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GEORG WILHELM FRIEDRICH HEGEL

Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics

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Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel , Bernard Bosanquet (Translator) , Michael Inwood (Introduction)

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Librarian note: an alternate cover for this edition can be found here.

For Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), art almost ranked with religion and philosophy in its power to reveal the fundamental nature of existence. But although he lived in the German golden age of Goethe, Schiller and Mozart, he also believed that art was in terminal decline.

To resolve this apparent paradox, as Michael Inwood explains in his incisive Introduction, we must understand the particular place of aesthetics in Hegel's vast intellectual edifice. Its central pillars consist of logic, philosophy of nature and philosophy of spirit. Art derives its value from offering a sensory vision of the God-like absolute, from its harmonious fusion of form and content, and from summing up the world-view of an age such as Homer's. While it scaled supreme heights in ancient Greece, Hegel doubted art's ability to encompass Christian belief or the reflective irony characteristic of modern societies. Many such challenging ideas are developed in this superb treatise; it counts among the most stimulating works of a master thinker.

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Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics Details

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From Reader Review Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics for online ebook

Nandini Goel says

"Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics" by "Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel" is a fine piece of work which speaks about "art", how it flourished, how it has taken different turns in the history and how its end is approaching. According to Hegel, Art can flourish the best only when it is given equal importance as compared to religion and philosophy. He believes that art is based on an Idea or a concept. He also continuously argues that the Greek art (which he calls classic art) was the period when art flourished at its peak and in the modern time after the arrival of Christian Art(which he calls the romantic art), the fervour is disappearing.

At first Hegel compares art and science. He discusses that art has doors opened for vagueness but science, which works on a specific criterion has none. He says that science is more of a technical subject but art deals mostly with beauty, which pleases the eyes. In Hegel's time art was not considered to be a subject of prime importance unlike subjects of science, religion and philosophy. He wishes to bring the status of art at equilibrium with religion and philosophy, for he believes that art can flourish the best only when it is given an equal status.

Hegel describes art to be of 5 types, namely: sculpture, poetry, architecture, painting and music. He divides the era of art into three, namely symbolic (pre-Greek), classic (Greek art) and romantic (post-Greek).

Hegel says that it is in the works of art that nations have deposited their profoundest intuitions and ideas of their heart and fine art is frequently the key but with many nations there are no other, to the understanding of their wisdom and of their religion. This I find very true even today. When I read about the heritage and culture of various countries for instance India, it is the art of the country through which we can understand the past. What the people of a particular era thought are reflected with the art works of that time. This can be easily explained with various existing monuments in the world, they can be easily distinguished in Persian, French, Greek, Moguls Chinese etc.

Here Hegel finds the most important part of the art to be its "content". The content of art is the Ideas and its form lies in the use of images accessible to the sense. Now, there are two requirements. The first requirement is the content, which is to be offered to the artistic representation, should show itself to be in its nature worthy of such representation otherwise it will only result in bad combination. The second requirement according to Hegel is the content should not be anything abstract in itself, it should be concrete (need not be "too specific").

Even after giving such profound understanding about art, Hegel then discusses about the ironies. He then despairs all possibilities of art having a future. He describes it to be a thing of past. He says "That art has rather been transferred into our ideas instead of maintaining its earlier necessity in reality and occupying its higher place". So maybe he felt that now the amalgamation of art and futuristic development of societies are not interrelated or expressed by the artist anymore.

Hegel staunchly believes, as I have mentioned earlier that art should be connected to religion and philosophy to achieve the best results. He believes "art no longer affords that satisfaction of spiritual needs which earlier ages and nations sought in it, and found in it alone, a satisfaction that, at least on the part of religion, was most intimately linked with art". May be we need to think about it as a future Generation.**smile**

According to Hegel, the feelings, the emotions and realistic approach of life, the relationship of men with one another had been badly compromised with the coming of Christianity and romantic art. Which I fail to understand as no religion can ever be expressed without representing Human relationship with one another. It is possible in general. Artists are finding inspiration in more singular & independent subjects than a subject like religion. May be moral compulsions of religious plurality in our society and more diverse existence of communities in a given place or area.

In the introduction of this book, there were notes about end of art, according to which art has come to the phase where all significant possibilities for art to manifest have disappeared as all manifestations in art have already been made. I disagree **smile**

I don't agree with this view of the writer as I believe human mind is meant to explore and as long as human desire, inquisition & expression exist the art would keep making its mark in the catalogue of human on this earth **smile**, new additions will always appear, not just in art, in philosophy, in science, in religion and in everything else that evolves with human endeavour and excellence.

Overall, Hegel's Introductory Lectures on aesthetics is a good piece of work. A little difficult to comprehend. You need to give it a read two or three time, give yourself time to absorb or things to settle-in, to understand it better. Hegel indeed has a profound view although a little plutonic. His work gives the reader information with antithesis which gives you the chance to derive for yourself, the better proposition of the two.

---The End---

Nandini Goel

Whitney says

I like Hegel. He's a nice breath of fresh air after Kant's prose. But I don't buy this idea of history being progressive. We continually repeat past mistakes (both literally and intellectually) so we need reminders through art. I think. But I'm no Hegel.

Steven says

Shit.

Jacob Hurley says

this makes some nice distinctions and assessments but is a bit limited. p similar to schiller and kant

Peter Dellas says

wat this nigga on a bout ??

Andrew Fairweather says

An absolutely fascinating introduction to his own larger two volume work on Aesthetics. For Hegel, the study of aesthetics is the study of the ways in which our productive energies have sought to “escape wholly from the fetters of rule and regularity.” For Hegel, the study of art is none other than the study of the rational impulse which enables humankind to recognize their own consciousness as an object. This has varied from age to age (the symbolic, classical, and romantic, according to Hegel) so the character of the arts as it is present in their moment reflect the way in which the moment has achieved vivification from the “shadowland of the idea” or from natural necessity, satisfying a need for spiritual freedom.

In this way, art objects are unique as they are freed from the appetite of desire which would sacrifice the object for the sake of the perceivers own self-satisfaction, enabling the art object to subsist in freedom. Unlike other objects, the relationship to the art object is not utilitive or consumable, but uniquely theoretical insofar as the viewer aims to become “acquainted with them in their universality, [finding] their inner being and law, and conceiving them in terms of their notion.” Similar to themes in the Phenomenology, Hegel says that in desiring, we are not able to separate ourselves from ourselves from our own determinateness—the consumption of objects requires only an unreflective subjectivity which takes the object for granted as for-us. Following this, art is a self-postulation of our own person which allows us to gain an awareness of ourselves as a universal, creating an ideal relationship which inspires a recognition of that which is external to him. Art is the only realm where objects are created to directly address the mind, the “spiritual appearing in sensuous shape.” It softens the savagery of desire which takes the world for granted, defacing the contradiction between the subject and object, bringing us in reconciliation with the world.

Beauty lies at the heart of this project. But what is at stake is not beauty as a simple idea, some concept identical to itself. Hegel understands beauty (and any notion, really) as capable of containing a manifold of sides which vary in emphasis from author to author, age to age. What is common to this manifold are the art object’s relationship to the way the movement of Spirit is manifest in it. In this way, what the artist produces is divine since it is only through artistic production that the idea of the Spirit is explicitly reduplicated and able to realize itself. This is another way of saying that this sort of production is not tied to necessity (which is probably why art is always commonly considered to be “useless”).

As this is an introduction, at this point Hegel only hints that the divinity of art is no longer observed in the modern world, and that art no longer satisfies “our supreme need” in the way it used to. So much for this idea—I have still not sussed out this major point of Hegel’s aesthetic theory... but this irresolution will probably clear up on its own, should I choose to read his two volumes dedicated to the subject. Hegel does, however, make a few excellent comments on irony in art (which was apparently prevalent in his day, as it is in ours) and its “perverse tendency” towards maintaining a relative cynicism towards the world, thus erasing the divine and noble in art. Hegel describes ironists as wielding a “Gold-like geniality,” detached from the world as a creator surrounded by dead matter which does not speak to him, looking down in superiority at all mankind. The ironist concentrates the I into itself and lives only for simple self-enjoyment. On the futility of the ironic standpoint, the following quote is an absolutely brilliant illustration of the deadlock achieved in irony. Note the use of the term “morbid saintliness”:

“Out of this there arises misfortune and antinomy, in that the subject desires to penetrate into truth and has a craving for objectivity, but yet is unable to abandon its isolation and retirement into itself, and to strip itself free of this unsatisfied abstract inwardness (of mind), and so has a seizure of sickly yearning [...] the discontent of this quiescence and feebleness—which does not like to act or to touch anything for fear of surrendering its inward harmony, and for all its craving after the absolute, remains none the less unreal and empty, even though pure in itself—is the source of morbid saintliness [WOW] and yearning. For a true saintly soul acts and is a reality. But all that craving is the feeling of nullity of the empty futile subject or

person, which lacks the strength to escape its futility, and to fill itself with something of substantial value.”

If art is dead, surely this has something to do with it!

The last chapter (V) of the book introduces us to the main categories of art which will make up Hegel’s Aesthetics. There are three phases of artistic expression which attempt to realize the idea of beauty (as spiritual freedom) itself:

The first phase is the Symbolic, which finds its home in the architectural art form. Architecture is a crystallization of the symmetry of the mind. The symbolic as architecture clears a space for God, creating an enclosure which protects inhabitants from the necessity of nature and the elements. The architectural purifies the external world, placing a symmetry on it which reflects that of the mind. In the symbolic the idea behind the manifestation of the expression in reality remains foreign to and greater than the expression, thus resulting in exaggeration and distortions of natural shapes which attempt to “exalt the phenomenon to the level of the idea.” In this way, the phenomenon of expression and the idea expressed are unsuitable to one another—its aesthetic in its grotesqueness or abstraction is an expression of this incongruity of the idea with the phenomenon. A sublime current runs through these works of art in all its “aspiration, disquiet, and mystery.”

The next phase is the classical, which establishes the ideal as a concrete, realized fact. Within this temple of the mind in the aforementioned symbolic phase occur the sculptural arts. Sculpture is the “organic modeling of the material in its sensuous and spacial totality,” or, the unity of the idea with the external world. Sculpture within the perfect symmetry of the symbolic temple will no longer adhere to simple symmetry, but contain the “lightening-flash of individuality” as Hegel phrases it. In this way the classical phase unites the ideal with its bodily form and is thus at peace with itself, freed from passion and exaggeration. Nature is strained through an object where the expression is adequate to the content of the idea itself. In the classical, there are no pretensions of reaching into another world, but that the union of idea and reality is meant to reach completion. On the one hand, this phase then is the highest phase of which the sensuous embodiment of art is capable... but of course, in Hegel, whenever something is realized in its “highest” form, it is also encountering its limitations. The defect of the classical phase is revealed insofar as the classical phase remains contingent upon realizing itself in physical space and remains limited in its ability to express the inwardness of the subject (or the infinite subjectivity of the idea) as a result.

This deficiency of the classical phase brings us to the romantic phase—this phase entails the attainment of self-knowledge and inward intelligence, and finds its home in painting and music. Painting is a liberation from space and can account for a diversity of material, and is therefore able to exhibit even the most particular moments in all their particularity. Yet, it is music that is the center of the romantic phase, since it is a further refinement of this liberation from the necessities of natural phenomena, allowing a greater expression of mental inwardness. Poetry is the third romantic art form, which unites the free play of the sonorous expression in music with the concreteness of the sign, determining content for its own say into the shape of ideas. Poetry “depress[es] the external medium] into complete insignificance.” Hegel’s understands poetry as the highest form of art since it is in this form that art transcends itself. In summary, the romantic phase enables the object of art as free to represent the inwardness of spirit and feeling, unchained from conforming to the outer world. Romantic art is meant to express a freedom linked to the play of the imagination (it seems to me). Standing against the symbolic temple and the bodily form of the ideal of God as manifest in sculpture, we have the community—the unity of the community, integral to the romantic phase, is not realized bodily like God in sculpture, but is purely ideal. Think—the ideal of the nation.

Yet, a contradiction remains—this premium on inward feeling is deficient as well since art as an expression requires concrete form. In the romantic phase the concrete expression is “fugitive” and unable (unlike the classical phase) to reach true reality except as an idea in itself. The romantic is similar to the symbolic phase in the distortion and exaggeration of the manifestation, except that the symbolic phase lacked the anxiety towards its concrete expression.

There's an interesting comment towards the end of this book which asserts that poetry and its imagination bulges into the “prose of thought.” Not much is said about this development from poetry to prose. Again, maybe he gets to this in the following volumes...

On the whole, I loved reading this introduction and I hope I've got the stomach for Hegel's entire ‘Aesthetics’!

Noé Ajo caamaño says

Tremenda construcción metafísica Hegeliana. Necesaria para comprender gran parte de la historia de la filosofía e incluso de la ciencia posterior a él. Uno de aquellos errores no confundentes, un error tan fértil, que estamos autorizados a agradecérselo al autor. Equivocarse así es un privilegio.

David Withun says

In his lectures on aesthetics, Hegel attempts to formulate a theory of the fine arts that will place them within the paradigm of his wider philosophy of history. Art, he says, is on the decline, but this is not altogether a bad thing as it is an indication of the increasing centrality of the mind in a purer form. The movement of the spirit, he says, has led us to an epoch in which it is no longer necessary as it once was to embody our thoughts within the material order. While it would be difficult to buy into Hegel's philosophy art without having already bought into the larger body of his philosophy as a whole, his lectures are interesting fuel for thought on the nature of art and the relationship of the fine arts to human thought, emotion, and the need for creative expression.

John Calvelli says

Prior to this book I read Zizek's 1000 page book on Hegel. This short and intense book was very helpful, as it embodied Hegel's thought and the dialectic in a concise form.

Karl Hallbjörnsson says

I'm gonna have to read this one again someday, preferably in a philosophy course at school - but don't get me wrong, I felt that I understood the otherwise clunky and obscure text well enough - I simply would like to partake in discussions regarding the subject matter. I'll take up some more Hegel soon, I think. He has an intoxicatingly grand view of the universe and our role in it.

Cris says

Not what I hoped for. Written to cull the support of a prince, this book spends much more time talking about Art as a tool for keeping society moral. Interesting but not what I was after. I guess the purposeful use of art as tool by a state offends me.

W.D. Clarke says

Victorian art critic Walter Pater said that all art aspires to the condition of music. With GWF Hegel, on the other hand, one might say that all of the arts aspire to the condition of poetry, and that all poetry aspires to the Idea of the Beautiful... a-a-and that the Beautiful is but a stepping stone along the way of Geist (Mind or Spirit or both) as it reveals itself to itself, and uses art, religion and philosophy to do so. It's all a big hierarchy, leading from the "Symbolic" arts of ancient peoples (reaching its apotheosis in architecture) to the "Classical" art of Hellenic sculpture and then to the "Romantic" arts of western European modernity: painting, music and poetry. But Hegel sees us as having passed out of the period of art's highest flowering and into a period more amenable to the reflection upon the meaning of art: art transcends itself by giving way to religion and philosophy, and after taking us part of the way to the Ideal it passes the baton to that which can complete the journey.

5*, then, not cos I agree with the Man, but because you hafta admire a work that sets out to do a thing, and then does it in high style. (OK, not a lot of actual style per se, perhaps, but with the inexhaustible thoroughness and rigor of the truly obsessed). But Hegel is just dipping a toe into the Vastness in this brief volume, en route to the voluminous sea of the *Aesthetics* (that I shall be bypassing for now), and I am but remarking here, on the appearance of his baby toenail as, all too briefly, it passed in front of my less than 20-20 vision.

One would really have to go back and read Kant's Critique of Judgement and Schiller's Aesthetic Education to *really* get this (though the exhaustive, lengthy endnotes to this addition try to help, they do presuppose more background than I currently possess)--and then, of course, you'd want to go on to the two-volume *Aesthetics* proper, and I hope that one day I shall have the leisure to do so.

Josh says

A book that radically changed my view of art and aesthetics. Cannot recommend highly enough

Kate says

Good fun as an intellectual exercise, but not particularly applicable to real, live art.

Mohamedridha Alaskari ????? ??? ?????? says