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ART, NARRATIVES, AND MORALITY

Is Kokoschka's *The Prometheus Triptych* a "good" work of art?

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The relation between art and morality has been a matter of standing dispute since at least ancient Greece. Especially the Platonic tradition, according to which art is regarded as morally highly significant, sometimes as suspect or even dangerous, has exerted considerable influence on cultural politics and art theoretical discussions throughout Western history. On the other hand, since at least the eighteenth century and Romanticism, a counter movement has gained increasingly more acceptance, stressing the aesthetic autonomy of art. According to this view, the application of moral judgments to works of art is claimed to be quite inappropriate, focusing upon rather irrelevant functional or consequential characteristics of art.

Generally speaking, critics as well as laymen seem often to distinguish, at least implicitly, between two kinds of reasons for ascribing a positive or negative value to a work of art. The first kind of reasons has to do with inherent or functional properties which works of art have *qua* works of art, i.e. criterial properties of objects falling under the concept of art. This presupposes some kind of understanding of ontological, conceptual, functional or historically conditioned differences between works of art and other objects. These reasons may be called *aesthetic*. On the other hand, reasons for evaluating works of art, which do not refer to category-specific features of these objects, could be called *non-aesthetic*.

However, if “art” is claimed to be a category with fuzzy boundaries, which I, as well as numerous other scholars, claim, then such an aesthetic purism, attempting to dismiss any moral concerns, appears to be highly problematic. In this paper, I will present

and discuss some philosophical arguments for and against a moral stance towards art. I will argue that limiting value judgments concerning art to strictly "aesthetic" and category specific considerations seems to presuppose an essentialist view on the concept of art. Most notably, I will focus upon the narrative aspects of art. Oskar Kokoschka's *The Prometheus Triptych* (1950) will be presented as an example of art where moral considerations seem to be crucial for its appreciation.

Aesthetic Value

There is no doubt that works of art frequently and in the most shifting contexts are the subject of evaluative judgments. These evaluations can be manifested as verbal utterances like "Picasso's paintings are excellent", "Jan van Eyck was a better painter than Petrus Christus" or "Matisse ought to have visualized the social reality". Not all value judgments are, however, as clear-cut and easy to identify as these. First, statements like "This painting is balanced" (or "dynamic", "complex", "unified") can - depending on the context - be understood in a descriptive or (also) in an honorific sense.¹ Second, to ascribe an object the status of being "art" - or to refuse to do so - may not always be intended as (just) an act of classification.² Calling something "art" can sometimes be understood as an evaluation according to which the object in question has certain good-making features. The statement "This is not art" may thus, in some contexts, mean something like "This is an inferior work of art - though it still is a work of art, seen from a classificatory point of view". Third, aesthetic evaluations may also be manifested by choices of actions. For example, a beholder's decision to visit a certain exhibition, to spend more or less time in front of certain works or to buy a work, while at the same time ignoring possible alternatives, could be interpreted as the result of evaluative - though perhaps vague - considerations. Selective choices like these are made by laymen as well as by persons belonging to the so-called "art world", although the reasons may vary. Furthermore, aesthetic value judgments influence the distribution of grants to artists, whether they become accepted by art schools, get commissions or their products are acquired by museums or other authorities. Decisions like these have consequences for the production and distribution of art and may thus - if art is considered to be an important contribution to the welfare or happiness of a society - have a moral significance.³

Now, manifold reasons (and causes) influence our appreciation of art, and evaluations of artworks can be based on the most shifting properties, functions, or purposes ascribed to them. Works of art can be enjoyed for their formal properties (i.e. the interplay of lines, colours, forms etc.) and their beauty (whatever this means). They can be praised for their beneficial effects, e.g. their capacity to deepen our or other people's religious or political convictions, to reinforce morally desirable attitudes or dispositions, and so on. Sometimes they seem to give us valuable insight into or knowledge about a society, a historical situation or the mental state of the creator. Moreover, they can be appreciated for economic (profit-maximizing) or social (status-maximizing) reasons. Apart from giving such seemingly uncontroversial reasons for our value judgments, we may also adopt a more idiosyncratic attitude towards artworks. For example, I may appreciate a painting because it reminds me of a pleasant experience I had, say, in my infancy, or because of its functional efficiency as a windbreak. Quite obviously, these latter reasons do not imply common and institutionally fixed uses of art. The use and appreciation of a painting as a windbreak is certainly possible, but radically deviating from normal practices. The other reason is likewise odd: private and contingent associations which a painting may give rise to should not be confused with its meaning or content, i.e. an understanding that is essentially non-private and shareable by other members of a community. Hence we may distinguish between evaluations of artworks which, at least in principle, are shared by numerous people and those which have a more personal character. When judging the beauty of works of art (or any objects), we usually implicitly claim that this judgment is universally valid. Thus it would be ridiculous to say that "this object...is beautiful for *me*." (as already Kant noted).⁴ Sometimes value judgements concerning works of art imply that the work in question meets certain standards or norms. In these cases it should be theoretically possible to give reasons in support of the judgment and to point to standards which others (ought to) agree on. Moreover, due to the fact that there are interpersonally (socially, historically, and institutionally) fixed uses of art, not all kinds of standards one may refer to are as good as others. There are limits - though perhaps not always very clear - for what should count as common and appropriate uses of objects falling under the concept of "art". Evaluative judgments based on the functional efficiency with regard to the use of a painting as, for example, a windbreak would certainly appear to be misplaced. The value of a work of art has to do with whether or not it satisfies certain value criteria for objects belonging to a

certain kind or class, in this case the class of "works of art". In the same way the "goodness" or "badness" of tennis players, knitters, cars, and steaks depend on whether they fulfil specific criteria for things of their kind.⁵

Now, if we decide to restrict the "proper" use of value judgments concerning to those which appear to be category-specific and which people usually agree on, it would seem to be rather doubtful whether statements referring to profit-maximizing effects or the owner's improvement of his social position justly could be called aesthetic reasons - according to my stipulation - for evaluating a work of art. Such reasons are applicable to manifold objects or actions and hence too all-inclusive to count as genuine aesthetic reasons. However, a statement like "This work is visually unified and at the same time highly complex" seems to be a paradigmatic case of an aesthetic reason. While there are reasons which clearly appear to qualify as aesthetic ones, and others which as clearly do not, it should still be stressed that borderline cases exist. For example, it may be argued that pointing to the capacity of an artwork to evoke feelings should count as an aesthetic reason. Yet, numerous other objects (such as an electric chair, or the photograph of a deceased relative) or actions (such as telling a joke, tickling someone, or describing a traffic accident) have this capacity.

Categorization Research and the Concept of Art

This leads me to another issue, namely if actually any category-specific reasons for evaluating works of art can be found and, moreover, which features more exactly might characterize the category or concept of art. Is it possible to define "art", and if so, which criteria should we refer to in order to accomplish that task? Traditional attempts to find a definition of art have consisted of finding necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for something to be a member of that category. Candidates in that respect have been, for instance, the notions of imitation or expression. Furthermore, from these theories evaluative (functional) principles may easily be derived, relating art's value to its degree of realism, the intensity of emotions it expresses or gives rise to, or the like. Now, faced with all the well-known difficulties of these attempts, especially when it comes to contemporary art, a number of scholars have come to suggest that attempts to find distinctive functional or institutional/procedural - rather than straightforwardly

perceptually based - constituents of art might be more promising.⁶ However, even these attempts have proved to be more or less problematic. The history of art is a history of a more or less radical creativity which has challenged, altered and departed from pre-existing concepts of art. Thus, as e.g. Morris Weitz and many other scholars have suggested, art ought to be thought of as an open concept without necessary and sufficient conditions for its application. Inspired by Ludwig Wittgenstein's remarks concerning the nature of games and other open concepts, they claim that the concept of art is comparable to such concepts, thus being like a family whose members resemble each other in some, but not in all or in commonly shared respects. These complicated networks of similarities constituting the class of artworks are, borrowing a Wittgensteinian term, called *family resemblance*.

Moreover, numerous cognitive psychologists have, following the psychologist Eleanor Rosch's initial work, attempted to investigate the nature and acquirement of categories, most notably that of taxonomic categories. A significant characteristic of cognitive psychology, which clearly distinguishes it from traditional behaviourism, is thus the supposition that intelligent organisms are capable of constructing and manipulating mental representations.

Such mental representations may provide us with information that enables us to distinguish members of a category from non-members. A number of cognitive psychologists have proposed that perception and cognitive activities are hierarchically structured. New information is compared with and assimilated into broader schemata or categories which are necessary for object recognition, explanations, predictions, and communicative activities. In other words, humans seem to be able to store mental representations which have something like a *type-character*. These representations are thus some kind of abstraction stored in long-term memory with which external objects are compared. Common taxonomic categories are acquired after encountering several particular instances of the category in question, after which relevant characteristics are extracted and integrated into category knowledge.

The results obtained from these experiments support, according to Rosch, the assumption that categories, psychologically speaking, usually do not have clear-cut boundaries, but rather possess a *graded* structure.⁷ This means that there are certain category members which are experienced as cognitive reference points (or the clearest cases of category membership), while other members gradually deviate from them,

although they still belong to the category in question. In other words, categories are formed around their most representative instances, which have something like a prototypical character. The more attributes an item shares with other members in a category, and the fewer attributes it shares with members of contrast categories, the higher is its degree of family resemblance and thus typicality supposed to be. Numerous studies within cognitive psychology indicate that category formation in general, whether we think of categories such as *furniture, fruit, birds, animals*, and so on, may generally be explained as outlined earlier.⁸

We may ask, then, which members of the category "art" would qualify as best or prototypical examples, as cognitive reference points. Generally speaking, this depends of course on the prevailing socio-historical circumstances (as probably is the case with numerous further or even most category structures). Impressionist paintings, for example, were judged to be highly atypical in the 1870s and 1880s and for some beholders hardly categorizable as art at all. They seemed to have no drawing, no composition, no convincing space or serious subject matter. Nowadays Impressionist works are highly admired and seem to belong to the core of the category "art". Indeed, as we might assume, this category (or strictly speaking the category "the visual arts") could probably be conceived as centring around exemplary members such as figurative landscape paintings, Greek sculpture, Michelangelo's frescoes, Picasso's cubist paintings, and so on. From these best examples other category members are more or less deviating, such as those relatively atypical works mentioned earlier. Thus the question "Is this art?" should more aptly be replaced by the question "How much is it art?"

All the essentialist definitions of art mentioned earlier in my paper seem to point to those aspects which disjunctively or conjunctively participate in establishing the category "art". Indeed, these definitions are not at all unreasonable (although they do not provide necessary and sufficient conditions, and thus are not all-inclusive), but hint at some characteristics which frequently are associated with the core of the concept of art. Thus imitation and expression (whatever these notions are supposed to mean more exactly), functional efficiency with regard to states of enjoyment, institutional sanctions, and so on are factors which contribute to the demarcation of this category.

Art and Morality

Now, what about the moral aspects of art? Do these aspects qualify as aesthetically significant or relevant in a similar sense as those here suggested? And what do we mean more exactly by "moral" aspects? For example, we may think of (and evaluate) works of art from a utilitarian, i.e. consequential, point of view. According to such a normative ethical position, actions (or rules) are judged by their consequences and the amount of intrinsic values (frequently happiness or pleasure) all concerned (conscious beings) derive from those consequences; the aim is the greatest amount of such values for the greatest number. Thus we may make moral evaluations of *actions* resulting in works of art as well as of the effects of their *very existence* by referring to the *consequences* they are assumed to lead to.

Art, so numerous scholars have claimed throughout history, is highly capable of influencing the beholders' attitudes and/or patterns of behaviour, for better and for worse. It can provide us with knowledge of various kinds or misinform us. Art can participate in stabilizing or changing society, and it can provoke more or less valuable emotional responses or states of mind, such as religious or spiritual ones. All these consequences of art can certainly be evaluated from a moral stance. And, of course, we may also think about contingent and less predictable effects of art. For example, what about the moral value of a painting, falling down from the wall and killing Adolf Hitler during his visit of an exhibition, say in 1925? If we assume that this incident would have prevented us from WW II and enormous suffering, we might very well claim that, all things being equal, the moral value of this painting has increased. However, the estimation of probable consequences or effects of works of art is clearly an empirical question, which, as I believe, in many cases only can result in rather speculative answers. Moreover, also a lamp falling down from the ceiling might lead to similar consequences. Thus, these kinds of consequences seem to be utterly devoted from any "core characteristics" of something being claimed to be a work of art.

Furthermore, apart from the consequences of the very *existence* of art objects, the *production* of them and all the involved circumstances may likewise be morally significant. For example, the magnificent baroque architecture in Salvador, Brazil's first capital, could only have been produced by extensive use and exploitation of slaves, with suffering and pain on their behalf as "side-effects" of this artistic production

(see figure 1).⁹ In general, the decision to produce art with high expenses and thus omitting to invest the economic resources involved to improve the living conditions or the welfare of larger groups of people could be regarded as morally dubious or even unacceptable. Was actually Louis XIVth' decision to spend a fortune on building the castle of Versailles morally justifiable, while at the same time a large population in France was starving? Numerous further examples on these lines throughout history could of course be mentioned.



Figure 1. Church "São Francisco" (1708-1750); Salvador, Brazil. The interior walls of this church have been covered with c. 750 kg gold.

Now, apart from all these consequences here mentioned, we may also take *the artist's intentions, moral stance or other personal characteristics* into consideration when evaluating works of art. As, for example, Kant maintained, a necessary presupposition for the moral rightness of an action consists of the fact that it is done with a Good Will or a sense of duty, independent of selfish motifs or subjective preferences. Likewise, we might also feel inclined to take the artist's Good Will, or the like, into consideration when judging his works. Leo Tolstoy, in his controversial work "What is Art?" (1898), defines art as "a human activity consisting in this, that one man consciously, by means of certain external signs, hands on to others feelings he has lived through, and that other people are infected by these feelings and also experience them."¹⁰ An indispensable condition, among others, for the efficiency and expressiveness (or, as he puts it, "infectiousness") of this activity consists of the sincerity of the emotions transmitted by the artist through his work. However, not any emotions whatsoever are acceptable; they have to be in accordance with certain ethical or religious codes, most notably Christian ones. Also John

Ruskin (1819-1900) claimed in a similar vein that the value of art is highly related to the moral qualities of the producer. In the present context, it is not my intention to discuss these views and their plausibility in detail, but only point to the fact that many of us might feel the idea intuitively quite compelling that the value of a work of art, at least to some degree, is affected by the moral characteristics of its creator. Take, for example, the following pictures:



Figure 2. Mahatma Gandhi, about 1889.

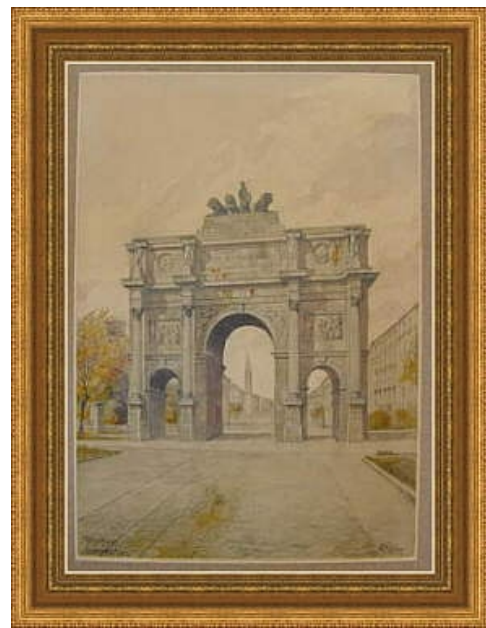


Figure 3. Unknown artist, about 1900.

The descriptive background of figure 2 could, for example, be put forward as follows: Mahatma Gandhi, during his stay in London 1888-91, became for a period interested in painting. This picture shows one of his artistic attempts, revealing an impression of peaceful calmness and, compositionally seen, focus and concentration. Figure 3, on the other hand, made by an unknown artist, is a rather traditional and academic architectural picture without any innovative or otherwise remarkable qualities. Figure 4, made by Adolf Hitler for his application to the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna in 1907, is likewise a rather conventional architectural study. However, it also creates an uncanny impression of emptiness, any signs of human life are missing, and the arch rises as a somewhat pompous, theatrical symbol of power.

Although we immediately can notice that these pictures are visually identical, it seems also quite probable that our response to and appreciation of them varies dependent on whom we think might be the creator (and actually this is a painting by Hitler).¹¹



Figure 4. *Adolf Hitler*, painting date unknown.

According to Noël Carroll, art has indeed a necessary and thus essential condition for its existence, namely the historical dimension with regard to its production as well as to its reception and evaluation.¹² The reception of art on part of the audience, for example, is guided by traditions of interpreting and appreciating art. Such traditions or the knowledge of historical antecedents provide means for orientation towards contemporary art. Historically preceding art activities and present ones have, as Carroll further claims, a narrative connection. A narrative can be characterized as the representation of at least two (real or fictive) actions, events, or situations with a temporal link on the content side (i.e. concerning the represented world).¹³ When it comes to historical narratives, the incorporated events are usually situated within an explanatory pattern which gives them significance by delineating their causal roles and teleological contributions to certain goals or outcomes.¹⁴

Art historical narratives show, as Carroll maintains, a similar pattern. Some of such historical narratives function as *identifying* narratives, that is, they are used to establish the art status of contested or disputed works. The beginning of these narratives includes a description of a set of historical circumstances, of previous art practices, which are

generally undisputed with regard to their art status. This background thus introduces a context which is adequate or sufficient for making the further development plausible and narratively intelligible. From this point of view, the identity and background of the artist certainly matters, and, depending on the scope of the considered context, also his or her moral status. On the other hand, it might also be argued that taking an all too wide context into consideration would lead us astray from the real objects of interest, namely the works of art in themselves. George Orwell, for example, seems to have been an adherent of a relatively purist aesthetic view, when he commented on Salvador Dalí's character and work:

*"What Dalí has done and what he has imagined is debatable, but in his outlook, his character, the bedrock decency of a human being does not exist. He is as anti-social as a flea...a deceased intelligence...a symptom of the world's illness...[But]...one ought to be able to hold in one's head simultaneously the two facts that Dalí is a good draughtsman and a disgusting human being. The one does not invalidate or, in a sense, affect the other."*¹⁵

While the moral aspects of art, such as the effects of their production or very existence as well as the moral status of its creators may influence our evaluations or preferences concerning art, there is yet another aspect worth mentioning, namely *the displayed message or content* in itself. Here I would especially like to focus upon art with outspoken narrative characteristics. With regard to pictorial art, for example, it may be assumed that in numerous cases the rendered content more or less corresponds to, and may be assimilated by, narrative mental representations which are shared by a relatively large group of beholders. As, for example, the art historian Michael Baxandall convincingly has claimed, artists have usually adapted their work to the general cognitive demands and presuppositions of the intended beholders.¹⁶ Although Baxandall chiefly has focused on strategies for pictorial representation used in fifteenth-century Italian painting, it seems quite possible to take his account as suggesting a more general point. The production of visual works of art is influenced by the demands and needs of a certain public. The artist responds to these demands and offers opportunities for the beholder to apply his background experience of his 'way of life' (in this case including the knowledge of biblical stories) as well as artistic conventions. The beholder interprets a work of art

according to acquired category systems and habits which the work has been adapted to. The recognition of familiar items or themes, the experience of something as typical in some sense, may give the beholder a feeling of satisfaction. With regard to the historical context discussed by Baxandall, such recognizable (and enjoyable) motifs may be typical religious events, typical geometric forms or mathematical relationships, and typical dance formations.

The presuppositions on part of the beholders can of course vary considerably among different individuals. An important task of artists, however, appears to be able to abstract and visualize those types of subjects which can be recognized and appreciated by a larger public, that is, which provide some kind of common denominators among individual beholders' mental representations. Such visual renderings may be regarded as more or less typical by the intended beholder. Pictorial narration, I believe, is frequently based upon the existence and activation of such mentally stored action and scene schemas on part of the beholders. These mental schemas are usually constituted out of earlier experiences of action series and events, either due to the beholders' previously acquired, direct familiarity with them, or due to the beholders' acquaintance with written, oral, and of course pictorial descriptions of certain events (e.g. religious or mythological tales). Pictorial narration, we might assume, consists of representing (more or less significant) components of action sequences familiar to the beholders, sometimes only by rendering a specific, arrested moment which can activate a wider, mentally imagined event schema. Indeed, the very identification of a picture *qua* semantically meaningful work presupposes to some extent the sharing of common beliefs and category structures.

Thus visual narratives make use of or imply all kinds of presuppositions taking more or less for granted by the beholders and are actually, semantically seen, selective and incomplete. These implied presuppositions range from knowledge of human biology and psychology as well as to geographical, historical, art historical, political, religious knowledge, and so on. In order to comprehend a visual narrative, the beholder has to fill in the missing parts within the rendered pictorial material. Moreover, the audience is, apart from activating propositional knowledge or "knowledge how", also stimulated to mobilize the emotions or feelings of empathy which the pictorial work seems to suggest or "invite" us to engage in. In this respect pictorial narratives give us opportunities for the exercise and activation of our emotional thinking and, furthermore, our moral concerns. This is not a question of presenting new or hitherto unknown moral propositions or

recommendations; rather, it is a matter of mobilizing and refreshing what we already, at least latently, are convinced of and “feel” (in a sense); the artwork may thus function as a stimulus source, an occasion for the audience to deepen and renewing moral knowledge it already has by means of concrete, clarifying examples, hence sometimes adding new nuances to that knowledge.

However, not anything goes. Take, for example, a look at the following two pictures taken from a children’s book by Arthur Maxwell, a Christian author of morality tales that illustrate values such as honesty, diligence, obedience, and selflessness. Figure 5, embedded in such a fictitious story, shows a scene which seems to suggest the principle that it is morally right to help people in situations of distress.¹⁷



Figure 5. From Maxwell (1966).

Aesthetically seen, though, this drawing appears to be rather unsatisfactory and clumsy, and the emotional reactions of two of the participants in this scene are obviously inappropriate or at least odd, seemingly expressing anger rather than, for example, fear or despair, thus being difficult to identify with. Moreover, the implied moral precept seems also to be rather trivial and self-evident, at least for an adult, hardly giving us a challenging opportunity to exercise our cognitive, emotional, or moral powers.¹⁸

Kokoschka's "The Prometheus Triptych"

Now, let us consider a work of art, which certainly has a quite different, and more profound, aesthetic as well as moral dignity, namely Oskar Kokoschka's "The Prometheus Triptych" (1950, figure 6).¹⁹



Figure 6. Oskar Kokoschka: "The Prometheus Triptych" (1950). Oil painting, 817 x 239 cm.

The tragic destiny of the Titan Prometheus, who according to Greek mythology created man from clay and became harshly punished by Zeus for having brought knowledge of fire to mankind, has inspired numerous writers throughout history, such as Aeschylus, Goethe, Mary Shelley ("Frankenstein"), as well as artists such as Rubens, Titian, or Michelangelo. Usually Prometheus has been depicted as an heroic demi-god who rescued mankind from its intellectual ignorance by stealing fire from the hearth of the gods, as a fighter against tyranny. However, in Kokoschka's adaptation of the myth quite a different view emerges. Instead of rendering Prometheus as a hero, he is rather described as a symbol for man's compulsion to conquer nature through the destructive power of intellect and rational thinking.²⁰ Thus in the right-hand canvas (figure 7), Prometheus is shown as a suffering figure chained to a rock where an eagle feeds on his liver while the flaming torch slips out of his hand. On the left below, symbols of authority and control, such as a crown, chains, scales and fasces have been rather carelessly placed. Athene, the goddess of wisdom and companion of heroes, is on the right side symbolized as an owl with white eyes and apparently blinded. The scene on the left-hand canvas, on the other hand, contrasts strikingly to the suffering male Prometheus, showing Demeter, the goddess of



Figure 7. Oskar Kokoschka: "Prometheus". Right-hand canvas, 239 x 234 cm.

grain and agriculture ("mother-earth"), in a graceful, protective gesture, full of strength, seemingly embracing the moonlit earth (figure 8).



Figure 8. Oskar Kokoschka: "Hades, Persephone, and Demeter". Left-hand canvas, 239 x 234 cm.

On her right side, her daughter Persephone, having been captured by Hades, the god of the dead, springs upwards into the safety of Persephone's protection. Hades' face is interestingly Kokoschka's own self-portrait, expressing compassion rather than threat, and seemingly releasing her, maybe even propelling her upwards. In his right hand, he brandishes the severed head of Medusa. The central Apocalypse canvas shows an even more striking scene (figure 9).



Figure 9. Oskar Kokoschka: "The Apocalypse". Centre canvas, 239 x 349 cm.

From the right side, the four horseman, perhaps anticipated by the explosive, dazzling light, charge threatfully towards a group of unsuspecting figures placed on a hillside on the left. Kokoschka was influenced by the ideas of the Swiss anthropologist Johann Jakob Bachofen (1815-1887), according to whom civilization was matriarchal in its archaic origins, characterized by bonds of fairness and motherly love. Gradually, civilization became overridden by patriarchal and hierarchical principles of authority, obedience, intellect, and rationalism, already fully manifested in the Roman world and the establishment of the Christian church. This view is obviously reflected in the Apocalypse

scene, where the hillside could be interpreted as showing the different stages in the development of ancient civilization. At the bottom, we can see representations of women, or pagan goddesses, involved in various peaceful activities, but upwards biblical figures can be discerned, such as Adam and Cain killing Abel, leading to the top with the Christian cross.

Quite obviously, this, even literally speaking, monumental work (its size is 817 cm x 239 cm in total) is compositionally and visually utterly complex, as well as it also, due to its semantic ambiguity, certainly challenges our interpretative skills. Kokoschka had been living in London since 1938 as a refugee from Nazi Germany, where he had been classified as a degenerate artist. The "Prometheus Triptych" was painted during his exile in Britain in 1950, in a Cold War situation with its escalating threats. Kokoschka had undoubtedly also the destructive effects of WW II in fresh memory, and thus it is hardly implausible to interpret this work as implying a warning for a cold-hearted, rational civilization's destructive forces. More specifically, Kokoschka seems to warn for man's need to conquer nature, to attain godlike authority by use of cold intellect and rationality. Instead, he appears to suggest, we should much more consider and apply maternal values of empathy, creativity, and emotional thinking in general, instead of a rigid patriarchal rationality. History, so he seems to say, has shown us what this path may lead us to.

Now, is Kokoschka's triptych a good work of art? Yes, I would definitely claim so. We may certainly appreciate its visual turbulence, energy, and complexity, the interplay between light and shadows, its nuanced and still dramatic colorization, its compositional structure, and so on. Moreover, we may also be intellectually and emotionally challenged by the quite unusual combination of biblical and mythological subject matter and its complex, ambiguous content. But certainly its moral gravity and the implied plea for human values such as compassion and creativity, rather than cold rationality and destruction, plays a significant and contributing role to its value *qua* work of art, I believe.

By contrast, we can compare this painting to two sculptural renderings of the Prometheus myth. Figure 10 by Josef Thorak (1943) shows Prometheus far from being weak or defeated, but rather as a powerful, muscular and heroic figure.²¹ Figure 11 by Arno Breker (1935) represents him as a forceful, authoritative person, with a determined facial expression.²²



Figure 10. Josef Thorak : "Prometheus" (1943).



Figure 11. Arno Breker: "Prometheus"(1935).

In both cases neo-classicist influences are evident, and these sculptures can thus hardly be said to display any remarkable innovative aesthetic qualities or visual intricacies, at least not compared to many other works of Western art produced during that period of time. Moreover, the context of their production seems also to be crucial for interpretative as well as moral reasons. Actually, both of them were made in Nazi Germany, and Thorak and especially Breker were some of the most prominent Nazi artists, endorsed and rewarded by the authorities, not least by Hitler himself. With this background in mind, the implied message becomes certainly more obvious as well as morally dubious. Thus it seems reasonable to assume that these sculptures have been intended to glorify certain racial ideals, emphasizing the positive values of power and strength as well, by implication, the heroic superiority of the German or Aryan race and social Darwinist ethical beliefs ("might is right"). If we compare Kokoschka's work to these sculptures, a significant difference can easily be discerned, quite apart from any clear-cut aesthetic or

formal considerations. While many of us might sympathize with, or at least respect, the implied moral stance in the former, the tacit message in the latter ones may by many beholders be experienced as unacceptable, even despicable.

Thus, as I would like to claim in concluding this paper, moral aspects have indeed a role to play when it comes to the appreciation and evaluation of art. I am not saying that the moral assessment of artworks always is appropriate; there are undoubtedly many works where such considerations are quite irrelevant or distracting. And there are certainly works of art where the degree of realism or the intensity of emotions revealed also might seem to be rather irrelevant, considered as aesthetic value criteria. But sometimes these criteria undoubtedly matter, and in some cases, such as those described here, it seems reasonable and intelligible to include also moral points of view into the total evaluation of an artwork, to add them to the aesthetically significant core in a similar way as realism or expression. We may of course estimate the "goodness" or "badness" of tennis players, knitters, cars, and steaks solely by referring to whether they fulfil utterly restricted, specific criteria for things of just their kind. However, a "good" steak can, all things being equal compared to other steaks, sometimes be even "better", for example, if it has been produced under advantageous working conditions or comes from "happy" cows. And comparable lines of thought are certainly, I believe, sometimes also applicable to works of art.

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Endnotes

¹ For discussions of the relationship between statements about aesthetic qualities - like those mentioned above - and value judgments, see e.g. Charles L Stevenson, "Interpretation and Evaluation in Aesthetics", in: Black (1950). Cf. also Hermerén (1973).

² See e.g. Hermerén (1983), pp. 53 - 58, for a discussion of the relationship between concepts of art and of artistic value.

³ Cf. Beardsley: "Aesthetic Welfare, Aesthetic Justice, and Educational Policy" in: Beardsley (1982).

⁴ Kant (1974), § 7, p. 126 (my trans.).

⁵ Cf. Knight (1954), p. 148.

⁶ See e.g. Davies (1991), for an account and discussion of such attempts.

⁷ It should be pointed out, though, that there may be categories which actually reflect an all-or-none rule, that is, some entities belong, formally speaking, to the category in question in strict essentialist terms, while others do not. For example, the category *odd number* includes any number whatsoever that will not result in a whole number when divided by 2. All category members satisfy the rule equally. Still, despite the existence of exact formal criteria for category membership, it may be claimed that such a category has a graded structure, psychologically and cognitively speaking, due to the efficiency with which people establish membership of certain numbers, or due to the fact that they regard some numbers as more typical than others (say, 3 compared to 1057). Cf. Lawrence Barsalou, "Deriving Categories to Achieve Goals", in Bower (1991), pp. 1 - 64.

⁸ For a review and discussion of cross-cultural studies within anthropology on category formation, see Malt (1995), 85 - 148.

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¹⁰ Tolstoy, p. 173.

¹¹ This illustration has been taken from http://www.oskarschindler.com/Albums6/jpg_hitlerart18.htm, June 22, 2007.

¹² See Carroll (2001), pp. 79-81.

¹³ Cf. Prince (1982), pp. 1 - 4.

¹⁴ Cf. George M. Wilson, "Narrativity", in Levinson (2003), p. 394.

¹⁵ Orwell, quoted in Rader & Jessup, p. 218.

¹⁶ Baxandall (1988).

¹⁷ Maxwell (1966), p. 38; illustr. by Thure Ödmark.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 147; illustr. by Thure Ödmark.

¹⁹ Figures 6-9 © DACS, London, The Samuel Courtauld Trust/ Courtauld Institute of Art Gallery, 2006.

²⁰ Wright (2006), pp. 16 - 20.

²¹ This illustration has been taken <http://img367.imageshack.us/img367/4172/thorakpromethe20ns.jpg>, June 22, 2007.

²² This illustration has been taken from Conrades (2006), p. 120.

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