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by Severin Schroeder

1.

In one of his lectures in 1938, Wittgenstein comments on the idea of a science of aesthetics:

> You might think that Aesthetics is a science telling us what’s beautiful — almost too ridiculous for words. I suppose it ought to include also what sort of coffee tastes well. [LC 11]

The idea of such a ‘science of aesthetics’ goes back to the 19th century, when Gustav Theodor Fechner in his *Vorschule der Ästhetik* (1876) studied people’s preferences for certain shapes and colours in the hope of ultimately reaching a psychological understanding of complex aesthetic experiences. Such hopes are much more widespread today when empirical psychology has been joined by neuroscience as a provider of systematic research in order to resolve questions in aesthetics. In the introduction to a recent interdisciplinary book on ‘Aesthetic Science’, Arthur Shimamura appears to confirm Wittgenstein’s contemptuous suspicion that the envisaged science would also be regarded as responsible for pronouncing on the taste of coffee, as he defines ‘aesthetics’ as ‘any “hedonic” response to a sensory experience’ (Shimamura 2011, 4). Shimamura distinguishes six questions for scientific aesthetics (2, 4), selecting only the last three as the focus of his edited collection:

> [1] What is art?
> [2] Why do humans make art?
> [3] What is art’s function in modern society?
> [4] What happens when we experience a work of art?
> [5] What does it mean to have an aesthetic experience?
> [6] Can science help us derive general principles about aesthetics, or is there really “no accounting for taste”?

Scientific answers to question [1], the question of the nature of art, have been suggested by neuroscientists. Thus, in 1999 V. S. Ramachandran and W. Hirstein claimed to have discovered 'what art really is' — namely caricature, an exaggerated representation of things able 'to more powerfully activate the same neural mechanisms that would be activated by the original object' (Ramachandran & Hirstein 1999, 16-17). An example of this are Indian sculptures of women with uncommonly big breasts (18).

John Hyman called this the *Baywatch* Theory of Art, and argued convincingly that it is painfully inadequate. In fact, it is not really a theory about art at all, since (as Hyman puts it) it fails to 'distinguish between a sculpture that represents a woman with big breasts and a woman with big breasts', ignoring the basic point that artistic representations are essentially intended to be perceived as representations, from a certain point of view, 'produced with specific tools, materials and techniques' (Hyman 2010, 248-51).

Like Shimamura, I have nothing to say on questions [2] and [3]:

[2] Why do humans make art?

[3] What is art's function in modern society?

These are obviously questions outside the scope of philosophical aesthetics and art criticism, requiring empirical research in evolutionary biology, psychology, or sociology (e.g. Pinker 2002, ch.20; Chatterjee 2013; cf. Rowe 2003). There can also be no objection to a psychological or neuroscientific approach to question [4]:

[4] What happens when we experience a work of art?

Just as it is interesting to investigate what happens in the brain when people play chess, sleep, or are sexually aroused, we may want to know more about psychological and physiological responses to works of art — even if perhaps one can imagine more exciting discoveries than the one cited by Shimamura, viz.: that the orbitofrontal cortex is active in people listening to Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 3 in D Minor, Opus 30 (Shimamura 2011, 22).

2.

What about question [5]?

[5] What does it mean to have an aesthetic experience?

At least on one reading, this is a philosophical question: asking for the clarification of a concept.[1] To think that scientific research can provide the answer, or a better answer, to this kind of question is a familiar philosophical mistake. It is the view that a scientific answer to question [4] would also be an answer to question [5]: 'Once we know exactly what *happens* during an aesthetic experience, especially in the brain, we know what the expression "aesthetic experience" really *means*.' — Not so. What scientists can find out about a phenomenon *F* is not the meaning of the word '*F*'. For that it is both too much and not enough.

To begin with, as John Locke perceptively noted, scientific investigation presupposes non-scientific concepts. In order to be able to ask scientists to investigate the 'true nature' of something *F*, we must have a concept of what is to count as *F* to begin with. In other words, we must already have given some clear meaning to the term *'F'* before we can meaningfully ask the question 'What is the underlying nature of *F*?'. Only because we have a pre-scientific concept of water can it be instructive to learn that water is (roughly speaking) H_2O. If one mistook the scientific explanation for a semantic explanation (to the effect that 'water' *means* H_2O) it should be as uninteresting to a competent speaker as 'A bachelor is an unmarried man'. For a scientific explanation to deserve that name we must be able to relate it to an explanandum in non-scientific terms.

Of course, scientific discoveries about a phenomenon *F may* subsequently be part of a redefinition of *'F'*. For example, acids, understood as sour substances turning litmus paper red, were at some point found to liberate hydrogen ions in water; this was then made part of a new definition of the term 'acid'.

However, two important points need to be emphasises:

First, such conceptual change is not automatic and necessary. There is a lot of scientific observation that is just taken to enrich our knowledge about *F* without for that matter leading to a change of meaning of the term *'F'*. E.g.: cats are very territorial. If this feature had become part of the very definition of a cat, it would not even make sense to suggest that they might not have this feature: that would be a

[1] Another reading might be: 'What is the significance or importance of aesthetic experiences? What does it mean to people to have aesthetic experiences?'. These are psychological questions likely to elicit very different answers from different people with respect to different kinds of aesthetic experience. — Perhaps question [5] could also be read as: 'What is it like to have an aesthetic experience?'. As I shall argue below, no useful answer to this question can be given that is not (for the most part) a detailed and perceptive description of the object perceived. Hence, in the case of works of art, it requires art criticism, not psychology, to answer this question.

contradiction in terms (like 'A cat is not a mammal'). But in fact it is not inconsistent to suggest that some cats may lack this feature or may come to lack it in future (while still being cats).

Secondly, while new scientific theories lead to new scientific concepts, it is another question whether those scientific concepts lead to a change of the humdrum concepts of everyday life. That depends on the role those ordinary concepts play in our lives and on whether the corresponding scientific classification is equally suitable for that role. Often that is not the case.

For example, biological classifications are often unsuitable for the culinary concerns of everyday life. Hence, at many points we do not adopt biological classifications in ordinary language. Thus, the biological concept of a fruit comprises tomatoes, bean pods and many kinds of nuts; the culinary one does not, but applies to rhubarb, used in sweet cooking, although not biologically speaking a fruit.

Even philosophers' standard example of scientific analysis —: 'water is H_2O' — is not a case where a scientific concept has been adopted in ordinary language. We need to distinguish between the common school knowledge that something has a certain property and the use of that property as a criterion when actually employing the concept. If by a concept we mean the classification that is constituted by the use of a predicate, then the concept of *F* will only be defined by features that competent users of the predicate *'F'* take into consideration. Hence, people that are unable to identify hydrogen or oxygen atoms may know (be able to say) that they occur in water molecules, but this knowledge can hardly be said to inform their actual use of the word 'water'. For another thing, the predicates 'water' and 'H_2O' do not even have the same extension. Water is a liquid, whereas H_2O can also occur as ice or steam. Moreover, what we call 'water' has many other ingredients beside H_2O, and not only accidentally: unlike water, pure H_2O is unsuitable for drinking: it tastes bitter and is toxic.[2]

So far I have argued that the scientific investigation of a phenomenon *F*, far from determining the *meaning* of the term *'F'*, has to presuppose it. Still, there is nothing wrong with the idea that a scientific investigation of *F* can tell us what *F*

[2] Ultra-pure water, sheer H_2O, is hypotonic: it moves into cells where there is a greater salt concentration, and in turn, can cause salts to flow in the opposite direction. If unchecked, these flows of water and salts can cause damage to cells and tissues. Correct water and salt movement is also important for kidney function which impacts on the overall fluid balance of the body. Disturbances can cause electrical abnormalities leading to irregular and weak heart beats, poor muscle strength, altered blood pressure and fatigue, amongst other problems.

really is: can reveal to us the true *nature* of *F*.[3] Granting then that a neurological investigation of what happens when he have an aesthetic experience cannot yield a definition of the concept of an aesthetic experience, can it not at least tell us what an aesthetic experience really is?

Not really. It can of course tell us what underlies a given experience: the brain events and causal mechanism that bring it about; just as chemical analysis can tell us what underlies the visual features of an oil painting, or acoustics can tell us what physically constitutes the sounds of music. But we would not for that matter claim that it's chemists (rather than art critics and art historians) that have a proper understanding of the true nature of painting. Of course it's fascinating to explore what kind of processes in the brain are responsible for our perceptual and emotional experiences, but in as much as such processes are not part of our experiences they are as irrelevant to an understanding of aesthetic experiences as such as the chemical analysis of pigments is to the art of painting.

3.

As the last question on Shimamura's list, let us consider:

> [6] Can science help us derive general principles about aesthetics, or is there really "no accounting for taste"?

Here we come to the view that Wittgenstein finds so repugnant. How should science, in particular psychology, help us to derive aesthetic principles? The underlying idea here is that empirical psychology is in the best position to find out what people really like, what they consider beautiful. Hence, we should turn to empirical psychology for determining aesthetics principles, that is, rules for how to make something, or recognize something as, beautiful.

As mentioned, this was Gustav Theodor Fechner's approach. His most famous study was that of people's aesthetic responses to different kinds of rectangles. His experiments seemed to show that the most beautiful rectangles, those that the majority of people found pleasing, were those constructed according to the Golden Section, a ratio already known and used in antiquity.[4] However, more recent studies failed to confirm Fechner's results. Holger Höge (1997) found that preference

[3] In Locke's terminology: its 'real essence', as opposed to the 'nominal essence' that we have to fix ourselves.

[4] The ratio of the Golden Section is: a (longer side) : b (shorter side) = $(a+b) : a \approx 1.61803$.

ranking varied considerably according to the experimental method used (e.g. whether subjects were asked to draw triangles or to sort them), but either way, no clear preference for the Golden Section could be found. In fact, in another study of 'experimental rectangle aesthetics' Chris McManus found that 'population preferences were small in comparison with individual variation' (McManus 1980, 522). In other words, even for very simple geometric shapes different people have strikingly different aesthetic preferences. But if there is no agreement at the most elementary geometric level, it is hard to see how such experiments could provide us with any guide to the assessment of more complicated aesthetic arrangements, especially as such arrangements in painting are hardly ever a matter of pure geometry, but tend to involve reference to things beyond the canvass. Thus, Flip Phillips *et alii* had to admit that 'applying a metric to beauty' was seriously impeded by, what they called, 'connotative properties of artwork' (Phillips et al. 2010, 269).

Moving from simple geometry to art, the American psychologist Colin Martindale found that his undergraduates quite liked Academic painters such as William-Adolphe Bouguereau and Lawrence Alma-Tadema, and concluded that these painters' low esteem in the art world must be down to snobbery and prejudice (Martindale 1998, 146). In other words, Martindale suggested that popular vote rather than expert critique was to be the criterion of aesthetic quality. By the same token, it would appear that kitschy puppies and sunsets on porcelain plates are likely to be esteemed as the finest paintings, while soppy soap operas may be acknowledged to be the most admirable dramatic art.

It is a commonplace truth that a lot of fine art is not immediately accessible. You are, for example, unable to appreciate Shakespeare if you find his archaic English utterly incomprehensible. It is clear that dismissive remarks about Shakespeare from somebody unable to read his plays do not deserve to be taken seriously. Generally speaking, where a ranking or a comparative value judgement is based on ignorance about some of the works at issue it can be disregarded. However, that does not give us a reason to disregard the likings of an uneducated taste. Martindale's students may be in no position to compare Alma-Tadema with other, less accessible painters, but that doesn't show that there is anything wrong with their enjoyment of his work. Moreover, it is conceivable, perhaps likely, that even after having received a careful induction to appreciate the greatness of Turner or Van

Gogh, a majority of those students will still prefer the luscious romanticism of Alma-Tadema or the 'lubricity' (Kenneth Clark) of Bouguereau.

Does that vindicate Martindale's popular vote approach to art? No, it does not. After all, why should it matter to me how many of Martindale's students enjoy Bouguereau? Obviously I don't need psychologists to tell me what I myself like, nor should I be so weak-minded as to make my liking dependent on the agreement of the majority. And if I don't like Bouguereau, what does it help me to be told that, say, 62% of the population do?

Psychologists, in Fechner's tradition, may do more: they may identify the aspects of Bouguereau's paintings that appeal to the masses (e.g. their slick realism, the smooth body contours of naked females), thus explaining the causal mechanism of their response. But if I don't care for Bouguereau, how should that persuade me to like his paintings better? As Arnold Isenberg puts it:

> when we ask [somebody] as a critic "why he likes the object *Y*," we want him to give us some reason to like it too and are not concerned with the causes of what we may so far regard as his bad taste. [Isenberg 1949, 158]

Such differences in taste between different parts of the public are of considerable sociological interest, but quite irrelevant when it comes to aesthetics. As Wittgenstein puts it:

> Whenever we get to the point where the question is one of taste, it is no longer aesthetics. [AWL 38]

It is confused to think that an academic discipline should tell us *what to like* — which is of course exactly what a venerable tradition of philosophical aesthetics has tried to do: to set up a standard of taste. This is what makes Wittgenstein begin his lectures with the bold claim that aesthetics has been 'entirely misunderstood' (LC 1); and contemporary psychological aesthetics perpetuates the misunderstanding, in a particularly crude manner.

One of the major concerns of modern philosophical aesthetics has been the justification of judgements of taste (as opposed to aesthetic judgements *within* a certain taste). Both Hume and Kant tried to explain how a judgement of taste could be true or correct, and not just an expression of personal preference. Attempts to put

aesthetics on a scientific footing tend to be motivated by the same ambitions. Wittgenstein's lectures on aesthetics are characterised by his emphatic rejection of this traditional approach to the subject. This is the first reason why he is scathing about the very idea of a science of aesthetics (LC 11): not just because its methods are problematic but because the whole project is irrelevant to aesthetics properly understood. From Wittgenstein's point of view, the very attempt to prove — be it by philosophical or psychological means — that judgements of taste can be objectively true, according to 'universal principles' (Hume), is misguided.

At the centre of Wittgenstein's account of aesthetics lies the notion of a 'cultured taste' (LC 8). This need not be a taste in art. One of Wittgenstein's key examples is sartorial: 'a person who knows a lot about suits' and is able to tell a tailor exactly which cut, length and material he thinks right (LC 5-7). A *cultured taste*, or serious aesthetic appreciation, has three characteristics:

> (i) It is informed by an uncommonly detailed knowledge of its subject matter, a keen awareness of particulars and nuances that others might overlook (LC 7).
> (ii) It is based on (though not fully determined by) a loose set of conventional rules (LC 5).
> (iii) It manifests a certain consistency of judgement (LC 6).

The second characteristic reinforces the first. Knowledge of the conventional rules of prosody will sharpen one's awareness of the details of versification. One acquires the concepts to describe, and hence is far more likely to notice, small metric differences. Similarly, mastery of the rules of musical theory greatly enhances one's perception and understanding of the structural details of a piece of music. And familiarity with the iconographic and representational conventions of a period of painting will make one discern and appreciate more in a painting than is apparent to the untutored eye.

It is important to note that a cultured taste is built on mastery of certain conventional rules, but not exhaustively defined by it. Aesthetic appreciation requires more than knowledge of rules or the ability to apply them in straightforward cases. As a connoisseur, 'I develop a feeling for the rules. I interpret the rules' (LC 5). That is to say, my familiarity with the rules — not only with their letter, but also with their spirit — informs my judgements in cases that cannot be adjudicated by mechanical application of rules. In some cases, Wittgenstein suggests, a rule may be more

honoured in the breach than the observance, for instance, when the perfect regularity of a metre would sound too wooden or monotonous, or when an extra-metrical stress serves to provide some special emphasis that is rhetorically apt.

Whereas Hume, Kant, and many others were anxious to free aesthetic judgements as much as possible from the contingencies of their cultural context, Wittgenstein, on the contrary, urges that these contingencies are of paramount importance. Social conventions, fashions, ideological background and temperamental inclinations should not be regarded as distorting influences, but as the necessary underpinnings of any serious aesthetic appreciation. What gives substance and significance to our appreciation of art, what makes it more than a superficial liking, is the way it is anchored in a specific culture, a way of life defined by its customs and manners, its moral values, its religious and political beliefs. Hence the ideal of a timelessly valid aesthetic judgement, cut loose from all its cultural moorings, doesn't make any sense. Just as the proper appreciation of a bespoke suit is inseparable from the sensitivities of a culture in which suits are worn and seen as a manifestation of social respectability, and where small differences in material, colour and fit are noticed with approval or disapproval. To somebody from a different culture with very different sartorial customs a European three-piece suit may look exotically charming or beautiful, but such a person would be unable seriously to appreciate it (cf. LC 8-9).

Moreover, a cultured taste is hardly ever fully determined by a culture, but also to a large extent shaped by personal inclinations. Two equally knowledgeable connoisseurs of suits can have markedly different tastes: one, according to his temperament, likes an element of panache and daring in his dress, whereas the other prefers a suit to be as discreet as possible. Both their aesthetic judgements are equally respectable, being well-informed (i), showing awareness of the relevant rules of fashion (ii), and displaying the consistency required for a taste (iii). Similarly, two people can be equally knowledgeable in their appreciation of Victorian poetry, yet have completely different lists of favourite poems, enjoying rather different aspects of Victorian poetry. And of course there are also much more radical differences among people's aesthetic orientation within the same culture. In our current society we find very different cultured tastes co-existing in each art form, sometimes overlapping, sometimes based on entirely different canons and quite different aesthetic conventions. Thus among serious music lovers you find tastes for classical opera, for contemporary dodecaphonic music, for jazz, or for progressive rock music, etc.

Wittgenstein has no interest whatsoever in adjudicating disagreements between different tastes; excluding such adjudications from what he calls 'aesthetics' (AWL 38). It is true that aesthetics is concerned with questions of right or wrong, correct or incorrect (LC 3), but only *relative to a given cultured taste*. Only on the basis of some accepted rules and standards can there be what Wittgenstein calls aesthetics: a concern with art or other things that involves interesting aesthetic questions, explanations and discussions. The attempt to adjudicate between different tastes, or to give aesthetic evaluations independently of a given cultured taste, is as pointless as the attempt to decide which is better, claret or Darjeeling.

4.

The first reason why Wittgenstein rejects psychological aesthetics is that it simply continues (in a fairly crude way) a misguided tradition in philosophical aesthetics that tries to ascertain what is objectively beautiful, meaning that it will, and should, please an unbiased audience. However, that is not the only way psychology could try to contribute to aesthetics. Rolf Reber (2008), cognitive psychologist at the University of Bergen, tries to suggest a more sophisticated approach. He agrees that it is not possible inductively to ascertain aesthetic principles by testing and reporting people's preferences. Aesthetic principles, the criteria for artistic value, have to be established by artists and art theorists, rather than scientists (Reber 2008, 372), but then it is for empirical psychology to test to what extent those criteria have been met by given works of art and hence to ascertain their artistic value. To develop this position, Reber starts with 'a definition of artistic value in terms of experience' (Reber 2008, 367). A work of art is supposed to produce certain experiences in its audience, including thoughts, perceptions, and emotions. Empirical psychology is best placed to investigate what experiences a work of art does *in fact* produce in its audience, and hence to evaluate to what extent the work achieves its purpose and is artistically successful. Unlike Martindale and Shimamura, Reber does not commit himself to aesthetic hedonism: to the view that artistic value is simply beauty which in turn is to be measured by the amount of *pleasure* we derive from a perceptual experience. According to Reber, different artists or art critics at different times may aim for very different experiences. Thus, beside the pleasure criterion, there has also been the 'novelty and surprise' criterion, the 'shock' criterion, and even the 'disgust criterion' (Reber 2008, 368; 371; 372). This allows Reber to say that a sample group of

undergraduates, unbiased by any previous knowledge of art, finding some of Damien Hirst's exhibits disgusting would not show that those works are of little artistic value — given that Hirst *intended* them to be disgusting. Reber likens artists to scientists testing hypotheses (Reber 2008, 370), to be aided by the more professional investigators in psychology departments: 'an artist predicts [that their work will produce] a certain experience, empirical psychology can assess the actual experience' (Reber 2008, 369), and hence the work's artistic value.

> If intended and actual experience matches, we can conclude that the artistic value of a work is high. [Reber 2008, 370]

As it stands, this is obviously implausible. If I produce an incompetent and uninteresting drawing with the intention that you find it incompetent and uninteresting — and you do — then, on Reber's account, my drawing would be a masterpiece. Reber simply confuses *artistic quality* with *the capacity to predict people's responses*.

However, this flaw can perhaps be mended by introducing some reasonable constraints on what kinds of experiences a work of art can be supposed to produce. Clearly, not everything goes. A work that simply gives its audience knowledge about nuclear physics would presumably be a work of nuclear physics, not a work of art. Perhaps we can assume, at least for argument's sake, that for something to qualify as art it must produce in the audience a suitable combination of delight, surprise, shock, and intellectual stimulation.

What would be wrong with that? It commits itself to a crude instrumentalist picture of art as merely a vehicle for psychological effects that are thought of as logically independent of the work in question.

Wittgenstein rejects a psychological approach to aesthetics not only because he is not interested in finding an objective and universal basis for our value judgements, but also because he is opposed to the idea that an object's aesthetic value lies in its positive psychological effects on an audience. Artistic value is not instrumental value, a capacity to produce independently identifiable — and scientifically measurable —psychological effects. 'The work of art does not seek to convey *something else*, just itself' (CV 67). Unlike a tin opener, a car or an aspirin, a work of art is not to be regarded as a means to an end. Rather, it is appreciated for its own sake. That is not to deny that works of art *can* be, and often are, used as means

to an end: as a source of information, as political propaganda, as a status symbol, or as an investment. But such uses are alien to art. Using a work of art in one of those ways is not to use it as a work of art.

There are other things that can be valued either as means to an end or for their own sake. A walk, for example, can serve the purpose of keeping in good health, or to familiarise oneself with the area, or as a convenient setting for a confidential conversation. But some people just enjoy walking with no such end in view. For them going for a walk is an end in itself. One might respond, however, that even such a person values a walk as a means to an end, namely as a means to certain agreeable experiences. And likewise, it might be objected that when we say that we value a work of art for its own sake, that is just a different way of saying that we value the aesthetic experiences that it can afford us.

Undeniably, when we appreciate a work of art we value it as a source of aesthetic experiences. But it would be rash therefore to regard works of art as means to an end. For that would suggest that one *uses* or *employs* a work of art in order to achieve an effect that is logically independent of that application. In that way, one applies a tin opener, thereby causing a tin to be open; and one uses, swallows, a tablet hoping thereby to cause one's headache to go away. Yet there is no such distinction between applying a means and achieving an end in the case of the appreciation of art. Looking at a picture or listening to music does not *cause* an aesthetic experience, it *is* an aesthetic experience. (It is arguable that in some cases, especially with longer narrative art forms, the aesthetic experience lasts much longer than the actual perception or perusal of the work of art (cf. Kivy, 2006), but even then the latter is clearly the core and most intensive part of that experience.)

Moreover, what is merely a means to an end is, at least in principle, replaceable without loss by other means to obtain the same end. Thus, if a work of art were regarded as a means to procuring enjoyable aesthetic experiences, it should be easily replaceable by other works of art of comparable efficacy; just as one good tin opener can without loss be replaced by another. But in fact, our attitude towards works of art is rarely that promiscuous (LC 29, 34). Somebody going to see an exhibition of Dutch still-lifes will hardly be content to be shown a ballet instead, or a volume of sonnets, even if they have equally good claims to being enjoyable. The concept of an enjoyable aesthetic experience is far less specific than most people's aesthetic interests most of the time.

Furthermore, not only are the aesthetic experiences produced in us by a painting not equivalent to those produced by a play or a poem, they are also crucially different from those produced by other paintings. Works of art are essentially individual objects whose value lies in their individual characteristics (cf. Strawson, 1974). That is what distinguishes them from functionally defined objects, such as tin openers or cars. The aesthetic experience of listening to a performance of Mozart's *Requiem* is largely determined by the specific characteristics of (the performance of) the piece of music that is its intentional object. A description of my aesthetic experience would be a description of Mozart's *Requiem,* or a particular performance of it, as I perceived it. And this is obviously an experience that could not be produced by any other work (unless my perception was so careless and unschooled that I could not tell the two apart). Therefore, provided that an aesthetic experience of a work of art is appropriately discerning, it is impossible to separate it from the work of art, as if it were the work's aim and logically independent of it (cf. Budd, 1995, p.4). The link between work and experience is not just causal (like that between aspirin and the removal of a headache), but conceptual: One cannot take an interest in the latter without *ipso facto* being interested in the former. Therefore, the truism that our interest in works of art is due to an interest in the aesthetic experiences they promise to afford us is not an objection to the view that we are interested in works of art for their own sake. For the aesthetic experience is essentially an aesthetic experience of the work itself. So, the value of a work of art cannot usefully be explained as its function to produce certain psychological effects.

Therefore, the provisional definition of art suggested above in order to patch up Reber's account is a non-starter. Delight, shock and surprise can be caused by any number of objects that have nothing to do with art. The positive emotions that a painting, a poem or a sonata are intended to evoke can only be characterised by their intentional object — the painting, poem, or sonata in question. Indeed, artists rarely think of their work in terms of audience emotions. Rather, they have something in mind that they want to express or to depict in a certain manner. For instance, 'to paint a whole group of people on a large scale in such a way that no one seems too prominent, each is easily related to the other, and all breathe the same air' (Clark 1960, 34); to achieve dramatic expression; to produce a harmonious arrangement of various shades of grey and black; or to render the movement of rain and sea in a

storm. The spectator's positive emotion is the result of appreciating the painter's success in such a project. Thus, Kenneth Clark reports:

> Every day I look at [Velasquez'] *Las Meniñas* I find myself exclaiming with delight as I recognise the absolute rightness of some passage of tone, the grey skirt of the standing *meniña*, the green skirt of her kneeling companion, the window recess on the right, which is exactly like a Vermeer of the same date, and above all, the painter himself, in his modest, yet confident, penumbra. [Clark 1960, 36]

It's not just delight — it is delight at the masterly correctness of all those pictorial details. Indeed, the delight is not essential. What matters is the appreciation of the painter's success in all those respects; whether it gives you delight, fills you with awe, grudging respect, nervous excitement, or even jealousy (being yourself an ambitious painter), or whether you just coldly note the skilful execution (because you are an unemotional type) — is immaterial. Such different emotional audience responses, which psychologists may expertly observe, say more about the audience than about the quality of the painting. In order to assess the latter we don't need any psychological research, we simply need some competent art criticism.

Reber himself provides the example of the German painter Georg Baselitz's curious idea that if he put a portrait upside down the content would no longer be recognisable, it would no longer have 'meaning' — which apparently was the effect Baselitz wanted to achieve. Reber objects that even when seen upside down a face still shows an expression (although sometimes not the same as when seen properly), and concludes:

> Psychological research thus suggests that Georg Baselitz's paintings do not yield the experience he would wish to convey. [Reber 2008, 369-70]

The response is, first, that you don't need anything meriting the title 'research' to notice that faces and facial expression do not become entirely unrecognizable when shown upside down. Secondly, this gimmicky idea has little to do with the artistic quality of Baselitz's paintings.

Imagine a case where it would really take psychological *research* to find out whether an artist's intentions were realised. What kind of intentions could that be? Perhaps that prolonged exposure to his paintings was likely to have a mood enhancing effect on people suffering from depressions? Or that a certain style of painting would

appeal more to women than to men? — These would indeed be hypotheses awaiting empirical testing, but they have obviously nothing to do with artistic quality.[5]

5.

Psychology investigates the causes of people's responses. And it is, as I tried to argue, misguided to expect such causal investigations to answer evaluative questions: to tell us how we *should* respond to a work of art. However, it is less implausible to suggest that psychology can provide explanations as to [7] *why* certain works make certain impressions on us. Is that not a legitimate area of causal investigation?

There could indeed be a sophisticated psychology of art, investigating why certain things appeal to us. However, according to Wittgenstein, as a causal investigation it would not be aesthetics: it would not afford us the kind of understanding that is relevant to aesthetic appreciation.

Wittgenstein considers an architectural example. Suppose looking at a façade, to begin with I just feel vaguely dissatisfied with it, before I realise that what is wrong with it is that the door is too low. Is this latter, more specific aesthetic reaction not a causal hypothesis, which psychology could be asked to test (cf. Budd, 2008, p. 269)? No, that is not its role in aesthetic discourse. It may well be true that it was the insufficient height of the door that caused my initial discontent, but when eventually I realise that the door is too low, this observation is not put forward as a hypothesis. Rather, it will have the status of an aesthetic reaction, an avowal of my impression whose truth is guaranteed by my truthfulness. If we assume that my initial discontent was not in fact due to the lowness of the door (but, let us say, caused by a subconscious association with some personal memories), that will in no way invalidate my eventual observation that the door is too low. The point is that when I am looking for an explanation of my vague initial impression, that is because I am not satisfied with it. My explanatory aim is to clarify and sharpen it, that is, to replace an inchoate impression by a clear and precise one. The latter will in some cases also provide a causal explanation of the former, but that is only a side effect. My main concern is a better understanding, an enhanced appreciation of the object in question;

[5] In some of his lectures Wittgenstein emphasised the similarities between aesthetic and moral judgements (AWL 36). Consider the analogous idea that 'a good deed is one that gives us the right feelings'. Should moral disputes be resolved by empirical psychology, investigating which kind of behaviour gives people agreeable feelings? — I expect here many people would immediately agree with Wittgenstein that such a suggestion was 'almost too ridiculous for words'.

not so much a better understanding of the early stages of my own imperfect understanding.

Note that, unlike a causal hypothesis, my directed aesthetic reaction — 'This door is too low. Make it higher' (*LC* 13) — does not commit me to the claim that if the door were higher I would like it better. That may turn out not to be the case (perhaps once the proportions of the door have been rectified something else will bother me even more); and yet the fact remains that the door struck me as too low (cf. Schroeder, 1993).

To be sure, aesthetic explanations are not only concerned with sharpening inchoate first impressions by identifying crucial details to which we attribute the effect in question. Sometimes what we are unclear about is not so much *which* specific details of an object are responsible for its effect on us, but rather *why* those details should impress us in that way. Wittgenstein is particularly interested in the way aesthetic puzzlement can be cured by peculiar kinds of comparisons or by synoptic representations of relevant variations (LC 20, 29). The only criterion of correctness of such an aesthetic explanation is that it satisfies me; that it removes my puzzlement or disquiet about the impression in question (LC 18-19).

In his famous essay 'On the Knocking at the Gate in *Macbeth*' (1823), Thomas De Quincey provides an example of the kind of aesthetic puzzle that Wittgenstein had in mind:[6]

> From my boyish days I had always felt a great perplexity on one point in *Macbeth*. It was this: the knocking at the gate, which succeeds to the murder of Duncan, produced to my feelings an effect for which I never could account. The effect was, that it reflected back upon the murder a peculiar awfulness and a depth of solemnity; yet, however obstinately I endeavoured with my understanding to comprehend this, for many years I never could see *why* it should produce such an effect. (De Quincey, 1823, p.81)

Wittgenstein would emphasise that no causal, psychological investigation can resolve this kind of puzzle. For one thing, psychological experiments trying to establish the psychological effects of certain kinds of experiences need to be made on a number of

[6] Mark Rowe remarks that this is a rather exceptional kind of criticism (trying to explain an initially puzzling aesthetic impression) (Rowe 2003, 181), but in fact some standard problems in philosophical aesthetics are just generalised versions of this kind of problem. E.g.: How to account for the sadness of a piano sonata? How to account for our enjoyment of tragedy? (I discuss the latter problem in Schroeder 2016, arguing that it is impossible to agree on a general solution since such aesthetic explanations can only ever be justified relative to a given cultured taste.)

subjects (LC 21); but De Quincey is not concerned with the way people *generally* respond to this element in the play. For all he knows, he may be the only one on whom the knocking at the gate has such a powerful effect. Admittedly, that is unlikely. Those who share De Quincey's general aesthetic outlook will be likely to share many of his aesthetic responses, including those of perplexity; or at least it will be possible to communicate to them a sense of such a puzzlement and thus make them share it. Still, it is not unconceivable that some such aesthetic puzzlements may be idiosyncratic; and anyway, for resolving such a perplexity it is quite immaterial whether others share it or not.

Of course there are also causal explanations that concern only one person. For instance, I may want to know why a certain kind of food gives me a headache. A causal explanation of such an allergic reaction doesn't require that anybody else suffers from the same allergy. In such a case, a causal investigation would try to identify the ingredient that triggered my reaction and the general causal laws according to which it comes about. Both the causally active ingredient of the food and the physiological processes it triggers would originally be unknown to me. Thus research into this causal link would have to discover new facts underlying the explanandum and show them to be instances of general laws.

De Quincey's problem is rather different. He doesn't want to discover new, hidden, details of the play; but only arrange the known phenomena in a way that highlights certain aspects. Most importantly, a successful explanation in this case will not depend on general causal laws, which need to be objectively established, but merely on De Quincey's subjective satisfaction. He is looking for a re-description of the relevant phenomena that will make his reaction appear reasonable, or less puzzling, to him. Thus, a crucial feature of this kind of explanation, that sets it apart from causal explanations, is that what seems right to the subject *is* right. The correct explanation is the one that satisfies me, that dissolves my sense of puzzlement (LC 18-19).

This is the explanation that satisfied De Quincey:

> We were to be made to feel that [during the scenes of the murder] the human nature, i.e. the divine nature of love and mercy, spread through the hearts of all creatures, and seldom utterly withdrawn from man — was gone, vanished, extinct; and that the fiendish nature had taken its place. […] The murderers and the murder must be insulated — cut off by an immeasurable gulf from the ordinary tide and succession of human affairs […]. Hence it is, that when the deed is done, when the work of darkness

> is perfect, then the world of darkness passes away like a pageantry in the clouds: the knocking at the gate is heard; and it makes known audibly that the reaction has commenced; the human has made its reflux upon the fiendish; the pulses of life are beginning to beat again; and the re-establishment of the goings-on of the world in which we live first makes us profoundly sensible of the awful parenthesis that has suspended them. (De Quincey, 1823, pp.84-5)

In short, question

[7] Why do certain works make certain impressions on us?

is ambiguous. It can well be taken as a guiding question for psychological research programmes, possibly in connection with answers to questions [4] and [2] above. However, in aesthetic discourse it is taken in a different sense, asking not for *causes* of our responses (which we may or may not be aware of), but for their *reasons*: for a clarification and justification of our aesthetic reactions in terms of their intentional objects. For aesthetics (or art criticism) is concerned with *what* we experience, not with the discovery of causal factors beyond our aesthetic experience. Its aim is to clarify and enrich aesthetic experiences, not to give scientific explanations of such experiences. Therefore, in aesthetics an explanation is satisfactory to the extent to which it satisfies us: we have to judge, in a given case, whether a proffered explanation does resolve our puzzlement or clarify or enrich our aesthetic experience. Obviously, no such first-person authority applies to causal explanations in empirical psychology.

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