

**Greg Currie, Matthew Kieran, Aaron Meskin, and Jon Robson, eds.** *Aesthetics and the Sciences of Mind*. Oxford University Press 2014. 272 pp. \$74.00 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9780199669639).

When I heard about *Aesthetics and The Sciences of Mind* by Greg Currie, Matthew Kieran, Aaron Meskin, and Jon Robson, I was quite excited. Like most of philosophy, Aesthetics has an odd relationship with empirical research that has gone through some changes. I was excited about a volume that traversed that intersection and was filled with good articles: some rigorous, some clever, and all interesting in some way. It is the latter, but not the former. While some of these articles can be viewed as being at the intersection, because they do make good use of empirical research in some places, the emphasis is on evaluating the relationship between philosophical aesthetics and empirical research. It is not at the intersection, it is an evaluation of the intersection. Is it a worthy topic? Yes. Is it the topic I wanted? No. Does what I want matter? Not really. But there are two things that do matter. As a topic, it is too soon. Giving the intersection a good chance to be productive or not be productive is necessary to make a good evaluation of it. In an attempt to get a head start on the issue, this volume has jumped the gun and started evaluating before sufficient evidence is in. This brings us to the second thing that matters. Without sufficiently rich evidence, we need to lean more heavily on the standards of evaluation. This is a problem when the question is itself one of standards of evaluation.

The volume asks the following questions: How should we do philosophical aesthetics? What should count as evidence? Should empirical evidence count? The problem occurs when we start trying to figure out how to answer these questions. How should we support claims about how to do philosophical aesthetics? What should count as evidence for what should count as evidence? Should empirical evidence count as evidence that philosophical aesthetics should use empirical evidence? A question about standards of evidence like this runs the risk of provoking questions about standards of evidence to determine standards of evidence, which leaves us with an unfortunate regress. One way to resolve this is to assume that while the relationship between philosophical aesthetics and empirical evidence is not obvious, there is an obvious or intuitive standard about how to evaluate it. Rather than make that assumption, I would rather rely on a rich body of evidence to bear some of this burden and help to avoid this problem. So, it is too soon for this sort of project.

There is another problem that has been neatly avoided in this volume: territoriality. There is a risk for articles at intersections to devolve into a sort of ‘turf protection’. The goal of the authors becomes a defense of their field or approach, often through criticism of another field or approach. Intersections of philosophy and psychology are prone to this sort of behavior. Consider the opening sentence of the introduction, ‘Are the traditional methods of philosophical aesthetics adequate, or should we supplement—even replace—they with some of the methods employed by the natural and social sciences?’ (1) There is a high risk of defensive behavior with regard to methods in this case. As a matter of luck or—far more likely—great care by the editors and contributors, this volume is mostly free of empty defensive behavior and territoriality. Contributors still take positions that endorse views on the value of one field or another in a certain context. However, these positions do not read as defensive or combative.

If there is a problem that hinders much of the volume, it is the need to make claims that are too strong. When dealing with questions about the relationship between philosophical aesthetics and empirical research, it is all too easy to make claims that are too strong about philosophical aesthetics and empirical research in order to justify stronger positions about their relationship. This volume

does not avoid this problem as well as it avoids territoriality. The idea that philosophical aesthetics is a uniform body strikes me as quite problematic. I am glad I was not tasked with the role of coming up with an account of it. The contributors seem likewise grateful as they generally avoid the issue as much as possible, except when necessary for their arguments. Of course some version this sort of account is required for most of the articles in the volume. While defining ‘philosophical aesthetics’ is outside the scope of the volume, it should not suffer from the lack. There is a similar challenge in making broad claims about empirical research, but the articles should not suffer from it. Some of the articles rise to this challenge and their overreaching actually sets up the article, whereas others are hindered by it. Now perhaps I am making too strong a claim to say that all of the volume can be tied together this way, but that will not stop me. Often the best way to predict if you would like an article is to see the way that the authors overreach. While the articles have much to recommend them—as does the history with an empirical emphasis in the introduction—here are those I see as overreaching, which seems to correspond pretty well with the editors’ organization.

‘Feckless Reason’ by Dominic McIver Lopes treats the empirical evidence of the unreliability of our reasons as being more complete than it is (29). Specifically he treats evidence of some fallibility as evidence of total fallibility. Sherri Irvin does the same in ‘Is Aesthetic Experience Possible?’ (42) but weakens it a bit to motivate an appeal to mindfulness, which itself seems too strong (48).

David Davies’ “‘This is Your Brain on Art’: What Can Philosophy of Art Learn from Neuroscience?” serves as a miniature version of the volume. In doing so, it makes a claim that is too strong but also common to the volume, namely that empirical research is not evidence for normative claims. Davies is not the only one to rely on this claim. Fabian Dorsch uses it as the central assumption in ‘The Limits of Aesthetic Empiricism’ and Bruce Nanay considers it an obstacle to be avoided in ‘the Philosophy of Perception as a Guide to Aesthetics.’ This assumption, which is not explored in detail, is something I find problematic. It is reasonable to make the claim that normative claims require something more than empirical evidence, it is unreasonable to claim that empirical evidence has no value in regard to normative claims. The stronger versions of this claim justify strong arguments about the relationship between normative claims in philosophical aesthetics and empirical evidence, but are not justified themselves.

Christy Mag Uidhir and Cameron Buckner try to reframe the aesthetic theory of art in ‘Portrait of the Artist as an Aesthetic Expert.’ In doing so, they make claims that are too strong as they make their alternative eliminative rather than supplementary.

‘Seeing with Feeling’ by Jesse Prinz contrasts simple views with complex ones, and does so very quickly.

‘The Arts, Emotion, and Evolution’ by Noel Carroll and ‘Believing in Stories’ by Stacie Friend are a reach in terms of fit for the volume. In fact, Friend’s article might even be the reverse of most of the articles since it is about fiction as empirical evidence rather than empirical evidence about fiction.

Jonathan M. Weinberg transitions too quickly between models about cognition and cognition in ‘All Your Desires in One Box.’

In 'Physiological Evidence and the Paradox of Fiction' by Kathleen Stock there is an exaggeration of how science ought to work. Specifically that it must provide a speculation free source of evidence.

Despite this over reaching this is a valuable volume with some useful examples and you can mine it—quite deeply in some cases—for some insight in how empirical evidence can help, or not, with philosophical aesthetics.

**Craig Derksen**, California State University