

Autonomism Reconsidered

Abstract: This paper has three aims: to define autonomism clearly and charitably, to offer a positive argument in its favor, and to defend a larger view about what is at stake in the debate between autonomism and its critics. Autonomism is here understood as the claim that a valuer does not make an error in failing to bring her moral and aesthetic judgments together, unless she herself does values doing so. The paper goes on to argue that reason does not require the valuer to make coherent her aesthetic and moral evaluations. Finally, the paper shows that the denial of autonomism has realist commitments that autonomism does not have, and concludes that issues of value realism and irrealism are relevant to the debates about autonomism in ways that have not hitherto been recognized.

The autonomist is a well-known bogeyman in philosophical aesthetics, an ardent defender of the freedom of aesthetic evaluation from moral and political intrusion. However, few contemporary philosophers are willing to call themselves autonomists.<sup>1</sup> Since the revival of interest in the moral criticism of art some twenty-five years or so ago, a mere handful have written on behalf of autonomism, while a staggering number have risen up to attack it. (It was not always so.<sup>2</sup>) As a result, these days, autonomism is defined largely by its critics: even the name 'autonomism' was coined by a critic of the view.<sup>3</sup> The result is the proliferation of a great number of views alleging some interaction between aesthetics and ethics; these views have been

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<sup>1</sup> There are, to my knowledge, only *two* publications that explicitly defend autonomism as such: Anderson, James and Jeffrey Dean (1998), 'Moderate Autonomism,' British Journal of Aesthetics, vol. 38 (2), 150-166; and Dickie, George (2005), 'The Triumph in *Triumph of the Will*,' British Journal of Aesthetics, vol. 45 (2), 151-156. Peter Lamarque has made it very clear in a number of public talks that he advocates some version of autonomism, and several of his publications make arguments that give ammunition to autonomism: for example, Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen (1994), Truth, Fiction, and Literature (Oxford, Clarendon Press), Chapter 15, 'Literature as Philosophy,' 368-97. In addition to these, Berys Gaut names several others as autonomists, including Monroe Beardsley, Arnold Isenberg, and William Gass, and claims to find arguments for autonomism in their writings. None of these philosophers used the term 'autonomism' or argued directly for it, though they made some arguments that can certainly be understood as being sympathetic to autonomism. It is not obvious to me that any of these writers took themselves to be defending autonomism as it is now understood, however. See Gaut, Berys (2007), Art, Emotion, and Ethics (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 76-82. By contrast, a list of contemporary critics of autonomism would be very long indeed, but would at a minimum include: Roman Bonzon, Noël Carroll, Mary Devereaux, A.W. Eaton, Marcia Muelder Eaton, Berys Gaut, Alessandro Giovanelli, Daniel Jacobson, Eileen John, Matthew Kieran, Amy Mullin, and Robert Stecker.

<sup>2</sup> For a more detailed history of the view, see Carroll, Noël (2000), 'Art and Ethical Criticism: An Overview of Recent Directions of Research,' Ethics vol. 110, 350-387.

<sup>3</sup> Carroll, Noël (1996), 'Moderate Moralism,' British Journal of Aesthetics, vol. 36 (3), 223-238.

developed in great detail, while autonomism has languished. It is time for a philosophical reconsideration.

This paper has three aims: to define autonomism clearly and charitably, to offer a positive argument in its favor, and to defend a larger view about what is at stake in the debate between autonomism and its critics. What emerges is that the contemporary debates about art and ethics mask important underlying issues about value realism and irrealism, issues which must be addressed in order to assess autonomism and its competitors.

A few preliminary remarks are in order before beginning. Autonomism is a view about aesthetic and moral evaluation. I will not attempt to define 'aesthetic' or 'moral' in this paper, and will instead simply assume that the distinction between these two kinds of evaluation is in general a sound and reasonably clear one. Though there are some hard cases, there are also many easy ones, in which ordinary speakers instantly agree about what kind of evaluation is being offered: 'Torture is a violation of human rights, and ought never to be permitted' and 'The band was tight and exuberant; you should really hear them if you can,' are easily sorted as moral and aesthetic in turn.

However, the notion of an *evaluation* (sometimes I will say 'judgment'), either moral or aesthetic, is less clear. Some take an evaluation to be a species of belief; others hold that it is some kind of desire-like attitude, a belief only secondarily or honorifically. What follows is intended to be neutral with regard to the cognitivism/expressivism debate. As I use the notion here, what makes an evaluation distinct from other states of mind is its *valence*. Moral and aesthetic evaluations are not neutral; they endorse or condemn. This is important, because *some* aesthetic views are not evaluations in this sense – merely calling a band's performance 'tight' might have in itself no approbative or disapprobative sense. Yet such a remark would surely be

aesthetic. For the purposes of this paper, however, we will focus on those moral and aesthetic claims that are clearly evaluative, that is, valenced positively or negatively.

### 1. *Defining autonomism*

Noël Carroll was the first to use the term 'autonomism.' In his article 'Moderate Moralism,' he both defines and attacks the view. James Anderson and Jeffrey Dean, and, later, George Dickie have attempted to defend autonomism against criticisms like Carroll's.<sup>4</sup> But, in their responses, they accept Carroll's definition (more or less), and thus the terms of the debate.

Carroll defines autonomism<sup>5</sup> as follows:

A given artwork may legitimately traffic in aesthetic, moral, cognitive and political value. But these various levels are independent or autonomous. An artwork may be aesthetically defective and morally defective, or vice versa. But these different levels of value do not mix, so to speak. An aesthetically defective artwork is not bad because it is morally defective and that provides a large part of the story about why a work can be aesthetically valuable, but evil.<sup>6</sup>

Put this way, autonomism appears to be a view about whether moral and aesthetic values themselves interact. It sounds as though we could put our values under a microscope and observe whether in fact they influence one another. One imagines values as electrons in different orbits. On this understanding of autonomism, it seems to be a thesis that can be tested through careful conceptual analysis.<sup>7</sup> What is needed is a picture of autonomism that foregrounds the person doing the valuing.

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<sup>4</sup> Anderson, James and Jeffrey Dean (1998); Dickie, George (2005).

<sup>5</sup> Carroll uses the modifier 'moderate' to distinguish this version of autonomism from a more radical view. The view he calls 'radical autonomism' will not be discussed here, and so, for the sake of simplicity, I drop the modifier 'moderate' and simply refer to the view Carroll calls 'moderate autonomism' as 'autonomism.'

<sup>6</sup> Carroll (1996), 231.

<sup>7</sup> Hallvard Lillehammer challenges this presumption in Lillehammer (2008), 'Values of Art and the Ethical Question,' *British Journal of Aesthetics* vol. 48 (4): 376-394. I discuss Lillehammer's alternative in the final section.

Let us see if we can approach the view differently. The question of whether or not autonomism is true often arises as a *practical* question. Mary Devereaux illustrates these practical concerns nicely in her discussion of Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* (1935), a documentary film about the 1934 Nazi Congress in Nuremberg:

*Triumph of the Will* also raises pressing questions about the attitude we should adopt towards the film as art. Should we praise it for its widely acclaimed aesthetic qualities despite its celebration of National Socialism? We recognize D.W. Griffith's *Birth of the Nation* as an important film despite its racism ... Should we similarly bracket questions of good and evil in looking at *Triumph of the Will*?<sup>8</sup>

Devereaux calls attention to the valuer and her choices: should she praise or blame, admire or condemn? Valuers often find themselves wondering how they should value artworks in this way. What ought a valuer to do when conflicts arise between her initial moral and aesthetic evaluations of an artwork? Is she to adjust her one evaluation in light of the other, or not? Devereaux's conception of autonomism is that it answers a question that is primarily practical, rather than primarily descriptive.

We can better understand autonomism by looking at a valuer in a situation of the kind that Devereaux describes. The situation is one in which the valuer makes two global evaluations, one moral and one aesthetic. These valences might or might not conflict, but they are, at least at one stage of deliberation, separate.

Some might deny that such a situation is possible. For example, one might think that no judgment of at least some objects is properly called an *aesthetic* judgment unless it has been modified by one's moral judgment of that object. One might think one is making a global aesthetic evaluation, but the psychological state that one thinks of as one's aesthetic judgment of

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<sup>8</sup> Devereaux, Mary (1998), 'Beauty and Evil: the case of Leni Reifenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*,' in Jerrold Levinson (ed.), *Aesthetics and Ethics: Essays at the Intersection* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 242.

the object is in fact something else, perhaps a near relative of, but a poor substitute for, an aesthetic judgment. (It might be a judgment, but it is not properly an aesthetic one.)

If this objection were sound, autonomism would be easily refuted. A careful analysis of the concept of 'aesthetic judgment' would show that it includes the concept of being adjusted appropriately by moral judgments. Talk of *whether* to adjust aesthetic evaluations in light of moral ones or vice versa would be shown to be confused. While Marcia Muelder Eaton can be read as making something like this claim<sup>9</sup>, most critics of autonomism regard autonomism as conceptually sound, but incorrect. In this paper, therefore, I will assume that autonomism cannot be disproved through mere analysis of the concept of aesthetic judgment.

The most interesting cases are ones, like Devereaux's, in which there is evaluative conflict: on the one hand, we think highly of a work in one respect, while on the other hand, we have concerns about that work when we take a different evaluative perspective. It is about situations of this kind that autonomists and their critics disagree. Where the critics think that, given at least some works<sup>10</sup>, the person makes a mistake (a particular type of mistake, in fact) if she fails to adjust one evaluation in light of the other, autonomists do not. So we can define autonomism in terms of the valuer:

Autonomism: the view that a person who makes a global moral judgment  $\mu$  and a global aesthetic judgment  $\alpha$  of the same object or event is not rationally required to adjust  $\alpha$  in light of  $\mu$  or to adjust  $\mu$  in light of  $\alpha$ .

Autonomism's distinctive idea is that neglecting to integrate one's moral and aesthetic evaluations is not in itself a failure on the agent's part. Neither the object itself nor some rational principle regarding, for example, the coherence of one's evaluations requires that moral

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<sup>9</sup> See Eaton, Marcia Muelder (1992), 'Integrating Moral and Aesthetic Value,' *Philosophical Studies* vol. 37, 219-240.

<sup>10</sup> Some critics of autonomism think that *any* conflict between moral and aesthetic judgment calls for adjustment; others think that such adjustment is only called for in conflicts regarding certain artworks and not others.

and aesthetic evaluations be brought together. This is not to deny that there can be sound principles which link moral and aesthetic evaluation indirectly.<sup>11</sup> What the autonomist denies is that an aesthetic judgment needs to take any moral judgment *qua* moral judgment into account, or *vice versa*. The autonomist can accept that moral and aesthetic judgments can be judgments about the same properties, and that they can be constrained by some of the same general principles (e.g., logical consistency). The autonomist rejects only the view that we are required to modify an aesthetic judgment because of a moral judgment, or the other way around.

An advantage of the above formulation of autonomism is that it does not color the debate with value realist language, as Carroll's formulation does. Whether moral and aesthetic evaluations are truth-evaluable (and if so, what their truth-makers are) is a deeply contentious and highly complex question. Carroll's formulation makes values themselves the object of our study, but value irrealists will simply deny that such values exist. There are many varieties of irrealism about values, but a common theme in irrealist writing is that there is a contrast between the kinds of facts and properties that are the proper object of scientific study and the kinds of 'facts' and 'properties' that evaluative statements appear to refer to.<sup>12</sup>

What irrealists will *not* deny is that human beings evaluate art: they like it, hate it, pay lots of money for it, write long articles about it, and spend hours arguing, laughing, or crying about it. While one might quite reasonably doubt the existence of *values*, that *evaluating* is something people do is not seriously questioned. In addition, the above formulation is not biased *against* realism, either. The realist simply answers questions about what the valuer

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<sup>11</sup> This is a point made nicely by Anderson and Dean (1998).

<sup>12</sup> For example, see Harman, Gilbert (1977), 'Ethics and Observation,' in his *The Nature of Morality: An Introduction to Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 3-10; Blackburn, Simon (1988), 'How to Be an Ethical Anti-Realist,' *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* vol. 12, 25-49.

should do in terms of what the values really are out there in the world: for example, valuers should evaluate positively what in fact has positive value. (However, the realist/irrealist issue is not *completely* untouched by this formulation; I return to this topic in the final section.)

The next question to ask about the above formulation of autonomism is whether it fits the view as its critics have understood it. Of course, the critics of autonomism are many and various. I follow Robert Stecker in using 'interaction' to name all of the views that deny autonomism, including moderate moralism, ethicism, immoralism, anti-theory, and aestheticism.<sup>13</sup> There is not sufficient room here to examine each kind of interaction theory individually, but following Stecker's general formulation, it is not difficult to see that any of the well-known versions of interaction would deny autonomism as I have formulated it. Stecker writes: 'Let 'interaction' name the view that the presence of one kind of value [moral or aesthetic] affects the degree of the other.'<sup>14</sup> Stecker thinks that it follows from this that the valuer is constrained to modify her evaluations. When Stecker later considers a case in which, he argues, moral value does diminish aesthetic value, he concludes that 'the reader aware of this is in an aesthetically intractable position'<sup>15</sup> unless he adjusts his aesthetic evaluation. The reader's position is affected because, once he is aware of the interaction that exists between the values, he must adjust his own evaluations to fit those facts. Any version of interaction coupled with some ordinary epistemic norms will yield the denial of autonomism as I have formulated it. Only if one thinks that the interaction of value properties out there in the artworks is epistemically unavailable to us could one conclude that we need not change our evaluations in light of such interaction. For the interactionist not to deny autonomism would involve allowing

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<sup>13</sup> Stecker, Robert (2005), 'The Interaction of Aesthetic and Ethical Value,' *British Journal of Aesthetics*, vol. 45 (2), 138-151.

<sup>14</sup> Stecker (2005), 138. This is, again, language loaded with realist baggage.

<sup>15</sup> Stecker (2005), 149.

that it could be appropriate for valuers to make evaluations that do not fit the object being valued, and this would be strange indeed.

However, even if interaction would deny autonomism as I have formulated it here, it does not follow that my formulation is identical to traditional formulations, such as Berys Gaut's.<sup>16</sup> For example, Gaut says that autonomists 'hold that the ethical qualities of artworks are *always* irrelevant to their aesthetic merit' (emphasis added).<sup>17</sup> But as I have formulated it here, autonomists allow *some* adjustment of aesthetic judgments by moral ones (or *vice versa*); the attitude is one of permission, not prohibition. So it may appear that autonomism as it is formulated here is considerably weaker than the one that interactionists have been attacking, and thus far easier to defend. However, the differences between my formulation and Gaut's are relatively minor. We should first note that there is some ambiguity in Gaut's formulation concerning to what the universal quantifier is applied. Gaut may have meant that autonomists think the ethical qualities of *all artworks* are irrelevant to aesthetic merit, or that *all ethical qualities* of artworks are irrelevant to aesthetic merit. My formulation of autonomism would accept both of these characterizations, because no work, and no ethical quality, forces the judger to make an adjustment in her moral or aesthetic evaluations. So in these cases there would be no difference. Alternatively, Gaut's formulation may mean that the ethical qualities of artworks are irrelevant to *all audiences'* judgments of aesthetic merit. In this case, there would be a difference, because on my account of autonomism, some audience members may indeed decide to treat their ethical judgment as relevant to their aesthetic judgment. But the notion of 'relevance' at work here is quite weak. An aesthetic judgment is *relevant* to a moral one only so long as the judger herself thinks so; nothing outside the judger makes it relevant. This

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<sup>16</sup> I am grateful to an anonymous referee for drawing my attention to this point.

<sup>17</sup> Gaut (2007), 76.



formulation, then, might be somewhat weaker than other versions, but it is sufficiently robust to oppose interaction.

Another reason for formulating autonomism in terms of the *valuer*, and not in terms of values is that autonomists can allow that *some* valuers err insofar as they do not adjust one evaluation in light of the other. This is the case when the valuer herself cares about how her norms fit together: she might, for example, endorse evaluative coherence across different species of value.<sup>18</sup> In that case, it would be true that by her own lights, she'd make a mistake in not adjusting her evaluations accordingly – though this would not necessarily be the case for other valuers in her situation. But this is not the kind of mistake that the interactionist has in mind. The interactionist thinks that *all* valuers, regardless of their particular preferences, would err in not adjusting one value in light of the other in at least some cases.

## 2. *The no-error argument*

Once we have understood autonomism in this way, a powerful and simple argument for autonomism presents itself. This argument is a version of Bernard Williams' argument from his 'Internal and External Reasons.'<sup>19</sup> There Williams argues that statements of the form 'A has reason to  $\Phi$ ' can only be true – can only make sense – if A can deliberate to that reason from some motive in her current subjective motivational set.<sup>20</sup> Williams' concern is with moral 'oughts' of the Kantian variety: commands of reason that are supposed to bind us no matter what we are in fact motivated to do. His claim is that no one who fails to do what he 'ought' is irrational unless there is something in his own psychology that speaks in favor of it (or at least

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<sup>18</sup> For a thoughtful and ambivalent discussion of the norm of consistency among aesthetic values, see Cohen, Ted (1996), 'On Consistency in One's Personal Aesthetics,' in Levinson (1996), 106-125.

<sup>19</sup> Williams, Bernard (1981), 'Internal and External Reasons,' in his *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 101-113.

<sup>20</sup> 'Subjective motivational set' is a term of art for Williams. See especially p. 102 and 105 for further explanation.

that *might* speak in its favor). Williams' argument is controversial, and it is not always clear what counts as a sound deliberative route from one's own current motivations to the reasons that Kantians and others think are universal. However, a rather narrower version is all that is necessary to support autonomism, and this narrower version is stronger than the original argument.

Consider a case. Julia watches *Triumph of the Will* and considers it to be aesthetically good and morally reprehensible. She does not adjust her moral judgment in light of her aesthetic judgment or *vice versa*. How will we know whether she has made an error? We have already mentioned one possibility, to which the autonomist will not object: look to her other values, especially her second-order values, and see whether according to her own views about how and when she should make adjustments in her evaluations, she herself is committed to making an adjustment. Let us, however, stipulate that Julia does not accept such views, and that such views are not implied by views she does accept.

Perhaps instead we look to the film, and ask whether there are any facts about it that give her a reason modify one evaluation in light of the other. Interactionists believe that in some cases (and many interactionists claim that *Triumph of the Will* falls into this category), examination of the object does yield such a reason. They differ on what exactly it is about the object that yields this reason, and they differ also on the content of the reason – which evaluation is to be adjusted and in which direction. According to Berys Gaut, that a work manifests ethically admirable attitudes is a reason to adjust one's aesthetic evaluation upwards.<sup>21</sup> According to Matthew Kieran, that a work invites a reader to have an immoral

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<sup>21</sup> Gaut, Berys (1998), 'The Ethical Criticism of Art,' in Levinson (1996), 182-203.

attitude towards its subject may be a reason to adjust one's aesthetic evaluation upwards.<sup>22</sup>

According to Robert Stecker, that a work employs the wrong aesthetic means towards its end may be a reason to adjust one's moral evaluation downwards.<sup>23</sup> Each of these interactionists takes some fact about the work and derives from it a reason for the valuer to adjust her initial evaluation.

The autonomist, however, insists that Julia does not commit any error at all if she remains in that situation. The reasons to which interactionists appeal do not move her, and there is no sense in which they should. As Williams emphasizes, any reason that a person can be said to have must be able to figure in an *explanation* of that person's action. And something can only figure in an explanation of a person's action if it has some purchase on his psychology. So if we are to say that Julia has a reason to modify her moral judgment of *Triumph of the Will*, we must be able to show that this reason has some purchase on her psychology. But, *ex hypothesi*, it does not.

The argument is not decisive against interaction, but it shifts the burden of proof. In what sense does Julia make a mistake in failing to abide by a norm she does not accept? The interactionist owes us an account of what exactly is irrational about Julia. In what sense do valuers of art err if they fail to respond to such reasons, that is, if they refuse to recognize them *as* reasons? Do they suffer from cognitive incapacity? What kind of mistake do they make? Many Kantians have responded to Williams' original argument by insisting that the categorical commands of morality underwrite the capacity to have any reasons at all, and their bindingness

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<sup>22</sup> Kieran, Matthew (2003), 'Forbidden Knowledge: The Challenge of Immoralism,' in Jose Bermúdez and Sebastian Gardner (eds.) *Art and Morality* (London: Routledge), 56-73.

<sup>23</sup> Stecker (2005).

is thus presupposed by any and all agents.<sup>24</sup> But it is hard to see how interactionists could formulate a parallel argument. Julia need not have presupposed a comprehensive conceptual scheme about the nature of evaluation, incorporating the idea that aesthetic and moral evaluations need to be united, in order to find herself in the situation of making conflicting moral and aesthetic judgments. Surely it is possible for Julia to have the necessary capacities for making both moral and aesthetic judgments without her having to first accept some general rational principle requiring the mutual coherence of these two sorts of judgments.

The interactionist may argue that a general rational requirement regarding consistency compels Julia to bring her moral and aesthetic evaluations into alignment. The idea might be that a negative  $\mu$  judgment and positive  $\alpha$  judgment are *inconsistent*. As a logical point, this would clearly be mistaken. Assuming, as we are here, that  $\mu$  and  $\alpha$  belong to distinct categories of evaluation, judging that a painting is morally good and aesthetically bad is no more inconsistent than judging that a painting is very tall but not at all wide. But the requirement for consistency may be understood instead as a constraint of *practical* reasoning.

Evaluations play a critical role in practical decision-making, and if one's  $\mu$  and  $\alpha$  evaluations have opposing valences, I may well experience a tension when it comes to making choices about actions: should I purchase the painting, or not? It may be argued that practical reason requires the resolution of conflicting evaluations when such evaluations create or exaggerate practical difficulties.

Such considerations may indeed offer *some* rational constraints on what one should do in situations where one must act on the basis of conflicted evaluations. It would be practically irrational, for example, to simply 'freeze up' and fail to reach a conclusion about what to do.

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<sup>24</sup> For example, see Korsgaard, Christine (1986), 'Skepticism about Practical Reason,' Journal of Philosophy, vol. 83 (1), 5-25.

But it is not clear that these considerations require us to modify the individual  $\mu$  or  $\alpha$  evaluations. There are other ways that one can proceed in one's deliberations without modifying one's initial evaluations. One might assign an overall weight to  $\mu$  and  $\alpha$  considerations – perhaps  $\mu$  evaluations are to be counted twice as strongly as  $\alpha$  evaluations. This would allow one to weigh the considerations and arrive at an all-things-considered decision of what to do, while still retaining the integrity of each individual judgment. Or one could adopt a rule telling one which evaluations to consider and which to ignore for a certain type of decision: e.g., a rule of only attending to  $\alpha$  and never  $\mu$  evaluations when making decisions about what paintings to buy. Modifying the original  $\mu$  or  $\alpha$  judgments so that they have the same valence is just one of *many* solutions to a practical problem, so reason cannot compel us to do adopt it.<sup>25</sup>

The interactionist, then, must show that there is some norm (or set of norms) regulating how we make evaluations of art that all of us must accept, no matter what our values are. Of course, such arguments have been made on behalf of a number of different norms in the history of philosophy: for example, producing a catharsis of fear and pity (Aristotle), having the form of purposiveness without purpose (Kant), having significant form (Bell), and being a sincere communication of feeling (Collingwood) have all been thought to be universally normative in making certain kinds of aesthetic judgment. But none of these principles are currently thought to be very plausible. And even if they were plausible, the traditional examples of universally binding norms about aesthetic evaluation will not serve the interactionist's purpose, since they

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<sup>25</sup> The no-error argument takes further strength from another, more controversial view, that aesthetic attitudes are recalcitrant: resistant to pressure from higher-order values. I argue for this view in my (2008) 'Can Expressivists Tell the Difference Between Beauty and Moral Goodness?' *American Philosophical Quarterly* vol. 45(3), 289-300.

tend to have the wrong sort of content: Kant's approach, for example, tends to separate moral and aesthetic judgments quite sharply.

The interactionist may object that people sometimes do change their minds about artworks, in cases just like Julia's, in response to the recognition that they had made an error. This is certainly right – I have had the experience myself of adjusting an initial aesthetic evaluation in light of a moral evaluation of the object. But this fact does not speak against the no-error argument. The natural explanation of my recognizing that my initial evaluation was erroneous is that I was able to reach that conclusion starting from values that I already had. That is, when I decided to adjust my aesthetic evaluation of a work in light of my moral evaluation, this is because I recognized that I cared (in this particular case, at least) about making these judgments coherent – it mattered to me. But it *need not* have mattered to me. Failure to care about the coherence of moral and aesthetic judgment is not in itself a failure of rationality.

It is not my aim here to show that it is not possible to meet the autonomist's challenge. It well may be that one of the above proposals, or something like them, can yet be shown to do so. The point here is merely to show that meeting this challenge is not a trivial matter.

### *3. Reframing the debate*

Where, then, does this leave the debate between autonomists and interactionists? The argument outlined here throws up a challenge to interactionists: explain why Julia has a reason to change her mind. It is not enough that the interactionist can find a principle for judging art that is in fact widely accepted (e.g., the principle that a work which prescribes an immoral response is *pro tanto* less valuable as art). And it is not enough to show that such a principle is plausible. The bar is higher. The interactionist must show that any person denying the

principle is guilty of an error. Interactionists require that there be some norm for reconciling different evaluations, and it must be the case that every valuer is required to accept this norm.

There is, then, a realist bias in most discussions about autonomism, though the realism in question has a very narrow scope. Interactionists need not be realists about moral and aesthetic properties, or in general about first-order evaluative claims (such as '*Triumph of the Will* is aesthetically magnificent'). But they must be realists about the higher-order norms governing these evaluations. The interactionist holds that some norm of the form 'moral evaluations and aesthetic evaluations of the same object should be reconciled' is truth-evaluable, and what's more, true.

In claiming that all valuers are rationally required to adjust their moral or aesthetic evaluations in cases of conflict, interactionists accept what Crispin Wright has called 'cognitive command.'<sup>26</sup> Cognitive command is, roughly<sup>27</sup>, the denial of the no-error claim: the view that any differences in two people's beliefs about  $\Phi$  that are not due to different inputs from  $\Phi$  must be explained in terms of one or the other person's cognitive error. Wright notes that cognitive command is 'a significant additional constraint on minimally truth-apt discourses.'<sup>28</sup> One who accepts cognitive command accepts not only realism, but a particularly strong version of realism – not only are some views about how evaluations should be reconciled *false*, but they any failure to accept such views indicates a cognitive failure on the part of the valuer.

For this reason, the debate between autonomists and interactionists is not neutral with regard to the value realism/irrealism debate. The interactionist, in rejecting the no-error argument, thereby embraces a particular form of realism about some norms: cognitive

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<sup>26</sup> Wright, Crispin (1992), *Truth and Objectivity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).

<sup>27</sup> 'Roughly' for a couple of reasons, but centrally, for Wright, because cognitive command is *a priori*. For a detailed account of Wright's theory of cognitive command, see (1992), 91-94.

<sup>28</sup> Wright (1992), 94.

command, or something very much like it. By contrast, however, autonomism does not imply irrationalism. The autonomist *might* be an irrationalist, but she need not be. The autonomist can be a realist who simply claims that the norms that the interactionists defend are false; this is consistent with her believing that her first-order moral and aesthetic judgments are true. The autonomist can claim that it is true that it is rationally permitted to evaluate art as both morally good and aesthetically bad, without mixing the two.

There is a way out of this for the interactionist, though it comes at a price. The interactionist can avoid committing to realism by suggesting that the claim ‘ $\alpha$  and  $\mu$  evaluations ought to be combined’ is *part* of evaluative discourse, not a claim originating from outside that discourse, describing it.<sup>29</sup> This is a strategy familiar to quasi-realists who wish to be able to say, correctly, that their first-order moral views are true; the quasi-realist simply asserts that the claim that one’s moral view is true is not a neutral description, but a claim *within* moral discourse, so then just as legitimate as the original moral claim.<sup>30</sup> The idea would be that interactionists are in fact *engaging in* such evaluative argument when they advocate for interaction.

This would mean that the interactionist is opposed to the autonomist only in one sense, and not in another. Insofar as autonomism is construed, as it is here, as a claim *outside* of value discourse, as part of a meta-discourse about what is (or is not) rationally required of valuers, the interactionist would no longer disagree with the autonomist. The quasi-realist interactionist (‘quasi-interactionist’?) makes no claims in the meta-discourse. Interactionists would only be critical of autonomism insofar as autonomism is or implies a normative claim about how we should (or should not) go about valuing art. The arguments of the interactionists can then be

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<sup>29</sup> This is the route that Lillehammer (2008) suggests.

<sup>30</sup> See Blackburn (1988).



construed in just the same way as arguments by those who want us to accept that a painting is beautiful, or reprehensible. Interaction would not stand above  $\alpha$  and  $\mu$  evaluations, but alongside them.

But it is not clear that interactionists would want to take the quasi-realist route. Quasi-realism seeks to grant speakers the right to claim truth for their claims without making any metaphysical commitments, but quasi-realists give up any claims they might have had to a special, philosophical authority supporting their views. Many interactionists would be reluctant to give up this detached, neutral position. Another reason, though, that interactionists might not want to go 'quasi' has to do with the viability of the quasi-realist program itself. Quasi-realism faces very serious problems; many doubt whether it can achieve its dual aims of sounding *just like* realism, without collapsing into realism.<sup>31</sup> So the interactionist may be better off accepting realism regarding norms governing the reconciliation of moral and aesthetic values.

The fact that interaction, and not autonomism, brings with it a commitment to value realism does not show autonomism to be right, or interaction to be wrong. It does tell us that autonomism is the more modest philosophical view, and so this perhaps gives one some (defeasable) reason to prefer it. And, perhaps more important, it shows us that that debate between autonomists and interactionists is informed by certain realist and irrealist assumptions that have been hitherto ignored.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> See, e.g., Egan, Andy (2007), 'Quasi-Realism and Fundamental Moral Error,' *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* vol. 85 (2), 205–19; Street, Sharon (manuscript), 'Mind-Independence without the Mystery: Why Quasi-Realists Can't Have It Both Ways.'

<sup>32</sup> An earlier version of this paper was presented at the annual meeting of the British Society for Aesthetics in Oxford in September 2009. I am grateful to the audience there for a lively discussion, which was enormously helpful to me in revising and expanding the paper. I am also grateful to an anonymous referee for this *Journal*, who suggested a number of improvements, large and small.