Introduction

The idea that aesthetics could be reconfigured wholly as a science is not seriously advocated in philosophy, and the few scientists who have endorsed the idea seem not to have understood what they were taking on. For one thing, aesthetics is concerned with normative questions which cannot be answered by empirical investigation. But this does not mean that science has nothing to say to aesthetics, or that we need never reconsider our critical standards and practices in the light of empirical results. Take the issue, central to aesthetics, of critical judgement. In many areas adopting the opinions of others is as good as – and sometimes better than – forming your own judgement. Kant, an enemy of scientific aesthetics, confidently asserted the irrationality of judgements of taste formed on the basis of testimony, and others have followed him. Jon Robson argues here that our admitted disinclination to accept testimony about the aesthetic is best explained, not by the irrationality of doing so, but by the fact that we systematically overrate our own aesthetic judgement relative to that of other people, a claim for which he produces a good deal of empirical evidence gleaned from psychological studies. Nigel Fabb argues that poetry is enjoyed partly because its regular pattern makes text-processing easier, thereby inducing a 'feeling of truth'. Conclusions such as this might unsettle our confidence in our ability to justify our aesthetic judgements, since few of us would offer this as a reason to support such judgements .

Kant was also an enemy of the idea that disgust is in any sense an aesthetic reaction. Responding to recent attempts to make sense of the role of disgust in art, Jenefer Robinson argues that an aesthetics of disgust must comprehend the emotional, sensory and cognitive components of disgust illuminated by recent work in the behavioural sciences. Turning to fiction, psychologist Deena Skolnick Weisberg suggests that developmental evidence concerning children's judgements about what holds in a game of pretence helps us understand the mature judgements we make about what is true in a story. Jonathan Gilmore argues that the epistemic standards we use when engaging with fiction do not closely parallel those we use when engaging with reality; he suggests along the way that biases in cognition of which most of us know little account for many of the pleasures of fiction, and are exploited, unknowingly, by their authors to that end. Noting an apparently pro-scientific move in recent aesthetics towards

doi:10.1017/S1358246114000228 ©The Royal Institute of Philosophy and the contributors 2014

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1358246114000228 Published online by Cambridge University Press

explanatory rather than analytical ambitions, Shen-yi Liao argues that careful attention to the role of ceteris paribus laws in actual scientific practice is necessary for understanding what a good genre explanation in aesthetics would be like. Murray Smith focuses on a particular genre, modernism, which was founded partly on the belief that our responses to art are not significantly constrained by nature. Is such a view consistent with a Darwinian emphasis on the complex tuning of human psychology by millennia of adaptive pressure? Smith argues that a proper understanding of the developmental plasticity of mind and the interactions of genetic and cultural evolution leave a good deal of scope in art for the challenging innovations characteristic of modernism.

But work across the disciplines is a two-way street; philosophers are not unquestioning recipients of information from the empirical sciences, and sometimes show a talent for reinterpreting the results they are presented with. Asking whether creativity is a virtue, Berys Gaut criticises the claim heard in psychology that there is a close connection between being creative and having intrinsic motivation. Matthew Kieran, arguing that creative excellence depends on the possession of virtuous character traits, suggests we rethink the relations between creativity and talent, mental illness and morality respectively. Roger Scruton, while seeing merit in some empirical work in musical cognition, suggests that it is a philosophical project to discover what makes an experience of sound an experience of *music*, and one that ought to be conducted prior to the investigation of the neural processes which are undoubtedly involved. Striking a note of deeper skepticism, Gordon Graham takes the side of Reid against Hume in arguing for a very limited role for empirical inquiry in aesthetics.

This collection of essays originated in a conference, held at the Leeds Art Gallery in the summer of 2012 under the title *Philosophical Aesthetics and the Sciences of Art?* The editors had by then been working for some time on a research project generously funded by the United Kingdom's Arts and Humanities Research Council and titled *Method in Philosophical Aesthetics: the Challenge from the Sciences* (grant number AH/G012644/1). The conference was a natural culmination of the project's public activities; we thank the Royal Institute of Philosophy for financial support and for the opportunity, given in conjunction with Cambridge University Press, to present a selection of the papers, much revised, here. We also thank all those who participated in the lively debates the conference provoked, and our authors, whose tireless revisions helped to give the volume the unity it enjoys.

The Editors

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