

Philosophical Thoughts with Artistic Values

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Abstract

Philosophy and music differ principally according to their subject-matter and also the means by which they reflect, transform and express it. In a certain sense, music and philosophy, reflects reality in its relation to man, and depicts man, his spiritual world, and the relations between individuals in their interaction with the world. We live not in a primeval pure world, but in a world where everything has, been given a "human angle", a world permeated with our attitudes towards it, our needs, ideas, aims, ideals, joys and sufferings, a world that is part of the vortex of our existence. The whole infinite range of our relationships to the world stems from the sum-total of our interactions with it. We are able to consider our environment rationally through the gigantic historical prism of science, philosophy and music, which are capable of expressing life as a tempestuous flood of contradictions that come into being, develop, are resolved and negated in order to generate new contradictions. Philosophy of music is the study of fundamental questions about the nature of music and our experience of it. Unlike philosophy of science, say, the philosophy of an artistic practice, such as music, is one that most people have a significant background in, merely as a result of being members of a musical culture. Music plays a central role in many people's lives. Thus, as with the central questions of metaphysics and epistemology, not only can most people quickly grasp the philosophical questions music raises, they tend to have thought about some of those questions before encountering the academic discipline itself. In my paper I'll be discussing on philosophy and art, their correlation and importance.

Introduction

Philosophy, science and art differ principally according to their subject-matter and also the means by which they reflect, transform and express it. In a certain sense, art, like philosophy, reflects reality in its relation to man, and depicts man, his spiritual world, and the relations between individuals in their interaction with the world.

No scientifically, let alone artistically, thinking person can remain deaf to the wise voice of true philosophy, can fail to study it as a vitally necessary sphere of culture, as the source of world-view and method. Equally true is the fact that no thinking and emotionally developed person can remain indifferent to literature, poetry, music, painting, sculpture and architecture. Obviously, one may be to some extent indifferent to some highly specialized science, but it is impossible to live an intellectually full life if one rejects philosophy and art. The person who is indifferent to these spheres deliberately condemns himself to a depressing narrowness of outlook.

In a certain generalized sense the true philosopher is like the poet. He, too, must possess the aesthetic gift of free associative thinking in integral images. And in general one cannot achieve true perfection of creative thought in any field without developing the ability to perceive reality from the aesthetic standpoint. Without this precious intellectual prism through which people view the world everything that goes beyond the empirical description of facts, beyond formulae and graphs may look dim and indistinct.

Scientists who lack an aesthetic element in their makeup are dry-as-dust pedants, and artists who have no knowledge of philosophy and science are not very interesting people either, for they have little to offer above elementary common sense. The true artist, on the other hand, constantly refreshes himself with the discoveries of the sciences and philosophy. While philosophy and science tend to draw us into "the forest of abstractions", art smiles upon everything, endowing it with its integrating, colorful imagery.

Great Minds, Philosophy and Art:

Life is so structured that for a man to be fully conscious of it he needs all these forms of intellectual activity, which complement each other and build up an integral perception of the world and versatile orientation in it.

The biographies of many scientists and philosophers indicate that the great minds, despite their total dedication to research, were deeply interested in art and themselves wrote poetry and novels, painted pictures, played musical instruments and molded sculpture. How did Einstein live, for example? He thought, wrote, and also played the violin, from which he was seldom parted no matter where he went or whom he visited. Norbert Wiener, the founder of cybernetics, wrote novels, Darwin was deeply interested in Shakespeare, Milton and Shelley. Niels Bohr venerated Goethe and Shakespeare; Hegel made an exhaustive study of world art and the science of his day. The formation of Marx's philosophical and scientific views was deeply influenced by literature. Aeschylus, Shakespeare, Dante, Cervantes, Milton, Goethe, Balzac and Heine were his favorite authors. He responded sensitively to the appearance of significant works of art and he wrote poetry and fairy-tales. The radiance of a broad culture shines forth from the work of this genius. Lenin was not only acquainted with art but also wrote specialized articles about it.

His philosophical, sociological and economic works are studded with apt literary references. And what a delight he took in music!

In short, the great men of theory were by no means dry rationalists. They were gifted with an aesthetic appreciation of the world. And no wonder, for art is a powerful catalyst for such abilities as power of imagination, keen intuition and the knack of association, abilities needed by both scientists and philosophers.

If we take the history of Oriental culture, we find that its characteristic feature is the organic synthesis of an artistic comprehension of the world with its philosophical and scientific perception. This blending of the philosophical and the artistic is inherent in all peoples, as can be seen from their sayings, proverbs, aphorisms, tales and legends, which abound in vividly expressed wisdom.

If we are to develop effective thinking, we must not exclude any specifically human feature from participation in creative activity. The gift of perception, penetrating observation of reality, mathematical and physical precision, depth of analysis, a free, forward-looking imagination, a joyful love of life—these are all necessary to be able to grasp, comprehend and express phenomena, and this is the only way a true work of art can appear, no matter what its subject may be.

Art and Value

With regard to the value of art in general, there are two central points on which there is some consensus. First, most philosophers take the value of artworks to be intrinsic to them, in the sense that the value of a work is tied essentially to the experience that the work affords. Thus, artworks are not (properly) valued merely instrumentally, as means to some end, but 'for' or 'in' themselves (Budd 1995, 1-16; S. Davies 1987, 198-200; Scruton 1997, 374-6; Levinson 1992, 15-17). The question that naturally arises next is what it is about the experience an artwork affords that makes it valuable. That *pleasure* is a non-negligible part of the answer to this question is the second point upon which there is some consensus (S. Davies 1987, 198-205; Levinson 1992; Kivy 1997b, 212-17). However, concomitant with this consensus is an acknowledgement that simple pleasure taken, say, in the pleasant sensuality of the musical sounds is too trivial to ground the great value we attribute to music. In looking for other sources, the puzzle that arises is that music is supposed to be an abstract art, *par excellence*. If this means that music is divorced from everything else that concerns us in the 'real world' (that is, extra-musical life), it is puzzling why we should find so valuable the experiences musical works afford. Like the questions about musical expressivity and understanding considered above, this puzzle is restricted to the 'purely musical' elements of artworks, though these play no small role in 'impure' musical works such as songs.

There are a couple of dimensions to most solutions of the puzzle of pure music's value. One is the extent to which it is agreed that music really is abstract.

To the extent that one thinks that music is *not* unrelated to the real world, one will be able to argue that music's value is at least no more puzzling than the value of arts more obviously related to the real world, such as literature and representational painting and sculpture. The other dimension to most solutions of the puzzle of pure music's value is the extent to which one thinks the abstractness of music is the source of its value. Thus, two theorists might agree on the extent to which music is related to the real world (by being expressive, say), yet one locate its primary value in that expressivity while the other locates it in its abstract, purely musical features.

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, those who take the experience of music's expressiveness to be a more intimately emotional one (through being predicated on imaginative engagement with the music, say), tend to emphasize that experience as more central to musical understanding, and thus attribute a larger part of music's value to its expressivity. Those, on the other hand, whose theory of the experience of musical expressivity is more distanced (a matter of noticed resemblance, say), tend to place less weight on this element in their theories of musical value. At one extreme of this spectrum is the position that denies music to be expressive at all, and thus cannot attribute music's value to its expressivity (most notably Hanslick (1986); see also Zangwill 2004). Apart from this extreme position, most theorists agree that music's value is to be located in different kinds of experience, including the experience of purely musical features and expressive features; their disagreements are mostly about the relative weight of these different kinds of experiences in a complete account of musical value.

As with the debate between architectonicists and concatenationists, discussed above, the extent of the disagreement between various parties to this dispute is not clear. Those defending the value of music's expressivity tend to claim that its contribution to overall musical value is significant, but they stop short even of according it primary value, and do not argue against the value of purely musical elements of musical works (Ridley 1995, 192-6; Levinson 1982; 1992, 20-2; 1996b 124-5). They content themselves rather with pointing out the ways in which expressivity can be valuable. These include many of the features discussed above with respect to our interest in listening to music that arouses negative affective states in the listener. To recap, our emotional responses to music's expressivity can enable us to savor, understand, and even, to some extent, experience emotions in a 'safe' way. They can provide us with a cathartic release, and enable us to participate in a kind of communication with the composer or communion with other members of our musical culture (Levinson 1982; 1996b; Higgins 1991; S. Davies 1994, 271). Emphasizing this last point, Roger Scruton argues that music's value is quasi-moral, in that the kinds of music one responds to, or those valued in a particular culture, reflect the state of that individual's or culture's 'soul' (1997, 380-91; see also S. Davies 1994, 275-6.) Stephen Davies (1987, 207-12) has argued that there are beneficial consequences of an interest in music *in general*, such as heightened emotional and aural sensitivity, which are not properly valued as consequences of listening to individual pieces, but which lead us to value musical culture as a whole (just as we value kindness for its consequences in general, while rejecting as inappropriate instrumental motivations for kind acts).

On the other hand, those who defend the value of purely musical features tend to argue that the value of those features is primary, and that the value of music's expressivity is overrated. Alan Goldman (1992), for instance, argues against the idea that music is particularly suited to the expression of emotion, claiming that representational arts such as painting and literature are better at this. Moreover, he disputes the grounds of the value of expressivity given above. For example, he denies that music can teach us much about the emotions, and that we can savor our negative emotional responses to expressive music. Similarly, after an extensive discussion of the nature of musical expressiveness, Malcolm Budd argues that such expressiveness cannot come close to explaining music's value (1995, 155-7). He points to the facts that much valuable music is not expressive and that the equal expressiveness of different pieces would be outweighed in a comparative evaluation by the differences between them in terms of their purely musical value.

Both Budd and Goldman locate the value of pure music precisely in the abstractness that to some seems the greatest obstacle to explaining that value. Budd (1995, 164-71) points out that we have an extensive interest in abstract forms outside the realm of music, such as those of natural formations and in the decorative arts, and that such forms are capable of possessing valued aesthetic properties, such as beauty, elegance, and so on. Thus, it is no surprise that we value highly the works of an *art* of abstract forms.

Such artworks can exhibit such forms at a level of complexity not found in nature or the decorative arts and, further, can be *about* their abstract patterns, as when the first movement of a piano sonata ‘says something about’ sonata form.

Though these claims may be true, and make the case of music less puzzling by showing it shares the grounds of its value with other things, they also leave the primary puzzle largely unsolved, namely, why it is that we find the experience of abstract forms so valuable. (In Budd's defense, this puzzle is no longer one specific to the philosophy of *music*.)

Goldman (1992), by contrast, emphasizes the detachment from the world of practical affairs implied by music's abstractness. The complexity of great musical works demands the active engagement of our cognitive faculties, which we find rewarding, yet not in the pursuit of some practical goal which could be frustrated. However, there are some links between music and the ‘real world’ in his account of the value of the musical experience. For one, we value pieces that lead to a satisfying resolution, particularly if they are colored with negative effect, since this experience is rare in everyday life. For another, we feel a particularly close communion with the minds of the composer and other listeners, since we feel we are going through an experience just like one they have also had. Peter Kivy offers a similar, if less detailed, defense of this ‘liberating’ power of music (1997b, 179-217). One problem for Kivy's account is that he maintains both that our experience of music has ‘complete freedom from connection with our workaday world’ (1997b, 209), and that the properties of the music relevant to our experience include, ‘most importantly, its *expressive properties*’ (1997b, 205, original emphasis). Without some account of how our interest in the expressive properties of a piece does not lead us back to the workaday world (as Kivy insists such properties do in representational arts, such as literature and painting) it seems we should prefer a theory, such as Budd's or Goldman's, that provides some account of the real-world role our experience of these properties plays.

Can one imagine our culture without the jewels of philosophical thought that were contributed to it by human genius? or without its artistic values? Can one conceive of the development of contemporary culture without the life-giving rays of meditative art embodied in the works of such people as Dante, Goethe, Leo Tolstoy, Balzac, Pushkin, Lermontov, Dostoyevsky, Tchaikovsky, and Beethoven? Culture would have had a very different history but for the brilliant minds that gave us their masterpieces of painting, music, poetry and prose. The whole world of our thoughts and feelings would have been different, and incomparably poorer. And we, as individuals, would also have been flawed. The intellectual atmosphere that surrounds us from childhood, the style of thinking that permeates folk sayings, tales and songs, the books we have read, the paintings and sculptures we have admired, the music we have heard, the view of the world and humanity that we have absorbed thanks to our contact with the treasures of art, has not all this contributed to the formation of our individual self? Did it not teach us to think philosophically and perceive and transform the world aesthetically?

An indispensable feature of art is its ability to convey information in an evaluative aspect. Art is a combination of man's cognitive and evaluative attitudes to reality recorded in words, colors, plastic forms or melodically arranged sounds. Like philosophy, art also has a profoundly communicative function. Through it people communicate to one another their feelings, their most intimate and infinitely varied and poignant thoughts. A common feature of art and philosophy is the wealth they both contain of cognitive, moral and social substance. Science is responsible to society for a true reflection of the world and no more. Its function is to predict events. On the basis of scientific discoveries one can build various technical devices, control production and social processes cure the sick and educate the ignorant. The main responsibility of art to society is the formation of a view of the world, a true and large-scale assessment of events, a rational, reasoning orientation of man in the world around him, a true assessment of his own self. But why does art have this function? Because in its great productions it is not only consummately artistic but also profoundly philosophical.

How deeply philosophical, for instance, are the verses of Shakespeare, Goethe, Lermontov, Verhaeren! And indeed all the great writers, poets, composers, sculptors, architects, painters, in short, all the most outstanding and brilliant exponents of art were imbued with a sense of the exceptional importance of progressive philosophy and not only kept abreast of but were often responsible for its achievements. How profound were Tolstoy's artistically expressed meditations on the role of the individual and the people in the historical process (for example, Napoleon and Kutuzov, or the Russian people in the war of liberation of 1812, as portrayed in *War and Peace*), on freedom and necessity, on the conscious and the unconscious in human behavior.

Consider the psychological and philosophical depth and the artistic power with which Balzac revealed the social types in the society of his day in all their diversity (the idea of greed and acquisitiveness in the character of Gobseck!). How philosophical are the artistic and publicist works of Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot, Thomas Mann, Heine, Herzen, Chernyshevsky and many others.

If we turn to science fiction, we find that it is full of scientific and philosophical reflections, of varying visions of the future of science, technology and human existence in general. Quite often its plot is a series of mental experiments. However, neither the scientific nor the philosophical content, no matter how fully expressed in a work of art, constitutes its specific element. We never speak of any work of art, no matter how powerful, as a study, whereas creative work in philosophy is a study, an inquiry, and it is characterized above all not by its artistic but by its scientific qualities, although its artistic aspect is highly valued and has more than purely aesthetic significance. The crown of philosophical inquiry is truth and prediction, whereas in art it is artistic truth, not accuracy of reproduction, in the sense of a copy of what exists, but a lifelike portrayal of typically possible phenomena in either their developed or potential form. If art produced only truths similar to scientific truths, there would be no masterpieces of world art. The immortality of great masterpieces lies in the power of their artistic generalization, generalization of the most complex phenomenon in the world—man and his relations with his fellow men.

Some people believe that the specific feature of art is that the artist expresses his own intellectual world, his own intrinsic individuality. But this is not quite true. In any active creativity, any act that reflects and transforms life, a person also expresses himself, and the higher the level of creativity, in this case artistic, the higher the level of generalization, and hence the universal, despite all the individuality of the form. "Man's individuality or singularity is not a barrier to the universality of the will, but is subordinated to it. A just or moral, in other words, a fine action, although performed by one individual, is nevertheless approved by all. Everyone recognizes himself or his own will in this act. Here there occurs the same thing as in a work of art. Even those who could not create such a work find their own essence expressed therein. Such a work is therefore truly universal. The more its individual creator dissolves in it, the more approval it earns."

The aesthetic principle is not the specific element in philosophy although it is present there. Naturally, philosophy is distinguished from the other sciences by its being related far more closely to the aesthetic principle, to art. It synthesizes the everyday experience of the people and something from the other sciences, and also something from art without confining itself to any of them. The aesthetic element is also present in any science. By some scientists it is even regarded as a criterion of truth: the true is elegant and highly refined in its structure. The beauty, the elegance of an experiment, or of any theoretical construction, especially if it sparkles with wit, does credit to scientific thought evokes our legitimate admiration and affords us intellectual and aesthetic pleasure. Quite often this elegance shows itself in meaningful brevity, for genius is usually simply expressed, without superfluous words. So truth and beauty are sisters, although not always.

In philosophy this aesthetic principle is expressed more powerfully and fully. It is not only more synthetic and integrated than science. In its very social purpose it is, or should be, closer and more understandable to the masses of the people. It should not be separated from them by the "barbed wire" of a formalized, let alone a mathematical language.

A considerable number of philosophical works have been written in poetic and artistic form. Actually they are not poetry but philosophical thoughts expressed as poetry. Many brilliant works of philosophy are couched in such fine language that they read like great works of both science and art. Inspired by their genius, the great philosophers clothed their profound thoughts in images of astonishing aptness.

Many people draw attention to the fact that the achievements of science, no matter how significant they once were, are constantly being reviewed, whereas the masterpieces of art survive the centuries in all the splendor of their individuality. But have you noticed that something similar happens in philosophy too? The works of the great philosophers retain their inimitable value through the centuries. So in philosophy, just as in art, history is of special importance. Whereas the works of the classical natural scientists are expounded in textbooks and few people read them in the original, the classical works of philosophy must be read in the original in order to gain a full appreciation of philosophical culture. Every great philosopher is unique in his intellectual and moral value; he teaches us to perceive the world and ourselves profoundly and in their most subtle aspects.

What has been said does not, of course, imply that philosophy may ultimately be reduced to a form of art. Philosophical treatises do not become works of art even when they are expressed in the colorful and deeply symbolical language of poetry, as was often the case in ancient times, in the philosophy of the Renaissance and the New Age. Take Plato, for example. He had a colorful world-view; its very form evokes admiration. He is aesthetic all the way through.

Or take the philosophical views of the French materialists of the 18th century. They are simultaneously splendid works of art, full of humor, satire and barbed witticisms aimed at religion, scholasticism, and so on. Their works still delight us with the brilliance of their form, which clothes subtle and profound thoughts. Or again, take the philosophical ideas of Tolstoy or Dostoyevsky, in which their masterpieces are steeped. We began by dealing with the aesthetic principle in philosophy. But to a no less degree one can speak also of the philosophical principle in art. Probably the closest thing to philosophy is poetry, which has the power to make laconic but profound generalizations about both social and individual life, moral phenomena, and the relationship between man and the universe.

The metaphorical language of art, far from being alien to philosophy and other sciences, is an essential condition for every new step into the unknown.

The similar and the specific in philosophy and art can also be seen in the nature of generalization. Philosophy uses generalizations and its generalizations are of an extremely broad, virtually universal character. Its categories of the general, the particular and the unique are both interconnected and yet separate concepts. In art, on the other hand, the general, the particular and the unique are alloyed in the very fabric of the artistic image. Philosophy is theoretical from beginning to end, whereas art is sensuous and imaginable. Philosophical thought reflects its subject-matter in concepts, in categories; art is characterized, on the other hand, by emotional and imaginable reflection and by transformation of reality. This is not to say, of course, that art, particularly in its verbal form, in *belles'lettres*, and even more so in the intellectual type of novel, contains no concepts. Dostoyevsky's novels are three-quarters philosophical. The same applies to the works of Goethe, for example, for whom feeling and a philosophical understanding of nature, expressed in both artistic form and scientific analysis, were his life's work. The scientific, philosophical and artistic approaches were organic in Goethe. His work as a thinker is inseparable from that of the artist. When composing his works of art, he is at the same time a philosopher. He achieves the greatest aesthetic power in those very works (*Prometheus* and *Faust*) where the unity of artist and philosopher is most organic. Can we distinguish clearly between the philosophical and aesthetic principles in *Faust*? All that can be said is that no genius could have created such a work without a synthesis of the philosophical, aesthetic and the scientific.

Without a certain degree of intellect there can be no subtle feelings and from this it follows that art, which aesthetically expresses man's emotional-intellectual world in his relationship to the environment, is bound to feel the impact of philosophy and the other sciences. A world-view may come into art but not as an intrinsic part of it. We can speak of the philosophical content of art, just as we can speak of the philosophical content of science, when the scientist begins to consider the essential nature of his science, its moral value, social responsibility, and so on. These are actually philosophical questions and they do not form part of the specific nature of the given science. Rather they are the self-awareness of the science, just as the artist's reflections on the nature of art, its social meaning, and so on, are the self-awareness of art. And this is in fact philosophy, whose categories permeate all forms of thought, including that of the artist. Without them no artist could generalize, identify the typical in the particular fact, assess the quality of his subject-matter, preserve proportion, the most vital element in aesthetic imagination, or comprehend the contradictions of life in such a way as to give them full expression.

Conclusion

The work of the artist is not spontaneous. It always follows some kind of plan and it is most effective when talent is guided by a world-view, when the artist has something to tell people, much more rarely is it effective when it comes about as a result of the accidental associative play of the imagination, and never is it effective when it is a result of blind instinct. The keen attention that is given to the problems of method is a sign of progress in both modern science and art, a sign of the increasing interaction of all aspects of intellectual life—science, philosophy, and art are all interlinked and important to be assimilated in one's life as well.

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