THE MODERN CONCEPTION OF ART

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MODERN CONCEPTION OF ART IN BRITAIN IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY, AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE FOR CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHY OF ART

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ABSTRACT

The question about the nature of art is at the centre of the philosophy of art. The thesis seeks to replace the two dominant approaches to this question in contemporary English-speaking philosophy - essentialism and descriptivism - with an historicist approach. The historicist approach I develop and defend holds that answers to the question "What is Art?" must take the form of localized cultural-historical narratives.

This alternative approach is applied to write the history of the development of what I call "the modern conception of art" in the early eighteenth century. A changing notion of art that emerges in Britain in this period is decisive for all later philosophy of art. Its genesis must be understood in a context of social, political and cultural changes. These changes deeply affected many people's conception of themselves and of their place in society. Social status becomes uncertain, and new criteria for the presentation of the self and evaluation of others emerge. Knowledge about art and the display of taste become indicators of social distinctions and thus criteria for social evaluation, replacing older notions of birth and rank. The modern conception of art emerges as part of new ideas of the presentation of the self, as part of a new ideal of edification.

In contemporary philosophy of art, the evaluative contents of the conception of art - its historical and contemporary connection to notions of the moral and social order - are seldom discussed. Yet, as I show, these connections exist and have existed for a long time. At the centre of contemporary philosophy of art, therefore, there is a conception of art which is ideological in the sense that it treats the normative as factual and the historically contingent as the natural. Only a historical analysis of the kind I carry out is able to bring to light this aspect of the conception of art presupposed in contemporary philosophy of art.

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INTRODUCTION

The Modern Conception of Art

This thesis deals with the question "What is art?" and addresses past and present attempts to answer that question, mainly in the work of philosophers. Seduced by the singular form of the question many philosophers have sought a single answer to it. One aim of the following work is to point out that there can be no single answer to the question. This should not, however, lead us to reject the question, but our search must be redirected on the principle that many specific answers must be sought instead of one general answer. General philosophical answers must be replaced by localized cultural history. In Chapters One through Three, I make this point in a discussion of contemporary philosophy of art. Since these chapters predominantly discuss the possibilities of generating certain types of answers to questions in aesthetics (more so than actual answers), this part can be considered an essay in meta-aesthetics rather than in aesthetics as such. In later chapters (Four through Eight) I write part of the cultural history of what I take to be our present conception of art. I call this conception of art "the modern conception of art".

A preliminary attempt to characterize the modern conception of art would include, among others, the ideas that (1) the most important forms of art are sculpture, painting, music, literature (including drama and poetry), and architecture; (2) art has a value in and of itself (and not just as, for example, a vehicle of moral or religious instruction or as a source of knowledge); (3) the creation of works of art is essentially,

and ought to be, a free creation by individuals endowed with special talents, which cannot, or only to a limited degree, be learned and taught. Indeed, works of art partly gain their significance because they are the personal expressions of unique individuals; (4) art expresses a subjective truth, and therefore differs fundamentally from science, which deals with objective facts of nature. By the middle of the twentieth century this difference between art and science had become so entrenched that C. P. Snow talked about "two cultures". The "literary culture" and the "scientific culture" are opposed, and to some degree hostile and unable to understand each other.[1]

These four ideas together make up the core of the modern conception of art. This characterization of the modern conception of art should be considered an empirical generalization: These are ideas Western people now typically connect with the terms "art" or "work of art" or "artist". I do not, so far, make any claims as to whether this conception is necessarily correct or desirable. Some philosophers (for example Dewey) and many twentieth-century artists deplore this conception of art. It isolates art from the broader concerns of people, makes it elitist, etc. It is also to some degree open to dispute exactly which forms of art are among the "most important". Some sociologists of art as well as some historians of art point out that central parts of the modern conception of art are simply wrong.[2]

The hypothesis I defend in this thesis can very briefly be formulated in the following manner: An inadequate understanding of the circumstances surrounding

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[1] C. P. Snow, *The Two Cultures: and a Second Look*, Cambridge 1965. First ed. 1959.

[2] In a recent book Vera Zolberg says that sociologists usually question traditional assumptions about art. Among the traditional assumptions she mentions three: "that a work of art is a unique object; that it is conceived and made by a single creator; and that it is in these works that the artist spontaneously expresses his genius" (Zolberg 1990, 43). Though this conception is "at odds with facts well known not only to sociologists (Becker 1982) but to other scholars as well" (ibid.), it nevertheless still forms the basis for, for example, most history of art, and is shared by many aestheticians (Zolberg 1990, 55 and 81f.).

the genesis of the modern conception of art marks contemporary British and North American philosophy of art, and is in part responsible for an impasse in this discipline, particularly as this concerns the discussion of the concept "art". At the core of recent philosophy of art is a conception of art which contains unacknowledged philosophical, political, cultural and social presuppositions. These presuppositions were shaped by the specific circumstances surrounding the genesis and development of the modern conception of art. The modern conception of art is part of a tightly woven social and historical fabric which is, for the most part, ignored in philosophical analysis of the concept; but the question of the nature of art can only be approached through recognition of the historical contingencies shaping this nature.

The impasse in contemporary philosophy of art consists in the inability to move beyond the two main alternatives currently demanding most of the attention: An essentialist and a descriptivist approach (these will be described in detail in Chapters Two and Three). As a result of "the linguistic turn" in the philosophy of art in the middle of the twentieth century, traditional aesthetics of the essentialist type came to be widely seen as mistaken. But no satisfactory alternative emerged (as I argue in Chapter Two), thus leaving the road open to renewed attempts of the traditional type. We are, therefore, still in a situation where two major alternatives compete for attention from the philosophical audience (though there are of course exceptions). To move beyond this impasse I suggest an historicist alternative. The alternative is not meant to remedy shortcomings in either of the two competing approaches, but as a rejection of both, though I do not wish to deny that each of them may have taught us something valuable. I do not, however, reject the traditional philosophical *question* about the nature of art. The question did not emerge merely from philosophical compulsions. It is a real and legitimate question, which arises in the world of artistic practices, but the established philosophical ways of approaching the problem are inadequate to the task.

The suggested reorientation can in part be expressed in the terminology created by Nelson Goodman (see particularly Goodman 1968 and 1978). Goodman urges us to not consider forms of classification as enumerations of the constituent parts of a pre-existing order, but as based of the categories we choose for the classification (nominalism). Classification is based on the standards we choose for the job. We should consider our way of dividing up the world (e.g. into art and non-art) as a result or our own activities. Divisions are made, and not found. Something is art when a world is made wherein it is possible for it to be art. In Goodman's conception of worldmaking (see Goodman 1978 and 1984), worlds can be very small and in principle made by a single individual. A painter painting an imaginative picture would be an example of a world created. But it is possible to conceive of the larger worlds created by science or philosophy as the results of the creative efforts of many people, often over an extended period of time. I wish to suggest that we consider our conception of art, the modern conception of art, as the result of such protracted efforts by many people. With the formation of the modern conception of art certain forms of discourse become possible, and the conception expresses a certain way of classifying things in the world. It is a shared view of the world, or such it has become. This world is brought about by historical contingencies. The discourses made possible by this world must be understood not just as an exchange of statements, but as a practice regulated by rules wherein a number of utterances are produced. The rules are explicit or tacit rules regulating, for example, agreement, truth, membership (whether or not something is art, philosophy, science etc.), and what is a legitimate move. The establishment of a world is an establishment of rules, procedures and standards.

I advocate a view of philosophy as worldmaking and as examination of the ways in which worlds are made. To elucidate this view of philosophy I develop a specific examination of a crucial period in the formation of a discourse about art. This type of philosophy does not offer any general, abstract answers applicable to any situation; in

fact, it rejects the view that this is the task of philosophy - it wishes, similarly to what has recently been suggested by Richard Rorty (see Rorty 1989, xiii), to ask specific questions, rather than general questions, and to provide answers to these by examination of the historically contingent development of discourses. "Contingency" refers to the view that there is not anything "deep" in the world that makes one way of talking about it better or more true than another. It is not a pre-existing order of the universe which grants validity to our statements, but only other statements. Historical, social, or psychological explanations go all the way down. No philosopher will deny that, say, the history of the conception of art can be told, and that this story may be illuminating and interesting; but many will claim that this does not solve the philosophical question "What is art?", that there is still a question left (a "purely philosophical question"), when the story is told. I wish to deny this. A reinstatement of the modern conception of art into its historical and social web is as much answer as we can reasonably hope to provide to the traditional philosophical question about the nature of art.

A philosophical examination, which seeks to examine the historical contingencies of worldmaking, must articulate what is initially, or through the course of historical development has become, inarticulate. This articulation can only be achieved by exploration of origins and developments of discourses, ideas and institutions (Taylor 1984). Through their development, ideas, institutions and so on often pass from a stage wherein their *raison d'être* evolve from the articulated to that which is no longer in need of articulation. When ideas are initially formulated they are advanced in opposition to other ideas. A set of ideas which, in the course of later historical developments, become the received opinion of the matter in question, come to be taken for simply granted. The ideas against which they initially had to be defended drop out of the historical narrative, or come to be seen as naive or mistaken, as was the case with Hobbes' opposition to Boyle's advocacy of experimentation or with Galileo's Aristotelian opponents (cf. Shapin and Schaffer 1985, and Feyerabend 1988). History is written by the victors. Important

assumptions on which the victorious ideas rested sink to the level of tacit knowledge. They become a matter of, for example, mastering techniques necessary for participation in practices (to be considered a competent practitioner of science or medicine), or for membership in a culture.

The fact that the modern conception of art is the object of criticism and has become visible as a part of an historical development is perhaps evidence that it is one of those figures of life which has grown old, as Hegel so poetically expressed it:

> Wenn die Philosophie ihr Grau in Grau mahlt, dann ist eine Gestalt des Lebens alt geworden, und mit Grau in Grau läßt sie sich nicht verjüngen, sondern nur erkennen; die Eule der Minerva beginnt erst mit der einbrechenden Dämmerung ihren Flug.[3]

The modern conception of art is nevertheless still sufficiently common within society in general to warrant the label "typical". It is embodied in the institutions of the art world, such as museums, concerts, literary criticism, the art sections of newspapers and magazines, as well as in the way the educational system is organized, textbooks are written and so on.

The final formation of the modern conception of art happened in a period stretching from the end of the seventeenth century to around the mid eighteenth century. Though elements of each of the four components characterising this conception can be found prior to *circa* 1700, for example in the ancient conception of poetic creation, they did not, to my knowledge, exist together before about 1700.[4]

Why call the conception of art under discussion "modern"? Does, for instance, Shaftesbury's use of "we Moderns" in the early eighteenth century as a way to

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[3] G. W. F. Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, Fischer Bücherei, Franfurt am Main 1968 (Studienausgabe in 3 Bänden, herausgegeben von Karl Löwith und Manfred Riedel), 42. First ed. 1820.

[4] For literature documenting this point, see for example Assunto 1961, Barasch 1985, Gombrich 1960, Hauser 1951, Kristeller 1951, Pollitt 1974, Ritter 1971, Tatarkiewicz 1970 and 1980.

refer to himself and his contemporaries indicate anything which he could not indicate as well with a simple "we"? What does the concept "modern" yield? Historically, three meanings have been associated with "modern": (1) it can simply mean that which is contemporary, as opposed to that which belongs in the past; (2) it can mean that which is new, as opposed to the old, and reveal an awareness of living in an epoch which is separated from, and different from past epochs. In this sense it is not just chronological, as in the first sense, but also oppositional: those who call themselves "modern" in this sense see themselves as already living in the future (Habermas 1985, 5); (3) something passing, of only temporary duration, as opposed to the eternal. We find this meaning of "modern" in the late Middle Ages and in some places in Hegel and Schlegel.[5]

The second sense of "modern" becomes prevalent from around 1700, and it emerges out of the "Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes". To call something "modern" in the way (for example) Shaftesbury did introduces a number of differentiations: It expresses a consciousness of living in a period which is historically distinct from another period. To Shaftesbury, it would be a difference partly in relation to "the ancients" in classical Greece and Rome, partly in relation to England before 1688. The term "modern" would, therefore, also imply that something constitutes a difference between the present and the past (for example "politeness", liberty or knowledge), something which serves to give the modern period a *differentia specifica*. The term "modern" expresses therefore partly a periodization (which may or may not express what is actually the case), and partly an attitude or a self-consciousness.

The conception of art under discussion has both these characteristics: it belongs to and is characteristic of a given historical period, and it expresses a quest for legitimacy and self-consciousness; those who think of themselves as "we moderns" bring to awareness their own standpoint within history (cf. Habermas 1985, 6).

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[5] See H. U. Gumbrecht, "Modern, Modernität, Moderne" in O. Brunner, W. Conze, R. Koselleck, *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, Stuttgart 1978, Band 4, 93-131.

To call the conception of art under discussion in the present work "modern" serves, therefore, also to bring out contrasts to other, earlier and contemporary, conceptions of art: Those held in ancient Greece, a Medieval conception of art, a Leninist conception of art, perhaps a Post-Modernist conception of art, and so on. Some of these may differ so much, that they have nothing but the term "art" in common (either occurring "naturally", or because "art" is the word chosen to translate a term from another language into modern English).

The conception of art under discussion is "modern" because it belongs to a certain period, beginning in the late seventeenth, early eighteenth centuries (though historical processes, strictly speaking, have neither end nor beginning), and because it demarcates an attitude *characteristic and typical* of this period, the period in which we still live. The term "modern" gives, in a reasonably economical way, a sense of these differentiating features of the conception of art under discussion. History, to be of any interest, or, indeed, of any use, cannot be written without assuming that *some* things in a given period are more important than others, that *some* things warrant labels such as "characteristic" or "typical".

In Chapters One and Two I examine some of the main contentions in contemporary British and North American philosophy of art. It has generally been assumed that one of the most important tasks for the philosophy of art is to provide an answer to the question "What is Art?". This assumption is, as mentioned, shared in the present work, but the approach to the problem is non-traditional.

Chapter One examines the approach of what has come to be known as "traditional aesthetics". The most characteristic feature of traditional aesthetics is its essentialism. Its proponents search for an essence of art, and seek to capture this essence in a definition. Usually this definition gives the necessary and sufficient conditions that make something art. The traditional approach is unsatisfactory, and Chapter Two goes on to examine the main alternative, some form of Wittgensteinian

philosophy. The Wittgensteinian alternative typically amounts to a descriptive and synchronic approach to, for example, the concept of art: At time t the concept "art" is used in these ways, it has these different meanings, and so on. Instead of finding essences we must describe a certain state of affairs, or a specific type of practice, in a manner not unlike the one in which an anthropologist would describe a culture foreign to her own. This approach is more promising, but equally unable to provide us with a theoretical framework able to shed light on the historicity of the concept of art. The historical diversity of the conception of art is implicitly or explicitly recognized by both traditional and Wittgensteinian philosophers, but none has been able to develop a satisfactory alternative based on this fact.

In some recent work in the philosophy of art there is a growing emphasis on how theoretical reflections in the philosophy of art spring from developments in the art world, or in society in general. This can be seen in for example the writings of Arthur Danto. George Dickie's institutional theory of art - though intended as a revival of traditional aesthetics - emphasizes the many conventional aspects involved in the production and reception of works of art. The conclusion of recent philosophical investigations such as Danto's and Dickie's has been that "art" must be seen in a social or even an historical context. While this is definitely true, it has to be taken further than those authors have taken it, and made a point of departure for further investigation.

Chapter Three probes deeper into the historical nature of philosophical problems and develops an historicist approach to them. In addition to general arguments (advanced in Chapters One through Three) I seek to substantiate the historicist approach by applying it to write (in part) an account of the emergence of the modern

conception of art. As Henry Fielding observed: "It is a trite but true observation, that examples work more forcibly on the mind than precepts."[6]

In Chapter Four, I provide some of the background to the emergence of the modern conception of art. This conception emerged as part of an all-encompassing (economical, political, cultural) transformation of British society. The conception forms a central part of new ideas of the presentation of the self in an era where old, feudal or aristocratic, values and codes of behaviour no longer have a place.

Chapter Five examines the place of the arts within this larger transformative process in Britain in the latter part of the seventeenth century and the early part of the eighteenth century. Changing interpersonal relations, resulting from the final collapse of the old order following the revolution in 1688, is an important cause of the explosive growth of interest in the arts in this period. The writings of Shaftesbury, Addison, Hutcheson and others, must be seen as steps in the development of a theoretical framework, wherein the changing role of the types of activity, which came to be included in the modern conception of art, could be understood and made legitimate. Chapters Six and Seven examine their work and situate it within the broader transformative process.

The modern conception of art emerges as an integral part of an all encompassing social, political and cultural transformation. When, for example, Shaftesbury's and Hutcheson's work is interpreted in this social and historical context it becomes apparent, that their contributions to the formation of the modern conception of art are deeply influenced by these historical circumstances. It is perhaps less apparent that contemporary philosophy of art contains unacknowledged political, social, cultural and philosophical assumptions, and that these where shaped through the genesis and development of the modern conception of art. The final chapter (Eight) connects the

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[6] Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth 1985, 39.

historical narrative to the present, in an effort to substantiate this part of my hypothesis.

Recently, some philosophers (for example David Carr) have emphasized the role played by narratives in understanding our lives. We weave, as it were, stories based on the way we understand our lives. The modern conception of art is an important part of the way many people view their lives, an integrated part of their personal narratives. If the origin of the modern conception of art is, as claimed in this thesis, deeply embedded in history, traditions, practices, and is an important part of the way many people think of themselves, it becomes clearer why many discussions of a seeming academic nature get so entrenched, why the modern conception of art is fought for so dearly, and why discussions about it often become highly animated.

Philosophical theories should make a difference in the way we view and explore the world, they should be relevant in relation to other areas of culture. To achieve this I try to focus on broader patterns of thought and explore the question why these, and not other patterns, became the accepted or prevailing ways of thinking and writings about, in casu, the arts.

The late seventeenth- early eighteenth-century origin of many of the attitudes (understood as forms of both thinking and behaviour) of late twentieth-century North-Americans/Western-Europeans, as well as the forms of our societies and their political, economical, and cultural institutions, is historically well documented. It has also, in no small degree thanks to Richard Rorty, become a commonplace to consider many of the problems discussed in epistemology and metaphysics as products of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. And it should, thanks to Alasdair MacIntyre, be recognized that many of the problems dealt with in moral philosophy must be seen in a similar historical light.

The modern conception of art is not just an attitude which "captured the Western imagination": It grew out of specific historical processes; it became

institutionalized, and gained, in this way, material expression. One of the most important of these institutionalizations is to be found in the way in which intellectual spheres of interests have been divided: The separation of the good (morality), the true (which became monopolized by science), and the beautiful (the arts, the aesthetic, that which is worthy of attention for its own sake). It is, above all, in this context that the modern conception of art has become a "cultural universal", a tacit assumption characteristic and typical of "we Moderns".

CHAPTER 1

The Quest for the Essence of Art

1.1.: Introduction

One day in January 1990 the Vancouver artist Rick Gibson found himself surrounded by angry people outside the Public Library on Vancouver's Burard street. Mr. Gibson had aroused their anger by his declared intention to crush a rat, Sniffy, by dropping a concrete block on top of Sniffy, who was trapped between two canvasses. In that same winter 1989-1990 Andreas Serrano's *Piss Christ*, a photograph of a plastic crucifix submerged in a yellow liquid, ostensibly the artists own urine, enraged segments of the American public, including some politicians. The waves from the upheaval in the United States were felt as far as Winnipeg. Serrano's appearance at the Winnipeg Art Gallery in March 1990 resulted in a demand from some Winnipeg City Counsellors to stop the city's financial support for the gallery. Gibson's and Serrano's are two cases out of many in which would-be-artists present, to an increasingly unmoved world, strange

new phenomena for which they claim the status of works of art.[1] Moral, political and religious reasons are, no doubt, to a large extent responsible for the outrage occasioned by these "works of art". Sniffy's life was saved by incensed animal lovers chasing Gibson down the street, rather than by philosophical arguments convincing Gibson that his work of art was not really art after all.

Gibson's and Serrano's works may, in the long run, turn out to merit at the most a footnote in the History of Art. But the important thing is the uncertainty we can feel: All of us are familiar with the scorn earlier generations have heaped on van Gogh, Gauguin, Ibsen and a dozen others for offending their painterly or moral sensitivities one way or the other. Equally familiar is the scorn later generations of art historians and critics have heaped on those who laughed first. Whatever reasons people have for thinking that some things can be done in the name of art, others not, the fact remains that there is disagreement about what art is.

Though often dealt with by philosophers, the question "What is Art?" thus arises in the "real" world of art, particularly in cases where the artistic tradition has been challenged. Some modern artists even see it as the purpose of art to raise the question:

> The 'value' of particular artists after Duchamp can be weighed according to how much they questioned the nature of art, which is another way of saying 'what they *added* to the conception of art' or what wasn't there before they started. Artists question the nature of art by presenting new propositions as to art's nature.[2]

It is a central assumption of A. C. Danto's philosophy of art that art, particularly in the twentieth century, increasingly presupposes theory and sees its task as accounting for its

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[1] About the incident with Rick Gibson see *The Globe and Mail*, January 13, 1990, D1 - D2. About Serrano see e.g. Richard Noble, "Resisting the Censor: Art, Morality, and the public Good", *Canadian Dimension*, vol. 24, No. 5, July/August 1990, 6-8.

[2] Joseph Kosuth, "Art after Philosophy", *Studio International*, 178, 1969, p. 135c.

own nature.[3] The question about the nature of art arises, then, from the historical development and the diversity of art production and reception. The first requirement of any general theory of art must therefore be to say something about this diversity and its historical development. And this is exactly the problem philosophy of art has tried to come to terms with in our century.[4]

In this chapter the attempts of traditional aesthetics to give an account of the nature of art will be examined and criticized.[5] Starting from the observation of the diversity of art and its historical developments traditional aesthetics wants, so to speak, to cut through the diversity to the unchanging essence of art. The approach of traditional aesthetics is criticized for in effect denying the historical development and diversity of art, or at least rendering it theoretically uninteresting. It has, therefore, nothing to say about why and how art and conceptions of art develop historically.

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[3] See e.g. Danto 1986, 125. If the sentence has a Hegelian ring to it, it would be a faithful representation of Danto's recent philosophical writings, which will be discussed in Chapter Three.

[4] The philosophy of art (or aesthetics - I use the two terms interchangeably) to be discussed in the following is mainly of what can broadly be characterized as analytic in type, and is the type dominating aesthetic discussions in for example *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* and *The British Journal of Aesthetics*. For an overview see Shusterman's Introduction to Shusterman (ed.) 1989.

[5] The expression "traditional aesthetics" gained prominence with Kennick's essay "Does Traditional Aesthetics Rest on a Mistake" (Kennick 1958), but is now widely used in discussions in the philosophy of art. Kennick's essay will be discussed in Chapter Two.

1.2.: Essentialism and Traditional Aesthetics

Throughout most of the twentieth century philosophers of art have seen it as one of their most important tasks to answer the question "What is Art?". They often assumed (and, as we shall see, continue today to assume) that the question can be answered if we can find the essence or substance of art, that which makes art art, and separates it from other phenomena. We would then have a definition of art.

Clive Bell's and Roger Fry's formalist conception of art represents an influential example of an attempt to capture the essence of art (see for example Bell 1914 and Fry 1926). In his definition of art, quoted below, Bell gives expression to a concern underlying, if not always as clearly expressed in, much later philosophy of art.

According to Clive Bell, all works of art provoke, at least in sensitive people, a certain kind of emotion, an emotion which is called "aesthetic emotion". This emotion is presumably generated by a common quality in works of art. In an often quoted passage Bell says:

> . . . either all works of visual art have some common quality, or when we speak of "works of art" we gibber. Everyone speaks of "art", making a mental classification by which he distinguishes the class "works of art" from all other classes. . . . There must be some one quality without which a work of art cannot exist; possessing which, in the least degree, no work is altogether worthless. What is this quality? What quality is shared by all objects that provoke our aesthetic emotions? What quality is common to Sta. Sophia and the windows at Chartres, Mexican sculpture, a Persian Bowl, Chinese carpets, Giotto's frescoes at Padua, and the masterpieces of Poussin, Piero della Francesca, and Cézanne? Only one answer seems possible - significant form (Bell 1914, 7-8).

Formulations similar to Bell's can be found in the work of Roger Fry. The type of formalist theory advocated by Bell and Fry is, from a philosophical point of view, a form of essentialism. The main content of essentialism can be formulated in the following manner: Though we seem to perceive an endless variety of things and phenomena in the world, there is, for each group of things for which we have one name, something unchangeable behind the perceived variety that makes it possible to apply one

name. This is of course thought to be part of the reason why we *have* one name for one kind of thing. The world is, in other words, divided into "natural kinds" with distinct natures. These distinctions are reflected in our language, and make it possible to define art by giving the necessary and sufficient conditions (or 'genus proximum' and 'differentia specifica') that make something art.

One might think that Bell's approach is, by now, a bygone stage in the philosophy of art, but in fact it appears in many recent theories of art.[6] George Dickie's famous "Institutional Theory of Art" is, as I will show below (sect. 1.3.), actually a species of traditional aesthetics, a fact not widely appreciated.

The history of essentialism is as long and as complex as the history of philosophy itself. An early form is Plato's theory of the forms or ideas. Essentialism is, under reference to this aspect of Plato's theory, also sometimes simply called Platonism. Though Platonism (strictly speaking) is an idealist variation on essentialism, the Platonic notion that there is "in each case a single form for each set of particular things, to which we apply the same name" (*Republic*, 596a) has had an enormous influence on the history of philosophy.

The assumption of something unchangeable is also thought to be necessary if we want to be able to explain how things or phenomena develop historically. How can we possibly explain continual change if we do not have a certain minimum of fixed points, or certain unchangeable conditions? An assumption underlying much philosophy of art (as well as philosophy in general) was, in a different context, formulated with

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[6] Essentialism or traditional aesthetics has been defended in, for example, Eldridge 1987, Matthews 1979, Mandelbaum 1965. Besides Dickie 1974, recent examples of definitions of art (not all of which are essentialist) can be found in Beardsley 1982, 299; 34; Eaton 1988; Levinson 1979 and 1989; Margolis 1980, 89. Anita Silvers has recently claimed that analytic aesthetics is anti-essentialist ("Introduction" to *The Monist*, vol. 71, April 1988, p. 137). This seems to me to imply an unjustifiably narrow conception of "analytic aesthetics".

particular clarity by the German mathematician and logician Gottlob Frege (1848-1925):

> If everything was in continual flux, and nothing maintained itself fixed for all time, there would no longer be any possibility of getting to know anything about the world and everything would be plunged into confusion (Frege 1884, vii).

Frege's remark was directed against the idea that an account of the origin and development of an idea or a concept (e.g. the idea of number) can tell us anything about the concept in its "pure form". Frege strongly influenced the logical and mathematical work of Bertrand Russell and the earlier work of Ludwig Wittgenstein, and he has in this way played an important role in shaping philosophy in the English-speaking world in the first half of the twentieth century.[7]

In contemporary philosophy of art Frege's concern is echoed in an essay by Harold Osborne wherein he defends traditional aesthetics in opposition to explanations of art in terms of social conventions (Osborne 1981). George Dickie's institutional theory of art is, Osborne finds, of this conventional kind. From a philosophical point of view, Dickie's theory trivializes art, according to Osborne, because it turns the question about the nature of art into a question more properly dealt with in social anthropology than in philosophy (Osborne 1981, 4-5). It gives an answer to the factual question "What things in the world are correctly designated works of art?", but not to the philosophical question "What is meant by calling anything at all a work of art?" This does not seem to be a correct interpretation of Dickie's theory, but for the moment I leave that aside. Dickie approach is, Osborne thinks, not really philosophical at all. What is then the task of philosophy?

> . . . it is a primary task of philosophy to make articulate the tacit concepts latent in our linguistic habits and the other conventions by which we live, to bring to the surface the submerged rationality of our social lives. So Philosophical Aesthetics must seek, not to invent a new concept of art *ab ovo*, but to articulate and to display in all its complexity the inarticulate

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[7] About essentialism or Platonism in relation to logic and mathematics see Bloor 1983, ch. 5 and Toulmin 1972, 55f.

> concept of art implicit in the behaviour and conventions of the artworld which the Institutional theories investigate on a factual level (5).

Osborne fails to appreciate that he has a potential ally in Dickie. Since Dickie claims that we have had the concepts of art captured by his definition "all along", it is clear that his definition is indeed meant to "articulate and to display . . . the inarticulate concept of art implicit in the behaviour and conventions of the artworld". But this is not the question of interest here.

How do we know that we have this "inarticulate concept", since it is not immediately apparent? Osborne's answer is interesting:

> The presence of such a concept is guaranteed by the fact that we are to some extent rational creatures, that we display a measure of consistency in our attitudes and behaviour. Without it the guidance of the artworld would be arbitrary and chaotic. It is this latent concept which is the object of philosophical search (6).

But how do we know that we do "display a measure of consistency" in this sense? No doubt, many people do in fact find the artworld arbitrary and chaotic. The question seems to rest on the ability of the philosopher to make it consistent. A heavy responsibility rests on the shoulders of the philosopher, who at the same time becomes the final judge of human culture, since the concept of art which is to guarantee rationality is a concept which transcends the merely empirical (sociological, anthropological, historical) examination. It is the philosopher who must "open our eyes" (9).

Besides assuring us of our rationality, the philosophical definition of art is also necessary for the historical account of art. Osborne echoes Frege:

> The notion of change involves the existence of something which continues through change. Unless we know what this changing thing is so that we can recognize it amid change and discriminate it from other things, we cannot know that it changes. Indeed the assertion that it changes would have no sense (7).

This is, for example, the case with science. Conceptions of science have no doubt changed, "[b]ut we do not argue for that reason that science is undefinable. We know,

and up to a point we can say, what we are talking about when we speak of science" (ibid). To draw an analogy to science is, however, not very convincing. Many philosophers of science, and many scientists, would claim that, in fact, there is no defining feature of science, and that one should not try to define it.[8]

Osborne does not develop a specific theory (at least not in any detail) in "What is a Work of Art?". His account is included here because it outlines with unusual clarity the ideas and underlying assumptions of traditional aesthetics. Osborne fails - as mentioned - to appreciate that Dickie's institutional theory is in fact prompted by the same theoretical attitude that he is advocating. An important starting point for Dickie's institutional theory of art is an essay by Maurice Mandelbaum (Mandelbaum 1965), wherein Mandelbaum defends the idea underlying traditional aesthetics. But traditional aesthetics has, according to Mandelbaum, been misguided in its search for a definition of art by focusing exclusively on manifest features or exhibited properties when attempting to define art. Mandelbaum suggests instead that we focus on non-exhibited, for example relational, properties when we try to define art. I will examine Dickie's theory in more detail. The centrality of this theory in British and North-American philosophy of art in the last fifteen years is one reason to discuss it here. Secondly, Dickie's institutional theory of art is one of the most elaborate attempts to revive traditional aesthetics, a fact which is not generally made clear. On the contrary, it is often seen as undermining everything of value in aesthetics, and opening the floodgates of relativism. Finally, the theoretical approach which is to emerge out of the present work shares some of Dickie's presuppositions, while at the same time being quite different from "the institutional theory". It is therefore necessary to point out what I find valuable in Dickie's theory, and the ways in which I wish to distance myself from it.

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[8] Most clearly, this is of course claimed by Feyerabend, but also by Putnam, Kuhn, Bloor and Toulmin. See the discussion of conceptions of science in sect. 3.2., below.

1.3.: George Dickie's Institutional Theory and Traditional Aesthetics

Dickie's theory was originally advanced in a series of articles published in the sixties and early seventies, but the most comprehensive presentation is in *Art and the Aesthetic - An Institutional Analysis* from 1974. Mandelbaum's essay "Family Resemblances and Generalizations concerning the Arts" was, as mentioned, an important starting point for Dickie. It is the suggestion that the defining qualities of something (for example family or game) can be "non-exhibited properties" Dickie takes up in *Art and the Aesthetic*.

The centrepiece of Dickie's theory is the following definition of art:

> A work of art in the classificatory sense [as opposed to the evaluative and the derivative] is (1) an artifact (2) a set of the aspects of which has had conferred upon it the status of candidate for appreciation by some person or persons acting on behalf of a certain social institution (the artworld) (Dickie 1974, 34).

There has been some discussion whether or not artifactuality is actually a necessary condition for something to be a work of art. I will not deal with this discussion here. The most interesting and controversial part of Dickie's definition is obviously that relating to "the artworld", a term Dickie adopted from A. C. Danto's essay "The Artworld" (Danto 1964).

In "The Artworld" Danto says that "[t]o see something as art requires something the eye cannot descry - an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of history of art: an artworld."[9] It is an elaborated form of this notion of an artworld Dickie incorporates into his definition of art. The artworld forms the background against which something can acquire "the status of candidate for appreciation", which is that non-exhibited feature which makes something art.

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[9] Quoted by Dickie 1974, 29; Danto's essay was originally published in *Journal of Philosophy*, 15, 1964, 571-584. A similar passage is now in Danto 1981, 135. Cf. Danto, 1986, xi ff.

Before examining further the contents of Dickie's definition of art I wish to establish that it is meant as and advanced as an essentialist definition of art, and that Dickie's theory is therefore - at least as far as the definition goes - properly considered as a form of traditional aesthetics.

In an essay published shortly before *Art and the Aesthetic* Dickie says that "'art' is a closed concept which we have had all along" (Dickie 1973, 24). In *Art and the Aesthetic* he says that the institutional theory of art

> . . . concentrates attention on the *nonexhibited* characteristics that works of art have in virtue of being embedded in an institutional matrix which may be called "the artworld" and argues that *these characteristics are essential and defining* [last italics mine] (Dickie 1974, 12).

The institutional definition of art has been true at all times, or "all along" as Dickie puts it. Dickie does seem to find it of importance that his definition is eternal, though he also says that it is not important if the features emphasized by his definition are of a more recent origin.[10]

Though Dickie's definition has always been true it has not always been apparent that the institutional character of art is indeed the essence of art. Only with the emergence of modern works of art in the early parts of the twentieth century, particularly Dadaism, was it revealed that none of the other features of works of art (such as their representational or expressive features) could define art. In spite of the falsity of earlier definitions of art, they may have drawn attention to important features of works of art (50-51). Painters have always (or "all along" (32)) been involved in the practice of status conferring. Even in periods where a different conception of art was prevailing, and art was considered to be, for example, representational, an actual

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[10] "...one need not assume that we and the ancient Egyptians share a common conception of art. It would be enough to be able to specify the necessary and sufficient conditions for the concept of art which we have (we present-day Americans, we present-day Westerners, we Westerners since the organization of the system of the arts in or about the eighteenth century - I am not sure of the exact limits of the 'we')" (Dickie 1974, 28).

"conferring of status" took place. What was thought to be a defining or essential feature of works of art actually turned out to be an epiphenomenon:

> When an artist of an earlier era painted a picture, he did some or all of a number of things: depicted a human being, portrayed a certain man, fulfilled a commission, worked at his livelihood, and so on. In addition he also acted as an agent of the artworld and conferred the status on his creation. . . . Duchamp did not invent the artworld, because it was there all along (Dickie 1974, 32-33).

The artworld is a social institution, not in the sense in which a formalized organization, such as a corporation, club or political party, is an institution, but in the sense of an "established practice" (31), or a "customary practice" (35). The artworld is composed of a very large group of people: artists, producers, museum directors, museum-goers, theatre goers, reporters for newspapers, critics, art historians, art theorists, philosophers of art and others (35-36). They are what Dickie calls the core of the artworld. "In addition, every person who sees himself as a member of the artworld is thereby a member" (36).

Many of the elements of the artworld mentioned by Dickie change through history. In the not too distant past (prior to about 1700) there were no public art museums as we know them today, and therefore no museum directors or museum-goers, no critics and no reporters for newspapers. The actual contents of the artworld undergoes dramatic changes. One of the features of Dickie's definition of art is supposed to be that it, as opposed to other definitions, is able to take developments and changes into account (33, 48).

Though the ability to take change and development in the artistic institutions into account is an important aspect of Dickie's definition of art, it is difficult to see how defining art in the way Dickie does actually contributes to understanding and explaining change and development in the institutional setting of art. In one passage (quoted in footnote No. 10), Dickie minimizes the role it would have for his theory if for example the Egyptians had a conception of art radically different from ours. It would be

enough, he says, to specify the present conception of art. But, if this is the case, why formulate a theory of art in the form of a definition giving the necessary and sufficient conditions that make something art? Definitions with necessary and sufficient conditions derive their logical form and metaphysical contents (essentialism) from a universe where change is only change in the appearance of an unalterable essence.[11] The ideal guiding the search for this type of definition is that of, for example, geometry, where the entire body of geometry can be derived from a few basic assumptions (see Robinson 1954, 163). But if Dickie's definition of art does not reveal the eternal essence of art (assuming that the notion of essence is meaningful), there does not seem to be any particular reason to insist on maintaining this particular form. From for example Robinson's examination of the bewildering array of definitions suggested throughout the history of philosophy, the conclusion emerges, that only heuristic considerations provide reasons to insist that a definition must have a particular form. If a central concern in defining art is to understand change and development, an investigation of the particular circumstances under which a certain conception of art emerged and developed would be preferable to an abstract definition of art.

The overall tendency of Dickie's theory is to claim that his definition has been true "all along", even if, as in the example with the painters, the conferring of status did not play any role in the actual historical circumstances of the production, distribution and reception of paintings.

To make this clearer, let us take a closer look at what Dickie says regarding the traditions of theatre:

> The institutions associated with the theater have varied from time to time: in the beginning it was Greek religion and the Greek state; in medieval times, the church; more recently, private business and the state (national theater). *What has remained constant with its own identity throughout its history is the theater itself* as an established way of doing and behaving. . . [my italics] (30).

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[11] See Toulmin 1972, 355, and Robinson 1954, 140 ff.

What is this "theater itself" which has remained constant despite the changes surrounding it? Dickie addresses this question in his discussion of "aesthetic objects": Paintings and other works of art are physical objects. But only certain of the many qualities paintings (etc.) have as physical objects interest us when considering them as works of art. The back of a painting is for example of no interest. Similarly, we ignore, or try to ignore, the backs of the heads of the people in front of us when we watch a movie or a play in a theatre. We just know that they are not part of the film or the play. What is left when all this has been ignored can be considered "aesthetic objects". How are those qualities or aspects belonging to, say, paintings qua aesthetic objects selected? Dickie answers that the selection is determined by the conventions governing the presentation of the work (147).

In his discussion of "theater itself" Dickie distinguishes between primary and secondary conventions regulating the presentation of theatre. The primary convention "is the understanding shared by the actors and the audience that they are engaged in a certain kind of formal activity. This convention is what establishes and sustains theatre" (174), and it remains, according to Dickie, constant throughout history. Since we are not told what a "certain kind of formal activity" is, it is difficult to know whether, from a purely historical point of view, this is correct or not.

In addition to the primary conventions there are also secondary conventions: The traditional way of placing the seats in a theatre, the raised stage, the printed program, the division of the play into acts, the raising and lowering of the curtain etc. As is apparent, these can vary greatly, and many of them are not observed in modern theatre: Often there is no curtain, the changing of the scene is fully visible to the spectators etc.

To draw some conclusions: As an essentialist definition of art, the focus of Dickie's institutional theory of art is on the eternal and unchanging nature of art, but the cost is extreme generality. In his explanation of, for example, who the artworld is

composed of, it is clear that Dickie actually has in mind limited aspects of more recent developments in artistic practice. This limited aspect of the historical development of art is elevated to an eternal essence of art, at the cost of the really interesting questions, the questions which would also be of interest to non-philosophers: To the extent that art is institutionalized and governed by conventions where did these institutions come from, and how did they develop? Have they changed throughout history, and if so from what to what? Because other parts of Dickie's theoretical efforts are directed to the examination of the historical origin of the aesthetic and of the conventional nature of the presentation of aesthetic objects, the lack of historical specificity seems particularly regrettable.[12] The lack of specificity in the institutional theory is also indicated by the uncertainty as to who populates the artworld. Though its organization is looser than that of a more formalized organization, it is certainly not true, as Dickie's theory would imply, that anyone considering themselves part of the artworld has it in their power to turn something into a work of art. This question - of the composition of the artworld - is one where Dickie's theory would point in the direction of specific, for example sociological, examinations of questions such as, What constitutes membership in the artworld? and, Why can some people can get away with exhibiting urinals and others not?

The institutional theory of art is a house divided against itself: It emphasizes the collective and social nature of art and could serve as a guide in the

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[12] As Nicholas Wolterstorff points out in a recent essay: "Something interesting might have turned up if philosophers had looked into the emergence of our (modern) concepts of *the arts* and *works of art*. When and where did these concepts emerge? Why? What intellectual and social purposes did they serve? Do those purposes remain viable? Have the concepts attached to the words "an art" and "a work of art" remained steady over the years or have they altered? If they have changed, why have they changed? All such historical inquiries would, however, be regarded by the neo-Kantian analytic philosopher as mucking around in the contingent. The analytic philosopher of art, like his fellow analytic philosophers, practised the craft with resolute ahistoricism: slicing into the conceptual scheme of art criticism at a certain moment in its history, never asking why the scheme had arisen and developed as it had..." (1987, 154-155). Now also in Shusterman (ed.) 1989, 37-38.

examination of what actually constitutes the different forms of "established social practice", and of how they develop and change, but Dickie presents it as the ultimate answer to the question about the essence of art. His theory, therefore, rests on a philosophical assumption which excludes or at least renders uninteresting historical or sociological examinations of those forms of collective human activity which make art.

1.4.: Summary of the criticism of traditional aesthetics

It is in the nature of essentialist definitions of art that they must focus on the unchangeable, that which remains constant "all along". But why is it necessary to assume something remains "fixed for all time" to write its history? To paraphrase Marx: People create their own history, but they do so under circumstances created by all the previous generations.[13] It is a continuous process of handing down, modifying, changing and retaining, and not the permanence of something enduring, changelessly the same, that gives unity to human history. This goes for the arts as well.

The point I wish to make is the following: To write (e.g.) the history of literature one would have to investigate how different forms of literary discourse develop, what their role and function are, how they give rise to new forms of literary discourse, and so on. (These are the kinds of questions raised in Peter Bürger's institutional theory of literature and the arts (in Bürger 1979).) An essentialist definition of art would be more a hindrance than a help in this undertaking, though it is of course necessary to have certain standards or exemplars available to determine which works to deal with and which not. But the standard will itself be a product of a developing tradition in the

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[13] "Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living." Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, quoted from Robert C. Tucker (ed.), *The Marx-Engels Reader*. Second Edition, New York, 1978, 595.

history of art or literature, not of a definition which a philosopher develops.[14] The prevailing concept of art must at any given time be seen against the background of these historically developing forms of human activity. The concept "art", like any other concept, is not a mysterious entity, but expresses the way some human beings think about an activity they or others are or were involved in. It sums up aspects of this activity the participants find important.

Bell's definition of art illustrates that definitions of art can have this function. It was no coincidence that Bell mentioned Cézanne along with Giotto, Piero della Francesca and Poussin. The three latter painters were accepted as a part of the art-historical canon by Bell's British contemporaries, but Cézanne was not. Until around 1910 Post-Impressionist painters such as Cézanne were relatively unknown in England, and an exhibition of the works of the Post-Impressionists organized in 1910 by Roger Fry had caused quite a stir in the British art-establishment. What Bell does (as well as what Fry does in a series of articles in *The Nation* in 1910), is to argue that Cézanne, and, by implication, the other Post-Impressionists, are in fact part of the art-historical tradition, because they exhibit that quality which by definition makes something art: significant form. The definition draws the attention to features which have been overlooked in the prevailing mode of reception, where pictures were seen as mainly representational in some straightforward sense of that term, and the definition recommends another way of looking at pictures.[15] (The events surrounding Bell's definition of art as "significant form" will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.)

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[14] T. J. Diffey has made a related point: "The Wittgensteinians are right that a formula defining art would be useless; for example, we do not need a definition of art to spot works of art since works of art are identified not by philosophical definition but by history" (Diffey 1979, 18).

[15] Similar points have been made by Kennick (Kennick 1958, 324-325).

The American sociologist Howard S. Becker has pointed out that Dickie's institutional theory has a function similar to the one here suggested for Bell's: When artistic phenomena which cannot be accounted for within the prevailing theoretical framework occur, it is the typical task of aesthetics to develop a new theory or definition of art which is able to accommodate these phenomena:

> . . . aestheticians (or whoever does the job) provide the rationale by which art works justify their existence and distinctiveness, and thus their claim to support. Art and artists can exist without such a rationale, but have more trouble when others dispute their right to do so. Art worlds, as they develop, therefore usually produce that rationale, whose most specialized form is aesthetics and whose most specialized producer, the philosopher (Becker 1982, 164).[16]

Dickie's institutional theory provides a theoretical justification for, for example, Dadaist art; in particular, it offers an explanation of how such objects as Duchamp's Readymades can come to be considered art.

Dickie never says directly why we need a definition of art. Assuming that he shares the view of other essentialists, one reason could be that it is necessary to make possible a historical account of the history of art and a history of the concept of art. But, as I have shown, this happens at the risk of extreme generality or direct emptiness.[17]

Criticism of essentialism is nothing new in the history of aesthetics. Particularly since the late forties traditional aesthetics has been attacked from different

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[16] ". . . new theories, rivalling, extending, or amending previous ones, arise when older theories fail to give an adequate account of the virtues of work widely accepted by knowledgeable members of the relevant art world. When an existing aesthetic does not legitimate logically what is already legitimate in other ways, someone will construct a theory that does" (Becker 1982, 145; cf. 162).

[17] This view is shared by Becker, whose work does contain a specific, sociological examination of the contemporary American artworld: "Philosophers tend to argue from hypothetical examples, and the "artworld" Dickie and Danto refer to does not have much meat on its bones, only what is minimally necessary to make the points they want to make. Nor do the criticisms made of their positions often refer to the character of existing art worlds or ones which have existed, emphasizing instead logical inconsistencies in the constructs used in the theory" (Becker 1982, 149-150).

angles, not least from one inspired by the philosophy of the later Wittgenstein. But the Wittgenstein-inspired criticism of essentialism suffers from some of the same shortcomings as essentialism, most importantly an inability to explain why the concept of art has a history at all. The purpose of the following two chapters is to develop an historicist alternative both to essentialism and to the Wittgensteinian type of anti-essentialism. But first it is necessary to deal in more detail with the Wittgenstein-inspired criticism of essentialism and the alternative to essentialism implied in this criticism.

CHAPTER 2

Wittgensteinian Philosophy and

The Histories of Art

2.1.: Introduction

Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* has been an important source for criticism of essentialism in the philosophy of art. In this chapter, two early attempts to undermine essentialism from an implicitly or explicitly Wittgensteinian point of view are briefly discussed. In his essay "Does Traditional Aesthetics rest on a Mistake?" Kennick rejects the question "What is Art?". Kennick does not base his case directly on an interpretation of Wittgenstein's philosophy, but his approach is distinctly Wittgensteinian in spirit.[1] In "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics" Weitz wants to substitute the approach of traditional aesthetics with a descriptive approach. In section 2.2. I show that both attempts are unsatisfactory. I therefore turn to one of the most sophisticated recent applications of Wittgenstein's philosophy to aesthetics, Benjamin Tilghman's *But is it*

[1] Wittgenstein is only mentioned once in Kennick 1958 (p. 323), but Kennick mentions e.g. Waismann's notion of "open texture" (p. 322).

art?. The examination reveals that resting one's case on Wittgenstein is not in itself a guarantee against essentialism.

The Wittgensteinians correctly criticize upholders of traditional aesthetics for their attempt to base theories of art on the supposedly eternal nature of art. They point in this way to the contingent, conventional nature of our concept of art. Tilghman, for one, points out that we have the concepts we have because our lives are formed or organized in a certain manner, and also in part because we are a certain kind of (biological) creature. It is the historical development of artistic (and other) practices that gives rise to the philosophical question about the nature of art in the first place. But, I will argue, asking why we have the practices we have will lead us into an examination of the historical development of these practices and of our way of thinking and doing. To suggest an historical examination of the origin and development of our conception of art is to suggest a move beyond Wittgenstein, whose conceptual apparatus, though compatible with, and, it could be argued, actually indicating the necessity of such a move, does not provide us with much guidance when we take this step.

2.2.: Wittgensteinian Criticism of Traditional Aesthetics

In "Does Traditional Aesthetics Rest on a Mistake?" Kennick urges philosophers to stop asking the question "What is Art?". Traditional aesthetics rests, according to Kennick, on two related mistakes: The first is the assumption of the existence of an essence among all the things which are called art which makes it possible for us to tell what is and what is not art, the second is the assumption that a definition of art is necessary for art criticism and evaluation.

Kennick's argument for the falsity of the assumption of an artistic essence can be summed up in the following manner: There isn't one, so forget it! To know what art is and to be able to distinguish between art and non-art has nothing to do with the

comprehension of essences. Ordinary linguistic competence is enough to know what art is,

> . . . we are able to separate those objects which are works of art from those which are not, because we know English; that is, we know how correctly to use the word 'art' and apply the phrase 'work of art' (Kennick 1958, 321).

This is all there is to it. To illustrate this point, Kennick asks us to imagine a large warehouse full of all kinds of different things, some of which are works of art (pictures, musical scores etc.), some of which are not (tools, houses, dog food, furniture). If we instructed anyone to enter the warehouse and bring back the works of art she would, according to Kennick, be able to do so without having a definition of art - in fact she would be able to do so much better than if she were equipped with one of the many available definitions of art. She would know what it is to pick out "works of art", but would be at a loss if asked to select objects with, for example, "significant form" or objects of "expression".

Whereas it is plausible that a person would be ill helped by being asked to bring out all things showing feature X considered to be the essence of art by philosopher or art critic Y, it does not seem that the task normally would be quite as straightforward as it appears to Kennick. Even before 1958, when Kennick's essay appeared in *Mind*, many objects considered to be art - notably Duchamp's "readymades" - could not be easily distinguished from ordinary merchandise. Kennick points out that it is possible to have a knowledge about what art is without necessarily being able to articulate this in a theoretical formulation. It is, to express it in the terminology I introduce below (p. 39), possible to have a concrete conception of art without having an abstract conception. But this possibility does not make it illegitimate to try to obtain a theoretical or abstract conception of art. In fact, the desire to develop a theoretical understanding of what art is, is often prompted by developments in artistic activity. The question "What is Art?" does arise outside the study of the philosopher.

The second mistake in traditional aesthetics Kennick points to is "the view that responsible criticism is impossible without standards or criteria universally applicable to all works of art" (Kennick 1958, 325). The second mistake actually seems to be a variation on the first mistake. Since there is no one thing which makes art art, there is no reason to assume that there are particular, uniform standards for artistic excellence or, for example, beauty:

> For 'art' and 'beauty' do not name one and only one substance and attribute respectively; no wonder we cannot find the one thing they name or render intelligible the felt discovery that they do name one thing. We can *make* each of them name one thing if we wish. But why should we bother? We get along very well with them as they are (327).

To sum up: Kennick correctly points out that general philosophical definitions of art are of limited interest in practical criticism of the arts. His denial that "What is Art?" is a real problem failed to convince. "What is Art?" is a real problem, presented to us by the historical development of artistic activities, and it is not just a problem philosophers ask themselves. Because he rejected the question Kennick's essay has not caused as much discussion as Weitz's.

Weitz's "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics" has probably been the most influential, and certainly the most discussed, of the earlier criticisms of traditional aesthetics. It is also one of the first attempts to directly apply principles and ideas from Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* to questions in the philosophy of art. In "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics" Weitz rejects the project of traditional aesthetics, as it has been described in Chapter One. Because the concept of "art" has no necessary and sufficient properties a theory of "art" is logically impossible and not merely factually difficult (Weitz 1956, 147). For the sake of clarity it should be pointed out that Weitz seems to share the conviction of the essentialists that only real definitions (as opposed to nominal and other types of definitions) are definitions, and he sometimes identifies real definitions with theory as such (cf. e.g. the title of his famous essay). Questionable as this is, I will not deal with it.

The remarkable thing about "art", and the reason for the misfortunes of the many attempts at defining it, is the fact that it is an *open concept* (147 f.). Weitz recommends instead to make use of insights he finds in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, particularly the idea that "meaning is use" and Wittgenstein's notion of "family resemblance". In section 66 and the following sections of *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein suggests that we "look and see" if there are any similarities among the different things we call games, rather than insist that there *must* be something in common among them. Weitz employs this passage on the concept of "art", and claims that if

> . . . we actually look and see what it is we call "art", we will also find no common properties - only strands of similarities. Knowing what art is is not apprehending some manifest or latent essence but being able to recognize, describe, and explain these things we call "art" in virtue of these similarities (148).

The approach suggested by Weitz is able to give us a synchronic description: At time "t" the concept or word "art" is used in these ways, it has these different meanings etc. Instead of finding essences, we must describe a certain use of a word or concept, or a specific type of practice. We must give "a logical description of the actual functioning of the concept, including a description of the conditions under which we correctly use it or its correlates" (147).[2]

Descriptions of "the actual functioning" of a concept can, however, be deceptive. A brief look at Frank Sibley's celebrated attempt to do so in his 1959 essay "Aesthetic Concepts" is instructive (Sibley 1959).[3] Sibley starts out by distinguishing between two types of statements that can be made about works of art. The first type can

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[2] The suggested approach comes close to what Robinson characterizes as a lexical definition, which is an explanation of "the actual way in which some actual word has been used by some actual persons" (Robinson 1954, 35. Cf. p. 52).

[3] Originally in *The Philosophical Review*, vol. 67, 1959. A criticism of Sibley with similarities to the one I advance can be found in Novitz 1990.

be called descriptive. Their use articulate some aspect of the work of art which can be seen by anyone and which will not give rise to disagreement. But there is another type of statement which is more complicated:

> . . . we . . . say that a poem is tightly knit or deeply moving; that a picture lacks balance, or has a certain serenity and repose, or that the grouping of the figures sets up an exciting tension; that the characters in a novel never really come to life, or that a certain episode strikes a false note (29).

Statements of this nature require a certain sensitivity or ability to make discriminations of a nature different from the descriptive type. They require the exercise of taste and the concepts used belong to the type that Sibley calls aesthetic concepts or taste concepts. Sibley wants to examine how we "actually employ these [aesthetic] concepts" (43). He has in mind concepts such as the following: unified, balanced, integrated, lifeless, serene, sombre, dynamic, powerful, vivid, delicate, moving, trite, sentimental, tragic, handsome, comely, garish, lovely, pretty, beautiful, dainty, graceful, elegant.

Aesthetic concepts are not governed by rules or conditions in the way descriptive terms are, and cannot be justified by appeal to "nonaesthetic conditions" (39-40). This confirms Sibley's initial idea that to make aesthetic judgements one has to be in possession of a special sensibility. The important thing to notice in Sibley's description is the character of the aesthetic concepts that he analyses. Though the vocabulary is presented as if it is the only natural one, it reveals a certain stance on art as well as on the reaction that would be appropriate when encountering a work of art. The concepts listed are mostly derived from formalist art criticism. They are based on the dual ideas that art is something to be appreciated for its own sake, and that this appreciation requires a certain sensitivity not everyone can acquire. None of the concepts listed above deal with, for example, the possible moral, religious or political content of a work of art, or with the various ways in which it may affect different recipients.

Weitz and Sibley suggest describing a certain conceptual practice. But description has its pitfalls if care is not exerted in what one chooses to describe, if, that

is, the description is made without awareness that a choice is made as to what is described. Without such an awareness description easily becomes prescription, and the result of the description is an acceptance and reinforcement of prevailing prejudices. "Prejudice" should here be taken in the sense that Gadamer gives this term (*Vorurteil*): it does not mean that the judgement is false or without basis, but that the judgement is made without awareness of its own embeddedness within a particular historical tradition (see for example Gadamer 1963, 137). As Richard Shusterman points out, analytic aesthetics was considered a "second-order discipline" meant to bring clarification and conceptual rigour to existing discourses about art, particularly art criticism. This seemed appropriate at a time when art criticism was dominated by similar aspirations, and New Criticism was relatively undisputed in literary theory. But it has become clear that criticism is actually characterized by a plurality of contested practices.[4] Rather than describe the philosopher must examine the basis for existing practices.[5]

Weitz correctly points out that the historical development of art makes the attempt of traditional aesthetics to capture the essence of art futile. But in their actual analyses, Weitz and Sibley do not in fact appreciate the historical or social nature of conceptions of art substantially more than the essentialists do. Weitz's criticism of traditional aesthetics can be summed up in the following points: (1) Rather than asking the question "What is Art?" we should ask about the use of the concept art; (2) this concept is similar to the concept "game", as discussed by Wittgenstein; (3) there are no necessary and sufficient conditions regulating the use of the concept "art", only strands of similarities. But these are not points likely to impress an upholder of traditional

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[4] Richard Shusterman, "Introduction: Analysing Analytic Aesthetics", in Shusterman (ed.) 1989, pp. 7, 14.

[5] "We must raise to a conscious level the prejudices which govern understanding and in this way realize the possibility that other aims emerge in their own right from tradition . . .". Gadamer, ibid.

aesthetics. A defender of essentialism and traditional aesthetics is not necessarily obliged to take our actual use of a concept in ordinary language as of any consequence for her project. If, say, a definition of art should fail to accord with ordinary usage this *could* be because ordinary usage rests on a wrong foundation. Weitz and other critics of essentialism have in part rested their case on the failure of traditional aesthetics to actually give a definition or an account of the nature of art, on which general agreement could be obtained. But from an actual failure to deliver the promised goods it does not necessarily follow - as has been pointed out - that the project is impossible in principle, or that it should be abandoned.[6]

This shows, I think, that criticism of essentialism which takes aim at the metaphysical and epistemological assumptions supporting this form of aesthetics, such as the ideas of necessary and sufficient conditions and essences, has little prospect of success. There is no philosophical argument which, once and for all, will be able to knock the essentialist out of the ring. This is the reason why Wittgenstein's argument in his discussion of family resemblance has a rhetorical character: He *appeals* to the reader to look once again, this time without assuming that there *must* be something in common between all the things we call "games".

Critics of essentialism and traditional aesthetics must therefore look for other roads. What motivated the search characteristic of traditional aesthetics in the first place was a desire to create some uniformity in variety. It was prompted by the manifold forms of contemporary art and the historical development of art, by a desire to bring to light the conception of art "implicit in the behaviour and conventions of the artworld" (Osborne 1981, 5). Traditional aesthetics was motivated by a wish to shed light on artistic activities. The question with which essentialism is confronted is then: Is it possible, from an essentialist point of view, to account for the ways in which the concept

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[6] This has been pointed out by for example Maurice Mandelbaum in Mandelbaum 1965, 226-227 and by Robert J. Matthews in Matthews 1979, 39.

"art" functions and develops within, for example, the practice of art historians and critics, and for its changing meanings and uses in ordinary discourse? Criticism of essentialism should not focus directly on the metaphysical and epistemological assumptions supporting it, but confront essentialism with specific forms of practice.

The emphasis on practice redirects attempts to answer the question "What is Art?" away from the focus on certain types of objects to an investigation of the forms of human activity wherein something becomes art. Art can then be understood as a form of cultural practice, in the manner in which for example Noël Carroll does (Carroll 1988; see also Pollock 1988, 4 f.).[7] The cultural practices of art, though based on tradition and custom, of course develop and change through history (cf. Carroll 1988, 143).

One can have a conception of art simply by participating in the activities characteristic of this form of practice, without necessarily being able to articulate the concept of art which underlies the cultural practice. It is possible to learn to master certain procedures, acquire certain skills, participate in certain activities and so on, simply by imitating what other people do; in fact, imitation is an important form of human learning. We can call the kind of knowledge expressed in the ability to participate in the artistic practices a concrete conception of art, while the articulated concept of art is an abstract concept of art. The abstract concept of art is an attempt to articulate what is tacit in the concrete conception of art, and the abstract conception presupposes the concrete conception. To understand abstract conceptions of art

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[7] "Calling art a cultural practice, it is to be hoped, is noncontroversial. To refer to something as a practice in its simplest sense is to regard it as an activity that is customarily or habitually undertaken; a cultural practice, in this sense, applies to the customary activities of a culture. . . . The sense of cultural practice I have in mind here is that of a complex body of interrelated human activities governed by reasons internal to those forms of activity and to their coordination. Practices are aimed at achieving goods that are appropriate to the forms of activity that comprise them, and these reasons and goods, in part, situate the place of the practice in the life of the culture. Such practices supply the frameworks in which human powers are developed and expanded" (Carroll 1988, 143).

articulated in, for example, philosophical theories it is therefore necessary to know which concrete conception of art they are meant to articulate.[8]

B. R. Tilghman's approach in *But is it art?*[9] is an elaborate attempt to apply ideas from Wittgenstein's philosophy to the philosophy of art, and it has two features of importance for my discussion: (1) it views art as a form of practice, or a set of practices, and strives for a close connection between the analytical endeavour and these practices. Tilghman sees his project in opposition to traditional aesthetics of the essentialist type. Traditional aesthetics must be replaced by an approach able to "bring 'art' back from philosophical theory to our actual dealings with particular works of art in gallery, study and concert hall" (xi). We learn - Tilghman says - to master the concept "art" not by description and explanation but by being placed in situations where we *do* certain things: Listen to music, have poems read to us and the like. Wittgenstein's notion of family resemblance must be understood in this context of activities. Because activities such as reading poetry, looking at pictures and listening to music are somehow connected in the actual practices of human beings, we can talk about a family resemblance, and group the different arts under the general name of art.[10] There is therefore no point in expecting a general answer to the question "What is the meaning of 'art'?" The meaning of a concept or a statement must always be investigated in the specific context in which it is used and within which alone it has meaning. When we learn to use the concept "art" we are also exposed to the broader values, ideas and

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[8] For this distinction between concrete and abstract concepts see Jensen 1987, 94 f.

[9] Tilghman 1984. Future page references will be given in the text.

[10] Wittgenstein, according to Tilghman " . . . does not use the family resemblance model as a criterion for identifying individuals as members of a class, or as a rule for 'extending' a concept to cover new cases; it plays no kind of a justificatory role in his thinking. It belongs, rather, to *a description of language as it is; it belongs to an account of what may be called the natural history of language*" (45) [my italics].

attitudes internal to the practices of art worlds, and these are part of what is meant with "art".

Tilghman's approach rightly emphasizes the primary role of practice. In conjunction with his interpretation of "family resemblance" it enables Tilghman to add an historical dimension to his theory. The second of the features referred to above, and the one to which I will devote most attention, is, then, (2) an alternative philosophy of the history of art, and it emerges through Tilghman's discussion (in Chapter Four) of the following example: In 1910 an exhibition entitled "Manet and the Post-Impressionists" held at the Grafton Gallery in London for the first time exposed an English audience to a large collection of the works of those painters who were to be known as the Post-Impressionists. Besides Manet, pictures by Van Gogh, Cezanne, Matisse, Picasso and many others were shown - Cezanne, Van Gogh and Gauguin in particular were well represented. Critics, audiences, and many painters were appalled. Since the Post-Impressionists did not use the traditional representational techniques in any immediately recognizable fashion, their work could not be considered art at all.

Roger Fry - the organizer of the exhibition - defended the Post-Impressionists by making a comparison with developments in the Italian Renaissance. We will still be able to appreciate Giotto's paintings and see them as having an independent value in their form and expression, Fry argued, if we do not regard them as crude forerunners of Leonardo's and Michelangelo's masterpieces. It is, similarly, impossible to understand or appreciate Cezanne's pictures, if they are considered as attempts to do the same as nineteenth-century academic paintings. Rather, we should look at them as we would look at Giotto's pictures. We should then be able to realize that Cezanne's pictures too have an independent value.[11] Fry, in other words, defends the Post-Impressionists by

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[11] According to Tilghman, what Fry is doing is ". . . showing us how to look at Cezanne so that we will see his value for ourselves. He helps us to do this by pointing out likenesses between his work and aspects of the artistic tradition with which we are already familiar despite those aspects having been neglected in the then prevalent view

(continued...)

arguing that their work is connected to those activities which make up an art-historical tradition, though it might not initially appear that way.

Tilghman has apparently opened the door to an understanding of what we could call "conceptual change" in art-historical, as well as in more ordinary discourse about art. But in fact he does not fully exploit the potential in his criticism of traditional aesthetics. Because his approach is descriptive, Tilghman remains, so to speak, at the level of appearances. Consequently, Tilghman accepts a formalist approach to art works, a formalism which enters with his acceptance of Fry's theories, and which in turn bars the understanding of conceptual change.

Tilghman's reliance on Fry gives rise to two problems: (1) There is an incompatibility between an essentialism drawn from Fry's formalist theories of art and an approach which is otherwise anti-essentialist; (2) When Tilghman takes his theory a step further this essentialism leads to the problems connected with the conception of art-historical development to which I will turn shortly.

2.3.: The History of Art and Conceptual Change

To address the first question it is necessary to show that Fry's theories are indeed essentialist. In his theoretical essays about aesthetics Fry advances the view that our experiences in confronting works of art are of a nature sufficiently different from all other kinds of experience to warrant talk about a special "aesthetic experience". We find

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[11](...continued)
of art history" (75). Fry himself said that "the group of painters whose work is on view at the Grafton Gallery are in reality the most traditional of any recent group of artists"; "The Grafton Gallery - I"; *The Nation*, VIII (November 19, 1910), 331.

this experience in relation to all types of art - not just paintings, but also architecture, drama, poetry and music.[12]

There exists "a special orientation of the consciousness", "a special focusing of the attention . . ." (Fry 1926, 5).[13] This special orientation of the consciousness Fry calls "disinterested contemplation".[14] He assumes that the possibility of the aesthetic experience rests on the existence of a certain quality found in all works of art. What is this quality? In "Retrospect" (from 1920)[15] Fry uses Clive Bell's term "significant form", while for example in "Transformations - Some Questions in Esthetics" he talks about "plastic qualities" as opposed to psychological and literary. It is the plastic qualities which are the distinctive aesthetic qualities, the essence of art. They make art art. For my present purposes it is not necessary to consider what the specific content of those notions may be. The remarks made so far are enough to point out that Fry's method and approach to aesthetics - as well as Clive Bell's - is that of traditional aesthetics and essentialism. I now turn to the consequences this has for Tilghman's understanding of art-historical development. How one views art in its historical development naturally influences one's view of the development of the concept of art.

Tilghman interprets Fry's arguments in defence of Cezanne and the Post-Impressionists as "in essence a rejection of the view of art history associated with Vasari that understands Giotto as doing in a crude and clumsy beginner's way what Leonardo,

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[12] If we compare our reactions to a number of art works, we find, according to Fry " . . . that *in all cases* our reaction to works of art is a reaction to a relation and not to sensations or objects or persons or events. This, if I am right, affords *a distinguishing mark* of what I call esthetic experiences, esthetic reactions, or esthetic states of mind" [my italics]. "Transformations. Some Questions in Esthetics", in Fry 1926, 3.

[13] See also "The French Post-Impressionists" (Preface to the Catalogue of the second Post-Impressionist Exhibition, Grafton Galleries, 1912), in Fry 1920, 242.

[14] See for example Fry 1920, 29.

[15] In Fry 1920, 284-302.

Michelangelo, and Titian did superbly well" (75). Instead, as we saw, Fry pointed to *formal values* common to Giotto and Cezanne. An alternative view of the history of art must therefore emerge from Tilghman's analysis of Fry's approach.

According to Tilghman, changes in art history, as in the case with the Post-Impressionists, are only apparent novelties. Actually, a new form of painting is only accentuating hitherto neglected aspects of the already existing tradition, though this may not be immediately obvious. The tradition can be "modified and enlarged", but there is no real break (77-78). The tradition contains a stock of ideas and possibilities which can be explored by the artist, and which we as spectators can learn to appreciate. Such modifications also give us a new way of looking at the history of art leading up to them. By comparing Cezanne with Giotto we get a new way of looking at Cezanne, but it also makes it possible to take a fresh look at Giotto (76-77).

Surprisingly, the alternative theory about the history of art embodied in Tilghman's approach amounts, then, to an actual denial of any real (qualitative) change, and it can at the most offer us what I will call a *reconstruction* of sequences of development.

A reconstruction of an historical process bases itself on present standards of and ideas about (for example) pictorial representation, scientific procedures, political institutions, and so on, and looks back through history to find likenesses and differences in relation to these standards. The historical account is written by including those theories that correspond to or which can be said to "anticipate" the current conception of what, for example, philosophy or philosophy of art is. As a result, the present standards appear as the inevitable end-product of a long chain of development, and historical predecessors are understood as immature or incomplete forms of the present. Historical reconstructions are therefore also typically teleological.[16] Auguste Comte's (1798-1857)

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[16] The distinction between 'reconstruction' and 'theory of development' draws, among other sources, on work by Uffe Juul Jensen. See Jensen 1981 and 1983.

view of scientific development would be an example of this view of historical development. The just mentioned view of art history associated with Vasari would be another. Evidently, what is here called reconstructions are similar to what is sometimes called "whig history", but the term "whig history" is, as Ernst Mayr has recently pointed out, used in so many different connections that its exact meaning has become uncertain (Mayr 1990).

A reconstructive history of aesthetic theory views the object of the discipline as something relatively unchanging, usually beauty (or the idea of beauty) or the fine arts. It is, consequently, not necessary to deal with the actual circumstances that gave rise to certain problems, such as the question about the nature of "art". This leads to anachronistic classifications of theories, and consequently to distortions.

An example of this can be found in George Dickie's discussion of the origin of the aesthetic in *Art and the Aesthetic* (Dickie 1974, Chapter Two). Dickie discusses, in particular, the development of theories of taste in Britain in the eighteenth century. Shaftesbury is generally recognized as one of the most influential early theoreticians of the arts, and he greatly influenced, for example, Hutcheson. But Dickie, though he does discuss Hutcheson, does not want to discuss Shaftesbury. Shaftesbury does not "fit in with the British philosophers he influenced" (p. 59). The problem, however, is actually that Shaftesbury does not fit into the category chosen by Dickie to classify the British philosophers who Shaftesbury influenced. Dickie's choice of classificatory units forces him to disregard aspects of the actual historical development.

On the basis of a reconstruction the history of aesthetics appears as a continuous chain of differing answers to the same question. Often theories of fine arts or beauty are attributed to, for example, Plato or Aristotle. This ignores the considerable difference in content and meaning between the Greek words *techne* and *kalos* and the modern English terms "art" and "beauty" usually chosen to translate them. That there is this difference is of course often acknowledged, but rather than give up the idea that

there are perennial questions, the views of the predecessors of the current view are seen as suffering from "elusiveness" (Barasch 1985, 5), as "relatively ill defined" (Stolnitz 1961b, 189) or one finds that the development in the Middle Ages ". . . obscur[es] the concept of the fine arts" (Barasch 1985, 46). When, for example, the concept of art throughout its historical development begins to look like the modern conception of art, this is then considered a realization of something which has always been true, but for some reason never been noticed. The author of one of the most extensive recent histories of aesthetics, Wladyslaw Tatarkiewicz, can thus be found saying:

> The concept of the fine arts and their system seem to us simple and natural, but the historian knows how late and with what effort they were established. . . . From the mid-18th century on there was no doubt left but that the handicrafts were handicrafts and not arts, and that the sciences were sciences and not arts; thus only the fine arts were really arts. . . . Looking back at the evolution of the concept of art, we will say that such an evolution was natural, indeed inevitable. One may only wonder that so many centuries were needed to bring the concept to its present-day form (Tatarkiewicz 1980, 21-22).

Though people have not realized this to be the case, the division of the fine arts which became the commonly accepted one from some time in the eighteenth century has actually always been the correct one. But this type of historical account only makes sense if it is assumed that the essence of art has not changed, and therefore relies on an essentialist notion of the concept "art".

But history does not develop along the neat conceptual divisions we (retrospectively) devise, but in a field of competing and clashing ideas and practices. A reconstruction does not distinguish between the units chosen for classification and the actual units of historical development. In fact there may be considerable difference between units of classification and units of development. To show that this distinction is possible and necessary, I wish to draw attention to how biologists conceive of a similar distinction of great importance for their field.

Evolutionary biologists distinguish between two different forms of species concepts: Species taxon and species category (see Mayr 1982, 253-4).[17] Species taxon refers to the actually living groups of animals or plants, existing at a particular place at a particular time. Species categories are theoretical products, made by biologists, and are simply a matter of definition. Species categories are units of classification, while species taxa are (or can be) units of development. When a taxonomist encounters a living organism he or she examines whether or not the organism "fits" into the species category. The distinction between species taxon and species category is necessary because it is not the possession of an essence or one common trait which defines the species. Within an actual species there is considerable variation among the individuals. This variation must be recognized by the biologists, since without variation there would be no evolution. An essentialist definition of a species would be based on the assumption that something remains unchanged, and that every species has a distinct essence. It can therefore not take gradual development into account, and essentialism can therefore not account for evolution.

This may seem a cumbersome way to make the point that it is necessary and possible to make a distinction between classificatory units which are a product of our intellectual efforts and the actually existing diversity. At the same time, the distinction between two types of units recognizes that our knowledge about the actually existing diversity develops through the creation and application of standards or prototypes.

The concept of art always exists within a field of other concepts, from which it is more or less sharply differentiated. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries "art" and "science" were, for example, often used almost synonymously to refer to any activity requiring the exercise of skill, whereas to most people in the late

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[17] See also Ernst Mayr, *Towards a New Philosophy of Biology*, Cambridge, Mass., and London, England, 1988, Part VI.

twentieth century the difference between art and science is considerable. When we wish to understand the historical development of conceptions of art we do so on the basis of the creation of certain standards. Dickie, for example, discusses theories of taste and theories of aesthetic attitudes in Britain in the early eighteenth century, whereas Stolnitz claims that the development of early philosophy of art must be understood in terms of theories of "aesthetic disinterestedness". Both efforts are attempts to develop the equivalent of what the biologist would call a species concept: they are a product of an act of classification, but both of them are by their various proponents presented as if they were the actual units of development, that is, to continue the analogy to biology, they are presented as if they are species taxa. This identification of the classificatory units with the actual units of development does not, however, hold up to even a relatively cursory examination of the actual historical diversity and complexity of the development of theories of art in Britain in the early eighteenth century.

The meaning of "art" must at any given time be understood in relation to the meaning of other concepts, such as "morality", "science", "politics", "craft" or "philosophy". When we classify something as art we make an effort to come to terms with this diversity of practices, and express, among other things, how we see art in relation to other phenomena within a given culture or in a given historical period. If the actual historical diversity of these practices is considered, and we keep in mind the distinction between concrete and abstract concepts, as well as the distinction between units of classification and units of development, the question can be raised: *Why* did particular ideas, particular forms of artistic (scientific, political and so on) practice develop and rise to prominence, and others not? This is opposed to the reconstructive view, where, as mentioned, the present standards are seen as the inevitable end product of the historical development. The developmental strategy will therefore have a tendency to emphasize diversity and contingency, and it seeks to answer the questions why something develops and what, more specifically, develops, whereas the reconstructive

approach will have a tendency to emphasize necessity and teleology. By saying above that art should be considered a form of cultural practice (a conception with which Tilghman (and Wittgenstein) would agree[18]), I have already indicated the answer to the questions of why something develops and what it is that develops.

Equipped with the distinction between a reconstruction and a theory of development we can now return to Tilghman.

If all concepts must be understood on the basis of their place and function within human practices - a view any Wittgensteinian philosopher must be committed to - this was as true in fourteenth century Italy as it is today. But in the world of Giotto and his contemporaries the concept of "art" was significantly different from ours, if we consider both in their context of artistic and other practices.[19] How, then, can Giotto be said to be part of the same artistic tradition as Cezanne? For the essentialist the answer is easy: What Giotto made was art, as was what Cezanne made, because their work share that essential quality which makes something art. A reconstruction is sufficient for an essentialist because reconstructions are the historical extension of essentialism. But for those who, like Tilghman, do not want to subscribe to essentialism, no simple answer to the question is forthcoming.

Much art history does not reach more than a basis for a reconstruction of the historical development of art, or only explains developments to the extent that changes in fashion are seen as expressing changing tastes. Tilghman's interpretation of the events surrounding the exhibition in England in 1910 is to some extent based on Ian

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[18] Cf. for example the following remark by Wittgenstein: "The words we call expressions of aesthetic judgement play a very complicated role, but a very definite role, in what we call a culture of a period. To describe their use or to describe what you mean by a cultured taste, you have to describe a culture. . . . What belongs to a language game is a whole culture" (Wittgenstein 1966, 8).

[19] About the historical development of the concept of art, see for example Tatarkiewicz 1980, Chapter 1, Kristeller 1951 and Baxandall 1972.

Dunlop's work, and Dunlop does in fact see conflicting tastes as a major reason for the events surrounding the exhibition (see Dunlop 1972, 127 and 146). But if we consider the events in a wider historical context it becomes clear that more than conflicting pictorial tastes were at stake.

2.4.: Art in context

The years leading up to the First World War were times of intense political conflicts in Britain, which had lost its position as the world's leading industrial power and was facing severe economic problems. The labour movement was growing, and in 1906 The Labour Party was for the first time represented in the parliament. The election in 1906 was also the first the Conservatives had lost in twenty years, and it led to the formation of a Liberal government.

In retrospect, the death of Queen Victoria in 1901 assumes symbolic proportions. In the words of Leonard Woolf:

> When in the grim, grey, rainy January days of 1901 Queen Victoria lay dying, we [Woolf's generation at Cambridge] already felt that we were living in an era of incipient revolt and that we ourselves were mortally involved in this revolt against a social system and code of conduct and morality which, for convenience sake, may be referred to as bourgeois Victorianism.[20]

[20] S.P. Rosenbaum (ed.) 1975, 106. The excerpt is from Leonard Woolf, *Sowing: An Autobiography of the Years 1880-1904*, London, 1960.

Roger Fry was older than Leonard Woolf (born in 1866 and 1880, respectively), but both were associated with the Bloomsbury Group, which in many ways grew out of the group of young Cambridge intellectuals Woolf talks about in the passage just quoted.[21]

When we know of the political and economic decline of the established powers in Britain, and combine it with the knowledge that Fry was, at the time of the first Post-Impressionist exhibition, a well known scholar of early Renaissance art, the outcry the exhibition created and the hostility towards Fry assumes another dimension: Fry was seen as taking sides for the forces of moral decadence and the undermining of society.

Those who attacked the Post-Impressionists, as well as those who defended them, saw in the discussion more than aesthetic issues: It was a moral, political and ideological question.[22] Fry was aware of the more far ranging political implications of the work of the art-historian and the critic, and that these surfaced in particular in connection with the introduction of Post-Impressionism into England. In "Retrospect" from 1920 (Fry 1920, 284-302) Fry says about the events:

> I found among the cultured who had hitherto been my most eager listeners the most inveterate and exasperated enemies of the new movement. The accusation of anarchism was constantly made. . . . I now see that my crime had been to strike at the vested emotional interests. These people felt instinctively that their special culture was one of their special assets. That to be able to speak glibly of Tang and Ming, of Amico di Sandro and Baldovinetti, gave them a social standing and a distinctive cachet. . . . It was felt that one could only appreciate Amico di Sandro when one had

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[21] "When our Cambridge days were over, there grew up in London during the years 1907 to 1914 a society or group of people which became publicly known as Bloomsbury. (...)...Bloomsbury grew directly out of Cambridge; it consisted of a number of intimate friends who had been at Trinity and King's and were now working in London, most of them living in Bloomsbury." Leonard Woolf, *Sowing: An Autobiography of the Years 1880-1904*, quoted from Rosenbaum (ed.) 1975, 108.

[22] A letter from Robert Morley in *The Nation* attacking the Post-Impressionists can illustrate the moral and ideological component in the discussion: "If English art is not to be dragged through the mud, if we are to uphold the great traditions of the past - not blindly, but accepting all that is good, all that is true, all that has behind it a high ideal wrought with the infinite labor of love, such exhibitions as these must cease, for disease and pestilence are apt to spread." *The Nation*, vol.VIII, (December 3, 1910), p. 406.

> acquired a certain considerable mass of erudition and given a great deal of time and attention, but to admire a Matisse required only a certain sensibility. One could feel fairly sure that one's maid could not rival one in the former case, but might by a mere haphazard gift of Providence surpass one in the second. So that the accusation of revolutionary anarchism was due to a social rather than an aesthetic prejudice (Fry 1920, 290-91).

To those who favoured them, the Post-Impressionists were "...the uncorrupted idealists, searching after reality, uninfluenced by their contemporary (mechanistic) world", according to one historian of the period (Falkenheim 1980, 17). Where the defenders of Post-Impressionism saw sincerity and idealism, its opponents saw childishness and ineptitude - if not downright madness. Fry found it regrettable that art, instead of being appreciated for its *own sake*, had become a form of social adornment and found the art which had the consent and support of the Royal Academy inferior and commercial. The producers of this official art were often living in comfort, while artists who were, in Fry's view, far superior had difficulties making ends meet.[23]

The described events illustrate the point I have made throughout this chapter that the question about the nature of art arises out of the actual development of artistic practices. The questions about art for art's sake, significant form and so on arose for Fry under specific circumstances, and they were more than purely theoretical questions about (for example) ways of analyzing works of art. In the historical context the defence of the Post-Impressionists was an attack on bourgeois Victorianism, on the established order of society and on the cultural elite in that society, which, as Fry put it, had seen a particular form of art as their special property. Part of the reason why these people had come to consider knowledge about certain forms of art their special asset will emerge out of the historical part of this work (in Chapters Four through Seven). The attitude to Post-Impressionism became an ideological and political question. The debate about the Post-Impressionists was to some degree a debate about what art is, but the

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[23] See for example "Art and Socialism" in Fry 1920, 55-78; "Art and the State" in Fry 1926, 44-55; "A Postscript on Post-Impressionism" in *The Nation*, vol.VIII (December 24, 1910), pp. 536-537.

different answers given to this question cannot be fully understood without taking into account the entire complex of events.

The developmental approach suggested will perhaps be seen as yet another species of cultural relativism. It is relativism in the trivial sense in which any refusal to view the question "What is Art?" as a perennial, abstract question can be considered relativism, but it is not relativism in the sense that "anything goes". Let us, to distinguish these two forms of relativism, call the "anything goes" relativism strong relativism, and the more moderate form of relativism (if it deserves the name relativism at all) weak relativism. The weak form of relativism that may be said to be involved in the historical approach I have indicated so far (it will be developed in more detail in the following chapter) presupposes that some historical accounts are better, more true to historical events, than others. Strong relativism, the type of relativism which would deny this ("anything goes"), in fact shares important presuppositions with essentialism: The relativist assumes that it is necessary to have some trans-historical essence to secure the foundations of art history or science (and so on), but does not believe that we actually have or could develop such a foundation, and concludes that one explanation can be as good as another. In the absence of foundations everything levitates. What I suggest is that the validity of historical accounts does not depend on the existence of foundations. We should not think in terms of the presence or absence of foundations. The strong relativist is right in refusing to go outside the historical practices of human beings. But the conclusion that one explanation can be as good as any other ("anything goes") shares the fundamentalist assumption that *either* we find an Archimedean point, *or* everything is lost.

In a specific context the concept "art" classifies certain forms of human practice and the products of this activity (and at the same time possibly evaluates them). A theoretical understanding of "art" (the development of an abstract conception of art, or the attempt to understand an abstract conception of art suggested by a philosopher)

must therefore relate the abstract conception of art to the concrete conception of art. In the concrete conception of art a whole range of beliefs about the nature of art, how it differs from, say, science and philosophy, what makes it valuable, and so on, may have the nature of tacit assumptions which are simply part of the fabric of a culture. Both the production and reception of art works rely on the existence of certain procedures or practices. These practices are carried on by cultural collectives. The collectives as carriers of practices develop through history. "Art" classifies a type of human activity and its products, and as such expresses a conviction that this type of activity or this type of object somehow differs from other activities and objects. Within this broader set of practices there are features of, for example, art works that present themselves as more important than others in our discourse about them and in our practice in general. As Noël Carroll points out, though there is no one rule or definition with which it is possible to identify art, there are a plurality of "rational strategies" which are internal to the practice of art. "New objects are identified as artworks through histories of art, rather than theories of art" (Carroll 1988, 149).

Let me draw some conclusions from this part of our examination: In spite of his attempt to do so, Tilghman does not really bring "art" back from philosophical theory to our actual dealings with art in galleries and so on. His reliance on Fry's conception of the history of art leads to a reconstructive view of the history of art, and consequently to essentialism on the conceptual level. In spite of appearances to the contrary Tilghman's approach is basically ahistorical.

The alternative account given of the events in 1910, however brief, is meant to suggest how a part of a theory of development of the concept "art" would look. Changes in the concept "art" represent renewed attempts to come to grips with the development of artistic practices in their relation to other practices. Our present concept of art, as well as earlier conceptions of art, develop as part of artistic and other practices. To understand these changing conceptions of art in an historical perspective

they must be "reinstated" in the historical processes they were a part of; that is, they must be understood against the background of the larger historical context they were a part of. Reconstructions, as I have defined them, cannot accomplish this because of their essentialist and teleological nature. Since reconstructions view the history of conceptions of art as an anticipation of the present classification they are blind to the actual historical diversity, in particular to classifications radically different from that of the present. But it is out of the historical diversity of conflicting practices and ideas that our conception of art grew.

Contemporary philosophy of art is at an impasse as far as shedding light on the nature of art is concerned. Two major alternatives (essentialism and descriptivism) compete for attention, and take turns in commanding the attention of the philosophical audience. To move beyond this impasse I suggest an historicist alternative. The proposed alternative is intended as an alternative to traditional aesthetics with its emphasis on definitions and abstract theories, and, as I have shown, an alternative to at least some forms of the Wittgensteinian approach to the philosophy of art.

I advocate turning attention away, not from the traditional philosophical questions, but from the customary philosophical manner of approaching them. Philosophers make, in Nelson Goodman's sense of the term, new worlds no less dispensable (though often less conspicuous) than the worlds created in science. These new worlds are not created by an individual *fiat*, but worked out within a complicated network of old and new beliefs, theories and practices.

Art is made when a world of discourse is present to make it possible. The task of philosophy must then be to examine the establishment and development of forms of discourse, the creation of worlds which make, in this case, art possible. "[T]he real question is not 'What objects are (permanently) works of art?' but 'When is an object a work of art?' . . . an object may be a work of art at some times and not at others" (Goodman 1978, 66-67). The question to be answered is then how worlds are made. And

the answer must take the form of an account of the conditions under which worlds are made, and of the means whereby they are made (Jensen 1990, 134).[24]

It is, then, the examination of specific practices involving the concept of art that I propose as an alternative. The practices may be contemporary or in the past. Rather than general theories we must develop a form of historical narratives. The nature of these narratives will be the subject of the following chapter.

[24] The last sentence is in part my free translation of a passage in Professor Jensen's Danish essay.

CHAPTER 3

Philosophy in History

> . . . wer sich nicht von der Sprache treiben lassen will, sondern um ein begründetes geschichtliches Selbstverständnis bemüht ist, sieht sich von einer Frage der Wort- und Begriffsgeschichte in die andere genötigt.
>
> Gadamer 1960, 7.

> Wir befleißigen uns eines soliden Historismus.
>
> Koselleck 1967, 91

3.1.: Introduction

Chapters One and Two demonstrated that there is an impasse in contemporary philosophy of art in the discussion about the concept of art. Traditional aesthetics is widely recognized as unsatisfactory, but the main contender for an alternative, some form of Wittgensteinian philosophy, has not been able to overcome the difficulties confronting traditional aesthetics. An historical approach to a philosophical problem was suggested as an alternative to both. It is now time to develop the alternative in more detail.

But before this can be done, one last contribution to contemporary philosophy of art must be dealt with. Arthur Danto's recent philosophy of art is widely considered a promising candidate for an historicist approach to aesthetics. Danto

emphasizes the close connection between artistic practice and philosophical conceptions of the nature of art, but assumes that art prior to about 1900 can be understood in terms of a progressing ability to correctly represent reality. For this, and other, reasons (given in section 3.2.) Danto's approach is also unable to provide us with the alternative sought for.

We must, therefore, start somewhere else. I start by defending the historicist view that it is an inherent feature of many philosophical problems that they require an historical or genetic approach. The historicist alternative is not intended as a suggestion to simply replace philosophical argumentation by history, but it points to the historically shifting framework, the contingencies of history within which philosophical argumentation always takes place in the absence of any universal canon of rationality. It would be a self-destructing course to think that, by becoming historians rather than philosophers, we could avoid philosophy altogether, a course on which for example attempts to develop a sociology of knowledge (in my view for example Mannheim's attempt) have become stranded. Philosophy without history is blind, but history without philosophy is empty.

In most contemporary philosophy in the British and North American tradition (analytic philosophy) history and philosophy are seen as sharply separated. To distinguish the view of the analytic philosopher from the historicist view the former will, for reasons to be given in section 3.3., be called the "scientistic" view or conception of philosophy. The problems with the scientistic view are, by now, well known. I defend the historicist view by reviewing the criticism of the scientistic view, and then explain in more detail what an historicist account will amount to. The disagreement between the historicist and the scientistic view is often confounded by an inarticulate disagreement about the appropriate way to write the history of philosophy, a question which is addressed in section 3.4. This disagreement makes it necessary to say more specifically

what *kind* of history of philosophy is required to fulfil the promises of the historicist programme. This is done in section 3.5.

3.2.: Art as philosophy

As mentioned above (p. 21), Danto's development of the notion of an art - world was an important starting-point for Dickie's development of an institutional theory of art, but Danto's application of the notion differs strongly from Dickie's. Danto has arguably become one of the most influential contemporary philosophers of art, and, since the publication of *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* in 1981, also an influential art critic.[1] Danto's philosophy of art is of particular interest to the discussion in this work because of his emphasis on an historical dimension in the understanding of art.

The major problem in contemporary philosophy of art is, according to Danto, posed by works of art such as Duchamp's and Warhol's. The troublesome nature of these objects is, Danto thinks, due to the fact that they are in all respects like ordinary objects which we might find in hardware stores or supermarkets: urinals, bottle racks, Brillo boxes and whatever else. While, on the one hand, these objects are in all respects mundane, and purposely so, they are, on the other hand, very different from ordinary things because they are works of art. The nature of this difference is the most important problem for the philosophy of art:

> In view of the fact that any work of art you choose can be imagined matched by a perceptually congruent counterpart which, though not a work of art, cannot be told apart from the artwork by perceptual differentia, *the major problem in the philosophy of art consists in identifying what the difference then consists in between works of art and mere things* [my italics] (Danto 1986, 63-64).

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[1] See Roger Scruton, "The Philosophical Hedonist: Arthur C. Danto on Art", *The New Criterion*, vol.9 No.1, 1990, 69.

The major purpose of *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* is to resolve this problem. The explanation of the apparent paradox is not, as Dickie would suggest, to be found in the institutional setting of art, but in an ontological difference: "We are dealing with an altogether different order of things" (Danto 1981, 99). The world consists of different "ontological spaces" (Danto 1981, 17) or planes (21, see also 42, 43, 83, 99). In one of those spaces, that of real things, the world just is as it appears to our senses, or as it is described by science. Objects are projected onto our retina, and can be described as they are. With the assistance of our five senses we can enumerate whatever qualities objects have, without recourse to theory and interpretation. When scientific theories have changed this only implies a new interpretation of the pre-existing facts. The believer in the Ptolemaic model of the universe has a picture on the retina identical to that found on the retina of a follower of the Copernican model of the universe. In the world of artworks the interpretation *constitutes* something as a work of art. Interpretation lifts "an object out of the real world and into the artworld" (1986, 39).[2]

That something is a work of art appears, in Danto's theoretical universe, almost as a question of belief. Danto talks about a particular "is" of artistic identification, similar to magical or mythical identification (Danto 1981, 126).[3] It is no coincidence that the title of Danto's book contains a religious allusion (see Matthew, 17:2; Mark, 9:2). There is a passage in *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* similar to the one about the artworld to which I referred above (p. 21), but Danto has omitted

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[2] " . . . no knowledge of an object can make it look different, . . . an object retains its sensory qualities unchanged however it is classed and whatever it may be called. . . . one's sensory experiences would not be expected to undergo alteration with changes in the description of the object; . . . If the aesthetic sense were like the other senses, the same would be true of it, but in fact one's aesthetic responses are often a function of what one's beliefs about an object are" (Danto 1981, 98-99).

[3] B. G. Allen has shown (in Allen 1982) that no such "is" can be said to exist.

the reference to the artworld, and instead emphasizes theory, rather than the existence of an artworld, as that which makes art possible:

> To see something as art demands nothing less than this, an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art. Art is the kind of thing that depends for its existence upon theories; without theories of art, black paint *is* just black paint and nothing more (Danto 1981, 135).

It is a characteristic feature of works of art that they cannot be understood without some knowledge of "where in the historical order [they] originated" (1986, xi; cf. p. 51). When Danto talks about history he primarily means the history of art, but he is aware that factors external to the history of art are of importance, though he has little to say about them.

From time to time, Danto appears to allow for the possibility that science, too, depends on theories and interpretations, but his general presupposition is that the world of real objects, the one dealt with by scientists, differs form the world of art: "One may be a realist about objects and an idealist about artworks; this is the germ of truth in saying without the artworld there is no art" (Danto 1981, 125). Danto's divided world can be schematized in the following manner (page references to Danto 1981):

The world of the realist	The world of the idealist
real things, objects (*passim*)	works of art (*passim*)
movements (4, 48, 100)	actions (ibid.)
reality (83)	language (83)
the five senses - sensory qualities (98-99)	the aesthetic sense (98-99)
body nervous system	mind (104) personality, character (160)

Danto's entire theoretical construction runs contrary to a large, and growing, body of literature in the philosophy of science which has shown that it is, in fact, not possible to separate theory from fact in scientific explanations (see below, sect. 3.3.). What counts as a fact (or an objective quality) is partly determined by a concomitant piece of theory. Furthermore, many of the entities dealt with by scientists are only understandable within a large body of theory, which scientists internalize through years of training: genes, quarks, electrons, fields and forces are not the kinds of things normally open to sensory inspection. If works of art possess qualities which are "logically hidden from the senses" (1986, 26), the same can certainly be said for many qualities of "mere real things".

Danto operates with a notion of "retinal indiscernibility" (Danto 1981, 36, cf. 125) which is quite simply empty: it is not possible to determine whether or not two pictures are identical without appealing to a standard of (qualitative) identity. It only makes sense to appeal to "retinal indiscernibility" if we assume that we have a medium of representation in which we can do that. Danto, in short, runs into all the problems Wittgenstein pointed out in his famous private language argument. Cognitive science has, according to Danto, produced "amazing demonstrations" establishing the existence of an "innocent eye" (1986, 199), but he does not give us any of these amazing demonstrations. It would have been better if he had produced some arguments to show the falsity of arguments presented by, for example, Norman Bryson, Nelson Goodman and Marx Wartofsky which throw serious doubt on the notion of an "innocent eye".[4] Danto correctly points out, that if Duchamp's bottle rack was placed along-side other such bottle racks in a ware house or in a wine cellar, it would be indistinguishable from the "mere real things". But to conclude from this that there must be a separate

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[4] It is beyond the scope of this work to go into a discussion of perception and representation. Serious doubt is thrown on Danto's position by the evidence and arguments presented in, for example, Bryson 1983; Goodman 1968, 1978 and 1984; Marx W. Wartofsky, "Pictures, Representation and the Understanding", in Wartofsky 1979.

ontological realm is unwarranted and unnecessary. What it shows is that we classify things on the basis of the context in which they appear, and based on our previous experience.

Danto views the history of pictorial representation as, in part, a history of how inference has been replaced by direct perception. The history of art until the beginning of this century can be seen as an attempt to create increasingly convincing representations of the world, or " . . . equivalences to perceptual experiences" (Danto 1986, 99 - future references are to this work unless otherwise indicated). In the early twentieth century, cinematography developed techniques of representation with which artists could no longer compete. Whereas a painter or a sculptor can produce a representation from which we can *infer* that, say, someone is moving, it is now possible to actually *show* movement, or create a perceptual equivalent to the perception of actual movement. The function of art changes. Painters and sculptors no longer see it as their task to produce "equivalences to perceptual experiences":

> . . . painters and sculptors began asking, if only through their actions, the question of what could be left for *them* to do, now the torch had, as it were, been taken up by other technologies. . . . painters and sculptors could only justify their activities by redefining art in ways which had to be shocking indeed to those who continued to judge painting and sculpture by the criteria of the progressive paradigm, not realizing that a transformation in technology now made practices appropriate to those criteria more and more archaic (99-100).

From the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the representational view of the arts consequently disappears. To find a theory which can make sense of the history of art in the twentieth century Danto therefore looks to Hegel. Hegel views the history of art as a cognitive process wherein art achieves self-consciousness, the knowledge of what art is (107). The increasingly short-lived art movements characteristic of the twentieth century all asked the question "What is Art?" and tried to provide an answer to it: " . . . it began to seem as though the whole main point of art in our century was to pursue

the question of its own identity while rejecting all available answers as insufficiently general" (110).

Through this process art becomes increasingly dependent on theory - it requires theory to be understood. Simultaneously the art object approaches zero. Art has in effect become philosophy, and can now be taken over by philosophers. Art has come to the stage where it is known what art is (111): " . . . art sought to merge with its own philosophy, seeing its task to be primarily that of providing an account of its essence which it began to think was defined by providing just such an account" (125).

The essence of art, at least in the twentieth century, has been to account for its own essence! Now that we know this there is no reason to continue the search for the nature of art, and the search can no longer serve as an organizing principle for artistic activity and the history of art. Rather than a particular historical development we get a proliferation of different forms of art. The age of pluralism is upon us, and this pluralism means the end of art, though not in the sense that people will stop making works of art (114-115, see also 208 ff.). They will no doubt continue to do so, but their activity no longer has any real historical significance: " . . . whatever comes next will not matter because the concept of art is internally exhausted" (84).

To summarize: Until around 1900 art was oriented towards the goal of creating perceptual equivalences. From the beginning of the twentieth century this task can be carried out much better by moving pictures. Art becomes philosophical. It begins to ask questions concerning its own nature. In due course it turns out that the nature of art, at least in this particular stage of its development, is to ask the question about the nature of art. Art then comes to an end *as an ordered development in stages*. Art has achieved self-consciousness and becomes philosophy.

Danto's account does make sense of part of the history of art in the twentieth century, though there are also significant parts of it which, it seems to me, cannot be understood only in terms of posing the question about the nature of art, for

example the work of Diego Rivera, the Group of Seven, Judy Chicago, and most of Picasso's work. As we saw in the case of Dickie, what Danto has in mind is actually a limited aspect of the history of art, that is the trajectory leading from Duchamp to Abstract Expressionism, Conceptual Art and Pop art. Danto in fact reproduces the conception of the history of art as exclusively regulated by factors internal to the history of art. The artist reacts to previous styles and conventions in the world of art, not influenced by political, economical or moral considerations. Similarly, we must understand the works only in these terms. When we look at a painting by Pollock we must understand it as making a point narrowly confined to the artistic tradition. But, as Serge Guilbaut's work shows, this will not do as a historical explanation of the rise of abstract expressionism (Guilbaut 1983). It could also be objected that Danto's account underestimates the radical intentions which have fuelled much avant-garde art in our century. Duchamp (for instance) was not just motivated by a desire for philosophical clarity, but sought to *undermine* prevailing notions of what art was supposed to be (cf. Bürger 1974, 49 f.).

Danto's conception of the history of art up to 1900 relies on the assumption that the history can be organized as a history of progression in the representation of reality. Danto bases part of his case on Gombrich. It is correct, as Danto points out, that Gombrich considers linear perspective an objectively better representation of space on a two dimensional surface. But the entire purpose of Gombrich's *Art and Illusion*, which Danto repeatedly refers to, is to reject the idea that the history of art can be construed in terms of the creation of better and better "likenesses". It is, furthermore, difficult to imagine anyone more opposed to the kind of teleological history that Danto outlines than Gombrich.[5] Even if we were to grant that the history of art could be constructed in

[5] See for example "In Search of Cultural History" and "The Logic of Vanity Fair: Alternatives to Historicism in the Study of Fashions, Style and Taste", both in Gombrich 1979.

terms of progressing abilities to represent reality, this would be an extremely impoverished version of the history of art. The function, meaning, and significance of art cannot be reduced to or derived from its quality as a representation.

Danto's work points to the shifting historical nature of conceptions of art, and how these conceptions of art are related to the development of artistic activity. But if we do not accept Danto's divided universe, and there are good reasons not to do that, his account of the specific ontological nature of art and its historical development is unconvincing. Danto, therefore, cannot provide us with the alternative sought for. We have to start somewhere else.

3.3.: The Scientistic Conception of Philosophy

Is anything of importance for contemporary philosophy to be gained from the study of the history of philosophy? It is clear that the question cannot be answered solely on a priori grounds. Only by actually creating historical accounts of the questions under discussion, accounts which, as a matter of fact, resolve some of the questions we want resolved, will we have evidence one way or the other.[6] But some general considerations in favour of an historical account can of course be advanced.

A major reason for rejecting an historical or genetic approach to philosophical problems is that it is thought to be unnecessary. Why should it not be possible to approach philosophical problems in a manner similar to the way in which scientists approach their problems, that is, without worrying about their history? In a recent essay Roy Mash has rejected the historicist approach, under appeal to, among others, the authority of Quine. Mash quotes Quine:

> Science and the history of science appeal to very different tempers. An advance in science resolves an obscurity, a tangle, a complexity, an inelegance, that the scientist then gratefully dismisses and forgets. The

[6] As has also been pointed out by MacIntyre: 1984, 47.

> historian of science tries to recapture the very tangles, confusions, obscurities from which the scientist is so eager to free himself.[7]

According to the scientistic conception of philosophy, methodological principles and practical results of natural science, particularly mathematics and physics, should form the basis for philosophy. The most overt form of scientism was positivism. Positivism is now a bygone stage in the history of philosophy, but some of the aspirations of positivism have been retained in analytic philosophy.[8]

In the first half of this century it was widely assumed that science rested on definite methodological principles, and that the adoption of the scientific method would lead to a new foundation for philosophy, and would open up solutions to problems which philosophers had been struggling with for more than two millennia. Not only philosophy, but also, for example, sociology and history should become scientific.[9] In particular, Frege's and Russell's development of mathematics and logic were thought to make this possible. That a new and more systematic period in the history of philosophy had been reached is, for example, the moral of Russell's *History of Western Philosophy*.[10]

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[7] W. O. Quine, *The Time of my Life: An Autobiography*, Cambridge, Mass., 1985, 194. Quoted from Mash 1987, 287. Clearly, the quotation reminds one of the remark attributed to Quine: "There are two reasons why a person is attracted to philosophy: one is because he is interested in philosophy - and the other is because he is interested in the history of philosophy". I. B. Cohen relates in "History and the Philosopher of Science" (in F. Suppe (ed.) 1974, 310, note 10) that he asked Quine whether or not he has actually said so. Quine did not recall making the remark, but expressed sympathy with it. In relation to Hume, Quine has said that he "...was not at all drawn to ideas solely because they were expressed by even the greatest of men; he was only concerned with statements that are true"(ibid). As Putnam has pointed out, the question of science versus history has been a central feature of philosophy throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. See "Beyond Historicism", in Putnam 1983, 288.

[8] As for example R. Rorty points out in "Philosophy in America Today", in Rorty 1982, 211-230.

[9] See for example Reichenbach 1951, 309.

[10] Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*, London, 1946, 862: "Modern analytical empiricism . . . is . . . able in regard to certain problems to achieve definite answers, which have the quality of science rather than of philosophy. . . . Its methods . . . resemble those of science. I have no doubt that, in so far as philosophical knowledge is

(continued...)

The opinion that philosophy had "proceeded from speculation to science" was also expressed by Reichenbach in *The Rise of Scientific Philosophy* (Reichenbach 1951, p. vii).

In practical terms, the study of the history of philosophy and of languages was downgraded, and logic became the most important discipline for philosophers (Rorty 1982, 215). Reichenbach suggested that the old, speculative type of philosopher was usually a man trained in literature and history, who had consequently not learned "the precision methods of the mathematical sciences" (1951, 308).

Science, conceived of along positivist lines, became a canon of rationality that should be extended to other areas of inquiry. This is where the scientific program for philosophy became scientism. Though positivism probably has no defenders left, some of the aspirations of the positivists have, as mentioned, been retained in later analytic philosophy.[11] Analytic philosophers now characteristically see themselves as possessing special skills in analyzing the rigour and conceptual clarity of arguments, regardless of the area in which they have been advanced (see Rorty 1982, 219, and Putnam 1983, 180 ff.). As Rorty explains:

> [C]ontemporary analytic philosophy inherits from the logical positivism of thirty years ago [e.g. Reichenbach's] the pretention to possess a secure matrix of heuristic concepts - categories which permit it to classify, comprehend, and criticize the rest of culture (Rorty 1982, 221).

Philosophers should, according to this conception of analytic philosophy, proceed by piecemeal analysis and argumentation. According to Arnold Isenberg, the analytic philosopher could contribute conceptual clarity and methodological rigour to the

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[10](...continued)
possible, it is by such methods that it must be sought; I have also no doubt that, by these methods, many ancient problems are completely soluble." See also Bertrand Russell, *Our Knowledge of the External World as a Field for Scientific Method in Philosophy*, London, 1952 (first ed. 1914), 245-246.

[11] About this aspect of contemporary philosophy and its relationship to positivism see Rorty 1979, 315-316; 1982; Putnam 1983, chapters 10, 11, 12, and 13. Regarding the idea that science exhausts rationality, see also Putnam 1981, ch. 8: "The impact of science on modern conceptions of rationality".

humanities. Philosophers of the analytic persuasion are in a much better position to do this than are those who actually practice the respective disciplines (see Isenberg 1950).

The suggestion to adopt the analytic methods implied a rejection of historical approaches to philosophical problems. As long as the philosophers know what the problems are, there is no reason to assume that the problems they are faced with cannot be solved without resorting to the history of philosophy. Thanks to the development of analytical skills and tools in philosophy in this century contemporary philosophers are in a better position to do this than their predecessors. Recently this has been expressed by W. K. Frankena in a critical review of Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue*. About MacIntyre's historical analysis of emotivism Frankena says:

> Of course, I can know *that* an emotivist held a certain view only by a kind of historical (biographical) inquiry, and I can understand *how* he came to hold that view only by a kind of historical investigation (biographical or otherwise). But I can, *if I have the right conceptual equipment* [my italics], understand *what* the view is without seeing it as the result of a historical development; and, so far as I can see, I can also assess its status as true or false or rational to believe without seeing it as such an outcome.[12]

Even this more modest form of scientism found in contemporary analytic philosophy presupposes, that it is possible to evaluate the validity of arguments independently of any knowledge about their purpose and of the context in which they were advanced.[13] All we need is "the right conceptual equipment", which is seen as a trans-historical standard of rationality. Putnam, for one, has recently argued convincingly, that there are good reasons to give up this view.[14]

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[12] William K. Frankena, "MacIntyre and Modern Morality", *Ethics*, vol. 93, April 1983, 580. MacIntyre answers this criticism in "Postscript to the Second Edition", in MacIntyre 1981, 265 ff.

[13] See Hacking 1990, 346-347 regarding different forms of this attitude.

[14] See Putnam 1981, particularly chapters 5, 7 and 8, and chapters 10, 11, 12 and 13 in Putnam 1983.

In the philosophy of science, criticism of positivism emerged in no small measure as a result of close scrutiny of the historical circumstances under which scientific theories and concepts changed. Historical evidence plays an important role in the criticism of positivism advanced by, for example, Kuhn, Toulmin, and Feyerabend.[15] On closer inspection, and if one does not assume that rejected theories necessarily wanted to answer the same questions as their successors, it has turned out that the arguments presented for the rejected theories were not as shoddy as earlier assumed. Feyerabend has argued that in the famous debate between the Aristotelians and Galileo it was Galileo who, if any, had rather poor arguments! (Feyerabend 1988, 55 ff.) It is because of the changing nature of the questions which men and women throughout history have sought to answer, that it is necessary to look at the historical background and context in which a particular theory was advanced. The changing nature of questions and answers is the core of Kuhn's concept of paradigm and the later developments of this concept.

Scientist carry out their work within what Kuhn originally called a "paradigm" (in Kuhn 1962). As it turned out, there were many problems connected with the term "paradigm" and on second thought Kuhn substituted the more specific "disciplinary matrixes" (in Kuhn 1974). A disciplinary matrix is characterized as the

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[15] In the first sentence of *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* Kuhn says that "[h]istory, if viewed as a repository for more than anecdote or chronology, could produce a decisive transformation in the image of science by which we are now possessed" (Kuhn 1962, 1). Critical discussions of positivism and rationality, as well as historical examples can, in addition to the works mentioned in notes No. 11, 13 and 14, be found in the following works: Bernstein 1985; Feyerabend 1988; Hesse 1980; F. Jacob, *The Logic of Living Systems. A History of Heredity*, London, 1974 (First published as *La Logique du vivant; une histoire de l'hérédité*, Paris, 1970); Jensen 1973; Kuhn 1962, 1970a, 1970b, 1974; Kuhn, *The Essential Tension*, Chicago and London, 1977; M. Masterman, "The Nature of a Paradigm", in Lakatos and Musgrave (ed.) 1970; Mayr 1982; K.R. Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, New York and Evanston, 1968. Putnam 1975, 1987; Schaffer and Shapin 1985; F. Suppe, "The Search for Philosophic Understanding of Scientific Theories", in F.Suppe (ed.) 1974 (This essay gives an excellent account of the development of positivism and alternatives to positivism.); Toulmin 1972, 1983; Wartofsky 1979.

shared assumptions of a scientific community, a kind of *Weltanschauung*, or conceptual framework (Kuhn 1974, 463). What constitutes a scientific problem, what the scientist looks for when attempting to solve the problem, what he or she as well as his or her scientific colleagues will accept as a solution all depends on the disciplinary matrix (see also Toulmin 1983, 101). These disciplinary matrixes develop through history.

Science does not, then, embody a canon of rationality, and there is little reason to think that any can be constructed. What is, however, embodied in scientific practice is an evolving notion of what Putnam calls "cognitive virtues": "Rationality may not be defined by a 'canon' or set of principles, *but* we do have an evolving conception of the cognitive virtues to guide us" (Putnam 1981, 163). Scientists do for the most part try to be impartial, to submit their results to critical scrutiny, to maintain an open-mindedness towards other possibilities, take into account what is considered established facts, and so on. But so does everybody else engaged in a systematic inquiry. In this respect there is therefore no difference between the psychologist, the sociologist, the historian and the physicist.

With the rejection of the idea that it is possible to develop a canon of rationality (with science as the most promising candidate), an important objection to historical approaches in science and philosophy has been cleared away. Post-positivist developments in philosophy of science have shown that scientific theories must be understood against the background of specific forms of scientific practices. Theories are answers to questions that someone has asked for some particular reason (see Toulmin 1972, 261 ff.). This is why it is not possible to understand *what* a view is without recovering which questions it was meant to answer. Or, to put it in other terms, the context of justification cannot be separated from the context of discovery (see for example Wartofsky 1979, 119 ff.). In later theoretical developments the specific background against which a problem or a set of problems was posed is often forgotten. A particular view obtains the status of a common assumption, or tacit knowledge which is no longer

articulated.[16] The task of the historical approach becomes to recover the background on which questions were asked and answered.

Implied is therefore an historical approach different from the still common view of the history of philosophy as a succession of differing answers to basically *the same* questions. We have in other words, in addition to the disagreement about rationality, also a disagreement about how the history of philosophy looks. I now turn to this question.

3.4.: Conceptions of the history of philosophy .

In the preceding chapter a distinction was introduced between a reconstruction of the history of philosophy and a theory of development, and this was illustrated in relation to the history of the concept of art. The reconstructive view considered the question "What is Art?" a perennial question. The reconstructive view can also be called "the problem view" of the history of philosophy. The assumption behind the view can be characterized in the following manner: From the dawn of European civilization in Greece, or at least from around 500 B.C., men (and to a lesser degree women) have been faced with problems such as What is Justice? What is the Good? What is Truth? What is Beauty? What is Art? Throughout history varying answers have been given to basically the same questions.[17] Since, so the reasoning goes, the questions dealt with by Plato or Kant are the same as the ones dealt with by present-day philosophers it is of course entirely possible that we can learn something from studying

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[16] Charles Taylor has argued that this is the case for certain epistemological assumptions supporting for example the enterprise of modern science and technology (Taylor 1984). It has been the theme of MacIntyre's work in moral philosophy from *A Short History of Ethics* (1966) to *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (1988).

[17] About this view in relation to the history of ethics see MacIntyre 1966, ch. 1.

what they had to say. But the important thing is the problem, not the history.[18] As already indicated in Chapter Two, this is not the view of the history of philosophy I am recommending in suggesting an historical approach to philosophical problems.

The view that philosophers have always been addressing basically the same questions does not hold up on closer scrutiny (see Skinner 1988, 283 and Rée 1978).

The "history of philosophy", as we know it from introductory courses at universities and colleges and in books with titles like *The History of Western Philosophy* is a relatively recent phenomenon. Like many other staples in our cupboard of intellectual disciplines it was developed in the eighteenth century (see Mandelbaum 1976 and Rée 1978). Even in this relatively short period the canon of the great philosophers has changed. In the eighteenth century, Shaftesbury was for example widely considered a great philosopher, but MacIntyre's contention that "[e]ach age, sometimes even each generation has its own canon of the great philosophical writers and indeed of the great philosophical books" (MacIntyre, 1984, 33) nevertheless seems exaggerated. But even to the extent that the canon of the great philosophers has remained constant, the view of what constitutes their "greatness" has changed considerably. Today Hume's place in the history of philosophy rests mainly on his *Treatise of Human Nature*, while his fame (and his livelihood) in the eighteenth century largely rested on his *History of England* and his essays. Hobbes as a scientist no longer plays an important role in our conception of him (see Shapin and Schaffer 1985, 7 f.). The distinction between rationalist and empiricist philosophers, which forms an important basis for our conception of early modern philosophy, came into existence relatively late, and definitely later than the philosophers

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[18] This is for example expressed by Roy Mash (Mash 1987, 293). Cf. also the remark by Quine, above, footnote No. 7.

who are supposed to be involved in this philosophical battle.[19] Descartes was considered a contributor to questions we would consider scientific questions, and in the eighteenth century he was seen as the great adversary of Newton, rather than as opposed to the empiricists (Locke, Berkeley, Hume). When science became a discipline separate from philosophy, Descartes was included in the history of philosophy mostly for his contribution to epistemology, which, after Kant, gradually emerged as one of the most important areas of philosophical enquiry (see Rée 1978, 28 ff.). Joseph-Marie Gerando's *Histoire Comparée des Systèmes de Philosophie* (3 vols., Paris, 1804), written under the influence of Kant, was one of the first histories which considered the history of philosophy from the angle of a few perennial questions, basically the ones raised by Kant's epistemology, and it introduced the separation between 'rationalism' and 'empiricism' (Rée 1978, 10, 22).[20] But even after the distinction between rationalists and empiricists was introduced it was far from obvious who belonged to which category. Hegel, for example, considered Locke a rationalist, and Locke was not generally considered an empiricist until late in the nineteenth century, the period wherein the final division as we know it has its origin (Rée 1978, 25). It then became canonical to view Descartes, Leibniz and Spinoza as the three major rationalists, and Locke, Berkeley and Hume as the three major empiricists. In the beginning of our century this classification is, for example, found in Russell's *The Problems of Philosophy*, from 1912 (Rée, 26).

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[19] About the history of the division between rationalists and empiricists in the history of philosophy in United States see Bruce Kuklick, "Seven thinkers and how they grew: Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz; Locke, Berkeley, Hume; Kant"; in Rorty, Schneewind, Skinner (ed.) 1984a, 125-139.

[20] About the influence of Kant's philosophy on subsequent writing of the history of philosophy see Mandelbaum 1976, 713-714.

Proponents of the problem view want to treat the great dead philosophers as contemporaries. Two recent examples are John Mackie's *Problems From Locke* (Mackie 1976) and Roger Scruton's *From Descartes to Wittgenstein.* (Scruton 1981).[21]

The way theories or parts of theories are selected for inclusion or exclusion in the history of philosophy is usually considered too obvious for words. The criteria are perhaps taken simply to be a matter of what is interesting and what is not interesting: "To be part of the history of philosophy an idea must be of intrinsic philosophical significance, capable of awakening the spirit of enquiry in a contemporary man, and representing itself as something that might be arguable and even true" (Scruton 1981, 10) (Mackie talks about "continuing philosophical interest" (1976, 1)).

It is as if, when we open Locke's *Essay*, the "most interesting" ideas of their own accord jump out at us, plain to see for everyone who wants to. (Or, to use Rorty's metaphor: The cream of philosophy naturally floats to the top (Rorty 1984, 66).) On the other hand, those less interesting and doubtful can be left to the antiquarian (if they had any actual influence but no relevance to us (they are not arguably true) they can be left to the historian of ideas!).[22]

This approach to the history of philosophy is not possible without distorting the actual historical development of philosophy. As we saw in the case of science, when a philosopher advances an argument or refutes a view it is always an argument with someone, for or against a point or view or a particular way of acting (Skinner 1984b, 201; 1988, 274. Cf. Toulmin 1972, 261 f.). To understand an argument it is necessary to understand what it was an argument against, which question it was meant to answer,

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[21] These two contributions are discussed by Quentin Skinner (Skinner, 1984b).

[22] As Skinner expresses this view: "...according to the view I have been outlining, the history of philosophy is only 'relevant' if we can use it as a mirror to reflect our own beliefs and assumptions back to us. If we can do this, it takes on 'intrinsic philosophical significance'; if we cannot, it remains 'of purely historical interest'" (Skinner 1984b, 202).

and so on, specific questions which will rarely be clear from the text alone, but have to be derived from historical knowledge about important issues at the time in question, knowledge about other philosophers, scientific and religious controversies at the time, and so on.

In the words of Quentin Skinner:

> If we wish . . . to arrive at an interpretation of the text, an understanding of why its contents are as they are and not otherwise, we are still left with the further task of recovering what the writer may have meant by arguing in the precise way he argued. We need, that is, to be able to give an account of what he was *doing* in presenting his argument: what set of conclusions, what course of action, he was supporting or defending, attacking or repudiating, ridiculing with irony, scorning with polemical silence, and so on and on through the entire gamut of speech-acts embodied in the vastly complex act of intended communication that any work of discursive reasoning may be said to comprise (1984b, 201).[23]

If one views the history of philosophy along the lines of the problem view, scepticism with regard to the fruitfulness of an historical approach to philosophical problems is understandable. But if we reject the problem or reconstructive view, and approach the history of philosophy along the lines indicated in the above quotation from Skinner, it is clear that an historical approach is the only option. Questions, as well as answers, are only accessible by reinstating them in their historical context.

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[23] A related point has been made by Mandelbaum: "The sources of a major philosopher's primary beliefs is [*sic*] not . . . dissatisfaction with the ways in which his predecessors have developed their views, but are usually to be found in that philosopher's concern with religious, moral or political problems, . . . or with [*sic*] his attempt to come to terms with aspects of his own experience which have led to intellectual or emotional or moral conflicts within his own life" (Mandelbaum 1976, 728). One very direct way in which historical circumstances can influence the contents of a text is through the existence of censorship. See Hill 1980, 46 ff. regarding how censorship may have affected what found its way into print in seventeenth-century England.

3.5.: A dialectical conception of the history of philosophy

From the above it is clear that the scope of the history to be written must be significantly broader than the scope of most traditional history of philosophy. The specific consequences this broader conception of the history of philosophy have for the concept of art will be the subject of the following chapters, but the general idea on which the following examination will be based can now be formulated in the following manner: In the course of its historical development, the modern conception of art has passed from a stage in which it was a conception which had to be defended against competing conceptions, to a stage in which its acceptance is a matter of being a competent member in the artworld. Many of the assumptions - among them cultural, social and political assumptions - that went into the formulation of the modern conception of art are no longer explicitly formulated assumptions, but they have obtained the status of tacit assumptions shaping philosophical and other discourses about art. Retracing the development of the modern conception of art, it is clear, however, that there was a time when it did not have this status. At some point in time it was an idea which had to be advanced in opposition to other ideas. Because our own practices and convictions are a product of this historical development, we may, by retracing the historical course through which the modern conception gained the status of self-evident truth, obtain important new insights into our present forms of behaviour and thinking.

It has, so far, been established that philosophy without history is blind, but, as mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, there is another side to the dialectical equation: History without philosophy is empty. I do not, in other words, wish what I have said so far to be understood to imply that history must take the place of philosophy, but rather I wish to point to a complicated relationship between history and philosophy.

The historical examination of philosophical positions cannot take the form of description of "events-as-they-really-were". Historical narratives are informed by philosophical standpoints, prejudices (in Gadamer's sense), and theories, as fully as scientific enquiries. Otherwise, something like positivism would be true - and if positivism is the truth, any philosophy of it is false. Our understanding of history is as inescapably philosophical as our philosophy is historical. What we can do is, to the extent it is possible, to try to become aware of our prejudices and try to articulate the philosophical basis on which our historical account rests, to make what may be implicit as explicit as possible.[24] In the remaining part of this section I try to make explicit the principles on which the historical part of the thesis rests (Chapters Four through Eight).

The philosophy of history assumed in the following can be characterized as a materialist conception of history. It is materialist in the sense that it emphasizes the significance of the economic and political structure of a society for the forms of its intellectual life, and in the broader sense that it conceives of men's and women's intellectual efforts as inseparable from their practical lives. One reason to examine the development of the modern conception of art in a wider social and historical context is that it is not the exclusive property of philosophers. But even suggested solutions to philosophical problems (in a narrower sense) represent, as for example Mandelbaum has argued, an attempt to come to grips with some aspect of the world in which the

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[24] " . . . I am . . . pleading for a history of philosophy which, instead of purveying rational reconstructions in the light of current prejudices, tries to avoid these as much as possible. Doubtless they cannot be avoided altogether. It is deservedly a commonplace of hermeneutic theories that, as Gadamer in particular has emphasized, we are likely to be constrained in our imaginative grasp of historical texts in ways that we cannot even be confident of bringing to consciousness. All I am proposing is that, instead of bowing to this limitation and erecting it into a principle, we should fight against it with all weapons that historians have already begun to fashion in their efforts to reconstruct without anachronism the alien *mentalités* of earlier periods" (Skinner 1984b, 202). The historian is, in other words, and as pointed out above, being guided by the same cognitive virtues as the scientist.

philosopher lives (Mandelbaum 1976, 728). For this reason too, it is therefore necessary to look into broader historical patterns to fully understand their theoretical efforts.

Within Marxist theory extensive discussions have been carried out about the relationship between the way material production is organized within a society and the intellectual life of that society, as expressed in philosophical and other forms of theories, the so-called discussion about the relationship between basis and superstructure. Much of this discussion seems less interesting if it is not assumed that this is a question to be decided a priori (cf. Wolff 1981, 80 ff.). The manner in which material production is organized within a society is of great importance, though not (as explained below, sect. 5.3.) of the all consuming importance ascribed to it by Marx and Engels.

Today it cannot be considered a particularly Marxist thesis that the products of human intellectual endeavour are connected to the economic and political structure of a society. (Marx cannot even be said to be the originator of this thesis (and did not claim he was). It was common before Marx, though not as theoretically elaborate.) But the actual contents of the relationship seems more appropriately left to specific empirical enquiry in different historical contexts.

The materialist conception of history I rely on has features which can be characterized as evolutionary in character. It is evolutionary in the sense that it emphasizes the variety of ideas at any given time, and that mechanisms of selection are at work on this variety. Certain ideas are accepted because they, at the time, "make sense" of the prevailing conditions of life, are considered to be more in accordance with actual experience, or fit in with already accepted theories. The important point is to emphasize the variety and complexity in the reasons why some ideas are accepted,

others discarded or ignored, as opposed to implausible causal explanations,[25] an emphasis which also allows for what is sometimes called the "relative autonomy" of philosophy (or art, or other intellectual phenomena).

In philosophy, as well as in disciplines such as history and anthropology, extensive discussions address the question of the perspective or point of view from which philosophers, historians and anthropologists should write their account of cultures or periods foreign to their own. The historian has of course problems the anthropologist does not have. Typically, the historian's informant will be dead, and texts or other forms of material evidence must take the place of the direct encounter with the informant characteristic of the work of the anthropologist (I will return to the question of textual interpretation shortly). But the principle problem is the same, and I will therefore centre the following remarks on anthropology. The anthropologist (as well as the historian) is faced with the question of the point of view of their explanations: Should they try to explain phenomena in terms of our Western (or present) conceptual framework, such that the explanations given by, say, natives of a tribe in Africa of some natural phenomena appear as a rudimentary form of science, or should the explanation be entirely "from the native's point of view", such that all explanations are acceptable to the people who are the object of the anthropologist's interest? Is it at all possible to give a faithful account "from the native's point of view"? Are we westerners not so "caught up" in our own point of view that we, even if we do not want to, impose our own values and criteria on the "natives"?

Anthropologists sometimes call the two different approaches "etic" and "emic". Emic analysis elevates the "native informant to the status of ultimate judge of the adequacy of the observer's descriptions and analysis", whereas etic analysis gives

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[25] Harré 1979, 28. See also Toulmin 1972. In *Ways of Worldmaking* Nelson Goodman uses the expression "fit" rather than "true" to account for the validity of theories (Goodman 1978).

this role to the observer, the observer is the "ultimate judge of the categories and concepts used in description and analysis" (Harris 1979, 32).

Evidently, it is not possible for us to experience and describe a culture or a period of history different from our own without relating it to our own "conceptual framework". Even basic acts of classification depend on our language and our form of life.[26] But to some degree it must be an empirical question whether or not our own conceptual prejudices can be overcome. Historical and anthropological research seems to indicate that - even though no specific Method can be recommended for so doing - with patience, appropriate sensitivity and a certain humility towards one's own beliefs and thought systems it *is* possible to gain insight into different cultures. As Marvin Harris points out, the goal is to achieve a balance between etic and emic: "The intent is neither to convert etics to emics nor emics to etics, but rather to explain one in terms of the other" (1979, 36). We may, in our search for this type of explanations, encounter phenomena which remain forever closed to us.[27] But there is no such thing as one "conceptual framework" which has the ability to make one particular type of proposition true, or which only allows views conforming to certain standards to pass through it. As a matter of historical and cultural fact, our part of the world, as any other part I can think of, is characterized by the existence of a plurality of voices, often contradictory, often emphasizing different aspects of "foreign" views. To the extent something like a specific Western "conceptual framework" exists it is therefore not a seamless web or an algorithm (see Putnam 1983, 238 f.). But there is a danger that beliefs and ideas appear

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[26] As has been shown by for example Alexander Luria: *Cognitive Development. Its Cultural and Social Foundations*, Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1976. See also his *The Making of Mind*, ed. by M. Cole and S. Cole, Cambridge and London, 1979.

[27] "The differences *do* go far deeper than an easy men-are-men humanism permits itself to see, and the similarities *are* far too substantial for an easy other-beasts, other-mores relativism to dissolve." Clifford Geertz, "Found in Translation: On the Social History of the Moral Imagination" (Geertz 1983, 41).

so obvious to us that we are unable to appreciate, also in a historical context, that they may not always have had that status. That some ideas appear obvious may result in an inability to make a proper assessment of those who have held views which lost out in the historical contest, as Shapin and Schaffer have shown in relation to Hobbes' opposition to Boyle, and as Feyerabend has shown in relation to Galileo's opponents (Shapin and Schaffer 1985, ch. 1, Feyerabend 1988).

I am not suggesting that the type of historicism I advocate demands special psychological faculties - a special *Verstehensvermögen,* as it were. As Hacking has pointed out, the type of historicism which investigates how our present conceptions came about and how the way in which they were formed influences the way we think " . . . is philosophy as hard work. Or to use understatement, it is less talking than taking a look."[28] Historians like Koselleck and Skinner and anthropologists like Geertz, rather than considering it a question to be decided a priori, seem to adopt a pragmatic attitude to the question of the possibilities of understanding other cultures and historical periods (cf. the quotation from Skinner 1984b, 202, above, footnote No. 24).

To understand, say, the mind-set of a thirteenth-century Franciscan monk does not mean to come to think as a thirteenth-century Franciscan monk. Understanding does require some translation into the spectator's own culture. Skinner points out that

> [i]f there is to be any prospect that the observer will successfully communicate his understanding within his own culture, it is obviously dangerous, but it is equally inescapable, that he should apply his own familiar criteria of classification and discrimination.

And he adds in a footnote to this passage: "Otherwise it is hard to see how there can be any *understanding* at all" (Skinner 1969, 24). Understanding and explanation cannot be

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[28] Hacking 1990, 361-362. The last sentence is directed against Rorty's conception of philosophy as conversation.

provided in general, but must always be generated for a specific group of people for a specific purpose.[29]

The historiography of philosophy is largely concerned with the understanding and interpretation of concepts and texts. Concepts exist in fields. An important function of concepts is that they help us distinguish something from something else. Depending on the context, "art" can be used to distinguish something from science or philosophy or craft. Klein (1967) talks about *Wortfeldforshung* (a term she takes from Joachim Ritter, who, until his death in 1974, was the editor of the monumental *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*): Words or concepts are not isolated from each other, but belong to more or less connected families of language games.[30] In connection with a discussion of Machiavelli's use of the term *virtù* Skinner says: "A term such as *virtù* gains its 'meaning' from its place within an extensive network of beliefs, the filiations of which must be fully traced if the place of any one element within the structure is to be properly understood" (Skinner 1988, 253). The meaning of an individual term is thus determined by its place and function in a larger structure, just as the meaning of the larger structure is partly approached through its constituent parts.[31] This implies that when the meaning of one word or concept changes, its change

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[29] Again, a similar observation is made by Clifford Geertz: "The truth of the doctrine of cultural (or historical - it is the same thing) relativism is that we can never apprehend another people's or another period's imagination neatly, as though it was our own. The falsity of it is that we can therefore never genuinely apprehend it at all" (Geertz 1983, 44). Essentially the same point is made by Skinner in connection with Derrida (Skinner 1988, 280-281).

[30] Taylor points out that words have meaning only in a field, that is in relation to other words. "The meaning of a word depends, for instance, on those words with which it contrasts, on those that define its place in language . . . on those that define the activity or "language game" it figures in (describing, invoking, establishing communion), and so on" (Taylor 1971, 41).

[31] This form of understanding concepts has similarities with the anthropologist's attempt to understand "the native's point of view". Clifford Geertz explains how this process involves ". . . a continuous dialectical tacking between the most local of local detail and the most global of global structure in such a way as to bring them into

(continued...)

of meaning has consequences for the entire field. Other concepts change along with it. This notion of "meaning" is obviously similar to the Wittgensteinian dictum that "meaning is use": The meaning of a concept is derived from what people have actually done with this concept, from the role it has played in their lives. A similar principle for the analysis of texts is known from the so-called aesthetics of reception in literary theory (*Rezeptionsästhetik).*

When we analyse a text we ask for its meaning. Meanings are constituted by human practice. They are always meanings for a subject or a group of subjects (see Taylor 1971, 41). When we analyse a text we must therefore ask who it was meant for (the receiver). When we encounter a certain sense of the concept "art" we must ask whether this particular sense was the one commonly in use, or if this particular sense is a disputed one, perhaps novel, perhaps outdated. Does the concept have a particular social range? Does it meet the need of any particular group? Is it used by and directed towards a particular social group, and does its use therefore indicate a certain belonging and as such contribute to the creation of a consciousness of belonging to a certain group (as for example "working class" or "proletariat" is used by people who are interested in promoting a sense of political consciousness among working people, while others may prefer "social groups")? What is the opposite of the concept? (For these questions see Koselleck 1967.)

I pointed out above that philosophical texts aim at answering specific questions. Shaftesbury, for instance, cannot be interpreted in terms of later developments in aesthetics, since these later developments could have played no direct role for Shaftesbury actually doing or saying anything. As Skinner puts it: ". . . no agent can eventually be said to have meant or done something which he could never be brought to

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[31](...continued)
simultaneous view." "'From the Native's Point of View': On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding", in Geertz 1983, 69. See also Koselleck 1967 and 1979, Skinner 1969, 1984 and 1988, Ritter 1967, Gadamer 1963 and 1970, Volosinov 1929.

accept as a correct description of what he had meant or done" (1969, 28). This does not mean that it cannot be illuminating or correct to say that Shaftesbury is in one way or another a predecessor of modern aesthetic theory. This depends on the actual history of the reception of his work. The important point is to avoid anachronistic classification of an author's work (cf. above, sect. 2.3.).

Shaftesbury did not know that his writings about the arts came to be seen as the starting point of a discipline called the philosophy of art. When we look to Shaftesbury in the hope that we may discover something about problems in contemporary philosophy of art, we obviously do so from the point of view of the present. It is from our point of view that Shaftesbury contributed to a discipline called philosophy of art.

Though I have emphasized the difference between a historiography which proceeds from the standpoint of the present, and one which proceeds form the standpoint of those who participate in the historical events, this distinction should not, and in practice cannot, be taken as mutually exclusive. It is a difference in emphasis. Any historical account will to some degree be written from the standpoint of the present and will be guided by the interests of those who give the account. We search into the past to shed light on the questions of the present, how our culture, society, political institutions or philosophical concepts came to be what they presently are. Attempts to avoid all prejudices in this sense would be impossible and assume the possibility of access to "the merely given". We do not delve into the historical material in a completely arbitrary manner. And because it would sever the connection between the historical narrative and our present problem, it would not be desirable either. It is precisely because we construe

the historical narrative around our interests, hopes and desires that it can illuminate our present darkness.[32]

The theory of development differs from the reconstruction mainly in emphasizing the contingent nature of the concepts, ideas and beliefs we hold. They have no basis "beyond the reach of time and chance" (Rorty 1989, xv). The reconstructive view sees the present concept as the necessary product of the historical development leading up to them. By viewing the present standards as the necessary outcome of the historical development reconstructions simultaneously give the appearance of neutrality, while in fact any standpoint at the same time draws differences, excludes, differentiates.

The principles outlined in this section are intended to give a more specific idea about an alternative to the traditional view of the history of philosophy, an alternative approach which in the following chapters will be applied to outline the genesis of the modern conception of art. Though the alternative emphasizes the ways in which earlier views differ from ours I do not, of course, wish to deny that there are broad continuities in the history of philosophy (cf. Skinner 1988, 283).

The alternative view can be called a dialectical view of history. It is dialectical in the sense that it emphasizes the character of a continued process, and the way in which human understanding of phenomena, as expressed in the concepts we form, has grown out of the clashes and conflicts of practices and ideas (contradictions) in this continued process.

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[32] " . . . we latecomers can tell the story of progress which those who are actually making progress cannot. We can view these people as toolmakers rather than discoverers because we have a clear sense of the product which the use of those tools produced. The product is *us* - our conscience, our culture, our form of life. Those who made us possible could not have envizaged what they were making possible, and so could not have described the ends to which their work was a means. But *we* can" (Rorty 1989, 56).

CHAPTER 4

Dispersing Authority

4.1.: Introduction

Attempts at an abstract definition of art have thus failed, and must be replaced by historical narratives, delineating conceptions of art characteristic of a given historical period.

The modern conception of art had, as mentioned in the Introduction, its origin in the eighteenth century. Many of the ideas formative for later philosophy of art and for the modern conception of art are found in the works of Shaftesbury (Anthony Ashley Cooper (1671-1713)), Joseph Addison (1672-1719), Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746), David Hume (1711-1776) and Edmund Burke (1727-1797).

Seventeenth-century England saw the demise of many well tried authorities and the emergence of what was to amount to a revolutionary transformation in philosophy and science - a transformation identified with names such as Harvey, Boyle, Hobbes, Newton, Sydenham and Locke.

Philosophers have sometimes suggested that the growing interest in the arts must be seen as a reaction to the growing prestige of what we would now consider a scientific approach. The new sciences do not concern themselves with the truth of human existence (*Seinswahrheit* (Klein 1967, 143)), which becomes the domain of the arts. I will call this theory the "compensation thesis": the task of the arts is, so to speak, to compensate for whatever is lost in the scientific "objectification".

While there is some truth in the compensation thesis, it captures only one limited aspect of a more complex process. In this and the following chapter, I argue that the growing interest in the arts, and the emergent conception of art (the modern conception of art) must be seen against the background of much deeper and more comprehensive changes, not just on the political and economical level, but in the very conception of what it is to be an honourable human being, of the place of men and women in society and in the universe.

Theoretical developments in the understanding of the arts in Britain cannot be separated from the attempts to create a new ideological, political and economical order after the settlement of 1688. These developments also changed conceptions of what it is to be a respectable person (the presentation of the self), and the role of the arts. The questions relating to the presentation of the self will be dealt with in the following chapter. When people in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries tried to develop a theoretical understanding of the arts they looked to the role of the arts in the world they knew. Their theoretical efforts express an attempt to come to grips with this world.

In this chapter, I first criticize the "compensation thesis" for being inadequate to the task of understanding the emergence of the modern conception of art and of aesthetics as a philosophical discipline. Science itself emerges as part of a complicated political and ideological transformation, outlined in section 4.3. An important aspect of this transformation is the disappearance of any one, central authority in moral, political and religious questions - authority is, so to speak, decentralized or dispersed. Locke's philosophy is one of the most influential expressions of these developments, and I discuss aspects of it in section 4.4. The emergence of science (experimental practices) as well as Locke's philosophy testify to new ways of understanding the construction of knowledge, belief and opinion: They no longer emanate from a central authority, but are formed collectively in a new social space, the sphere of public opinion. The significance of

the public sphere and the role ascribed to the arts in this sphere is discussed in section 4.5.

This chapter, then, provides a social and historical framework wherein the changing role of the arts and the growing theoretical concern with the arts may be understood. The chapter therefore forms the background for a more comprehensive understanding of the changing theoretical and practical role of the arts, and of how the growing theoretical interest in the arts is connected to what I call the presentation of the self, which is the subject of the following chapter.

4.2.: Art and Science

An inseparable part of our conception of the arts is its opposition to science. It may well be impossible to have a full understanding of the modern conception of art without knowing something about conceptions of science. Since the modern conception of art develops simultaneously with modern science, it is perhaps natural to see in the development of scientific forms of knowledge part of the explanation of the genesis of the modern conception of art and aesthetics as a philosophical discipline. This explanation has been suggested by P. O. Kristeller and the German philosophers Joachim Ritter and Hannelore Klein.[1] One of the most elaborate formulations of the compensation thesis is that of Ritter in his, unfortunately little known, *Landschaft - Zur Funktion des Ästhetischen in der Modernen Gesellschaft.*[2] I will, very briefly, summarize the major points Ritter makes in this essay.

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[1] Though the following discussion is focused on Ritter's account, the compensation thesis has wider significance. I will not argue the point, but I think the compensation thesis underlies the understanding of the arts expressed, for example, by the Frankfurt School (Horkheimer, Marcuse, and, to some degree, Habermas).

[2] Aschendorff, Münster Westfalen, 1963.

In the philosophical tradition of antiquity and the Middle Ages philosophy was seen as giving human beings a view of nature and the universe as a whole, free of any particular purpose or intent. There was, thus, no place for a specifically aesthetic attitude to nature. The emergence of modern science changes all this. *Naturwissenschaft* objectifies nature, and has nothing to say about the place of human beings in the cosmos or about the way we subjectively experience nature.

> In der geschichtlichen Zeit, in welcher die Natur, ihre Kräfte und Stoffe zum "Objekt" der Naturwissenschaften und der auf diese gegründeten technischen Nutzung und Ausbeutung werden, übernehmen es Dichtung und Bildkunst, die gleiche Natur - nicht weninger universal - in ihrer Beziehung auf den empfindenden Menschen aufzufassen und "ästhetisch" zu vergegenwärtigen (Ritter 1963, 21).

This distinction between *Naturwissenschaft* and the arts is, as Ritter amply demonstrates, a central feature of the view of the arts characteristic of the later part of the eighteenth century (for example Kant, and, as Ritter shows, Goethe and Schiller), and of the nineteenth century.

Formulations found in, for example, Shaftesbury lend plausibility to the compensation thesis, and I do not wish to discard it entirely. Shaftesbury objected to Descartes' mechanistic explanations of human behaviour (as did the followers of Newton), on the grounds that they do not give us any understanding of man "as real man, and as human agent, but as a watch or common machine" (Shaftesbury 1711, vol. 1, 191. See also vol. 2, 274 ff.). Sir William Temple thought little good had come from the purported scientific discoveries (Temple 1690, 55 ff.). But such considerations cannot be immediately transferred to a more recent distinction between the arts and the sciences, and they are more valid for the type of natural philosophy advocated by Descartes than they are for the development of scientific practices in England. At least in its earlier stages, the new science did not in fact venture any general claims about the possibilities of a universal theory of nature. Boyle, for one, made it very explicit that the experimental practices he advocated did not, as opposed to the scholastic philosophers

and natural philosophers such as Hobbes, suggest any general theories of nature. Rather, the advocates of experimentation as a way of obtaining knowledge emphasized the fallible and probable character of their findings (Shapin and Schaffer 1985, 23-24). Locke was very pessimistic about the possibilities of a science of nature: "The works of nature are contrived by a wisdom, and operate by ways, too far surpassing our faculties to discover, or capacities to conceive, for us ever to be able to reduce them into a science" (Locke 1693, 182).[3] In fact, a much higher degree of certainty could, according to Locke, be obtained in matters of morality and religion (see below, sect. 4.4.).

The advocates of experimental practices hoped to achieve at least two things: By concentrating on areas which could be examined experimentally they intended to eliminate areas (such as politics and religion) in which endless, unresolvable disputes were likely to occur, disputes which might ultimately lead to civil war. Experimental practices were supposed to rule out of court those problems that bred discord and divisiveness among philosophers. This required the creation of new forms of discursive and social practices (Shapin and Schaffer 1985, 46, 298).[4] Secondly, the experimental practices were meant to provide criteria for agreement. How to obtain agreement was an important question in England after the civil wars in the seventeenth century. Sprat, for example, pointed out that experiment gives room for differences without leading to civil

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[3] Similar opinions were expressed by Sydenham (see Dunn 1984, 7) and by Glanville (see Willey 1934, 178-179). Regarding Locke, see also Dunn 1984, 80 f.

[4] In Spectator No. 262, December 31, 1711 Addison commented as follows: "Among those Advantages which the Publick may reap from this Paper, it is not the least, that it draws Mens Minds off from the Bitterness of Party, and furnishes them with Subjects of Discourse that may be treated without Warmth of Passion. This is said to have been the first Design of those Gentlemen who set on Foot the Royal Society; and had then a very good Effect, as it turned many of the greatest Genius's of that Age to the Disquisitions of natural knowledge, who, if they had engaged in Politics with the same Parts and Application, might have set their Country in Flame. The Air-Pump, the Barometer, the Quadrant, and the like Inventions, were thrown out to those busy Spirits, as Tubs and Barrels are to a Whale, that he may let the Ship sail on without Disturbance, while he diverts himself with those innocent Amusements" (Bond (ed.) 1965, vol. 2, p. 519).

war (Shapin and Schaffer 1985, 306). In his *History of the Royal Society* Sprat carefully emphasizes that the activities of the Royal Society do not pose a threat to the established social order, nor does the society in any way (or at least only very minimally) interfere with the teachings of the church. Some of these assurances can perhaps be ascribed to political expediency. Though the Royal Society had its own *imprimatur* and printing privileges it could still be dangerous to publish books that might be considered subversive. Many of the founding members of the Royal Society were on the side of the Parliament prior to 1660, and therefore politically suspicious (Hill 1974b, Chapter 12). The fact remains, that the activities of the Royal Society were only one part of a general interest in critical examination of areas that had hitherto been left to the church or the court. The advocates of the new science were therefore advocates of much more than a different manner in which nature could be explored: They were, as Shapin and Schaffer put it with a phrase of Wittgenstein's, advocates of a new form of life, the experimental form of life. By performing experiments witnessed by a number of trustworthy people it was hoped that agreement could be obtained through public discourse. Experimental activities were themselves meant to create spaces for this type of public discourse (Shapin and Schaffer 1985, 152, Chapter 8).[5] Boyle rejected Hobbes' criticism of the experimental proceedings not just because Hobbes refused to recognize the results produced by Boyle's experiments, but because Hobbes rejected the idea that experiments were a way in which proper philosophical knowledge could be obtained (Shapin and Schaffer 1985, 201).

In many historical accounts it appears as if the new sciences immediately won the day, but in fact the experimental practices were initially not particularly popular (Shapin and Schaffer 1985, 70). Throughout much of the eighteenth century the scientifically inclined virtuoso collecting shells and rocks, or performing pointless

[5] That public debate could be a way of obtaining knowledge had also been suggested by Milton (Shapin and Schaffer 1985, 290).

experiments, remained a subject of ridicule. A too specific and detailed knowledge of an area was thought to be incompatible with proper manners and politeness.[6] The experimental practices and new scientific theories coexisted with many older, more traditional beliefs. Belief in witches and spirits were not seen as contradictory to the embrace of the new science.[7] Witches were still persecuted in England through much of the eighteenth century, though after 1737 without the sanction of the law. Pneumatology covered the area of spiritual beings - including angels, demons, and the human soul. In spite of Harvey's discovery of the circulation of the blood and the development of more empirically oriented forms of medicine, individual behaviour and personal characteristics were still widely understood within the Galenic theory of the humours. In his *Reflections upon Ancient and Modern Learning*, Wotton considers Harvey's discovery of the circulation of the blood as a corrective, but not a refutation, of Galen's theory of the humours. Harvey's theory sheds, according to Wotton, light on how the humours of the body communicate (Wotton 1694, 211 - see also the postscript, and chapters XVIII and XIX).[8]

Even if the new science had been perceived to be in need of something to compensate it, as suggested by the compensation thesis, it is, therefore, not clear why those to whom this need appeared should have turned to the arts, rather than to, say,

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[6] See for example Shaftesbury 1711, vol.2, 253 and Defoe 1729, 203. A "meer schollar" as opposed to a man of polite learning is, according to Defoe, "all learning and no manners". See also Heltzel 1925, 107 ff.

[7] Glanville (1652-1680) is probably the one most famously associated with the defence of the existence of witches and spirits, but Boyle agreed with him (Shapin and Schaffer 1985, 314-316). Hobbes, on the other hand, rejected the new science, but did not believe in witches. A philosophical system from the late seventeenth century which also contains accounts of witches and spirits is Antoine Le Grand's (1629-1699) *An Entire Body of Philosophy According to the Principles of the Famous Renate Des Cartes*, London 1694 (reprint with an Introduction by R. A. Watson, New York and London, 1972).

[8] See also Mandeville's explanation of courage (Mandeville 1714, vol. 1, 211 f.). Mandeville was by education a physician. About the practice of medicine see also Earle 1989, 69 f.

moral philosophy or religion. These were in fact the areas which were still perceived to contain the truth about human existence. Locke's political theory in *Two Treatises* depends, as Dunn points out, on a view of "man's place in nature as one in which each man is fully instructed by the Deity on how he ought to live" (Dunn 1984, 30). The disagreement between Hobbes and Boyle about experimentation was also a religious disagreement. Boyle rejected Hobbes' views because he considered them a danger to "good religion and to the conception of nature that was required by proper Christianity" (Shapin and Schaffer 1985, 201). Moral philosophy, particularly in Scotland, was a somewhat less abstract discipline in the eighteenth century than it often is today. In the Scottish universities it was taught with the teaching of actual rules of behaviour in mind, and closely tied to the teachings of the church.[9]

To conclude this discussion of the compensation thesis: The compensation thesis relies on a notion of science and of the division between the arts and the sciences which is a later product of the very historical period whose origin it is meant to explain. The advocates of the compensation thesis ignore the difference between what science was and what it is now. In the seventeenth century, when what we have come to call science emerged, the conception of science was different from the one prevailing today, concerned as much with the solution of urgent practical problems as with general theory (see below). In addition, the different spheres of culture were not specialized: Hooke was for some time a pupil of the painter Lely, and Wren was a professor of astronomy at Oxford (Foss 1972, 31). This is not to deny that science in the longer run achieved an "objectifying" character, perhaps particularly with the emergence of positivism in the nineteenth century. But in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries science emerged as only one element in an immensely complicated process. It is as part of this process that the significance of science for the development of the conception of art, and ultimately

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[9] See MacIntyre 1988 and Scott 1900.

for aesthetics, must be seen. We must, therefore, turn to broader historical patterns. The following is not intended as a detailed historical analysis - which it would be beyond the scope of this work to undertake - but as an indication of what the most important elements in the transformation of Britain in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are.

4.3.: The Transformation of England

The world of the educated European in the late seventeenth century was, in many respects, much larger than that known to previous generations. Galileo and Copernicus had removed the Earth from its comfortable place at the centre of the universe. Though this was not something entirely new, but rather a rediscovery, it was disturbing. Microscopes, though still rather primitive, had opened new universes, no less amazing than the larger one in the starry skies above.

The civil war in England had shown to those who did not already realize it that conflict could no longer be solved by appeal to old authorities: the church, the divine rights of kings and so on. Furthermore, no one seemed any longer to have the requisite force to enforce their particular version of the authorities. The dispersing of authority is reflected in the emergence of the new discursive practices advocated by the Royal Society (discussed above).

The political revolutions in England in the seventeenth century changed more than the political and economical organization of England. The revolutionary changes resulted in, and were partly fuelled by, theoretical and ideological changes. Cherished beliefs and systems of values changed as well. As MacIntyre has expressed it:

> The criteria that used to return the same answers to the questions, What standards ought I to accept and, What ought I to do? now provide several answers derived from the new competition between rival criteria. What God commands or is alleged to command, what has the sanctions of power behind it, what is endorsed by legitimate authority, and what appears to

> lead to the satisfaction of contemporary wants and needs are no longer the same (MacIntyre 1966, 147).

In England a new class of wealthy landowners had emerged prior to 1640, people who did not possess land in the way a feudal landlord did, but owned it as their private, individual property - land they had, in many cases, bought from the Crown, which had confiscated it from monasteries (Hill 1967, 64; see also Tawney 1926, 142 f.). The system of feudal tenure had been abolished during the revolution (in 1646) and had not been reestablished during the Restoration (after 1660) (Hill 1967, 146). Land which traditionally had been the property of nobody in particular, held in common amongst villagers, was transformed to private property in the process known as "enclosure". This land could be cultivated on a capitalist basis (that is with paid labour or by renting it to others to cultivate) (Wood 1983, 9; Hill 1980, 38 f.). Besides being profitable, ownership of land was also a necessary requisite for political power: Land ownership was required to hold a seat in parliament.[10]

Often the land was used for pasture, primarily for sheep in order to benefit from England's profitable wool trade. Land put to pasture was more valuable than land with timber, so forests were cleared, which in turn led to a lack of wood for (e.g.) fuel, and a growing reliance on coal, which became an increasingly important industry (Hill 1967, 66). The change from wood to coal gave a boost to the development of capitalist industries, and also played an important role in the development of science and the activities of the early Royal Society (Hall, Williams, Singer (ed.) 1957, 77). Technical innovation arose both to solve many of the new problems posed by the mining of coal and in many areas of manufacture (e.g. beer and glass) where it was not possible to immediately substitute coal for wood.

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[10] The Parliamentary Qualification Act of 1711, in A. Browning, *English Historical Documents. 1660-1714*, London, 1966, p. 224. (Vol. VIII of D. C. Douglas, General Editor, *English Historical Documents*).

Merchants who had made money on trade would frequently invest their commercial profit in country estates, and this stimulated the growth of a new class of gentleman farmers (Hall, Williams, Singer (ed.) 1957, 15). Historians disagree about the extent to which merchants and middling people turned country gentlemen, but even if the number was not as high as perhaps sometimes assumed, the movement was enough to impress contemporary observers (see Earle 1989, 152). Earle's examinations show, not surprisingly, that relatively few middle class people owned large country estates, but that it was relatively common to own small estates just outside London (Earle 1989, 155-156).

Questions of land ownership are not just questions of interest to economic historians, but reveal what kind of society England was in the early eighteenth century, and what kind of life the emerging bourgeoisie aspired to lead. The aristocracy remained throughout the eighteenth century a significant cultural and political force, but they were aristocrats mostly in name. Many younger sons of the gentry would enter a profession or make it on their own in trade and live most of the time in London, in effect creating "an almost impenetrable web of relationships . . . between the middling people of London and the country gentleman" (Earle 1989, 7).[11] Traditional aristocratic values and codes of behaviour had for some time been under attack from below, but in the longer run the bourgeois ethic of usefulness and industriousness enters into a compromise with the aristocratic values of conspicuous consumption and conspicuous leisure, to borrow Veblen's terms (Veblen 1899) (this will be discussed more at length in the following chapters).

After the settlement of 1688-89 England was the undisputed world leader in trade (in slaves and other commodities) as well as in industrial output. The new order

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[11] "The growth of towns, and especially of London, the expansion of inland and foreign trade, of industry and the professions, had rapidly increased the number of those belonging to the urban middle station and made a nonsense of systems of social classification based on a purely rural and agricultural society" (Earle 1989, 4).

emphasized personal merit and achievement - particularly in the form of acquired wealth - more than birth. In principle this makes the higher ranks of society open to all. In *Two Treatises of Government* Locke had made property one of the central concepts of his political philosophy: "The great and chief end of men uniting into a commonwealth and putting themselves under government is the preservation of their property" (Locke 1689, Book II, Ch. ix, sect. 124). The work came, as was Locke's expressed intention (in the Preface to *Two Treatises)*, to serve as a political justification of the settlement of 1688.

The values conducive to the development of capitalism are often, in deference to Max Weber, called "the Protestant Ethic" (Weber 1921). Though the significance of the Protestant Ethic for the social and political changes cannot be denied the expression can be misleading. The values embodied in the Protestant Ethic, though more predominant among protestants, were not exclusively protestant values. They also existed among Catholics (Burke 1978, 213; Tawney 1926, 93), and they were not shared by all Protestants. Luther in particular was no friend of capitalism and commerce (see Tawney 1926, 98 ff.), and even Locke retained many "pre-capitalist" convictions (see Dunn 1984, 43).

The growth in knowledge and the development of an empirical attitude to the examination of nature were closely linked to the political and economical changes. The company of Merchant Adventurers, founded in 1553, saw themselves not only as tradesmen but also as a company "for the Discovery of regions, dominions, islands, and places unknown".[12] The interest in non-European cultures and the connection between, in particular, trade and the expansion of human knowledge is emphasized in Thomas Sprat's *History of the Royal Society* from 1667.[13] An important part of the activity of the

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[12] Quoted from Habermas 1962, note No. 37, p. 254.

[13] The full title was *The History of the Royal-Society of London, for the Improving of Natural Knowledge*. Edited with critical apparatus by Jackson I. Cope and Harold Whitmore Jones, St. Louis, Missouri and London, 1958.

Royal Society, it appears from Sprat's account, was to systematically gather knowledge from merchants who had visited distant corners of the world. London, Sprat found, was a particularly suitable place to carry out this type of activity, because it "is the head of a *mighty Empire,* the greatest that ever commanded the *Ocean:* It is composed of *Gentlemen* as well as *Traders."* London is a city "where all the noises of business in the World do meet: and therefore this honour is justly due to it, to be the *constant* place of *residence* for that *Knowledg,* which is to be made up of the Reports, and Intelligence of all Countreys" (Sprat 1667, 87-88).

The members of the Royal Society were opposed to extravagant and metaphorical forms of expression and aimed for a return to a "primitive purity and shortness" of expression. The members of the Royal Society have

> . . . exacted from all their members, a close, naked, natural way of speaking; positive expressions; clear senses; a native easiness: bringing all things as near Mathematical plainness, as they can: and preferring the language of Artizans, Countrymen, and Merchants, before that, of Wits, or Scholars (113).

The bewildering array of different activities Sprat mentions as among the activities of the Royal Society bears witness to two things: A new-found, almost childlike curiosity in all kinds of natural phenomena, but above all a pressure from practical concerns, problems arising from navigation, trade, manufacture, and agriculture, and a confidence, characteristic of modernity, in the ability to solve them. The experimental laboratory promised, but did not always deliver, solutions to practical problems (Shapin and Schaffer 1985, 340). Among the activities of the Royal Society was the collecting of a catalogue of all *"Trades, Works,* and *Manufactures,* wherein men are emploi'd". This would include description of all the different instruments used, "Physical Receipts, or Secrets", engines, manual operations and so on (Sprat 1667, 190) - much of which was of

course meant to be well kept secrets within the remnants of the guild system.[14] In Harris's *Lexicon Technicum* from 1704 we find this practical emphasis too. A major purpose of the lexicon is to make information about navigation and ship-building publicly available.

Sprat points out that the Royal Society admits men of different "Religions, Countries, and Professions of Life" and aims, not at founding a philosophy of any particular nation or religion, "but a Philosophy of *Mankind*" (p. 63). Though the society admits men of different professions it is, Sprat emphasizes, composed mostly of gentlemen "free, and unconfin'd" (p. 67). Freedom and independence are necessary not to be lead astray in the search for truth, either by personal interest in, for example, profiting from some new discovery, or by reverence for authority, in the way this is practised in the schools, where "some have *taught,* and all the rest *subscribed*" (p. 68). The gentlemanly composition is, therefore, necessary to be better able to question authorities and received beliefs.

The rise of the new philosophy (most clearly, and most influentially, represented by Locke) and the new science is thus closely connected with the broader social and political changes taking place in England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in particular to the rise of a new social class (the middle class, merchants, artisans, lawyers, doctors). Associated with this is the increasing prominence of the social values cherished by these groups, the ones also found in Locke's philosophy, with which it is now necessary to deal in more detail.

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[14] This may be what Sprat has in mind when referring to knowledge being in "the custody of a few" (p. 62, l.5). An apprentice was said to learn the mysteries of a trade. See Earle 1989, 93, 98.

4.4.: The Significance of Locke

The influence of Locke's writings in England in the eighteenth century was second only to that of the Bible. Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* was published in four editions in Locke's own lifetime (Locke died in 1704), a fifth edition appeared in 1706 and a sixth in 1710. An additional twenty editions of the *Essay* were printed before the end of the eighteenth century, either separately or in editions of Locke's collected works. In addition to these there were abbreviated editions, for example for students and young people (Wood 1983, 47-48).[15] As Koselleck points out, Locke's *Essay* ranked "among the Holy Scriptures of the modern bourgeoisie" (Koselleck 1959, 54).

Those of us educated in philosophy have come to see the *Essay* mainly as a contribution to epistemology and perhaps to psychology. Of course, it was seen as that too in the eighteenth century, but the fact that it appealed to and was recommended as reading for a very wide audience indicates that it was received as more than a narrowly philosophical treatise.[16] Locke no doubt intended his work to be accessible to the educated public in general (see Wood 1983, 41-47). Besides epistemological and psychological problems, Locke's *Essay* deals with questions relating to morality, manners, and the laws of citizens. As Neal Wood (and to some extent Koselleck) shows, the effect of all this is to create for the emerging bourgeoisie a kind of new anthropology: A picture of a rational, industrious, basically selfish, God-fearing, but not popish or fanatic

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[15] Even Locke's popularity pales by comparison with that of Bunyan. *The Pilgrim's Progress* went through one hundred and sixty editions before the end of the eighteenth century (Watt 1957, 50), but probably did not have the same educated audience as Locke.

[16] John Clarke (master of a grammar school in Hull) recommended, in *An Essay upon Study* (1731), Locke's *Essay* as valuable reading for ladies (along with for example *The Tatler* and *The Spectator)* (Mason 1935, 193-194).

individual, a kind of "ideal of bourgeois man" (as Wood expresses it (1983, ch. 6, cf. Koselleck, 1959, ch. 4))[17]. It was to the industrious and rational that God had given the earth, Locke claimed in *Two Treatises* (Book II, sect. 34). Those parts of the *Essay* which dealt with this new anthropology became one part of the intellectual equipment of the emergent bourgeoisie, in particular of their conception of themselves. What Locke offered, was a view of what it is to be a rational, worthy human being.

In the *Essay* Locke emphasizes a fundamental equality between human beings, at least as far as their natural abilities are concerned.[18] Authority as a source of truth in questions of morality is criticized. Locke was greatly impressed by the information about non-European cultures following from the expanding trade with foreign countries and their colonization. As mentioned, trade (and colonization) brought Europeans into contact with many different peoples who conducted their lives in ways vastly different from the ones previously known. In the latter part of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth, England was flooded with more or less imaginative accounts of travels to exotic places and encounters with strange people. Locke was an eager reader of these, and constantly refers to the North American Indians, people in China, Ceylon and elsewhere in his argumentation in *Two Treatises* and in the *Essay*. (See e.g. *Essay*, Book I, ch. iv, sect. 8, 13, and 15, I.iii.9 and 12. Locke attributes these discoveries to "navigation".) Locke uses these examples to reject any ideas of innate moral rules or principles (*Essay,* Book I, chs. iii and iv). The absence of innate moral principles does not lead Locke to suggest that there is no distinction

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[17] This reference to Koselleck is meant to express agreement with the overall tendency expressed in Koselleck's understanding of Locke. The actual interpretation of Locke's *Essay,* II.xxviii.4 given by Koselleck in the passage referred to seems to me somewhat questionable.

[18] This point was also made by Hobbes: "On Liberty", in *Works,* Molesworth ed., II, 16, 7,; *Leviathan,* MacPherson ed., p. 183. Secular expressions of freedom and equality were expressed for the first time by the left wing of the Parliamentary army in the civil war (MacIntyre 1966, 149). See also *Two Treatises*, II, 4, 5.

between true and false moral principles, but the demonstration of the certainty of their truth requires ". . . reasoning and discourse, and some exercise of the mind" (*Essay,* I.ii.1.). Among the most important and demonstrably true moral principles Locke mentions worship of God (I.iv.7), as well as the existence of God. Anyone who will use their reason in the right manner must concede the truth of these propositions (I.iv.10).[19] The truth, Locke thought, was Christianity. Reason would require people to live in accordance with Christianity.

We can say that Locke is dealing with the possibility of moral and epistemological relativism, though he did not himself draw any relativistic conclusions: Some moral principles conform to reason, others do not. That there are in fact no rules or principles on which there is universal agreement is apparent to anyone who knows history and who would look "abroad beyond the smoke of their own chimneys" (*Essay,* I.iii.2). For any moral rule suggested we are entitled, even obligated, to demand a reason why it should be followed (I.iii.4). Though there are no innate moral principles, there is one moral truth. Morality and knowledge were closely connected for Locke. It is possible for men and women to know their moral duties - but unfortunately, Locke realized, most did not bother. They succumbed to desires and other distractions from that application of reason which would have lent them insight into the law of nature (Dunn 1984, 60 ff.). For most men (Locke's expression) it is understandable that they do not engage in this questioning, since most of their lives are taken up by making a livelihood (I.iii.24) - "the greatest part of mankind . . . are given up to labour and enslaved to the necessity of

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[19] "The *idea* of a supreme Being, infinite in power, goodness, and wisdom, whose workmanship we are and on whom we depend, and the *idea* of ourselves as understanding rational beings, being such as are clear in us, would, I suppose, if duly considered and pursued, afford such foundations of our duty and rules of action as might place *morality amongst the sciences capable of demonstration*: wherein I doubt not but from self-evident propositions, by necessary consequences as incontestable as those in mathematics, the measures of right and wrong might be made out to anyone that will apply himself with the same indifferency and attention to the one as he does to the other of these sciences" (*Essay,* IV.iii.18).

their mean condition" (IV.xx.2). But for those who have the leisure, reluctance to examine their moral principles can only be attributed to laziness, "especially when one of their principles is that principles ought not to be questioned" (I.iii.25).

Locke's recommendations are an extension of the principles guiding the activities of the Royal Society (of which Locke was of course a Fellow (from 1668)).[20] Here men were concerned with practical affairs rather than idle speculation. If those examining the material world followed the example of those examining the intellectual world the result would have been sheer confusion:

> . . . volumes writ of navigation and voyages, theories and stories of zones and tides multiplied and disputed, nay, ships built and fleets set out would never have taught us the way beyond the line; and the antipodes would be still as much unknown as when it was declared heresy to hold there were any (IV.iii.30) (cf. Wood 1983, 127).[21]

In a manuscript from 1669 which Locke presumably wrote with Sydenham we find the idea expressed more forcefully:

> Thus the most acute and ingenious part of men by custom and education engaged in empty speculations, the improvement of useful arts was left to the meaner sort of people, who had weaker parts and less opportunities to do it, and were therefore branded with the disgraceful name of mechanics.[22]

It was not philosophical speculation but "chance or well-designed experiments" which led to insight into nature.

Locke's philosophy, with its anti-authoritarian, egalitarian and practical emphases, is an important indicator of a widespread collapse of old authorities, including the political authorities. Though Locke claimed that moral precepts could be deduced with mathematical certainty he in fact never delivered on that promise. Locke's moral

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[20] Locke wanted to be an "underlabourer" to Boyle, Newton, Sydenham and Huygens ("The Epistle to the Reader", Locke 1690, p. xxxv).

[21] For a similar remark by Glanville, see Willey 1934, 187.

[22] The passage occurs in "De Arte Medica"; in H. R. Fox Bourne, *The Life of John Locke*, London, 1876, vol.1, 225-226 - quoted from Wood 1983, 126-127. A remark about "mechanics" can also be found in *Essay,* III.x.9.

philosophy becomes, in effect, an instance of what MacIntyre calls the "Enlightenment Project" of founding morality, and an instance of its inevitable failure (see MacIntyre 1981, chs. 4 and 5).

As mentioned in the discussion about the relationship between art and science, an important substitute for authority and a way to avoid that difference of opinion which degenerates into civil war was the generation of knowledge through public opinion, or public discourse on available evidence. Immediately after the restoration (in 1660) the Declaration of Breda suggested "freedom of conversation" as a path to resolving conflicts, or at least obtaining a better understanding of the different positions (Shapin and Schaffer 1985, 285). This freedom was very soon restricted, but it nevertheless testifies to the emergence of a public sphere. In this emerging public sphere, discussion of the arts (art criticism) was to play an important role. To understand the changing role of the arts and the emergence of aesthetics and the modern conception of art it is therefore necessary to deal with the emergence of a public sphere.

4.5.: Criticism and Commercialism

In 1675 King Charles issued a proclamation forbidding the operation of coffee-houses. The reason given for this action was that "many tradesmen and others do therein misspend much of their time". In particular they "misspent" their time by not minding their own business, but instead spreading abroad "divers false, malicious and scandalous reports . . . to the defamation of his Majesty's government and to the disturbance of the peace and quiet of the realm".[23] In London the first coffee-house had been opened in 1652, and they grew into meeting places for, besides tradesmen, people

[23] *English Historical Documents. 1660-1714*, edited by A. Browning, London 1966, 482-483. (D. C. Douglas (general editor), *English Historical Documents*, vol. 8).

with political, literary, scientific or artistic interests. Some of the disputes about the new experimental science took place in the coffee-houses, and they were often centres of political dissent (Shapin and Schaffer 1985, 292-293). In the first decade of the eighteenth century there were 3000 such coffee-houses in London alone (Habermas 1962, 32) (as compared to 6000 alehouses in metropolitan London in the 1730s (Earle 1989, 55)). What we see here (following Habermas) is the emergence of a bourgeois public sphere.

Newspapers formed an important ingredient in the formation of this public sphere. Newspapers had been known in England since the beginning of the seventeenth century, but their number grew when the Licensing Act in 1695 removed most forms of censorship. In the case of *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*, the readership of the newspapers is clearly to a large extent identical with the coffee-house clientele. Newspapers were often available in the coffee-houses, and people would go there to read them. The discussions in the coffee-houses dealt with any imaginable area, as is evidenced by the topics dealt with in *The Tatler* and *The Spectator,* but for our purposes the most important are discussions about the role of the different arts. Literary and philosophical works as well as different forms of art - theatre, music, engravings of paintings - had become more readily available to a broader audience. Music, dancing and theatre became increasingly popular with the middle class (Earle 1989, 59). From the 1680's on England becomes flooded with paintings, imported mainly from Italy and France (these developments will be discussed in section 5.2.).

In Britain these developments are accompanied by a commodification of artistic production. Production and reception of works of art now become increasingly subjected to the laws of the market. Works of art become commodities along with other commodities. Literary works and works of art had earlier been produced within a patronage system and their evaluation restricted to the circles of the aristocracy - for Dryden, the court was still the "best and surest judge of writing" (Foss 1972, 37). Public

criticism was still something which had to be defended. Charles Gildon prefaced his play from 1714, *A new Rehearsal*, with a vindication of criticism by Shaftesbury. This vindication is mostly a précis of Shaftesbury's defence of criticism in the *Characteristics*.

Through the insistence on the right to public criticism, the expansion of the audience for artistic creation, and their greater availability, the public, as a new social entity, creates, as it were, itself, and changes the conditions for production, distribution and reception of works of art. Habermas points out that this change can be seen particularly clearly in relation to music, which had been, and to a large extent throughout the eighteenth century remained, closely tied "to the kind of publicity involved in representation - what today we call occasional music" (Habermas 1962, 39). By "publicity involved in representation" Habermas refers to types of public display characteristic of societies where the court is a central unit. What is represented is an inherent status or attribute. Representation makes "something invisible visible" (Habermas 1962, 7), and is the expression of a shared code of conduct. The function of music within this context was to enhance the established social order. Musicians were appointed and worked on commission, and their work was scarcely heard by anyone outside the courtly circles. With the performance of public concerts this changes:

> Admission for a payment turned the musical performance into a commodity; simultaneously, however, there arose something like music not tied to a purpose. For the first time an audience gathered to listen to music as such - a public of music lovers to which anyone who was propertied and educated was admitted. Released from its function in the service of social representation, art became an object of free choice and of changing preference. The "taste" to which art was oriented from then on became manifest in the assessments of lay people who claimed no prerogative, since within a public everyone was entitled to judge (Habermas 1962, 39-40).

It is in these changed conditions of the production, consumption and reception of art that we find the germ of important parts of the modern conception of art. The concept of taste forms an important entry into this emerging conception (as do the notions of 'wit' and 'judgement'). As with the other developments discussed in this chapter, it signals the demise of old authorities and the search for new ones. The lack of

a central authority in the evaluation of art is particularly evident in the discussion of taste. Gadamer sees a clear connection between the decline of absolutism and the emergence of 'taste' as a central category in discussions about the arts:

> Die Geschichte des Geschmacksbegriffs folgt daher der Geschichte des Absolutismus von Spanien nach Frankreich und England und fällt mit der Vorgeschichte des dritten Standes zusammen. Geschmach ist nicht nur das Ideal, das eine neue Gesellschaft aufstellt, sondern erstmal bildet sich im Zeichen dieses Ideals des 'guten Geschmacks' das, was man seither die 'gute Gesellschaft' nennt. Sie erkennt sich und legitimiert sich nicht mehr durch Geburt und Rang, sondern grundsätzlich durch nichts als die Gemeinsamkeit ihrer Urteile oder besser dadurch, daß sie sich überhaupt über die Borniertheit der Interessen und die Privatheit der Vorlieben zum Anspruch auf Urteil zu erheben weiß (Gadamer 1960, 32-33).

The importance of taste and what came to be known as politeness must be understood against the background of the demise of older criteria of nobility and social status. To express the relationship in Wittgensteinian terms: The language game surrounding the arts changes, but this change is only a part of a larger change in the form of life. With the demise of these older criteria, forms of social interaction also change. The connection between the change in the language game surrounding art and the emergent new form of life is the subject of the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5

Art, Manners and the Presentation of the Self

5.1.: Introduction

In Chapter Four I pointed out that the significance of 'taste' must be seen against the background of the collapse of the old social order. Discussions of taste are part of the search for new social standards. In Britain in the early eighteenth century social position has become less transparent, one no longer wears one's social position on one's sleeve. The possession of "good taste" becomes a sign of belonging to "good company". That an involvement with the arts has this signalling function is apparent from contemporary comments on the growth of interest in the arts in Britain in the early eighteenth century. Aspects of these developments are covered in section 5.2. They form the background for discussions of taste, and other theoretical attempts to come to terms with the arts.

For a theoretical understanding of these developments it is useful to introduce a distinction between "expressive order" and "practical order" developed by Rom Harré (section 5.3.). Against the background of this distinction it becomes clear that the growing theoretical and practical concern with art is an important part of changing notions of the presentation of the self, notions which in turn become an integral part of aesthetics.

In section 5.4. I show that it is not just in retrospect that the question of the presentation of the self appears important. Though not expressed in these terms, the

presentation of the self was a matter of great concern in late seventeenth- early eighteenth-century Britain, and the concern was expressed, not least, in the discourse around manners, breeding, politeness, and the character of the "fine gentleman".

Discussions about taste in much of the eighteenth century can then be understood, not as narrowly confined to the evaluation of art, but as an attempt to forge a new expressive order. In section 5.5. I show - with Addison and Hume as influential instances - that discussions of taste do indeed have this social aspect.

5.2.: The growth of interest in the arts

In the first decades of the eighteenth century an explosive growth in interest in the arts occurred in England. The increasing literary output, the rise of the novel and the new reading audience are well known phenomena (see for example Watt 1957, ch. 2, and Löwenthal 1961, ch. 3), but a similar development affected such areas as music, painting, printmaking, gardening, and architecture. A growing number of musical scores and instructional music books were printed and sold and the theatrical audience expanded rapidly. The expansion of all these activities testifies to the increasing commercialization of leisure, and, according to Plumb, " . . . to the growth of a middle-class audience - not a mass audience by our standards, but so large and so growing that its commercial exploitation was becoming an important industry, involving considerable capital" (Plumb 1982a, 284).

The growth of interest in painting in the last two decades of the seventeenth century was so impressive that Iain Pears talks about the *discovery* of painting in England in this period (Pears 1988). From the 1680's England becomes flooded with paintings and other works of art imported from the European continent,

chiefly from Italy, but also from France, Germany and Holland.[1] Only the very wealthy could afford a genuine Poussin (or what they were led to believe was a genuine Poussin) but, Pears' examinations reveal, the bulk of the art market, and the area in which art dealers would make most of their money, consisted of paintings and prints which were within reach of a middle class audience. It was not, Pears shows, the relatively few very exclusive works of art (such as paintings by Poussin or Claude Lorraine) which were the driving force behind the growing interest in painting but that "overwhelming majority of the pictures" which were sold to "the more modest customers" (Pears 106, see also 148-149).

A commentator in the *London Journal* observes that painting and music, together with poetry considered among the "most polite Arts", have become the "darling Amusements of the Town, and engross the Affections of the *Beaumonde* . . . " (July 3, 1725). Music in particular has gained a large audience. The anonymous writer questions the vast amounts of money spent on this form of entertainment, and raises a theme which is repeated by many other commentators: Many pretend to admire the polite arts, but are unable to pass true judgement on them. That taste and an interest in the arts in general was a requirement for the new urban living is also evident from James Bramston's satirical poem, *The Man of Taste* (1734). The poem is a derisive description (in the first person) of the accomplishments of a man of taste, intended to benefit others who aspire to acquire taste. The poem's narrator is an uneducated person of humble origins, but he does all the right things: He has a "*gout* for criticism" a smattering of French, reads Swift, but does not understand Milton (90). Mandeville provides him with moral guidance (92), and he has a taste for music, architecture, gardening and painting -

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[1] According to Roy Porter, "[m]agnates ransacked Europe - and the globe itself - for paintings, sculpture, furniture, jewellery. They patronized artists and poets, and collected antiques, scientific instruments, and books by the roomful. The second Viscount Palmerston snapped up 300 old masters for a bargain £8,000. Flanked by landscapers such as William Kent, Capability Brown, and Humprey Repton, they redesigned Nature, on occasion flattening entire settlements which spoilt the view" (Porter 1982, 75).

all in the contemporary fashion, "[f]or what is beautiful that is not new?" (94). He is also a collector of paintings:

> In curious paintings I'm exceeding nice,
> And know their several beauties by their *Price.*
> *Auctions* and *Sales* I constantly attend,
> But chuse my pictures by a *skilful friend.*
> Originals and copies much the same,
> The picture's value is the *painter's name* (94-95).

Conspicuous consumption has, it appears, taken the place of true achievement.[2] Some contemporary observers thought the concern with acquiring "the fine Taste" interfered with the acquisition of more useful and practical accomplishments, such as knowledge of the laws and the principles of commerce (see *The London Journal*, May 21, 1726).

The commercialization of writing is a source of repeated complaints for Shaftesbury: "In our days the audience makes the poet, and the bookseller the author, with what profit, or what prospect of lasting fame and honour to the writer, let anyone who has judgment imagine" (Shaftesbury 1711, vol. I, 172-173; see also vol. I, 197 and vol. II, 162 ff.). Though Shaftesbury was a defender of the right to public criticism he did not always approve of the choices actually made by the majority of the public. Shaftesbury's dilemma is in essence the central dilemma in the discussions of taste: How can it be avoided that the public's freedom to criticize and judge leads to complete chaos? Is it not, after all, possible to find some common standard which at least all rational human beings should follow?

With the collapse of the old authorities and the increasing number of voices wanting to be heard, it was difficult to determine which standards were to be followed. The discussions about taste throughout a considerable part of the eighteenth century are

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[2] Conspicuous consumption and the identification of the value of a painting with its monetary worth is also a target for satire in Miller's *Of Politeness* (1738). Before a young man returns from his trip to Italy he must buy something, "something must be bought/ Before we *Latium* quit - no matter what,/ But *something* must, to shew our Taste at home,/ And prove we have not been in vain at *Rome./* . . . *Bustoes* that each a Nose or Chin had lost,/ And *Paintings* of much Worth, for -- much they cost" (217).

an expression of this problem: Who is setting the standards? Which standards are to be set? Before entering into the discussion about taste it is, however, necessary to introduce a distinction which will provide a theoretical framework for the understanding of this discussion.

5.3.: The expressive order and the presentation of the self

Consider the impression a person makes if you know that he or she often does one of the following: listens to jazz, attends the opera, reads poetry, reads comic-books, listens to heavy metal music, watches programming on the American Public Broadcasting Stations. Artistic preferences express more than just differing tastes. Often they express a very conscious attempt to project a certain view of oneself. Listening to rock music in the late 1960's (and later to for example punk-rock) was not just a matter of preferring one type of music to another, but a sign of belonging to a certain group which rejected values associated with the established order of society. Because we know this to be the case, we draw more or less well grounded conclusions about people based on their artistic preferences. I wish to draw attention to how this phenomenon worked in connection with the emergence of the modern conception of art.

The developments in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries can be conceptualized in terms of the English philosopher Rom Harré's distinction between "practical order" and "expressive order". In *Social Being* Harré distinguishes between (1) the practical aspects of an activity and (2) the expressive aspects of an activity. The practical aspects of an activity are those directed to material and biological ends, while the expressive aspects are those directed to ends such as the presentation of the self as rational and worthy of respect, as belonging to a certain category of beings:

> In the expressive aspects of social activity we make a public showing of skills, attitudes, emotions, feelings and so on, providing, sometimes consciously, the evidence upon which our friends, colleagues, neighbours,

> rivals and enemies are to draw conclusions as to the kind of person we are (Harré 1979, 21).[3]

The expressive order and the practical order are equally important for human existence. Harré points out that Marx and Engels made a mistake when they based their view of history on the assumption that, as they put it in the *German Ideology*, " . . . life involves above all else eating and drinking, housing, clothing and various other things". Harré comments:

> Of course life involves eating and drinking, but not 'above all else'. Above all else it involves honour and the respect of persons. One hardly needs reminding that those who conceive themselves to lack these expressive goods have sometimes refrained from eating and drinking altogether. Human beings can waste away and die from shame, humiliation and loneliness as much as they can from physical privation (Harré 1979, 33).

Harré finds Marx's theory one of the best available for the practical order, but not for the expressive order. To understand the expressive order Harré turns primarily to Thorstein Veblen. Marx considered work to be the all consuming activity for most people throughout most of human history, but his view is not borne out by more recent observations by anthropologists and historians. Until the Industrial Revolution the amount of time used in providing the means of subsistence was fairly small. In contemporary (or near contemporary) pre-industrial societies, for example of the Kung in Southern Africa or in Melanesian society, anthropologists have estimated that it is no more than 10%. That, as Harré comments, "leaves a lot of social space and time for dressing up, gossiping and chasing other people's spouses" (1979, 21). In some parts of

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[3] A similar observation was, perhaps in a somewhat negative fashion, already made by Adam Smith: " . . . what are the advantages which we propose by that great purpose of human life which we call bettering our condition? To be observed, to be attended to, to be taken notice of with sympathy, complacency, and approbation, are all the advantages which we can propose to derive from it. It is the vanity, not the ease or the pleasure, which interests us. But vanity is always founded upon the belief of our being the object of attention and approbation." *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. by D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie, Oxford, 1976, 50. See Hirschman 1977, 108.

Medieval Europe as much as a third of the year was taken up by carnivals or festivals (Bakhtin 1965).

Harre's notion of the expressive order incorporates the point often made by hermeneutically oriented philosophers of the social sciences, that understanding of social and historical phenomena cannot be achieved without taking into account the notions the actors have of themselves as actors, what they think they are up to. The expressive order provides an entry into the self-understanding of the actors. Values embodied in the expressive order will serve as motivations for actions and are therefore necessary for understanding and explaining these actions.

For the British upper and middle classes in the eighteenth century the expressive order acquire paramount importance. For Lord Chesterfield (Philip Stanhope, 1694-1773) the goal of the education of a gentleman was to learn how to please. His dictum that "manner is everything" is well known, but mistakenly he is often presumed to hold extreme and exceptional views. In fact, most elements in Chesterfield's conception of proper behaviour and education were, when he wrote his letters in the mid eighteenth century, well established in writings on conduct and education, and Chesterfield derived, as V. B. Heltzel shows, many of his views from, for example, Locke and Shaftesbury (Heltzel 1925 - see below, sect. 5.5.).

For Chesterfield the expressive order is the only thing that matters, but most often both the expressive and the practical aspects will play a role in an activity. They can be, and often are, closely connected in, for instance, the way a particular piece of necessary work is carried out. A craftsman can execute a piece of work which provides him with his livelihood, but he can at the same time take immense pride in the manner in which it is executed.

When the social and moral order breaks down in the seventeenth century, the expressive order falls into confusion. The presentation of the self characteristic of a society where (for example) the court is a central social unit is no longer valid. The role

ascribed to art (including literature) in writers from Addison and Shaftesbury to Jane Austen is evidently one where part of the interest in art is to create a certain impression of oneself by which one wishes to be judged by others. In *Pride and Prejudice*, the gradual change in Elizabeth's perception of Darcy is influenced by her discovery of the tasteful manner in which he has furnished his house and planned the surrounding garden (ch. 43).

It is not just in retrospect that changes in conceptions of the presentation of the self appear important. People in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries were acutely aware of it, though they expressed this awareness in other terms: They discussed manners, breeding and politeness, and whether or not one could be a gentleman by birth or if it required following certain patterns of behaviour.

5.4.: "It matters not whence we came, but what we are... "

The radical changes in the expressive order are reflected in the changing ideas of what it is to be a gentleman. Originally the status of gentleman could only be obtained by birth and gentility denoted good birth. "The idea of the gentleman . . . had its roots in words that denoted good birth and membership in a family" (Castronovo 1987, 5).[4] This sense of gentleman is the one Defoe describes in *The Compleat English Gentleman*:

> Our modern Acceptation of a *Gentleman* then . . . is this, A person BORN (for there lies the Essence of Quality) of some known, or Ancient family; whose Ancestors have at least for some time been rais'd above the Class of Mechanics (Defoe 1729, 13).

Defoe expresses some uncertainty as to the length of time one must be able to trace one's pedigree: Too close a scrutiny of one's ancestry will show that even the most noble descend from something ordinary. Even the tallest of trees has its roots in the dirt, and

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[4] See also Bülbring's introduction to Defoe 1729, xxxii ff., and Heltzel 1925, ch. 1.

the most beautiful of flowers are raised "out of the grossest Mixture of the Dunghill and the Jakes" (ibid, 14). When Defoe wrote his *Compleat Gentleman* it had already become common to question birth as the sole criterion with which to judge a gentleman. Living the life associated with the landed aristocracy was in principle open to anyone with money. A prosperous merchant could (as mentioned in Chapter Four, p. 97) buy a country estate and live the life traditionally associated with the gentry.

The traditional forms of achievement within the expressive order had become a threat to the social order. Warfare, duelling, and other activities related to traditional conceptions of honour were constantly attacked from below; more and more these activities came to be perceived as anachronistic, and new, more peaceful, occupations increasingly get their defenders as proper for gentlemen. Learning had generally not been considered part of the equipment necessary to be gentleman. The rough and simple minded country squires in Fielding's novels are testimony to the existence of this type of gentleman well into the eighteenth century (see also Defoe 1729, Introduction, p. xlvii ff.).

Many, such as Steele, criticized birth as the proper criterion for being a gentleman:

> The appellation of gentleman is never to be affixed to a man's circumstances, but to his behaviour in them. . . . There are no qualities for which we ought to pretend to the esteem of others, but such as render us serviceable to them: for 'Free men have no superiors but benefactors' (*Tatler,* No. 207, August 5, 1710; see also *Tatler* No. 66, September 10, 1709).

In *The English Theophrastus* Abel Boyer (1667-1729) summed up his criticism of birthright in the sentence "it matters not whence we came, but what we are . . ." (Boyer 1702) . The only true qualities are those of one's body or mind, and not what position or title one happens to be born with. Jeremy Collier (1650-1723) also criticized received notions of nobility. Hereditary nobility is no reason to respect a person (Collier 1697, Part I, 55). The important thing is present merit (63), and a gentleman should primarily

shine by his superior personal qualities (101). The author of an essay in *The London Journal* (October 26, 1728) finds reason to congratulate his countrymen in the fact that they have gone farther than any other nation in Europe "in shaking off this Impertinence" of basing a person's merit on birth alone. Chesterfield thought the idea of superiority from birth silly (Heltzel 1925, 2). Increasingly, then, there is a move away from traditional patterns of social recognition, particulary those connected with birth and rank, and a move towards behavioral criteria - criteria which are initially of a much more elusive character, and open to dispute.

The profound change undergone in the expressive order is evident in the changes in books on conduct and in the increasing role of the arts for the behaviour of the gentleman. Heltzel dates the move away from birth and origin to around the middle of the seventeenth century, particularly the period after 1660 (Heltzel 1925, 7, 12-13, 37).[5] Locke was the first who "elaborated the conception of good-breeding as an essential requirement in the education of a gentleman" (Heltzel 1925, 441). The elusive character of the truly accomplished gentleman is sometimes characterized with the expression that he has a certain *je ne sais quoi* (for example by Chesterfield (see Heltzel 1925, 434) and Hutcheson (Hutcheson 1726, 250). See also Eagleton 1990, 41 ff.). The term is also used with respect to art: Perfection in a work of art can be felt, but the specific cause of the generated feeling is unknown to most people, and therefore called *je ne sais quoi* (as Shaftesbury explains (1711, vol. 1, 214)). The truly accomplished gentleman has to present himself as a work of art. Taste, as the ability to judge works of art, extends to

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[5] The decline of birth as a criterion is also evidence of the growing influence of middle-class values: " . . . with the rise of the middle classes following the Civil War and with the decay of the nobility and gentry through debauchery and prodigality of living, men were disillusioned; and as they recalled the glory of English nobility of preceding generations, they could have little short of contempt for the atheistic and riotous debauches of the Restoration and later, who had nothing except the title" (Heltzel 1925, 13). Whether the nobility was so much worse in the late seventeenth century than it had previously been is perhaps an open question, but there is no doubt that the middle class saw the development in the terms used by Heltzel. See the discussion about the reformation of manners in Chapter Six, below.

the ability to judge whether or not certain forms of behaviour are appropriate. Addison compared the purpose of good-breeding with that of "architecture, painting, and statuary": both should "lift up human-nature, and set it off to an advantage" (*Tatler* No. 108, Dec. 17, 1709).

As mentioned above, the change in standards was caused in part by the opening of the upper ranks of society to people with money and education regardless of their family background, but it was also caused by the fact that the new cultural centre was the City, in England almost exclusively London. In a traditional rural society patterns of social interactions are simpler. In the secluded country houses, which form the setting of, for example, Jane Austen's *Emma* and *Pride and Prejudice*, the exact social location of all the actors is always known by everyone involved. When anyone enters a room, their income, social position, family background and so on are already known, and their place in the social intercourse is therefore already defined. Not so in an urban setting. Cecilia, in Fanny Burney's novel of that name, is, by the death of her parents, removed from a rural background similar to those of Austen's novels. Upon her arrival in London, she discovers that she is completely unfamiliar with the expressive order regulating social life in the metropolis. Though she is introduced by name to people at a social gathering she is unable to converse with them because she knows nothing "of their histories, parties or connections" (Burney 1782, 18). Since everyone is dressed fashionably, she gets no clues from that either. The difficulty of placing people socially in the city was already observed by Mandeville: everyone strives, particularly through conspicuous consumption of clothing, to appear better than their social position merits:

> . . . fine Feathers make fine Birds, and People, where they are not known, are generally honour'd according to their Clothes and other Accoutrements they have about them; from the richness of them we judge of their Wealth, and by their ordering of them we guess at their Understanding. It is this which encourages every Body, who is conscious of his little Merit, if he is any ways able, to wear Clothes above his Rank, especially in large and populous Cities, where obscure Men may hourly meet with fifty Strangers to one Acquaintance, and consequently have the Pleasure of being esteem'd

> by a vast Majority, not as what they are, but what they appear to be . . . (Mandeville 1714, I, 127-128).

From the dissolution of the old expressive order new behavioral criteria emerge. The boundaries of human activities are redrawn, and it is this redrawing which constitutes the fine arts as a category. The new criteria were discussed extensively in the many courtesy books of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. No doubt they partly reflect that the expressive order characteristic of the middling sort of people is given more prominence, a position more in accordance with their actual power and influence.

Jonathan Richardson's *Two Discourses* (Richardson 1719) is among the first of more systematic writings designated to encourage the gentleman's interest in painting, and, at the same time, provide guidelines for the solution to a number of practical problems encountered by those buying pictures: How can I judge if a painting is genuinely a Titian or a Poussin? How do I judge the artistic merits of a painting, and if it will retain and possibly increase in value? Until around 1700 the question of choice and evaluation of pictures had limited interest because of the limited availability of pictures (Pears 1988, 160, see also Gibson-Wood 1984). Richardson claims that his work is the first of its kind (Richardson 1719, II.8 f.), and he may well be right about this, at least if the claim is that his book is the first to deal *exclusively* with art criticism and connoisseurship. According to Heltzel, the appreciation of art plays only a minor role in the conception of the accomplishments befitting a gentleman in the period until around mid-eighteenth century (Heltzel 1925, ch. 2). Interest in the arts was still something which had to be argued for. Richardson wants to recommend the new science of connoisseurship to gentlemen (Richardson 1719, II.7). Besides being a good investment (II.47-48), connoisseurship will generally "promote our Interest, Power, Reputation, Politeness, and even our Virtue" (II.217), and it will increase the respect and esteem granted to the one who possesses this skill (219-220).

> And accordingly in Conversation (when as it frequently does) it turns upon Painting, a Gentleman that is a *Connoisseur* is distinguish'd, as one that has Wit, and Learning . . . Not to be a *Connoisseur* on such occasions either Silences a Gentleman, and Hurts his Character; or he makes a much Worse Figure in pretending to be what he is Not . . . (Richardson 1719, II.222).

Richardson thus recommends connoisseurship to the gentleman partly because it will improve his social standing. A similar reason for taking an interest in painting had been given by Marshall Smith in *The Art of Painting according to the Theory and Practice of the best Italian, French and Germane Masters* (London, 1692. See Pears 1988, 36-37). Chesterfield recommended that his son develop a taste for painting, sculpture, and architecture, because they "become a man of fashion very well" (see Heltzel 1925, 208), though he should not have a too detailed knowledge of these arts, particularly of the "mechanical parts".[6]

Richardson's recommendation that the gentleman take an interest in painting, and, in general, the possession of taste, becomes part of the new behavioral ideals, which replace the old criterion of birth. Beginning with Locke, the most important purpose of education becomes good-breeding or politeness, along with the acquisition of skills more pertinent to the new society (e.g. some knowledge of trade). It was a repeated criticism of the education at Oxford and Cambridge that it was useless (Heltzel 1925, 98 ff.). "Usefulness" is one of the words most frequently invoked to justify the pursuit of any interest or project, or, if something is not found useful, as a basis for criticism. Though the emphasis on usefulness may initially seem to be opposed to the attainment of good-breeding (it does not strike us as something useful), in the early eighteenth century politeness and breeding were essential for a man to make his way in the world. Breeding and politeness, as well as taste, could be obtained only through

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[6] "In brief, the gentleman, according to Chesterfield, should have a smattering in the criticism of painting, sculpture, and architecture to fit him for conversation upon these subjects, but he must not descend into the details of any of them nor concern himself with any of those low and mechanical parts which are beneath the gentleman" (Heltzel 1925, 211).

actual experience in interacting with those already in possession of these qualities. This is evident in Addison's and Hume's discussions of taste, to which I now turn.

5.5.: Taste, Human Nature and Social Privilege

Concerns about taste were nothing new in England in the early eighteenth century. Sir Robert Howard and John Dryden had been involved in a controversy about the conception of taste in the 1660's. In the Preface to his tragedy *The Great Favourite, or the Duke of Lerma* (1668), Howard criticized those who would "endeavour to like or dislike by the Rules of others". In judging tragedies, comedies and so on, as well as their manner of composition, "there can be no determination but by the Taste".[7] Dryden rejected this in *A Defence of an Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (1668). Distinctions should not be based on what people like or dislike.[8]

It is not, however, until the first decade of the eighteenth century that the discussion about taste truly commences. According to Klein, John Dennis' *A Large Account of the Taste in Poetry, and the Causes of the Degeneracy of it* (1702) is the first attempt to define taste (Klein 1967, 18). John Harris's *Lexicon Technicum* from 1704 (Harris 1704) has no entry under 'taste', but one under the French term 'grand gout', an indication that a notion of aesthetic taste was still a relatively new phenomenon in England. A few years later Addison mentions that the notion of "the fine taste" often arises in conversation (*Spectator*, No. 409, June 19, 1712; Bond (ed.) 1965, vol. III, p. 527)

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[7] Spingarn 1908, vol.II, 106 ff. Quoted in Klein 1967, 10.

[8] *Essays of John Dryden*, ed. by W. P. Ker, 2 vols., Oxford 1926, vol.I, 119. See Klein 1967, 12.

5.5.1.: Addison

Addison's influential considerations on taste connect to his analysis of wit, which in turn is based on the analysis of the concept given by Locke. Locke's distinction between 'wit' and 'judgement' occurs in the course of his discussion of the different faculties of the mind *(Essay,* Book II, ch. xi). The ability to differentiate among different ideas is, according to Locke, an important element in any form of knowledge. The assumption that two ideas are only one is an important source of error, and can lead one to think that something is an innate idea when in fact it is composed of two different ideas, neither of which is innate: " . . . so far as this faculty [of discriminating ideas] is in itself dull or not rightly made use of, for the distinguishing one thing from another, so far our notions are confused, and our reason and judgement disturbed or misled". Conversely: the possession of this ability results in "exactness of judgement and clearness of reason" (II.xi.2). Whereas we can call judgement an analytical skill, 'wit' is, according to Locke, the ability to put things together. Wit lies mostly in the "assemblage of ideas, and putting those together with quickness and variety, wherein can be found any resemblance or congruity, thereby to make up pleasant pictures and agreeable visions in the fancy" (ibid.). 'Wit' is typically the skill of the poet, since one form of this "putting together" is metaphor or allusion. As opposed to the analytical procedure involved in judgement, metaphor and allusion create (or can create) beauty, which "appears at first sight" and does not require any examination:

> The mind, without looking any further, rests satisfied with the agreeableness of the picture and the gaiety of the fancy; and it is a kind of affront to go about to examine it by the severe rules of truth and good reason; whereby it appears that it consists in something that is not perfectly conformable to them (*Essay,* II.xi.2).

Addison's analysis of wit in *The Spectator* (No. 61 & 62, May 10 and May 11, 1711) is, as mentioned, based on Locke's definition of wit and judgement, but Addison adds some

further distinctions. Addison distinguishes between false and true wit: It is not every idea playing on a resemblance which can properly be considered wit. It must also contain something which "gives Delight and Surprize to the Reader" (No. 62; Bond (ed.) 1965, vol. II, p. 264). Just repeating some worn out metaphor, or presenting some rather obvious resemblance between two objects does not constitute wit. Addison's analysis of taste is based on this notion of wit: wit creates agreeable pictures or beauties, but requires in turn a faculty to judge about the products of wit. This faculty is 'taste'.

Addison's discussion of taste is not restricted to what we would call the fine arts - the concept is not available to him. His discussion of the imagination includes, not only most of the arts classified within the modern conception of art (poetry, painting, sculpture, architecture and music), but also gardening and natural beauty, as well as some forms of historical and "scientific" writing.

The concept of taste is not just a concept related to evaluation of different forms of art, but a concept with much wider social content. For Addison some judgements of taste are valid (true) and others false - it is obvious that some things conform to the taste and others do not. But some people do not possess the faculty which makes this discrimination possible. The problem relating to taste is, then, not the validity of taste-judgements (whether or not they are true) but (1) to know if we have the faculty of fine taste, and (2) if we don't, to know how to acquire it. In connection with his discussion of the fine taste in writing, Addison defines "fine taste" as "*that Faculty of the Soul, which discerns the Beauties of an Author with Pleasure, and the Imperfections with Dislike*" (Bond (ed.) 1965, vol. III, p. 528). The possession of "fine taste" makes it possible to experience the "pleasures of the imagination". The pleasures of the imagination inhabit a middle ground between those of sense and those of the understanding. The man of taste or "Polite Imagination" has the possibility of many pleasures "that the Vulgar are not capable of receiving" (Bond (ed.) 1965, vol. III, p. 538). Addison recommends the pleasures of the imagination because they are different

from sensual pleasures, but nevertheless compatible with a life of leisure. They make it possible to be idle without leading to "Vice and Folly" (538-39). The pleasures of the imagination

> . . . do not require such a Bent of Thought as is necessary to our more serious Employments, nor at the same Time, suffer the Mind to sink into that Negligence and Remissness, which are apt to accompany our more sensual Delights, but, like a gentle Exercise to the Faculties, awaken them from Sloth and Idleness, without putting them upon any Labour or Difficulty (539).

Addison evidently does not want to lay himself open to possible accusations of recommending slothfulness and idleness.

Taste is a faculty which must, Addison says, "in some degree be born with us" (Bond (ed.) 1965, vol. III, p. 529). Beauty (and imperfections) are objective: "We [those with 'fine taste'] are struck, we know not how, with the symmetry of any thing we see, and immediately assent to the Beauty of an Object . . . " (538), beauty "makes its way directly to the Soul" (542). If there should, after all, be any doubt about the quality of an object this is, in older writings, decided through the test of time, in more recent writings, by the "politer part" of society. To discover whether or not a person has taste, he should read the works which have passed the test of time, or which "have the Sanction of the Politer Part of our Contemporaries".

> If upon the Perusal of such Writings he does not find himself delighted in an extraordinary Manner, or if, upon reading the admired Passages in such Authors, he finds a Coldness and Indifference in his Thoughts, he ought to conclude, not (as is too usual among tasteless Readers) that the Author wants those Perfections which have been admired in him, but that he himself wants the Faculty of discovering them (*Spectator* No. 409, June 19, 1712; Bond (ed.) 1965, vol. III, p. 528).

Beauty, confronted with the faculty of taste, gives rise to the pleasures of the imagination. But even if a person does not experience pleasure, this absence cannot immediately be taken as an indication of the absence of beauty. It may be that the person in question does not have taste, and therefore does not experience the pleasure of the imagination though confronted with beauty. We must therefore have a criterion in

addition to pleasure. The additional criterion is the conformity of the judgement of taste to the judgement of the "politer part" of mankind. Evidently, Addison's definition of taste is circular: Taste is defined by the agreement in judgement with those recognized to have taste. Consequently, taste (and politeness) are acquired by emulating those with these qualities, a point which is repeated by most writers on the subject. Writers about taste could afford to be circular in their definition of taste because they would implicitly share with their readers the knowledge or the assumption that they belonged to the tasteful part of human kind. Taste was a quality belonging to a specific social stratum, and everyone knew where it was.

The circular definition of taste is also present in Hume's writings. In a recent essay, Shusterman points out that most commentators on Hume consider the circular nature of the conception of taste an epistemological or ontological problem, whereas it should be properly considered a social or even a political problem - and this was in fact the way it was conceived in the first part of the eighteenth century (Shusterman 1989). The problem is similar to the problem discussed in connection with the emergence of experimental practices in science: How do we, in a world where there is no longer a central authority, create new forms of agreement?

Hume's discussion of taste in "Of the Delicacy of Taste and Passion" and in "Of the Standard of Taste", though more systematic and detailed, has many similarities with Addison's treatment of the concept. It is therefore appropriate to deal with it here.[9]

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[9] "Of the Delicacy of Taste and Passion" was first published in 1741 in Hume's *Essays, Moral and Political*, "Of the Standard of Taste" in *Four Dissertations* in 1757. All references are to Hume 1777.

5.5.2.: Hume

That taste stretches beyond the confines of art is clear from the outset of Hume's "Of the Delicacy of Taste and Passion". A man of "delicate taste" reacts to the perfections or imperfections of a poem or a picture, but he reacts equally to forms of behaviour: "A polite and judicious conversation affords him the highest entertainment; rudeness or impertinence is as great a punishment to him" (4-5). Cultivating a taste for the arts therefore also makes us, Hume claims, better judges of other human beings and places us in a special category: "Many things, which please or afflict others, will appear to us too frivolous to engage our attention" (6).

Hume's intention with "Of the Standard of Taste" is twofold: He wants to reject the idea that taste cannot be disputed, and to show that there are indeed standards of taste which must be, and actually are, followed by people of "good sense"; secondly, Hume wants to explain the origin and nature of differences in judgements of taste, how it is possible that there can at the same time be certain standards of taste, universally followed, and some who, in their judgements of taste, nevertheless deviate from them.

Hume, as Addison, considers taste a faculty all human beings have, though not to the same degree. Some people have a very delicate taste, some hardly any at all. Though there is great variation in the judgements of taste people form, this variation appears, Hume claims, much larger that it really is. In most questions there is actually fairly universal agreement:

> Whoever would assert an equality of genius and elegance between OGILBY and MILTON, or BUNYAN and ADDISON, would be thought to defend no less an extravagance, than if he had maintained a mole-hill to be as high as TENERIFFE, or a pond as extensive as the ocean (Hume 1777, 230-231).

Of course, there may be people who prefer, say, Bunyan to Addison. Judging from the popularity of *The Pilgrim's Progress* throughout the eighteenth century many of Hume's

contemporaries would indeed have a very high opinion of Bunyan, but anyone who prefers Bunyan to Addison can justly be considered "absurd and ridiculous" (231). In general, only those works of art which follow certain rules are found to please. The nature of the rules to be followed is determined by "general observations, concerning what has been universally found to please in all countries and ages" (231). As is apparent, the notion of "universal" must already be restricted, since those who might prefer Bunyan to Addison have already been excluded from among those who have a claim to be taken seriously. Hume, though arguing in the name of universal human nature, gives voice only to those who have what he considers appropriate preferences: The rules are "founded only on experience and on the observation of the common sentiments of human nature" (232), but they are not always followed by everyone. In order to form true judgements it is necessary to be in a certain state of mind: It requires a "perfect serenity of mind, a recollection of thought, a due attention to the object" (232). Prejudice or authority may also hamper the judgement. In spite of apparent differences, it is therefore possible for Hume to maintain that there are "certain general principles of approbation or blame, whose influence a careful eye may trace in all operations of the mind" (233). Those who prefer Bunyan to Addison may then be either prejudiced, misled by authority, or otherwise distracted, or they may simply not have examined the case at hand carefully enough. In addition to these reasons, differences in judgements of taste may also be due to the differing degrees in which the faculty of taste is developed in different individuals. Some have very acute senses of taste, or what Hume calls "delicacy of taste" (e.g. 235), some do not. How do we know if a person has "delicacy of taste"? Hume's answer is basically the same as Addison's. Since we have established that there is a standard of good taste, those who are pleased, or in whom a sense of delight or pleasure occur when confronted with objects conforming to the standard of taste, have this delicacy. If a person is not so affected, he or she is void of taste - "we exclude the person from all pretensions to this

delicacy" (235): "He must conclude, upon the whole, that the fault lies in himself, and that he wants the delicacy, which is requisite to make him sensible of every beauty and every blemish, in any composition or discourse" (236). The possession of delicacy of taste is a very desirable quality in a man, and it can be developed by practice. In fact, it is only one who has had extended exposure to modern and classical works of art who is truly able to judge about the value of a work (238).

All this amounts to a *de facto* requirement to share large parts of the dominant culture, to have had a sufficient amount of time at one's disposal to develop the requisite type of knowledge, and to have received a certain type of education. The person Hume has in mind is a well travelled, well educated person, free of what Hume considers prejudices, who allows "nothing to enter into his consideration, but the very object which is submitted to his examination" (239). But the consideration of the object requires, according to Hume, practice and the ability to compare with other types of objects. This exclusion of any other concerns in the consideration of works of art is an important ingredient in much later philosophy of art, and a component in my characterization of the modern conception of art. A person who is able to rise above what Hume considers prejudices and personal preferences shows "good sense" (240) and can become a good critic. As Shusterman has pointed out, the demand that the good critic be free of prejudices is actually a demand that the good critic has the *right* prejudices (Shusterman 1989, 217).

Since the only way to determine whether or not a person has delicacy of taste is the conformity of the judgements made by this person to a set standard, it is clear, that the possession of taste becomes, above all, a criterion for belonging to a certain group of people, those who have good sense. It is the joint verdict of men of good sense and delicate sentiments which sets the "true standard of taste and beauty" (241).

But where do we find such critics, Hume asks, returning full circle to the initial question about standards. He does not directly answer the question. It is as a

matter of fact widely agreed that some people are better equipped to make judgements of taste than others (242): "Though men of delicate taste be rare, they are easily to be distinguished in society, by the soundness of their understanding and the superiority of their faculties above the rest of mankind" (243).

Hume's standard is based on consensus, but not, as he claims, among all human beings, but only among a small group. In fact, "the taste of all individuals is not upon an equal footing" (242). Those who deviate from the standard do so because of "some defect or perversion in the faculties . . . proceeding either from prejudice, from want of practice, or want of delicacy" (243).

In England in the late seventeenth century older values characteristic of the expressive order lose their validity. Though this is a process stretching back at least a century, it becomes more rapid and more evident in the period after 1660. The search is for new values to fill out the void in the expressive order. When birthright is no longer a viable social criterion, other criteria take its place: Having the same artistic preferences, the same taste as others, becomes a sign of belonging to the right segment of society. Though the philosophers and the patrons of coffee-houses imagined they spoke for and expressed values characteristic of mankind as such, they were clearly expressing a world view which was restricted to a certain social group. As Habermas points out, even if education was the only criterion for entry into the public sphere, this in fact reduced access to those who owned property, since education was not generally available - "formal education at that time was more a consequence than a precondition of a social status, which in turn was primarily determined by one's title to property. The educated strata were also the property owning ones" (Habermas 1962, 85). Hume's demand that the good critic be a man with some practice and experience, is similarly a requirement which can only be met by a person of some education and with sufficient leisure time. The ability to converse about painting and poetry becomes a sign of what

Veblen calls conspicuous leisure, and an indication that someone who possesses these skills has not spent the time in which he or she is not observed by their peers by anything mechanical or debasing.

Pears sees the interest in painting as derived from a "process of cultural unification of the upper ranks of English society" (Pears 1988, 3) in much the same way as Gadamer explains the significance of 'taste': having certain preferences, interests and knowledge in common serves to distinguish those who belong from those who do not belong to the elite, at the same time as it justifies the existence of the elite. "Possession of taste not only indicated education and hence virtue but also implied and signified the fitness of its possessors to rule" (Pears 1988, 36). Appreciating art in the appropriate manner becomes an important token in the social intercourse of the enlightened bourgeois. It signals a level of sophistication, but above all it signals membership.

Many of the questions relating to taste and judgement received a more thorough treatment in Shaftesbury's philosophy. In his writings we also find evidence of that uncertainty relating to the expressive order I have described as characteristic of the early eighteenth century. In one of Shaftesbury's notebooks, perhaps written during one of his stays in Holland in 1698 or 1703-03, we find an expression of this. Everyone, he says, is referring to "the world", but it is not clear where this world is, who it is composed of - or if everyone is even referring to the same world!

> But where then is this emphatical world? what is it? or who? - Is it the beau monde? is it the court and drawing-room? is it the chocolate-house world? the coffee-house world? the quality world or the common-people world? the scholar world? the virtuoso world, or the politic, negotiating, managing, busy world? the foreign or the home world? - For behold what passes as a great story, a mighty affair in one of these worlds is just nothing in another. Whom of these, then, or which am I to consider? whom or which of these will I make the world? shall it be the greater number, the mere people? . . . Shall it be the managers, the men who govern the multitude; and not the multitude themselves? . . . Are the courts or even the senates, parliaments, and public stations, the passages to virtue and true honour, as well as to fame, fortune, and honour of another kind? (Shaftesbury 1900, 68).

Shaftesbury is often regarded as the father of modern aesthetics. With him "we have arrived at a really critical point in the development of aesthetics, a point at which minds and problems had to part" (Cassirer 1932a, 315; see also Kivy 1976, 9). Shaftesbury is the philosopher at the beginning of the modern period who gives a central place to the arts. Shaftesbury's philosophy and its place within the transformative processes (changing expressive order, cultural unification of the elite) discussed in this and the previous chapters will therefore be the subject of the following chapter.

CHAPTER 6

Shaftesbury and the Morality of Art Appreciation

6.1.: Introduction

I mentioned in the Introduction that a central part of the modern conception of art is the idea that art has its value in itself, and not just as a vehicle for, say, moral or religious enlightenment - that, as Danto puts it, "the essence of art is its ephemerality" (Danto 1986, 166). According to this view, when we contemplate art we adopt a specific "aesthetic attitude" which serves, as it were, to bracket whatever practical, moral, religious, political, or other concerns we may have, and we attend to the object in an aesthetic manner only. This way of attending to works of art (or other objects) is sometimes called disinterested contemplation. Shaftesbury is often considered the first to call attention to the phenomenon of "disinterested perception" as it relates to aesthetics. He can, therefore, with some justification be considered the founder of aesthetics, since it is only with the emergence of the notion "aesthetic disinterestedness" that a specifically aesthetic form of experience can be conceived as possible.

But a critical re-examination (carried out in section 6.2) of Shaftesbury's writings does not support the view that Shaftesbury separates the contemplation of art from moral concerns in particular. Shaftesbury's concern was, on the contrary, *to situate the contemplation of art within a morality acceptable to his contemporaries.* Since, as Alaisdair MacIntyre in particular has emphasized, a conception of morality presupposes or envisions a view of the social order, situating art appreciation morally implies a view

of the social order. To come to grips with this part of Shaftesbury's philosophy it is therefore necessary to situate it within some of the late seventeenth- early eighteenth-century debates about the moral and social order. The forging of a new moral and social order, and of what I have called a new expressive order, came to the fore in the movement for the reformation of manners. Today it is rarely necessary to defend an interest in art. Most people find it obvious that art has a value, though they may be hard pressed to say exactly wherein its value consists. But this has not always been the case. To understand why Shaftesbury had to provide a moral defence of the appreciation of art, and to understand what his defence amounted to, it is necessary to see it against the background of the attempt to create a new social and moral order in England after the revolution in 1688, particularly as these attempts were expressed in the movement to reform people's manners. This background is provided, at least in outline, in section 6.3. Shaftesbury, and those of his contemporaries who agreed with him, expressed their view of the social order, in part, in the conception of "politeness". An interest in art and the possession of taste become central ingredients of politeness. "Politeness" is discussed in section 6.4.

Much of the historical material presented in the following is well known, but though well known, it has not been connected to an interpretation of Shaftesbury's philosophy. By bringing it to bear on Shaftesbury's philosophy, these historical considerations thus provide a new interpretation of Shaftesbury's philosophy and a deeper understanding of the philosophical and historical context out of which aesthetics as a philosophical discipline grew.

6.2.: Shaftesbury and the morality of art

Throughout the eighteenth century Shaftesbury was one of the most widely read philosophers, not just in Britain, but also in Holland, Germany and France. The first edition of the *Characteristics* was published in 1711, and eleven editions had been published by 1790.[1] It was translated into French in 1769 (several of the individual treatises comprising the *Characteristics* had been translated earlier), and a complete German translation of the *Characteristics* appeared 1776-1779.[2] Much of this attention was due to Shaftesbury's moral, political, and theological views, but his views on taste and the arts were influential too.

One of the most authoritative recent interpretations of Shaftesbury's philosophy was advanced by Jerome Stolnitz in a series of essays from the 1960's. Stolnitz's interpretation, perhaps more than any other, deserves credit for drawing attention to this somewhat neglected philosopher, and has, to some degree, obtained the status of the "received view" on Shaftesbury's philosophy. A natural starting-point for a discussion of Shaftesbury is therefore Stolnitz's interpretation of his philosophy.

According to Stolnitz, much of Shaftesbury's influence in philosophy of art is due to the fact that he introduced the concept of "aesthetic disinterestedness".[3]

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[1] Most of Shaftesbury writings are to be found in *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*. Unless otherwise mentioned references in the following are to the edition by John M. Robertson in two volumes (London, 1900). The Roman numeral before the page number indicates the volume. This edition was reprinted in one volume in 1964 (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company) with an introduction by Stanley Grean, but with the same pagination as the two-volume edition.

[2] See Brett 1951, ch. IX; Fowler 1882, ch. V; Schlegel 1956, ch. 1; Robertson's introduction to his edition of the *Characteristics* (I, xiv); Grean 1967, Preface.

[3] Shaftesbury ". . . sets into motion the idea which, more than any other, marks off modern from traditional aesthetics and around which a great deal of the dialectic of modern thought has revolved, viz., the concept of 'aesthetic disinterestedness'" (Stolnitz 1961c, 98). Aesthetic disinterestedness "describes a certain mode of perceiving" peculiar to a certain kind of experience: aesthetic experience. When perceiving anything in this

(continued...)

Shaftesbury's use of the term disinterestedness is not, as also Stolnitz points out, connected to art in particular, but is part of an argument in ethics, directed against the idea that "interest rules the world" (I, 77). To evaluate Stolnitz's interpretation of Shaftesbury's conception of disinterestedness we must examine the idea of interest and its role in the early eighteenth century. When this is done we shall return to Stolnitz's interpretation of Shaftesbury.

The idea that "interest rules the world" was, in Shaftesbury's days, often identified with the name of Hobbes, but by no means limited to Hobbes. Even the inhabitants of Locke's more civilized state of nature (as compared to Hobbes') decide to leave it because interest and selfishness makes the enjoyment of their property insecure (Locke 1689, 395-396).

The meaning of "interest" was not quite the same in the eighteenth century as it is today, where we tend to identify that which we have an interest in doing with that which we are inclined to do or desire to do. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, following one's interest could be the exact opposite of following one's passions, as illustrated in the following incidence in Fanny Burney's *Cecilia*: In a conversation with Cecilia, Mrs. Delvile tries, without directly saying so, to make it clear to Cecilia that her son cannot possibly marry her, even though they may all desire it. Mrs. Delvile concludes: "How few are there, how very few, who marry at once upon principles rational and feelings pleasant! Interest and inclination are eternally at strife . . . " (Burney 1792, 488. See also p. 510).

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[3](...continued)
manner any other concerns, such as practical, moral, political or religious are suspended (1961c, 98-99). To consider anything, typically a work of art, in a disinterested manner is to value it or perceive it "for its own sake". The assumed possibility of this type of perception is definitive for the modern conception of art, since disinterestedness is a central ingredient in the idea that art has a value in and of itself. The subject matter of aesthetics is therefore, according to Stolnitz, " . . . the experience of disinterested perception and the nature and value of its objects" (1961c, 99; see also Kivy 1976, 120-121).

In this passage, interest is something which has to be followed because of one's position in society. It is an obligation imposed on one. Following one's feelings or inclinations would have destructive consequences; in the situation in *Cecilia*, young Delvile would not be able to carry on the family name. The interests are seen as controlling and counteracting desires and passions. The task of reining in and controlling people's unruly passions had traditionally been an important legitimation of coercion by the state or the church, justified on the grounds that it was for the greater good for the whole (Hirschman 1977, Part I). Bernard Mandeville (to whom I return in sect. 7.3.) later became a prominent advocate of the view that individuals should be left to freely follow their private passions, since such freedom would lead to harmony and prosperity (though not to virtue) on the greater scale - the view most famously associated with the name of Adam Smith.

In the early eighteenth century interest was closely connected with the possession of wealth. Shaftesbury defines the term "interest" in this manner:

> In luxury and intemperance we easily apprehend how far thought is oppressed and the mind debarred from just reflection, and from the free examination and censure of its own opinions or maxims, on which the conduct of a life is formed.
>
> Even in *that complicated good of vulgar kind which we commonly call interest, in which we comprehend both pleasure, riches, power and other exterior advantages*, we may discern how a fascinated sight contracts a genius, and by shortening the view even of that very interest which it seeks, betrays the knave, and necessitates the ablest and wittiest proselyte of the kind to expose himself on every emergency and sudden turn [my italics] (II, 345).

Interest is also defined as "desire of those conveniences by which we are well provided for and maintained", or in more general terms as "self-love" (I, 317). A certain moderate self-love is not necessarily bad, but driven to extremes it becomes dangerous. Exclusive concern for one's private interest becomes "cowardice, revengefulness, luxury, avarice, vanity, ambition, and sloth" (ibid.). Interest in particular leads to avarice.[4] Shaftesbury

[4] This is also the sense in which Hume uses the term interest. See Hirschman 1977, 37.

thought that nature, assisted by education, would regulate itself in finding a balance between too much and too little self-love. The purpose of education is to enable one to live a "natural and regular life" (I, 325). For Shaftesbury, as for Locke (who had supervised Shaftesbury's education), the purpose of education is to make it possible to lead a life according to reason, which for Shaftesbury meant that which was contrary to interest.[5] The person inclined to indulge in luxury will, besides ruining his health by, say, overeating, receive little pleasure from it and be an unhappy and unnatural creature (I, 322 f.):

> As to the consequences of such an indulgence: how fatal to the body, by diseases of many kinds, and to the mind, by sottishness and stupidity; this needs not any explanation. . . . 'tis easy to conclude "that luxury, riot, and debauch are contrary to real interest, and to the true enjoyment of life" (I, 323. See also 329).

According to Hirschman the meaning of "interest", though initially wider, comes, in the course of the seventeenth century, to be identified almost exclusively with the acquisition of material wealth and the pursuit of economic advantages (Hirschman 1977, 38 ff.). But, paradoxically, the term "interest" gradually gets the function of legitimizing what had hitherto been known under such negative terms as "avarice" or

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[5] The view that Shaftesbury rejected his teacher's philosophy is only true with modifications. Shaftesbury accepted much of Locke's philosophy, though not his ethical views and his view of human nature. See Fowler 1882, 44-45. In a letter to Michael Ainsworth dated June 3rd, 1709, Shaftesbury says that he admires Locke for his writings on government, policy, trade, coin, education, toleration, etc., but he cannot accept Locke's view of human nature, which he sees as essentially the same as Hobbes'. '"Twas Mr. Locke that struck at all fundamentals, threw all order and virtue out of the world, and made the very idea of these . . . *unnatural,* and without foundations in our minds" (Shaftesbury 1900, 403). Shaftesbury, correctly, thought Locke a much greater danger in this respect than Hobbes, because Locke generally was so much more highly estimated than Hobbes. Shaftesbury was also greatly disturbed by what I have called Locke's moral relativism, and thought it derived, probably again correctly, from too much reading of "Indian barbarian stories of wild nations" (ibid., 403-404). Perhaps the fear of moral relativism is the reason why Shaftesbury was so vehemently opposed to the reading of travel-books, a very popular genre in the early eighteenth century (see *Characteristics* I, 221-223). For Locke's view on the purpose of the education of the mind see Locke 1693, sect. 33 (p. 27) and sect. 45 (p. 36).

"greed" because it was seen as a control on greater evils, such as ambition, lust for power, or sexual desire (Hirschman 1977, 41).

Though the conception of the interests as a check on the passions is present in Shaftesbury's writings - for example in the passage above, where he points out that luxury, etc. are "contrary to real interest" - Shaftesbury does not view passion as solely negative and destructive. In *Sensus Communis: An Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour* (originally published in 1709) Shaftesbury wants to show that throughout history and in different societies there is a certain sense of the public good: " . . . a social feeling or sense of partnership with human kind" (I, 72). Man is by nature a social creature and finds pleasure in the company of others. We have a natural instinct to take care of one another. The formation of society has not come about through a contract as Locke and, in particular, Hobbes claimed, but has grown gradually out of the natural inclination men and women have to keep each other's company, and to enjoy the "pleasure found in social entertainment, language, and discourse" (I, 74-75). Shaftesbury's view of human nature at times comes close to that of the "noble savage", which can be corrupted by civilization. He talks about that "simplicity of manners and innocence of behaviour which has been often known among mere savages, ere they were corrupted by our commerce and by sad example..." (I, 226). That "mere savages" should be innocent was contrary to received religious dogma. It was official doctrine of both the Anglican and the Presbyterian churches that man, because of Adam's fall, was unable of his own strength to be virtuous, but was unremittingly evil. Salvation for men and women is only possible through the grace of God, though the threat of eternal damnation or the promise of salvation can serve to mend their ways.[6]

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[6] See *The Confession of Faith agreed upon by the Assembly of Divines at Westminster*, e.g. Chapters VI, and IX, and *The Book of Common Prayer*, Articles of Religion, No. IX, X, and XVIII. In 1738 Hutcheson was tried for heresy for being in contravention of this principle. See Scott 1900, 83 ff. and MacIntyre 1988, 245 f.

Shaftesbury argues against a view of good acts that conceives of these as grounded only in the self-interest of individuals, the view that good acts should be done "for the sake of a bargain" (I, 66), or because of a view of "future reward and punishment" (II, 55), actually a form of bargain too.[7]

> If the love of doing good be not, of itself, a good and right inclination, I know not how there can possibly be such a thing as goodness or virtue. If the inclination be right, 'tis a perverting of it, to apply it solely to the reward, and make us conceive such wonders of the grace and favour which is to attend virtue, when there is so little shown of the intrinsic worth or value of the thing itself (I, 66).

As is well known, Shaftesbury was of the opinion that human beings have a "natural moral sense" (I, 262), a sense of "right and wrong", and are naturally inclined to do the right thing. Acting without any regard for the possible personal benefit one might get from an act, either in this world or beyond, is to act disinterestedly (I, 67-69). In particular one must strive to love God and virtue in a disinterested manner, that is for "God or virtue's sake" (II, 55).

After this examination of the notions of "interest" and "disinterest" current in the eighteenth century, we can now return to Stolnitz's interpretation of "aesthetic disinterestedness" in Shaftesbury's work.

The core of Stolnitz's interpretation of Shaftesbury's conception of aesthetic disinterestedness is that "disinterestedness", though it originates in ethics, evolves out of this realm to become "properly aesthetic" (1961c, 105). Stolnitz does not claim that a clear cut case of the use of disinterestedness in the modern, aesthetic sense can be found in Shaftesbury's writings, only that Shaftesbury is the starting point for this development of the concept, regardless of the intentions which Shaftesbury might himself have had. As Stolnitz points out, in the history of ideas it is not unusual that an idea,

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[7] Jeremy Collier expresses this common view of Shaftesbury's contemporaries in his *Essays Upon Several Moral Subjects*: "A good Man is contented with hard Usage at present, that he may take his *Pleasure* in the other World" (Collier 1697, Part II, 191). See also Locke, *Essay* I.iii.12 and 13, where he argues that moral principles require rewards and punishments.

introduced by a writer with certain intentions, in its later historical development acquires implications different from those intended by the writer (1961c, 100). Stolnitz's claims about disinterestedness rest, then, partly on an understanding of what Shaftesbury said (a textual claim), partly on a claim about the actual history of the reception of the concept or idea "set into motion". I deal first with the claim about Shaftesbury's text, second with the claim about the history of the reception of "disinterestedness".

How, according to Stolnitz, does the notion of disinterestedness evolve into a concept of a particular manner in which works of art can be perceived? Following Stolnitz, the meaning given to disinterestedness in the passage from *The Moralists* (published 1709) referred to above, where Shaftesbury discusses the disinterested love of God and virtue, comes close to a meaning which makes it possible also to use the term in connection with aesthetics. In this context Shaftesbury does not use 'disinterestedness' in the sense in which the concept is often used in the moral context, as meaning "benevolent" or acting to further the common good of mankind. Here it refers only to *a suspension of any private interest*, to something which is "not motivated by self-seeking" (Stolnitz 1961c, 106). The sense of disinterestedness we are looking for is "opposed, not to benevolence, but to the falling away of self-concern" (107).[8]

In addition to the deliberations about the disinterested love of virtue and God, the aesthetically relevant notion of disinterestedness can also, according to Stolnitz,

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[8] "This passage [about the disinterested love of God] brings us close to the aesthetically relevant meaning of 'disinterestedness'. Perception cannot be disinterested unless the spectator forsakes all self-concern and therefore trains attention upon the object for its own sake" (Stolnitz 1961c, 107). Stolnitz applies the term "aesthetic" in the modern sense, where it refers to something which is independent of, for example, morality and religion. "Aesthetic perception looks to no consequences ulterior to itself" (1961c, 108). As mentioned, Stolnitz does not claim that this more fully developed sense of "aesthetic disinterestedness" is present in Shaftesbury's writings, only that writers who later develop the notion of aesthetic disinterestedness in more detail unpack "what is already implicit in his [Shaftesbury's] account" (ibid.).

be seen in another passage from *The Moralists*. In *The Moralists* Shaftesbury, even more than in his other works, discusses a bewildering array of different topics, presented in part in the form of a dialogue between Theocles and Philocles, as recounted by Philocles to Palemon. Theocles represents the "correct" line of reasoning. In their conversation, Theocles and Philocles touch upon the nature of poetry and beauty. Poets and other lovers of the Muses and the Graces copy nature (II, 125). The things in nature we find beautiful, things which can "passionately" strike us, are shadows of a deeper kind of beauty:

> . . . whatever in Nature is beautiful or charming is only the faint shadow of that first beauty. So that every real love depending on the mind, and being only the contemplation of beauty either as it really is in itself or as it appears imperfectly in the objects which strike the sense, how can the rational mind rest here, or be satisfied with the absurd enjoyment which reaches the sense alone? (II, 126)

The true enjoyment of something excludes, in other words, that the enjoyment is merely sensuous. Opposed to the sensuous kind of enjoyment there is a higher, rational kind. Theocles further explains the rational kind of enjoyment in a passage quoted by Stolnitz. I cite the passage at greater length to shed further light on the context in which it occurs:

> [T.:] Imagine then, good Philocles, if being taken with the beauty of the ocean, which you see yonder at a distance, it should come into your head to seek to command it, and, like some mighty admiral, ride master of the sea, would not the fancy be a little absurd?
> [P.:] Absurd enough, in conscience. The next thing I should do, 'tis likely, upon this frenzy, would be to hire some bark and go in nuptial ceremony, Venetian-like, to wed the gulf, which I might call perhaps as properly my own.
> [T.:] Let who will call it theirs, replied Theocles, you will own the enjoyment of this kind to be very different from that which should naturally follow from the contemplation of the ocean's beauty. (. . .) But to come nearer home, and make the question still more familiar. Suppose (my Philocles) that, viewing such a tract of country as this delicious vale we see beneath us, you should, for the enjoyment of the prospect, require the property or possession of the land.
> [P.:] The covetous fancy, replied I, would be as absurd altogether as that other ambitious one (II, 126-127).

Shaftesbury wishes to distinguish between admiring something for its beauty and the desire to possess or own it.[9] An immediate objection to this distinction comes to mind: There is a kind of beauty, the admiration of which seems naturally to lead to a desire to possess the object (II, 127-128). Shaftesbury's oblique reference is probably to sexual attraction.[10] This type of attraction is nevertheless natural, which in Shaftesbury's moral universe means that it is good. It appears, then, that a contradiction arises: what is natural has been praised as good, but according to the passage just referred to, that which is natural now seems to be bad, linked as it is to dangerous desires. To this objection Theocles answers:

> [T.:] Far be it from us both . . . to condemn a joy which is from Nature. But when we spoke of the enjoyment of these woods and prospects, we understood by it a far different kind from that of the inferior creatures, who, rifling in these places, find here their choicest food. Yet we too live by tasteful food, and feel those other joys of sense in common with them. But 'twas not here . . . that we had agreed to place our good, nor consequently our enjoyment. We who were rational, and had minds, methought, should place it rather in those minds which were indeed abused, and cheated of their real good, when drawn to seek absurdly the enjoyment of it in the objects of sense, and not in those objects they might properly call their own, in which kind, as I remember, we comprehended all which was truly fair, generous, or good.
> [P.:] So that beauty, said I, and good with you, Theocles, I perceive, are still one and the same (II, 128).

Theocles, speaking for Shaftesbury, rather than wishing to carve out an independent realm for the contemplation of beauty, wants to reassert a point frequently

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[9] A passage by Addison reminds one of this (and other) places in the *Characteristics*: "A man of a Polite Imagination is let into a great many Pleasures, that the Vulgar are not capable of receiving. He can converse with a Picture, and find an agreeable Companion in a Statue. He meets with a secret Refreshment in a Description, and often feels a greater Satisfaction in the Prospect of Fields and Meadows, than another does in the Possession. It gives him, indeed, a kind of Property in every thing he sees, and makes the most rude uncultivated Parts of Nature administer to his Pleasures: So that he looks upon the World, as it were, in another Light, and discovers in it a Multitude of Charms, that conceal themselves from the generality of Mankind" (*Spectator* No. 411, June 21, 1712; Bond (ed.) 1965, vol. III, 538).

[10] See also I, 91: "The admirers of beauty in the fair sex would laugh, perhaps, to hear of a moral part in their amours." Cf. I, 324 f.

made by Shaftesbury: the unity of the good and the beautiful (rational beauty). Shaftesbury derived from his reading of Plato and Plotinus a view of the universe as one harmonious whole, and was in this question, as in many others, deeply influenced by the Cambridge Platonists.[11] To know what is true, good, or beautiful requires insight into "inward numbers" (I, 217). Knowledge of truth, beauty, and goodness is insight into an actual order in the universe, characterized by given numerical proportions, particularly symmetry (see for example II, 267-268):

> . . . what is beautiful is harmonious and proportionable; what is harmonious and proportionable is true; and what is at once both beautiful and true is, of consequence, agreeable and good (II, 268-269).
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> . . . the most natural beauty in the world is honesty and moral truth. For all beauty is truth. True features make the beauty of a face; and true proportions the beauty of architecture; as true measures that of harmony and music. In poetry, which is all fable, truth still is the perfection (I, 94).

It is my contention that Shaftesbury, rather than separating the contemplation of beauty from the sphere of morality, wants to place it solidly within the realm of an acceptable morality. What he is saying is that there is a moral way of admiring things, a way which is not to be identified with covetousness, avarice, ostentation and similar - to Shaftesbury and most of his contemporaries - immoral qualities.[12]

Taken in its most literal sense, Shaftesbury's argument seeks to separate the desire for possessions and property from the (rational) appreciation of something for its beauty. Why was their separation important for Shaftesbury? As I have shown above, the notion that "interest rules the world" was common in the late seventeenth

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[11] See Cassirer 1932b for this question. My concern is with the contemporary context of Shaftesbury's writings in general, and their actual reception in particular. It is, therefore, beyond the scope of this work to go into details about Shaftesbury's theoretical sources.

[12] Shaftesbury gives a related example in connection with mathematics: when doing mathematics it is possible to experience "a pleasure and delight superior to that of sense" (I, 296), but this pleasure has no connection to any advantage we ourselves may derive from it. See also the previously quoted passage by Addison (Note no. 9, above).

and early eighteenth century, and "interest" was in particular connected with wealth. It was a commonly held opinion in contemporary discourse that appreciation and desire to possess could be conflated, or that the one (appreciation, admiration) would naturally lead to the other (desire to possess). Shaftesbury was opposing views held by three of the most influential philosophers of his time, Locke, Hobbes, and Descartes. Though his arguments were directed against the philosophers they were, at the same time, part of a tangled contemporary controversy, to which I will return shortly. But first I must say a few words about the philosophers.

In his *Essay* Locke defines joy as a

> . . . delight of the mind, from the consideration of the present or assured approaching possession of a good; and we are then possessed of any good when we have it so in our power that we can use it when we please (*Essay*, II.xx.7).

The notion of joy or enjoyment expressed by Locke comes close to the one Theocles argues against in the above quotation from *The Moralists* (p. 142). Locke's view has strong similarities to views expressed by Descartes and Hobbes. In *The Passions of the Soul*, a work we know (from comments in the *Characteristics* (I, 191)) Shaftesbury despised, Descartes says that most passions are caused by our encounter with different objects. But whether or not objects "excite diverse passions in us" depends, not on the objects, but only on the possible use we think they may be to us, "because of the diverse ways in which they may harm or help us, or in general be of some importance to us".[13] The beauty of flowers, which are of no use to us, "incites us only to look at them", whereas the beauty of fruits incites us to eat them.[14]

In *Leviathan* Hobbes identifies the use of the term beauty with that of containing a promise of something good (Hobbes 1651, 121). To Hobbes there is no

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[13] *The Passions of the Soul*, second part, art. LII; in: *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, translated by E. S. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross, vol 1, p. 357.

[14] ibid., Article XC, p. 371.

absolute good (120, 160), but everyone desires power, because power is the only means by which it is possible to secure whatever we may individually consider good (150, 161). What is good is simply what we desire, "whatsoever is the object of any mans Appetite or Desire" (120). Appetite is what moves us towards objects. The appearance of something good gives rise to pleasures, most of which - such as what is pleasant in "*Sight, Hearing, Smell, Tast, or Touch*" (122) - are of a sensual kind. Hobbes allows for pleasures of the mind, but these are just expectations or imaginations of the other, sensuous, pleasures. In sum, Hobbes' view is close to the view expressed by Locke in the passage from the *Essay* quoted above.[15]

It is, then, a common assumption in Descartes', Hobbes' and Locke's discussion of pleasure and enjoyment that these are entirely sensuous and based on individual self-interest. Shaftesbury's argument that we have an ability disinterestedly to observe something beautiful, and that this beauty is (or can be) of a non-sensuous, rational kind, can now be seen to serve an important function in Shaftesbury's general philosophical strategy: it underlines and illustrates his criticism of the view, prevalent in the last half of the seventeenth century and in the eighteenth century, that human beings always act only on the basis of "interest" or "self-love". Criticism of the view of human nature as guided by "interest" had occupied Shaftesbury since his first published work.[16] When we see something beautiful, and appreciate it in the proper manner, we

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[15] Hobbes also identifies possession of a high degree of wit and fancy with desire for power and riches: "The Passions that most of all cause the differences of Wit, are principally, the more or less Desire of Power, Riches, of Knowledge and of Honour. All which may be reduced to the first, that is Desire of Power. For Riches, Knowledge and Honour are but severall sorts of Power" (1651, 139). The absence of a desire for riches, etc. consequently leads to a lack of fancy and judgement.

[16] This is another area in which there is agreement between Shaftesbury's position and the view of the Cambridge Platonists. Shaftesbury's first published work was a preface to a collection of sermons by the Cambridge Platonist Benjamin Whichcote (Whichcote 1698). See for example the attack on Hobbes in the preface, xxv f. Many elements in Shaftesbury's conception of human nature and of his moral philosophy can be found in Whichcote's sermons, but as J. A. Bernstein points out in his introduction to

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have, according to Shaftesbury, an instance where we are beyond any narrow self-interest. Disinterestedness is, therefore, not a category which takes aesthetic contemplation beyond the sphere of morality, but one that places it squarely within the realm of morality. Even when the concept is ostensibly used in its most directly aesthetic sense it has a clear moral content.

But which moral content? I have briefly related Shaftesbury's standpoint to those of Locke, Descartes, and Hobbes, but the discussion about pleasure and the possibility of disinterested contemplation had, as mentioned, much more than philosophical significance. It was an important part of a cultural struggle about the direction England should take after the revolution of 1688, and about the formation of those new ideals of behaviour I have discussed in Chapters Four and Five. Lacking an appropriate English term I will use the German *Bildungsideal* to designate these ideals. Shaftesbury and his contemporaries used terms like "good-breeding", "manners" and "politeness". For Shaftesbury morality and manners cannot be separated, and the content of Shaftesbury's moral-aesthetic view must therefore be understood through an examination of this *Bildungsideal*. Shaftesbury's conception of the virtuoso gentleman becomes part of a new *Bildungsideal*, and an interest in the arts is a central ingredient in this ideal.

In promoting his alternative, Shaftesbury is maneuvering among a number of positions: He opposes the vulgar habits of the people as well as the luxurious living identified with the court. But he also rejects the excessive zeal shown by many of the middling sort of people, particularly as they gained expression in the Societies for the Reformation of Manners in the last decade of the seventeenth century and the first decades of the eighteenth century.

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[16](...continued)
the 1977 facsimile reprint of the work, we "cannot judge the degree to which the reading of these sermons actually influenced the young Shaftesbury, or were merely consonant with views he had already formed" (vii).

In section 6.3. I show that the discussion about the arts cannot be separated from that broader political process which was the formation of a new England after 1688. This is not just how it appears in retrospect, but the way the people involved in the discussions in the first decades of the eighteenth century actually discussed the questions. It is in this context that the urgency for Shaftesbury to address the relationship between morality and beauty arises. It is necessary to address his relationship to the Societies for the Reformation of Manners because Shaftesbury's position emerges out of his theoretical engagement with them. He was sympathetic to many of their goals, but did not share their total rejection of refinement. It was against them, his political allies, that he felt he had to defend himself, by showing that their moral suspicions of the arts and refinement were unjustified. Art appreciation was not morally suspect; it did not lead to libertinism. Out of this grows Shaftesbury's conception of politeness. In section 6.4. I discuss the nature of politeness - the alternative *Bildungsideal* that Shaftesbury suggests.

6.3.: The Reformation of Manners

The political revolution in England in 1688 was accompanied by what has been called a moral revolution (Bahlman 1957). An essential part of this moral revolution was the reformation of manners. For those most eager in the reformation of manners, manners and morality were not sharply separated. To the extent that they were distinguished at all, they were seen as two sides of the same issue.[17]

In a larger historical perspective the interest in the reformation of manners is part of the demise of a popular culture in Europe (see Burke 1978, particularly ch. 8).

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[17] "Manners and morals were regulated, because it is through the *minutiae* of conduct that the enemy of mankind finds his way to the soul; the traitors of the Kingdom might be revealed by pointed shoes or golden ear-rings" (Tawney 1926, 124).

Throughout the Middle Ages the official ecclesiastical and political culture was parallelled by a less serious undercurrent of folkculture or popular culture (Bakhtin 1965 and Burke 1978). It is important to appreciate this aspect of medieval and renaissance culture in order to understand the Enlightenment's preoccupation with the reform of manners. The "laughter culture" or "carnival culture", as Bakhtin calls it, was characterized by total opposition to the serious, political, feudal and ecclesiastical forms and ceremonies. During carnival everybody was equal, the usual hierarchies dividing people were suspended. This popular culture was also a culture of the market place, for example Bartholomew Fair in London.[18] Though this was a folk-culture, it was not restricted to the lower classes. Both the nobility and the clergy participated widely in popular culture, particularly during festivals (Burke 1978, 24f.; Malcolmson 1973, 13).[19] In addition to popular culture the upper classes had a separate culture in what Burke calls the "great tradition" of the classical heritage as it was transmitted in the schools and universities, from which the lower classes were of course excluded. The reformers of the late seventeenth century therefore directed their efforts against the people, but also against the more backward elements of the upper classes who retained a connection with popular culture. The reform movement of the late seventeenth century was not the first such attempt. In the sixteenth century Puritans had made similar attempts, but with less success (see Burke 1978, 207 ff.). The upper class was then still united with the

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[18] "Bartholomew Fair was held at Smithfield on 25 August, the feast of St Bartholomew. There, in the seventeenth century, you could see plays, puppet-shows, clowns, rope-dancers and waxworks, introduced by showmen dressed as fools or as wild men of the woods, while your ears were assaulted by drums and penny trumpets . . ." (Burke 1978, 112). Cf. below on Shaftesbury's attitude to the fair.

[19] Regarding festivals in early eighteenth century England, see Malcolmson 1973, ch. 2. About the participation of the upper classes in popular recreations Malcolmson ch. 4. "[D]uring the first half of the eighteenth century in particular, many gentlemen were not entirely disengaged from the culture of the common people. They frequently occupied something of a half-way house between the robust, unpolished culture of provincial England and the cosmopolitan, sophisticated culture which was based in London" (Malcolmson 1973, 68).

people against the reformers, and in 1633 Charles I issued a proclamation defending the rights of the people to their traditional entertainments (Malcolmson 1973, 11).

The theatre was one of those places where high and low would meet in common entertainment, and it was one of the institutions the Puritans most vehemently opposed. Shaftesbury comments on the state of theatre: The state of the royal theatre is in many ways no different from that of the popular circus or bear-garden (II, 315). Many people, indeed, seem to frequent both places indiscriminately. Shaftesbury emphasizes that there is nothing wrong with theatre in itself: "The practice and art is honest in itself. Our foundations are well laid" (I, 315). But in theatre, poetry and other arts, as well as in manners and in life in general, politeness requires obedience to certain standards of good taste.

Shaftesbury occasionally comments on still existing forms of popular culture. That Shaftesbury was familiar with carnivals is evident from his reference to the carnivals at Paris and Venice (I, 57). Shaftesbury considered carnival a ridiculous practice, and also says that " . . . he who laughs and is himself ridiculous, bears a double share of ridicule" (ibid.). The carnivalesque laughter has according to Bakhtin the exact opposite feature: As opposed to the case in, say, modern satires, here there is no difference between being the object and the subject of ridicule. You are laughing at yourself and the world. The carnivalesque laughter is connected with popular culture, and opposition to it is only one part of the changing attitudes to popular culture and the "turn to modernity".[20]

The change in manners was not just left to chance, but implemented in a systematic way by the Societies for the Reformation of Manners. The first such society

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[20] It is instructive to compare to Chesterfield's attitude to laughter. He writes to his son that "[f]requent and loud laughter is the characteristic of folly and ill manners; it is the manner in which the mob express their silly joy at silly things; and they call it being merry. In my mind there is nothing so illiberal, and so ill bred, as audible laughter" (*Letters to his Son*, CXLIV, March 9, 1748; quoted in Heltzel 1925, 429-30).

was formed in London in 1690, but the idea rapidly spread to other parts of Britain (Bahlman 1957, 31 f.). In a proclamation from 1689 King William emphasized the significance of the reformation of manners:

> We most earnestly desire and shall endeavour a general reformation of manners of all our subjects as being that which must establish our throne and secure to our people their religion, happiness, and peace, all which seem to be in great danger at this time by reason of that overflowing of vice which is too notorious in this as well as other neighboring nations (quoted from Bahlman 1957, 15 - see also Woodward 1699).

Another proclamation "For preventing and punishing Immorality and Prophaneness" was issued by William in February 1697 (Woodward 1699). This proclamation is essentially an encouragement to enforce the existing laws. It urges mayors, sheriffs, justices of the peace, and everybody else for that matter,

> . . . to be very Vigilant and Strict in the Discovery and the Effectual Prosecusion and Punishment of all persons who shall be Guilty of Eccessive Drinking, Blasphemy, Prophane Swearing and Cursing, Lewdness, Prophanation of the Lords Day, or other Dissolute, Immoral or disorderly Practices (Woodward 1699).

This proclamation had to be read in church at least four times a year. Since many people, if left to their own devices, would prefer to play football or dance rather than go to church, profanation of the Lord's day and popular culture were closely connected in the minds of many Puritans (Malcolmson 1973, 9).

The repeated proclamations with their encouragement to enforce the existing laws indicate that it was not a straightforward task to teach the unruly Britons to behave themselves. An important task of the Societies for the Reformation of Manners was to secure the enforcement of existing laws against profaneness, drunkenness, swearing and so on. Through a net of informers these societies went about their work, and in 1704 Woodward reports that no less than thirty thousand persons had been convicted for profane swearing and cursing, and about the same number had been punished for other forms of disorderly behaviour (Woodward 1704, 32). In 1720 Woodward claims 75,270 prosecutions since 1691 (Bahlman 1957, 56). In addition to

securing the enforcement of the laws, the societies distributed religious tracts and "Dissvasives from the Vices of the Age" (Woodward 1704, 32), of which Woodward's account of the societies and his reports on their progress are examples.

The reason for the zeal shown in the reformation of manners was not just that swearing and drinking were undesirable forms of behaviour, but that a reformation of manners was seen as a necessary prerequisite for social stability. Lewd and vicious persons had a spirit which was not conducive to subordination, but to the levelling of social differences (Bahlman 1957, 42 f.).[21] The Puritan divine Richard Baxter (1615-1691) found that those participating in the popular festivals are led into "idleness, riotousness and disobedience to their Superiors".[22] The discussion about manners was, thus, inseparable from political discussions and the struggle to shape the new England after 1688. Most of the members of the reforming societies were not Anglican. Socially they seem to have been composed mostly of tradesmen and apprentices (Bahlman 1957, 69), and they were most successful in the cities, particularly in London (Malcolmson 1973, 160-161). The societies promoted the puritan values of industriousness and seriousness, and the discipline necessary for work in larger manufacturing industries with a division of labour more complicated than in a rural economy (cf. Malcolmson 1973, 90). Because the ideals are closely connected to the growth of an economy which has its centre in the city rather than in the country, the growing influence of these ideals parallels the demise of the traditional rural economy. Tawney identifies this ideal with Calvinism:

> . . . a society which seeks wealth with the sober gravity of men who are conscious at once of disciplining their own character by patient labour, and of devoting themselves to a service acceptable to God (Tawney 1926, 114).

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[21] John Dennis said so directly: a reformation of manners "would confirm the present establishment, both in Church and State" (Dennis, *The Person of Quality's Answer to Mr.Collier's Letter*, p. 29; quoted in Bahlman 1957, 43).

[22] Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory* (2nd ed., London, 1678), Book I, 390. Quoted from Malcolmson 1973, 7.

According to Tawney, Baxter condemned luxury, unrestrained pleasure, and personal extravagance; for "every penny which is laid out . . . must be done as by God's own appointment" (Tawney, 241-242). Terms like "frugality", "squandering" and "spendthrift" became widely used for the first time towards the end of the sixteenth century, the first to designate a positive attitude to a certain form of behaviour, the latter two to express "a new disapproval of the aristocratic ideal of conspicuous consumption".[23] Though these values were puritan in origin they became widely accepted, and they were not limited to dissenters, but ultimately accepted by the Church of England, as can be seen in, for example, the Charity School Movement (Malcolmson 1973, 90). In the process Puritanism loses whatever revolutionary aspirations it originally had.[24]

To understand the role of art in this context, it is important to point out that the arts were not seen only in terms of the fine arts. For most people in the early eighteenth century they also included gardening, for example, and Hutcheson discusses dress, equipage and furniture almost on a par with painting and sculpture. The discussion of dress and fashion played a particularly prominent role.[25] In Shaftesbury's use of 'art' some of the ancient meaning of skill is preserved. Surgery and horsemanship are called arts (I, 105; II, 9), but most of what we would include among the fine arts are also called arts by Shaftesbury: painting (I, 94, 214, 219; II, 242), music (I, 227), architecture (I, 227; II, 63, 242), sculpture (statuary) (I, 214, 227; II, 242), poetry

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[23] Quentin Skinner, "Some problems in the analysis of political thought and action", in Tully (ed.) 1988, 114-115.

[24] "In both England and New England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries puritanism is transformed from a critique of the established order in the name of King Jesus to an endorsement of the new economic activities of the middle classes. At the end of this process economic man emerges fully fledged; throughout, human nature appears as given, and human need or what is useful to supply it as a single, uncomplicated standard for action. Utility and advantage are treated as clear and perspicuous notions which stand in no further need of justification" (MacIntyre 1966, 150).

[25] See for example Collier 1697, *Upon Cloaths*, and Mandeville 1714, *passim*. For an overview see McKendrick 1982b.

(*passim*). Rhetoric is also an art (I, 188). Music (I, 104) and painting (Shaftesbury 1914, 20) are also sometimes called sciences, along with ethics, dialectics, logic (I, 168) and morality (I, 187, 220), revealing that the two terms could be used almost as synonyms, in the broad sense of skill (" . . . is there no skill or science required?" (II, 130)).

An interest in the arts was often seen as directly connected with the life of the idle rich, or as a mere display of wealth, and therefore morally suspicious. Nothing good would come from making verses, Locke thought, and he advised parents to suppress whatever inclinations their sons might have in that direction (Locke 1693, 167). Making verses would not provide them with a living and was apt to bring them into bad company. Locke did not see much value in painting and music either. Both were too much trouble for a very doubtful gain (ibid., 191, 194).

Showing that involvement with art was not only not adverse to virtue, but on the contrary might contribute to it, was a good argument for the appropriateness of the gentleman's occupation with the arts. Shaftesbury could thus hope to deliver a moral justification for the growing interest in the arts in England in the early eighteenth century.

Though the initial reform of manners had approval and encouragement from the highest places, it was soon feared that it might go too far. The involvement of many Puritans was a cause for particular concern (Bahlman, 84 f.). The Puritans were concerned with reforming the people at large, but their attacks were often directed against the powerful in society. 'Luxury' is a central term in contemporary condemnations of the life of the aristocracy, and it undergoes profound changes in meaning in the course of the eighteenth century.[26] In a tradition stretching from the history of the Israelites to the eighteenth century, the idea of luxury originally had a definite negative sense: a source of destruction and depravity in the individual as well as

[26] See Sekora 1977, Part III.

in the state (Sekora 1977, Part I). Luxury is riot, excess, extravagance, debauchery - the sense in which Shaftesbury uses the term (see for example I, 82, 201-206, 219-220 (note), 321-323). By the mid-eighteenth century, when Hume, continuing a trend begun by Mandeville and Hutcheson, wrote his essay "Of Refinement in the Arts", luxury was no longer a term with exclusively negative connotations, but now had the sense of refinement and polish, at least when not taken to extremes. (The initial title of Hume's essay was actually "Of Luxury".)

Luxury plays a central part in the discussions about the role of the arts and in Shaftesbury's writings. Shaftesbury wants to reject both the vulgar taste of the multitude and a courtly and aristocratic culture that has some of the features identified with the "vulgar", but which is more frequently identified with "luxury". For Shaftesbury the primary seat of luxury is the court:

> 'Tis otherwise with those who are taken up in honest and due employment, and have been well inured to it from their youth. This we may observe in the hardy and remote provincials, the inhabitants of smaller towns, and the industrious sort of common people, where 'tis rare to meet with any instances of those irregularities which are known in courts and palaces, and in the rich foundations of easy and pampered priests (I, 313).

In *Second Characters, or the Language of Forms*, the reign of King Charles II is condemned as one of luxury and pleasure (Shaftesbury, 1914, 20): " . . . it is not the nature of a court (such as courts generally are) to improve, but rather corrupt a taste" (Shaftesbury 1914, 23). In an introduction to a collection of some of Shaftesbury's letters John Toland (1670-1722) says that Shaftesbury sometimes expressed an "uncommon

aversion" for the court (Shaftesbury 1721, xv).[27] Shaftesbury identifies punning, a particular form of wit, with the court, and condemns it, though he considers it mostly a thing of the past (I, 46).[28]

Thus Shaftesbury shared many radical, Protestant values, and he shared most of their political goals. Besides being extremely well-connected with the English Whig leadership (evident from, e.g., the correspondence in Shaftesbury 1900) he was a personal friend of some of the Calvinists in exile in Holland, for example Pierre Bayle. Jean Le Clerc (1657-1736) translated and published writings by Locke and Shaftesbury, and reviewed Shaftesbury's writings favourably in the *Bibliothéque Choisie* (Fowler 1882, 136). Shaftesbury was also a friend of the English Quaker merchant Benjamin Furley (1634-1714). Furley lived in Rotterdam, and Locke had stayed in his house while a refugee in Holland. Furley's home in Rotterdam was the meetingplace for "English republicans, Dutch Dissenters and French refugees" (Jacob 1981, 149). Shaftesbury and Furley corresponded for the rest of their lives. Furley's home might also have been where Shaftesbury met Toland, a radical Whig and republican and, according to Margaret Jacob, a Freemason (see Jacob 1981, 152 f.). The Freemasons played an important part in spreading to the continent what they took to be the principles of the revolution of 1688. Shaftesbury did not approve of all parts of Toland's politics, but he

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[27] "Another thing that much afflicted him, was to see the very designs of the *Revolution* daily perverted, and the noble effects, that ought naturally to stream from it, like to be frustrated: not by the opposers and sworn enemies of it, from whom less cou'd not be expected; but by many of those who were the most active in it, and who suck'd in the Principles of it with their first milk. These, finding the sweet of Places and Pensions, were resolv'd to hold or procure them at any rate" (Toland in Shaftesbury 1721, viii). Shaftesbury began "to be prejudic'd not a little against all Courtiers" (ibid, xv). It is possible, of course, that Toland exaggerated Shaftesbury's aversion to the court to serve his own political (republican) purposes, but judging from Shaftesbury's published writings there is probably a good deal of truth in Toland's remarks.

[28] Addison, too, condemned punning and identified it with the court of King James the First (*Spectator* No. 61, May 10, 1711 and No. 62, May 11, 1711 (Bond (ed.) 1965, vol. I, 260 f.).

did support him financially (Shaftesbury 1900, xxiii-xxiv, cf. Brett 1951, 42).[29] Many Huguenots came to England at the time of the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 (though many came before). In England they supported the Whigs - some of them even came to England with William's army in 1688 (Willcox and Arnstein 1966, 6). From London (and Holland) they would continue to exert their political influence on the continent with propaganda in support of the English spirit, English liberties, and the English political system (Koselleck 1959, 64-65).

Though Shaftesbury shared the political goals and many of the Puritan values of the middling sort of people, he did not share the religious fanaticism of some of them, and he did not think that use of power was an appropriate way to enforce religious beliefs. Everything, Shaftesbury thought, including religious beliefs, should be open to critical scrutiny:

> There can be no impartial and free censure of manners where any peculiar custom or national opinion is set apart, and not only exempted from criticism, but even flattered with the highest art. 'Tis only in a free nation, such as ours, that imposture has no privilege; and that neither the credit of a court, the power of a nobility, nor the awfulness of a Church can give her protection, or hinder her from being arraigned in every shape and appearance (I, 9).

If a certain point of view is true it will hold up to scrutiny, so there is nothing to fear from free criticism: "Let but the search go freely on, and the right measure of everything will soon be found" (I, 10).[30] Though Shaftesbury defended freedom of expression, he also

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[29] The chapter of Shaftesbury's life relating to his, perhaps partly underground, political activities still remains to be written. From a letter written to Benjamin Furley from Naples it appears that Shaftesbury feared that the correspondence between him and Furley was being intercepted. Furley had received a letter without Shaftesbury's seal, though Shaftesbury says he always makes sure to seal his letters (August 9th, 1712; Shaftesbury 1900, 510-11). A letter from later the same year warns Furley against an un-named traitor, and urges him to burn the letter after having read it (Shaftesbury 1900, 519-520).

[30] This is another question in which Shaftesbury may be influenced by the Cambridge Platonists. See Cassirer 1932b, 34 ff. According to the Cambridge School "[t]here can be, and there should be, no such thing as blind faith, that is, a faith which simply eludes examination and justification by reason" (Cassirer 1932b, 39).

imposed limitations on this freedom. Shaftesbury is writing in defence "only of the liberty of *the club*, and of that sort of freedom which is taken amongst gentlemen and friends who know one another perfectly well" (I, 53).[31]

It is often pointed out that Shaftesbury's *Letter Concerning Enthusiasm* (written 1707) is an attack on the excesses of the French Prophets (not to be confused with the Huguenots, who disapproved of the Prophets (see for example Voitle 1984, 324-325; Appendix I to Shaftesbury 1870; Grean 1967, ch. 2)). It is certainly true that Shaftesbury was strongly opposed to claims about miracles and religious revelations,[32] but given the charged moral and political atmosphere in England in the first decade of the eighteenth century, his *Letter Concerning Enthusiasm* would, regardless of Shaftesbury's intentions, be seen as an attack on the attempts to reform manners in general. Ironic statements such as "If the knowing well how to expose any infirmity or vice were a sufficient security for the virtue which is contrary, how excellent an age might we be presumed to live in!" (I, 9) could easily be read by contemporaries as a criticism of the efforts of the reforming societies. Part of the motivation of the reformers was to save souls that might otherwise go to hell, a project Shaftesbury also ridiculed:

> . . . a new sort of policy, which extends itself to another world and considers the future lives and happiness of men rather than the present, has made us leap the bounds of natural humanity; and out of a supernatural charity has taught us the way of plaguing one another most devoutly. It has raised an antipathy which no temporal interest could ever do; and entailed upon us a mutual hatred to all eternity. And now uniformity in opinion (a hopeful project!) is looked on as the only expedient against this evil. *The saving of souls is now the heroic passion of exalted spirits; and is become the chief care of the magistrate, and the very end of government itself* [my italics] (I, 15).

Shaftesbury thought the magistrate should keep out of religious controversies and is clearly opposing the ascription of that role to the magistrates in royal proclamations and

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[31] Cf. also the following remarks " . . . what is contrary to good breeding is . . . contrary to liberty" (ibid.).

[32] See particularly Shaftesbury 1701.

by the reforming societies. He could be - and was - therefore seen as an enemy of propriety and morality as such.

One such attack came from Mary Astell in a pamphlet from 1709. Astell, according to her recent biographer, did not at first know who the author of the *Letter* was, but thought it might be Steele or Swift (Perry 1986, 224-225). Astell, though neither a dissenter nor a Whig, was a reformer, and opened a charity school in 1709 (Perry, 238).[33] The pamphlet often distorts Shaftesbury's views, and in retrospect it seems that the disagreements between Astell and Shaftesbury are less significant than they were initially perceived to be. Astell was a Tory and longed for the good old days. She read Shaftesbury's letter as an expression of the decay in manners and morals which had happened in the time since the disappearance of the "Ancient *English* Peerage" (Astell 1709, 83). These ancient peers of England "subdu'd themselves, as well as their Enemies. Their Health was not consum'd in Debauchery, nor were their Estates squander'd in Vanity, Gaming and Luxury" (Astell 1709, 83-84). By contrast, the present aristocrats are "Covetuous, Boasters, Proud, Disobedient, Unthankful, Unholy, without Natural affection . . . lovers of their own selves" (82). The position Shaftesbury defends is repeatedly identified with that of a "libertine", a "great man", or simply a gentleman. The pleasures of a true Christian are of a lasting character, while those of the libertine (such as Shaftesbury) are of a fleeting and disappearing kind (89-90). Christianity is opposed to luxury and sloth. The libertine is enjoying only "Brutal Pleasure" (139), or "Pleasures of Sensation". The Libertine is always a "Slave to the Appetites" (140).

These historical events may seem irrelevant to the philosophical questions, but they are not. They provide the reason why Shaftesbury would present an argument about the morality of art appreciation, in the manner I have interpreted him to do, and

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[33] Richard Steele was, judging from *Tatler* No. 3 (April 16, 1709) himself actually a member of a Society for Reformation of Manners, though obviously a relatively moderate member.

therefore lend historical support to my interpretation. They show why a moral justification for the involvement with art was a politically and personally urgent task for Shaftesbury.

The accusations raised by Mary Astell are exactly those Shaftesbury tries to keep at a distance in his explanation of disinterested contemplation of art and nature, and they add force to the claim that Shaftesbury's argumentation was not meant to separate the contemplation of art from morality, but instead to place it within an acceptable morality, a morality which freed the gentleman from the accusation of luxury and sloth. That Shaftesbury saw a need to address these questions can perhaps be inferred from some of the changes made between the publication of *The Sociable Enthusiast* in 1703 or 1704 and the publication of *The Moralists* in 1709. *The Moralist* is essentially an extended version of *The Sociable Enthusiast*.[34] One of the questions elaborated on in *The Moralists*, as compared to the earlier version, is the distinction between the pleasures of sense and the pleasures of reason. Shaftesbury vehemently attacks those who seek only sensuous pleasures, and calls them "our modern Epicures" (SE, 92; RE, II, 32). Among the "purely mental" satisfactions Shaftesbury mentions the work of the mathematician, the toils of the "bookish man", and "the artist who endures voluntarily the greatest hardships and fatigues" (ibid.). In fact, the "satisfactions of the mind" and the "enjoyments of reason and judgement" should not properly be called pleasures at all. These pleasures are not accessible to the Epicureans - they have called them pleasures only to dignify the term pleasure and, by implication, to give themselves a license to practice pleasures of a more vulgar kind (SE, 92; RE, II, 33).

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[34] According to Rand, Shaftesbury's reaction to the treatises answering his *Letter* can be found in a letter dated May 5th, 1709, addressed to a student in the university (Shaftesbury 1900, xxvi), but I have not been able to see this letter. The *Sociable Enthusiast* is now published in Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, *Standard Edition. Complete Works, Selected Letters and posthumous Writings.* In the following SE refers to the Standard Edition, while RE refers to the previously used Robertson Edition.

Mary Astell was not the only one suspicious of the new rich. A similar attitude is expressed in a book on courtesy from the early eighteenth century, *The English Theophrastus*, published in three editions between 1702 and 1708. Though I have not, so far, been able to determine that Shaftesbury knew this work, many of the ideas advanced in it are similar to Shaftesbury's (e.g. the conception of philosophy, cf. below), and the demand for the book supports the assumption that the ideas advanced in it had currency in the early part of the eighteenth century.[35] In it we read that the "generality of Mankind sink in Virtue as they rise in Fortune. How many hopeful young Men by the sudden Accession of a good Estate have deviated into Debauchery, nay turned absolute Rakes" (71-72). It is different with those who have acquired wealth by their own industry. "It is not for acquiring Wealth, but for misemploying it when he has acquired it, that a Man ought to be blamed" (78). The book is clearly addressed to a middle class audience. The "Middle State both of Body and Fortune" is declared to be the best (75), and notions of nobility and birthright are dispelled.

Again, similar sentiments are expressed by Jeremy Collier (1650-1726). To have a high position in society is only deserving of respect if it is a result of one's own achievement. Hereditary nobility is no guarantee for the moral uprightness of the person - on the contrary, if people with a noble title have a certain air about them it is probably because they have never done an honest day's work, and is the result of a "Slothful and Effeminate Life" (Collier 1697, Part I, 58). Differences in social position, Collier repeatedly emphasizes, are necessary for the promotion of industry and the support of government (Part I, 16, 62, 100). But the important thing is present merit, not whatever one's forefathers, however deserving, may have done. Distinction is

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[35] Abel Boyer, *The English Theophrastus; or the Manners of the Age. Being the Modern Characters of the Court, the Town, and the City* (1702) second ed., 1706. For evidence of views similar to Boyer's see Klein 1984. Regarding Shaftesbury's possible knowledge of the work, Klein 1984, 198-199. The work was in any case not an original work but a compilation of views and statements from other works.

necessary as a reward for merit and industry. If it were not possible to better one's position in society nobody would be industrious (63). One should not exhibit one's superior position. For private persons to appear "Pompous in Equipage or Habit, is but a vain-glorious Publishing of their own Grandeur" (100). One should conceal rather than make an ostentatious display of wealth (ibid.). Besides, outward appearance is no reliable guide to people's position in society, since "every one has the liberty to be as Expensive, and Modish as he pleases. . . . ordinary People, when they happen to abound in Money and Vanity, have their Houses and Persons as richly Furnished, as those who are much their superiors" (102). Dressing beyond one's station in life, Collier thought, was not just immoral: It could have the most dangerous political implications. To do so

> . . . looks like a Levelling Principle; like an Illegal Aspiring into a forbidden Station. It looks as if they had a Mind to destroy the Order of Government, and to confound the Distinctions of Merit and Degree (Collier 1697, Part I, 111).

For Collier, morality, manners and politics are closely connected - even down to the level of the choice of dress. But often the connection between manners and morality or virtue were seen as a negative connection (see Klein, 1984). Politeness was all appearance, and no soul. Shaftesbury wanted to show that it did not have to be like this - that politeness and virtue could be connected.

6.4.: Shaftesbury and Politeness

Shaftesbury saw himself as a part of a new England which had come into being after 1688. Many things, particularly in the political and economical spheres, had greatly improved: "We are now in an age when Liberty is once again in its ascendant" (I, 145). But much was still to be desired. England's financial and political growth had not been accompanied by a comparable growth in taste and politeness (II, 249, 314). Since, however, "[a]ll politeness is owing to liberty" (I, 46, see also Shaftesbury 1914,

105) England was now in a favourable position to take that leadership position which once belonged to Greece.[36] Politeness, for Shaftesbury, can only blossom under conditions of liberty. Where freedom prevails - such as in England or among the ancients (I, 50-51, cf. 142-143) - urbanity and politeness will be the dominant forms of expression. Where liberty is wanting (such as in Italy), rustic forms of expression (raillery, etc.) prevail. Shaftesbury sees it as one of his principle tasks to bring England to a position of cultural leadership among the nations of Europe.[37]

As shown in Chapters Four and Five, notions of social status were rapidly changing in England in the seventeenth century, reflected in, among other things a change in the conception of what it is to be a gentleman. In a situation where questions of social status and position are uncertain, questions of the presentation of the self - what I have called the expressive order - become particularly important. Terms like "politeness" and "good breeding" were, around Shaftesbury's time, expressions for the desirable patterns of social behaviour. As Klein remarks, "'politeness' was not a form of nostalgia, but a program for modernity" (Klein 1984, 213).

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[36] As already Hume pointed out, this connection between liberty and growth in arts and sciences hardly holds up to a closer historical scrutiny. In reference to Addison and Shaftesbury Hume says: "But what would these writers have said, to the instances of modern ROME and of FLORENCE? Of which the former carried to perfection all the finer arts of sculpture, painting, and music, as well as poetry, though it groaned under tyranny, and under the tyranny of priests: While the latter made its chief progress in the arts and sciences, after it began to lose its liberty to the usurpation of the family of MEDICI." Hume, "Of Civil Liberty" (1741), in Hume 1777, 90.

[37] " . . . the figure we are like to make abroad, and the increase of knowledge, industry and sense at home, will render united Britain the principal seat of arts . . . When the free spirit of a nation turns itself this way [to the improvement of art and science], judgments are formed; critics arise; the public eye and ear improve; a right taste prevails, and in a manner forces its way. Nothing is so improving, nothing so natural, so congenial to the liberal arts, as that reigning liberty and high spirit of a people, which from the habit of judging in the highest matters for themselves, makes them freely judge of other subjects, and enter thoroughly into the characters as well of men and manners, as of the products or works of men, in art and science" (Shaftesbury 1914, 20-23). According to Steele, "the present grandeur of the British nation might make us expect, that we should rise in our public diversions, and manner of enjoying life, in proportion to our advancement in glory and power." (*Tatler* No. 12, May 7, 1709)

Politeness is an elusive concept. It is sometimes used in the sense of "civilized" or "cultured", as when Shaftesbury describes ancient Greece as a polite nation. Politeness, in this sense, describes a high degree of development towards some ideal. More often, however, politeness relates to the behaviour of individuals. It expresses an ideal of behaviour, a *Bildungsideal,* and is synonymous with good-breeding, manners or gentility, occasionally with gallantry (Hume). Politeness or breeding is the criterion for membership in the elite.

Manners or politeness show themselves in all areas of behaviour, from the taking of snuff (discussed by Steele in *Tatler* No. 35), to the principles of literary criticism (as in Addison's discussion of the critic, *Spectator* No. 291). The essence of politeness consists, according to James Forrester, in the right timing and discreet management of "a Thousand little *Civilities, Complacencies,* and *Endeavours* to give others *Pleasure*" (Forrester 1734, 10).[38]

For Locke, too, the most important accomplishment in politeness or breeding is to please others, to do what is expected of us in social intercourse. Locke emphasizes that the two most important parts of breeding are " . . . a disposition of the mind not to offend others; and secondly, the most acceptable and agreeable way of expressing that disposition" (Locke 1693, 134). This state is achieved chiefly by emulation of "persons above us", by observation of those "who are allowed to be exactly well-bred" (ibid.). For Forrester it is possible to explain only negatively what politeness is - its actual mastery must be achieved by emulation, "from Company and Observation" (40), particularly by interacting with "the Ladies".

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[38] Forrester's little book must have enjoyed considerable popularity. The *British Library Catalogue* lists 8 different editions between 1734 and 1773. Johnson defined politeness in similar terms. It is "the observance of those little civilities and ceremonious delicacies, which inconsiderable as they may appear to the man of science, and difficult as they may prove to be detailed with dignity, yet contribute to the regulation of the world, by facilitating the intercourse between one man and another . . ." *Rambler* No. 98, Feb. 23, 1751. Quoted from Heltzel 1925, 445.

Locke is sufficiently steeped in the puritan tradition to modify the emphasis on appearance which gradually became the sole content of the tradition of politeness. One's behaviour should reflect a genuine good-will and regard for all people, and Locke's entire regimen of education is an earnest attempt to acquire self-discipline (as is Benjamin Franklin's). For Forrester, as later for Chesterfield, what you actually think of other people is irrelevant. The rules for politeness Forrester offers "are intended . . . to guide Men in *Company*", rather than when they are alone. "What we advance tends not so directly to amend People's Hearts, as to regulate their Conduct" (Forrester 1734, 20). It is revealing that Forrester often uses economic metaphors. He compares the concern for the minutiae of manners to the concern for small amounts of money: "People are too apt to think lightly of Shillings and Pence, forgetting that they are the constituent Parts of a Pound" (9). By politeness one can defend and achieve a good reputation or fame. "Fame is a kind of Goods, which, when once taken away, can *hardly* be restored" (26). "*Conversation* is a Sort of *Bank,* in which all who compose it have their respective Shares" (31). Politeness is the manner in which you present your-self in the hope of increasing your own value on the market. Forrester's position represents the commodification of inter-personal relationships.

The eighteenth-century gentleman is an example of the significance of what Thorstein Veblen calls conspicuous leisure: certain types of activity, in particular certain types of work, by which one may earn a living are seen as debasing. It is necessary to display one's distance from such activities, and this is done through "conspicuous leisure". The display can be accomplished indirectly, through "immaterial evidences of past leisure" (Veblen 1899, 45) such as being well versed in classical literature or languages, which have no practical application. A knowledge about the "latest proprieties of dress, furniture, and equipage" is also required. Besides these, an important area is that of manners, breeding, polite usage, and formal and ceremonial observances (ibid.). Knowledge of classical languages and literature is among the requirements Addison

mentions for achieving "polite Learning" (in *Spectator,* No. 291). The term "polite arts" expresses a social approval of the occupation with certain forms of art. William Aglionby used the term "polite arts" for painting, architecture, sculpture, music, gardening, conversation, and "prudent Behaviour".[39] We find almost the same classification of the "polite arts" in Shaftesbury, though he also expressed some concern that painting is a vulgar art (Shaftesbury 1914, 18). The "polite arts", which from the mid-eighteenth century simply become the "fine arts", represent in this way a new historical form of the old distinction between the vulgar or mechanical arts, and the liberal arts. The classical division of the arts into liberal and vulgar, or mechanical, arts depended on whether or not they relied on physical or manual effort (Tatarkiewicz 1980, 88-89; Barasch 1985, 23). Those requiring manual effort were considered inferior, and consequently inappropriate activities for the elite. As long as the arts are "polite" their connection to a social elite is apparent. Though less apparent, they retain this connection when they become the "fine arts", as Roger Fry discovered in the early parts of this century (cf. the earlier quoted passage from Fry (pp. 51-52), see sect. 8.3. below, and Klein 1984, 201-202).

Veblen remarks that in periods in which conspicuous leisure is of particular importance, and eighteenth century England would be an instance of such a period, the emphasis on manners is greater (Veblen 1899, 46). This is because manners are themselves evidence of (past) conspicuous leisure. "The knowledge and habit of good form come only by long-continued use" (48), and are therefore also a safeguard against impostors.

> Refined tastes, manners and habits of life are a useful evidence of gentility, because good breeding requires time, application, and expense, and can therefore not be compassed by those whose time and energy are taken up with work. A knowledge of good form is *prima facie* evidence that that portion of the well bred person's life which is not spent under the

[39] See Klein 1984, 201, note 39.

> observation of the spectator has been worthily spent in acquiring accomplishments that are of no lucrative effect (48-49).

As mentioned in passing, Steele's and Addison's project in some of the *Spectator*-papers must also be seen in the context of the advancement of politeness and manners. Dr. Johnson saw Addison's papers in *The Spectator* as a continuation of Casa's and Castiglione's writings on the conduct of the courtier, and the first English contribution to this genre.[40] In his examination of Addison's and Steele's *Bildungsideal* Walter Göricke draws a similar conclusion. The ideal gentleman envisioned by Addison and Steele retains elements of the leisured courtier described for example by Castiglione (1478-1529) in *Il Cortegiano* (English translation 1561). A gentleman is still not supposed to make his living from manual labour *(Tatler* No. 66, Göricke 1921, 23), but the ideal is strongly modified under influence of what are in effect puritan values, and particularly influenced by what Göricke calls *das Nützlichkeitsideal*: Education must be useful for the fulfilment of particular tasks in life (an idea Göricke traces back to Milton (Göricke 1921, 14 f.)). Addison and Steele develop, as I have shown Shaftesbury does, a historical compromise between puritan sternness and religious zeal, and the traditional leisured life of the aristocracy (cf. Göricke 36, and Plumb 1982a, 269).

Understandably, this new ideal had great appeal for the new upper class, and Shaftesbury's (and Addison's) new *Bildungsideal* was the one which became victorious in the course of the eighteenth century. Plumb observes that Addison "was the model essayist in thought as well as style" when he was a boy at school (Plumb 1982a, 284. Plumb was born in 1911). The new *Bildungsideal* offered an alternative to the traditional values of the gentry, though it retained some aristocratic values. It was less

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[40] "Before *The Tatler* and *Spectator,* if the writers for the theatre are excepted, England had no masters of common life. No writers had yet undertaken to reform either the savageness of neglect or the impertinence of civility . . ." (Samuel Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets*, Oxford 1905, vol. 2, 93 f.). Bahlman observes that the influence of *The Spectator* and *The Tatler* were, in no small part, due to the more light-hearted manner in which Steele and Addison presented their ideas of reformation of manners (Bahlman 1957, 102-103).

harsh than the one proposed by the Puritans. As one writer in the *London Journal* observes:

> 'Tis well known what good Effect the Essays in the *Tatlers* and *Spectators* had on the Manners of this Town. There was such a Delicacy in the Raillery, such a Becomingness in the Reproofs, that Men were shamed out of Folly and Vice, upon the Principles of Good Behaviour; and Society was freed from the Insults of Fools and Rakes, without their being allarm'd with the Terrors of Religion, or the Threats of the Law (*The London Journal*, No. CCCXXI, September 18, 1725).

Through this process, high- and low-culture become increasingly separated. The upper classes no longer participate in popular culture, but come to view it contemptuously. The popular becomes vulgar, and attempts at its systematic oppression increase.

Not surprisingly, many writers in the early eighteenth century criticized what they took to be the lack of connection between morality or virtue on the one side and politeness on the other. In *The English Theophrastus* we read:

> Politeness, or Good-breeding, does not always inspire a Man with Humanity, Justice, Complaisance and Gratitude, but yet it gives him the outside of those vertues, and makes him in appearance what he should be in reality (111, cf. Klein 1984, 190-191).

The lack of connection between virtue and politeness or good manners was also a theme for Mandeville: manners and good breeding consist "in a Fashionable Habit, acquired by Precept and Example, of Flattering the Pride and Selfishness of Others, and concealing our own with Judgment and Dexterity" (Mandeville 1714, I.77). "Good Manners have nothing to do with Virtue or Religion; instead of extinguishing, they rather inflame the Passions" (Mandeville, I.79).[41]

Many authors of the period saw a contradiction between the emphasis on appearance or self-presentation and sincerity or moral uprightness (see Klein 1984, 190

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[41] Most of Mandeville's work was published too late for it to have any direct influence on Shaftesbury, but it was the starting point for Hutcheson's development of his own moral philosophy (discussed in Chapter Seven).

ff.). The enormously popular *The Whole Duty of Man*[42] emphasizes the obligation of humility, a duty violated by pride. Pride in the goods of Fortune (wealth and honour) add nothing to a man, except "outward pomp and bravery" (54). It is a virtue to be content with our position in life, and not be ambitious and covetous (60-61). The author also urges us to observe modesty in apparel. To follow fashion in dress is "a most ridiculous folly" - though differences in dress are necessary to distinguish between people of different stations in society. Everybody should dress in accordance with their place and calling, but not strive to dress better than their position allows for or strive to appear as their superiors (77-78). The argument was essentially repeated by Hutcheson, as we shall see below.

What Shaftesbury (and also e.g. Addison and Steele) wanted to do was to overcome this contradiction, to show that politeness was compatible with virtue, and that a central part of politeness is an interest in the arts and forming a correct taste, and the other way around: a proper (disinterested) approach to art reflects back on the moral character of the spectator, as one who is able to overstep the narrow boundaries of self-interest:

> To philosophise, in a just signification, is but to carry good-breeding a step higher. For the accomplishment of breeding is, to learn whatever is decent in company or beautiful in arts; and the sum of philosophy is, to learn what is just in society and beautiful in Nature and the order of the world.
>
> 'Tis not wit merely, but a temper which must form the well-bred man. In the same manner, 'tis not a head merely, but a heart and resolution which must complete the real philosopher. Both characters aim at what is excellent, aspire to a just taste, and carry in view the model of what is beautiful and becoming. Accordingly, the respective conduct and distinct manners of each party are regulated; . . . (II, 255) (see also II, 3-5).

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[42] The author is presumed to be Richard Allestree (1619-1681). The following references are to *The Works of the Learned and Pious Author of the Whole Duty of Man*, London, 1684. *The Whole Duty of Man* was first published in 1658. In *Spectator* No. 568 Addison calls it "one of the best Books in the World".

One of the stated goals of the *Characteristics* is to " . . . recommend morals on the same foot with what in a lower sense is called manners, and to advance philosophy . . . on the very foundation of what is called agreeable and polite" (II, 257). Philosophy, to Shaftesbury, was not an abstract discipline, but should be devoted to the question of self-presentation. The purpose of philosophy is to "teach us ourselves" and to teach us self control and a certain consistency in our behaviour (I, 184, cf. II, 274-275).

In *Miscellany III* Shaftesbury comments on his own writing in *Soliloquy, or Advice to an Author*, and declares his intention to be that of discovering " . . . within ourselves what in the polite world is called a relish or good taste" (II, 252).

Politeness and virtue are not united in everybody, though it is in principle an achievable goal for all. Poor people may need the threat of a devil and a hell "where a jail and gallows are thought insufficient" (II, 265, cf. I, 84-85). But those who are not among "the mere vulgar of mankind" (I, 84) or corrupted in other ways (for example by attending university) have the possibility of conducting their life in accordance with the natural order of things and becoming "gentlemen of fashion":

> By gentlemen of fashion, I understand those to whom a natural good genius, or the force of good education, has given a sense of what is naturally graceful and becoming. Some by mere nature, others by art and practice, are masters of an ear in music, an eye in painting, a fancy in the ordinary things of ornament and grace, a judgement in proportions of all kinds, and a general good taste in most of those subjects which make the amusement and delight of the ingenious people of the world. Let such gentlemen be as extravagant as they please, or as irregular in their morals, they must at the same time discover their inconsistency, live at variance with themselves, and in contradiction to that principle on which they ground their highest pleasure and entertainment (I, 89-90).

This is again based on the idea that there are certain measures given in nature as to the rightness and wrongness in the areas of morality, truth and beauty. The gentleman who does not live in accordance with these principles must eventually "discover their inconsistency", for living in accordance with these principles is also conducive to human happiness, while violating them leads to misery. It seems that we have, in this way, a contradiction or at least a tension in Shaftesbury's view of morality: To be truly moral

an action must be motivated by a desire to "do the right thing" for its own sake, but doing the right thing will also ultimately lead to happiness, and will, in a sense, be rewarded. In specific cases it will, then, be difficult to determine what really motivated an action. For Shaftesbury, as for Locke, the final justification for the connection between virtue and happiness belongs in religion: God has, "by an inseparable connexion, joined *virtue* and *public happiness* together, and made the practice thereof necessary to the preservation of society, and visibly beneficial to all with whom the virtuous man has to do" (Locke, *Essay,* I.iii.6).[43]

The formation of the right taste is not restricted to painting, music etc., but extends to areas such as behaviour, countenance, and carriage:

> Could we once convince ourselves of what is in itself so evident, "That in the very nature of things there must of necessity be the foundation of a right and wrong taste, as well in respect of inward characters and features as of outward person, behaviour, and action," we should be far more ashamed of ignorance and wrong judgement in the former than in the latter of these subjects. Even in the Arts, which are mere imitations of that outward grace and beauty, we not only confess a taste, but make it a part of refined breeding to discover amidst the many false manners and ill styles the true and natural one, which represents the real beauty and Venus of the kind (I, 216-217).[44]

In Shaftesbury's view every human being has the same potential. Given the opportunity, even rustics can become graceful. There are, however, some differences which seem to be inborn, but these are independent of rank: some rustics are naturally graceful, while some educated people are far from it (I, 125). "'Tis undeniable, however, that the

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[43] A view similar to Shaftesbury's and Locke's was expressed by John Balguy: "Upon the Whole, our End and our Business, as Men and *Moral Agents*, is to pursue *Virtue*, leaving the Consequence to our Maker; who as he has made us capable of *Truth, Virtue,* and *Happiness,* will undoubtedly take care to make them finally compatible and coincident. So great is, or will be, the Harmony among them, that they may rather be looked upon as one and the same End, than as distinct and several" (Balguy 1728, Part I, 68).

[44] Cf. also the following remark: "There are few so affectedly clownish as absolutely to disown good breeding, and renounce the notion of beauty in outward manners and deportment" (II, 266).

perfection of grace and comeliness in action and behaviour can be found only among the people of a liberal education" (ibid.).

> Whoever has been an observer of action and grace in human bodies must of necessity have discovered the great difference in this respect between such persons as have been taught by nature only, and such as by reflection and the assistance of art have learnt to form those motions which on experience are found the easiest and most natural. Of the former kind are either those good rustics who have been bred remote from the formed societies of men, or those plain artisans and people of the lower rank who, living in cities and places of resort, have been necessitated however to follow mean employments, and wanted the opportunity and means to form themselves after the better models (I, 124-125).

The "gentleman of fashion" who unites these characteristics may become what Shaftesbury calls a "virtuoso". The task of the virtuoso is, among other things, to inform himself about the true standards in the arts and sciences. A virtuoso is essentially the same as a "real fine gentleman",

> . . . the lovers of art and ingenuity, such as have seen the world, and informed themselves of the manners and customs of the several nations of Europe; searched into their antiquities and records; considered their police, laws and constitutions; observed the situation, strength and ornament of their cities, their principal arts, studies and amusements; their architecture, sculpture, painting, music and their taste in poetry, learning, language and conversation (II, 252-253) (see also I, 217-218; II, 129; Shaftesbury 1914, 22).

A person who goes through this process becomes a "man of breeding and politeness". The purpose of the process is to discover the "foundation of right and wrong taste" (I, 216). Though this is, in principle, a goal attainable by all, it is clear that in practice it is restricted to those with substantial amounts of time and money to spare. To become "a real fine gentleman" is a social privilege. A person who has the right taste in arts and manners also, since the good and the beautiful are the same, has insight into what virtue is, and, unless he is a very unnatural person, acts accordingly. "Thus are the Arts and Virtues mutually friends; and thus the science of virtuosi and that of

virtue itself become, in a manner, one and the same" (ibid.).[45] Only for the person capable of rising above the vulgar and sensuous is a "refined contemplation of beauty" possible (II, 128).

To draw some conclusions from our examination: Shaftesbury was not interested in showing the existence of a form of aesthetic perception independent of morality. On the contrary, he wanted to show that the appreciation of certain kinds of art, those conforming to the true standard of taste, were part of the development of a virtuous character. In his argumentation for this point Shaftesbury is waging war on a number of fronts: Against the philosophers of "private interest", against the "rustics", people with a "gothic" taste, the entertainments of the people, popular literature, and against the indulgence in luxury identified with the courts of the period of the restoration.

Shaftesbury did not really think that just anyone would be able to appreciate art in the required manner. But this restriction did not show that it was not universal, only that there is something wrong with certain people, the conclusion also drawn by Addison and Hume, as we saw in Chapter Five. In short, the preferences of a certain group of people, those thought to be "polite", become identified with human nature, and those who do not live up to this standard are consequently less than fully human. As a matter of historical fact the polite are also the privileged in society. Since

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[45] Cf. also the following passage: "Should a writer upon music, addressing himself to the students and lovers of the art, declare to them 'that the measure or rule of harmony was caprice or will, humour or fashion', 'tis not very likely he should be heard with great attention or treated with real gravity. For harmony is harmony by nature, let men judge ever so ridiculously of music. So is symmetry and proportion founded still in nature, let men's fancy prove ever so barbarous, or their fashions ever so Gothic in their architecture, sculpture, or whatever other designing art. 'Tis the same case where life and manners are concerned. Virtue has the same fixed standard. The same numbers, harmony, and proportion will have place in morals, and are discoverable in the characters and affections of mankind; in which are laid the just foundations of an art and science superior to every other of human practice and comprehension" (I, 227-228).

the standards of politeness are the standards with which all people must be measured, social privilege is identified with human nature.

Shaftesbury could hope to convince his readers that there was no necessary contradiction between the way a person chooses to present him- or herself and moral virtue, between outward appearance and inward character. By emphasizing that the person who has, among other things, a certain taste in art and a certain etiquette, is a "real fine gentleman", Shaftesbury contributes to filling a gap in the expressive order. He offers a new set of values for the presentation of the self in social interaction with people of a certain class, for whom birthright is no longer a valid criterion, and serves, as he himself put it, " . . . the polite world and the better sort in those pleasures and diversions which they are sometimes at a loss how to defend against the formal censors of the age" (Shaftesbury 1914, 4).

Stolnitz's claims about the significance of Shaftesbury's conception of aesthetic disinterestedness for the development of aesthetics are correct, but he is mistaken about the contents of this notion. The present examination shows that "disinterestedness", and the related idea of the autonomy of art, emerge as part of the forging of a new form of life. They develop as part of the political and social aspirations of the emerging middle class in England in the eighteenth century, as these are expressed, for example, in the conception of "politeness", and remain in their development inseparable from the social fabric of which they are a part. "Disinterestedness" is not as disinterested as it appears.

CHAPTER 7

Hutcheson and the Problem of Conspicuous Consumption

7.1.: Introduction

Hutcheson's *Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* is divided into two treatises, the first "Concerning Beauty, Order, Harmony, Design", and the second "Concerning Moral Good and Evil". To the modern ear this sounds like two distinctively different topics, and most commentators treat the two topics as unrelated, or they see the intermingling of the two subjects as a failure on Hutcheson's behalf to keep different things separate. In this chapter, I will argue that the connection between morality and beauty is central to both Hutcheson's theory of beauty and to his conception of morality. The argumentation in Hutcheson's first treatise is intended to support the arguments in the second, and vice versa.[1] Hutcheson can then be seen as continuing the Shaftesburian theme of the unity of the good and the beautiful. There is

[1] Hutcheson's enquiries were published four times during his life-time, each time with alterations: in 1725, in 1726, in 1729 and in 1738. A modern edition of the first treatise, edited with an introduction and notes by Peter Kivy (Martinus Nijhoff: The Hague), was published in 1973. This edition follows the fourth edition but indicates alterations in relation to previous editions. I refer to Kivy's edition in the following by giving the year 1973. Garland Publishing has published a facsimile of the second edition (New York, 1971). In the following I refer to this edition for Treatise II by giving the year 1726.

no doubt about Shaftesbury's influence on Hutcheson. Shaftesbury is mentioned in the introduction to *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, as well as in the subtitle to the first edition of the work ("*In which the Principles of the late Earl of Shaftesbury are explain'd and defended, against the Author of the Fable of the Bees*"[2]), and there is biographical evidence of Shaftesbury's influence from relatively early on in Hutcheson's intellectual life (see Scott 1900, 27 ff.).

Though Hutcheson's main concern in Treatise I (*Concerning Beauty, Order, Harmony, Design*) is to develop a theory of beauty based on Locke's epistemology and psychology, the treatise also contains important considerations on the arts. What Hutcheson has to say about the arts must be interpreted in light of the contemporary controversy about luxury, and particularly in light of the unsettling treatment of that subject given by Bernard Mandeville (1670-1732) in *The Fable of the Bees* (I discuss this in section 7.3.). Mandeville made it plain that there was a discrepancy between the interest in trade, the accumulation of riches and their conspicuous consumption on the one hand and traditional, still professed, moral values on the other. The challenge for those who wanted to show Mandeville wrong was then either to reinterpret the traditional moral values or to try to change the way people behave. Obviously, reinterpreting morality to bring it in better agreement with the changed social circumstances is a more manageable task than reforming behaviour, though, as we saw

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[2] A title page should not, however, be taken as a reliable guide to the contents of a work. Often the title page was not written by the author, and it served as an advertisement for the work in newspapers, in the same manner as the blurbs on the dust jackets of books presently do. One writer in the *London Journal* complained about this new custom: Since writing has become "a Trade" and is now practised "for a Livelihood, like other mechanic Professions", writers have begun applying different means to lure people to buy their books, including the use of professional title page writers, " . . . from whence it often comes to pass, that when we have bought a Book, which makes a pompous appearance in the News-Papers, and promises perhaps to explain some knotty Point of Science, or abstruse Branch of Philosophy, we are mightily disappointed and surprized to find in it nothing but a Heap of dull Quotations oddly jumbled together, or a strange Medley of the Author's own superficial Observations" (*The London Journal*, July 17, 1725).

in the previous chapter, much effort was concentrated on the reformation of manners. Hutcheson was among the first of many throughout the eighteenth century who contributed to a reinterpretation of traditional morality, though in many aspects he also agreed with Mandeville (as did Hume). From Mandeville via Hutcheson to Hume and Adam Smith we can follow a line in which the traditional economic and social values become redefined and in better agreement with the social and political realities of a capitalist society where conspicuous consumption is a central element.

Hutcheson's theory of beauty is outlined in section 7.2. We can only understand how Hutcheson's theory of beauty connects to moral (and social) concerns if we appreciate the significance of Mandeville's work, discussed in section 7.3. I return to an interpretation of Hutcheson's theory of the moral sense of beauty in section 7.4., and suggest that Hutcheson's philosophy must be understood as an important move in the redefinition of attitudes to luxury and conspicuous consumption, wherein the arts play a prominent role.

7.2.: Hutcheson's Theory of Beauty and the Sense of Beauty

The first indication that the issues addressed in Hutcheson's *Inquiry* were of more than narrowly philosophical interest is the public attention given to the work. The *Inquiry* was the focus of a debate in the *London Journal* to which Hutcheson himself contributed (under the pseudonym Philanthropus, June 12 and June 19, 1725). The *London Journal* was a Whig journal, and when the work was introduced with some excerpts "Philopatris" expressed the hope that it would be studied in particular by "Men of Fortune and Leisure" (March 27, 1725). A number of books, for example by John Balguy (Balguy 1728) and Archibald Campbell (Campbell 1728), attempted from different angles to refute Hutcheson.

Hutcheson's main concern in Treatise I (*Concerning Beauty, Order, Harmony, Design*) is to develop a theory of beauty based on Locke's theory of ideas and perception. The theoretical details of the theory of beauty are only indirectly related to the theme of the present work, but it is necessary to give an outline of the theory to understand the other parts of Hutcheson's theory.[3]

The general theme of both Treatises is presented in the preface: A contribution to "a just knowledge of human nature and its various powers and dispositions" (1973, 23). Most recent contributions to this quest have, according to Hutcheson, concerned themselves with the employment of the understanding, and "the several methods of obtaining truth". But truth is only of importance in so far as it contributes to make men happy or to give them *pleasure*. Pleasure is then more fundamental than truth itself, and requires an examination of its own. To a Lockean philosopher such as Hutcheson, pleasure (and pain) is a simple idea which cannot be analyzed any further, but it is possible to examine what experience and self-reflection tell us about their mode of operation, and their role in our lives.[4] It is an investigation of this empirical nature that Hutcheson proposes to undertake in the two Treatises and he goes beyond Locke and other "modern philosophers", who, according to Hutcheson, have treated of this subject only in a very superficial manner. The "modern philosophers" usually restrict themselves to a distinction between rational and sensible pleasures, but have little to say about either of them: "We are seldom taught any other notion of

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[3] A detailed and excellent analytical discussion of Treatise I can be found in Kivy 1976. I refer in general to this work.

[4] In the 4th ed. Hutcheson says that "Approbation and Condemnation are probably simple Ideas, which cannot be farther explained" (Introduction to Treatise II). Cf. Locke, *Essay*, II.xx.1: Pain and pleasure "like other simple *ideas*, cannot be described, nor their names defined; the way of knowing them is, as one of the simple *ideas* of the senses, only by experience". A simple idea is uncompounded and "contains in it nothing but *one uniform appearance* or conception in the mind, and is not distinguishable into different *ideas*" (*Essay*, II.ii.1).

rational pleasure than that which we have upon reflecting on our possessions, or claim to those objects which may be occasions of pleasure" (1973, 23-24; see also 1726, 118). Hutcheson is, in other words, confronting an argument similar to the one countered by Shaftesbury in the discussion about disinterested contemplation of beauty. According to the view opposed by Hutcheson (and Shaftesbury), pleasure arising from contemplation of any object is reducible to (for example) desire to possess the object or pride in already possessing it (section 6.2.).

Pleasure or pain spontaneously accompany certain perceptions - we do not know why or how, but we can, Hutcheson thinks, say something about the circumstances under which these sensations arise, about their origin (or "original"). Pleasure occurs, for example, when we perceive something beautiful, regular or harmonious (1973, 33). We are able to perceive beauty and be pleased by the perception because we (or most people) have a sense of beauty. But what more specifically is beauty and the sense of beauty, according to Hutcheson?

Hutcheson's definition of beauty is based on the assumption that human beings generally agree about what is and what is not beautiful, though on one occasion he expresses some reservations on that point (25-26). Hutcheson assumes that some actual quality in objects gives rise to our idea of beauty (1973, 38-39; see Kivy 1976, ch. III for the complex nature of the relationship between object and idea). Hutcheson thought it obvious that figures or objects which "excite in us the ideas of beauty seem to be those in which there is *uniformity amidst variety*" (40). Since this view of beauty was received doctrine in the early eighteenth century no real argument is given for the choice of these particular qualities, though Hutcheson does give a number of examples. That beauty consists in "uniformity amidst vareity" is, we must assume, simply an empirical generalization.

The sense of beauty is an internal sense, different from our physiological senses of sight, hearing, taste, and touch. It is common to all human beings, and even to

most animals (24). The sense of beauty has similarities with wit, as defined by Locke, since it requires the ability to relate and compare ideas to each other. Some people may be perfectly able to hear individual tones, or see individual colors, but they do not have the requisite synthesizing ability, which makes it possible to see the beauty of the whole:

> They perceive all the *simple ideas* separately, and have their pleasures; they distinguish them from each other, such as one colour from another. . . . They can tell in separate notes, the higher, lower, sharper or flatter, when separately sounded . . . And yet perhaps they shall find no pleasure in musical compositions, in painting, architecture, natural landscape, or but a very weak one in comparison of what others enjoy from the same object (1973, 34).

Two people can look at the same figure or landscape, and one feel the pleasure of its beauty, the other not. The pleasure one can feel is distinct from the mere perception of the physical features of the object considered separately, but requires some additional ability, characteristic of the poet or the man of fine taste (see the alternate passage in 2nd and 3rd eds., 1973, 35-36 note 22). Consequently, one can have the sense of beauty to a higher or lower degree. "The greater capacity of receiving such pleasant ideas we commonly call a *fine genius* or *taste*" (34-35).

Though the sense of beauty is what Hutcheson calls an internal sense it works somewhat in the same manner as the external senses: In the same way as we cannot choose to make "a bitter potion" taste good to us, the idea of beauty arises independently of our will. It is possible to prevent a person from *desiring* something beautiful by, say, threatening with some form of punishment, but that does not mean that the person stops *perceiving* the beauty. In fact, the desire to possess the object would never have arisen in the first place if the object was not perceived to be beautiful. Those who argue that beauty can be reduced to interest have, therefore, turned things upside down. We do not judge things to be beautiful because we desire them, but we desire them because they are beautiful. Even if something is directly harmful to us, we can still perceive it to be beautiful:

> So propose the whole world as a reward, or threaten the greatest evil, to make us approve a deformed object, or disapprove a beautiful one:

> dissimulation may be procured by rewards or threatenings, or we may in external conduct abstain from any pursuit of the beautiful, and pursue the deformed, but our *sentiments* of the forms, and our *perceptions,* would continue invariably the same (1973, 37).

The pleasure we receive from perceiving anything beautiful is therefore "distinct from that joy which arises upon prospect of advantage" (ibid.). We may, of course, try to gather beautiful objects around us in order to obtain the pleasure from perceiving them, but this is secondary to the actual sense of beauty:

> Our sense of beauty from objects, by which they are constituted good to us, is very distinct from our desire of them when they are thus constituted. . . . Had we no sense of beauty and harmony, houses, gardens, dress, equipage might have been recommended to us as convenient, fruitful, warm, easy, but never as *beautiful* (37-38).

The ability to go beyond prospects of personal advantage may be taken as a condition for the experience of beauty, though the two are not meant to logically exclude each other (cf. Kivy 1976, 74-75). In Hutcheson's moral philosophy the contemplation of beauty has a function similar to the conception of disinterested contemplation in Shaftesbury's moral philosophy: It shows, against Hobbes, Mandeville et al., the possibility of disinterested, benevolent behaviour and attitudes. The sense of beauty is structurally similar to our moral sense, since both are disinterested. In our application of our sense of beauty and our moral sense we are able to pass judgement about the beauty or morality of an action independently of the personal benefit we may derive from it, or even contrary to any benefit we may derive from it. We can deem an act a morally good act even if the act is contrary to our personal interst. Hence, morality is not reducible to self-love or interst.[5]

In the last section of the first treatise Hutcheson discusses the significance of his investigation of the internal sense of beauty. He claims here that the gratifications of the internal senses "are the chief ends for which we pursue wealth and power" (87). To satisfy the external senses a modest wealth suffices, and therefore " . . . the only use

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[5] The rejection of interest as a motive for all human action is also an important part of Hutcheson's discussion of laughter in the essays in the *Dublin Journal* (originally published June 5, 12, and 19 1725, now in Hutcheson 1750 and 1973).

of a great fortune above a very small one (except in good offices and moral pleasures) must be to supply us with the pleasures of beauty, order and harmony" (88). This is supplied through, for example, gardening, architecture, music, painting, dress, equipage and furniture (ibid.).

The gratification of the sense of beauty becomes, then, of some social significance. To understand this dimension of Hutcheson's argument it is necessary to know what he was arguing against. Hutcheson was arguing against the philosophers of self-interest in general, but in particular he was arguing against the view of vice and virtue presented by Mandeville in his *Fable of the Bees*. To understand the social significance of the sense of beauty and the connection between morality and beauty in Hutcheson's work it must be seen against the background of Mandeville's *The Fable of the Bees* and contemporary discussions about conspicuous consumption and luxury.

7.3.: Mandeville and the question of conspicuous consumption

The poem which is now a small part of Mandeville's *The Fable of the Bees* was originally published under the title *The Grumbling Hive: or, Knaves Turn'd Honest* in a pamplet in 1705, but caused little attention. Not until the edition of 1723, of which the original poem is only a small part, did Mandeville's work gain the notoriety it retained throughout the eighteenth century. The edition of 1723 contains twenty-two remarks explaining and elaborating on the poem, and a number of essays, for example "An Essay into the Nature of Society" wherein Mandeville attacks Shaftesbury, and an attack on charity schools in "An Essay on Charity and Charity Schools". This edition resulted in a stream of periodical essays and books, most of which intended to show that Mandeville was wrong in his assertion that private vices could be, and actually were,

turned into public benefit.[6] One reason for the many attacks on Mandeville was his disregard for traditional notions of luxury and vice. Luxury and vice, Mandeville thought, rather than leading to decline and degeneracy on the personal and national level actually lead to overall prosperity.

I mentioned ealier (pp. 153 and 162) that the late seventeenth, early eighteenth century saw a growing concern for dress and the moral consequences of fashion. This concern is in part an expression of the fact that growing imports as well as increased domestic production of textiles for the first time made it possible for a large number of people to have a choice in how they dress. In the 1690's the taste for colorful fabrics imported from East India reached epidemic proportions (McKendrick 1982a, 14). Though many found this and similar developments morally and politically reprehensible, the economic significance of fashion and conspicuous consumption was quickly discovered by contemporary observers. In *Discourses upon Trade* from 1691 Sir Dudley North observed that

> . . . the main spur to Trade, or rather to Industry and Ingenuity, is the exorbitant Appetites of Men, which they will take pains to gratifie, and so be disposed to work, when nothing else will incline them to it; for did Men content themselves with bare Necessaries, we should have a poor World (p. 14).[7]

The problematic nature of conspicuous consumption derived from the fact that it was in conflict with a long tradition in the history of morality which, as already mentioned in the discussion of Shaftesbury, condemned luxury. In the classical tradition stretching from Plato to Augustine, Aquinas and Shaftesbury, luxury, though not restricted to material wealth, had been seen as opposed to the ideal of a simple life, an ideal often recommended by the wealthy to the poor in an attempt to save them from themselves.

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[6] For a partial, but nevertheless very long, list of works discussing *The Fable of the Bees* see Kaye's edition, vol. II, 419 ff.

[7] Quoted from McKendrick 1982a, 15. See also Kaye's quotation from Dudley North in Mandeville 1714, vol. I, note No. 1, p. 109.

But in England in the eighteenth century the debate about luxury was also a debate about the new political and economical order, in which money, trade and commercialism played an increasing role. Writers of a Tory bent in particular saw luxury as a threat to all social order (see Sekora 1977, 77 ff.).

It was the contradiction between the moral condemnation of luxury and the fact that this condemnation was ignored in practice that Mandeville elaborated in such detail in *The Fable of the Bees*, while, or so he was understood, urging his readers to give up the traditional view of luxury. Though most contemporary commentators condemned Mandeville, his advice (or what was thought to be his advice) was actually taken by some, though even here few (Hume was one of the few) did so in Mandeville's candid and realistic spirit. Most, among them Hutcheson, opted instead for a redefintion of luxury, wherein it loses its flavour of something odious and dangerous. In his examination of the history of the conception of luxury Sekora states that in a larger historical context this redefinition of luxury " . . . represents nothing less than the movement from the classical world to the modern" (Sekora 1977, 1).

Mandeville defines luxury as "every thing . . . that is not immediately necessary to make Man subsist as he is a living Creature" (vol. I, 107). He admits that this is too rigorous a definition, but nevertheless finds it justified on the grounds that if we depart from it, it will be impossible to draw a line between what is and what is not luxury, since anything can be considered a necessity of life for someone (vol. I, 108).

Mandeville claims that there is a choice between virtue and wealth, but it is not possible to have both. If people were to live in accordance with accepted principles of virtue, they had to live in poverty or at least simplicity. Most people chose in practice to live in relative comfort, and ignore moral prescriptions. Paradoxically, the private vices exhibited in the pursuit of the material comforts of life turn into public benefits, because it is the sum of private vices which forms the basis for the wealth of the nation

and therefore makes economic growth and a comfortable existence possible, at least for some people.

Mandeville turns many received notions of vice and virtue upside down. In Remark I (vol. I, 131 ff.) he argues against the prevailing view of avarice as something solely bad. Though he does agree that avarice is generally bad, it is also necessary "to glean and gather what has been dropt and scatter'd by the contrary Vice" (I, 101). Avarice is necessary to make profuse spending possible,

> . . . there is a sort of avarice which consists in a greedy desire of Riches, in order to spend them, and this often meets with Prodigality in the same Persons, as is evident in most Courtiers and great Officers, both Civil and Military. In their Buildings and Furniture, Equipages and Entertainments, their Gallantry is display'd with the greatest Profusion, while the base Actions they submit to for Lucre, and the many Frauds and Impositions they are guilty of, discover the utmost Avarice (vol. I, 102).

From the point of view of the public, Mandeville thinks prodigality is a noble sin; "for as the Avaricious does no Good to himself, and is injurious to all the World besides, except his Heir, so the Prodigal is a Blessing to the whole Society, and injures nobody but himself" (I, 103). Prodigality has what a modern economist might call a "trickle down effect": By spending his money the prodigal person benefits many people,

> Frugality is like Honesty, a mean starving Virtue, that is only fit for small Societies of good peaceable Men, who are contended to be poor so they may be easy; but in a large stirring Nation you may have soon enough of it. 'Tis an idle dreaming Virtue that employs no Hands, and therefore very useless in a trading Country, where there are vast numbers that one way or other must be all set to work. Prodigality has a thousand Inventions to keep People from sitting still, that Frugality would never think of; and as this must consume a prodigious Wealth, so Avarice again knows innumerable Tricks to rake it together, which Frugality would scorn to make use of (I, 104-5).

Luxury, therefore, far from being a vice, is actually a necessity for a wealthy and thriving trading nation. Without pride and luxury trade would "in a great Measure decay" (124). The encouragement of trade will also bring growth in the arts and sciences: ". . . promote Navigation, cherish the Merchant, and encourage Trade in every Branch of it; this will bring Riches, and where they are, Arts and Sciences will soon follow . . .

"(vol. I, 184). But wealth is never achieved without its inseparable companions, luxury and pride. Consequently, one cannot hope to achieve growth in the arts and sciences, and at the same time retain high moral principles:

> Where Trade is considerable Fraud will intrude. To be at once well-bred and sincere, is no less than a contradiction; and therefore while Man advances in Knowledge, and his Manners are polish'd, we must expect to see at the same time his Desires enlarg'd, his Appetites refin'd, and his Vices encreas'd (I, 185).[8]

In the second part of *The Fable of the Bees* Mandeville declares, through his mouthpiece Cleomenes, that "Politeness of Manners and Pleasure of Conversation . . . are the things he laughs at and exposes throughout his Book" (vol. II, 102). He attacks in particular the *Beau Monde* and the followers of fashion. Politeness and good breeding do not mean that men and women have subdued their passions, but only that they have found a shrewd way of concealing them in the hope of better fulfilling them: " . . . a Man need not conquer his Passions, it is sufficient that he conceals them. Virtue bids us subdue, but good Breeding only requires we should hide our Appetites" (I, 72; see also II, 108-9).[9] Politeness is, in short, nothing but self-love and hypocrisy, masquerading as sophistication and benevolence (see also II, 138 f.).

For those wanting to counter Mandeville's arguments a number of possible strategies suggest themselves, one of which is to show that what Mandeville considers vices, particularly luxury and conspicuous consumption, are not really vices at all, or

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[8] That Mandeville's attack is directed against those claiming to be well-bred and polite is made clear in his Preface to volume II, first published in 1729: "In the very Politeness of Conversation, the Complacency, with which fashionable People are continually soothing each other's Frailties, and in almost every part of a Gentleman's Behaviour", Cleomenes (who Mandeville declares to speak for him in the dialogues which make up the second volume) found that "there was a Disagreement between the outward Appearances, and what is felt within, that was clashing with Uprightness and Sincerity" (vol. II, 17). See also the third dialogue in vol. II.

[9] " . . . by being well bred, we suffer no Abridgement in our sensual Pleasures, but only labour for our mutual Happiness, and assist each other in the luxurious Enjoyment of all worldly Comforts" (I, 73).

possibly minor vices, less than other possible vices, such as sloth or lust. Another strategy, compatible with the first, is to admit that Mandeville's scenario where vice leads to public benefit is a possibility, but far from a necessity. National wealth and growth in the arts and sciences is also obtainable through virtuous actions.

Archibald Campbell (1691-1756) followed the first strategy. Luxury is not, as claimed by Mandeville, everything that is beyond what is necessary to stay alive (Campbell 1728, 103 ff.). Since God has provided us with things in nature which cause us to be pleased, Campbell sees nothing morally suspicious in them, and by extension there cannot be anything wrong with the things which are products of human labour:

> And why may I not bring those Materials together, so as to indulge to my self these Gratifications, in Buildings, Furniture, Equipages and Cloaths, wherein, our Author [Mandeville] tells us, the greatest Excesses of Luxury are shewn? I know of no Law of Nature that forbids these Enjoyments, that declares them Vicious in themselves, or that prohibits my employing my Thoughts and Labour to procure them (Campbell 1728, 112).

Is there then nothing which deserves the name of luxury, Campbell asks? The answer is yes, but luxury is not as defined by Mandeville. Campbell defines luxury in relation to individual social position: what is luxury to some may be necessity to others, "that which is call'd Superfluous, Vicious, or Luxurious to some Degree of People, may be thought requisite to, or be innocently pursu'd and enjoy'd by those of higher Quality" (Campbell 1728, 125).

Campbell may, in fact, have derived his defintion of luxury from Hutcheson, who, in one of his essays on *The Fable of the Bees*, defines luxury as "the using more curious and expensive habitation, dress, table, equipage, than the person's wealth will bear, so as to discharge his duty to his family, his friends, his country, or the indigent" (Hutcheson 1750, 56 (originally published in 1725.)). Hume's proposed redefinition of luxury is similar to Hutcheson's: something becomes a luxury when it exceeds one's ability to pay, and thus jeopardizes one's position and ability to, for example, take care of one's family (Hume 1777, 269 and 279). Hume agreed with Mandeville that

conspicuous consumption contributed to the economical growth of a nation, and that the pursuit of commodities "which serve to the ornament and pleasure of life" is a spur to industry in the individual (Hume 1777, 272). For Hume luxury is a positive phenomenon, synonymous with "refinement in the arts". Sekora observes that Hume's point of view defines the normal sense of luxury today, while at the time when it was advanced, Hume belonged to a very small group of defenders of luxury (Sekora 1977, 110).

This brief overview of the contemporary debate about luxury, particularly as it centered around *The Fable of the Bees*, is necessary to provide the background for an interpretation of Hutcheson's conception of the moral sense of beauty. Mandeville's satirical exposition of the discrepancy between professed principles and actual practice was an attack on those most guilty of indulgence in luxury and conspicuous consumption, the part of society which considered itself polite. Since art-collection and an interest in the arts had become a central ingredient in the conception of politeness, a refutation of Mandeville could then in part take the form of a defence of an interest in the arts, by showing that this interest was not morally suspicious. This demonstration was what Hutcheson attempted with the development of his conception of the moral sense of beauty, to which I now return.

7.4.: The moral sense of beauty

Whereas Treatise I investigates the nature of beauty and the sense of beauty, Treatise II returns to the question about the connection between beauty and virtue, and between the sense of beauty and the moral sense. Hutcheson repeatedly emphasizes the close connection: " . . . we have a distinct Perception of *Beauty* or *Excellence* in the kind Affections of *rational Agents* . . ." (1726, 118-9). "If there is no *moral Sense*, which makes rational [4th. ed.: "benevolent"] Actions appear *Beautiful* or

Deform'd; if all Approbation be from *Interest* of the Approver, *'What's* HECUBA *to us, or we to* HECUBA?'" (121-2) (see also 126 (sect. 5); 181 ("the moral Beauty of Actions, or Dispositions"); 163, 176, 190, 191). To perceive a virtuous action gives us a pleasure independent of any advantage we may or may not receive from it - virtuous actions are *beautiful.* We can appreciate an action as being virtuous, though it is directly harmful to what we consider our interest, or we can consciously choose to perform an action contrary to morality if we think it will benefit us, and at the same time know that the action is wrong. Our judgement about the moral quality of the action is therefore independent of private interest.

To pass judgements about the nature of moral actions by way of reasoning is a long and laborious process. But moral actions are instantly recognizable to us because they have a beauty of their own. Reasoning would, no doubt, enable us to draw the same conclusions regarding the morality or immorality of actions, but most men are unable to follow a complicated line of reasoning. For that reason "the Author of nature" has assured instant recognition of moral acts by making them beautiful. Virtue and beauty have been conveniently joined by the Author of Nature: Virtue has been made into a lovely form (1973, 25). This is why Hutcheson often employs the term "moral sense of beauty" (ibid.). The notion of a "moral sense of beauty", as it can be found in Shaftesbury's writings, has, Hutcheson says, offended many, who have been accustomed to "to deduce every approbation or aversion from rational views of private interest".

Because moral actions appear beautiful to us, and because the judgement that something is beautiful is disinterested, that is, because it cannot be reduced to the self-interest of the one making the judgement, the beauty of moral actions becomes evidence that moral actions cannot be reduced to self-interst. As in the case of Shaftesbury, the argument for the disinterestedness of the contemplation of beauty becomes a part of an argument in morality. It does not lift the judgement out of the realm of morality, but places it within it.

Among the different kinds of beauty there is one of particular significance, which is dealt with at greater length in the second treatise. In Treatise I Hutcheson promises to show in Treatise II that " . . . that most powerful beauty in countenances, airs, gestures, motion, . . . arises from some imagined indication of morally good dispositions of the mind" (1973, 45). In the passage in Treatise II with the promised demonstration (1726, pp. 250-253), Hutcheson identifies external beauty in a person with " . . . certain *Airs, Proportions, je ne scai quoy's* [sic]", which we take to be expressions of moral qualities such as "*Sweetness, Mildness, Majesty, Dignity, Vivacity, Humility, Tenderness, Good-nature*" (1726, 250). We form the idea of a connection between outward appearance and the moral qualities of a person on the basis of an association of ideas. By education, custom or habit, two or more otherwise unconnected ideas can become connected by the association of ideas - but Hutcheson does not directly say whether this association is justified or not.

Hutcheson did not attach much importance to the question whether or not the connection we *imagine* between, say, gestures, motion, and so on, and a certain moral disposition is also found in nature. Some of the conclusions we draw are clearly *not* founded on anything in nature, but are solely due to habit and custom. In one of the "Remarks upon *The Fable of the Bees*" Hutcheson says that the belief that there is a connection between, on the one hand, wealth and "the finer sort of habitation, dress, equipage, furniture" and moral uprightness on the other hand, is a "foolish conjunction" (Hutcheson 1750, 46). The same holds for our propensity to connect different forms of ceremonial behavior "and the *Affections* of *Mind* which they are by *Custom* made to express" (1726, 254).

> Every thing we count agreeable, some way denotes *Chearfulness, Ease,* a *Condescension,* and *Readiness* to oblige, a *Love* of *Company,* with a *Freedom* and *Boldness* which always accompanys an *honest, undesigning Heart.* On the Contrary, what is shocking in *Air* or *Motion,* is *Roughness, Ill-nature,* a *Disregard* of others, or a *foolish Shame-facedness,* which evidences a Person to be unexperienced in Society, or Offices of Humanity (Hutcheson 1726, 254).

This connection is also based on an association of ideas, which may vary greatly from culture to culture - there is no natural connection. What is important is not the validity of the presumed connection, but the mere fact that we, according to Hutcheson, have the propensity to assume such connections. The fact that we make such connections shows that what we are really judging about is not the appearance of the person or the outward movements and so on, but the moral character of the person, which we, rightly or wrongly, think expressed in what we can observe. Beauty gives us the presumption of the existence of moral uprightness, and when we pursue beauty it is therefore actually to morality that we attach most importance (1726, 256). It is also in this connection that we find the reason why moralists of Hutcheson's and Shaftesbury's persuasion claim that it is virtuous to take an interst in art:

> . . . we are excited to do these [virtuous] actions, even as we pursue, or purchase Pictures, Statues, Landskips, from Self-Interest, to obtain this Pleasure which arises from Reflection upon the Action, or some other future Advantage (1726, 116).

Similarly when we pursue wealth and power. Our pursuit of wealth and power is not, as Mandeville thinks, an expression of viciousness or a violation of moral principles. Even our pursuit of wealth and power is guided by moral concerns: we think for example that wealth and power will bring us in a position where we are able to help friends and relatives. In general, people do not approve of wealth for its own sake, and they do not want it if it can only be obtained at the cost of virtue (1726, 247). We would not want wealth and power if we knew that it meant we had to give up friendship and the company of others - consequently, Hutcheson concludes, the "love of society" is more important to most people than the desire for wealth: ". . . 'tis some Appearance of *Friendship,* of *Love,* of *communicating* Pleasure to others, which preserves the Pleasures of the *Luxurious* from being *nauseous* and *insipid*" (1726, 249). Even if a person performs a morally blameworthy action he or she will at least give the actions the

appearance of being morally commendable, also to themselves, even if this involves "some deluding Imagination of *moral Good*" (1726, 210).

Since the motivating factors in these cases are virtuous, Hutcheson can argue that those who make their wealth and power known are morally commendable. For one thing, the display of wealth shows a benevolent diposition on the part of the one who displays, and for another it does indeed have very beneficial effects in the form of an economic spin-off: "so many Dependants *supported,* so many Friends *entertain'd, assisted, protected*. . . . We never affect Obscurity or Concealment, but rather desire that our *State* and *Magnificence* should be known" (1726, 150). To conceal a state of wealth is wrong, because it is a sign of the desire of *private pleasures*, some of which may be of doubtful moral value, and the desire for which show a lack of moral sense.

> The *Shame* we suffer from Meanness of *Dress, Table, Equipage,* is entirely owing to the same reason. This Meanness is often imagin'd to argue *Avarice, Meanness* of *Spirit,* want of *Capacity,* or *Conduct* in Life, of *Industry,* or moral Abilitys of one Kind or other 1726, 234-35).

In other words: Being well-dressed, and so on, reflects favourably on the moral character of the person. We generally assume a connection between " . . . *external Grandeur, Regularity* in *Dress, Equipage, Retinue, Badges* of *Honour,* and some *moral Abilitys* greater than ordinary . . ." (235). The fact that people make this connection also makes the display of "external Grandeur" politically expedient, since it is so aweinspiring that it serves to keep one's inferiors in their right place with less effort than would otherwise be required. It can " . . . quell the Spirits of the *Vulgar,* and keep them in subjection".

Hutcheson does not deny that we sometimes pursue objects that will give us pleasure solely on the basis of self-interest, but claims that this form of self-interest is benign, and may in fact benefit other people as well, since they can take part in the

pleasures, to the extent that they are publicly available (1726, 326).[10] But it is only in so far as wealth is connected with the "moral Pleasures" that it is truly admirable (248-9).

Similarly to Shaftesbury, Hutcheson argues that the enjoyment of beauty is only really possible for those of a virtuous character:

> . . . the Perceptions of *Beauty, Order, Harmony* . . . are, no doubt, . . . *noble Pleasures*, and seem to inlarge the *Mind;* and yet how *cold* and *joyless* are they, if there be no *moral Pleasures* of *Friendship, Love* and *Beneficence?* . . . The internal Pleasures of *Beauty* and *Harmony*, contribute greatly toward soothing the Mind into a Forgetfulness of *Wrath, Malice* or *Revenge;* and they must do so, before we can have any tolerable Delight or Enjoyment: for while *these Affections* possess the Mind, there is nothing but *Torment* and *Misery* (1726, 244-5).

With the development of a benevolent moral attitude also develops a "Love of *Poetry, Musick*, the *Beauty* of *Nature* in rural Scenes, a *Contempt* of other selfish Pleasures of the *external Senses*, a *neat Dress,* a *humane Deportment,* a *Delight* in and *Emulation* of every thing which is *gallant, generous,* and *friendly*" (257).

Hutcheson's notion of the moral sense of beauty serves, then, a dual purpose. It serves, first, to counter the philosophers of self-interest, in particular Mandeville, and the notion that the motivating factor in all human action is self-interest. Even in the situation where we pursue the pleasures of beauty or luxury, we are actually, on Hutcheson's account, often guided by moral principles, or at least see our own actions in a moral light. Secondly, the moral sense of beauty serves therefore to justify the pursuit of luxury as long as it is within the limits of one's financial abilities. Hutcheson did not dispute that people pursue luxury and indulge in conspicuous

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[10] "Such Objects as we know either from Experience of Sense, or Reason, to be *immediately* or *mediately Advantageous,* or apt to minister Pleasure, we are said to pursue from *Self-Interest,* when our Intention is only to enjoy this Pleasure, which they have the Power of exciting. Thus *Meats, Drink, Harmony, fine Prospects, Painting, Statues*, are perceiv'd by our senses to be *immediately Good*; and our Reason shows *Riches* and *Power* to be *mediately so*, that is, apt to furnish us with Objects of immediate Pleasure: and both Kinds of these *natural Goods* are pursu'd from *Interest,* or *Self-Love*" (1726, 113-4).

consumption, but he did dispute that this should be seen in the negative light in which Mandeville saw it.[11] The desire for luxuries or art is not a threat to virtue, Hutcheson maintains. It is perfectly possible to combine, say, virtue and patriotism with interest in the arts:

> . . . love of a country, a family, or friends never spoiled a taste for architecture, painting or sculpture; the knowledge of the true measures and harmony of life never vitiated an ear, or genius for the harmony of music or poetry (Hutcheson 1750, 47).

Because their social locus was the same, the assessment of conspicuous consumption and luxury was for Hutcheson and some of his contemporaries inseparable from their view on the propriety of an interest in art, in the same way as Mandeville's view on these issues was inseparable from his expressed contempt for those who considered themselves to belong to the polite world. Hutcheson's defence of luxury and conspicuous consumption therefore had to turn into a defence of art appreciation and art collecting. Hutcheson's aesthetic and moral theory becomes, in the same way as Shaftesbury's did, inseparable from the creation of a new social order in the eighteenth century.

The conflict between actual practice and moral principle which carries Mandeville's exposé in *The Fable of the Bees* is only disturbing if one accepts the validity of that traditional morality which throws a dubious light on conspicuous consumption and luxury. Hutcheson's argumentation is directed against this traditional morality: In fact, he says, pursuit of luxury and certain forms of conspicuous consumption, particularly the consumption of works of art, can be and often are guided by high moral

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[11] Cf. also the following comment from one of Hutcheson's essays in the *Dublin Journal* where he comments on *The Fable of the Bees*: "The commonest gratifications of the appetites do not satisfy them [men] fully: they desire those objects, which give some more grateful sensations, as well as allay their pain; they have perceptions of beauty in external objects, and desire something more in dress, houses, furniture, than mere warmth or necessary use. . . . They are fond of the approbation of each other, and desirous of whatever either directly procures approbation and esteem, or, by a confused association of ideas, is made an evidence of any valuable ability or kind disposition. Wealth and power are in like manner desired, as soon as we observe their usefulness to procure any kind of pleasures" (Hutcheson 1750, 44-5).

principles, and have beneficial effects for the individual as well as for society in general. There is, thus, no contradiction between what benefits the public, and what benefits the individual. By presenting the lover of art, the polite person, as a social type worthy of respect, Hutcheson's argumentation serves, as Shaftesbury's, to redefine the expressive order.

CHAPTER 8

From the Morality to the Autonomy of Art

8.1.: Introduction

We have arrived at what appears to be a paradox: On the one hand the theoreticians of the early eighteenth century are claimed to be among the first to give voice to what became the modern conception of art. On the other hand our examination of some of the most influential of these theoreticians reveals that they did in fact not subscribe to what is a central element in the modern conception of art, the idea that the value of art is independent of any moral, political or religious purposes that it may serve. It may be tempting on this basis to draw the conclusion that perhaps the modern conception of art did not after all have its origin in the early eighteenth century. This conclusion would, however, run contrary to a very large body of historical research. But this is not the only conclusion it is possible to draw: It is also possible to conclude that there is something wrong with the way in which we think about parts of the modern conception of art. The claim that art has a value in itself, and is beyond any social, political or moral concerns is, if we are to draw this second conclusion, in some way deceptive. This second line of reasoning is the one I will persue in this chapter, in accordance with the hypothesis advanced in the introduction (above pp. 2-3), where I claimed that at the core of recent philosophy of art is a conception of art which contains unacknowledged philosophical, political and cultural presuppositions, and that these presuppositions were shaped by the specific circumstances surrounding the genesis and development of the modern conception of art.

To render this conclusion plausible, I must show how the conception of art and taste advanced in the theories of Addison, Shaftesbury, Hutcheson and Hume evolved into that conception of art which is often called the doctrine of "the autonomy of art", a doctrine whose first influential theoretician is often considered to be Kant. Many of the aspirations of Shaftesbury and others were actually retained by Kant and other German theoreticians of the later eighteenth century. They continued the trend begun by the British theoreticians (by whom they were deeply influenced), but the objectives they shared with their theoretical predecessors gained different expressions.

In Britain in the early eighteenth century, we find a relatively optimistic view of human nature, and of the possibility of arriving at a standard of taste (if criticism and debate are given free rein). The Germans of the later part of the century can no longer share this optimism, in part because of different social and political circumstances in Germany in the later eighteenth century. The scope of the public sphere becomes restricted. Already Shaftesbury realized that there was a dilemma involved in the freedom of criticism and judgement, since the works approved of by the freely judging public were not always those Shaftesbury thought most worthy of attention. The increasing commercialization of literature in particular leads the German theoreticians to a less optimistic conclusion about the possibility of obtaining consensus. But discrepancies in artistic preferences and enlightenment are not explained in terms of the social, historical, political and economical circumstances which lead to the commercialization of art and the "degradation" of the artist to a wage labourer. Rather, the theoreticians writing about art and aesthetics see the inability of the majority of the public to arrive at the same "level" as they, the intellectual elite, as a matter of individual inadequacy - it is the responsibility of the individual to arrive at enlightenment, as Kant implied in his essay "What is Enlightenment?" (Kant 1784).

In section 8.2. I briefly examine the development of the conception of art and taste in the contributions of Moritz, Kant and others in order to show that the

social (and other) presuppositions found in, for example, Shaftesbury's view of the arts are also present in these later works.

In section 8.3. I return to contemporary philosophy of art, and to the social implications of this conception of art in contemporary society. Most contemporary British and North American philosophy of art relies on the assumption of the autonomy of art, and the idea that art must be approached in a specifically aesthetic manner which is often called "disinterested". In section 8.4. I show that the contemporary conceptions of the autonomy of art and its disinterested contemplation contain political and social presuppositions similar to those found in its historical predecessors.

Because it is prejudiced (in the Gadamerian sense of that term (see above p. 37)), this branch of contemporary philosophy does not normally advance its conception of art as a conception with a social and political nature, as a conception belonging to a particular historical tradition and culture. Within the tradition the conception of art was, as I have shown, inseparable from a *Bildungsideal*, and as such had the character of a prescription or norm. In contemporary philosophy this normative character is preserved, but it is no longer acknowledged as such. The conception of art is advanced as a matter of fact. In a sense to be specified, this turns the modern conception of art into an ideology.

8.2.: The Autonomy of Art

With the demise of older, feudal conceptions of the expressive order, the idea of taste, in relation to objects, as well as in relation to manners, became, as we have seen, an important ingredient in the conception of the presentation of the self characteristic of the new social order. At the same time, taste is thought to be a basis for the demarcation of social distinctions. Shaftesbury claimed that under the conditions of free criticism the true standards of taste and beauty would emerge. For Shaftesbury

and Hutcheson beauty is important for the evaluation of morality and appropriate behaviour. The sense of beauty is in part a spontaneous ability to judge about manners. The connection between manners and a sense of beauty was also pointed out by Adam Smith:

> As in any other beautiful and noble machine that was the production of human art, whatever tended to render its movements more smooth and easy would derive a beauty from this effect, and, on the contrary, whatever tended to obstruct them would displease on that account: so virtue, which is, as it were, the fine polish to the wheels of society, necessarily pleases; while vice, like the vile rust, which makes them jar and grate upon one another, is as necessarily offensive.[1]

Terry Eagleton observes that with the decline of absolutism and the demise of central authorities, political power and the maintenance of social stability are no longer seen as externally imposed: the citizens must give the law to themselves. They must, of their own accord, in what appears to be a spontaneous way, internalize proper forms of behaviour. As I have pointed out above, aesthetic judgement was not restricted to works of art and nature, but was a central ingredient in the evaluation of behaviour. This is what is indicated by the centrality of taste in manners and the emergence of politeness as a standard for behaviour. "We encounter the law", Eagleton comments in connection with a discussion of Burke's view of manners, "if we are lucky, only sporadically, as an unpleasantly coercive power; but in the aesthetics of social conduct, or 'culture' as it would later be called, the law is always with us, as the very unconscious structure of our life" (Eagleton 1990, 42).

According to Kames, the fine arts have a "beneficial influence on society".[2] Because they cherish love of order, the fine arts can, Kames says, have the effect of

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[1] Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, edited by D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie (Oxford University Press, Oxford 1976) p. 316. Quoted by Eagleton, 1990, 37.

[2] Kames 1762, vol. 1, p. v; quoted in Caygill 1989, 65 ff.

enforcing submission (ibid.), and a "taste in the fine arts goes hand in hand with the moral sense".[3]

From Shaftesbury at the beginning of the eighteenth century to Kames and Burke in the last half of the century, what came to be known as the fine arts (polite arts in Shaftesbury's terminology) became a sign of virtue, and a promoter and upholder of social harmony.

Literature was one of the media through which certain forms of behaviour could obtain the status of "the law within":

> Literatur war im aufklärerischen Denken ein geschichtphilosophisch *und* politisch unverzichtbares Medium der Einübung von Verhaltensweisen, der Vereinheitlichung bürgerlichen Sitten, der Entwicklung einer homogenen bürgerlichen Öffentlichkeit. Aber dieser unbegriffliche, nicht-rationale Prozeß wurde zurückgekoppelt an die kritisch-rationale Diskussion einer relativ kleinen Gruppe, an eine vorausdenkende Elite (Schulte-Sasse 1980, 95).

In the development of aesthetic theory throughout the eighteenth century the fact that the aesthetics of manners embodies a view of the social order, and thus is moral and social in nature, becomes less prominent in the theoretical contributions. Manners and morality become routine, self-evident expressions of what is simply agreeable or disagreeable (Eagleton 1990, 43).

Shaftesbury's and others' theoretical approaches to taste contained a dilemma: while advocating freedom of criticism in the conviction that this freedom would lead people at large to the correct standards of taste, they also disapproved of the types of art and conduct actually adopted by a large number of people. The standards on which Shaftesbury, Addison and Hume relied were actually the standards of a small elite (as Schulte-Sasse points out in the passage just quoted, though not with specific reference to these thinkers). The gap between reality and the ideal of the elite grows with the increasing commercialization of art and literature, and is in large measure the

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[3] Kames 1762, vol. I, p. 6; quoted in Caygill 1989, 66

reason for the apparent reorientation in aesthetic theory towards the end of the eighteenth century. Under pressure from the commercialization of artistic production and with the realization that most people do not live up to the ideal of enlightenment the theoreticians of the arts (among whom some are practising artists, for example Schiller and Moritz) turn away from any concern for the audience.

In the last half of the eighteenth century there is an explosive growth in literary production in Germany, but the literary market becomes, to the chagrin of the intellectual elite, increasingly dominated by works exclusively intended for entertainment, works which do not or only to a very limited degree attempt to provide moral edification and enlightenment, the functions which literary theoreticians ascribed to literature (Schulte-Sasse 1980, 97). Producers, as well as consumers, of works living up to the theoretical ideals of enlightenment saw themselves increasingly isolated, and the works of their choice did not meet with commercial success. The emerging cultural industry begins to undermine "die als homogen vorgestellte bürgerliche Öffentlichkeit" (Schulte-Sasse 1980, 98). On the theoretical level there is in Germany an increasing criticism of the "Geschhäftsgeist der Buchhändler" (Schulte-Sasse, 106), a criticism we also find in the writings of Moritz and Kant (see below; also Bürger 1980). The descrepancy between the ideal of enlightenment and taste and the actual preferences of many people is, however, usually understood as an individual phenomenon, and not as a result of social and economical processes. Enlightenment is, as Kant claims in "What is Enlightenment?", "man's release from his *self-incurred* tutelage" [my italics].

> Tutelage is man's inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another. Self-incurred is this tutelage when its cause lies not in lack of reason but in lack of resolution and courage to use it without direction from another (Kant 1784, 3).

It is thought-provoking that the creator of one of the most complex epistemologies in the history of philosophy could think of no other reasons than laziness and cowardice to explain why "the greater portion of mankind (and . . . the entire fair sex)" remains in

this state of tutelage. Kant's explanation was essentially repeated by Schiller, though Schiller added that the generality of mankind lives in circumstances too difficult to leave much energy for more noble activities (1793, 284-85). Schiller recommended that the artist should look contemptuously on the judgement of his own time: "Wie verwahrt sich aber der Künstler vor der Verderbnissen seiner Zeit, die ihn von allen Seiten umfangen? Wenn er ihr Urteil verachtet" (Schiller 1793, 288).

It is this turn which forms the core of the move from the type of disinterested approach found in Shaftesbury and Hutcheson to the development of the notion of the autonomy of art. The turn is a reaction to a social development which makes the situation of the artist increasingly difficult. The artists are forced into exile, but theoretically they become idealized. Against what is seen as the destructive tendencies of the age art and culture become, in the words of Raymond Williams, a model "of access to that ideal of human perfection which was to be the centre of defence against the disintegrating tendencies of the age" (Williams 1958, 59). In other words, the emergent doctrine of the autonomy of art is rooted in specific historical processes affecting the production, distribution and consumption of art (see Bürger 1974, 46).

Kant's authority is invoked when the doctrine of *l'art pour l'art* becomes fashionable in France in the early part of the nineteenth century. It demands a somewhat one-sided reading of Kant to attribute this doctrine to him, but since none of the people advancing the thesis - for example Benjamin Constant (1767-1830) and Victor Cousin (1792-1867) - appear to actually have read Kant, this made little difference (see Willcox 1953). There are, however, elements in Kant's thinking pointing in the direction of the romantic notion of art and artistic creation, for example in his discussion of the work of art as a free creation by the artist-genius. According to Kant, fine art is the art of genius, and one characteristic feature of the creation by genius is that it is not known how the work of fine art is brought about, not even to the creator (Kant 1790, sec. 46).

In France in the early nineteenth century the doctrine of art for art's sake was a response to political oppression and censorship, a reaction to the growing commercialization of literature and culture in general, and a response to an increasing alienation of the artist from large segments of his or her potential public. As such, the idea of art for art's sake had a liberating effect on the activities of the artist. Though the doctrine can be used as an argument against undesired interference in the artist's activities from, for example, the state, this does not mean that it cannot simultaneously serve as an indicator of social distinctions. In the doctrine of art for art's sake, art becomes the expression of a view of life, identified as *being* as opposed to *doing,* where doing refers to all the utilitarian aspects of commercial life and industrialization. In the words of Walter Pater:

> That the end of life is not action but contemplation - *being* as distinct from *doing* - a certain disposition of the mind: is . . . the principle of all the higher morality. . . . To treat life in the spirit of art, is to make a thing in which means and ends are identified: to encourage such treatment, the true moral significance of art and poetry.[4]

That this view of life had a moral aspect was, as apparent in the quotation, clear to Pater.

The disharmonious relationship between social reality and the artist also found expression in the writings of Karl Philip Moritz (1756-1793), Kant, Schiller and the English Romantics. Philosophically, the Germans were very influential, and the following exposition will therefore be focused on their contribution.

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[4] W. Pater, *Appreciations: with an Essay on Style*, London, 1907 (3rd ed.), 62-63; quoted in Williams 1958, 170.

8.2.1.: Moritz

The turn away from any concern for the audience is clearly present in Moritz's essay "Versuch einer Vereinigung aller schönen Künste und Wissenschaften unter dem Begriff des in sich selbst Vollendeten" from 1785. This essay may very well have had a considerable influence on Kant's aesthetics (see Woodmansee 1984, 23-24). Beautiful works of art have, Moritz explains in the essay, their purpose entirely in themselves, and not in their possible usefulness or in the fact that they may please. Use or pleasure are external to the work of art. Beauty "hat seinen Zweck nicht außer sich . . . sondern wegen seiner eignen innern Vollkommenheit" (Moritz 1785, 4). We must, therefore, appreciate beauty in a manner akin to disinterested love, without any regard to what we may obtain from it or of what use it may be (5). In particular we should not be concerned with obtaining any pleasure from the work of art. The work has its own laws of perfection, and the artist should be concerned with these, which may be contrary to what pleases. If the artist aims to make something pleasing he may be creating a work which is less than perfect (6). This is consequently not what he should be striving for.[5] As Martha Woodmansee points out in her discussion of Moritz's essay, Moritz is evidently addressing a situation wherein the popular has become identified with the inferior, and where what Moritz considers true art has little hope of gaining a wider audience. In her analysis, Woodmansee gives reasons for this theoretical development similar to the ones discussed above, primarily the commercialization of literary production (Woodmansee 1984, 35 ff.). Moritz's recommendation to disregard whether or

[5] "Sagt der Künstler: aber wenn mein Werk gefällt oder Vergnügen erweckt, so habe ich doch meinen Zweck erreicht; so antworte ich: umgekehrt! Weil du deinen Zweck erreicht hast, so gefällt dein Werk, oder daß dein Werk gefällt, *kann vielleicht ein Zeichen* sein, daß du deinen Zweck in dem Werke selbst erreicht hast. War aber der eigentliche Zweck bei deinem Werke mehr das Vergnügen, das du dadurch bewürken wolltest, als die Vollkommenheit des Werks in sich selber; so wird mir eben dadurch der Beifall schon sehr verdächtig, den dein Werk bei diesem oder jenem erhaltet hat" (Moritz 1785, 7).

not a work would please an audience has the appearance of making a virtue out of necessity. Moritz, as well as many other writers, had to make his living writing travelogues and magazine articles, while he had difficulties getting the works he himself held in higher esteem published (Woodmansee, 45). The themes discussed by Moritz also found expression in Kant's philosophy. Kant's contention that free art must not be carried out for the sake of wages ("Lohnkunst", Kant 1790, p. 156; future references are to this work, unless otherwise indicated) must be understood as a reaction to the growing commercialization of literature in particular. Free art must not be a "Lohngeschäft" (p. 177). I now turn to a closer inspection of Kant's aesthetics.

8.2.2.: Kant

The thrust of Kant's aesthetics is to present the a priori framework which alone makes aesthetic judgements possible. As such, the basis for the judgements is universal. A justification for the empirical use of the factulty of judgement, cannot itself be empirical (based on experience), but must be a priori (see sect. IV and V of the Introduction). The judgements of taste also rest on a priori reasons (sect. 12). The universal principles of the aesthetic judgement-power are the major theme of Kant's third Critique, but in his attempt to prove his point it occasionally emerges that the supposed universality actually has a social basis.

According to Kant, the judgement of taste is subjective (sect. 1, p. 39), though this subjectivity is of a distinctive kind. "Subjectivity", in this context, does not mean arbitrary or purely private. Though subjective, the judgement of taste is also necessary, but its necessity is not of a conceptual or theoretical kind (in the sense in which scientific laws are necessary), and it is not based on rules or prescriptions, only on what is "mere nature (bloße Natur) in the subject" (p. 203). The necessity of aesthetic judgements is not based on general rules, but must, Kant says, be based on a subjective

principle and on feelings, rather than on concepts (sect. 20, p. 79). Since the beautiful is not judged on the basis of concepts, it cannot be based on rules or prescriptions, but only on the nature of the subject. The "mere nature" of the subject is "das übersinnliche Substrat aller seiner Vermögen" (p. 203). Kant here (I suspect) refers to that commonality in our nature which explains the origin of our feeling of pleasure. In section V of the Introduction, Kant argues that the principle of the formal purposiveness (formalen Zweckmäßigkeit) of nature is a transcendental principle of the judgement-power. It is necessary for the judgement-power to have such a transcendental principle to obtain the status of a priori validity.[6] The principle of purposiveness is, very briefly, the principle that our abilities to explain what is going on in nature are such that they accord with what is necessary to this explanation; our faculties, by some strange coincidence, are such that we can umderstand and explain nature. We have to assume that our faculties are such that they make knowledge possible, and the experience of this puposiveness (though we are not able to prove its existence) gives rise to pleasure (p. 21). The feeling of pleasure connected with purposiveness is subjective, and expresses the play of the cognitive faculties in the reflective judgement. If we consider an object, and this consideration gives rise to the pleasure associated with the consciousness of puposiveness, we think that this pleasure cannot be something only we would experience, but must be connected to the object of our experience. This imagined generality gives the judgement its subjective necessity. This is evident in the way in which we talk about beauty as if it were something in the things we judge beautiful: "Der Gegenstand heißt alsdann schön; und das Vermögen, durch eine solche Lust (folglich auch allgemeingültig) zu urteilen, der Geschmack" (p. 27). Only that aesthetic

[6] "Ich nenne alle Erkenntnis transzendental, die sich nicht sowohl mit Gegenständen, sondern mit unserer Erkenntnisart von Gegenständen, insofar diese a priori möglich sein soll, überhaubt beschäftigt". Kant, *Kritik der Reinen Vernunft*, B 25.

purposiveness of fine arts which is thus based on our subjective nature (our intellectual equipment), can make a warranted claim to be bound to please everybody.

In its assumed objectivity the judgement of taste differs from the judgement that something is pleasing or entertaining. If I find something pleasing or entertaining it makes no difference if the experience is shared by others, but when I say that something is beautiful I *demand* that they agree with me (sect. 7, p. 50). The expectation that others agree with our judgement of taste is, according to Kant, an expectation that we have our sense of taste in common with others, that the pleasurable effect of "dem freien Spiel unserer Enrkenntniskräfte" (p. 80) is a common sensation. It is this "Gemeinsinn" which gives our judgements of taste their subjective necessity. Taste can be considered a form of *sensus communis* (sect. 40).

According to Kant, the judgement of taste thus has its basis in human nature. But there is, as mentioned, another aspect to the judgement of taste, an aspect which occasionally appears in Kant's text. This aspect can properly be considered a social aspect, and it runs contrary to the claim that the judgement of taste is based on a common human ability.

The judgement of taste is disinterested ("ohne alles Interesse"). To make a judgement of taste I must take no interest in the existence or non-existence of the thing judged about; I am not allowed, when for example observing a castle, to think "auf gut Rousseauisch auf die Eitelkeit der Großen schmälen, welche den Schweiß des Volks auf so entbehrliche Dinge verwenden" (sect. 2, p. 41). In general, it is possible to pass judgements of taste only when one is beyond all desires and need, in the way only a full person is able to tell whether or not a meal is tasteful. To the hungry person everything is tasteful (sect. 5, p. 47). The ability to make judgements of taste distinguishes human beings from animals - but it also distinguishes some people from others: a certain culture which is not always present among the simpler section of society is necessary (sect. 60, p. 216; see Shusterman 1989, 222-3).

The cultural difference is even more pronounced in relation to the other major type of aesthetic judgement discussed by Kant, the sublime. We encounter the sublime mostly in natural objects, or think we do, since strictly speaking it exists only in the mind. The idea or feeling of the sublime arises particularly when nature appears chaotic, " . . . oder in ihren wildesten, regellosesten Unordnung und Verwüstung, wenn sich nur Größe und Macht blicken läßt" (sect. 23, p. 89). The feeling of the sublime can nevertheless be a pleasant feeling, though not in the restful manner in which we experience anything beautiful: "Das Gemüt fühlt sich in der Vorstellung des Erhabenen in der Natur *bewegt* . . ." (sect. 27). Uncultivated people will only find terrible that which the cultivated person finds sublime - in the powers of nature, against which their own are nothing, they see only "Mühseligkeit, Gefahr und Not" (sect. 29, p. 111). The one who fears nature cannot judge about its sublimity, in the same manner as the one influenced by "Neigung und Appetit" cannot judge about the beautiful (sect. 28, p. 107). A certain amount of culture, and the development of "sittlicher Ideen", are necessary to be able to judge about the sublime, Kant says (sect. 29, p. 111). But even judgements about the beautiful require culture, though not as much as judgements about the sublime (p. 112). The appreciation of the beauty of nature is actually not all that common, but only characteristic of those whose habits of thought have a disposition for the good or are particularly receptive to it (sect. 42, p. 153).

These requirements are actually requirements to live in relative comfort, in circumstances where the forces of nature do not pose a direct threat, and where one does not have to make a living constantly confronting and struggling with the forces of nature as, for example, the peasant or the labourer does, and where one's immediate physical needs are secured. As Shusterman points out, what Kant advances in the name of universal human nature is actually a "socially distinctive acquisition, presupposing and motivated by sociocultural distinction" (Shusterman 1989, 224).

In Kant's attempt to distinguish the judgement of taste from the merely entertaining or moving we find the same theme as we encountered in Moritz. The entertaining or moving is an example of a barbarian taste: "Der Geschmack ist jederzeit noch barbarisch, wo er die Beimischung der Reize und Rührungen zum Wohlgefallen bedarf, ja wohl gar diese zum Maßstabe seines Beifalls macht" (sect. 13, p. 62). But, as shown above, the requirements for the ability to make aesthetic judgements actually restrict the possession of taste to those who are beyond need and desire, those who have reached a certain level of culture, and are not directly confronted with the forces of nature.

The connection between the ability to pass aesthetic judgements and social privilege becomes particularly clear when we consider Kant's view of the relationship between judgements of taste and moral judgements. Taste is a form of *sensus communis*, it is evidence of a certain feeling for one's fellow human beings. Taste is therefore also a "Beförderungsmittel" (sect. 41, p. 148) for social intercourse. An isolated individual has no interest in his own appearance or the appearance of his dwellings. It is only in society that it is important not only to be human, "sondern auch nach einer Art ein *feiner* Mensch zu sein (der Anfang der Zivilisierung)" [my italics] (sect. 41, p. 148). Many therefore assume, Kant comments, that there is a connection between an interest in beauty as such and the moral character of an individual. But others point out that this is not necessarily so: some virtuosos of taste are morally corrupt and vain. So perhaps, Kant admits, a sense for the beautiful cannot as such be an indication of a good moral character (sect. 42, p. 150). But an interest in the beauty of *nature*, Kant claims, is always a mark of a good soul (ibid.). This interest is not, however, common: It requires some level of culture, a disposition to the good or a susceptibility to it (sect. 42, p. 153. Cf. Shusterman 1989, 225).

In the last paragraph of the first part of *Kritik der Urteilskraft* Kant says that taste is actually a "Beurteilungsvermögen der Versinnlichung sittlicher Ideen

(vermittelst einer gewissen Analogie der Refelexion über beide)". The pleasure which gives the judgement of taste its general validity (though subjective), and brings it beyond the merely private, is actually a moral sensitivity. Consequently, the best preparatory education for the development of a true taste is the development of "sittlicher Ideen und die Kultur des moralischen Gefühls" (sect. 60, p. 217).

Kant does not think it possible to find, or at least articulate, any particular standard of taste, but the assumption of a general agreement in taste is nevertheless present in his aesthetics. It is the assumption that others must agree with my judgement of taste which gives it its apparent necessity. The necessity is explained by Kant in terms of human nature, as flowing from our shared intellectual equipment. But Kant's conception of "human nature" is, it turns out, actually a product of social distinction and privilege.[7]

We find, thus, that there is a continuity between the concerns of Shaftesbury, Addison, Hutcheson and Hume, and the concerns of Kant. Our examination of the British thinkers from the first half of the eighteenth century revealed that they, in their discussions of taste and the arts, articulated a point of view associated with a particular historical and social standpoint. The connection between morality and beauty in the writings of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson also contained a view of the social order and they paved the way for a new conception of what I called the expressive order, compatible with that ascending social group to which they belonged, or with which they identified politically. This social group or class, along with its culture and world view, becomes dominant in the course of the eighteenth century. Taste in particular embodies an attempt to create a new form of human community, united by a common taste and a

[7] Bürger points out that the appeal to universality is a bourgeois element in Kant's argumentation: "What is bourgeois in Kant's argument is precisely the demand that the aesthetic judgment have universal validity. The pathos of universality is characteristic of the bourgeoisie, which fights the feudal nobility as an estate that represents particular interests" (Bürger 1974, 43).

common culture developed through public discourse. The view of culture, according to which the appreciation of works of art is a commendable activity, or even a condition for membership among the cultured, and according to which the possession of taste is important, becomes, in the course of the eighteenth century, generally accepted. With its general acceptance it no longer has to be defended against those who find its value dubious, or see it as a sign of a depraved craving for luxury. It becomes part of the social fabric which is simply taken for granted, and no longer has to be defended in directly social or political terms, as it did for Shaftesbury and Hutcheson. In the development that brings us from the late eighteenth - early nineteenth century to the present, the social or political content of the notions of disinterestedness, aesthetic experience, and the autonomy of art can then seem less apparent. The conception of the disinterested contemplation of art and nature in the theories of Shaftesbury, Hume and Kant, translated in the real world into social distinctions, since not everyone could obtain the required disinterested state. In our contemporary world the claim that one must approach art in a detached manner similarly presupposes social distinctions, as I will show in the following section.

The autonomous conception of art (understood as a theory of the conditions of existence of art, and generally of the proper way of interpreting and engaging with art) is now taken to imply that art does not have a social and political function, or at least that its value is above and beyond whatever social and political function it may occasionally serve. Autonomy means independence. To say that art is autonomous becomes a claim that its being as art does not depend on any ethical, political or social functions. But the notion of the autonomy of art and the notion that an "autonomous" manner is the correct manner wherein one should engage with art cannot be separated from the social order of modern society as it has been shaped since 1700. This conception of art marginalizes other forms of art, and connects art to notions of self-presentation, characteristic of the dominant culture. The historical part of this thesis has

shown how a particular form of discourse about art gained cultural hegemony, and how this type of discourse is inseparable from social assumptions and aspirations, expressed in terms such as "politeness" and "good breeding". In section 8.3. I will show how many of these assumptions are part of the modern conception of art today, and that it is in this form that it forms a tacit assumption underlying most discussion of the conception of art in contemporary aesthetics, and in some forms of art history.

8.3.: Contemporary philosophy and the state of the arts

The conception of the autonomy of art is taken for granted in most contemporary philosophy of art. Danto observes that there is virtual consensus in Western aesthetics " ...that the essence of art is its ephemerality, outside the framework of use and purpose which defines human life..." (Danto 1986, 166). Art does not, according to this view, belong in the realm of ordinary things and events. The proper approach to a work of art consists, according to one of the few contemporary philosophers critical of the conception of art's autonomy, "in abstracting the object from its context of action, isolating the work from its fabric of intention, and focusing one's attention on the object itself - discerning and revelling in its play of sounds or colors or textures or metaphors" (Wolterstorff 1980, 3). In the early parts of this century this was the view advocated in Fry's and Bell's theories of art and by Edward Bullough in his essay "'Psychical Distance' as a Factor in Art and an Aesthetic Principle". Some form of it has later been defended by, for example, Ortega y Gasset, Beardsley, Hampshire, Sibley, Ingarden, Stolnitz, and Scruton.[8] Scruton has argued that without the assumption

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[8] J. Ortega y Gasset, *The Dehumanization of Art*, New York, n.d. (Dobleday Anchor Books), p. 16. M. C. Beardsley, "The Aesthetic Point of View", in Margolis (ed.) 1987, 10-28. The autonomy of art is also assumed in an essay Beardsley co-authored with W. K. Wimsatt, "The Intentional Fallacy" (in Margolis (ed.) 1987, 367-380). S. Hampshire, "Logic and Appreciation", in W. Elton (ed.), *Aesthetics and Language*, Oxford 1959. See also Stuart Hampshire, *Thought and Action. New Edition*, Notre Dame, Indiana, 1982,

(continued...)

of the autonomy of art there would not be any aesthetics (as a philosophical discipline) at all (Scruton 1983, 8). The present controversy about new forms of, for example, social or feminist, art history and criticism is in large measure a controversy about this conception.[9]

Kant's conception of artistic creation is a commonplace today. Essentially a Kantian view of artistic creation is presupposed today by the type of art history known as 'connoisseurship', a major part of which is the question of attribution of artworks to particular artists (cf. Zolberg 1990, 6-7). The art historian Mark Roskill points out that "[w]e tend to see art . . . as the aggregate of the work of particular gifted individuals" (Roskill 1976, 19). For this reason, the most typical art historical treatises are the monograph and the *catalogue raissonné*.[10]

In the contemporary world, the idea that art is independent of political or moral values is occasionally used to keep the censor at a distance. It is interesting to observe, that in cases where the borderline between politics, morality and art is blurred, as for instance happens in controversial art exhibits, both defenders and attackers build

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[8](...continued)
244 f. Sibley 1959. R. Ingarden, "Aesthetic Experience and Aesthetic Object", in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. 21, No. 3, 1961. Stolnitz 1986. Scruton 1983. See also Goodman 1978, 58 f.

[9] One of the purposes of *The New Criterion*, a review edited by Hilton Kramer, is the defence of traditional forms of art history and criticism against, for example, social art history. See also Grace Gluck, "Clashing Views Reshape Art History", *New York Times*, December 20, 1987, p. B 1.

[10] Becker aptly summarizes this element in the modern conception of art: ". . . making great works [of art] is not something anyone could do on a good day, . . . the works get their value from being made by unusual people, of whom there are not many" (Becker 1982, 354-355). The art historical monograph, according to Griselda Pollock, " . . . traces the life of a special kind of person, the artist, from life to death, within the narrow limits of only that which serves to render all that is narrated as signifiers of artistness. The monograph is paralleled by the catalogue raissoné - the chronological ordering of the products of this 'artistness' through which can be reconstructed the linear development of an artistic biography" (Pollock 1980, 63 - see also Zolberg 1990, 55 and Pollock 1988, 11).

their case on the maintenance of the distinction. The controversy over an exhibit entitled "Witnesses: Against Our Vanishing" held in New York City in November 1989 exemplifies this. This exhibit, dealing with AIDS and its consequences, was originally given a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) in the United States, but the grant was later withdrawn by the chairman of the NEA (Frohnmayer), ostensibly because of a law passed in the United States aiming to restrict public funding for artwork considered "homoerotic" or "obscene" and because of critical remarks in the catalogue about the Roman Catholic Archbishop of New York and certain American politicians. Frohnmayer's main objection to the show is that "a large portion of the content [of the show] is political rather than artistic" (*New York Times*, November 9, C 28). One possible line of defence for the organizers of the exhibition would, of course, be to acknowledge a political element in the exhibit: It deals with AIDS, very much a political issue in the United States today, so how can it possibly avoid being political? But the executive director of the gallery where the exhibit was held shares (or at least pretends to share) Frohnmayer's intention to preserve the division between art and politics, and states that she "wholeheartedly believe[s] in this show. It has not changed from art to politics. It is art" (ibid.; see also *New York Times*, November 10, 1989, p. C 33).

This conception of art as autonomous occurs in contemporary philosophy of art in the idea that art should be appreciated and interpreted in a manner that does not relate it to political and social issues, or to the context in which art is produced and consumed. I have already in passing indicated how this is the case in some contemporary contributions to aesthetics, for example in my discussion of Sibley's celebrated "Aesthetic Concepts" in Chapter Two (sect. 2.2., pp. 35-37). It was also implied in my criticism of Tilghman, who, in spite of appearances to the contrary, relies on a notion of the historical development of art which views this as autonomous (sect. 2.3. and 2.4.). Recently, the view that art has its value in itself and that it should be

approached in a manner that does not relate it to practical, moral or political concerns has been defended by Stolnitz (Stolnitz 1986).

The characteristic feature of the proper approach to a work of art is what Stolnitz calls its aesthetic disinterestedness. Popular entertainment or folk art is not approached in this manner, but merely for the sake of entertainment or relaxation. These types of art are not, therefore, abstracted from the interests of the group(s). Real, or authentic, art cannot be appreciated if it is used to gratify any ulterior desires (entertainment, relaxation) (30). It is assumed that the so-called disinterested approach to works of art is better, more elevated, than the approach characteristic of folk or popular culture, where the works of art (if that is what they are) are closely connected to the "common interests, hopes, and fears of the group", as Stolnitz says with a quotation from Arnold Hauser (Stolnitz 1986, 33). The person who seeks entertainment or demands to recognize his own world in the work of art,

> . . . cannot divorce himself from the insistence that things must serve his desires, "biological" or aesthetic, and that they must do so quickly. His self, gripped by this need for "tendency gratification", dominates this experience. "Art music" and art of comparable quality in the other media, because it will not serve him, cannot then become the center of his attention. Its will is to be itself, faithful to its own integrity. Such art can be appreciated only by the percipient who can rise to the demand of taking on "for the time being" the self enjoined by the work (Stolnitz 1986, 42).

When we interpret a painting, such as Picasso's *Guernica*, anything external, for example knowledge about the history of the painting or personal knowledge about Picasso, is irrelevant, even the fact that the title of the painting is the name of a city in Spain which was bombed during the Spanish civil war: " . . . *Guernica* has nothing whatever to do with Guernica" (Stolnitz 1986, 37). In fact, Stolnitz thinks, the more ignorant a person is about things external to the painting the better that person is able to appreciate the painting. Stolnitz assumes, as is generally assumed, that in the "disinterested" approach to the work of art no special interests are at stake, that it is

possible to perceive (e.g.) a picture merely on the conditions which are somehow given by the picture itself.

The work of Gombrich, Goodman, Wartofsky, Bryson and others gives us strong reasons to think that the idea of the uneducated gaze is false. Wartofsky and Bryson in particular have argued that perception is always educated (Wartofsky 1979, Bryson 1983). Perception is not just a function of unalterable biological faculties, but is historically shaped.[11]

It is through its reliance on the conception of the autonomy of art contemporary philosophy of art has a function analogous to that of its historical predecessors. In the following (sect. 8.4.) I will argue, that the disinterestedness claimed in much contemporary philosophy of art is not as disinterested as it appears, but connected to social interests: it reinforces distinctions between those to whom "high art" is accessible and those to whom it is not. This happens because a distinction which is socially and historically contingent is presented as a simple difference between "the best", that which has "quality" and that which is not very good or void of quality (as usually assumed); a difference which is often expressed as a difference between "high art" and "low" or "popular art". But the distinction between "high" and "low" has become increasingly problematic as feminists, sociologists of art, and post-modernists increasingly challenge the process through which something become a part of the canon of "high art".

[11] Even from a biological point of view our perceptual apparatus is a product of the evolutionary circumstance wherein it was shaped. See Wartofsky 1979, ch. 11.

8.4.: Philosophy of Art and Social Distinction: Art and Ideology

The conception of the autonomy of art connects in the real world to the reinforcement of social distinctions. The appreciation of the right kinds of art in the appropriate manner becomes a requirement for, and a sign of membership in, a cultural elite. The ability and desire to abstract from extraneous circumstances, and not relate, for example, that which is seen in a picture to one's own life world, is a product of what Pierre Bourdieu calls one's cultural or educational capital (Bourdieu 1979; see also Noreng 1974 and Novitz 1989 and 1990). In general, it turns out that the ability and inclination to approach a work of art in a "disinterested" or "aesthetic" manner which does not relate the work to practical, moral, or political questions is directly related to what Bourdieu calls one's educational capital. Educational capital simply refers to the duration of one's schooling (Bourdieu 1979, 18). The higher one's educational (or academic) capital the better, generally speaking, one's ability to approach a work of art in the manner presupposed in much aesthetic theory and art history. Differences between people with equal amounts of educational capital are explicable in terms of their social origin (determined on the basis of their fathers' education). But education alone is not decisive, since success in academic pursuits, or even access to education, is also determined by social background (23). It is characteristic of what Bourdieu calls "popular aesthetics" or popular culture that it is the direct opposite of the approach presupposed in large parts of the philosophy of art (41). People with little formal education do not typically observe a work of art in a detached manner, but relate it to the world in which they live. According to Bourdieu,

> . . . nothing more rigorously distinguishes the different [social] classes than the disposition objectively demanded by the legitimate consumption of legitimate works, the aptitude for taking a specifically aesthetic point of view on objects already constituted aesthetically . . . and the even rarer capacity to constitute aesthetically objects that are ordinary or even 'common' . . . or to apply the principles of 'pure' aesthetic in the most

> everyday choices of everyday life, in cooking, dress or decoration, for example (Bourdieu 1979, 40).

But the ability to view a work of art or any other object independently of its context is not just a matter of having the right education, and hence the right conceptual apparatus to do so. It requires in addition, Bourdieu observes, "withdrawal from economic necessity" (54). These requirements restrict the ability to approach art in the manner presupposed in some forms of aesthetic theory and art history to socially privileged groups.

The approach here exemplified by Stolnitz gives the appearance of nature or mere fact to that which is historically and socially contingent. There are, we are led to believe, inherent features of some types of art which make them more conducive to the disinterested approach than others, a feature or features which distinguish them from, say, folk art or popular entertainment. The difference is a simple one of quality. But this approach disregards the questions of how and why some things are of "high quality" and others not. For instance feminist art historians have recently claimed that the conception of art which typically shapes the way in which the history of art is written, and the way in which the art-historical canon is formed, has a gender bias. Griselda Pollock has argued that the reasons for the marginalization of women artists in the canon of "great art" must be sought at a deep conceptual and systematic level in the discipline of art history, in the very concept of art which structures the writing of traditional art history. The point made by Pollock and other feminist art historians is that this concept is not neutral, but embodies, for example in the notion of the individualistic artist-genius, a conception that is ideological (Pollock 1988, 11).[12] At the

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[12] It is perhaps instructive that modern analytic philosophy of art has had little place for feminism. A recent issue of *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* has as its theme "Feminism and Traditional Aesthetics" (edited by P. Brand and C. Korsmeyer, vol. 48 (No. 4) 1990), but the editors point out that prior to this issue "no articles from a feminist perspective have appeared, and few books of feminist scholarship have been reviewed" (p. 277).

core of the historiography of art is, besides the shamanistic conception of the artist, the assumption of the autonomy of art (Pollock 1988, 22). This conception of art relies on presuppositions of a social and political nature which are not acknowledged as such. The differentiating feature between that which becomes canonical and that which does not, is presented as a fact, as a simple matter of what is great art and what is not, as a question of features of objects and not a matter of the rules guiding a cultural practice, or the way in which a historically, socially and politically contingent discourse has been constructed.

Related to the ability to approach works of art in a certain manner is, therefore, a distinction between different forms of art, between what is commonly called "high art" and "popular art". Most philosophy of art deals almost exclusively with what is considered high art, works of art belonging to the art-historical canon. In a recent essay, David Novitz has examined different attempts to distinguish between high and popular art on the basis of the intrinsic features of the objects belonging to the two different categories (Novitz 1989). Normally, the distinction between the two types of art is understood in terms similar to the ones we encountered in Stolnitz's account of disinterestedness above: high art is not merely entertaining or pleasing, but satisfies a more refined taste, a difference which, it is assumed, is based on a formal difference between the high and the low (Novitz 1989, 215). Novitz examines possible answers to the question wherein this formal difference may consist: Does high art have a higher "formal complexity"? Does it arouse or embody a different (nobler) sort of feelings than popular art? Is it produced in a different manner? None of these suggestions allow us to draw a clear distinction between high and low or popular art. Some forms of popular art, for example film, are highly complex, while some forms of high art (for example minimalist paintings, or medieval Madonnas) cannot be said to be complex. Similarly with the other suggested destinctions: Regardless of the suggested feature, it is always possible to find a work of popular art with the same feature, and vice versa.

Novitz draws the conclusion that, since works of art are socially produced, the demarcation is actually a socially created distinction. The reasons for the distinction between high art and popular art "are to be found in certain social relations, and not in the physical features, origins, or causal properties of the works" (Novitz 1989, 219). Among the causes of the origin of the emergence of the distinction between high and popular art, Novitz points to factors similar to those discussed above (in section 8.2.): the development of mass-produced literature, the gradual isolation of the artist from the mainstream of society, and so on. The distinction between high and popular art becomes, according to Novitz, particularly evident from the beginning of this century, when modernist art becomes increasingly esoteric and difficult to understand. High art becomes, in particular, en epithet for art created without concern for or in direct opposition to commercially successful art, a distinction we traced back at least to Moritz, Schiller and Kant. Since this art was only accessible to those with a minimum of education, its appreciation became a sign of belonging to a cultural elite. Consequently, "the distinction between high and popular art does not merely distinguish different types of art, but, much more than this, it actually accentuates and reinforces traditional class divisions within capitalist society" (224).

To rely on the conception of art as autonomous is, therefore, to treat as priviledged one particular discourse, among many possible and competing discourses. Perhaps the values represented by high art are different from those of popular art, but they are not inherently "higher" or "better". Their superiority cannot be claimed without argumentation. To do so is to become an advocate of one specific culture at the expense of others.

To summarize: Some forms of art do, no doubt, in some measure have a life of their own in our society. The relative isolation of (high) art is a result of specific historical developments; to the extent that art is autonomous, the autonomy is, therefore, a result of historical contingencies, and not a natural fact about the existence of art as

such. Similarly with the disinterested approach to art: to the extent that such an approach is possible or desirable, it is a product of socialization, and not a fact of nature. The representation of the normative as the merely factual is a feature of all ideology. In the words of Wartofsky: "When norms present themselves as descriptions of fact, we have ideology" (Wartofsky 1980, 241). The elevation of a socially and culturally contingent, historically limited condition of the existence of art to an essential fact about the true nature of art "itself" turns the reliance on this conception into an ideology. This is equally the case for traditional aesthetics as for the alternative, descriptive approach: Essentialism mistakes what is a result of historical and social contingecies for natural or purely formal features of objects; descriptivism uncritically elevates the prevailing order, which forms the basis for its descriptions, to a matter of fact, and in this way gives to the prevailing state of the arts the appearance of being eternal and natural.

The ideological function appears as well when the conception of the autonomy of art is taken (as it almost always is) as an indication that the social function of art can be ignored in a philosophical analysis. The conception of the autonomy of art becomes equated with the idea that art is independent of society. Peter Bürger has aptly summarized how the autonomy of art can be taken for the view that art is therefore independent of social constraints. The category of autonomy permits, Bürger says,

> . . . the description of art's detachment from the context of practical life as a historical development - that among the members of those classes which, at least at times, are free from the pressures of the need for survival, a sensuousness could evolve that was not part of any means-ends relationships. Here we find the moment of truth in the talk about the autonomous work of art. What this category cannot lay hold of is that this detachment of art from practical contexts is a *historical process*, i.e., that it is socially conditioned (Bürger 1974, 46).

If the autonomy of art is not viewed as the product of a historical process but as the essential, timeless truth of art, the conception of the autonomy of art becomes, Bürger says, ideological:

> And here lies the untruth of the category [autonomy], the element of distortion that characterizes every ideology, provided one uses this term in the sense the early Marx does when he speaks of the critique of ideology. The category 'autonomy' does not permit the understanding of its referent as one that has developed historically. The relative dissociation of the work of art from the praxis of life in bourgeois society thus becomes transformed into the (erroneous) idea that the work of art is totally independent of society (Ibid.).

Through the uncritical assumption of the conception of the autonomy of art, philosophy of art elevates a historically contingent, social, political and cultural norm to the status of a fact of nature, or a purely conceptual truth.

Some of the points I have made have also been made by, for example sociologists of art, advocates of new forms of art history, and postmodernists investigating forms of popular culture in the contemporary world. But the historicist approach taken in this work makes it possible to draw conclusions which have not been drawn by either: the distinction between high and low is not something which has emerged as a result of a recent cultural disintegration (as claimed by for example Collins (Collins 1989)). It has been slowly built into our conception of art and culture since the later eighteenth century. Novitz erroneously claims that the distinction between high and popular art is a product of the twentieth century (Novitz 1989, 215). As I have shown above, the distinction was already present in the eighteenth century differentiation between polite and vulgar forms of art, and even earlier in the distinction between mechanical and liberal arts. From its very first formulation in the works of Shaftesbury, Hutcheson and Hume, art was an alternative to and was, so to speak, developed on the ruins of traditional forms of popular culture. The modern conception of art has always had built into it cultural differentiations, though these beame more pronounced with the dissipation of the hope of creating a homogenous public sphere.

Secondly, the historicist approach allows us at least to glimpse an answer to the question why areas such as the philosophy and history of art have proven peculiarly resistant to theoretical changes. The historical account given in this work has

shown that the emergent conception of art became a part of a new expressive order. This conception of art became part of a view most educated people form of themselves, a part of a personal narrative, as for example Fry had occasion to observe in the early part of this century (see above pp. 51-52). Because the modern conception of art is ingrained in the expressive order it is particularly resistant to change. To change it requires change in more than a theoretical conception: a deeply held view many of us have of ourselves must change. With the formation of this view of the self is also formed a view of that which it is not: the appreciator of art, as opposed to the non-appreciator, the polite as opposed to the vulgar, culture as opposed to anarchy. In Shaftesbury and Hume we still find the hope that a universal culture can be created, but this proves, in the course of the eighteenth century, increasingly difficult. Consequently, the idea of art becomes increasingly connected to the creation of differences, a development which becomes particulatly evident throughout the nineteenth century where possesion of culture becomes opposed to the mob (cf. Williams 1958).

CONCLUSION

I began this thesis with the observation of the centrality of the question of the nature of art in contemporary British and North American philosophy. The question arose in response to developments in the art world, and to the diversity of artistic practices in the twentieth century in particular. The philosophers' efforts must, therefore, be understood as attempts to provide a theoretical framework within which the historical development of artistic practices can be understood and explained. Such an understanding is actually the declared goal of, for example, Osborne (cf. above, p. 19), Dickie (p. 23 ff.), and Tilghman (p. 41 f.). Danto's ontological theory of art is intended as a framework within which the development of artistic practices, particularly in the twentieth century, can be understood (see sect. 3.2., particularly p. 63 f.). Dickie's institutional theory of art was examined (sect. 1.3.) in an effort to show that it is a form of traditional aesthetics. For this reason it too is unable to provide an answer to the question about the nature of art which takes account of the historically shifting circumstances wherein some things come to be considered art and others not. Critics of essentialism considered the historical development and cultural diversity of artistic practices an important reason for the futility of traditional aesthetics.

The impact of Wittgenstein's philosophy has been felt in the philosophy of art no less strongly than in other branches of philosophy (discussed in Chapter Two). The first stage in the Wittgenstein-inspired criticism of traditional aesthetics ("ordinary language philosophy") resulted in a recommendation to describe the ways in which the concept or word "art" is used. But mere description is as little possible in the philosophy of art, as it is in history or science or medicine. In the philosophy of art, description will give the appearance of fact to the prevailing artistic discourse, which may actually rest

on normative or other presuppositions not apparent on the descriptive level. This was, for example, the case with Sibley's account: a formalist approach to works of art was elevated to a natural fact of art as such (p. 35). Similarly with Tilghman's more recent attempt to develop a philosophy of art on a Wittgensteinian basis (sect. 2.3 and 2.4.). Tilghman's aim is to develop a philosophical approach with a closer connection between practice and philosophical theory, but the approach does not, on closer inspection, provide an alternative to essentialism, again because the historical material on which Tilghman based his examination leads him to accept uncritically a formalist approach to the history and interpretation of art.

I therefore advocated an historicist alternative which moves beyond the current impasse between a descriptive and an essentialist approach. This alternative views the traditional question of the nature of art as a question about the development of forms of discourse. The question of the nature of art should not be considered a question of the classification of a pre-existing order, but, in the terminology of Nelson Goodman, of how to give an account of the conditions which make worlds possible. The existence of art is (as pointed out by for example Dickie and Danto) made possible by the existence of an art world. This art world is brought into existence by social and historical contingencies. The traditional philosophical question of the nature of art must therefore be approached through an examination of these social and historical contingencies.

This historicist alternative to traditional and Wittgensteinian aesthetics was further developed in Chapter Three. Historical accounts cannot be construed as mere descriptions of the past, but will always be informed by a theoretical standpoint and contemporary interests. The hostility towards historicist accounts characteristic of analytic philosophy is in part traced to a disagreement about the proper way in which to write an historical account of philosophical conceptions. I therefore examined and criticized (in sect. 3.2., 3.3. and 3.4.) what I take to be the conception of the history of

philosophy ordinarily presupposed by analytic philosophy. Given this conception, scepticism with regard to an historicist conception of philosophical problems is understandable. This conception was, however, found unduly narrow and actually ahistorical, since it views philosophical problems as perennial. A different theoretical framework for an historicist approach to philosophical problems was therefore suggested (in sect. 3.5.). The validity of the historicist approach must rest in part on its ability to shed light on problems about which we will otherwise remain in the dark, in our case the question about the nature of art. An historicist approach of the type suggested cannot, of course, provide a general, once-and-for-all answer to the question of the nature of art, similar to the type traditional aestheticians hoped to provide. But it can illuminate some of the general characteristics of the discourse of art in a given historical period, and this is what I attempt to do in tracing the historical contingencies that characterized the formation and development of that discourse of which the modern conception of art is a part.

The modern conception of art emerged as part of complex cultural, social and political transformations in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Britain. There was no longer any central authority by which political power and claims to truth could be validated. Everything, Shaftesbury and others claimed, should be open to critical scrutiny within the public sphere. This critical scrutiny also encompassed previously accepted forms of morality and behaviour, and notions of what it is to be a respectable human being. The change in the expressive order, as it was called (sect. 5.3.), could be seen for example in the demise of birth as a criterion for being a gentleman. New behavioral criteria take the place of birth. Among these, the possession of taste and politeness are of particular importance. In the redrawing of the boundaries of human activity, certain activities relating to the possession of taste obtain special significance: knowledge of painting, an interest in sculpture and gardening, acquaintance with certain forms of literature, familiarity with music and architecture - all of which

come to be known as the polite, or later the fine arts. Addison, Shaftesbury, Hutcheson and Hume assured their readers that by surrounding themselves with art they would set themselves off to an advantage, and indicate their moral superiority. The grouping together of what came to be known as the fine arts and the idea that they should be approached in a disinterested manner, disregarding the sweat of the labourers expended in the erection of buildings or creation of gardens, became an important part of the self-consciousness of the emerging middle-class. Because they alone were able to approach art in this manner, this approach to art became part of the way they justified their social position to themselves and others. As such, the disinterested approach to art is not at all disinterested, but serves specific social interests.

The modern conception of art emerged as part of an immensely complicated social and political transformation. Through the course of history the conception of art's disinterestedness, and later the conception of the autonomy of art, passes from a theoretically explicit assumption to a tacit presupposition for theoretical and historical accounts of art. It no longer appears as historically contingent, as representing one particular stance, but as a natural fact about art as such. This, I argued in Chapter Eight, is largely the state in which we find it in contemporary English-speaking philosophy of art. The doctrine of the autonomy of art, and the idea that art must be approached disinterestedly, or in a specifically aesthetic manner, provide its advocates with a view of themselves, a personal narrative through which they can see themselves as perhaps more worthy than others, with an ability to communicate with works of art in a manner not available to just anyone.

This thesis provides us with an historical background against which to view the contemporary state of the philosophy of art. It substantiates the claim, advanced in the Introduction, that it is because of the ahistorical nature of much contemporary philosophy of art that it is unable to come to terms with the nature of art. It may seem paradoxical that a conception of art which claims its independence from social, political

and moral questions is actually deeply imbedded in social, political and moral issues, and only the retrieval of the particular historical circumstances wherein this conception came to be has revealed why this claim is not as paradoxical as it appears.

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The following abbreviations are used in the bibliography:

BJA:	*British Journal of Aesthetics*
JAAC:	*Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*
JHI:	*Journal of the History of Ideas*
JP:	*Journal of Philosophy*
PR:	*Philosophical Review*
HWdPh:	*Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, Basel & Stuttgart, 1971 ff.
AfBG:	*Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte*

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