



Chapter Seven – Aesthetic Experience Is Truth Beauty and Beauty Truth?

Roots of Wisdom
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Helen Buss Mitchell

Chapter Review



The Issue Defined

- In this chapter we consider the medium of *aesthetic experience*, look at some philosophical reflections on the beautiful, and examine the role art can play in bringing us to aesthetic forms of knowing. Our focus will be less on aesthetics than on an aesthetic approach to examining truth.

Functions of Art in Society

- Plato regards art as copies of appearances in the material world (i.e., copies of copies), twice removed from the Forms and able to be used for propaganda
- Aristotle regards art as able to perform a cathartic function
- Robert Browning has criticized even art that is perfect in its imitation for failing to have “soul”
- Artists, like Celtic poets, have sometimes functioned in the role of priest
- Art can act as a form of Zen practice, disciplining the mind
- African art has been interpreted as an artist serving as a conduit for the Supreme Being

Art and Beauty

- In the *Symposium*, Plato explores the relationship between love and beauty
- Socrates explains that *eros* or earthly love can function as art does to link the temporal and the spiritual
- Through ascending forms of love, Socrates contends, humans can achieve the love of beauty in itself

Truth and Beauty

- Keats asserted that truth and beauty are two aspects of one ultimate reality
- Buddhist doctrines of emptiness find a realization in some Asian art
- Chinese and Japanese landscape painting helps us reach beyond words to the inner knowledge and wisdom that are too deep for verbal expression

Truth and Beauty in Western Philosophy

- Schelling
 - Responded to Kant's assertion that the noumenal is unknowable
 - Artistic creation seen as fusing subject and object
 - Aesthetic intuition offers knowing through aesthetic experience
- Schopenhauer
 - most art forms copy the Ideas of the Will
 - music copies the Will itself in order to transcend it
 - human beings are natural slaves to the Will

Truth and Beauty in Western Philosophy

- Nietzsche
 - Socrates, the theoretical man, has ruined Greek tragedy
 - tragedy combined the individuating Apollonian impulse and the ecstatic loss of self evidenced in the Dionysian impulse
 - the rebirth of tragedy could signal the return of the aesthetic hearer, i.e, the person able to properly emotionally respond to art
- Heidegger
 - human persons as instances of being-in-the-world
 - truth verification not so much a matter of mimesis as unconcealing
 - artworks bring truth into being in historically specific ways

Art as a Vehicle for Experiencing the World Differently

- Impressionism reveals the effect of light in changing the appearance of an object
- Cubism dissects a form and then reconstructs it, using the entire surface area of a painting
- Museums and exhibitions have used juxtaposition and art installations to pose questions about reality, as well as to consider the consequences of race and gender for human beings
- Art has served as a healing response to trauma

Key Terms

- Noetic
- Ineffable
- Aesthetics
- Mimesis
- Catharsis
- Beginner's mind
- Symposium
- Hubris
- Eros
- Aesthetic intuition
- Aesthetic contemplation
- Shadow self
- Theoretical man
- Aesthetic hearer
- Being-in-the-world
- Unconcealment/revealment
- Axiology

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