The current enthusiasm in some quarters in Germany for adopting the methods, concerns, and assumptions of Anglo-American analytical philosophy seems rather odd in the light of the fact that the most influential recent moves in Anglo-American philosophy have involved a rejection of the empiricist assumptions on which analytical philosophy relies, in favour of a reassessment of the concerns of Kant and German Idealism, concerns which are inherently bound up with aesthetics. My use here of the term ‘analytical philosophy’ is evidently too vague to give such a generalized contention much substance, so let’s take a specific example, which illustrates the results of some of the dominant methods in such philosophy, and which will lead me to my main topic.

Even most Anglo-American philosophers have little time for ‘analytical aesthetics’. This is despite the fact that its main methods are of the same kind as those which still inform much of the rest of what goes on in Anglo-American philosophy departments, namely such things as ‘conceptual analysis’ – the fancy term for trying to specify how it is appropriate to use a word – questions about ‘properties’ and ontology, questions about the objectivity of non-factual judgments, and so on. Some of the reasons for the low standing of aesthetics in analytical philosophy have to do with that philosophy’s self-perception as being closely linked to the rigour of the natural sciences, which makes philosophy concerned with art appear to be lacking in rigour. However, the rigour such philosophy prides itself on ought more often to be contrasted with that of its putative source.

The success of many of the modern natural sciences, judged in terms of their ability to predict and control law-bound natural phenomena, is beyond doubt, whatever one may think of some of the results of their application. The purely epistemological attempt to give an agreed philosophical account of that success, whether we date it, for example, from Kant (whose main

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1 Such success and the broad conceptual agreements on which it depends is, importantly, less and less unanimous the closer the science comes to the human world, as the justified suspicions of socio-biology and of evident misapplications of genetic explanations to society make clear.
concern was – pace Rorty, and most analytical philosophers – not epistemology anyway), or from logical empiricism, is one of the signal failures of the modern era, if judged in relation to the kind of results achieved in some of the sciences. One result of all that supposed rigour has been a proliferation of incompatible approaches which is reminiscent of the later phases of scholasticism, and often does not make much difference to the actual practices of most of the sciences. It is not least for this reason that attention to thinkers who talk of the ‘end of philosophy’, like Heidegger, should have grown in some areas of the analytical camp.

With regard to art it might therefore already seem pretty strange to adopt some of the tools employed in the failure of so many approaches to epistemology to investigate a further aspect of modern culture, which has given us Beethoven, Monet, Proust, John Coltrane, and so much else that has provided resources for articulating our responses to the modern world. These resources make a difference to how we inhabit that world to a degree which it is hard to maintain is the case for the kind of epistemology that seeks to overcome Cartesian sceptical problems.² It is therefore hardly surprising that, given its dependence on something which fails to deliver what it promises, analytical aesthetics is notable for the almost total lack of interest it generates among those who are most engaged with artistic production and reception. Musicians have little or no interest in what constitutes the ‘real’ musical work, be it the score, a performance, etc., because that is a problem generated by a philosophical concern with ontology which has little effect on the practice of music;³ writers find questions about fictional discourse even less relevant to literary production than they find most literary theory; and visual artists (who often do attend to aspects of European philosophy) largely ignore analytical approaches to art that worry, for instance, about what ‘expression’ means. Things have begun to change in some areas, as Aaron Ridley’s excellent book on *The Philosophy of Music* (2004)⁴ suggests, but the essential vacuity of analytical aesthetics is only really interesting as a sign of a wider issue concerning the goals of philosophy. A good theory about a virus might enable one to combat its pathogenic effects. What does a theory of expression achieve in relation to artists who need to ‘express themselves’? Would a true philosophical account of what it is that they are doing really make a difference to how they impro-

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² Sceptical issues about our knowledge of other people of the kind that inform the best work of Stanley Cavell are another matter: as he suggests, these are a vital aspect of modernity. As Rorty argues, Cavell unfortunately tends to conflate epistemological scepticism in the analytical mode with scepticism about the knowledge of others.

³ The question as to how to establish the ‘real’ score no doubt has philosophical elements, but in practice these do not finally determine what is established, as there is no precise match between philological procedures and philosophical ones.

⁴ Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.