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The Role of Arguing in Aesthetic Appreciation

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ABSTRACT. In this paper I examine Peter Kivy's *De Gustibus* (2015) and his inquiry on the *raison d'être* for our arguing about taste. In the face of full-blooded subjectivism and widespread skepticism about the point and persistence of taste disagreements, Kivy confronts the inconsistency of ruling objectivity out of matters about taste and still engaging in aesthetic arguments. According to him, the reason why we engage in aesthetic disputes is, in analogy with factual matters, to persuade others that one's belief is true and theirs is false. I analyze whether Kivy's solution grasps the appreciative dimension of our arguing and present three main objections to his approach, with emphasis on two key aspects of aesthetic disagreements, namely: the priority of our reasons above others and the difficulty of changing one's appreciation. I thus suggest that a closer look at the practice of art criticism may shed some light on the motivations for arguing about taste, as well as on the practice of giving (and asking) for reasons for appreciation.

1. Introduction

Peter Kivy's last book, *De Gustibus: Arguing About Taste and Why We Do It* (2015), covers the phenomenology and metaphysics of the quintessential philosophical issue of our arguing about

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taste. Though primarily focused on the "disputative phenomenology" of aesthetic discourse – that is, on the reason why we argue about taste – the book also examines the virtues of a realist ontology in aesthetics. Against skepticism about aesthetic objectivism, held by the layman as much as by philosophers, Kivy lays out the following question: if matters of taste are subjective and lack objective criteria by which our aesthetic arguments might be settled, why do we engage in such conversations at all? In other words, is our arguing about taste rational? *De Gustibus*' main goal is therefore to answer why we argue about taste and whether it is a proper and fruitful debate. Kivy's starting point is that people interested in art – or in any aesthetic matter – argue about taste because they are aiming to persuade others about the truth and falsity of each other's beliefs.

After examining Kivy's solution to the issue of the rationality of our arguing [section 2], I present three objections to his phenomenological approach to aesthetic arguments [section 3]. Though much needed when it comes to the study of disagreements about taste predicates, I claim that the particular way in which he appeals to objectivity brings about important difficulties in our understanding of our conversations about taste. Namely, the comparison between empirical and aesthetic matters evades rather than addresses our concerns about the specificities of taste disagreements. The result, therefore, is an incomplete picture of the expressive dynamics of aesthetic arguments, incapable of accounting for our legitimate resistance to others' reasons and the difficulty of changing our aesthetic experiences. In turn, I endorse Salvador Rubio's aspectualism [section 4] not only as a better approach to the subject matter, but also as a more comprehensive understanding of changes in appreciation and developments of taste.

2. Kivy's Solution to Our Arguing about Taste

As mentioned above, Kivy starts by identifying the subject to which the "why" question on aesthetic arguments is addressed: "of course, if one has no particular interest in the arts […] then one is likely to give 'the aesthetic shrug' and eschew argument." (Kivy, 2015, p. 49). And he suggests "it is, needless to say, people who are interested in aesthetic matters that display aesthetic argument behavior; and of such there are and have been multitudes." (*ibid.*). Casting doubt on the *raison d'être* of such "multitudinous" practice, skepticism about aesthetic objectivity is widespread

among the layman as well as philosophers, among which moral theorists appear to stand out.[2] With regards to the former group, Kivy observes a general sympathy towards the old saw *De gustibus non disputandum est*, which also has its English and French analogues: "there is no disputing about taste" and "a chacun son goût" (that is, "to each his or her own taste"). People sometimes use it as a reason to avoid an aesthetic argument, whereas others adopt this behavior after a long, deep and hard-settling disagreement. Its use rests on an appeal to subjectivity and autonomy and, more so, on the assumption that the expectation of agreement and the hope of objective criteria is out of place when it comes to matters of taste. This inclination is said by Nick Zangwill "to constitute part of the intellectual air in certain parts of the humanities." (Zangwill, 2021, p. 7).

The latter, on the other hand, rejects aesthetic objectivism and opts for relativism or subjectivism based on the long-alleged contrast between empirical and aesthetic matters, but also on assumed differences between aesthetic and moral values. Accordingly, disputes about taste are often considered entirely pointless, fruitless, or even irrational. For instance, moral realist Russ Shafer-Landau compares our arguing about taste with "entering an intractable debate about whether red or orange was really the most beautiful color." (Kivy, 2015, p. 46). On these occasions, "the point and persistence of moral disagreements" (*ibid.*) is defended by moral philosophers at the expense of a characterization of aesthetic arguments as hard to settle and irrational. Whereas moral disagreements are compared to factual ones, taste disagreements less often enjoy that status. And even though both moral and aesthetic judgements are value judgements, the latter are frequently characterized as a matter of personal preference, rather than a normative endeavor.

Kivy therefore denies a view of matters of taste as, in in Zangwill's terms, "individually" or "socially" relative, since it turns aesthetic arguments into fruitless, pointless conversations.[3] Were full-blooded subjectivism true, it would be hard to make sense of our arguing about taste. Without no criteria beyond each person's own subjectivity, the rationality of aesthetic arguments is at risk, as well as a strong sense of the notion of disagreement when it comes to taste. *De Gustibus*,

[2] Aesthetic relativism, as pointed out by Dominic McIver Lopes (2017), is also highly popular among philosophers of language. Much of the discussion around predicates of taste and disagreement appear to take the following structure of dialogue as a reference: A: "This [chili] is tasty"; B: "No, it isn't!". See Barker (2013); Bordonaba Plou (2020); Egan (2010); and Schafer (2010). For a critical commentary of the use of these expressions as paradigmatic cases of deep, aesthetic disagreements, see Lopes (2017) and Kivy (2015).
[3] See Zangwill (2021, p. 7).

to the contrary, replies to aesthetic skepticism by rejecting the alleged contrast between matters of taste and matters of fact as the rational grounds for our arguing about taste. Objectivity, therefore, holds up as the most direct way to make philosophical sense of our arguing about taste and the expectation of coming to an agreement.[4] Mainly, Kivy's vindication is based on the denial of the long-since alleged difference between taste disagreements and factual ones. The rationality of aesthetic disagreements, he argues, rests on an identification of matters of taste as matters of fact. The following quote illustrates this characterization: "Why are they arguing about *The Philadelphia Story*? If you asked them, I think [they], would find the question as odd as being asked why they are arguing about *any other* matter of fact." (Kivy, 2015, p. 139; my italics).

Kivy gives a two-fold argument for this comparison. First, he proposes that there are two major reasons for arguing in general: (i) "with the ultimate aim of motivating one's opponent to some specific action", or (ii) with the purpose of "convincing one's opponent that one's belief is true and his is not." (Kivy, 2015, p. 95). He rejects (i) for the same reason he denies aesthetic emotivism: since action is the conclusion of practical reasoning and "there is no relevant action, normally, at issue" (Kivy, 2015, p. 96) in aesthetic disputes, the first reason isn't appropriate to make sense of our arguing about taste. Of course, there are reasons – e.g. prudential or moral – to do some actions related to our aesthetic life, like reading music magazines to keep up with new releases or going to art exhibitions. But those would be *motivating* reasons for a certain action or experience, and "there normally seems to be no action the partaker in an aesthetic dispute would have a stake in motivating, so no reason to bring an opponent around to her attitude of aesthetic approval or disapproval." (Kivy, 2015, p. 95). The conclusion for Kivy is then that the only available explanation for engaging in aesthetic arguments must be that, as (ii) suggests, we try to persuade others that our aesthetic judgement is true and theirs is false. Second, Kivy notes that this phenomenological answer doesn't ontologically commit us to the existence of an aesthetic truth. For it does not really matter if aesthetic truth, qualities, and value are real properties of things: what

[4] Not so straightforward, since there are psychological, social or prudential reasons for arguing about taste as well: for the sake of arguing, because one loves conflict, because "one likes to annoy people" (Kivy 2015, p. 95), as a channel of expressing other emotions, due to social pressure, as an *ad hominem* excuse, and so forth. In contrast, *De Gustibus* is concerned with a phenomenological explanation of our arguing about taste.

is significant is that, when judging and arguing about taste, one believes it so, at least partially, even with "low confidence", and behaves *as if* they were.[5]

Kivy's solution may be summed up in the following quote:

> If aesthetic disputes, like ethical ones, are genuine disputes about matters of fact, then there seems to be good reason for one person wanting to bring another around to his aesthetic attitude. He is trying to get the other to get the facts straight, as in all disputes about how the world is. (Kivy 2015, p. 35)

The main appeal of this lies in its normative explanation of our arguing about taste: the fact that we behave as if aesthetic features were real properties of objects means that our aesthetic appreciation is guided by objective criteria by which our taste disagreements may be fruitfully settled. On the basis of this objective criteria is built the expectation of convergence. Consider the following example that Kivy uses to illustrate the sensibility and appropriateness of aesthetic arguments. "Two well-educated individuals" – but not art experts – a dentist and an accountant, argue about the Hollywood classic *The Philadelphia Story*. While "the accountant didn't think much of the movie, the dentist did." (Kivy, 2015, p. 137). The former felt uncomfortable with the movie's worldview on social classes: "it ennobles the rich, by inheritance, over the ambitious, upwardly mobile middle class." (Kivy, 2015, p. 138). The latter, "quite naturally, tries to convince his friend that the film was quite successful." (Kivy, 2015, p. 137). Kivy claims that persuasion, "among other things", consists in "pointing out what [he has] been calling aesthetic features, both the emergent and non-emergent ones, the presence of which in the film he thinks are what makes it a successful one: what makes it a *good movie*." (*ibid.*). Both then try to persuade each other:

> The dentist touts the very attractive features of the film, its setting, its humor, its intriguing characters and amusing plot as his *reasons for believing* that it's a great film of its genre, while the accountant points to the moral flaws of the 'world view' […] that he sees the movie as projecting, in defense of his negative judgement of its merit (Kivy, 2015, p. 139; my italics).

Aesthetic (and in this case, also moral) features of the artwork are used here as reasons not only to defend and back up their overall judgements, but also to persuade each other that one's belief is

[5] See Kivy (2015, p. 159).

true and the other's is false. The goal of our arguing, according to Kivy, depends on the ability of the dentist to persuade his friend that something is, or was, in the work, and to persuade the other of the truth of his belief. He then rejects the definition of aesthetic arguments as "non-straightforwardly factual" ones, one of the characteristics of which is an alleged absence of "smoking guns" or "pieces of evidence that could 'settle the debate in a way that convinces all parties'." (Bordonaba Plou, 2019, p. 170). In contrast, Kivy would defend the idea that there actually are "smoking guns" to be pointed to and persuaded about in aesthetic experience. For him, only the acceptance of such objective criteria can make sense of our arguing.

I believe that Kivy is right in his appeal to objectivity as the only way to make sense of our arguing about taste and aesthetic appreciation in general as normative practices. But *De Gustibus*' appeal to persuasion, I suggest, doesn't fully explain the dynamics of taste disagreements and the autonomy of aesthetic appreciation. In the next section, I will present three main objections to his account.

3. Three Objections to Kivy

My first concern with Kivy's approach has to do with the comparison of taste disagreements as empirical or theoretical ones, which overlooks relevant differences in their respective dynamics and our expectations in each domain. Kivy's equation between matters of taste and matters of fact is, in a way, quite appealing: comparing our arguing about taste to theoretical or empirical arguments, the rationality and pertinence of which is not under debate but taken for granted, simplifies our making sense of aesthetic arguments. Moreover, the comparison is correct in a sense: aesthetic judgements, just like theoretical ones, aim to (correctly) describe and apprehend the world. And it's this orientation towards the world and its objects that rationally grounds our engagement in taste disagreements and our expectations of coming to an agreement. By drawing an characterization of aesthetic disagreements as empirical, factual ones, Kivy responds to criticism about an alleged lack of objectivity in aesthetic discourse, which is set as the *De Gustibus*' main goal from the beginning. The "why" question that heads up the book title echoes the subjectivist doubts about the pointlessness of aesthetic arguments. My suspicion, nonetheless, is that not all our

philosophical concerns about the *raison d'être* for our arguing emerge from skepticism about the possibility of aesthetic objectivity. Some of them, I argue, issue from an agreed-upon contrast between theoretical and aesthetic arguments. For even though the two kinds of judgements are object-oriented (or, even truth-oriented), aesthetic and empirical arguments are not of the same nature. Namely, the former involve a kind of difficulty and resistance to others' reasonings which wouldn't be so appropriate – or at least, usual – in the latter. This contrast, denied by Kivy in his assimilation of matters of taste to matters of fact, is related to aesthetic autonomy. On this regard, Eileen John refers to Robert Hopkins' stance on the matter:

> In empirical matters, when several others share a view that I do not, this can suffice to give me reason to adopt their view. But in aesthetic matters, while others' shared opposition can give me reason to be less confident about my judgment, it seems I do not have reason to adopt their view. Rather, I should 'if possible, test the issue by reexamining the disputed item' (John 2012, p. 194).

The priority of aesthetic autonomy, the legitimate resistance to others' reasons, and the difficulty of changing one's experience are, therefore, fundamental aspects of our arguing about taste. Acknowledging them, I claim, requires a phenomenological answer as well: why would someone (even multitudes!) engage aesthetic disputes if they are entitled to prioritize their own experience over others' and aren't forced to retraction in the same way that they are in straightforward factual disagreements?[6] The point of this objection is that, even if Kivy successfully dealt with full-blooded subjectivists and skeptics, he wouldn't account for any of the aspects above, since his view overlooks taste disagreements' deep roots in our subjective experience. Notably, his account doesn't seem to capture the familiar struggle of changing one's appreciation. Even though changes in appreciation may lead to the formation of new beliefs, changing one's mind – in this case, one's taste – involves much more than a switch of beliefs from a false to a true one, but rather different experiences. What the dentist did exceeds any mere beliefs about the amusing plot or the intrigue of the movie's characters. Plus, Kivy accounts for such change of mind by appealing to persuasion, so the explanation of the resulting evolution of someone's taste would rest on the opponent's ability

[6] David Bordonaba Plou (2020) defends an asymmetry between straightorwardly and non-straightforwardly factual disagreements in terms of retraction and persistency.

to convince others, and not so much on the new, conflicting engagement that it requires from someone like the accountant to exercise of his cognitive, affective, and rational faculties.

Another problem with Kivy's approach is that reasons for believing, to which he appeals, cannot *on their own* change appreciation. This is not to deny that beliefs with aesthetic content can play an important role in appreciation, which they certainly do, but instead to reject that the resulting belief from a theoretical reason may be equated with appreciation. For instance, changes in someone's appreciation of screwball movies (say, from feeling indifference to praising them) may give rise to all sorts of beliefs about the genre's golden years, or gender stereotypes. Similarly, the acquisition of beliefs about its social, economic and political roots also may help us realise relevant features missed in our first watch, the acknowledgement of which might compel a revised outlook on the genre and a different appreciation of it as a result. Nonetheless, even such changes in appreciation cannot be explained by the formation of new, true, and justified beliefs on their own. According to Keren Gorodeisky, "a true belief about the value of the work is not a fully successful response to the critic even though it is true (and even justified). […] Such a belief is not responsive to the critic's reasons, and to the value of the relevant work." (Gorodeisky, 2022, p. 325) Consider again *The Philadelphia Story* example: the dentist's *reasons for believing* that the movie is good are expected to persuade his friend that his belief is false. Our response to theoretical reasons – reasons for believing – is a true, justified belief. But that doesn't seem to be the appropriate response in the aesthetic domain. In other words, reason-responsiveness isn't of the same nature nor has the same "success conditions" in the aesthetic realm than it does in the theoretical one. According to Keren Gorodeisky and Eric Marcus, to take something as an aesthetic reason and to be responsive to it (*qua* aesthetic reason) is not to believe a certain proposition, "not even the proposition that the object merits a certain feeling" (Gorodeisky & Marcus, 2018, p. 117), but instead "is itself to be in a certain affective state" (*ibid.*). When the dentist touts the "very attractive features" of the movie, its setting, humor, intriguing characters and amusing plot, he doesn't only believe in a true and justified way that *The Philadelphia Story* is a wonderful movie, but also and foremost loves, praises, and expresses an appreciative attitude towards it. And for that reason, it wouldn't be a successful response from his friend to just believe that the movie has this and that virtue; instead, the dentist's expectations are that the accountant comes to *appreciate* it in

a similar way to him. The love, praise, and thrill that the dentist expresses wouldn't match up with a mere belief that the accountant acquires from recognizing its value. The expectation of convergence that pervades taste disagreements, therefore, doesn't aim for a change of belief, but a different response.

Aesthetic reasons, on the contrary, are appreciative. As Gorodeisky and Marcus claim, they are "reasons for feeling a certain way", the role of which is at the same time to "explain why we in fact judge the object to be beautiful – which is to say, why we appreciate it – and also why one ought to so judge it" (Gorodeisky & Marcus, 2018, p. 117). Appreciative reasons not only are object-directed but also, in contrast with reasons for believing, "self-directed": "by being conscious of what the object merits, the subject is conscious of her feeling's property." (Gorodeisky & Marcus, 2018, p. 119) The puzzle of *The Philadelphia Story* debate isn't that the accountant doesn't believe, for instance, that the plot is amusing. (It is highly likely that, given the fact that most of his thoughts on the movie appear to be on the moral worldview portrayed, neither he believes that the plot is *not* amusing). In a sense, their disagreement would be even deeper if the accountant believed that the plot was amusing but didn't express such a feeling. Arguably, a theoretical understanding of the practice of reason-giving cannot account for nothing else than a belief as a result, which doesn't satisfy the appreciative condition of what Stanley Cavell calls "the hope of agreement" towards which aesthetic judgements aim.[7]

The third objection is that there isn't an appreciative reason to argue about taste in Kivy's account, since the only two major reasons offered for our arguing in general are either theoretical or practical. For him, *either* one argues for practical reasons, to motivate some specific action in our opponent, *or* one does so for theoretical reasons, to persuade someone that one's belief is true and hers is false. As Kivy examines which one accommodates our arguing about taste better, he rejects outright a practical justification: "there is no reason for me to want you to share my aesthetic attitude because there is no action of yours relevant to that attitude that I have any stake in motivating." (Kivy, 2015, p. 33) And "that *leaves* the second alternative." (Kivy, 2015, p. 100; my italics) Kivy opts for a theoretical justification of our arguing about taste, but he does so as the result of what Gorodeisky defines as the "either/or" assumption. She brings it up in the context of

[7] See Hansen & Adams (2024).

another debate within the discipline, following the discussion on the nature of critical reasons. She observes that all sides of the debate agree that there "can only be *either* theoretical reasons (namely, those that explain what to believe or what propositions are true) *or* practical reasons (namely, those that explain what is to be done or what actions are good/required/called-for/otherwise-worth-doing)." (Gorodeisky, 2022, p. 314) I claim that a similar assumption underlies Kivy's approach, the result of which is a theoretical solution to the subject matter that, as argued above, "falls short of the mark of the relevant success in this domain" (Gorodeisky, 2022, p. 325) and a cloudy view of the appreciation involved in our arguing about taste.

Moreover, according to Gorodeisky, "mere beliefs about the value of works don't aptly capture what the critic [of the relevant genre] articulates in her practice." (Gorodeisky, 2022, p. 315) What turns art critics into ideal appreciators is instead to "standardly articulate their appreciation of the work, and *guide* their audience to appreciate the work similarly." (*ibid.*). The constraints of the "either theoretical or practical" framework in which Kivy is embedded don't make room for a third appreciative justification of our engagement and interest in aesthetic arguments. An appreciative understanding of our arguing about taste that explicitly involves the exercise of our cognitive and affective capacities cannot be apprehended by a theoretical one, for it doesn't leave room for the (sometimes) deep persistence of (some of) our taste disagreements, the difficulty to change one's experience – not to mention one's aesthetic taste or personality –, the priority of aesthetic autonomy, and the consequent resistance to others' reasonings. All of this, I claim, doesn't pose a problem to aesthetic objectivity itself, but just to Kivy's theoretical account of it and the tight identification between aesthetic and empirical disagreements that he offers, which leaves unanswered some relevant issues concerning our arguing about taste.

If the objections above are correct, the success of Kivy's proposal is at risk. And even if some of the worries here raised are not of *De Gustibus*' concern nor the target of Kivy's inquiries, I suggest that a more comprehensive understanding of aesthetic arguments would constitute a better option to grasp unresolved aspects of the practice. I believe that this alternative can be found in Salvador Rubio's (2019) aspectualist approach to the matter, as well as in some analysis of the activity of art criticism.

4. Not a Matter of Persuasion: Aspect-seeing and Reason-giving

In the previous section I argued that the phenomenological answer offered by Kivy has some loose ends in relation to two intrinsic aspects of our arguing about taste, namely the difficulty of changing one's mind and the tendency to resist others' reasons. Were my analysis right, Kivy's standpoint – especially his vindication of objectivity in aesthetics – wouldn't be completely rejected, but the prospects of an alternative view capable of accommodating those neglected aspects of appreciation would be better than his to grasp appreciation. I believe that such accommodation is provided by Rubio's Wittgensteinian approach to our arguing about taste and changes in appreciation. Rubio accepts Kivy's realist phenomenology, but claims that the former's approach accounts "confusingly (or insufficiently, at least) of our arguing about taste" (Rubio, 2019, p. 27). Rather than aiming for persuasion,

> [w]e argue about taste because we are willing to see, and to make other people see, what an artwork, or a piece of an artwork, means or expresses. Of course, that 'seeing' is always related (fortunately) to the twofoldness of the aspect seeing: when I see the new aspect of the thing, I see that the thing is completely different, but at the same time I see that it is the same thing. Consequently, what I see 'is' always 'in' the thing, but at the same time it is dependent on my seeing in order to have this aspect (*ibid.*).

The twofoldness of aspect-seeing captures both our pursuit of the object's merits and the inescapable bond between this pursuit and our seeing.[8] Seeing an aspect once unseen is often the result of arguing and speaking about art. Changes in appreciation come along with the recognition that the newly seen aspect is "in" the thing, as an objective feature, which explains our interest in correctness and our engagement in aesthetic arguments, as well as with the realisation of the dependence of the aspect on my seeing, which completely modifies my seeing of the thing. Therefore, aspect-seeing has the internal resources to account for our resistance to others' reasons and the difficulty of changing one's appreciation *without* giving up objectivity. For the accountant

[8] Gorodeisky and Marcus' Kantian account of aesthetic pleasure grasps the unity of both aspects of appreciation similarly: "aesthetic pleasure is both 'object-directed' and 'self-directed': by being conscious of what the object merits, the subject is conscious of her feeling's propriety" (Gorodeisky & Marcus, 2018, p. 119).

to see *The Philadelphia Story* under a new, different aspect and pay more attention to the aesthetic merits of the movie and less to the moral worldview, the dentist will have to do something more than persuade him: he will have to help him see. Rubio's aspectualism contrasts here with Kivy in the two following points.

Firstly, Rubio says: "I see that the seeing is a seeing, rather than just a trial to convince someone else (to make someone believe) that something is in the work." (Rubio, 2019, p. 27) Consider, for instance, a disagreement between two people on the last Justine Triet movie *Anatomy of a Fall*. One of them complains about that the film, technically exquisite and impeccably scripted, doesn't really break the audience down, in the sense that she waited for an "emotional shock" that didn't come, whereas the other likes it precisely because of that. Persuading the other of the presence of an aesthetic feature, which is the goal of our arguing about taste for Kivy, doesn't seem to be the solution here. For they both believe, truly and justified, that there is an emotional absence in the movie. The way in which Kivy understands our grasping of objective facts leaves no room for the unavoidable dependence of my seeing that comes along with aesthetic objectivity. The fact that both grasp the absence of an emotional shock doesn't mean that their grasp is phenomenologically identical, nor that the content of their beliefs is entirely the same. Trying to persuade the other that there is something in the work – in this case, an "emotional shock" that doesn't come – wouldn't end the disagreement, since the main issue here is that their respective seeings of that *something* aren't the same. This kind of disagreement is not uncommon in aesthetics, but an explanation of it in Kivy's terms, in contrast with aspectualism, comes with difficulty.

Secondly, Rubio argues that "my seeing reveals a natural link, not only to the features in the work, but to the external world around it" (Rubio, 2019, p. 27), and illustrates this idea with Jordi Llovet's strategy to help us understand the unity of *Le Nozze di Figaro*. He invites us

> […] to raise our eyes from the music and looking to the musical and dramatic building of characters […] to understand and justify the organic unity of the music. […] But it is also an invitation to look at the music again, remarking on the musical diversity in a new seeing now coherent with the whole artistic plan of the opera (Rubio, 2019, p. 31).

The "typical procedures" we use to argue about taste are not just pointing to the aesthetic features of a certain artwork, which for Kivy would include both emergent as well as non-emergent features, but also activities that involve seeing beyond the movie *and* returning back for a different sight of it. Let's consider how the emphasis Kivy puts on pointing to aesthetic features as a way to form new, true beliefs fits with the activity of criticism. Regarding again *The Philadelphia Story* argument, film criticism would also point to aesthetic features of the movie, but I believe that this "pointing out" isn't just realized by the assertion of, for instance, its bitterness, but instead by getting the audience to experience it. Compare, therefore, the pointing out of the intriguing characters and amusing plot of the movie with the first clue that the Spanish film critic and director José Luis Garci gives to the audience to appreciate the movie in general and the bitter taste of it.[9] Similarly to Llovet's strategy, he invites the audience to raise their eyes away from the movie and compare *The Philadelphia Story* with the lightness of fellow screwball comedies. Apart from comparisons, famously vindicated by David Hume[10], critics are mostly expected to get the audience into a position to have a certain experience. In this regard, Stanley Cavell claims that the story about Sancho Panza's relatives discussed in Hume's 'Of the Standard of Taste' "is *not* a good model for understanding the form of aesthetic judgements" (Hansen & Adams, 20124, p. 745), because

> it dissociates the exercise of taste from the discipline of accounting for it: but *all* that makes the critic's expression of taste worth more than another man's is his ability to produce for himself the thong and key of his response; and his vindication comes not from his pointing out that it is, or was, in the barrel, but in getting us to taste it there. (*ibid.*).

Here Nat Hansen and Zed Adams identify in Cavell a phenomenological reason to argue about taste, this time in terms of appreciation: what he refers as "the discipline of accounting for" aesthetic judgements may be interpreted as "a readiness to argue for the correctness of one's aesthetic judgements in the face of disagreement, with the aim of bringing about a shared feeling or emotion in one's interlocutor." (Hansen & Adams, 2024, p. 746). And they conclude: "the

[9] Garci's critical commentary of *The Philadelphia Story* belongs to a series of screen classics' discussions for the Spanish TV programme *Cine en blanco y negro* (Telemadrid).
[10] See Hume (1757/1910).

vindication of the critic's judgment comes from 'getting us to taste' what he tastes in the object being judged" (*ibid.*).

Persuasion may have an expressive meaning here, in contrast with Kivy's approach: what people involved in aesthetic arguments aim for is *showing* their opponent how to appreciate a certain aspect or artwork. The resulting response from the audience to this "showing how" can be understood in terms of what Gorodeisky calls "mirroring" what the critic has done:

> Critics neither rationally support the audience's appreciation of the relevant work independently of the audience's own appreciation of these reasons, nor communicate premises on the basis of which the audience is to infer a conclusion. Instead, by articulating their own rationally supported appreciative experiences of works, critics offer themselves as our appreciative mirrors (Gorodeisky, 2022, p. 327-8).

Aiming or, in Cavell's terms, 'hoping' for agreement would not be then a matter of persuasion (to adopt a true and justified belief), but of getting others to see things differently, either by means of expression (of approval or disapproval) of how it looks to get things right, or by giving reasons.[11] The consideration of the latter I will hopefully get to examine elsewhere. But for the time being I believe that the practice of giving aesthetic reasons, far from being the premise by which one can infer aesthetic judgements as conclusions, is not to be "dissociated" – as pointed out by Cavell's quote – from the activity of judging itself. Further inquiry into the rational dimension of aesthetic judgements, understood by Fabian Dorsch (2013) in inferential terms, will test the viability and appropriateness of a non-inferentialist account of reasoning in aesthetics.

5. Conclusion

In this paper I've argued that the approach to the issue of aesthetic arguments outlined by Peter Kivy is partially incorrect. Even though his appeal to objectivity is successful on the rejection of full-blooded subjectivism and skepticism about our arguing about taste, the comparison between factual (or theoretical) and aesthetic domains that he puts forth is misleading, as well as his picture

[11] See Hansen & Adams (2024).

of persuasion as our motivating reason. On the one hand, his approach faces major difficulties in accounting for the resistance to other's reasonings, the priority to our experience above others', and the struggle to change one's appreciation. This difficulty, nonetheless, doesn't issue from appealing to objectivity in aesthetics, but from Kivy's characterization of aesthetic arguments as factual, empirical ones. On the other hand, the theoretical justification of aesthetic arguments suggested in *De Gustibus* doesn't apprehend their appreciative dimension: what appreciators do when judging is different from believing certain (sets of) propositions, even if those beliefs are true and justified and have aesthetic content. I've claimed, in turn, that Rubio's aspectualism gives a better explanation of our arguing about taste, taste developments, and changes in appreciation. The activity of art criticism, on this regard, hints at the unity of our judging and accounting for and justifying it: the reason behind our arguing is, against Kivy, not a matter of persuasion, but instead a "willingness" to see and "getting" others there as well.

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