Pg 30-31 Gaut, Berys, "'Art' as a Cluster Concept", in Theories of Art, Noël Carroll (ed.), University of Wisconsin Press, 2000, pp. 25-44.

vi. For example, Roger Scruton argues against Photography (which many would take to be an established art form) as an art form in: Roger Scruton, "Why Photography is Not Art," in Golblatt and Brown, op. cit., p. 90

vii. All explanations of reason in this section are drawn from: Skorupski, John, 'The Unity and Diversity of Reasons' Unpublished. They can applied to concepts of art to explain many of the problems with anti-essentialists.

Interview with Simon Prosser

(Conducted on 3rd June 2008. Interviewer: Joe Slater).

Joe Slater: It's common knowledge among your students that you were originally a physicist. At what point did you "see the light," as it were, and come to philosophy?

Simon Prosser: Not while I was still doing physics. I often get asked how I started off in physics and got into philosophy. It's not something uncommon, actually. There are quite a few philosophers who did either physics or mathematics at first. I think it's because in the case of people doing physics they're often interested in the big questions about space and time and the universe and so on. Certainly what happened in my case was just that I mis-located the things that I was interested in. I thought physicists were the people who addressed the really big questions about those topics, and it took a long time to realise that actually what physicists do is mainly mathematics; figuring out things that are specific to the actual world. So I did my physics degree feeling that something wasn't right, but I didn't know what. I even started a Masters degree and had a conditional offer of a PhD place before I finally had to accept that physics wasn't really the thing for me, but I didn't know what I did want to do at that time. I had done just one very short philosophy of science course during my physics degree, so I had just a little idea about what philosophy was. It seemed to come very naturally to me, but it took a couple of years after finishing with physics before I finally decided that I should come and study philosophy properly. Because things hadn't really worked out with the physics I was very cautious about it, so I did a one-year conversion course, a postgraduate diploma. I went into it thinking "well, just be very careful and see how this goes." But I very quickly realised that I was very, very keen.

J: You've been a member of staff here at St Andrews since 2002?

S: That's right.

J: What attracted you to St Andrews in the first place?

S: Well, to be honest, the job situation in academia generally and certainly in philosophy is such that you often don't have much of a choice, especially at first, so if I'm completely honest what brought me here initially was the fact that they offered me a job. Every time a job is advertised loads and loads of people apply. But I was very happy to get a job here because it's an exceptionally strong department. In surveys that people respect it's usually rated in the top two or three departments in the UK. And I always wanted to live by the sea. I'm very happy about that too.

J: Are you likely to still be here in a few years time, or are you planning to move on...?

S: No plans to move anywhere at the moment. I think I like the place more and more as time goes

on.

J: At the moment, you're working on Zeno objects, two dimensional content of consciousness and complex demonstratives, indexicals and immunity to error.

S: Well, those are some things I've written about in the past. My main research interest is in philosophy of mind and then after that metaphysics. After that some areas of philosophy of language insofar as they overlap with mind and metaphysics. What I'm going to be working on over the next period is a number of issues in philosophy of perception and some things that overlap with philosophy of perception and philosophy of time. I'm provisionally planning to write a book on time and perception, but before I do that I've got a number of articles that I want to finish, mostly on issues to do with perception but also some other issues.

J: You regularly make references to other current philosophers in your articles, such as in your article about the two-dimensional content of consciousness, you refer to Chalmers, Dretske and Tye. To what extent is there a dialogue among philosophers when writing such articles? Do you, for example, have David Chalmers' number in your phone book?

S: I don't think I have his phone number, but I've got his email address! For that particular article Chalmers did very kindly read a draft for me. It's a general practice that people send drafts of articles to people who might be interested or people who might have helpful things to say. Most of what gets published has already been read by quite a lot of different people before it even gets sent to the journal. It's very useful because people can point out errors that you don't see yourself. We also meet each other and discuss our work at seminars and conferences. You can't make anywhere near as much progress just working in complete isolation as you do with help from other people.

J: Are there any philosophers today who you particularly agree with?

S: That's a difficult one. Let's think...possibly the person I find myself agreeing with most often is Daniel Dennett. That doesn't mean that I agree with everything he says, but I tend to be sympathetic to his views.

J: On a similar note, who would you say has had the greatest philosophical influence on you?

S: That's a really difficult one. It's very hard to pick out one person. I suppose when I was writing my PhD, Gareth Evans was a big figure and then Dennett... There are probably lots of them. Well, Jerry Fodor, John Perry, David Kaplan, Fred Dretske... There are probably others that I'm not thinking of. More recently Robert Stalnaker's work made me rethink a few things.

J: Is there any advice you would give to any students considering or aiming towards a career in philosophy?

S: I'd say they should understand that it's extremely competitive. But, on the other hand, if you really feel that it's what you want to do, if you're passionate about it and if you're willing to make sacrifices, then be very stubborn, determined and persistent. You may have lots of setbacks, and it can take a lot of determination, but if you're persistent enough you may get there. Funding for graduate studies is very competitive, and there are nowhere near enough jobs to go around and a lot of very bright people with PhDs chasing them. And when you get a job you have to work hard and it can sometimes be stressful. But most of us in this profession really love what we do – I'd certainly never want to do anything else.

J: In the current philosophical climate, there appears to be an increasing amount of specialisation. No one today can be so successful across the board as Hume, or Kant, or even Russell, so do you

think in the future, it will reach the extent, where philosophers have to have very precise niches of specialisation or areas of expertise to make any contribution to philosophy?

S: It's hard to say. I hope it won't get much more specialised than it is now, because one of the nice things about philosophy at the moment is that even though people do specialise there is some scope for doing something quite different. For example, I've toyed with the idea of trying to write something in aesthetics. There are people who maybe work on metaphysics and philosophy of mind and then have managed to write something on ethics. It's certainly not possible to keep up with the literature on everything. There's just too much getting published. But maybe we won't be able to specialise too much more because of the fact that issues in philosophy do tend to be fairly interconnected. Sometimes you have to know a bit about one area to make progress in another area. But predicting the future is very difficult.

J: In lectures, you quite often refer to sci-fi series. *Star Trek* and *Red Dwarf* spring to mind. It does seem an interesting link between physics and philosophy. Do you think that the sci-fi genre particularly lends itself to being used in examples in philosophy?

S: I think it does. Yes, a lot of philosophers have used thought-experiments that have involved sci-fi, and in many different areas of philosophy. For example Derek Parfit has used sci-fi examples to do with teleportation in certain areas of moral philosophy. I think that sometimes the people who write sci-fi series must have been studying philosophy. I'm pretty sure that whoever wrote the scripts for *Star Trek* must know a bit of philosophy because you can sometimes identify specific philosophical issues and maybe issues from cognitive science as well. The older series sometimes seemed to be influenced by existentialism more than analytic philosophy, although there was one episode where they used the liar paradox to disarm a robot. But yes, sci-fi does lend itself to philosophical examples, I find. It's all about imagining far-off possibilities and thinking about what would happen.

J: What is your favourite sci-fi series?

S: At the moment I'd have to say *Battlestar Galactica.* Not the old one from the 1970s, but the new one.

J: Having experience in both physics and philosophy, what do you think should be the role of philosophy with regard to physics, or science in general?

S: Well, I suppose to clarify what it is that physicists and other scientists do and also to clarify the interpretation of their theories. There has tended to be this phenomenon with quantum mechanics in particular, that physicists have given interpretations of quantum mechanics that are really philosophical interpretations. What the physicists can do is figure out the theories and figure out the mathematical structure that gives the right predictions, but then, what that really tells us about the world is really a philosophical question. Philosophy also has other roles, such as in relation to ethical issues that arise from certain scientific investigations or discoveries.

J: I noticed on your webpage that you're a keen photographer.

S: That's right.

J: Do you think that helps out in any way with your philosophising? Does it inspire you?

S: Well, it's more something I do to give my brain a rest and try to do something more artistic. But I have to admit that I am feeling a certain temptation to try to write something on photographic aesthetics, because there is a literature of certain issues to do with photography. I haven't really read

very far into it yet, but it's possible I might try to do something like that at some point. Mostly photography satisfies a different need I think. There are some issues of overlap, because I work on philosophy of perception quite a lot and sometimes when you're doing photography it forces you to think about how the camera is representing the world. So perhaps it can help a little bit in thinking about how the mind is representing the world.

J: One last question. As was asked to Marcus Rossberg in *Aporia's* first issue, what is your favourite bar in St Andrews.?

S: Favourite bar? There are so many to choose from! (*Deliberates for a long time*). I suppose it's Drouthy Neebors probably, though I preferred it before they refurbished it, but there are several others that I like.

Can Modal Agnosticism Save Constructive Empiricism?

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Supervised by Dr. Katherine Hawley
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ABSTRACT

In this paper I argue that by adopting modal agnosticism, the constructive empiricist can overcome the scientific realist's main objection. After introducing Bas van Fraassen's constructive empiricism and showing how he can respond to three traditional objections to his view, I consider James Ladyman's recent critique. Ladyman correctly argues that the constructive empiricist needs to distinguish between the observable and unobservable in a non-arbitrary manner. To be able to do so, the constructive empiricist must recognise objective modality in nature, but doing so would be at odds with the position's principle motivation of doing away with inflationary metaphysics and objective modality. I next explain John Diver's modal agnosticism. I argue that the modal agnostic has the resources available for the constructive empiricist to be able to make the distinction Ladyman requires. Since modal agnosticism does not entail an inflationary metaphysics, I argue that it is compatible with, and can thus save, constructive empiricism from Ladyman's challenge.

1. INTRODUCTION

Scientific realists believe that our best, currently accepted scientific theories are approximately true. In his seminal work *The Scientific Image*, Bas van Fraassen criticises the realist for the 'inflationary metaphysics' the position entails and offers in its place a constructive empiricist account of science which aims to do without the latter. "To be an empiricist" argues van Fraassen, "is to withhold belief in anything that goes beyond the actual, observable phenomena, and to recognise no objective modality in nature" (1980, 202).