

# DIOTIMA

REVUE DE RECHERCHE PHILOSOPHIQUE  
REVIEW OF PHILOSOPHICAL RESEARCH

EDITOR AND DIRECTOR  
E. MOUTSOPOULOS  
PROFESSOR AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ATHENS  
MEMBER OF THE ACADEMY OF ATHENS

MANAGING EDITOR  
L. BARGELIOTES  
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR  
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ATHENS

PROCEEDINGS  
OF THE  
THIRD INTERNATIONAL WEEK  
ON  
THE PHILOSOPHY OF ART  
CORFU 1984  
PART II

N.A. ΚΑΛΟΓΕΡΟΠΟΥΛΟΣ  
THE FUNCTION  
OF THE AESTHETIC CATEGORIES

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## THE FUNCTION OF THE AESTHETIC CATEGORIES

Preamble: *The process of imitation.*

In this paper I shall try to present as briefly as possible an aesthetic theory which, if fully developed, can cover a much wider field with implications on the ethical sphere. I shall begin with an analysis of the Kantian set of categories and then proceed to the deduction of a new set of categories which I will call Aesthetic Categories. These categories, which I will then try to expand, must be understood as *constitutive* of aesthetic experience in the same manner as the Kantian categories are *constitutive* of rational experience. It will then be seen that the evaluation of a work of art can be fully explained as a subjective process of imitation. The imitation I am talking about is somewhat different from that as understood by the ancient greek thought. In greek thought, imitation was a relation between the work of art and the natural object. In my meaning, imitation is a relation between object and subject, i.e. between the work of art and the spectator. What is of importance here is the fact that the work of art implies a message which the spectator unconsciously imitates and in this manner he acquires the same characteristics as those *implied* by the work of art. As a prerequisite therefore of aesthetic appreciation I posit this psychological process of imitation which in fact is a fusion between the contemplating subject and the object of art. If man was not a mimetic animal art appreciation would be impossible. Once the mimetic principle is posited, the question arises as to what is the message implied by the work of art. I will follow the argument in this order: 1. What is the function of the Kantian Categories? 2. How can we arrive at the deduction of aesthetic categories? 3. What is the table of the Aesthetic Categories?

## THE FUNCTION OF THE AESTHETIC CATEGORIES

### 1. What is the function of the Kantian Categories?

Kant has given us an insight into the boundaries between rationalism and irrationalism. He showed where rational knowledge ends and by showing this « limit » he left us suppose some unknown beyond which must be understood as the field of irrationality. After Kant we can more clearly distinguish between Caesar's world and God's.

Now in Caesar's world of rationality the initial unknown « X », as Kant put it, is « given » to the mind. The mind then applies to it the forms of intuition (space and time) and the Categories of Understanding in order to transform it (and thereby alter it) into the known world of experience. As it is known, Kant gives four sets of Categories which he calls Quantity, Quality, Relations and Modality. Each set contains three Categories which, as Hegel rightly saw, proceed in a dialectical order of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. Kant himself says that the third Category in each group is the result of the combination of the first Category with the second. In this manner, the Unity of Plurality gives *Totality*, the Negation of Reality gives *Limitation* and the Cause/Effect relation of Substances gives *Community*, whereas the Existence of Possibility gives *Necessity*. For our purposes we shall insist on the first three main Categories, i.e. Totality, Limitation and Community.

According to the Kantian model, the formal intuition of space is the primordial screen of consciousness. This pure intuition has the double characteristic of being a Unity of Totality and, as the screen of human consciousness, of being *necessarily* Infinite. Therefore Infinite Totality is the first form in which the unknown given X is represented within the human mind. *This Infinite Totality therefore is the first human knowledge.* On the other hand the inter-relation of the various categories makes it evident that the initial Unity of Totality is split into Plurality by the Category of Limitation and Reality, prior to its Negation by Limitation, but be conceived as Totality. *must* This leads to the very important conclusion that Community emerges as an a priori Category *because of the fact* that the splitting of Totality into Plurality by Limitation has indeed occurred within the human mind. May I be permitted to insist on this point. Kant never attempted to explain why Community is an a priori Category.

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For Kant the whole categorial apparatus is given as a biological contingent fact. However, with the foregoing remarks we can see why this is so. If the original «given» to human consciousness is Infinite Totality and the empirical world of Plurality is the result of an operation of the human mind, it is evident that the Community of Substances is not a contingent a priori category but it is a necessary *a priori knowledge*, being the *reminiscence* of what has actually occurred in the human mind. Indeed, the human mind knows prior to any experience that it is itself that divided the given Infinite Totality into clear and distinct ideas by the application of the Category of Limitation. It knows therefore that Community is a primitive fact. *What is first «given», is the World as an undetermined Unity of Totality.*

This conception we find that it is also confirmed if we look back to the platonic model. The causal sequence (in Kant's terminology): Totality, Limitation, Community may be considered as identical to what Plato calls in the *Philebus* the Infinite, the Finite and the Cause. For Plato the object emerges from the «mixture of the infinite with the finite» whilst for Kant the world of experience is created within the human mind by the application of Limitation on the original Totality.

It has now become evident that before man is conscious of an isolated, distinct, determined object, he is firstly aware of a Totality which is the world of Being as given to him on the spatio-temporal screen of consciousness. The human mind is so constituted by nature that it has no ability to have a unified intuition of all there is. We observe therefore a movement from Totality to the formation of distinct objects which covers the rational activity and which I call a Strophe. And there is an opposite movement (incited by the reminiscence of Community) which tends to cancel the rational sphere and *return* to the initial Totality. This covers the irrational activity which I call Antistrophe. Such procedure is the primary cause which determines human psychology and human action. In final analysis what *links* the human rational activity with the primary truth that is Unity of Totality is the category of Community as «a priori knowledge». (In this pattern we can understand better the philosophies of Descartes and of Berkeley but I shall not insist now on this point).

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### 2. The deduction of the Aesthetic Categories.

Now, how is all this connected with aesthetic appreciation? If the rational operation consists in the splitting of the world into objects could it be possible that the final aspiration of man is the denial of multiplicity and his return to the *initial* Unity of Totality which is the ultimate Reality? We can now come to the deduction of the Aesthetic Categories. What right do we have to suppose their existence?

Human beings irrespective of degree of civilisation or of differing opinions have this in common: they all experience a feeling of pleasure or of pain and moreover they all seem to understand what they mean by the notions of the beautiful and of the ugly. The fact that some people call the same object beautiful while others call it ugly, is sufficient proof that the concept cannot derive from the object. There must be something *in them* which determines this feeling in accordance with the satisfaction or non-satisfaction of an internal *desire*.

Now desires are either physical or mental. The satisfaction of physical desires (such as, for instance, the desire for water when thirsty) gives the feeling of pleasure if there is «adequation» of what is acquired with the particular primary constitution of our nature. E.g. the quality of water must be such as it satisfies the requirements of our sense organs. Whatever «fits» a requirement gives pleasure. Thus physical pleasure must be similar to aesthetic pleasure from the point of view of method. We have the same *genus* but with a particular *differentia*. The object of the aesthetic desire must be adequate not with our physical organs but with our intellectual faculties. Such faculties are twofold — the forms of intuition and the categories. What is adequate to the forms of intuition (space and time) gives pleasure and is called beautiful. A class of beautiful things are those that «fit» the requirements of spatiotemporal order (harmonious proportion, symmetry, composition in space, spatial divisions in accordance with the golden number etc). This meets the greek definition of beauty: it is harmony of parts in relation to each other and each one to the whole. This I would call, following the Kantian pattern, «mathematical» beauty. With regard to the categories, adequation with Quantity and Quality (called by Kant «mathema-

tical categories») must always be referred back to what I called adequation with formal intuitions.

There is however one Category which goes beyond this rule. It is the category of Community which belongs to the «dynamical» group of categories. We have seen how this category is in fact an a priori knowledge — being the *reminiscence* of an act effected by the human mind. Therefore this Category, as a priori knowledge, is the principle which determines the ultimate goal of human desire as such. *It is the desire to reconstruct the original Infinite Totality* and thereby *cancel* the rational operation. In other words, it is the desire to return to the ultimate Being whose existence remains as a reminiscence in the form of the Category of Community. Man cannot bear for a long time being «rational»! This desire (we may call it Will to Totalisation for the Will is the faculty of Desire) is a supersensible and irrational urge, in itself indifferent to practical sensible aims, i.e. indifferent to the object as object of experience. It is therefore easy to see why Kant insists on this point as a prerequisite of aesthetic experience albeit he gives no explanation to it. The apples of Cezanne do not arise the appetite and do not prompt us to eat them!

We have accordingly a ground to believe that there must be a faculty a priori which helps to drive home the ultimate Desire to Totalisation. This faculty comprises the a priori Aesthetic Categories. It remains now to be seen what may be the Table of such categories.

### 3. The Table of Aesthetic Categories.

By Aesthetic Categories in this analysis I mean an a priori faculty which is similar, although antistrophical, to the cognitive faculty. They are *constitutive* of aesthetic experience. Since the Kantian categories (as Categories of the Understanding) are the transcendental «tools» which split Totality into the multiplicity of the world of phenomena, the Aesthetic Categories (as Categories of Feeling) are the transcendental «tools» whose business is *to reconstruct the split Unity of Totality*. The former constitutes what I call the «Strophic» movement whose God is Apollon. The latter constitutes the «Antistrophic» movement of human reason whose God is Dionysos.

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From the deduction it becomes apparent that there must be two sets of categories. The first must pertain to the sensible and must be in reference to the forms of intuition in connection with the mathematical categories, i.e. what concerns extension (space, quantity, extensive magnitude) and degree of intensity (quality, intensive magnitude). The second kind must pertain to the Will of Totalisation which corresponds, as we saw, to the dynamical category of Community as a priori knowledge of the Infinite Totality. Now, a mid term must be sought for, which will explain the process of transformation of an apparent contradiction i.e. the fusion of the sensible with the supersensible. In all, there must be four Categories each one having an element connected with the respective feeling that is created. The Table I have worked out is as follows:

TABLE OF THE AESTHETIC CATEGORIES

<b>1. Of Extension (Quantity)</b> Elements: The Grammic Moods: Exaltation Depression	<b>2. Of Intention (Quality)</b> Elements: The Chromatic Moods: Activity Passivity
<b>3. Of Illusion (Symbolism)</b> Elements: The Projection Moods: Apotheosis Annihilation	<b>4. Of. Totalisation (Community)</b> Elements: Unity of totality Moods: Happiness FREEDOM

We must analyse very briefly each Category separately:

### 1. Extension.

At this step the aesthetic process in the mind, incited by this category consists in the restitution of a schema in the pure concept of imagination. This is effected by the reduction of the object into a few significant *trends*. Every work of art can thus be reduced into a few linear trends and this is what I call the «Grammic» element (greek gramme, line). The trends are: the Line Upwards, the Line Downwards and the Line in extension (anogrammic, hypogrammic, macrogrammic trends) The effect of the Grammic has been unconsciously emphasized by many artists. Beaudelaire remarks that «the figure owns its charm to the arabesque that it traces in space». Delac-



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roix said: «there are lines that are monsters: the right line, the serpentine and two parallels». Hogarth draws attention to the serpentine which gives pleasure by conducting the eye «to a sort of hunting or pursuit». The Line Upwards, combined with the Line in Extension, is the very essence of the trend to Infinity. Identification of the spectator (by means of the mimetic principle) with the linear trend to Infinity satisfies the Desire to Totalisation. By contemplating, we follow up the line in its journey to Infinity. Therefore the moods created by the linear effect is Exaltation (upwards) or Depression (downwards). It is either subjection to the spirit of gravity or deliverance from it and flight to Infinity.

The romantic movement in Art has laid particular emphasis on this Category.

## 2. Intention.

This step determines the power or vigor of the preceding operation. Its element is the Chromatic (greek «chroma», color) — the color effect. Goethe had made the remark that beauty of colors derives from a biological, even *therapeutical*, necessity. We know the division of the spectrum into «warm» and «cold» colors. The thermal class of colors stimulates action. The chemical class has the contrary effect. I shall not insist here on the psychological effect of colors because it is well known. The moods created by the chromatic element is Activity and Passivity. As Bachelard put it speaking of Goethe «color for him was not a simple play of light, it is an *action* in the profundity of being».

## 3. Illusion (Symbolism).

This Category incites the subject to transcend the particular object of aesthetic experience. The function of this Category of Illusion is to project the particular into the universal. It is not the case, as it is in a logical judgement, to subsume the particular to the universal. It is to *change* the particular into a universal. It is at this moment that the aesthetic object, to use Baudelaire's intuitive vision, «emerges like a World».

Victor Hugo explained love in words indicating that this feeling is born with the projection, made by the lover, of an individual (the

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beloved) into the Universe<sup>and of the Universe</sup> unto this individual. By embracing the individual one, in fact, does embrace the World. This is the process of Illusion by means of a *Symbol*. It also shows the intrinsic affinity between Art and Love. The identification of the spectator with the *object* becomes an identification with Infinite Totality — the World. This is Art. The identification of the spectator with a *person* becomes an identification with Infinite Totality — the World. This is Love. When the lover says to the beloved «You are the World to me» this is not mere figurative talk. The object in Art (in like manner as the person in Love) does in fact, as Beaudelaire put it, «emerge like a World». Wackenrode has seen that «every work of art is an illusion to the Infinite». Schelling defined Beauty as «the infinite represented in a finite fashion». For Schlegel «the beautiful is a symbolic representation of Infinity». Infinity is the message of every *true* work of art. This is what the subject is identified with.

The corresponding moods are what I call Apotheosis of Will or Annihilation of Will. There are two ways to identify yourself with the Universe. The one is when the spectator possessed by the moods of exaltation and activity (contributed to by the first two Categories) assimilates the Universe with the object, i.e. with himself. The other is when the spectator possessed by the moods of depression and passivity assimilates *himself* with the Universe. The one takes vigorously possession of. The other gives himself up tenderly in surrender. (There is a masculine and a feminine Art). In these dialectics of activity and passivity we have the two main psychological types of mankind. This is the metaphysical aspect of the Master and Slave complex.

### 4. Totalisation.

When the third stage has been fulfilled, the Category of Totalisation enables the spectator to experience the sensation of One-ness with All That Exists. It is the *final reconstruction* of the initial Unity of Totality, the accomplishment of the «antistrophic» movement. The feeling of aesthetic experience is now complete. This final stage is the domain not only of Beauty but also of Freedom for it is the cancellation of all reference to anything other than itself. If the Epistemological Categories build up the concept of nature (in its

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multiplicity), the Aesthetic Categories I proposed act in the domain of Freedom. Freedom lies only in the world of cancellation of «otherness», in the World of Totalisation which is a homecoming to the Unity of Being. This, as we saw, is the domain of Art and of Love. The return to the original Being, to that «intuition of all at once» (intuition de tout à la fois) which Descartes had reserved «for God alone» is now achieved by the frail human intellect by means of aesthetic experience through the process of identification with an object having the capacity to act as a Symbol of the World of Being. We can now understand better why Art is Divine. Byron's verses can now be seen vested with a new meaning:

Are not the mountains waves and skies a part  
Of me and of my soul and I of them?

This is the great achievement of Totalisation. And at this point, the aesthetic theory leaves the door wide open for a revision of the ethical theory.

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(Geneva)

#### A SUMMARY OF THE AESTHETIC THEORY

##### A. STROPHE (rationalism — Logic)

- 1.0.0. What is given is the World
  - 1.1.0. The World is Infinite Totality
- 2.0.0. The human mind employs the category of Limitation to split the World into distinct ideas (multiplicity)
  - 2.1.0. The (created) ideas search for corresponding objects in experience
  - 2.2.0. The logical function of the human mind is to order the multiplicity by subsuming the particular ideas-objects under a more and more universal order
    - 2.2.1. The final universal order is the World
- 3.0.0. The human mind retains the memory of its own operation (2.0.0.) in the form of the category of Community (cause/effect relation)
  - 3.1.0. The human mind knows a priori that all objects are interrelated because it knows it is itself that made the division of the World into multiplicity (2.0.0.)
    - 3.1.1. Community is the reminiscence of the mental operation 1 to 3
    - 3.1.2. Operation 1 to 3 is the domain of the cognitive faculty
    - 3.1.3. The operation of the cognitive faculty is the territory of RATIONALISM

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### B. ANTISTROPHE (irrationalism — Aesthetics)

- 4.0.0. The human mind desires to return to the initial state (1.0.0.) It desires its own fusion with the World thus cancelling its own cognitive operation
  - 4.1.0. The fulfillment of this desire gives the feeling of Happiness
- 5.0.0. THE desire (4.0.0.) can be fulfilled by means of the category of Illusion
  - 5.1.0. Illusion is the employment of a SYMBOL, as if the Symbol were the World (1.0.0.)
    - 5.1.1. When the symbol is an OBJECT this is the territory of Art
    - 5.1.2. When the symbol is a PERSON this is the territory of LOVE
    - 5.1.3. When the symbol is an IDEA this is the territory of RELIGION
- 6.0.0. The human mind identifies with the Symbol having thus the illusion that it identifies with the World (1.0.0.)
  - 6.1.0. Identification is either passive or active
    - 6.2.1. In ART the object is the World; it is the object beautiful
    - 6.2.2. In LOVE the person is the World; it is the person beloved
    - 6.2.3. In RELIGION the idea is the World; it is the idea worshipped
- 7.0.0. Identification with the Symbol is Happiness. Non-identification is Unhappiness
  - 7.1.0. Operation 4 to 7 is the domain of the Aesthetic faculty
    - 7.1.1. The cancellation (4.0.0.) of the operations of the cognitive faculty is the territory of irrationalism
- 8.0.0. Happiness is the identification with the «given», the World. This is the domain of FREEDOM