

## ***Art, Truth and Knowledge***

*An International Conference in Aesthetics*

*organized by the Institute of Philosophy, HAS and the Hungarian Academy of Arts*

17-18 February, 2017

Budapest, Vigadó

*Organizers:*

Deodáth Zuh (HAS)

Andrew Huddleston (Birkbeck College, University of London)

Ferenc Hörcher (HAS)

### **Short description:**

The conference will explore themes concerning the cognitive capacities and value of the arts. How, if at all, can works of art convey non-trivial and important truths about the world? Can we learn from the arts, and if so, what sort of knowledge might this be? What sort of justification would undergird it? Genre-specific discussions would be very welcome, as well as consideration of more general issues. The conference will also consider cognitive issues parallel to the ethicist/moralist debates about whether—fictional elements aside—a work of art's truth or untruth concerning its thematic content contributes or detracts from its value as a work of art.

### **Programme (provisory):**

#### ***17th February:***

*10:00 Conference opening (T. Kucsera, A. Huddleston, F. Hörcher)*

*10:10 – 11:25 E. Schellekens: **On the Relation between Aesthetic Value and Epistemic Value***

*11:25 – 12:40 J. Grant: **Understanding and Artistic Value***

*12:40 – 13:00 Coffee Break*

*13:00 – 14:15 E. Lord: **Learning about Morality Through Art***

*14:15 – 15:30 Lunch Break*

*15:30 – 16:45 F. Hörcher: **How to learn through catharsis: once again about the cognitive value of poetry in Aristotle***

*16:45 – 18:00 V. Simoniti: **Art and Minor Philosophical Genres***

*18th February:*

11:15 – 12:30 S. Friend: *Learning from Stories*

12: 30 – 12: 45 *Coffee Break*

12:45 – 14: 00 D. Zuh: *Framing the Philosophy of Art History. Arnold Hauser's Take on the Cognitive Value of Art*

14: 00 *Closing Lunch*

*Abstracts:*

### **1. Art and minor philosophical genres**

Vid Simoniti, Churchill College, University of Cambridge

One of the long-running disputes within philosophical aesthetics surrounds the cognitive value of art: the question whether art is valuable insofar as it makes non-trivial knowledge available to the audience. Several philosophers have answered this question affirmatively by exploring continuities between art and philosophy. Some have done so in relation to literature (e.g. Martha Nussbaum, Eileen John, Bence Nanay); others in relation to conceptual art (Elisabeth Schellekens, Peter Goldie). Though the exact strategies of these authors differ depending on the kind of art they consider, the general challenge here is to show how art is not merely ancillary to philosophy proper. This task, I argue, is analogous to a defence of minor philosophical genres, such as the philosophical dialogue, polemic or confession. And while these genres have fallen by the wayside in academic philosophy, I suggest contemporary visual art is one place where new minor forms are being conceived.

### **2. Understanding and Artistic Value**

James Grant, Exeter College, Oxford

Art critics help us understand why an artwork is good, bad, or indifferent. Appreciating an artwork commonly involves understanding why it has the artistic value it does. So what is involved in understanding why a work has a certain artistic value? Despite its evident importance to the theory of criticism and appreciation, this question has received relatively little attention. Building on some observations made by Frank Sibley, I argue for two claims. First, understanding why a work has a certain value is distinct from knowing why the work has that value. Second, such understanding requires awareness of a special class of reasons why the work has the value it does. I conclude by considering what the implications of these claims are for the question of the role of generalizations in appreciation and criticism.

### 3. Learning from Stories

Stacie Friend, Birkbeck, University of London

Discussions of the cognitive value of fictional literature usually take for granted that we can learn ordinary facts from fiction. But even when this is accepted, it is typically thought to be uninteresting, and little attention is paid to how such learning occurs. Instead, the focus is on other forms of knowledge or cognitive improvement. I claim, by contrast, that other kinds of learning from literature presuppose a basis in fact. Focusing on learning "what it is like" and "training" the moral emotions, I argue that justification of these sorts of cognitive value requires an explanation of how we learn facts from fiction.

### 4. Learning about Morality Through Art

Errol Lord, University of Pennsylvania

It is appealing to many that we can learn important things about morality by engaging with art. This thought is central to several different views about the cognitive and virtue-theoretic values of art. Skeptics remain, though. As I see it, these skeptics gain traction mostly because non-skeptics haven't adequately developed the details of an account of how we can learn about morality through art. This paper seeks to at least partially rectify this situation. I will defend my preferred non-skeptical view in light of several objections in the literature. I will also argue that the epistemic relationship between art and morality is a unique one. The ways of thinking about morality by engaging with art (usually) cannot yield knowledge of contingent matters of (non-normative) fact nor can they yield knowledge of (non-normative) necessities. This opens the door for an argument that the aesthetic value of a work of art can be intensified or attenuated by the work's ability to facilitate moral learning. The end of the paper will explore the plausibility of this argument.

### 5. Framing the Philosophy of Art History. Arnold Hauser's Take on the Cognitive Value of Art

Deodath Zuh, IP, RCH, HAS

According to Arnold Hauser a philosophy of art history (PAH) defines the major factors, which configure style and encompasses the motivations behind style changes delivering non-trivial knowledge about the surrounding world. His PAH is focusing not only on the receptive or epistemic side of an artwork (stylistic elements) but also on its proveniential tear (psychological, social). This multifaceted approach incorporates the sociological factor as a crucial one and uncovers the dialectic of conventions and creativity. Hauser's key example is the art of moving images. But visual arts and music are utterly suitable fields of research, ideal for this kind of multifaceted investigations in how the proveniential and epistemic factors they cooperate. Answering this last question will bring us closer to the contemporary issues of multiple artworks (a) and of the authenticity debate (nota bene: pertaining to multiple artworks) (b). At the end it makes us revisit Hauser's position in 20th century philosophy of art. In a certain way he is

becoming our 'contemporary' and not on obsolete Marxist writer eclipsed by the ongoing age of interdisciplinary studies.

## **6. How to learn through catharsis: once again about the cognitive value of poetry in Aristotle**

Ferenc Hörcher, IP, RCH, HAS

Perhaps the most famous interpretation of dramatic poetry is provided by Aristotle in his *Poetics*. A lot of attention has been paid to his short and rather vague definition of catharsis. Most of the interpreters tried to make sense how exactly the psychic process is to be understood, which led to the "purification of the soul". The present paper is less interested in this aspect of Aristotle's theories and focuses instead on the idea of learning human nature through imitations of human deeds. It argues that this theory of knowledge acquisition is quite in tune with Aristotle's theory of political prudence, as a habitus of the statesman, and less a clearcut package of conceptual information. Both the viewer and the politician is supposed to learn human nature (and through that how to become wise) by and through imitations of human deeds. The difference is that dramatic poetry presents human failures, while prudence look for what could be called "good practices". The paper would like to elaborate on this indirect way of learning through imitation in dramatic poetry, interested both in the artistic and political aspect of the genre.

## **7. On the Relation between Aesthetic Value and Epistemic Value**

Elisabeth Schellekens, University of Uppsala

In analytic aesthetics, much emphasis has been placed on the distinction, outlined by Kant in the opening of his *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, between judgements of aesthetic taste on the one hand, and logical or cognitive judgements on the other. Our working conception of aesthetic judgement has, as a result, focused on the notion of pleasure (or emotional responses generally) and rested on the assumption that aesthetic judgement cannot enjoy any serious epistemic status.

One way to address this problematic conception is to engage in fine-grained examinations of the emotional responses recorded or expressed by aesthetic judgements and highlight the possible cognitive content of such responses. Another strategy is to reflect on how we account for the underlying relation between aesthetic value and epistemic value, and investigate the extent to which both kinds of value are connected to a form of pleasure.

Previously, I have argued that good ideas in art, most notably the ones central to conceptual pieces, can in principle be ascribed aesthetic value. Whilst I am still committed to that idea, I would like to reflect further on the relations between aesthetic and epistemic value in art. In this very explorative paper, I discuss what it would mean to claim that aesthetic value is best understood as intimately connected to the pursuit of knowledge and understanding, how aesthetic value might perhaps even be cast as a form of epistemic value, and how that view can be squared with a Kantian perspective.