

Quotation I.

The problem, which Simone de Beauvoir raises in the quotation, is about the representation of Philosophy in literature, or, in a wider sense, in art. (Although she does not talk about non-literal types of art directly, the quote can be applied to them as well.) How can Philosophy be represented in art? In this essay, I shall examine the question by looking on several examples from art and literature, in which some metaphysical or ethical ideas are represented (note that the original title of de Beauvoir's work was *Literature and Metaphysics*), and then decide if the quotation was right: it is useless to write a novel if you can discuss something in a philosophical essay.

## **Philosophy and art**

Philosophy and literature have been in a symbiosis since the ancient Greeks: ethical problems were represented in the tragedies of Sophocles, and literature was represented in Philosophy, not only because Aristotle examined it: Plato's dialogues were written in a literary matter, as they were plays. The relation between traditional Philosophy and literature seem to come from the sheer fact that both use the same tool for its work: the written language. However, philosophical questions are raised in all kinds of art, not only literature: we can see metaphysical problems represented in the pictures of Egon Schiele, the Austrian expressionist painter from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, or in the pictures of his older colleague, Gustav Klimt. Philosophical problems can be represented even in music. It seems that the relationship between Philosophy and art is deeper than the sheer fact that they use the same tool. But is this true, or is it just an illusion?

Wittgenstein said that the things that are cannot be said manifest themselves. In that sense we can take the argument that metaphysical and ethical questions are actually better represented in art than in philosophical works. Simone de Beauvoir suggests in the quote that Philosophy explains our experiences, whereas art only shows them. This idea of showing is in a sense parallel with Aristotle's *mimesis*: art mimes the real world; it shows us our experiences to us. However, de Beauvoir was not right in all sense: art is not at all unreflected, it is not "prior to any elucidation"; in fact, the artist reflects to the world when creating a piece of art. In art, the thoughts of the artist are always represented: that is because the artists *themselves* see the world which they reflect to in their work and no one can put their personal ideas apart when seeing the world.

This means that art never creates an imaginary plane: it might use an imaginary world as a tool, but only as a tool: it always tells us our world. E.T.A. Hoffmann might have sent Anselmus to an imaginary world, but only to tell us about our own world, about how we treat geniuses. And if thoughts of an artist are always represented in a piece of art, then it is true of the artist's philosophical thoughts as

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well: consequently, philosophical thoughts are represented in art, whether it is Metaphysics, Ethics, Political or Social Philosophy, and so on. Of course, there are some disciplines in Philosophy that are not so often represented than others: it is rare to see the Philosophy of Science represented in art, however, even that is not impossible at all.

## Tools of the world

The main point of the quote is not that it is possible to have Philosophy represented in art, but that it is useless to have philosophical novels: novels are for something, and Philosophy is for something else and there is no sense in writing a novel when it would be enough to write a philosophical essay. But imagine Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*: in the novel, there is a moral standpoint Raskolnikov himself states (that there are some, who are able to break the laws for the common good), and Dostoevsky uses the novel to show how wrong that statement was and that Raskolnikov could not bear the moral responsibility of killing the two women. It is a philosophical novel, it explains the world, it represents an idea that can be abstracted, and yet, there is a sense that it is a novel and not an essay: philosophy is represented in such a different way, than in philosophical works, that it has a meaning, even if it can actually be "translated into abstract concepts".

One of the reasons of that is that art shows the world, whereas Philosophy explains it. While philosophers experience and examine the world, and then write down what they think it is like, an artist experiences and examines a world, and then creates a tool to show that really personal world. For example, Bertolt Brecht not only writes about alienation, he shows us that through his plays. The meanings of *writing* and *showing* are a little different than the normal usage, so I had to define them: *writing* means to tell how I see the world (like telling that the working class is exploited) whereas *showing* means to give an example of the facts I believe to be true (like writing a poem about an exploited worker). It is clear, that both concepts exist in both art and in Philosophy: in art, there can be situations, when writing about the world is appropriate (e.g. a monologue), whereas in Philosophy, it could be helpful to sometimes show the world, not only to write about it (e.g. a thought experiment), but generally speaking it is true that art mostly shows the world, whereas Philosophy normally writes about the world, using the other only in cases when it helps to represent the thoughts, it helps to clear the argument or makes it more clear how to interpret the things shown. (And of course they are just helping the other, not supplying it.)

Sometimes translating writing to showing (or showing to writing) is easy, sometimes it is not; but it is legitimate to write things that can be easily shown or to show things that can be easily written, just as I can decide to write an essay in English, although that essay could be written in German or French, without any differences in the argument. It is up to me to decide, whether I want to do it in

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this language or that language. The difference between art and Philosophy is not what they do with the world, but how they do it, or at least it seems up to this point.

## Context and intelligibility

However, deriving from the fact that its tools are different, there are some other differences between Philosophy and art, not only their tools. In Philosophy, things tend to be more concrete, usually there are less ways to explain them (but there some notable exceptions, like Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*), whereas in art several interpretations of a work are normal. The fact, that things are not written, but shown, means that the philosophical thoughts can easily be misunderstood, and they depend a lot more on the context than in philosophical texts, where the things are more exact. (That does not mean that the context is not important when we examine philosophical texts, it only means that we can generally understand those texts. That might not be true of every piece of art.) Although it seems that examining art is much easier than Philosophy, but sometimes it can have so many layers that cannot be known without the context that it is hard to realise it without knowledge. Take Danto's example of this by referring to Roy Lichtenstein in his *Transformation of the Commonplace*: we can enjoy those paintings without the contexts for sure: but to really understand those pictures, we have to know a lot more things.

Or examine the pictures of Gustav Klimt: we see faces somehow melancholic within a background of gold and overall shine. This is really curious in itself: but if we think that these not exactly reassuring, sometimes even strange paintings (like the *Beethoven Fries*) were made in an era, when decadence was the general feeling of life, when although life was more and more easy, Nietzsche was the leading philosopher (and he was not optimistic with his age), we can understand those melancholic faces. We can examine the weird, somehow alienated nudity in the pictures of Schiele (an apprentice of Klimt): of course, we can enjoy those paintings without any knowledge of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, but we can only understand it when we realise that those were made in an era when sexuality became less and less oppressed, when Freud published his works about repressed sexuality.

Even though the knowledge of the context is important to a person who researches, let's say, Kant, but the works of Kant can be completely understood without knowing the context it was written. Maybe we can understand why Plato did not like democracy better if we know what happened to Socrates than otherwise, but we can read and understand the *Republic* without knowing anything of that story. The only things that cannot be understood without knowing the era are the examples; but examples are shown not written (in the sense I use the words).

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Maybe the sense we can examine philosophical art is example: philosophers wrote about something and it is an opportunity to show it for the people in a context they are familiar with, like the ancient Greek dramas used mythology to argue their moral point – a thing that everyone in the society knew. That would mean that philosophical art is a servant of Philosophy (*ancilla Philosophiae*, to paraphrase the scholastics), but can we declare that works like *Crime and Punishment* or Goethe's *Faust* are only serving a philosophical thought? In that case, de Beauvoir was perfectly right: it is much easier to put a thought experiment into a philosophical essay than to write a 500-pages-long book only to make an example to something. But I think all of us, who read *Crime and Punishment*, would say immediately, that Dostoevsky's work is much more than a sheer example. It might seem that the psychological state of Raskolnikov only helps the moral argument of the author, but in fact, those make *Crime and Punishment* the wonderful book it is. With the sheer argument, we might have never heard of it. Now it is world famous.

### In defence of philosophical art

That is because there is a third major difference between artistic and philosophical works (aside the tools and the role of the context) is how we, the people who examine the works, treat the tools. We not only like Schiele because the metaphysical aspects of his work but because *how* he showed us those aspects, unlike in the case of Philosophy, when we normally focus on the intellectual points, and if the philosopher uses the language in a great way, we might declare it *by the way*.

That is because art is not only intellectual, but sensual. Although the intellectual and intelligible part is important in a piece of art, but we can examine that with only focusing on the tools of it (i.e. how it is painted, how it is written (in the common sense this time), etc.). (This explains how it is possible that we can enjoy a piece of art without knowing the context, which would be important to understand it.) But how can we not only focus on the ideas? Maybe Kant had the answer: when we categorize our senses of the outer world (like what we see) there will be something more there, and that thing is beauty. In Kant's sense, beauty differs from pleasant things, as the latter have something to do with interests. If we differ pleasant and beautiful, we can say that the former might have to do something with ideas; my interests, morality, etc. But beautiful is beautiful in itself regardless of the thing it shows, and it is for its own sake, in the sense, that art is for its sake (*l'art pour l'art*) according to the French symbolists.

If beautiful is in itself and for its own sake, and beauty is in the tools of the work of art, then the tools always add something to the piece of art, making that more important as a similar, but not beautiful one. Of course, defining beautiful would be really hard in this essay, but with this concept we can derive that the tools of art matter at least as much as the ideas in it.

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If in a piece of art not only the ideas but the tools matter, then it could be easy to defend philosophical art, even based on the argument de Beauvoir used against it. She says that “a novel is only justified only if it is a mode of communication irreducible to any other”. She is right, but that is not a question of the signification, but the tools. The mode a philosophical novel (or painting) communicates with us is essentially different from the mode a philosophical essay communicates with us, not only because its tools are completely different, but because the *role* of the tools are completely different. There can be poems (and there are quite a lot), which’s essential meaning can be said a few words (e.g. “I love you.”), but it would make no sense to say (as the motto if the *Tractatus* does), that it is better to say (write, in the sense I used) these three words than show them in three paragraphs, not only because showing and writing are completely different (that would not defend this poem), but because it matters *how* I show them as well, whether that poem is beautiful or not. We cannot judge a piece of art without aesthetical judgement on its tools.

There is still a question to be answered: why should anyone philosophise in a piece of art? Until now, I only referred that it makes sense to create a philosophical piece of art, but does that have a special role, or is it just something artists can done, if they wish so? I think, as art represents truth, and Philosophy discusses some kinds of truths, which is nowadays underrepresented. It is important not to exclude Philosophy from art, not only because artists should have the opportunity to use Philosophy, but because it is important to have that in the discourse of art. Art has the burden to discuss philosophical topics.

## Conclusion

In this essay, I tried to show how Simone de Beauvoir was wrong when she stated there is no use of philosophical novels (or, as I used, philosophical art). To do so, I first examined the differences between the way art and Philosophy represents the world, then I showed, in a strictly aesthetic sense, that art has (because of the fact that is art) some more things aside its ideas, therefore it can be justified to create philosophical novels: not only its Philosophy matters. In the end, I tried to refer, that art not only can, but, in a sense, must include philosophical questions to its examinations. I strongly believe, that art can tell about our world in a deeper sense, just as Philosophy does that. Maybe I can state, paraphrasing Clausewitz, that art is Philosophy with other means.