

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
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Department of Philosophy

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Dear Professor Ferrater:

I am sorry to be so late with these comments, but this first semester, after a year's sabbatical in Italy has been fairly hectic, besides which, the book did not get to me until my return this September.

What I shall do in the attached, is to make some general observations, and then offer some specific criticisms of the three articles, Arte, Estetica, and Bello, on which I shall concentrate.

Best wishes.

Sincerely yours,

Arthur Szathmary
Arthur Szathmary.

22-4-59.

Report on articles relating to aesthetics in Ferrater's
Diccionario de filosofia.

May I say first that the Dictionary represents a very impressive accomplishment, and that I, myself, have found it quite useful. Such articles as "Phenomenology" and "Existentialis"^m contain a good deal of material not easily found elsewhere, presented in admirably clear form. I must add, however, that the overall quality of the articles in the field I have been asked to discuss is not as high as that of others I have read, and that even among them there are definite differences in quality. From these, and also from others outside the field, I gather the impression that Professor Ferrater has not decided on a consistent approach to the problem of presentation and choice of material under the various topics. For example, in the article, Estetica he offers a fairly systematic account of the various conceptions of the field that have been proposed in history, doing the work throughout of the dispassionate interpreter of types of thought and ending with some remarks on the present state of the discipline. The article, Arte, however, is for the most part a personal essay on the subject with emphasis on the ideas of Ortega, and Milton Nahm, and some of his own. This lack of consistency I consider a serious defect, not because I have any a priori objections to writing philosophical essays from one's own point of view in a "dictionary" but because I think that for the readers' benefit a definite choice of one approach has to be made. It is natural for the reader to want to know what to go to such a book for, and whether to expect a historical

survey or a schematization of the various subjects, or something else, and if they go from Arte with expectations derived from their reading of Estetica-er-vice versa they will be justifiably disappointed. Moreover, I make no secret of my personal opinion that a dictionary is not the place for essays, if no other reason than that, one cannot develop one's ideas sufficiently in the limited space that such a dictionary affords.

The comments to follow should be read with the fact that they are written from this "objectivist" bias.

Article, Bello

P. 131. col. 3 ff. The account of the Hippias and Phaedrus is a little extended, considering what the author derives from it. The "psychological" and "epistemological theories mentioned are not "anti-Platonic," but rather "Plato-negative," in the sense that they are theories about what it would never occur to Plato to theorize about. The various theories between the Platonic and the anti-Platonic should, I think, be located historically.

p. 152, col. 3. For reasons indicated under the article, "Gnoseologia" wouldn't it be wise to find a synonymous expression, or invent one? Iden. The statements that beauty is a "social instinct," and "purposefulness without purpose" require some clarification. Does Schopenhauer define beauty as the recognition of the general in the particular? Why is Cousin's theory, of so little importance historically, mentioned?

p. 153, col. 1 From the author's examples of instances of the "semantic" approach to the beautiful, it seems that he is confusing semantic accounts of the nature of artistic expression, which are not necessarily theories of the beautiful with any theoretical

attempt to define beauty. On this conception, any theory which aimed at such a definition would be a "semantic" theory, and this would include practically all theories of art, in which case "semantic" would include too much to mean much.

153, col. 2 The distinction between "axiological" and "ethical" approaches is not clear. This is related to the fact that the statement that beauty is "not a reality or a property, but a value" is not clear as it stands.

Idem. I personally cannot understand the relative space given to Scheler and Hartmann as compared with that devoted to Hegel.

Bibliography: I notice omission of the works of Prall, Pepper, R. Church - but my suggestion is not to expand, but to classify under headings suggested by the article ("Not Platonic and anti-Platonic"?)
Article, Estetica

p. 446, col. 1 It seems unwise to begin with the meaning of "esthetic" in transcendental ~~esthetic~~, only to put it aside as no longer alive.

P. 447, col. 1 "Perfection of sensitive knowledge" requires elucidation, which is not given it adequately at the bottom of the column.

p. 447, col. 2 It strikes me that purposefulness without purpose, is not clearly explained.

p. 447, col. 3 Is not the author begging the question when he says that idealists reduce the esthetic to elements alien to itself?

p. 447 What is given in this column is different definitions of "the esthetic" and not different definitions of esthetics.

p. 447, col. 3 It is incorrect to say that intuitionists have drawn a hard-and-fast line between esthetic intuition and expression, as the author himself points out in the article, Bello.

It is certainly questionable whether psychologists

and sociologists of art reduce the meaning of art to its origins." Here example, illustration is required.

p. 448, col. 1 It is incorrect to say that semiotic aesthetics confines itself to the analysis of "esthetic iconic signs." (Why "esthetic"?) Langer, for example, departs from this and remains a semiotician. Nor is it true that the object is interpretation of the aesthetic object as a vehicle of communication. Expression would be more to the point.

Bibliography: Similar comment to the preceding. In place of "sociology of esthetics," I suggest sociology of art, and, add, Why is no Marxist writing mentioned?

Article, Expression

Of those I have read, this I consider the poorest. The examples of forms of philosophical expression are not used to clarify the concept of expression or varying senses of expression. At times, moreover, (notably, in the criticism of Croce) he assumes a meaning of expression which is not explained elsewhere. So far as I can see, the question of expression as an artistic phenomenon is almost untouched.

Article, Arte

p. 112, col. 2 It is true that there are almost as many conceptions of art as there are philosophies. But it is not true that all these theories deal with art as an activity. More important, the conception that the artist offers a "certain idea of the world" is to be found in relatively few philosophies. The impression given by Ferrater's preliminary remarks is the false one that all philosophers of art have written variations on the

same theme, when, - at least so I believe - Aristotle and Hegel are really theorizing about two different subjects. This difference should be made clear in any objective account. Idem. The statement, "Art is neither salvation nor useful action" is one of the statements I have in mind when I speak of positions which would take too long to defend and therefore have no place in a dictionary.

p. 113. col. 1. The expression "intuitive symbolism" is unclear in the extreme at this point, and is not made much clearer by the (much later) reference to the difference between, "internal" and "substitutive" symbols.

Idem. Since the conception of "the beautiful" has not been analyzed in such a way as to distinguish it clearly from the expressive, it is not clear what Ferrater means when he says that art is expressive before being beautiful.

p. 113., col. 2 The notion of "emotion of the forms" is in dire need of explication.

p. 114. col. 1 f. It is not easy to see how the presentation of Nahm's conception of the problems of understanding the structure of the work of art summarizes what precedes it.

Bibliography: I can make little sense of the choice of texts. If Vivas and Nahm and Munro, why not Prall, Santayana? If not Gentile why not Croce? Why Richards' rather specialized Science and Poetry? If the article were clearly organized according to categories, then I would suggest a highly selective bibliography under "aspects" of various problems.

General comments: It seems almost impertinent to say that the article recognizes only a small number of theories as to the

"nature of art," so far does doing this seem from the intention of the author. The informed reader would be surprised to find that there are philosophers of art who would not define art in terms of "expression" or "symbol" of some sort.

Frederic Spalding