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Some Difficulties with the Reidian Argument for Aesthetic Realism

This paper deals with aesthetic realism as a theoretical issue, which should be distinguished from aesthetic realism as a normative view, that is, the view that the work of art ought to represent or express reality. Aesthetic realism as a theoretical issue is not concerned with the question of the normative relation between the work of art and reality. It is rather a claim about the status, not of the work of art as such, but of aesthetic properties in general, whether natural or artificial. The claim, roughly, is the following: (1) There are aesthetic properties (such as “ugly”, “handsome”, “tedious”, “beautiful”, or “interesting”) to which our aesthetic judgements point or react. And (2) these properties exist in the objects independently of our aesthetic judgements.

We must distinguish, at least, between weak realism and strong realism, according to the answers given to two questions: (a) May aesthetic properties be clearly perceived through our aesthetic judgements? (b) Are aesthetic judgements liable to be true or false? Strong realism answers “yes” to both questions. Weak realism claims that aesthetic properties should be viewed, not as objects directly accessible to the aesthetic sense, but rather as the hidden causes of our aesthetic responses, which may be appropriate or inappropriate, and thus that the correlative aesthetic judgments are not, properly speaking, true or false.

In the opposite direction, antirealism or subjectivism claims that so-called aesthetic properties are nothing but affective mental states, or predicates expressing such states. We may distinguish in the same way strong antirealism and weak antirealism. Strong antirealism answers “yes” to the question: are these mental states peculiar to each individual?, whereas weak antirealism claims that these states are shareable – indeed they may be universally shareable. According to strong antirealism,

aesthetic judgements, basically, are arbitrary, whereas weak antirealism maintains that, albeit subjective, they have a *sui generis* necessity or objectivity.

If we apply these distinctions to eighteenth century philosophers, we have reasons to categorise the Scottish philosopher Thomas Reid as a strong realist, while Francis Hutcheson, the author of the *Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* embodies weak realism. According to most commentators, David Hume is a strong subjectivist, whereas it is commonly acknowledged that Kant gives the best formulation of weak subjectivism, when he argues that, when an individual X recognises O as beautiful, X claims both that O pleases him or her and that O should please anybody in a similar context.

The aim of this paper is to briefly discuss some arguments pro and contra strong realism in the Reidian fashion and also to qualify the use that Roger Pouivet has made recently of Reid's theory in his defence of aesthetic strong realism¹. Pouivet, first, makes use of Reid's epistemological arguments against subjectivism, idealism, and scepticism. Secondly, he ascribes to Reid the ontological claim that beauty is a real quality in beautiful things.

1. Two epistemological arguments against antirealism

Before I discuss the second point, to which I will devote myself in this paper, I would like to say a word about the first one. There are several epistemological arguments against aesthetic antirealism. One argument is that common sense beliefs stand up to the best idealist, subjectivist, or sceptic theories. We have common sense beliefs and as long as we do not have strong reasons to reject them we ought not to reject them. If the sceptics know of strong reasons to reject them, we would be glad to hear about them. According to the argument from common sense, the burden of proof is therefore on the side of the sceptics.

Obviously this argument is not specific enough. The philosophical gigantomachia between commonsensists and sceptics concerns all aspects of human knowledge, from ethics to metaphysics. A philosopher who would confront the issue of the ontological

¹ Roger Pouivet, *Le réalisme esthétique*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2006.

status of aesthetic properties with the preliminary view that subjectivists of any kind are always wrong would be biased against aesthetic subjectivism for reasons that are not peculiar to the point under discussion. I do not mean that the issues with which the ontology of aesthetic properties deals have to be very different from problems discussed in the fields of metaphysics, epistemology, or metaethics. But we cannot broach aesthetic theory with the unquestioned assumption that it is just a particular application of general views.

Another epistemological argument is that when we say that X is beautiful, we mean that X is beautiful, not just that X pleases us. As Reid puts it: "Why should I use a language that expresses the contrary of what I mean?"² A well-known problem with the argument from meaning is that it does not rule out equivalents, in the field of aesthetics, of various forms of metaethical projectivism, such as quasi-realism³.

Let us take for granted that when I say that O is beautiful I mean that O is beautiful in itself, not just that I feel pleasure when I behold it. Firstly, on the surface, the structure of aesthetic judgement, thus construed, suggests that subjectivists theories do not correctly account for the status of aesthetic properties, since aesthetic judgement points to these properties as aspects of the object, not as subjective states. However, we should not infer from this that aesthetic properties are objective, but rather that there is a built-in claim to objectivity within aesthetic judgements. It might seem to a philosopher that the structure of aesthetic judgements speaks for realism; in fact, it is just the way these judgements are made up. There is no theoretical conclusion to draw from it.

² Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, edited by D.R. Brookes, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002, p. 577. See also p. 574: "According to those philosophers [...] there is no beauty in any object whatsoever; it is only a sensation or feeling in the person that perceives it. The language and the common sense of mankind contradict this theory. Even those who hold it, find themselves obliged to use a language that contradicts it."

³ Simon Blackburn, "Errors and the Phenomenology of Value", in *Morality and Objectivity: A Tribute to J. L. Mackie*, edited by Ted Honderich, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985.

Secondly, if we tackle the issue also from the side of meaning, it is doubtful that if subjectivists were correct then language would “express the contrary of what I mean”. Suppose that I had a phobia about Yorkshire terriers. If I say that this Yorkshire terrier is scary, I do mean that I am scared by it, not necessarily that it is in itself scary. If a friend tells me “come on, you should not be afraid, it is a very cute and gentle little animal”, she does mean that I should not view it as a fierce beast, not necessarily that it is in itself cute and gentle. Why should it be different in the case of aesthetic judgements? When I say that the Mona Lisa is beautiful, I do certainly mean that it pleases me, that it should please other people too, that there in it a *je ne sais quoi* that is causally responsible for this common experience, and that experts in Renaissance art with the help of x-ray engineers may eventually find what it is. But it is doubtful that what I mean when I claim in various situations that X is beautiful reaches always so far. In short, I do not see why realism should be more on the side of common sense than subjectivism, at least in its weak version.

2. The Reidian ontological claim and the two-component view

Let us turn now to the alleged Reidian ontological claim. In his recent book on aesthetic realism, Pouivet draws on the authority of the modern father of metaphysical and ethical realism:

“Aesthetic realism maintains that beauty is a “real quality” of beautiful things. This is Thomas Reid’s claim: *When I hear an air in music that pleases me, I say, it is fine and agreeable. This excellence is not in me, it is in the music.* Most philosophers hold it untrue. I will defend it.”⁴

Pouivet claims to quote from Reid’s *Essays on the Intellectual Powers* (published in 1785), Essay VIII, chapter 1. This quote is intended to be the motto of aesthetic realism.

⁴ Pouivet, *Le réalisme esthétique*, p. 135: “Le réalisme esthétique, enfin, affirme que la beauté est une ‘qualité réelle’ des belles choses. C’est la thèse de Thomas Reid: ‘*Quand j’entends un air de musique qui me plaît, je dis qu’il est bon et agréable. Cette excellence n’est pas en moi; elle est dans la musique.*’ La plupart des philosophes la pensent fausse. Je vais la défendre.”

But there are two problems here. For, firstly, Reid had written “it is fine, it is excellent”, not “it is fine and agreeable”.⁵ Pouivet alters Reid’s text, since he translates “it is fine, it is excellent” “il est bon et agréable”. “Agréable” is not the right translation for “excellent”. It is not even a synonym for it. What is at stake is the question whether Reid does or does not maintain that aesthetic pleasure is something different from (albeit connected with) the knowledge of the excellence. In my opinion, he does. Secondly, Pouivet just drops the next sentence: “But the pleasure it gives is not in the music, it is in me”. To sum up, according to Reid, the sense of beauty has two ingredients: (1) the pleasure produced in me by the object; (2) the excellence in the object, that is, its intrinsic quality. A good account of Reid’s opinion on the subject should mention both points.⁶

Moreover, in the same passage, Reid stresses that his claim is about the existence of “excellence”, and this does not necessarily entail a claim about the knowledge of excellence:

“Perhaps I cannot say what it is in the tune that pleases my ear, as I cannot say what it is in the tune that pleases my palate; but there is a quality in the sapid body which pleases my palate, and I call it a delicious taste; and there is a quality in the tune that pleases my taste, and I call it a fine or an excellent air.”⁷

Of course this does not exclude the possibility of our being able, as experts, to discern and know the qualities involved.⁸

⁵ Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, p. 574.

⁶ In his parallel paper on “Thomas Reid’s Aesthetic Realism” (*Journal of Scottish Philosophy*, 3 (1), 2005, pp. 35-45), Pouivet quotes the passage under discussion without altering Reid’s text. However, as in his book, he does not mention the next sentence about pleasure.

⁷ Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, p. 574.

⁸ “Though some of the qualities that please a good taste resemble the secondary qualities of body, and therefore may be called occult qualities, as we only feel their effect, and have no more knowledge of the cause, but that it is something which is adapted by Nature to produce that effect; this is not always the case. Our judgement of beauty is in many cases more enlightened.” Ibid.

In short, according to Pouivet's reading of Reid, the sense of beauty amounts to the knowledge of the excellence in the object. This interpretation tends to reduce aesthetic appreciation to its cognitive aspects and underestimates the relational nature of beauty, or more precisely the importance of the causal relation between objective properties and pleasure.

I think that, to be true to Reid, we must ascribe him what I will call the two-component view, which he formulates in this passage from his *Essays on the Intellectual Powers*, VIII, chapter 4:

“All the objects we call beautiful agree in two things, which seem to concur in our sense of beauty. First, when they are perceived, or even imagined, they produce a certain agreeable emotion or feeling in the mind; and, secondly, this agreeable emotion is accompanied with an opinion or belief of their having some perfection or excellence belonging to them.”⁹

It is obvious here that the “agreeable” component is different from the opinion about the excellence of the object, since if they were identical Reid would not say that they “concur in our sense of beauty”. Needless to say, the “agreeable” component is subjective in the sense that it is in the mind of the spectator or the auditor:

“The sense of beauty may be analysed in a manner very similar to the sense of sweetness. It is an agreeable feeling or emotion, accompanied with an opinion or judgement of some excellence in the object, which is fitted by Nature to produce that feeling. The feeling is, no doubt, in the mind, and so also is the judgement we form of the object; but this judgement, like all others, must be true or false. If it be a true judgement, there is some excellence in the object.”¹⁰

It is important to notice that it is the judgement, not the feeling as such that can be true or false. We find here one reason of considering Reid as a strong realist, since he answers “yes” to the question: are aesthetic judgements liable to be true or false?

The excellence is intrinsic, non-relational, that is, it exists independently of its being perceived by the spectator. At the same time, excellence would not be fully

⁹ Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, p. 592.

¹⁰ Ibid.

discovered if there were not people who are expert at detecting it. There is no contradiction between the claim that excellence is intrinsic to the object and the claim that it must be, so to speak, tasted by connoisseurs. On the contrary, the need for expertise speaks in favour of the view that appreciation is not a matter of purely subjective preferences, but must be grounded on the consideration of the qualities of the object.

The pleasure is produced in the mind by the excellence of the object. When Reid writes that the objective excellence is “fitted by Nature” to produce the agreeable feeling, “Nature”, here, far from being opposed to the supernatural, is the same thing as providence. The relation between the pleasure and the excellence involves not two, but three terms: the pleasure, the excellence, and Nature, or more accurately the “constitution of our nature”¹¹ as it is determined by divine providence. The causal relation by which the excellence produces the object is not necessary or intrinsic in the sense that the excellence would by itself produce the pleasure; it is rather mediated by a third term, “Nature”, which fits that excellence to produce that pleasure. God is behind the seeming two-term relation between excellence and pleasure. The causality from the object to the subject appears to be contingent to some extent, that is, in so far as it depends on the divine providence. In this context, “contingent” does not mean “arbitrary”.

However, Reid’s views on this subject may be very differently construed, since he refuses to settle the matter.¹² He is indeed attracted by Richard Price’s anti-Hutchesonian strong realism. Price, in the second chapter of his *Review of the Principal Questions of Morals*, goes so far as to assume that there is, at least in some cases, a necessary connection between aesthetic pleasure in the subject and a “natural aptitude to please” in the object. Price rejects Hutcheson’s concept of an internal “sense”, i.e. of a

¹¹ Ibid, p. 578. Reid speaks also of “the constitution of man by the appointment of Nature” (p. 580).

¹² Ibid, p. 592: “Whether the pleasure we feel in contemplating beautiful objects may have any necessary connection with the belief of their excellence, or whether that pleasure be conjoined with this belief, by the good pleasure only of our maker, I will not determine.”

faculty adapted by God to the qualities it is intended to detect. We might say that Reid's views on the topic are somewhere between Hutcheson and Price, closer to Price in the intent, but not so distant from Hutcheson from the standpoint of his conceptual means. For when Reid works on establishing the reality of beauty, a result that Price would approve of, he has recourse to qualities in a way quite comparable to Hutcheson's analysis of our sense of beauty, provided that we construe Hutcheson's argument as an instance of weak realism and that we seriously diminish its non-cognitivist trend.

The pleasure is "in the mind". Reid says that the judgement is also in the mind. However, they are not in the mind in the same manner. The judgement, seen from the angle of its mental nature, is in the mind of the one who judges, but, seen from the angle of its cognitive content, points to the object outside. Therefore, it is subjective in a sense that does not exclude it from having an objective content. The pleasure is only in the mind and the relation of the pleasure to the object outside is that of an effect to its cause. This is why we may say that pleasure is subjective in a strong sense.

According to this interpretation, Reid might seem not that distant from Hume, since there is a flavour of a two-component theory when Hume stresses that functional properties in the object are partly the source of aesthetic appreciation. As he puts it in his *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, VI, 2:

"Broad shoulders, a lank belly, firm joints, taper legs; all these are beautiful in our species, because signs of force and vigour. Ideas of utility and its contrary, though they do not entirely determine what is handsome or deformed, are evidently the source of a considerable part of approbation or dislike."

On the surface, Hume recognises the importance of "excellence" as an ingredient of the experience of beauty in the object. It is true that those passages in which Hume insists that there is something in the structure of the object that plays a role in the recognition of beauty do not fit in with Reid's usual charge against Hume as a representative of the post-Cartesian way of ideas that reduces our experience of the world to subjective phenomena. Here Hume speaks the language of realism. However, we should not be taken in. In the Humean version of the two-component theory, the major role is played by pleasure, for which structural excellence is only, so to speak, a stooge:

"Attend to Palladio and Perrault, while they explain all the parts and proportions of a pillar: They talk of the cornice and frieze and base and entablature and shaft and

architrave; and give the description and position of each of these members. But should you ask the description and position of its beauty, they would readily reply, that the beauty is not in any of the parts or members of a pillar, but results from the whole, when that complicated figure is presented to an intelligent mind, susceptible to those finer sensations.'Till such a spectator appear, there is nothing but a figure of such particular dimensions and proportions: From his sentiments alone arise its elegance and beauty."¹³

What conveys the distinctive colours of beauty or ugliness to our experience? It is not the structure of the object alone, nor even the relation between the two components, but only the structure of the mind. As Hume puts it:

“Euclid has fully explained all the qualities of the circle; but has not, in any proposition, said a word of its beauty. The reason is evident. The beauty is not a quality of the circle. It lies not in any part of the line, whose parts are equally distant from a common centre. It is only the effect, which that figure produces upon the mind, whose peculiar fabric or structure renders it susceptible of such sentiments.”¹⁴

It is worth noticing that Reid does not simply content himself with inverting Hume's account. That would lead him to claim that the structure of the object alone bears aesthetic values. He does not substitute absolute objectivism for subjectivism. On the contrary, Reid takes seriously the two-component view and ascribes to the relation between the objective structure and the structure of the mind the charge of producing the experience of beauty.

Why restore the two-component view as Reid's official opinion on the subject? It is not only a matter of philological meticulousness. My reasons are also philosophical. I will try to show that the two-component view, according to which the sense of beauty involves both an opinion about the perfection of the object and a feeling produced by the object, is more able to solve difficulties and more plausible than an interpretation of strong realism that dismisses the subjective component as insignificant.

¹³ Hume, *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, Appendix 1.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

3. A few arguments contra pseudo-Reidian aesthetic realism and pro the two-component theory

I have suggested above that epistemological arguments against aesthetic antirealism are not specific, but apply to other kinds of antirealism, as if the case of aesthetic antirealism was similar to that of moral antirealism. Now it is obvious that moral properties and aesthetic properties are not on the same level, since usually the claim to objectivity is really stronger in moral matters than in aesthetic matters. When I say that X is morally ugly I never mean that, whatever it be in itself, it just makes me feel uneasy, whereas when I say that X is aesthetically ugly it may happen that I mean that I just feel uneasy with it as far as I am concerned. On the ladder of the reality of values, if moral properties are located at the top, I would describe aesthetic properties as lower, and I would place conventions such as politeness or etiquette at the bottom. Were moral realism difficult to defend, then the case of aesthetic realism would be even worse.

In order to estimate the claim to objectivity in various contexts, we should have recourse to a phenomenological approach to values. We would then discover intriguing facts, variable and dependent upon social and cultural contexts. For instance, in the case of a disagreement in aesthetic matters, even about topics close to my heart, I hesitate to breach politeness, whereas I do not hesitate to contradict someone on significant moral matters. Another intriguing fact from which there is much to learn: Within the aesthetic field, in certain contexts, realism about ugliness is often weaker than realism about beauty at least when persons are concerned, as if the intensity of the claim to objectivity in aesthetic judgements about people could be affected by politeness or the demands of respect for other people. It seems to me that the defence of aesthetic realism cannot draw only on metaphysical arguments about the status of properties or epistemological arguments about our access to values. We would need a fine phenomenology of aesthetic experience to understand what we mean when we ascribe aesthetic properties to an object.

Can the two-component theory account for these facts? At least, it is compatible with them. According to the two-component theory, aesthetic experience involves both a subjective pleasure (or dislike) and an objective “excellence” (or imperfection), combined in various degrees. When I say that X is beautiful or ugly it may be the case that I mean both, that is, pleasure plus excellence (or dislike plus imperfection), or that I

mean one of them more than the other. This fits in with the fact that the following statements may make sense in some contexts: “It is ugly, but I like it”; “I do not say that it is ugly, I just say I do not like it”; “I see that it is well-done, but I do not like it”.

The two-component theory amounts to say that aesthetic judgement cannot be reduced to the knowledge of aesthetic properties in the object. It involves *also* the pleasure that the properties produce in me. This is why when we say that X is beautiful, the claim is very ambiguous, since we may mean one of the following:

1. That X has certain qualities (which we may condense into “excellence”) liable to produce some pleasure in us and that the qualities presently or usually produce that pleasure, either in a merely causal way (without our knowing), or in a both causal and cognitive way (when we do not confusedly perceive the qualities, but do know them).
2. That X presently or usually produces a pleasure such as the one that qualities encapsulated by “excellence” produce – here the focus is on pleasure and it happens each time that we feel pleasure without having any notion, or at least any clear notion, of the qualities that produce it.
3. That X has certain qualities such as the ones that are liable to produce pleasure – here the focus is on “excellence” and it happens when we act as experts and have a cognitive relation to the qualities. Of course the expert may feel pleasure, but uses it rather as a tool to detect and estimate the qualities.

It is interesting to notice that Reid indirectly affirms that the judgement “X is beautiful” is ambiguous. He maintains that the “internal power of the mind by which we perceive what is beautiful” (this is how he names what we call “aesthetic judgement”) is analogous to the “external sense of taste by which we distinguish and relish the various kinds of food”.¹⁵ Both are structured in such a way as a feeling (a sensation in the case of the taste of the palate; an emotion in the case of the sense of beauty) is a sign of the quality that causes it. We use the same term to signify both. For instance “piquant” stands both for the flavour and for the quality in the object, which is responsible for the flavour (the example is mine). Reid’s analysis of aesthetic judgement develops within the framework of his theory of perception, which is indeed a two-component theory. Since Reid insists that the “internal power of taste bears a great analogy in this respect

¹⁵ Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, p. 573.

to the external”, we have good ground for ascribing to Reid the view that there is a semantic instability in aesthetic judgement. Let us formulate this:

When I claim that X is beautiful, I mean that X is beautiful₁ or beautiful₂ or both in different proportions.

Being beautiful₁ = having qualities encapsulated by “excellence”. Of course the use of the term “excellence” is subject to examination and should not exempt philosophers from trying to identify and list those qualities.

Being beautiful₂ = producing or being capable of producing pleasure. In fact, that pleasure must be specific. It must be the kind of pleasure that excellence produces. Conversely, we should put on the list of excellence qualities that produce that pleasure. The specification of pleasure as aesthetic and the identification of qualities that are relevant to aesthetic experience are interdependent.

It may be the case that X be beautiful₁ without being beautiful₂ and conversely. But these are borderline cases. Usually, aesthetic judgement involves the intention of both expressing pleasure and pointing out remarkable qualities that are responsible for that pleasure. The great variety of contexts in which aesthetic judgement develops, and its various degrees of elaboration from animal reaction (what Reid terms the “instinctive sense of beauty”¹⁶) to connoisseurship (the “rational judgement of beauty”¹⁷), suggest one important feature which a good aesthetic theory should account for: focus variation, that is, the contextual ability of aesthetic judgement of gradually shifting from a focus on properties to a focus on appreciation.¹⁸

Now we can address the big question: does the two-component view make any difference to the question of the ontological status of aesthetic properties? I think that it does, even though the improvement might seem only marginal. Since aesthetic judgement is a response to some properties in the object, the aesthetic nature of so-called aesthetic properties is deeply relational. Excellence is just one side of beauty, the

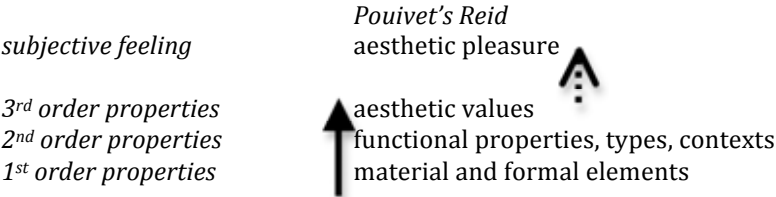
¹⁶ Ibid, p. 596.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 598.

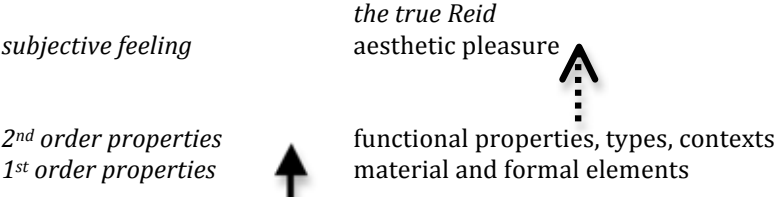
¹⁸ Reid often insists that there is a “great diversity” in the degrees and in the kinds of beauty. See p. 575.

other side being pleasure; excellence is really in the object, but is a functional in the broad sense, not a (strictly speaking) aesthetic property.

Let us draw on Pouivet’s very elaborate diagram of properties involved in the aesthetic experience.¹⁹ The continuous arrow indicates (weak) supervenience. $n + 1$ order-properties are (weakly) supervenient upon n order-properties if and only if when there is a difference between $n + 1$ order-properties there must be also a difference between n order-properties. The dotted arrow, which I add to Pouivet’s diagram, indicates a causal relation.



My view of Reid’s doctrine is slightly different:



2nd order properties are supervenient upon 1st order properties and they produce aesthetic responses. My question is whether aesthetic responses should be construed as 3rd order objective properties (aesthetic values), supervenient upon functional properties, or as subjective effects of functional properties which cause them and to which they point in a more or less cognitive way (as “signs”). I think that Reid maintains the latter answer.

What Reid terms “excellence” amounts to functional properties, not to alleged aesthetic properties:

“To one who understands it perfectly, and perceives how every part is fitted with exact judgement to its end, the beauty is not mysterious; it is perfectly comprehended; and he knows wherein it consists, as well as how it affects him.”²⁰

¹⁹ Pouivet, *Le réalisme esthétique*, pp. 136-141.

²⁰ Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, p. 574.

The structural perfection in the object (functional properties) is clearly distinguished from beauty, although it is causally connected with it.

“Beauty or deformity in an object results from its nature or structure. To perceive the beauty, therefore, we must perceive the nature or structure from which it results”.²¹

According to the two-component scheme, aesthetic values are not supervenient upon functional properties, because they are not properties of the object in the same sense, but consist in the combination of the perception of functional properties with a specific pleasure (caused by functional properties). For Reid, the “excellence” alone, as a functional property, does not suffice to induce beauty: “There is no real excellence which has not its beauty to a discerning eye, when placed in a proper point of view”. Of course, this does not mean that the emotion of beauty is projected onto the object, but that the object is conditionally beautiful, i.e., that its being beautiful appears if there is a “discerning eye” around. We may say then, with Pouivet, that being beautiful is an extrinsic, albeit real, property of the object, that is, a property that the object has only if there is someone around with the right dispositions.²² Since aesthetic pleasure is produced in the subject by (functional) properties of the object, an object cannot be said aesthetically pleasing independently of the effect that it produces, which supposes the existence of someone who feels the pleasure. In my opinion, Reid’s stresses the significance of *intrinsic* functional properties (“excellence”) and does not conflate the property of being “excellent” with real extrinsic properties such as “beautiful”, “ugly”, etc.

Therefore, when Pouivet writes (in the passage quoted at the beginning of this paper) that “aesthetic realism holds that beauty is a real quality of beautiful things” and claims that Reid is an aesthetic realist in that sense, he quotes him as if “excellence” was the real quality, beauty itself, whereas it is obvious that excellence as an intrinsic functional property cannot be identical to beauty, which is an extrinsic property. When Reid speaks of excellence as “having its beauty”, this does not entail that excellence and beauty are identical, on the contrary.

²¹ Ibid, p. 578.

²² Pouivet, *Le réalisme esthétique*, p. 168.

4. Conclusion

The relation between excellence and pleasure, through which excellence produces pleasure, is causal and often cognitive. It is always cognitive only in the case of the expert. Therefore, it is impossible to account for aesthetic pleasure purely in terms of knowledge of excellence. Reid's strong realism draws on the two-component view in order to describe the various proportions in which instinctive responses (to hidden causes) and clear perceptions (of identifiable perfections) are mixed. As he puts it:

“Although the instinctive and the rational sense of beauty may be perfectly distinguished in speculation, yet, in passing judgement upon particular objects, they are often so mixed and confounded, that it is difficult to assign to each its own province.”²³

Reid is a strong realist of a very open-minded kind, since he acknowledges that weak realism, according to which the ontological claim is confined to the existence of unknown properties, is correct at least in some cases.

I am in favour of a still more indulgent version of strong realism. Why not admit that in some cases weak subjectivism is correct too? The degree to which the claim to objectivity takes precedence (or not) over the acceptance of the subjectivity of aesthetic pleasure is variable and should be determined phenomenologically, not theoretically. In the experience of beauty, its elusiveness is as important as its reality. To some extent, subjectivism is embedded within aesthetic experience (contra the Reidian epistemological argument from common sense) and a sound version of strong realism should not need to deny this. It must be more sensitive to the diverse ways in which aesthetic cultures mix the claim to subjectivity with the claim to objectivity, in an unstable fashion for which a two-component theory could account. Here philosophical aesthetics must make room for substantive aesthetics, comparative aesthetics in particular, and pay attention to the historical and geographical varieties of aesthetic experience.

²³ Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, p. 598.