

ART

A work of art is a device created by a human being for the purpose of giving rise to certain special emotional and other sorts of experience in other human beings, experiences which are in turn found pleasurable by the latter. The experiences in question are not, however, what we might call genuine or bona fide experiences (of love, sadness, terror, etc.). For if they were, then it would be a problem to understand why, for example, tragic art should exist at all, for it would be difficult to see how works of tragic art could be *enjoyed*. Certainly there are some cases, as for instance in the playing of solemn music at funerals, where the experiences brought about by works of art may serve to intensify those genuine experiences which belong to the world of everyday human reality. In general, however, it seems that the experiences which works of art are designed to generate are much rather what we might crudely refer to as 'fantasy' experiences, in the sense that they are experiences which dislodge us from, or are skew to, our normal day-to-day concerns.

We properly ascribe aesthetic value to works of art according to the extent that they are able to give rise reliably to fantasy experiences of a peculiarly subtle or powerful or enjoyable sort. Special disciplines and skills are involved in the production of works with these qualities, and a special genius is required if essentially new ways of instilling fantasy experiences are to be discovered and made concretely effective. Moreover, these disciplines and skills will typically be of the sort which need to be handed down from one generation of artists to the next, and this will imply that the existence of traditions of artistic activity will typically be intertwined with the different sorts of local and national traditions which conservatives hold dear.

From another perspective, however, it must be clear from the above that art and politics need have no intrinsic connection with each other. For the sorts of fantasy experiences which works of art are properly constructed to generate lie precisely outside the normal everyday world to which politics belongs. A genuine feeling of moral guilt fails, to this extent, as a work of art.

These ideas can now be used to distinguish a spectrum of different sorts of conservative attitudes to art. At the one extreme is Plato, for whom the fact that works of art instil fantasy experiences of the sort described constitutes a sufficient reason to place a low value on art as such, precisely because it leads us away from truth and from those genuine feelings and emotions which are alone of value and importance. At the opposite extreme are those conservatives who place a positive value on art precisely because it stands out in this way as a separate ingredient in the natural history of man, a part of that motley collection of non-political human activities which leaven our day-to-day concerns and which are set at

a distance from what is a matter of expedience. Such views may see a value in artistic activity that is quite independent of the experiences to which works of art give rise. Thus Hegel conceives art as one of the manifestations of Absolute Mind by which the humdrum concerns of man are transcended in the course of history. Between these two extremes are the views of those, like Tolstoy, who award value to works of art because, and to the extent that, they are deemed able to give rise to genuine experiences of one or other specific sort. A work of art, according to Tolstoy, is a vehicle for the *communication* of emotions, a device by which the artist seeks to infect others with his own emotional experiences. Great art is art which has the power to infect mankind as a whole, and the greatest of all art is art which instils in its audience that feeling of religious compassion which is for Tolstoy the supreme emotional experience. Conservatives may similarly award value to what they conceive as upright or morally uplifting art, or they may see in art a means of energizing and intensifying those national or other sorts of feeling which they deem intrinsically valuable for other reasons.

One further consequence of a broadly political nature would seem to follow from the account presented above. If a work of art is truly a device that is constructed by one human being to give rise to certain sorts of (subtle, and also pleasurable) experiences in the minds of others, then it will follow that those modern developments which tend to thwart this direct contact between the artist and the consumers of the artist's work will tend to have negative consequences for the value of the works of art which are produced. Both conservative and classical liberal theories here predict similar results. Where the artist is confronted with alien tiers of decision-makers, his energies will naturally tend to be deflected away from the construction of objects with properly artistic powers and towards engagement of such activities as will, to put it crudely, impress the members of committees. The careers of those artists will thereby also tend to be furthered who show particular skills or diligence in these activities. 'Thin', conceptually appealing art is what results, subject to the twists and turns of fashion, and owing more to programmes and manifestos than to craftsmanship and properly artistic inspiration.

Conservative and classical liberal theorists can agree, too, that the remedy for this state of affairs would consist in a depoliticization of art, a process which would be expected to lead also to the stimulation of the production of works of art which are on a human scale and which have the power to generate truly aesthetic experiences.

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Further reading

- Banfield, E., *The Democratic Muse*, New York, Basic Books, 1984.
 Smith, B., 'The substitution theory of art', *Grazer Philosophische Studien* 17 1986, 25-6: 533-57.
 Tolstoy, L., *What is Art?*, London, Croom Helm, 1985.

AUSTRIAN ECONOMICS

Austrian economics is often thought to be the economic 'ideology' of conservative and classical liberal thinkers. This is because of its implicit individualistic and anti-statist features and because of the crucial role it attributes to private property in the market system. However, it developed out of certain technical innovations that were made in economic theory in the nineteenth century and all of its practitioners, in their pure economics at least, have maintained a resolutely *wertfrei* (value-free) methodological stance.

Austrian economics began with the publication of Menger's *Principles of Economics* in 1870. Along with the work of Walras and Jevons this established the 'marginalist' and 'subjectivist' revolution in economic theory: a new approach which solved certain key problems in the prevailing classical economics associated with Smith and Ricardo. Menger's belief in timeless and universally true propositions in economics led to a fierce *Methodenstreit* (methodological debate) with the German 'historicists' (who understood economics to be the empirical study of historical and sociological categories). Austrian economics was further refined and developed by Weisser and Boehm-Bawerk. Its major twentieth-century exponents were Mises and Hayek; under whom, despite their technical proficiency, it became associated with the politics of liberal individualism. The major contemporary Austrian economists are the American writers Rothbard and Kirzner.

The main concepts that distinguish Austrian economics from other related schools are subjectivism, individualism, time, market process, and entrepreneurship.

Subjectivism is the methodological doctrine that social science deals not with objective 'facts' or rigid regularities but the actions of individuals subject to constraints, e.g. scarcity. Since choice is inherently subjective, economics cannot be a predictive science. The most obvious example of subjectivist economics is the theory of value. In contrast to the Smith-Ricardo tradition, in subjectivist economics price is determined by the preferences of individuals, at the margin, rather than by some objective cost of production. Austrians extended subjectivism beyond the theory of price into all aspects of economic phenomena. For example, Weisser developed the notion of 'opportunity cost'. This is the idea that the cost of