: Velasquez, *The Feast of Bacchus*, 1629



Figure 12: Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin, *The Ray*, 1728



Figure 13: Thomas Gainsborough,  
*Mrs. Richard Brinsley Sheridan*,  
1785-1786

Figure 14: Mark Rothko, *Light  
Red Over Black*, 1957

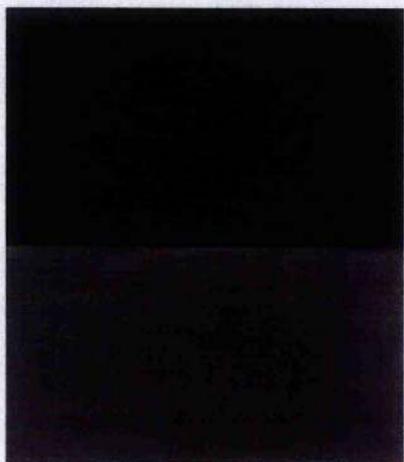


Figure 15: Mark Rothko, *Untitled* (Black on  
Gray), 1969-1970



Figure 16: Edouard Manet, *The Execution of Maximilian* (Mannheim Version), 1867



Figure 17: Neri Di Bicci, *Madonna and Child with Saints*, 15<sup>th</sup> century

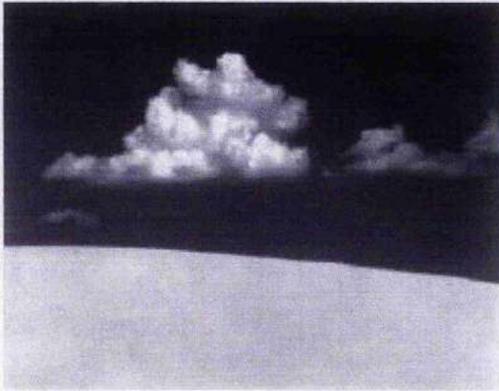


Figure 18: Edward Weston, *White Sands*, 1946

Figure 19: Wayne Thiebaud, *Pies, Pies, Pies*, 1961



Figure 20: Willem DeKooning, *Women Singing II*, 1966

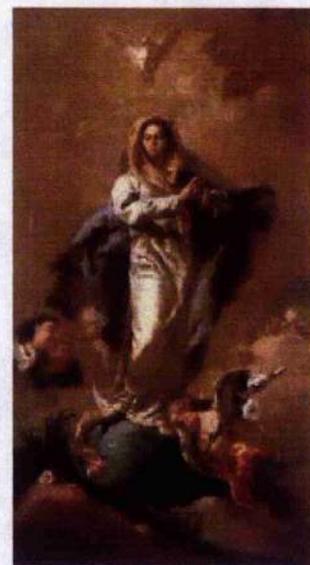


Figure 21: Giambattista Tiepolo, *Immaculate Conception*, 1769



Figure 22: Francis Bacon, *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of an Execution*, 1944



Figure 23: Andy Warhol, *Marilyn (Three Times)*, 1962



Figure 24: George Braque, *Mandora*, 1910

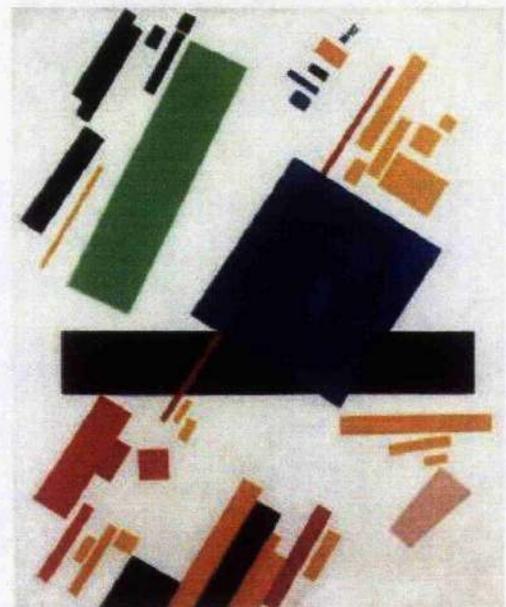


Figure 25: Kasimir Malevich, *Suprematist Painting*, 1916



Figure 26: Jan Jansz. Treck, *Vanitas Still Life*,  
1648

Figure 27: Jackson Pollock,  
*Number 1*, 1948



Figure 28: John Singer Sargent, *Madame  
Pierre Gautreau (Madame X)* 1884



Figure 29: Paul Cézanne, *Small House at  
Auvers*, 1873-1874

## Appendix 2: Proof of $S1 \leftrightarrow S2$

$$\forall x \forall y ((\alpha x \wedge \sim \alpha y) \rightarrow \sim (\beta x \wedge \beta y)) \leftrightarrow (\exists x (\beta x \wedge \alpha x) \rightarrow \forall y (\beta y \rightarrow \alpha y))$$

' $\rightarrow$ ':

* (1)	$\forall x \forall y ((\alpha x \wedge \sim \alpha y) \rightarrow \sim (\beta x \wedge \beta y))$	premise
* (2)	$((\alpha a \wedge \sim \alpha b) \rightarrow \sim (\beta a \wedge \beta b))$	(1), UI
** (3)	$\exists x (\beta x \wedge \alpha x) \wedge \sim \forall y (\beta y \rightarrow \alpha y)$	ass.
** (4)	$\beta a \wedge \alpha a$	(3), $\wedge$ E, EI 'a'
** (5)	$\sim (\beta b \rightarrow \alpha b)$	(3), $\wedge$ E, EI 'b'
** (6)	$\beta b \wedge \sim \alpha b$	(5), p.l.
** (7)	$\alpha a \wedge \sim \alpha b$	(4), (6), $\wedge$ E, $\wedge$ I
** (8)	$\sim (\beta a \wedge \beta b)$	(7), (2), m.p.
** (9)	$\beta a \wedge \beta b$	(4), (6), $\wedge$ E, $\wedge$ I
* (10)	$\sim (\exists x (\beta x \wedge \alpha x) \wedge \sim \forall y (\beta y \rightarrow \alpha y))$	(8), (9), contr., $\sim$ (3)
* (11)	$\exists x (\beta x \wedge \alpha x) \rightarrow \forall y (\beta y \rightarrow \alpha y)$	(10), p.l.

' $\leftarrow$ ':

* (1)	$\exists x (\beta x \wedge \alpha x) \rightarrow \forall y (\beta y \rightarrow \alpha y)$	premise
** (2)	$\sim \forall x \forall y ((\alpha x \wedge \sim \alpha y) \rightarrow \sim (\beta x \wedge \beta y))$	ass.
** (3)	$\sim ((\alpha a \wedge \sim \alpha b) \rightarrow \sim (\beta a \wedge \beta b))$	(2), q.c., EI, 'a' 'b'
** (4)	$(\alpha a \wedge \sim \alpha b) \wedge (\beta a \wedge \beta b)$	(3), p.l.
** (5)	$\beta a \wedge \alpha a$	(4), $\wedge$ E, $\wedge$ I
** (6)	$\exists x (\beta x \wedge \alpha x)$	(5), EG
** (7)	$\forall y (\beta y \rightarrow \alpha y)$	(1), (6), m.p.
** (8)	$\beta b \rightarrow \alpha b$	(7), UI
** (9)	$\sim (\beta b \wedge \sim \alpha b)$	(8), p.l.
** (10)	$(\beta b \wedge \sim \alpha b)$	(4), $\wedge$ E, $\wedge$ I
* (11)	$\forall x \forall y ((\alpha x \wedge \sim \alpha y) \rightarrow \sim (\beta x \wedge \beta y))$	(9), (10), contr., $\sim$ (2)

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