

THE PROBLEM OF TRUTH  
IN ART

by

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## INTRODUCTION

The twentieth century might be aptly characterized as a century of progress. The idea of progress assumed here, however, would have to be restricted to the western world. For in line with most investigation in the twentieth century, one would have to recognize that what one part of the world accepts as progress might not be considered progress in another part of the world. Such a recognition would be consonant with the gradual, if grudging disappearance, in the modern world of dogmas that there is only one standard for measuring things, some single criterion that is universal, natural, and God-given. Investigation shows that most standards of such unlimited scope are based on limited selections of samples and evidence that seldom warrant the extrapolation to "all" which they receive. Even in the field of natural science, laws are no longer boldly proclaimed as absolutely certain or universal in scope and application.

But laws in the old-fashioned, absolutistic sense of invariable uniformities in nature are scarcer than we used to think, even in the physical sciences. Instead, the scientist now talks in terms of averages, correlations and trends.<sup>1</sup>

This constriction of the "mind's expanse" has a sobering side. Its purpose is to solidify human knowledge rather than to destroy all that is good in man.

The force that is behind this change may be called "scientific," that is an approach which is an attitude of mind, rather than any particular, specific method of investigation in

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Munro, Towards Science In Aesthetics (New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1956), p. 86

a branch of natural science. In other words, this use of "scientific" does not mean that everything must submit to the criteria of natural science and that if they do not, then they cannot be of any reliable value for knowledge. It does mean, however, that some basis for knowledge must be found in observation and experience, i.e., in an empirical approach. "Empirical" must, in turn, be taken in a broad sense. It must not be taken to mean that only sense knowledge is empirically acceptable and that all other knowledge must be dismissed as "important nonsense" of some kind or other. "Empirical" can embrace introspection, experience, and inference beyond the observed data that is warranted by the evidence. One area to which this approach has been brought recently and with profit is the field of art. An excess of subjectivity often pervades the field of art and too often in disregard of evidence and good reasons.<sup>1</sup> This subjectivity in itself is not to be condemned, for there is a necessary, though trivial, sense in which any endeavor is bound to be subjective.<sup>2</sup> But it is a harmful influence when the subjective pronouncements are elevated to objective status with no better evidence than like or dislike.

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<sup>1</sup>In this way the objection that art or the humanistic studies in general cannot be studied in a scientific manner may be forestalled. This objection is often made to any scientific, i.e., more objective approach to such studies and though it is often justified, it is just as often unjustified. The crux of the matter is not to judge beforehand but afterwards, i.e., on the basis of the results rather than prejudice.

<sup>2</sup>Necessary because one cannot avoid subjectivity; it is necessary that one grasp knowledge from a personal standpoint, but trivial since this aspect of subjectivity does not exclude the possibility of objectivity.

In turn, the misuse of subjectivity leads to vagueness and ambiguity in art that results in either sterile dogmatism, pure fancy or an appeal to mysticism. On the other hand, discussion and analysis of what factual evidence there is for these views and judgments will shed some needed light on the field of aesthetics and lead to a better understanding of what we can consider reliable knowledge in this area of human experience.

Traditionally, the field of aesthetics is concerned with the nature of the beautiful. It raises various questions about beauty and its significance in the work of art. A good example is the controversy over art as form and art as expression. The issue involved here has been aptly polarized by E. F. Carritt.

This controversy between the aesthetics of form and expression which has run through the whole history of philosophy and is still a crux of the subject, is closely connected, though not identical, with another question, even more burning in modern times, the question whether beauty is on the one hand a quality of things or on the other only a relation to ourselves (like novelty) which arouses in us a certain emotion--an attitude of ours to things.<sup>1</sup>

The controversy might be seen as an epistemological difficulty as much as a problem distinct to aesthetics.<sup>2</sup> Looked at in such a way, the above controversy in art may become clearer, and an increase in clarity may suggest a direction toward some resolution of the difficulty. I should like to suggest a way of attacking this controversy and how

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<sup>1</sup>E. F. Carritt, Philosophies Of Beauty (New York: Oxford University Press, 1931), p. xxxviii.

<sup>2</sup>Perception here includes auditory as well as visual perception.



the attack leads into issues related to the issues alive in science.

That which is perceived would be the object, an individual work of art, e.g., a poem, a painting, or a piece of music. The work of art is the aesthetic object. The percipient is the viewer, the observer of the aesthetic object; the perceptual problem involves aesthetic perception.<sup>1</sup> In the terminology of Carritt, the question arises: is beauty something in the object or is it something in the mind of the viewer?, i.e., is it a quality that we ascribe to the thing or is it some aspect or property, that only a subject finds in the thing, something that we discover or recognize in the object relative only to ourselves? Depending on which of the two poles is stressed, the viewer or the object, a different account of what beauty in art consists of arises. The history of aesthetics proves the above point.

An excellent example of the subjectivist position has been put forward in this century by the English poet, A. E. Housman, specifically in his small but famous essay The Name And Nature Of Poetry. In this work Housman states that he recognizes great poetry because it makes his skin bristle. Art, from this point of view, is ineffable, that is, it cannot be treated reasonably. Although a work of art cannot be explained logically and rationally, it is nevertheless some-

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<sup>1</sup> Lewis Edwin Hahn, A Contextualistic Theory Of Perception (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University Of California Press, 1942) pp. 106ff.

thing that one recognizes, even if it cannot be expressed in words. Recognition here is rather like instinct; one recognizes a great work of art in the way a terrier recognizes a rat.<sup>1</sup>

There is however, a paradox in this view. And the paradox undermines the very view of art which Housman wants to maintain. Even the person who claims that he knows nothing about art does know what he likes. And as with Housman the same person is prepared to defend his view or "taste" on some art. From the point of view of reason it could then be argued that the subjectivist position admits the possibility of debate about matters of taste. If it does allow debate, then there must be something that is open to discussion. If this is the case, then reasons or evidence of some sort could be put forward for one view rather than another. As soon as the above is granted, it is only reasonable to conclude that some opinions (even in art) are better than others. In other words the debate is a disagreement which may be real and not apparent. Even within the subjectivist framework presumably some kind of agreement could be reached. By way of example of the statements that may be admitted by the subjectivist, one might cite the following: I like Crime And Punishment but The Idiot is a better novel; Beethoven's Third Symphony is powerful as a work of art but it is uneven in its composition, and the Fifth is superior as a piece of music; Picasso' Woman In Profile fascinates

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<sup>1</sup> A. E. Housman, The Name And Nature Of Poetry (Cambridge University Press, 1950), pp. 40-50.

me more than any of his paintings but his Guernica is actually a great work of art. And if the subjectivist is willing to admit statements of this kind, he allows for the possibility of arriving at agreement or disagreement by rational argument.

In contrast to the subjectivist view, there is the objectivist position. This view usually has a definition of beauty and standards by which to judge whether or not a particular work of art is beautiful. Though oversimplified, it is statable as follows: if the candidate meets the standards, then it is a work of art and is beautiful; if the candidate does not meet the standards, then it is neither a work of art nor beautiful, whatever else it may be. The presence of rigidity in this position makes the position questionable, though it does have the merit of trying to establish a more reliable basis for judgments on works of art. An example of such a view is the proposal that beauty must have a certain proportion so that it can be measured. This view is present in the Middle Ages in Aquinas who states that a work of art must possess clarity (or brilliance), harmony, and integrity.

The objectivist approach to the work of art paralyzes sound judgment by deciding beforehand what a work of art must be. It lacks flexibility and becomes especially difficult to maintain when confronted with new works of art which depart from preconceived standards. In short it has no power to assimilate new forms and new styles when they appear. Walter Pater has stated the main problem which this position faces



and pointed the way towards a solution.

Many attempts have been made by writers on art and poetry to define beauty in the abstract, to express it in the most general terms, to find some universal formula for it. The value of these attempts has most often been in the suggestive and penetrating things said by the way. Such discussions help us very little to enjoy what has been done in art and poetry, to discriminate between what is more and what is less excellent in them, or to use words like beauty, excellence, art, poetry, with a more precise meaning than they would otherwise have. Beauty, like all other qualities, presented to human experience, is relative; and the definition of it becomes unmeaning and useless in proportion to its abstractness. To define beauty, not in its most abstract but in the most concrete terms possible, to find not its universal formula, but the formula which expresses most adequately this or that special manifestation of it, is the aim of the true student of aesthetics.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to getting at the crux of the objectivist's difficulty, the quotation from Pater brings up a number of points that are too often overlooked in forming theories of art. The point about change is especially important.

Standards in art change, tastes in art change, and new forms of art appear which defy classification. The change in standard and in taste within a decade, a generation, or a century may be explained culturally. For example, the high regard which the nineteenth century had for Raphael as opposed to the twentieth century view that Giotto is more important artistically. The emergence of new art forms is more of a problem for an aesthetic theory, since new forms are not as easily attributable to extra-artistic factors, such as social

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Pater, The Renaissance (London: Macmillan and Co., 1873), p. 15.

or cultural change. In fact, it might be contended that the flexibility of an aesthetic theory is an important factor in judging its soundness, that is, its ability to leave itself open to the assimilation and acceptance of work of art that may not have been present at the time of its formulation. New directions in the fields of literature, painting, and music in the twentieth century have shown the need for greater flexibility in aesthetic theorizing. The appearance of abstract painting, the twelve-tone school of music, and new forms in poetry and the novel provide examples of what an aesthetic theory may fail to foresee and furnish an account of. The case becomes similar to the plight of the biologist for whom all swans were white; when a black swan was discovered, his natural inclination was to deny that the black specimen was a swan.<sup>1</sup>

At this point, further comparison with natural science will prove fruitful. Difficulties in the natural sciences about the true and the false are resolved more easily and more quickly than in other fields, for example, the humanities, the social sciences, or the subject at hand, aesthetics. This does not mean that disagreement never arises in natural science, for it does, and there are many examples of such disagreement in the history of science. Instead, there is a significant difference that must be noted. There is a "decision procedure,"

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<sup>1</sup>This is not to deny the valuable work that has been done in aesthetics but to point out a difficulty that aesthetics, or any subject for that matter, must face: that is, the problem of new evidence.

so to speak, in the natural sciences and in time, if the evidence is present and testable then agreement is reached. The lack of such a decision procedure for the controversial issues and questions is a main cause of the conflicting, if not contradictory, views in the more humanistic fields.

There are reasons for the difference pointed out above. Undoubtedly, the "nature" of the phenomena studied in the humanistic fields can, to some extent, explain why the amount of disagreement is greater than in natural science. The increase of complexity in the material of the humanities where the human element or attitude is of a high degree is an important factor. To be sure, this "complexity" is an advantage, for it is this very complexity which makes the humanities what they are. But the complexity of the humanities is a disadvantage since it is the same complexity that makes them so intractable.

A brief glance at the status and function of a law in science may throw some light on the question of agreement. This consideration also may have some value for aesthetics. The law of gravitation is accepted as true and all are agreed upon its truth. The law itself, however, has never been fully verified or directly verified, though some laws are directly verifiable. It is a law of science that is accepted as true by indirect verification, that is, in terms of consequences that can be deduced from the law which are themselves directly testable and verifiable. Despite the lack of complete

verification, the law is not subject to any reasonable doubt. And though it applies to an infinity of cases and unobservable particles, the law provides an explanation and account for any and every instance that falls within its range. The certainty of the truth accorded to the law is contingent upon its continuing workability.

Would such a law be possible in aesthetics? The suggested parallel could prove helpful, though it might not succeed so fully as it does in natural science. But before its fruitfulness is speculated about, it would be wise to take a look at the relation of truth and law in science. In each field, science and aesthetics, truth is claimed, though all aestheticians would not support such an assertion about aesthetics. Verification in science is public and anyone, scientist or layman, can check the evidence for a truth of science.<sup>1</sup> Truth in science, then, is publicly verifiable. A scientific law must have evidence in its support, upon which all who are competent, may agree. The room for disagreement is less, by comparison, with other fields of study, as mentioned earlier.<sup>2</sup> The personal element in science is less conspicuous. Anyone who wants to deny the truth of a scientific law will scarcely succeed without having strong empirical evidence in support of the denial. But one who wishes to discredit an existing

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<sup>1</sup>Needless to say, one should be able to understand the particular field whose claims one would want to check.

<sup>2</sup>There is, of course, disagreement in science but, strictly speaking, it is usually on matters that have not yet been fully accepted.

judgment about an art masterpiece, or who wishes to supplant it with his own opinion, may very well succeed without such evidence. Opinion and personal evaluation play a larger role in aesthetics than in science. That they not only should but must is indubitable, if liking is to have any place in appreciation. But the degree to which like and dislike should enter in is certainly questionable. On this point, there is a definite and important difference between science and aesthetics.<sup>1</sup>

Seen against the background of science, the following dilemma arises in aesthetics. On the one hand, it may attempt to become more scientific and less vulnerable in theorizing about the nature of art, but art may not lend itself too easily to scientific treatment. Or it may be decided that the specific subject-matter of art may not allow scientific treatment. On the latter alternative, aesthetics would not be a subject that can be treated scientifically, even in the broadest sense of that word. But this may lead to a third alternative. Its treatment could be scientific, but not in the sense of some specific method, so much as the looser sense of "scientific"

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<sup>1</sup>The contrast is oversimplified, for new theories in science are accepted slowly, though they eventually gain acceptance and approval, if the evidence for its truth is proven. And any opinion on a masterpiece is not unquestioningly accepted, although the individual has a right to his likes and dislikes that he could not be said to have on scientific matters. Nonetheless, even about scientific matters, a crude stubbornness can be exercised, for example, by religion on the theory of evolution. There is an arbitrariness present here that is unacceptable and the relevance of "feeling" in science and aesthetics, as far as truth is concerned, needs careful examination.



as objective.<sup>1</sup> This is the direction that aesthetics has been taking in the twentieth century.

Aesthetics can no longer be satisfied with the investigation, either dialectically or by superficially empirical methods of any one supposedly absolute Beauty. It stands face to face with the alarmingly complex and bewilderingly multiform world of actual aesthetic experiences and art products. But here arises the first difficulty; what is to become of the theoretical unification of this intricate mass of facts? How is it possible to arrive at that co-ordination of phenomena which a theory requires, if the phenomena themselves are pronounced to be incomparable with one another? How can any basis for a principle be found, if the principle is to take account of all the subtlest shadings of difference, to embrace them all and yet allow latitude for individual variations? The co-ordination was easy enough, if you simply took certain buildings, statues and pictures, measured them, found a common ratio and labeled this ratio the criterion of the beautiful. Those buildings, statues and paintings which did not conform to it were blithely disregarded, or simply pronounced less perfect than the others. There you had a unification in the simplest conceivable manner. But on the modern view, which has become chary of comparisons, which would even refuse to set up any special work of acknowledged excellence as a standard of perfection, the whole subject-matter of aesthetics seems to fall asunder in innumerable fragments of concrete experience...yet some point of view common to all facts is essential for a theory. The orbits of a planet and the trajectory of a cannon-ball, however, dissimilar a planet and a cannon-ball may be, yet offer features which make it possible to subsume both phenomena under the law of gravity. And aesthetics requires, in order to exist as a study, some co-ordination, some subsumption of the particular facts under a common point of view.<sup>2</sup>

There is then a middle ground. Aesthetics shows that beauty is not easy to demonstrate. But it is not subject to what is

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<sup>1</sup>See John Kemeny, A Philosopher Looks At Science (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc., 1959), p. 20-24, for a discussion of the looser sense of "scientific".

<sup>2</sup>Edward Bullough, Aesthetics (London: Bowes and Bowes, 1957), pp. 54-55.

called a "proof" as found in science, for aesthetics is not dealing with phenomena that are measurable to the same extent that they are in science. The proportion of 3:5 will not work, however helpful it may be with some aspects of aesthetics. It is obvious that this proportion is met by a number of things that are not works of art, for example, an ash-can.

Any demonstration that this or that particular thing is a work of art does not entail acceptance in the same way as a logical demonstration. Acceptance is mainly psychological, even where good reasons are given. At best, demonstration in the field of art is suggestive or directive argumentation. An attempt is made to show someone what it is that ought to be seen in order to understand the work of art. In this way there is an opening for argument supported by factual observations and a scientific tendency. And yet evidence will not have the same cogency that evidence has in science. Rigorous argumentation in aesthetics about works of art would not achieve a desirable effect. Even if one could force someone through evidence and argument to concede that "x" was a work of art, then the question would arise whether this was what one sought in the appreciation of art. If agreement had to be extracted out of someone in the above way, then demonstration would paralyze what it wanted to accomplish, the willing acceptance of evidence and good reasons which show that "x" is a work of art.

All the above considerations on aesthetics and science serve to show some of the problems that confront aesthetics and

that their contrast to the problems of science points towards a new look. A problem, that has been touched upon already in this introduction, has recently received considerable attention in aesthetics: the problem of truth in art. This is the topic of the thesis: how does art convey truth? With the approach that has been sketched here kept in mind, the question of truth in art might profitably be raised. That there is truth in art seems to be a safe assertion, but just how, and on what basis it is founded is where the problem arises, that is, where disagreement occurs. There are opposing views on the matter, such as those of the expressionist and the propositionalist. It is a form of the propositionalist theory that will be argued for in the thesis. Against the expressionist, who denies the claim that there is truth in art (or who, at least, insists that the truth or lack of truth is not of any aesthetic importance), it will be suggested that there is not only truth in art but truth is also of some importance aesthetically to the work of art.

In particular, the thesis concerns, as a basis for consideration, the propositionalist theory of U. P. Ushenko as presented in his book, Dynamics Of Art. In this work, Ushenko maintains that logic is a useful instrument in the discussion and clarification of questions in aesthetics.

Consider, for example, the phrase "logic of art." In a general way the intended meaning of the phrase is clear. We understand that within the work of art all parts are interconnected with a bond of necessity that is comparable to the entailment of a conclusion of a syllogism

by its premises. The phrase suggests, however, that, their similarity notwithstanding, formal logic and the logic of art represent different types of discursive procedure. One reason why aestheticians prefer to leave the suggestion without scrutiny or elaboration is that comparison with formal logic would require (just what they want to avoid) a consideration of the latter.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, Uskenko's view is selected not only because he proposes a propositionalist theory, but also because he is concerned with the relevance of logic to aesthetics. If there is truth in art, then it is the kind of truth that is referred to as propositional. For this reason the first chapter deals with truth from the standpoint of logic as it is found in science and everyday life or affairs.

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<sup>1</sup>A. P. Ushenko, *Dynamics Of Art* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1953), pp. 4-5.

## CHAPTER I

### LOGIC AND TRUTH

Since the entire discussion of the problem concerns truth in art, science, and the everyday world, some characterization of truth is needed. The characterization will need modification as the analysis proceeds, but for present discussion, some characterization will prove helpful.

It is a truism that truth is difficult to define; and yet it is at least possible to mention some of the conditions of truth. One of the most useful conceptions of truth is the logical conception. From the point of view of logic, truth is found in propositions, that is, "anything which can be said to be true or false..."<sup>1</sup> These propositions are statements about the world or some kind of reality, which can presumably be checked. We call the statement or proposition true for its content, when it corresponds to that which it is about.<sup>2</sup> This correspondence of a proposition with that which it is about is also the conception of truth which is used in science. Since the purpose of the investigation of this thesis is to determine

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<sup>1</sup>Ernest Nagel and R. M. Cohen, An Introduction To Logic And Scientific Method (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1934), p. 27.

<sup>2</sup>R. M. Cohen, Preface To Logic (New York: Meridian, 1956), pp. 36-48. A number of difficult and complex problems about the proposition may seem casually dismissed here, but, if such is the case, then it can seek its justification on pragmatic grounds. The thesis is not about the problem of whether or not there are such things as propositions, and the interpretation given above is questionable. It is, however, a valid interpretation, and a legitimate point of departure.



whether truth in art is as equally accessible to the criteria of the public and empirically verifiable, as truth in science is, the empirical conception of truth must be used in the discussion of the problem. The important aspect of truth, so conceived, is its empirical character. It is empirical truth that is given us by science. Thus, the question of the thesis is whether or not there is truth in art that is verifiable empirically, as truth in science and some truths in the everyday world are.

### Truth In Science

A further look at the law of gravitation will help to characterize the empirical truth that is found in science. The "particles" mentioned in Newton's first law are no more directly observable than the "intelligences" or "spirits" which, previous to Newton, were posited in order to explain the motion of the planets. Indirectly, however, Newton's law is testable; it has consequences which the explanation based on "intelligences" or "spirits" does not have. On the basis of such indirect verification, the truth of the law is established. The deducible consequences which are directly testable provide the empirical basis for the acceptance of the law as true. In addition to the character of correspondence with evidence, there is the character of coherence: the law must also be consistent with all that is already known or bring sufficient evidence for any radical change that it demands.

The truth of science is not final, that is, it is not absolutely certain and fixed. New evidence is always relevant in science; it remains open to modification, if needed. To the extent that it is subject to change, the truth of any law is provisional. Thus, in contrast, the "truth" of the theory which posits "spirits" that move the planets, is dogmatic; whereas, the truth that there are "spirits" is unquestionable, the truth of science is flexible.<sup>1</sup> The flexibility of truth in science is paradoxical. Though a truth of science is referred to as a law or a theory, it always remains an hypothesis. This is important to bear in mind when the laws of science are considered. The law of gravitation, for example, has never been fully verified. In fact, it cannot be, since it applies to an infinity of cases. It is impossible to check every particle in the universe. Nonetheless, the law is acceptable to science in terms of the directly observable consequences that can be deduced from the law. This causes a paradox but not a contradiction. A truth of science is the most certain truth and yet the most uncertain. Its certainty lies in the empirical evidence that is used to prove it and its uncertainty lies in its provisional character as an hypothesis that could be changed by new evidence.

Granted that the laws of science are true, there is, to be sure, a further step in the determination of the basis of

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<sup>1</sup>I. M. Copi, Introduction To Logic (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1953), pp. 385-392

truth. The analysis set down here is by no means complete. But it should be sufficient for the purposes of comparison and clarification of truth in art and in science. In short, truth in science does provide us with a sound empirical basis for its acceptance.

### Truth In The Everyday World

The "truth" of the everyday world may prove more puzzling. It is certainly more complex, and therefore, harder to describe. Nevertheless, some observations can be made about such truth.

Some statements in the everyday world are directly verifiable. Such statements as "It is raining", "The sun is shining", and "The light is red", are easy to check. We can look out of the window and see that it is raining. We can look at the sky and see that the sun is shining. We can look at the light and see that it is red. It may not be raining, the sun may not be shining, or the light may not be red. The claims made in these statements can be verified or falsified, depending on whether or not the reality referred to corresponds with the claim of the statement. Two difficulties present themselves immediately: (1) what does reality mean and (2) what does correspondence mean?

Reality can be anything at all; it is that which the claim is about. The claim must be verifiable, that is, correspond to reality in such a way that the claim is seen to be so or not. The verification is accomplished through

observations, or inference from these observations, just as it is done in science. "True," then, means "empirically true," that is, in agreement with the reality to which it refers. This account is oversimplified, but its general outline is clear.

The ascription of "true," however, to statements in the everyday world goes beyond the prosaic level of the weather, the traffic light, and the sun. At another level the truth claim becomes harder to handle. For example, a person will say: "People can't be trusted." To the latter remark, someone replies: "That's true." By the same token, someone could say: "People can be trusted; you have to trust people, if you want to get along with them." Again, the reply will come: "That's true". From the logical standpoint, both statements cannot be true. The principle of non-contradiction states that nothing can be both A and the contradiction of A at the same time and in the same respect. But logic concerns itself with propositions and these propositions must be accurately stated. If the proposition is vague and general, then it cannot receive logical treatment. The principle of non-contradiction would not apply to these statements unless they were more precise, hence, the statements "People can't be trusted," and "People can be trusted," are not contradictory. They are too vague and too general to be judged by logic. If the statements were analyzed, it would be found that they are based upon limited evidence and limited experiences. The statements might then be further specified so that they could be considered for their truth

value in the limited circumstances to which they would apply. Thus, it would not be wrong to reserve the application "true" for the observations backing up these statements, as long as the range of such statements is limited.<sup>1</sup> The test of their truth would remain direct in character, though inferences are made which go beyond the evidence.

There are other statements the truth of which might be investigated, for example, "the soul is immortal". These are not in question here and the examples used serve to show some aspects of the character of empirical truth in the everyday world.

The above example brings out an important difference between the empirical truth of propositions in everyday affairs and in science. Both, it may be said, arrive at truth indirectly by inference. The inference in science, however, is acceptable only if it is warranted by the evidence. In the example of the statements on trusting people and not trusting people, the inference goes beyond the evidence. This similarity brings out a difference in reliability. Science is more guarded and exacting in the formulation of such statements. In contrast, statements made in the everyday world, which are also based on factual observations are generalized too hastily.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless,

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<sup>1</sup>This is usually the assumption for understanding such generalizations, though the assumption is seldom made explicit.

<sup>2</sup>In the strict sense there is very little basis for generalization, but it serves a need for communication in the everyday world. Science is capable of generalization and can justify its extrapolations. The point is an important one, since it concerns art and a requirement for knowledge.



it is advisable not to be misled by naivete about the truth in either area. The empirical truth of science is highly abstract and often highly abstruse as well. The empirical truth of the everyday world is not so abstract. Nor is it very abstruse except to the extent that it is vague and general, as well as often emotionally over-charged. Both, however, do generalize on the basis of specific, particular, concrete instances, and the generalization as it operates in both can be understood, if it is carefully scrutinized.

In the next chapter, truth in art, the foregoing characterization of truth will be applied to the issue of this thesis.

## CHAPTER II

### TRUTH IN ART

The propositional theory of truth in art maintains (1) that there is truth in art and (2) that artistic truth is statable as a proposition. Hence, for the propositional theory truth is empirical; it has the character of propositional truth in science, allowing for certain differences in the medium through which such truth must be communicated. Two spokesmen for this view, whose positions will be treated in this thesis, are T. M. Greene and A. P. Ushenko.<sup>1</sup> Greene's position is that all works of art contain propositions which are verifiable. Ushenko's position, though propositionalist, is more limited; it only claims that some works of art are true.

There are, of course, other theories of truth in art, but they are based on a different characterization of truth. Some of these are also versions of the propositionalist position.<sup>2</sup> Most of them, however, are either emotionalist or expressionist or intuitionist in character, and, if they claim truth at all in art, they do so by using a Pickwickian sense of truth. These other theories will not be discussed in detail. Mention

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<sup>1</sup>T. M. Greene, The Arts And The Art Of Criticism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940).

<sup>2</sup>M. Weitz, in Philosophy Of The Arts (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950), upholds a propositionalist view, which bases itself on a distinction between designative and embodied meaning as distinguished by R. M. Cohen in Preface To Logic. F. Ballard, in Art And Analysis (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1957), also upholds a version of the propositionalist theory.

of or reference to them will be made insofar as they bear upon the main concern of the thesis, the propositional theory of truth in art.

### Greene's Propositional Theory

The propositionalist theory, according to Greene, contends that all works of art contain true propositions in the same way as science. Science and art differ, however, in their specific nature.

...The truths which science and art respectively express will differ from one another in significant ways, and the generic criteria of truth will be applicable to works of art and to scientific propositions respectively only as restated in a more specialized form. That is the specific criteria of truth which are applicable in the one case are not applicable in the other. A validation of the concept of artistic truth must accordingly take into account the difference between artistic and scientific truth, as well as their similarity as species of a common genus.<sup>1</sup>

The two main characteristics of generic truth are: consistency and correspondence. Both of these are present in artistic and scientific truth but peculiar to each field.

We can express in some media what we cannot express in other media--in mathematical symbols what we cannot express in words; in scientific prose what we cannot express in music; in music what we cannot utter in words; etc. Each of these languages has its own expressive potentialities and limitations. And since reality itself is infinitely various and complex in character, certain aspects of it lend themselves far better to apprehension and interpretation in and through a given medium than any other. Thus the artist, apprehending human experience and its objects in and through an artistic medium, can grasp their individuality and human significance as the scientist cannot, whereas the scientist can apprehend and express the skeletal structure of the phenomenal

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<sup>1</sup>Greene, p. 425 (*Italics Greene's*).

world with a precision which art cannot rival. Each gets what the other misses, and what one apprehends and expresses in his medium cannot be apprehended or expressed with even comparable adequacy in any other medium.<sup>1</sup>

In science, consistency means the relation of new discoveries to the present state of scientific knowledge. The scientist works in a network of established laws, to which his own experimenting must be connected. Either the further discoveries are consistent with the body of truths already established or sufficient evidence must be presented in order to demand the rejection or modification of the extant state of scientific knowledge.

... A scientific proposition or set of propositions can be accepted as true only in proportion as they do not repudiate relevant scientific evidence and in proportion as they satisfy all available evidence which is both relevant and reliable.<sup>2</sup>

The second criterion, correspondence, is empirically more important. The criterion on consistency may be objectionable as it applies to art, and correspondence is "much closer to the usual meaning of truth."<sup>3</sup> On this point, Greene is clear and emphatic.

The technique of obtaining scientifically reliable evidence has been so perfected by the natural scientists that, for precision and reliability, it is unrivalled in other cognitive disciplines. Not only have the scientist's direct observations of natural processes been greatly extended in scope and sharpened in precision by the invention of scientific instruments; a complicated experimental method has been evolved for the securing of observations under the most favorable conditions. The scientist has learned how to isolate phenomena and

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<sup>1</sup>Greene, pp. 437-438.

<sup>2</sup>Greene, p. 440.

<sup>3</sup>Jerome Stolnitz, Aesthetics And The Philosophy Of Art Criticism (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1960), p. 317.

how to exclude or compensate for disturbing factors. He has also devised a technique of measurement whose flexibility makes it adaptable to a great variety of empirical observations. Nor has he been content with mere direct observation; he has learned how to detect phenomenal occurrences not immediately manifest, even with the aid of instruments, by noting and interpreting their observable effects.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, Greene shows how the specific criteria of scientific truth are applications of the generic criteria, and concludes:

It is clear, then, that the truths achieved in science are highly specialized manifestations of generic truth, and that the scientific criteria of consistency and correspondence are specialized applications of the generic criteria.<sup>2</sup>

Next, Greene considers the specific criteria of artistic truth. First, he notes the differences between artistic and scientific cognition. The artist enmeshes his work in the concrete, whereas the scientist is interested in abstraction from individual phenomena. The artist is "normative and anthropocentric," and the scientist is concerned with the "phenomenal structure for its own sake." The latter difference reflects itself again in that the artist's expression of the normative is emotional compared to the "impersonal" expression in "scientific prose and mathematics." Finally, each has his own "type" of objectivity, which is requisite to "artistic insight" and "scientific discovery."

There are also similarities. Each, scientist and artist, has his own subject-matter, "which he interprets in his own way."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Greene, p. 440.

<sup>2</sup>Greene, p. 442.

<sup>3</sup>The consistency of "phenomenal structure for its own sake" and a subject-matter, "which he interprets in his own way" will be taken up after Greene's position has been accurately stated.



Another similarity, which Greene notes, is "clarity of thought and expression," which in both art and science are "complementary aspects of a single process." With these differences and similarities duly noted, Greene gives his definition of a work of art.

If a work of art has "anything to say" it must be regarded as the expression, in an artistic medium via artistic form, of a proposition (simple or complex) which is both factual and normative, that is, which not only describes an objective situation but formulates an evaluation of it. Since the only objects which I have been concerned to analyze in this book are genuine works of art, i.e., works which are artistically expressive and are not merely decorative or aesthetically agreeable, I can therefore re-define a work of art as the artistic expression of one or more descriptive and evaluative propositions with a discoverable referendum. These artistically expressed propositions are what I have previously entitled artistic content. Accordingly, if truth can be correctly assigned only to propositions, and if propositions artistically expressed, constitute artistic content, it follows that artistic truth is necessarily a function not of the artistic medium as such, or of the artistic form as such, but of the content of the work of art. The locus of artistic truth is artistic content.<sup>1</sup>

Nonetheless, Greene insists, in the communication of any truth, there are demands that the artist, like the scientist, must meet: consistency and correspondence.

Consistency, as it enters into art, is both linguistic and ideational. The linguistic aspect of consistency consists of a negative criterion, "correctness," and a positive criterion, "felicity."

This negative criterion must be supplemented by the positive criterion of linguistic felicity. We expect

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<sup>1</sup>Greene, pp. 443-444 (*Italics Greene's*).

an artist to be not merely consistent in following out the implications of his own artistic premises, and not merely competent in the use of those conventions to which he has committed himself ---we expect him to be felicitous in his selection and exploitation of his primary medium, and fertile in the creation of new specific artistic forms.<sup>1</sup>

Ideational non-contradiction refers to the "consistent approach" which an artist must bring to his subject-matter. Greene provides a concrete illustration of this criterion.

...To illustrate this type of contradiction in an extreme, indeed, a fantastic manner--suppose we were to find in a single composition different representational objects treated in the manner of Corot, Cezanne, Matisse, and Henri Rousseau. The result would be utter ideational chaos. We would exclaim: "The painter has contradicted himself in almost every stroke." And what applies to representational painting applies equally to the other arts. Imagine a characteristic passage of Debussy inserted into the middle of Bach's B Minor Mass, or a Barrack Room Ballad into Paradise Lost, or a modernistic architectural motif into the Sainte Chapelle. But it should not be necessary to appeal to such grotesque examples of ideational contradiction in art; the world is full of art which the competent critic must condemn in terms of this criterion.<sup>2</sup>

In connection with this criterion there is ideational coherence, which concerns style.

But in art, as in science, the absence of ideational contradiction does not, of itself, guarantee positive ideational coherence. For such coherence is achieved only in proportion as all the interpretations of the several portions of the specific subject-matter complement one another so that the work of art as a whole expresses a complex and coherent commentary on the nature and import of the entire subject-matter in question.<sup>3</sup>

Next, Greene explains the role of correspondence in art.

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<sup>1</sup>Greene, p. 448.

<sup>2</sup>Greene, p. 450.

<sup>3</sup>Greene, p. 450 (*Italics Greene's*).

Here too there is, in regard to empirical evidence, a negative and a positive aspect. The negative aspect is the "avoidance of discrepancy with artistically relevant evidence." The positive side is the "satisfaction of all artistically empirical evidence which is artistically relevant and artistically reliable."

Greene presents a thorough and elaborate scheme and account of truth in both art and science, but his account is not without its difficulties. His first difficulty occurs with his characterization of the subject-matter in science and art. The scientist, he claims, at one point, is purely factual in his work and free from the emotional involvement of art. Later, however, when he notes similarities between the artist and the scientist, Greene declares that "the artist, like the scientist, has a subject-matter which he interprets in his own way." This declaration is correct, but only if it has the reasonable limitation which Greene himself has pointed out, namely, that the scientist must not contradict previously established scientific truths and laws (consistency) and also that he must have considered all relevant empirical evidence (correspondence). The use of "interprets" is important and concerns a crucial difference between the artist and the scientist in terms of their respective subject-matters. The artist possesses far greater freedom in the treatment of his subject-matter than the scientist. The "in his own way" of the scientist is more sharply limited than the "in his own way" of the artist.

The above objection may become clearer if another and similar difficulty of Greene's account is considered. Greene declares, in speaking about "ideational non-contradiction", that the composer could not introduce Debussy into a Bach B Minor Mass nor could the painter mix four or five different styles without contradicting himself. But, contrary to Greene, the artist could do this successfully. There is no way of deciding beforehand that an attempt to mix varying styles will turn out to be grotesque. A rather famous example is found in T. S. Eliot, the American poet, or Benjamin Britton, the modern English composer.<sup>1</sup> It might be objected that Greene has foreseen this difficulty.

It goes without saying that such contradiction must not be confused with deliberate and artistically eloquent contrast. The donor in the Avignon Pieta is deliberately painted in a markedly plastic manner to emphasize his humanity and to distinguish him from the religious group which is treated in a markedly planear manner. Here the artist is not guilty of ideational contradiction, for he is emphasizing contrasting characteristics of his subject-matter in order to depict its complex nature.<sup>2</sup>

However, Greene undermines his own criterion by showing that the work itself must provide the basis for any decision on the mixture of styles. It must be admitted that the artist could fashion his subject-matter in mixed styles and produce a work of art that would be distinctly his own and acceptable to the

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<sup>1</sup>Eliot, it is well known, leans heavily on previous poetry in the writing of his own poetry, but this method of artistic creation did not result in either lack of originality or grotesqueness.

<sup>2</sup>Greene, p. 450.

critics as well. This function of the consistency criterion, as Greene presents it, is objectionable, if not an outright contradiction in his own theory.

There are other objections to Greene's criterion of consistency. In Meaning And Truth In The Arts, John Hospers objects to the confusion in Greene's application of consistency as a specific criterion of artistic truth:

...What I here object to is the use of the term "truth" to designate the characteristics of which he speaks. It seems to me to call any or all of these things "truth" introduces much confusion, and arises, in this case, from a false analogy of art with logic (in using words such as "consistency" to describe the relation of various items in works of art) which arises in turn from an identification of works of art with propositions...<sup>1</sup>

Additionally, in speaking about true propositions in art, Greene refers to "genuine works of art, i.e.," works which are artistically expressive and are not merely decorative or aesthetically agreeable,..." It should follow then that only those works of art are genuine in which truth can be found. But, then, Greene has begged the question.

The use of "genuine" presents other problems.

He (Professor Greene) holds that truths are present only in "genuine works of art, i.e., works which are artistically expressive and are not merely decorative." But the word "genuine" here is bothersome. Does it mean that works which are lacking in truth are not "real" works of art, i.e., not works of art at all? It is difficult to accept this conclusion, for then the realm of art would be narrowed excessively. Or does it mean

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<sup>1</sup> John Hospers, Meaning And Truth In The Arts (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1946), p. 144.



that the works which lack truth are always of lesser value aesthetically? This is equally untenable. Matisse is commonly considered the "decorative" painter par excellence of this century, and yet he is ranked among the greats.<sup>1</sup>

Objections must also be made to the specific criterion of of art, such as correspondence. Greene sets out to show:

...that a work of art, defined as a proposition or set of propositions express in a distinctive communicatory medium, may be as true or false as a scientific proposition, that is, that the categories of truth and falsity are, mutatis mutandis, as applicable to art as they are to science. If this can be established, any more adequate analysis would be as relevant to the artistic as to the scientific (or other) cognitive enterprises.<sup>2</sup>

But in his explanation of how empirical evidence enters into works of art and how such evidence is verified, the subjective aspect of art is stressed. Some examples will illustrate what I mean.

Whatever objectivity can be attributed to artistic cognition and expression must certainly not be identified with scientific objectivity.

...The artist's distinctive approach to his subject--matter. This approach in no way relieves the artist of the necessity of first-hand scrutiny of empirical data, both factual and normative. His interpretations, like those of other men, must be based on empirical observation and supported by empirical evidence. But this observation must take the form of artistic intuitions; and this empirical evidence, to be artistically relevant, must condition genuinely artistic insight....

The value of art, in contrast, is to a notable degree a function of the individuality of the artist's outlook. Despite his technical and cultural dependence upon his artistic predecessors and contemporaries, his contribution to the sum of artistic insight is, in the nature of the case, far more individual than the contribution of any scientist to the sum of scientific knowledge...<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Stollnitz, pp. 323-324.

<sup>2</sup>Greene, p. 425.

<sup>3</sup>Greene, p. 455; p. 452; p. 456 (*Italics Greene's*).

Granted that the artist is not objective in the same way that the scientist is objective, there is still the need for objectivity in a propositional theory of truth in art. Greene, of course, demands "scrutiny of empirical data", but the data are both "factual and normative". The "normative" aspect is undoubtedly provided by the artist. But how can this normative aspect of the artist's approach to his subject be judged by correspondence in any empirical sense.

Greene raises the same problems, from the standpoint of the logical and the empirical with what he calls "artistic intuitions" and "artistic insight". For example a problem arises when Greene notes the individuality of the "artist's outlook", which might be kept quite distinct from an empirical test to which a work of art could submit in order to determine its truth value.<sup>1</sup>

There is, however, a positive side, and Greene gives an illustration of what he has in mind by the verification of correspondence in art.

We can, accordingly, test the accuracy of the artist's empirical observations, as these have been recorded in his art, by learning from his art to see his subject-matter through his eyes and then checking the artist's observation with observations of our own which are relevant to the artist's immediate cognitive interests. Thus, by studying a number of Cezanne landscapes,... We can then go directly to nature, either in retrospect or by means of new perceptual observations, and test the accuracy of

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<sup>1</sup>One might also argue here that the scientist's individuality is as important as that of the artist's, but the individuality of the scientist must be seen in terms of the peculiar nature of scientific work.

his recorded observations in terms of Cezanne's own cognitive preoccupation. This is what every sensitive critic does... And if he tests Cezanne's observations in this manner, the critic cannot but be impressed by the objectivity of Cezanne's vision or fail to realize that what Cezanne saw we too can see, and that what had significance for him can have significance for us.<sup>1</sup>

The procedure that Greene suggests is sensible and could be followed. But can we ever know what the artist's "cognitive preoccupation" was in a reliable sense, or can we ever see again "through his eyes" other than dimly? In terms of any proposition that is extracted from a work of art, the "objectivity" of the work must be more than the impression made upon the critic. Needless to say, the "significance" of the proposition must also be more readily apparent than Greene makes it in his example from Cezanne. The same objection that is raised above is applicable here: Greene's position on the proposition in art is too subjective. One further example will make this criticism definitively clear.

Thus, the music critic tests the composer's interpretation of his subject-matter. (i.e., man's emotive-conative states) for truth and falsity by comparing it with his own emotive and conative experiences and observations. Similarly, the literary critic must draw on his own experience if he would verify the observations and interpretations of reality and human experience which are recorded in specific literary compositions.<sup>2</sup>

The above observations from Greene undermine his entire theory of truth in art, for surely the critic of any work of art in music, literature, or painting must be prepared to evaluate

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<sup>1</sup>Greene, p. 454.

<sup>2</sup>Greene, pp. 458-459.

and judge "empirical data" relevant to the work beyond his own personal experience. His own personal attitude and experience will undoubtedly enter in, but "empirical data" consist of more than his own "emotive and conative experiences and observations." As part of the testing, his own personal experience may provide him with a more quickened apprehension, but it is out of the question that this can suffice as the sole basis and source for his critical task. "Empirical data", which would be relevant to any truth that the work of art may possess, must also be found outside his personal experience as well within it, if propositional truth is present in art.

Greene's propositional theory has strong and weak points. The most important differences and similarities between truth in art and truth in science are explained in detail. Nonetheless, his generic criteria of consistency and correspondence turn out to be so vastly different as specific criteria in art and in science, that the common note of the proposition vanishes. On Greene's own analysis, science is sharply set apart from art, and he never clearly establishes the propositional truth of art.<sup>1</sup> Greene's investigation could be defended as a theory of truth in art, but it falters as the particular theory of truth in art he conceives it to be. That is, the use made of "proposition", "empirical", and "logical" are objectionable though he defines the proposition broadly enough for its application to art.

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<sup>1</sup>Stollnitz, pp. 316-318.



His own summary of his analysis is well stated, even if it is not what he actually accomplishes.

The artist's approach to reality, like the scientist's is a highly specialized approach. Hence artistic truth, like scientific truth, can be tested only by an application of specific variants of the generic criteria of truth. In both cases, consistency and correspondence must be defined in terms of the distinctive characteristics of the specific cognitive enterprise. No intelligent person would dream of testing a refined scientific hypothesis by means of ordinary untutored sense-perception. To verify a scientific observation we must conform to the requisite technique and bear in mind the specific objective of the experiment of observation in question. And this requires natural aptitude, training, and the adoption of a distinctive observational approach. Why, then, should it be surprising that an analogous aptitude, training, and observational orientation are requisite to the enlightened verification of artistic insight? A layman, untrained in mathematics, is not able to detect an inconsistency in a complicated mathematical argument, and a person unfamiliar with modern scientific theory cannot distinguish clarity from confusion in advanced scientific thinking. Is it surprising, then, that a layman who is unfamiliar with the intra-medial forms and conventions of music, architecture, or any of the other arts, or even a critic who is unfamiliar with the more or less distinctive language of a particular artist, should be unable to judge whether the artist in question is contradicting himself in his work, or whether a specific composition is artistically confused or clear? Witness the proverbially incompetent judgments of the general public, and the bewilderment of even the critics, in the presence of a significant artistic innovation. What is imperatively required is a trained sensitivity to artistic expression in general and more specifically, an understanding of the specific language used by the artist in the work in question.<sup>1</sup>

The above is in bare outline unobjectionable, but the matter in question is whether the proposition in art is equal to the proposition in science.

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<sup>1</sup>Greene, p. 459.



# Ushenko's Propositional Theory

Ushenko, like Greene, proposes a propositionalist interpretation of truth in art, but limits its application to "some" works of art. And again, like Greene, Ushenko considers the proposition in art to be like the proposition in science.

Let it be understood that I do not propose any esoteric or special connotation but that I am using the word "truth" throughout in its conventional scientific sense. This is to say that a truth is to be taken in the sense of a true proposition (or statement) or understood to be the truth of a proposition (or statement). My use of "truth" commits me to the recognition that if a work of art, for example, a piece of music, contains no propositions, it can have no truth either.<sup>1</sup>

Since language is the normal physical medium through which truth is communicated, and literature is the only art which makes use of language, Ushenko makes a distinction between explicit and implicit propositions.

In art explicit propositions (i.e., propositions uttered written by means of sentences) are admittedly rare. Artistic truth, however, need not be rare, because an implicit proposition can often take over the function of an absent statement. An implicit proposition is a would-be statement; a particular claim to truth not yet expressed but readily expressible, in words.<sup>2</sup>

The above distinction, he believes, makes possible the existence of truth in music and in painting.

Whether or not every work of art actually conveys a proposition is a different matter. The present point is that with the aid of implicit propositions any medium of art (sounds or colors as well as words) may be used to carry a message of truth.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>A. P. Ushenko, p. 164.

<sup>2</sup>Ushenko, p. 168.

<sup>3</sup>Ushenko, p. 172.

There are three ways in which truth could be conveyed through the arts of literature, painting, and music.

First, by means of explicit statements; second, by communication of explicit, even if unuttered, concepts; and, third, by enactment or presentation through dynamic images or vectors.<sup>1</sup>

The first way, of course, is open only to literature. Ushenko mentions no art which could make use of the second way, except to observe that the second way could not be the way of music. The third, however, is even open to music, as well as other arts.<sup>2</sup> The third also needs further explanation, as it is crucial to the entire aesthetic theory of Ushenko, especially the status of the proposition in the work of art.

For in the medium of art the function of an abstract idea can be taken over by a dynamic image because the latter combines the virtues of a functional meaning with that of an objective meaning. In its capacity of functional meaning the dynamic image is a disposition or tendency. But in the capacity of an objective meaning the disposition or tendency is dissociated from the thinker's body or mind and can be projected upon the aesthetic field in the form of a vector. The projected (and objective) vector is a substitute for an abstract concept that enables us to dispense with the latter altogether within an aesthetic experience.<sup>3</sup>

Up to this point Ushenko has maintained a straightforward presentation of how the proposition would enter into art, i.e., literature, painting, and music. The first qualification of his theory concerns the separability of the proposition from the work of art, that is, its statement apart from the work of art.

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<sup>1</sup>Ushenko, p. 172.

<sup>2</sup>Ushenko, p. 172. The use of "any art" is bothersome, since it could be used to topple Ushenko's whole theory. On the other hand, it seems scarcely irrelevant, and architecture would convey truth in a propositional sense, if "every art" is meant.

<sup>3</sup>Ushenko, p. 170.

Even in literature the equivalent between an explicit statement and an enacted truth is dynamic, i.e., recognizable only within the total context of a literary piece. The moment an explicit statement is detached from context, it ceases to convey the same meaning or proposition as before. We must not treat a proposition of art as a proposition of science. In science a proposition is dissociated from any dynamic or imaginative equivalent. The dissociation enables the scientist to treat a scientific proposition as a complete and self-sufficient meaning, i.e., as invariant in meaning through the change from one context to another as well as through the removal from context. In aesthetics, on the contrary, the assumption of contextual independence is untenable because it would leave the fact of co-operation between truth and other constituents within a work of art an inexplicable mystery.<sup>1</sup>

The above quotation presents the paradox par excellence of truth in art, propositional or not, and contains the solution to the problem, which will be discussed later. For Ushenko, this question of separability connects itself to a further view that the work of art is autonomous. If the work of art is autonomous, then it is itself and nothing else. But then how can the proposition in art refer? If the work of art contains proposition, then it must refer. To account for this dilemma, Ushenko distinguishes between statement of fact and statement of law. Since the above distinction is so crucial an issue in the position of Ushenko, a full presentation of his explanation and supporting examples, in his own words, is in order.

I am ready to admit that truth by representation, or truth of fact, is aesthetically irrelevant or even, when reference leads to facts outside of art, detrimental. But the admission does not rule out artistic truth. For statements of fact do not exhaust truth; there are also statements of law. And I shall proceed to argue that truth in art is truth of law. But, first, in order to explain the differentiation between statements of fact

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<sup>1</sup>Ushenko, p. 172.

and statements of law, let me turn to human knowledge outside of art, where the differentiation in question is familiar and can be readily supported with examples. To begin with a few illustrations of our knowledge of fact, consider the following: "The earth is round," "Some cats are tailless," "There are elastic bodies," These are, respectively, truths of fact in astronomy, zoology, and physics. To contrast these with truth of law consider the statements, "The orbits of the planets are ellipses," "All animals are mortal," "The strain is proportional to the stress." Logical analysis of such statements has shown that the contrast between the two kinds of truth depends upon the difference of logical form or structure. The form of a statement of fact is: "There exists an x which is both A and B." To show, for example, that the form is present in our illustration from physics, we translate "There are elastic bodies" into "There exists an x which is both corporeal and elastic." On the other hand the form of a statement of law is: "There exists no x which, if it were A, would not be B..." In each case the statement of fact contains the phrase "There exists an x...", whereas the statement of law, on the contrary, contains the phrase "There exists no x...", The significance of the contrast is obvious. The first phrase functions as a reference to fact whereas the second phrase repudiates any such reference. Accordingly, when there is no fact to be referred to, the first phrase turns the statement into falsehood. On the otherhand, the absence of fact is in accord with the repudiation of factual reference. Accordingly, a truth of law would not break down through a mere lack of exemplification. Suppose there were no more bodies under stress. Then, since there would be no bodies under stress at all, there would be no bodies that were both under stress and unchanged in size and shape. This is to say that Hooke's law would still be true. Therefore, the law does not depend upon external reference. ...Artistic truth is a truth of law... Exclusion of representation or reference to fact does not exclude artistic truth.

Since a law does not refer to particular facts, what is a statement of law about? We need to know that the statement is about something—not in the sense of "about" that connotes external reference but in the sense of concern with a type of being that the form of the statement may presuppose—because if there were no object, there would be nothing to present. ...That a statement of law has the form of a subjunctive conditional can mean only that the statement is about a tendency or disposition. A subjunctive conditional is about a tendency because it means that something tends to be realized under certain conditions regardless of whether these conditions happen to be fulfilled or not. For example, Hooke's law asserts



that if a body were under stress, it would change in size or shape. Attempts to analyze the assertion as a logical combination of two statements of fact, "A body is under stress" and "A body has changed in size or shape," have always failed and are bound to fail, since the statements that are, in fact, true may happen to be, on the contrary, "A body is not under stress" and "A body has not changed in size or shape." With the facts to the contrary, Hooke's law can still be true because the tendency to be distorted under stress remains. A tendency, which is expressed by a law, is present, regardless of the actual course of events, exactly in the same sense in which a disposition to laugh at a joke exists even while we follow a funeral procession. A law cannot be adequately formulated in words except as a subjunctive conditional. But the form of a differential equation, which so many laws take in mathematical physics, makes the connection with tendencies no less evident. "The use of differential equations is necessary whenever a certain set of circumstances produces a tendency to a certain change in the circumstances, and this change, in turn, alters the tendency to change." This observation would seem to be sufficient to assure us of an object for presentation in a statement of law.<sup>1</sup>

In evaluating Ushenko's theory, the above quotation requires some discussion, but, first, some other points must be considered.

Ushenko's statement of the propositionalist theory of truth in art has some advantages over Greene's. First among these is its limited range, that is, the restriction to "some" works of art. The restriction wards off the objection that a work of art might not contain truth and still be a work of art, which is an objection that Stollnitz brings against Greene's theory. Secondly, Ushenko's statement of the theory has the merit of simplicity in contrast to Greene. In comparison with the status of the proposition in science and the proposition in art, Ushenko demands fewer modifications and changes in his

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<sup>1</sup>Ushenko, pp. 179-181.



"specific criteria," than Greene, as they apply to the field of art.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, there are also some disputable points in Ushenko's theory, two of which are the status of the proposition within the work of art and the reference of the proposition.

The first difficulty is the question of "contextual independence" in regard to the proposition in art and the proposition in science. Ushenko's position on this aspect of the question of truth in art has already been cited. The proposition of science can be stated meaningfully apart from the set of circumstances that exemplify it, since the invariant relation remains the same regardless of context. But the proposition in art cannot be treated in the same way, because "it would leave the fact of co-operation between truth and other constituents within a work of art an inexplicable mystery." But if the proposition in art cannot be so treated, then why should the question of truth in art, propositional in form or in any other form for that matter, be raised at all? To discuss the scientific proposition in isolation does not mean that the scientific proposition is not connected with a context in any way. A context of some kind would enter into the discussion of a proposition in science. The context does not discount the fact that it is a "self-sufficient meaning," but only means that the proposition in science is not absolutely

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<sup>1</sup>Whether or not Ushenko fares any better with the "principle of parsimony" in his favor is another question and can only emerge as the discussion proceeds.

independent of the circumstances to which it applies. Such circumstantial reference would be true of the proposition even in science. Similarly though it is, of course, true that the proposition of art depends on the whole work of which it is an integral part the proposition may be asserted apart from the work of art and discussed in terms of its truth-value. This treatment of the proposition in art does not mean that it still cannot be seen in the context of the work from which it was taken, and to which it may primarily apply. Ushenko admits as much, but he seems bothered by the admission.

...There is no reason why a paraphrase in words, although unsatisfactory as a substitute for the aesthetic experience, should not be feasible and serve to prove the existence of an artistic truth.<sup>1</sup>

The above quotation contains the solution to the problem and, when examined closely, it becomes clear that the problem arises from an interest in the work of art qua work of art rather than in cognitive analysis that is the aim of any aesthetics.<sup>2</sup>

Further criticism must be made of the external reference of the proposition, which also concerns the distinction which Ushenko makes between statement of fact and statement of law. Previous to his discussion of artistic truth in the Dynamics Of Art, Ushenko argued that the work of art is autonomous.

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<sup>1</sup>Ushenko, p. 181.

<sup>2</sup>It may be that the point at issue here for aestheticians is that, if the work of art is so treated, then the "truth-value" of art is non-aesthetic. This question is best deferred until the concluding chapter, for it may also be true that the truth of science is non-scientific, since truth as correspondence from an empirical point of view could be found anywhere, regardless of the particular field, as long as the conditions that were needed were fulfilled.

This position, however, leads to the objection that, if a work of art contains a proposition, then it must refer, and the work of art is not autonomous. In order to counter the above objection, Ushenko distinguishes between statements of fact and statements of law. Statements of law account for truth in art. The "statement of law" involves an interpretation of law in science, the reference of the truth of the law. Though there are other viewpoints on the question, Ushenko's interpretation is defensible as a reasonable explanation of the reference of the truth of a law in science. Thus, the distinction of Ushenko is admissible to the extent that a law can be so interpreted. The further and more important question is whether or not Ushenko's explanation of what the law is "about" is satisfactory. Is the law only a "concern with a type of being," or is it a tendency or disposition? And even if the latter alternative were true, would a tendency or disposition be free from all factual reference? Hooke's law does assert that, if a body were under stress, then it would change in size and shape. The law is also true. Is Ushenko's analysis, however, of what it is true about a satisfactory explanation? Presumably, in the physical world to which the law refers, bodies do not change because they are not under stress. The consequences mentioned in Hooke's law are the empirical observations deducible from Hooke's law, which provide the verification of the law. But the law itself is formulated as a subjunctive conditional. The simplest explanation of the paradoxical character of the law's

formulation is preferable to any explanation that makes it more quixotic and Pickwickian than is necessary. On the basis of the principle of simplicity, then, it must be objected that Ushenko's interpretation complicates the issue. The law in science, Hooke's law in this particular instance, does refer to facts, but the reference is indirect. The statement of the law is still about the physical world and how the world functions, since the law refers negatively to the facts. That is, the law states something about bodies in the physical world by stating how they would act, if the circumstances were otherwise. Since this analysis suits the notion of the law's formulation more adequately, on grounds of simplicity, Ushenko's defense of artistic truth as statement of law is untenable.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, since Ushenko's interpretation of law, though complex, could be granted as a defensible view, it may be advisable to defer judgment until his interpretation is seen in terms of its application and its verifiability in literature, painting, and music. In the next chapter, the propositional theory will be examined in its application to literature, painting, and music.

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<sup>1</sup>See Kemeny, pp. 99-101.

### CHAPTER III

### APPLICATIONS

#### Truth In Literature

Can there be truth in literature? Literature, as an art, makes use of language, and since language is the physical medium through which the truth of propositions is normally communicated, it is not improbable that in this art form, at least, propositional truth could be found. According to Ushenko, literature contains propositional truth, and these truths are, with qualification, statable apart from the work of art. As an example, in support of his contention, Ushenko cites Keat's Ode On A Grecian Urn.

For example, "Beauty is Truth" is a statement of law since we can readily translate it into "There exists no x which, if it were a beautiful object of art, would not communicate truth".<sup>1</sup>

And, as a statement of law, the truth in the poem refers to a tendency or disposition, which may or may not be exemplified in actuality. This artistic truth, then, is a truth of possibility, and to the extent that its correspondence with truth in the laws of science holds, Ushenko's contention is unobjectionable. But, to use Ushenko's example, Hooke's law is indirectly verifiable. The question must be asked, how is the truth in the poem from Keats verified?

A law is formulated by means of variables. For example, Newton's second law of motion is  $F=ma$  (the force is

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<sup>1</sup>Ushenko, p. 164.



equal to the product of the mass and the acceleration), where  $F$  and  $a$  are variables that take different experimental values. At the same time, each performance of an experiment gives just one set of numerical values, and all such sets, derived through the variation of the initial conditions in repeating the experiment, exemplify the law equally well; i.e., the values are correlated in every set in accordance with the same law. The universality of a scientific law is, therefore, clearly distinguishable from the particularity of exemplification by a single set of values. Not so with art. Truth in art can also be expressed in terms of variables. For example, since there are many beautiful things and true propositions, the terms "beauty" and "truth" in Keat's equation are, in effect, variables. And a particular work of art, like the performance of an experiment, exemplifies a law in an unique and definite, although imaginative, setting, for example, in the plot of a story or in the scene portrayed by a picture. But in art there is no variability of exemplification. When a work of art succeeds in communicating a certain truth, nothing else can take its place, for a paraphrase would not be adequate communication. This means that one, and only one, instance enables us to grasp universality, so that a separation between truth and its presentation is not called for.<sup>1</sup>

The above makes clear that the work of art provides its own verification, that is, it is its own evidence. Ushenko makes this aspect of verification in art quite explicit.

Whether in science or in art truth is proposed not because there is correspondence to something outside of the statement of law but as an empirical hypothesis subject to confirmation. And in both science and art verification is confirmation by means of experiment. Of course, there is some difference. In science the law can be stated apart from the experiment, whereas in art, as we already know, truth is not isolable from the context. And experimentation in the two fields is not of the same kind. Scientific experiments are performed with instruments in the laboratory. In art, on the other hand, the experiment is always imaginative. The work of art itself plays the part of a test tube. The artist's insight is both realized and confirmed by a work of fiction.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ushenko, p. 187

<sup>2</sup>Ushenko, p. 186

Some questions are in order. Hooke's law leads indirectly to empirical observations, formulable as propositions, which can be used for verification. With what other propositions, then, does the poem from Keats provide us for its verification? The poem is about an urn, a particular Grecian urn, which, it must be presumed, if Ushenko's thesis is tenable, is also a work of art. In an extensive analysis of the poem, Ushenko points out the various concrete statements which Keats used to verify the statement on beauty and truth at the end of the poem.<sup>1</sup> In line with Ushenko's attempt to draw a parallel to a law in science, the observations made by Keats about the scene depicted on the urn must serve as the directly observable evidence that provides the verification of the final statement. But with such verification even the "some" works of art that convey truth could never be falsified and truth would not make much sense empirically, since the work of art is, accordingly, its own evidence. Furthermore, the similarity with a law in science is not at all direct; it is more in the sense of a proportion: as the notion of law is to the phenomena of science, so there is a notion of law for the phenomena of art.

Upon close examination, especially in terms of the method of verification, Ushenko's theory approaches the theory of Greene. The poem from Keats could be considered on Greene's terms as well as on Ushenko's. But on either view the difference between the law in science and the law in art is so sharp

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<sup>1</sup>Ushenko, pp. 174-176.

that the two are no longer recognizable as even vaguely related.<sup>1</sup>

Some further corroboration from Ushenko will help. The law in science is universal and in a proportionate sense the law in art is universal also, and both are about tendencies.

So much for the solution of the old puzzle. Since the solution, however, rests on the idea that in art universality is inalienably embedded in a single instance, what do we mean by the universality of an artistic truth of law? Our reference to Hamlet may serve to illustrate the answer. Familiarity with the play enables us to discern a resemblance between our acquaintance and Hamlet even though the real man is neither a prince nor a man who can act on the level of high tension that the tragedy requires. Our illustration shows that universality in literature may be understood in the sense of universality of a standard, not because we can expect to find in nature an exact exemplification, but because we find approximations to such.<sup>2</sup>

In the above, Ushenko admits reference to something beyond the work of art. The law is about more than a tendency or pure disposition, as his comments about Hamlet show. There is then, an appeal to some kind of reality outside the work itself. The above point is important. In Art And Reality, Joyce Cary maintained that Tolstoi's Kreutzer Sonata attempts to convey a truth that is simply false, but the work is nonetheless enjoyable as a work of art:

The Kreutzer Sonata...that women are brought up only for the marriage market, taught from childhood to exploit their sex, that marriage itself is merely a sexual conspiracy or sexual battle, and that from these causes arise all the evils of society. It is pure propaganda and we don't believe a word of it.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>As with Greene, it should be noted that a position on truth in art could be maintained nonetheless, but the basis upon which it was founded, for example, the parallel to science, would have to be recognized as faulty.

<sup>2</sup>Ushenko, p. 188.

<sup>3</sup>Joyce Cary, Art And Reality (New York: Harper And Brothers, 1958), pp. 109-110.

The interpretation of Cary is debatable, but, as an analysis of a work of fiction that is propositional, it is on the level where truth and falsity can be applied. In order to determine the falsity of the thesis that Tolstoi presents, Cary draws upon empirical information external to the events and circumstances in The Kreutzer Sonata. According to Ushenko, however, if reference is made to anything outside the work of art, then the autonomy of the work of art is destroyed. On the other hand, if the work of art provides its own verification, then the use of "true" has no meaning from an empirical and logical standpoint. The alternative is either no truth in art, as the emotionalists claim, or reference to reality in some way in order to arrive at truth in art. The third possibility, is an account that could combine autonomy and reference.

The third possibility will be investigated. For this purpose, a slight digression is necessary here. Both Greene and Ushenko stress the fact that the proposition in art is not statable apart from the work of which it is an integral part, whereas such is not the case with science. Ushenko goes so far as to say that in art a separation between truth and its presentation is not called for. Admittedly, truth in art is not contextually independent of the work itself. But if there is to be anything such as truth in the work of art that is discussable and capable of formulation into a proposition, then truth in art must be separable in some sense from the work in which truth appears.



At this point, a distinction between the aesthetic experience and aesthetic analysis will prove helpful. It is the failure to recognize the above distinction which brings about a confusion that is common to both Greene and Ushenko, and perhaps the emotionalist as well. The work of art as directly experienced is autonomous. Aesthetic perception differs from ordinary perception.<sup>1</sup> In the aesthetic perception of a work of art, reference beyond it to some other kind of reality is unimportant. On the level of aesthetic analysis, however, this kind of reference is important. A good example of the confusion of the aesthetic experience and aesthetic analysis, is the so-called problem of paraphrase.

The problem of paraphrase, however, can be solved once the problem is seen in the light of this distinction.<sup>2</sup> If the work of art contains a proposition that is either true or false, then it makes sense to discuss a proposition isolated from all other elements in a work of art. It may be granted, as Ushenko points out, that Tolstoi, in War And Peace, does not present an accurate historical picture of Napoleon. In actual fact Tolstoi does caricature Napoleon in order to support the proposition that history is made by the masses and not by individuals. Nonetheless, reference beyond the work of art on the

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<sup>1</sup>Hahn, pp. 106-121.

<sup>2</sup>Beardsley, pp. 432-437. Beardsley presents a minute and careful analysis and I do not want to appear hasty. Nevertheless, the paraphrase of a work of art is treated, if a simile is permissible, like a doctor who opened the patient up only to decide such operations were unnatural, and could not be performed. More prosaically, the paraphrase is allowed and then condemned for being a paraphrase.



level of aesthetic analysis is legitimate, and it does not follow that if there is such reference that the work of art is no longer autonomous. Nor is truth of War And Peace distorted when it is separated from the work of art in which it appears and has meaning. If discussion through analysis is to take place, then certainly any truth in the work of art will be treated in reference to the work of art from which the truth is taken. The latter consideration, however, does not exclude any treatment of the truth as a statement which is also dependent upon evidence outside the work of art. In this way it is possible to speak of truth in literature as propositional. And the word "true" retains its meaning and use in the same sense as it does in science.

(1) When we speak of something as "true", let us keep this word as an epistemic term--that is, a term connected with knowledge--and not let it shift over into one of its other familiar but irrelevant senses, such as loyal, sincere, or genuine. (2) Let us keep this truth from getting mixed up with psychological states; the statement "This is true to you, but not to me" means "You believe this, but I don't," and these statements are not about truth at all. (3) Let us agree that truth involves a correspondence of something to reality, but let us not smuggle any assumptions about the nature of that reality into our definition of truth. A person who believes that "The soul is immortal" is true, and "Grass is green" is true, is at liberty to say that souls and grass are different sorts of being, but not that the word "true" is used in different senses.<sup>1</sup>

Both Ushenko and Greene can use the word "true" in the above sense, if (1) the proposition is set apart from the work of art and (2) a distinction is recognized between the level of aesthetic experience and the level of aesthetic analysis.

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<sup>1</sup>Beardsley, p. 368.

When I see the grass its greenness, I do not formulate a proposition that "The grass is green" is true at the same time that I am engaged in the act of seeing. The formulation of a proposition and the ascription of the word "true" involves a further step, though the ingredients, so to speak, which make a true proposition are, for all practical purposes, already present, because of what one has seen. Nonetheless, truth arises on the level of reflection and inquiry, whether in art, science, or everyday living.<sup>1</sup> The work of art can remain autonomous, but, at the level of analysis, reference to reality of some kind outside of it is relevant, if there is to be any significant verification of any proposition that the work contains and conveys. When the need for the above distinction is recognized, that is, that truth in the art of literature comes into question at the level of analysis of aesthetic experience, then it can be said that the question of truth in literature is, in principle, decidable. Other difficulties, of course, remain, such as variant, if not conflicting interpretations; but, if there is empirical evidence of some kind that is verifiable, then the interpretations could be checked against such evidence, and on the basis of good reasoning some decision could be reached. The arrival at any truth in literature could involve, however, a further

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<sup>1</sup>Eliseo Vivas, Creation And Discovery (New York: The Noonday Press, 1955), "Dreiser, an inconsistent mechanist" pp. 3-13. Vivas presents an excellent illustration in this essay of the distinction between aesthetic experience and aesthetic analysis, since his critical appraisal of Dreiser is a recognition of this distinction.

psychological aspect, and another distinction between belief and attitude might be made. This point has been lightly touched upon earlier in the thesis. Its overall relevance to the problem of truth in art is best deferred until the concluding chapter.

### Truth In Painting

The question can also be asked, is there truth in painting? The case for painting is not so clear as the case for literature, since the physical medium by means of which painting would communicate propositions is attackable as incapable of conveying propositional truth. The objection is certainly sound, but it is based on the failure to distinguish between the aesthetic experience and the analysis of the aesthetic experience. Both Ushenko and Greene defend the view that there is truth in painting, Ushenko more explicitly than Greene. The opposite view is taken by Beardsley, who bases his objection upon a distinction between saying and showing.<sup>1</sup> In this part of the thesis, then, the objection of Beardsley to the position of the propositionalist will be used to illustrate the denial that there can be truth in painting.

To begin with Beardsley's distinction between saying and showing will be considered.

...The Kollwitz lithograph can be said to depict cold and hungry human beings, and, by abstraction, the suffer-

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<sup>1</sup>Beardsley, p. 370.

ings of humanity. Its sympathy is directed to the children, not as individuals, but simply as helpless and homeless and fatherless children. But whatever indictment of society may have been in Kollwitz's mind, or in the mind of many of her admirers, there is no indictment in the painting, for there is nothing that can be read as an index pointing to anything indicted. The Giorgione landscape does not contain the pantheistic proposition that God is immanent in nature, for no part of it is an index referring to God. But we may perhaps say that it depicts a landscape that looks as though divine force is immanent in it--just as Franz Marc depicts a blue horse without saying that all horses are blue or that there exist blue horses. So with the Breughel Fall Of Icarus, and thinking of it as a depiction: it does not contain the psychological generalization that people are indifferent to other people's sufferings. But it does depict a ploughman ignoring a man falling into the sea, and perhaps even shows, as Auden says, that "for him it was not an important failure."

The Fall Of Icarus, however, raises a somewhat more difficult problem. For it tells a story, or--if "tells" is too strong a word--it reminds us of a story already told elsewhere. Now it is generally held that a story can have an idea or ideology, a "moral," as it is called when the story is simple,...The story of Icarus, for example, might be said to suggest, or imply, that man should not be too proud or ambitious. But if the story contains a proposition about life, and the painting contains the story, then should we not say that the painting contains a proposition? "Contains" cannot mean the same thing in both cases here; the painting depicts the story, and the story suggests the proposition. We can go on to say that therefore the painting suggests the proposition. But this is a very special kind of example, for in this view the painting becomes a kind of illustration of the story, and thus a substitute sign, like the medium's cough; it can only suggest a proposition that is already suggested by a story.<sup>1</sup>

The above raises a number of questions, each of which deserves some comment.

To begin with, the distinction between aesthetic experience and aesthetic analysis is relevant to Beardsley's observations on the proposition in painting. One can agree with

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<sup>1</sup>Beardsley, pp. 373-374, (*Italics* Beardsley's).

Beardsley that within the perceptual act the painting only presents, that is, "shows" or gives us a depiction. And anything that goes beyond that depiction, such as any statement on the "sufferings of humanity," which must come about by abstraction, is not shown. Thus far, Beardsley is undoubtedly right. Reference to "the sufferings of humanity" arises after seeing the painting. As mentioned before, even in ordinary perception there is no direct apprehension of truth. To say that "The grass is green" is true is a step removed from seeing the greenness of the grass. A similar further step takes place in painting. The question of truth in painting arises when one reflects upon what the painting shows. It is only at this point that statements (propositions) about the "sufferings of humanity" are relevant to what has been shown. Contrary to Beardsley, statements about truth in the work can be made upon analysis.

The same point can be made in regard to his comments on the Fall Of Icarus. Beardsley assumes unnecessarily that the painting from Breughel is dependent upon the story of Icarus, whereas the painting could be interpreted, even for someone who was unacquainted with the story of Icarus, to mean that there was indifference to other people's sufferings. This is not to deny that a knowledge of the story would not enable an observer to grasp the "truth" of the painting. The question that Beardsley raises is about the relation of knowledge that an observer may possess to the work of art. Granted that the



artist may make use of a particular subject-matter or story line in his creation, such a factor, as well as other antecedent inspiratory factors, can be kept separate from the speculation and understanding of the work of art as it exists publicly. In relation to the propositional theory of truth in art, the point is that, subsequent to analysis, it can be seen that the painting is capable of speaking for itself.

A more crucial issue in the quotation from Beardsley is the reference to "index," which concerns his interpretation of the proposition. Again, one can only agree that the painting provides no index through mere presentation. The index is, however, provided through reflection, when a proposition enters into consideration of the painting, and an index becomes relevant to any proposition that may be in the painting. In fact, analysis would show that the painting could have several indices.

In contrast, Ushenko is quite convinced that there is truth in painting and that such truth is a statement of law. These laws which are enacted through painting are artistic truths.

Nevertheless, even though a law, outside of literature, cannot be extracted unimpaired by a statement from the medium of art, there is no reason why a paraphrase in words, although unsatisfactory as a substitute for the aesthetic experience, should not be feasible and serve to prove the existence of artistic truth. Paraphrase informs us that a portrait, unlike a snapshot, which catches only the fleeting facial expression, intimates the character of the sitter. And what is character but a disposition to think or act in accordance with a law, i.e., in a consistent or predictable variety of ways? As Dostoevski has observed, "an artist studies a face and divines its main thoughts, even if at the time of the sitting facial expression did not convey them."

Much more can usually be said by way of paraphrase when the picture portrays more than one person. For example, we can say that Titian's The Tribute Money enacts a law of contest between two kinds of inquiry. The calm, questioning look of penetration, on the face of Christ, thwarts the scheming and malicious expectation expressed in the Pharisee's inquisitive look. Admittedly this statement of interpretation is excessively vague and general. If we want a measure of specificity and precision in a paraphrase, let us turn to a painting of greater complexity and detail. Examine again Breughel's Winter. This picture unmistakably enacts the law of cold indifference with which the town meets an intrusion of country life, the return of the hunters. For the hunters, both men and dogs, are portrayed in a state of dejection beyond mere tiredness, not because the hunt was entirely in vain—one of the men carries some kill on a long stick over his shoulder—but because of the sense of vanity with which their enterprise must impress them in the face of the town's self-absorption. In the abundance of the activity around them there is no concern for the tired men. There are people on the ice, but they circle on skates in apparent self-content. The solitary figure on the bridge is heading towards the warmth of his home. Even the crows are unperturbed; only one has flown off a branch, in a leisurely flight on a private errand. The structure of the composition in depth supports the interpretation...<sup>1</sup>

The paraphrase of what the painting contains, according to Ushenko, is plausible; it also "serves to prove the existence of artistic truth", by its explanation of what it is that we might find in painting at the level of aesthetic analysis.<sup>2</sup> Why the result of this analysis should be called "law," however, is severely questionable, except to the extent that Ushenko requires this curious usage of the word in order to maintain that the work of art is autonomous at the same time that it may also serve to convey a proposition not dependent for its truth upon

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<sup>1</sup>Ushenko, pp. 181-182.

<sup>2</sup>The word "prove" is too strong to be used here in its strict sense of a logical demonstration.

any reference beyond itself. For the sake of simplicity and to avoid the confusion that the word "law" carries, the same purpose can be achieved without it.<sup>1</sup> And the use of the notion of law is best omitted.

In conclusion, then, truth is present in painting. Both the analysis of Ushenko and the analysis of Beardsley show its presence. For example, for Beardsley, the Giorgione landscape "depicts a landscape that looks as though divine force is immanent in it."<sup>2</sup> There is no reason, however, to call the result of such an analysis a law, as Ushenko proposes. Furthermore, the kinds of inquiry shown in The Tribute Money from Titian have some bearing or relation to more than mere tendency or disposition.<sup>3</sup> The painting shows something, but, through showing, the painting also states something, which Beardsley, himself notwithstanding, corroborates. At the level of analysis it makes sense to talk about truth in a painting. Granted the extraction of "truths" by analysis, after aesthetic experience, the propositionalist position is cogent.

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<sup>1</sup>Kemeny, pp. 37-38. Kemeny points out the confusion already attendant upon the use of the word "law".

<sup>2</sup>At another point in his discussion of painting, Ushenko admits, if only unwittingly, that the "law" of the painting can be seen also in reference to reality outside of it. Ushenko's admission occurs while he is commenting on a photograph and Picasso. Cf. p. 183, Dynamics Of Art.

<sup>3</sup>With the qualification of "some" added, the objection could be met that Matisse is an excellent painter, but mainly "decorative" and his work doesn't contain or convey any truth.

## Truth In Music

Music is the art which poses the greatest difficulty. Can patterns of sound represent or refer? How can the experience of music be related to experience outside of it? Is music autonomous, or does it refer to something in experience?

A long standing quarrel exists on the answer to the above questions. Each answer provides a different theory on the meaning of music; the expressionists and the formalists. The latter group contends that music is a law unto itself; music refers to nothing other than itself, a world of tonal relationships.<sup>1</sup> The former group, the expressionists, are like the propositionalists and unlike "expressionists" in regard to art in general, they maintain that music does refer to experiences beyond itself, that is, that musical works can and do have reference to the physical world of our everyday experience.<sup>2</sup> These two positions illustrate the extremes of the main problem, but they fail to advance it towards any solution.

A sensible critical estimation and amalgamation of these two positions has been presented by Leonard Meyer in Emotion And Meaning In Music.

There is no diametric opposition, no inseparable gulf, between the affective and the intellectual responses made to music. Though they are psychologically differentiated as responses, both depend upon the same perceptive processes,

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<sup>1</sup>Eduard Hanslick, The Beautiful In Music (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1957).

<sup>2</sup>J. W. N. Sullivan, Beethoven, His Spiritual Development (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1927).

the same stylistic habits, the same modes of mental organization; and the same musical processes give rise to and shape both types of experience. Seen in this light, the formalist's conception of musical experience and the expressionist's conception of it appear as complementary rather than contradictory positions. They are considering not different processes but different ways of experiencing the same process.<sup>1</sup>

The thesis of Meyer allows one to pass over the controversy between the formalists and the expressionists, and raise directly the issue of reference in music.

Next, the distinction between aesthetic experience and aesthetic analysis that has been made in connection with literature and painting must be applied to music. Accordingly, any inquiry into the truth of music must follow the experience of listening to the piece of music in question.

A good example for analysis is the tone poem of Richard Strauss, Also Sprach Zarathustra. The following questions may be raised. Even if one were unfamiliar with the philosophical work to which the tone poem from Strauss, is related, and only provided with the kind of sketch found in music programs, could one after hearing the music be able to say anything about its truth? Could a listener who knew the philosophical work by Nietzsche and considered the philosophical work false, say that the musical interpretation was true? Third, and last, could a listener who recieved no information about anything extraneous to the music find the same truth in the experience of listening

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<sup>1</sup>Leonard Meyer, Emotion And Meaning In Music (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1956), pp. 39-40.



as those who are in some way informed about it?

The first question might be answered in the affirmative. The listener could find that the programmatic sketch and the music corroborated one another. The same listener could also find that the music was false to the statement in the program. On either side, definite aspects of the music could be used as evidence for or against, such as crescendo and diminuendo, various mixed keys, or chords, etc. The second question could also be answered in the affirmative. A philosopher, let us say, could consider the written work of Nietzsche false, but the musical piece by Strauss true in its interpretation of such a philosophical attitude, or experience of the world, however false it might otherwise be. The third question could also be answered affirmatively. The musical piece could speak for itself so clearly that a completely uninformed listener might report an experience of the music, which corresponded to the experience of the informed listener. In the third case, if the listener did not report that he encountered the same experience, as the others who knew something about the piece, then it could be shown that information disposed the listener to find in the music what he knew about the music previous to any listening.

But is there a proposition conveyed through music? In both painting and literature, analysis has shown that such statements are present. In works such as Zarathustra, for example, a proposition could be conveyed through the music. But the affective response has its basis in emotion and the analysis of

musical experience is couched in terms of moods and feeling-states. The amount of vagueness increases, in comparison with literature and painting. The propositionalist position falters in music, as witnessed by Ushenko, as well as Greene, when they deal with music. The example of Ushenko will make this clear. (In the following quotation Ushenko is referring to Carroll C. Pratt's The Meaning Of Music).

...He writes: "The stuff of musical struggle cannot, by itself alone, trace the dimension of an object. It remains the essence of all struggle, divorced from real life and presented through a sensuous medium of wondrous beauty...."(4) I have no disagreement with what Pratt tells us except for his contention that the world of sound means the world beyond. His theory does not warrant that contention. For, as he himself recognizes, tonal movement has only a "potential capacity for suggesting meanings both near and remote." I admit the potential capacity, but I submit that a disposition to refer to something outside of art is not yet reference or meaning and that the latter alone would establish a connection between music and life. I admit also that the power to refer resides in music through a disclosure of laws to which both tonal movement and psychological processes conform. But this is not to say that music discloses the fact that both art and nature conform to the same law. And without a disclosure of such fact a mere presentation of law in the medium of sound remains a presentation of a law of potentiality... A piece of music means a potentiality which the actual sounds realize, a meaning which does not connote the possibility of concurrent realizations in a medium outside of art....<sup>1</sup>

In sharp contrast to his treatment of literature and painting, Ushenko is vague and weak when he considers the art of music. He gives no specific examples and leans heavily upon Pratt. Nonetheless, he wants to maintain that the artistic truths of music are statements of law. With music, the contention of

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<sup>1</sup>Ushenko, p. 184.

Ushenko fails, since statements of law are more difficult to show than in literature and painting. The elusiveness of music, rooted in the physical medium of sound, is too difficult to formulate "laws" about. Another propositionalist, Morris Weitz, acknowledges similar problems when he comes to a consideration of music.

...The present writer, unfortunately, has doubts about the linguistic capacities of music. That music is a language in the sense of a system of signs that has meaning to listeners, we have already shown; but that music is a language in the sense of a system of signs and contains propositions in the ways that literature or painting do, we do not feel ready to accept.<sup>1</sup>

The only reasonable conclusion that can be drawn is that there are no propositions in any specific sense in music. However, it does not follow from the above conclusion that nothing at all can be said about music through analysis. The example of Strauss's Also Sprach Zarathustra could be shown to convey a proposition, but in pointing to evidence both within and without the work, verification is vague and general. Nevertheless, not only program music, but instrumental, or "pure," music could also be analyzed meaningfully. Both Beardsley and Meyer make this point about instrumental music. As Beardsley is the most skeptical and refers to the propositional problem as well, his remarks are relevant.

...Yet it makes sense, even if it is vague to speak of the attitude of such works. In a pure design there may be fun or high seriousness, restraint and discipline or

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<sup>1</sup>Weitz, pp. 151-152.

abandon and frenzy. And critics sometimes find in music an outgoing and adventurous attitude towards life or a deep introspective quality.

These descriptions, in the end, are best taken as attempts at a compendious description of the prevalent or dominant human regional qualities of the work. They do not entail, nor do they presuppose that the work can be, or contain, a proposition.<sup>1</sup>

The status of the proposition in the art of music is clear.

Whether or not such descriptions, as referred to by Beardsley, could be treated or considered for their truth value is a further question, and not the question under discussion in the thesis.

The three preceding parts on literature, painting, and music scarcely exhaust the question of truth in art. However, they do indicate what truth in these three major arts would be like, in the sense in which truth is present. In short, all facets of the question and problem have not been dealt with, but the essentials of the problem have been discussed and examined.

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<sup>1</sup>Beardsley, p. 368.

#### CHAPTER IV

#### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The thesis began with a general introduction to the difficulties in coping with various problems in aesthetics. The relatively unstable character of the field of aesthetics was contrasted with the more stable character of the sciences. With this aim in mind, the thesis undertook the investigation of what use the logical conception of truth as propositional might have for the problem of truth in art. Accordingly, the logical conception of truth as propositional was examined in science and in everyday affairs. Some parallel was found in the use of inference from specific instances of an empirical nature, but an important advantage of science was noted: its reliability and precision. Next, the propositional theories were considered as they apply to art in general, as proposed by Greene and Ushenko. Greene's theory, though detailed and explicit, was shown to proceed from a parallel to science and scientific truth to a completely independent theory of truth in art, despite the categories of generic and specific criteria of truth in science and truth in art. Ushenko's theory was considered next and investigated at greater length because of its more direct claim that the proposition in art was like the proposition in science. Investigation of Ushenko's claim uncovered difficulties in the parallel, in particular, the notion of "law" as applicable to both science and art, and in the notion of contextual dependence



of the proposition in art. The propositional theory of truth in art was then examined in the arts of literature, painting, and music. It was seen that the theory holds to a limited extent in literature and painting, but is weak in music. The testing of the propositional theory, especially in music, shows that truth in art, even when it is present, is, as Ushenko puts it, "too vague and too general".<sup>1</sup> This latter point concerns the problem of paraphrase and can serve to introduce the main conclusion that has emerged from the thesis.

The main conclusion is that there is a need for the recognition of a distinction between aesthetic experience and aesthetic analysis. The former, the aesthetic experience, can be described and discussed and outlined. It is what takes place when we engage in aesthetic perception. The aesthetic experience, however, is distinct from analysis of what is present in the experience. To raise questions about the meaning of the said experience (such as questions concerning whether or not it is cognitive, and if it is cognitive, in what manner truth exists in art), takes place on the level of analysis. To experience life is, as we know, different from raising questions about the various experiences of life. The case with aesthetics is the same: to experience the work of art is different from the investigation of what exactly it is in art that we experience.

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<sup>1</sup>The matter of "vagueness" and "generality" raises some doubt whether the word proposition should be used at all in this connection, though it is, on the other hand, enlightening in regard to this particular question.

The latter is accomplished by analysis and is itself not at all an aesthetic experience. Aesthetics itself is not art, but concerned with art. It tries to understand art in its various aspects. An example of such an aspect is the question of truth in art, which was considered in this thesis. Consequently, the question of truth in art arises not during the experience, but after the experience, when we reflect upon art as art. Whatever function truth may serve in the aesthetic experience itself is another question; the thesis has shown that there is truth in art, on the level of aesthetic analysis.

The above distinction can also be applied to science and the everyday world, when we ask whether or not something is true. There is no truth in the data of science as data, or the phenomena themselves that are under scrutiny. Truth enters in at a further stage. Subsequent to the observations of various phenomena, meaningful correlations of these phenomena are provided. Hypotheses are proposed to explain what has been observed. Next, the hypotheses are tested and either confirmed or disconfirmed, that is, their truth established. The same procedure, though less reliable, is used in matters of an empirical nature in the everyday world. The ascription of truth in all three areas, science, the everyday world, and art, involves a further step. Verification is also the same, but different in terms of what it is that must be verified.

Verification again raises the question of difference. Granted that there is truth in art, and also that the word "true"

is used in the same sense, as it is used in science, is there, nevertheless, a difference of some importance between truth in science and truth in art? The truths that we receive from each field relate themselves to us differently. Science explains primarily physical phenomena - though to the extent that psychology is science, it also explains psychical phenomena. Art deals mainly with psychical phenomena, though this is not unqualifiedly true of art, for paintings may be treatments of landscapes, still-lives, and abstractions. And a poet, like Keats, brings our attention to the "spaces" between the branches of trees. Science explains the physical world, how it operates, whereas art provides an understanding of the world from another standpoint, that of human experience and its significance. Truth is a more primary consideration in science than in art, of more immediacy to scientific inquiry. And, most important, in art, especially art as directly experienced, truth is not an explicit factor and only becomes apparent upon reflection, after the immediate experience of the work of art. An example of the latter was given in Joyce Cary's remarks on Tolstoi's The Kreutzer Sonata.

Moreover, there are further points on which truth in art and science differ. Scientific laws are general descriptions of invariant relations among the phenomena science investigates. The inquiry of science is directed towards the general from the outset, and in contrast to art, the propositions of science are statable as "self-sufficient" meanings, apart from any specific

context. In the actual work of art itself, this does not seem to be the case, since the truth in art becomes barren and emptied of its richness as it exists in the concrete work. In fact, truth in art, divorced from its context, may be banal and prosaic. But this aspect of truth in art must be kept separate from the aesthetic inquiry into the truth in art: our analysis for the purposes of understanding and our awareness in the actual appreciative experience of individual works of art. Thus, whether or not truth as abstracted from a work of art is banal or trivial from the standpoint of the aesthetic experience is not relevant to the question whether or not there is truth in art.

One final point, which also concerns the main conclusion, remains to be made. From time to time throughout the thesis the aspect of belief or acceptance was mentioned. Since there can be conflicting interpretations, what is the possibility that a truth in a work of art will be accepted? On this point, the logical distinction between belief and attitude may prove helpful.<sup>1</sup> A belief about something may be called true in the sense that it is based upon facts. These facts provide verification and can be checked. Theoretically, at least, the proposition that something actually occurred, took place, or is the case, can be established. There could then be agreement in belief.

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<sup>1</sup>It should perhaps be noted also that Copi has taken the distinction from Stevenson's Ethics And Language, where it was first used and applied to ethical issues which, like aesthetic issues, tend to be tinged with a high degree of emotional involvement.

Disagreement, however, might still be present in the attitude taken towards the belief. The attitude is mainly evaluative, and there is no direct appeal that can be made here to empirical sources. One could show that there is truth in art, and empirically establish a true belief about the work of art, and yet face disagreement in the attitude towards the truth. A good illustration of this point is given by Beardsley, who recognizes that while the same belief about a truth claim is accepted, disagreements in attitude may lead to differing evaluations of the political significance of a work of art. The belief in the example is "all or most manufacturers are dishonest."

But suppose we find incompatible interpretations of a work: how do we know which one is right? Arthur Miller's All My Sons was attacked as anti-capitalist propaganda on the ground that by making the father a manufacturer of defective airplane engines, it suggests that all, or most, manufacturers are dishonest. To which Miller later replied that by having Chris Keller make such a fuss about his father's wrong, it suggests that in fact the crime is unusual among capitalists: therefore, it is anti-communistic... Probably All My Sons contains no predications about capitalism at all, either for or against, though it does contain some predication about the responsibilities of man for his fellow man.<sup>1</sup>

If the belief is corrigible, that is, can be changed by appeal to evidence, then, correspondingly, the attitude too may be changed. The issue concerning truth in art can be further clarified by this distinction, since any truth, in the everyday world, as well as in art, and science, faces the dilemma of an attitude, though logically the true belief may have been established, if only provisionally. For it is possible to account

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<sup>1</sup>Beardsley, pp. 417-418.



for differences in interpretations of truths in works of art on the grounds that the differences concern attitudes. If the distinction between aesthetic experience and aesthetic analysis is followed, then the way is clear to a more reasonable discussion of truth in art.

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THE PROBLEM OF TRUTH  
IN ART

by

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AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S THESIS

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The topic of the thesis is the problem of truth in art. The question it seeks to investigate and limitedly answer is whether or not there is truth in art, and if there is, then under what conditions and with what relation to knowledge. The introduction contains a short survey of various and related problems in aesthetics and suggests the possibility of a more scientific procedure in aesthetics, in particular, in the use of logic. In Chapter I the question of truth is treated from a logical standpoint, that is, propositional truth in science and in everyday affairs. Chapter II deals with the propositional theories of truth in art as expounded by T. M. Greene and A. P. Ushenko. In Chapter III, the preceding theories are looked at in their specific application to the fields of literature, painting, and music. Chapter IV contains a summary and the conclusion of the thesis. The main point made in the last chapter is that a distinction is needed between the aesthetic experience and aesthetic analysis for the purposes of answering the question of whether or not there is any truth in art. The latter distinction is the basis for the chief conclusion of the thesis, as the distinction determines the conditions under which there is truth in art.