

HEGEL: ON THE ARTS

is an introduction to the world of artistic beauty, as explored by the most influential thinker of modern times.

Hegel (1770-1831) was the founder of modern systematic aesthetics. No other philosopher since Aristotle offered such profound insights into the nature of artistic beauty. None has matched him in showing architecture, sculpture, painting, music, and literature to be an organic progression, a total world shared with religion and philosophy.

Hegel's lectures on fine art have been pruned to their living core, and expertly translated. Here is Hegel himself, comprehensively brief, and in his own words.

The translator's extended introduction provides valuable background for the reader new to these stimulating ideas.

Milestone of Thought

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by Henry Paolucci

Charles Bénard (5 vols., Paris, 1840–52). The first complete translation into English was *G. W. F. Hegel: The Philosophy of Fine Art*, translated, with notes, by Francis Plumptre Bereford Osmaston (4 vols., London, 1920), based on the 1835 Hotho text; the second is *Hegel's Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, translated by T. M. Knox, with a Translator's Preface and notes (2 vols., Oxford, 1975), based, like our abridged version, on Hotho's second edition. In his Preface, Professor Knox gives an objective evaluation of the Osmaston translation. Both he and Osmaston acknowledge that the English version of Hegel's Introduction by Bernard Bosanquet—*The Introduction to Hegel's Philosophy of Fine Art*, translated from the German, with Notes and a Prefatory Essay, by Bernard Bosanquet (London, 1886)—is a model translation that has become a philosophical classic in its own right. For an evaluation of the T. M. Knox translation, stressing its interpretative significance as compared with Bosanquet's treatment of the Introduction, see the review by Anne and Henry Paolucci in *The Owl of Minerva: Quarterly Journal of the Hegel Society of America*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (March, 1977), pp. 4–7.

A list of useful supplementary readings in English follows:

- Bosanquet, Bernard (1892, 1894). *A History of Aesthetic*. London: Allen & Unwin.
- Bradley, A. C. (1909, 1961). "Hegel's Theory of Tragedy." In *Oxford Lectures on Poetry*. London: Macmillan.
- Clark, Richard C. (1970). "Hegel: Bibliographical Spectrum." In *Hegel in Comparative Literature, Review of National Literatures*, I, 2, 273–292. New York: St. John's University.
- Hofstadter, Albert (1974). "On Artistic Knowledge: A Study of Hegel's Philosophy of Art." In *Beyond Epistemology: New Studies in the Philosophy of Hegel*, edited by F. G. Weiss. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.
- Kaminsky, Jack (1962, 1970). *Hegel on Art: An Interpretation of Hegel's Aesthetics*. Albany: State University of New York (SUNY).
- Kedney, John Steinfort (1885, 1897). *Hegel's Aesthetics: A Critical Exposition*. Chicago: Scott, Foresman & Co.
- Knox, Israel (1936). *The Aesthetic Theories of Kant, Hegel, and Schopenhauer*. New York: Columbia University.
- Paolucci, Anne (1978). "Hegel's Theory of Comedy." In *Comedy: New Perspectives, New York Literary Forum*, I, 89–108. New York: New York Literary Forum.
- Paolucci, Anne and H. Paolucci (1962, 1975, 1978). "Introduction." In *Hegel on Tragedy*. New York: Doubleday; Harper & Row; Greenwood.
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I

THE IDEA OF ARTISTIC BEAUTY, OR THE IDEAL

These lectures deal with *Aesthetics*. Their subject is the wide *realm of the beautiful*—which is to say, the realm of *art*, and more precisely, of *fine art*.

Artistic rather than natural beauty is the subject matter of aesthetics, which may thus be called, more properly, the philosophy of fine art

Def.
aesthetics

The word *Aesthetics* in its literal sense is perhaps not quite appropriate here, for it means, strictly speaking, the science of sensation or feeling. Yet it is now commonly used in our more specialized sense, and may therefore be permitted to stand. We should bear in mind, however, that a more accurate expression for our science is the "Philosophy of Art," and better still, the "Philosophy of Fine Art."

With that expression we at once exclude from consideration the *beauty of nature*. In ordinary usage we speak of beautiful color, a beautiful sky, a beautiful river, and, even more, of beautiful flowers, animals, and, above all, beautiful human beings. Whether there is a natural beauty to be recognized as existing beside artistic beauty is not our concern here. We wish merely to assert that *artistic* beauty stands higher than the beauty of nature. But "higher" is of course an altogether indefinite expression. We mean that the beauty of art

belongs to mind and that mind only is capable of truth. Thus to be truly beautiful, a thing must have an element of mind in it and indeed be a product of mind. In this respect the beauty of nature exists for us as but a reflection of the beauty of mind, as a thing incomplete and imperfect in itself, the real substance of which is contained in mind.

As a matter of historical fact, for all that is said about the beauties of nature, no one has as yet taken it into his head to give us a scientific, systematic account of such beauty. The aspect of *utility* has been emphasized; we have had, for example, scientific catalogues of medically useful natural things, offering detailed descriptions of minerals, chemical compounds, plants, and animals. But we have not had any comparable analysis and classification of natural things to emphasize their beauty.

Insofar as works of art are produced by mind, they are in themselves essentially spiritual. They have sensuous being for us, of course, but it is a sensuousness pervaded by mind. In the merely external things of unintelligent nature, mind finds itself at a distance; but in works of art, it has to do with its very own. Indeed, artistic productivity belongs as much to mind as thought itself; and thus, when mind subjects art to scientific consideration, it is in fact only satisfying its own inmost need.

To begin with, we meet generally with two opposite ways of treating our subject scientifically. On the one hand, we find a purely external approach. It busies itself with actual works of art, arranging them to show historical patterns and initiating discussion of their particular characteristics; or it may sketch out theories to guide us both in criticizing and in producing works of art. On the other hand, we find science leaving particular works of art behind to generalize about the beautiful as such, thereby creating a merely abstract philosophy of the beautiful.

An empirical approach to art is indispensable, of course; yet, on this side, it is only the *scholarship* of the history of art that has had a permanent scientific value, and one that it cannot but continue to have. Its task is to enrich our aesthetic appreciation of particular works of art by supplying us with what we need to know of the historical circumstances that conditioned their production. Theorizing in the strict sense is not a part of such scholarship, though there may be an occasional straying in that direction. Yet if a reader doesn't let this

distract him, he will find that such scholarship provides the philosophy of art with a wealth of historical material, into the details of which philosophy cannot enter.

The opposite approach to art leaves particular works aside and seeks to understand in a purely theoretical way what beauty is in itself. It was Plato who first required of philosophic study that it deal with things not in their particularity but in their universality. He held that truth was not in the singleness of individual good actions, true opinions, beautiful human beings or works of art, but in *goodness*, *beauty*, *truth* themselves. Still, in the sphere of art, even for the mere idea of beauty, the Platonic abstraction must fail to satisfy the deeper philosophical wants of the mind today. An idea of the beautiful must indeed be our starting point for a philosophy of art; but our conception must from the beginning reconcile the two approaches we have mentioned, combining metaphysical universality with what is genuinely particular.

Coming closer to a scientific treatment of our subject, we take for granted, as an introductory conception, that a work of art is no natural product but a thing brought into being by human activity, created by mind. But the question at once occurs: What is man's need to produce works of art? On the one hand, it may appear that such works are products of idle fancy or chance. On the other, they seem sometimes to originate in the highest of human impulses, supplying what seems to be an absolute need of man and being wedded in this respect to the most universal religious interests and world-perspectives of entire epochs and peoples. It is art in this latter sense, conceived as an absolute rather than a merely contingent need of man, that concerns us here.

Man's need for art, no less than his need for religion and philosophy, is rooted in his capacity to mirror himself in thought

On its formal side, man's need for art is rooted in the fact that he is a thinking consciousness. Man is not only *immediate* and *single*, like all other natural things; as mind, he also reduplicates himself, existing for himself because he thinks himself. He does this, in the first place, theoretically, by bringing himself into his own consciousness, so as to

art as self-actualization versus art as imitation

as
form
making
planning

form an idea of himself. But he also realizes himself for himself through *practical* activity. This he does by reshaping external things, by setting the seal of his inner being upon them, thereby endowing them with his own characteristics. Man's spiritual freedom consists in this reduplicating process of human consciousness, whereby all that exists is made explicit *within* him and all that is in him is realized *without*. Here not only artistic making but all human behaving and explaining—whether in the forms of political and moral action, religious imaginative awareness, or scientific knowledge—has its ground and necessary origin.

What distinguishes art from other things made by man is, first of all, that it is made for man's *sensuous* apprehension in such a way as to address itself ultimately to his *mind*, which is to find a spiritual satisfaction in it. The sensuous shapes and sounds of art present themselves to us not to arouse or satisfy desire but to excite a response and echo in all the depths of consciousness of the mind. The *sensuous* can be thus *spiritualized* in us because in art, it is the *spiritual* that appears in sensuous shape. A man-made sensuous thing is a true work of art, in other words, only in the measure that it has been brought into being through mind, by genuinely spiritual productive activity. In such activity, the spiritual and sensuous aspects must be fused as an undivided unity. This is what constitutes genuinely artistic productive imagination, or *phantasy*. When such phantasy is truly artistic, it is the imagination of a great mind and heart that seizes and creates both ideas and shapes so as to exhibit the profoundest and most universal human interests in completely formed sensory representations.

argus
imitation

With that we put aside any notion that art's purpose is the *imitation of nature*. To take what already exists, just as it is, simply to make it over a second time as an exact *copy*—that we may at once dismiss as a superfluous labor. The result, at best, must fall far short of nature. Imitations are, after all, *one-sided* deceptions, i.e., appearances of reality addressed to one sense only, and therefore hardly more than parodies of what is genuinely living. Pleasure is no doubt to be found in the skill and industry required to produce strikingly realistic copies of nature, but it is pleasure that is soon enough chilled into boredom and repugnance. When it becomes a question only of whether a natural thing has been *correctly* copied, what disappears in the process is the very idea of *objective beauty*. It is of course essential to art to have natural shapes as part of its foundation. But what the

natural world supplies, cannot be art's *rule*, and much less can mere imitation of external appearance as external be its *end*.

To conclude our introductory remarks, we must ask finally: What then is the true content of art, and with what aim is it to be *true content* presented? A common view is that it ought to offer us, through our senses, *all* that finds a place in human experience, all that can arouse and animate the heart and mind of a human being, whether he be cultured or uncultured. To draw the human heart through the whole significance of life by means of external representations of its innermost movements is what, from this perspective, constitutes the peculiar and pre-eminent power of art. Linked with this is the notion that art has also a power to mitigate and even purge the fierceness of our impulses, passions, and desires—which is to say that, while it is itself sensuous, art is somehow nevertheless able to deliver man from the power of sensuousness.

Related to this, in turn, is the notion that art ought ultimately to teach. That art has taught, that it has been in fact the first *instructress* of peoples, is certainly true. But to suggest that *didactic* utility in the moral or spiritual sphere is its end and that its sensuous basis is a mere means, amounts to denying it a vocation and purpose of its own. The sensuous and the spiritual are both essential to art. The contrast or struggle of the two in the mind of man makes him, it has been said, an amphibious animal forced to live in two contradictory worlds at once. His consciousness wanders between them, shuttle-cocked back and forth, unable to satisfy itself wholly in either. The common understanding demands that this contradiction be resolved, yet it remains fixed in the antithesis. The solution demanded remains for it a mere *ought*. When the cultural experience of an entire age sinks into this contradiction, it becomes philosophy's task to show that neither side possesses truth in itself, that each is one-sided and self-dissolving, that the truth lies in the conciliation and mediation of the two, and that such mediation or *reconciliation* is in reality already accomplished and is always self-accomplishing.

v

The sensuous and the spiritual which struggle as opposites in the common understanding are revealed as reconciled in the truth expressed by art

That points us toward what we must vindicate as a higher standpoint

for art. Against the view that art is a means of instruction and moral improvement, aspiring to something that remains an *ought to be*, we must maintain rather that its purpose is to reveal the *truth* in an arresting sensuous form, representing for mind the reconciliation of opposites just described. There we have the idea of art in its inner necessity, traced to what has been, historically speaking, its point of origin. In the modern world, brought to focus on the antithesis we have described, philosophy in general has had a re-awakening; and it was that re-awakening that gave us the beginnings of a truly scientific aesthetics as well as a higher sense of the importance of art.

To have recognized that artistic beauty is and has been a means of resolving the contradiction between abstract mind and actual nature must stand as one of the great achievements of modern times. It was indeed Kant who brought philosophical thinking to focus on the "reconciled contradiction," though he did not elaborate its essence scientifically or present it as the only true reality. In his *Critique of the power of judgment*, which he defines as "the power of thinking the particular as contained under the universal," he gives us a treatment of the beautiful in art that cancels any severance of universal and particular, end and means, conception and object. In artistic beauty, perception and feeling are exalted into spiritual universality, and the sensuous and conceptual find justification and satisfaction all in one. Yet Kant in the end requires that we accept this apparent reconciliation not as the truth and reality of art in itself, but as something merely subjective, experienced as such in both the production and appreciation of works of art.

Thus we may say that while Kant's criticism is the starting-point for a true conception of artistic beauty, that conception could not assert itself as a higher grasp of the true unity of necessity and freedom, of particular and universal, of sensuous and rational, till it had overcome the basic deficiencies of Kantian thought. It is Schiller who presses beyond the subjectivity and abstractness of Kant's thinking. Accepting the principles of unity and reconciliation as the truth of art, as actualized in art, Schiller touched the profoundest depths of the true concept of artistic beauty.

After Schiller, the unity of opposites which he first grasped scientifically as the principle and essence of art was taken up, by an advance in philosophy, as the *Idea itself*—principle of all existence

and knowledge—to be recognized in that capacity as the sole truth and reality. This insight, as developed in Schelling's philosophy, brings science to its absolute standpoint. As we have seen, art had already begun to assert its true nature and dignity in relation to the highest human interests, but it was only now that the actual *concept* of art and its place in scientific theory were discovered. Though at times not without a significant measure of distortion, art was now accepted in its high and genuine vocation.

Scientifically treated, art stands on the same ground as religion and philosophy

Indicating briefly the place of aesthetics as it relates to the other philosophical sciences, we may say to begin with that, where it rises highest, art's sphere is shared with religion and philosophy. Each of the three—art, religion, and philosophy—is a moment of absolute mind, and they differ from one another only in the forms in which they bring their content, the absolute, to human consciousness. The differences in form, moreover, are implicit in the shared content. Mind in its truth is absolute; which means that it is not an abstraction lying outside the objective world, but is rather present in objectivity as our finite minds experience what is objective, whether as finite in the natural sphere or as absolute on the levels of artistic, religious, or philosophic awareness. Distinguishing the three forms of the finite mind's awareness and apprehension of the absolute, we may say that the first is an immediate and for that reason sensuous knowing, a knowing in the configuration of the sensuous and objective itself, in which the absolute is brought to our contemplation and feeling; that the second form is imaginative or pictorial thinking; and that the third and last is the free thinking of absolute mind.

Art is thus the most immediate self-gratification of absolute mind. Its truth is the absolute as an object in sensuous form, which is for art the only adequate form. Religion adds worship to pictorial thinking, and thereby, in a subjective sense, transcends art's way of apprehending the absolute. In worship, the subject so identifies himself with the absolute content that its *inner* presence for him, in ideas and depth of feeling, becomes for the absolute itself the essential element of existence. Philosophy, in turn, unites the forms of apprehension of art

as idea, as moment of absolute mind

3 Forms of awareness of absolute

philosophy
 as union
 of objectivity
 art → idea
 and subjectivity
 religion →
 thinking

and religion. The *objectivity* of art here loses its characteristically external sensuous form, but only so that it may be exchanged for what is the highest form of the objective, the form of *thought*; and the *subjectivity* of religion is purified, similarly, into the subjectivity of *thinking*. For thinking is, on the one hand, the most intimate, truest subjectivity, while true thought, the Idea, is at the same time the most effectual and most objective universality which can apprehend itself in its true form only in thinking.

Having linked art with religion and philosophy as proceeding from the absolute Idea, and having defined art's end as the sensuous representation of the absolute itself, we must next try to indicate, briefly, how the basic divisions of aesthetics as a science may be deduced from this very concept of artistic beauty. Granted that the content of art is the Idea, and that its form lies in the plastic use of images accessible to sense, we must first examine how art succeeds in reconciling these two sides—its content and its form—into a full and united totality. What is first required is that the content which is to be given artistic representation be inherently worthy of such representation. The result is, otherwise, only a bad combination: a content that will not lend itself to plastic, external representation is forced into it, a prosaic matter is expected to manifest itself in a form antagonistic to its very nature.

content of art concrete
 Related to this is the requirement that the content of art must not be anything inherently abstract. This does not mean that only something sensuously concrete, as opposed to all that is spiritual and intellectual, will do. For, in fact, everything that is genuinely true, in mind as in nature, is inherently concrete, having both subjectivity and particularity in itself, as well as universality. If, for example, we take God simply in his *Oneness*, merely as the *Supreme Being*, we have only a lifeless abstraction. As such, God is not apprehended in his concrete truth and cannot therefore provide material for art, least of all for plastic art. That explains why the Jews and Turks have not used art to represent their God—who is by no means an abstraction of the understanding for them—in the positive way that Christians have used it. For in Christianity, God is conceived in his truth as thoroughly concrete in himself, which is to say, as person and subject and, more closely determined, as spirit or mind. What he is as spirit manifests itself to religious consciousness as the Trinity of Persons

which is for itself nevertheless One. Here we have essentiality, universality, and particularity in reconciled unity; and such unity alone constitutes the concrete. To be true in itself, any content must have such unity; and art can therefore require nothing less of whatever it is to represent in sensuous form.

But the form, too, must be no less individual and wholly concrete in itself. Indeed, it is only insofar as both have a measure of concreteness that the two elements of art, the content and the form, can coincide. The natural shape of the human body, for instance, is sensuously concrete in a way that enables it to represent spirit, which is in itself also concrete. We must reject the view that the human body, as an actual phenomenon, is only accidentally chosen to supply art with a true form. A content that is inherently concrete involves in itself the element of manifestation. And the sensuously concrete manifestation, in turn, addresses itself to the inward being, for which it in fact exists as perceptible and imaginable. This alone is the reason that shape and content must be made to conform in art. Unlike the *merely* sensuous concrete things of external nature, a work of art is not naively self-centered; it is instead essentially a question, an address to the responding human soul, an appeal to affections and to mind.

In Ideal artistic beauty, perfection of form derives ultimately from perfection of content

It follows from this that the Idea embodied in actual works of art—the *Idea as the beautiful in art*—cannot be the *Idea as such* in the way that a metaphysical logic conceives it. If the Idea and its sensuous shape in art are to be reciprocally adequate, the Idea as such must already have been specially determined in itself to be fit for true expression. So determined, or molded, the Idea becomes the Ideal. The reciprocal adequacy required is not something merely formal, as if this or that idea might do equally well, so long as the actual shape given it, of whatever kind, represents only that specific idea. The truth required of the Ideal is in that case confounded with mere correctness, which consists in nothing more than giving appropriate expression to any meaning in such a way that the meaning is immediately recognizable in the objective expression. The Ideal is nothing of the sort. Any content whatever can be given a representation which, judged by

*formes
concrete*

*concrete =
idea of
art must
be fit for
expression*

*reciprocal
adequacy as
not just
more
correctness*

*inadequacy of
ideal not
matter
& technique*

the standard of its own nature, is wholly adequate; yet it would not therefore gain the right to claim for itself the artistic beauty of the Ideal. Contrasted with ideal beauty, such a representation might appear quite defective. Defectiveness in art, as we shall later show, is not to be ascribed only and always to lack of skill. On the contrary: defectiveness of form arises from defectiveness of content. Greater or lesser skill in apprehending or imitating nature's forms is not the chief thing here. Art that may be quite perfect technically, and in other respects, may nevertheless be defective in terms of the Ideal of art. Only on art's highest levels can the Idea and its expression be reciprocally adequate in the Ideal sense. The outward shape the Idea then receives is the essentially true shape because the content of the Idea which that shape expresses is the essentially true content. This correspondence of the true Idea with the true shape it generates for itself is the Ideal.

But that correspondence can actualize itself in art only through the unfolding and reconciliation of the divergent aspects of the Idea, and it is in the process of such unfolding and reconciliation that artistic beauty comes to exhibit itself as a *totality of particular stages and forms.*

*historical
progression*

Art's progression through diverse forms—forms that are in fact nothing but the different possible relations of content and shape—may be regarded as an advance either of the Idea in itself or of the shape in which it gains existence. Since each is immediately bound up in the other, perfection of the Idea as content is reflected in perfection of shape; and correspondingly what are defects in the artistic shape prove to be defects also in the informing Idea. But, as we shall see, there are three basic relations that may obtain between the Idea and its outward artistic representation. As each serves to define and characterize a distinctive art form, we have three such forms to consider: first the Symbolic, then the Classical, and finally the Romantic.

harmonic sympathy with carnal

II

THE SYMBOLIC ART FORM

*Symbolic art seeks the perfect unity of form and content
that classical art finds and romantic art transcends* ✓

The Idea of the beautiful is actualized in the symbolical, classical, and romantic relationships of content and form. In the first of these, however, the Idea has not yet found its true form in itself; and so its external representation, regardless of the measure of skill with which it has been realized, cannot get beyond a mere search and struggle for genuine artistic expression. As an Idea that is still abstract in itself for mind, it seeks outward expression, first of all, in natural shapes that are left essentially unaltered. For such shapes the claim is inevitably made that they already have the substantial Idea attached to them as their meaning, that they have a calling to express or manifest it, and even that they are themselves to be interpreted as actual embodiments of the Idea. The element of truth in this lies in the fact that in all natural objects as externally existent, there is an aspect that can and does represent for us a universal meaning. But because a perfect correspondence is not possible at this stage, the relation between Idea and representation can comprehend at best only an abstract aspect of the natural thing, as when we use a lion to mean strength.

The one-sided abstractness in the relation makes clear, on the other hand, how foreign the Idea seeking expression and the natural, external phenomenon really are to one another. Whatever the form

*abstract idea, concrete form containing another
idea as well as symbolic one*