

PHIL 4403: Philosophy of Art
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Kant, "Art and Genius"

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*For Kant, art requires reason:

"By right it is only production through freedom, i.e. through an act of will that places reason at the basis of its action, that should be termed art." (180)

--Artwork is always manmade.

*Producing art requires more than just theoretical knowledge (it also requires *skill*).

*Art, unlike handicraft, is valuable as an end in itself.

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*There is no science of beauty (art)—art does not admit of proof, but rather is a matter of taste.

*Agreeable art—art enjoyed as mere sensations.

Fine art—art enjoyed as sensations + cognition

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*"Genius is the talent (natural endowment) which gives the rule to art...Genius is the innate mental aptitude (*ingenium*) through which nature gives the rule of art." (182)

--So, by definition, Kant connects the concepts of 'genius' and 'art'.

--Art requires rules, but fine art cannot be evaluated according to rules. So, creators of fine art produce their own rules. (183)

--The unknowability and unpredictability of the source of genius:

"Hence, where an author owes a product to his genius, he does not himself know how the *ideas* for it have entered into his head, nor has he it in his power to invent the like at pleasure, or methodically, and communicate the same to others in such precepts as would put them in a position to produce similar products. (Hence, presumably, our word *Genie* is derived from *genius*, as the peculiar guardian and guiding spirit given to a man at his birth, by the inspiration of which those original ideas were obtained.)" (183)

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*Genius is not achieved by rule-following, cannot be taught/learned, and cannot be obtained by imitation. In these ways, fine art differs from science.

--Fine art is not wholly disconnected from rules and training though:

“Genius can do no more than furnish rich *material* for products of fine art; its elaboration and its *form* require a talent academically trained, so that it may be employed in such a way as to stand the test of judgement.” (185)

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*What genius is to creating fine art, taste is to its evaluation.

*“A beauty of nature is a *beautiful thing*; beauty of art is a *beautiful representation* of a thing.” (185)

--Even ugly things can be given a beautiful description or depiction—except for disgust. (186)

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*Many works of art are fine, but for being *soulless*.

--Note Kant’s comments on aesthetic ideas, at the bottom of p. 187, through 190.

--“The mental powers whose union in a certain relation constitutes *genius* are imagination and understanding.” (190)

*There is a nice summary of Kant’s theory of artistic genius at the bottom of p. 190, onto 191.

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*“The requisites for fine art are, therefore, *imagination, understanding, soul, and taste.*” (192)