



## I – The research of aesthetic realism

In 2012, Cova and Pain sought to demonstrate that aesthetic realism cannot be grounded in our common-sense intuitions. They used a questionnaire which asked subjects to state what they thought of the described disagreement between two people about an object being beautiful. The options were presented in a following way:

1. One of them is right and the other is not.
2. Both are right.
3. Both are wrong.
4. Neither is right or wrong. It makes no sense to speak in terms of the correctness in this situation. Everyone is entitled to his own opinion. (Cova and Pain 2012: 245)

Overwhelmingly, the subjects (initially a few dozen students) chose the fourth option, thus invalidating any appeal to the common sense in defending aesthetic realism. Cova and Pain replicated those results several times, most recently in 2018, and on a much larger sample, consisting of over 2000 subjects, drawn from 25 populations in 19 different countries (Cova et al, 2018: 8).

## II – Zangwill's criticism and additional observations

Nick Zangwill (Zangwill, 2018: 292-297) offers two main criticisms of Cova's and Pain's research:

1. Content criticism: The option 4 is not a good characterization of the normativity of aesthetic judgment.
2. Methodological criticism regarding the answers subjects provide in questionnaires:
  - Subjects may want to please those doing the asking.
  - Subjects may simply not know what to say and may make something up.
  - Double-blind research demonstrates the unreliability of questionnaires.

We agree with Zangwill but have two further points.

1. Zangwill doesn't mention probably the most pressing issue regarding the option 4. Namely, it is a paradigmatic example of what is usually called a leading question. (Krosnick 2009). It is a question that suggests itself as the right answer. Main problems with option 4:
  - a) The answer provided is notably longer than the other three options and suggestively provides repudiation of other three options.
  - b) Phrases like 'it makes no sense to...' and 'everyone is entitled to...' imply that if a subject chooses a realist answer they will somehow express lack of knowledge or lack of tolerance for other viewpoints, which is something that realism in no way entails.
  - c) The three sentences in option 4. don't follow from one another and state three different ideas, all aimed not at revealing, but at directing our intuitions.
2. Zangwill is perhaps too harsh in expressing general concern for questionnaires. There is no need for a stronger conclusion that questionnaires in themselves are an incorrect method of capturing intuitions. Cova and Pain would have to reformulate their questionnaire so to include four options that contain similarly neutral verbiage, are of equal length and capture the ideas of aesthetic realism properly.

## III – More nuanced research questions

- A proper questionnaire would have to capture both first-order intuitions (whether x is beautiful or not) and second-order intuitions (whether subjects consider their expression of the first-order intuition as being truth-apt). See, Goodwin and Darley 2008 and 2010).
- We would have to explore whether common-sense aesthetic intuitions are coherent, i.e. whether subjects would provide contradictory answers within the same questionnaire. Asking the same thing in different ways will help see to what degree subjects have cohesive intuitions.
- Aside from coherency, those interested in aesthetic intuitions should also want to explore robustness, or the stability of such intuitions. Are our subjectivist or objectivist common-sense intuitions impervious to change in light of a debate which would provide reasons for opposing viewpoints? To check the stability of intuitions, one must expand the methodological arsenal and add something that hasn't so far been a part of the experimental inventory in aesthetics – deliberative events.

## IV Deliberation in Aesthetics

As political research shows, deliberative events are an excellent way to explore the dynamics of debating opposing viewpoints (Steiner 2012, Steiner et al. 2017). By using qualitative methodology (specifically Steiner's DQI), we would organize a deliberative event with a specific topic of exploring intuitions regarding aesthetic realism. The discussion would be held between two groups of participants – one that leans toward subjectivism and the one that is in the objectivist camp. We would track discussion in real time considering several parameters – how actively subjects participate, whether they support their views with arguments, how overtly tolerant are they when others express differing viewpoints, etc. Research shows that people can overcome their initial differences and bring their views closer together or altogether change them. By exploring how such a discussion would reflect our aesthetic intuitions, we will gain more insight into how people ordinarily think about aesthetic realism.

## V – Is aesthetic realism really founded on common-sense intuitions?

Cova and Pain put too much substantive stock in what is merely a piece of philosophical rhetoric or a figure of speech. Namely, when philosophers defend aesthetic realism by referring to common-sense intuitions, what they really mean is something akin to what Heraclitus said: Having harkened *not to me* but to the Word (*Logos*) *it is wise to agree* that all things are one. (B50, our italics) In other words, what philosophers claim is that there is a strong independent support for aesthetic realism, i.e. that we should be aesthetic realists. This is the case in most instances in which philosophers appeal to common-sense intuitions.

