

PHIL 4403: Philosophy of Art

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Tolstoy, "What is Art?"; Hospers, "Art as Expression"

\*Tolstoy claims that past aestheticians have started with a class of widely accepted works of art, and have then constructed a definition of 'art' that properly classifies these works (as well as others) as art. Tolstoy thinks this is putting the cart before the horse. He wishes to first provide a definition of 'art', and he leaves it as an open possibility that this definition might rule out many of the canonical examples of art.

--Tolstoy claims that before defining a term (concerning "human activity") it is first necessary to ascertain why that kind of activity is important. (168)

--Just as food is not important because of the pleasure it provides us, neither is art important because of the pleasure it provides us.

"Everyone understands that the satisfaction of our taste cannot serve as a basis for our definition of the merits of food...And in the same way, beauty, or that which pleases us, can in no sense serve as the basis for the definition of art; nor can a series of objects which afford us pleasure serve as the model of what art should be." (168)

One thing to worry about is whether Tolstoy is offering a definition of 'art', or a standard for *good* art. Note the following phrases in particular: "the *merits* of food" and "what art *should be*" (italics added).

--Rather than the pleasure of beauty being the aim of art, the aim of art is to transmit feelings. Just as words and languages are used to transmit our thoughts, art is used to transmit our feelings. Just as understanding the words of another allows us to share the same thought, viewing (reading, listening to, etc.) artwork allows us to experience the same emotion as the artist. (See the last 2 paragraphs on p. 169.)

--Definition:

"Art begins when one person, with the object of joining another or others to himself in one and the same feeling, expresses that feeling by certain external indications..."

If only the spectators or auditors are infected by the feelings which the author has felt, it is art.

*To evoke in oneself a feeling one has once experienced, and having evoked it in oneself, then, by means of movements, lines, colors, sounds, or forms expressed in words, so to transmit that feeling that others may experience the same feeling—this is the activity of art.*" (170)

--This definition does not wed art to the idea of beauty. Rather, it holds that art is essentially expressive and social.

--Much of what is commonly considered to be art is left out by Tolstoy's definition. And much that is not commonly considered art is included in Tolstoy's definition. For example:

"All human life is filled with works of art of every kind—from cradlesong, jest, mimicry, the ornamentation of houses, dress, and utensils, up to church services, buildings, monuments, and triumphal processions. It is all artistic activity." (171)

### Hospers, "Art as Expression"

\*Some might think that there are 2 kinds of requirements of art: form and expression.

--But, 'expression' can refer to either a *process* or a *product*. The former interpretation holds that a work of art must be produced by someone with a suitable motivation. The latter interpretation does not require that the work is motivated by certain emotions—it must merely express emotion. For example: "Suppose we agree that a certain musical composition is a great one and learn subsequently that the composer felt no emotions whatever while he was composing it (Richard Strauss, for example, said 'I work very coldly, without agitation, without emotion even; one must be completely master of oneself to organize that changing, moving, flowing chessboard, orchestration')." (173)

A work of art can express an emotion that its producer did not experience in creating it.

--A work can express an emotion without causing that emotion in us. For example, music can be sad (and recognized as such) without causing sadness in the listener.

"The sadness of the music is phenomenally objective (that is, felt as being 'in the music'), whereas a person's sadness when he hears it (if such sadness occurs) is quite distinguishable from the sadness of the music; it is felt as being 'phenomenally subjective', belonging to him and not to the music, and only evoked by the music." (173)

--Hospers claims that music expresses certain emotions in virtue of mimicking the human symptoms of those emotions.

"In short, the work of art may be said to have a specific feeling property when it has features that human beings have when they feel the same or similar emotion, mood, etc. This is the bridge between musical qualities and human qualities, which explains how music can possess properties that are literally possessed only by sentient beings." (174)