

The author's main conclusion is that despite the capacity of art to evoke emotions and provoke thought, art cannot give us genuine knowledge. He first considers the two possible avenues for art to contribute to knowledge, namely via the interpretations of art experts and the eliciting of feelings and introspection, before concluding that neither avenue creates genuine knowledge — art experts are prone to bias, while feelings are unreliable bases for objective knowledge and can be elicited by propaganda. Ultimately, while the author correctly acknowledges the limited capacity of art to provide objective knowledge of the world given the inherent subjectivity of aesthetic judgements and responses, his argument is weakened by an overly narrow conception of what knowledge is — art can still give us tacit knowledge and introspective knowledge about our own beliefs and dispositions.

The author first examines the capacity of art experts to provide knowledge from and about art, before identifying two challenges that preclude this possibility — aesthetic judgements made by experts are still prone to bias, and requiring experts to interpret art is an elitist conception of aesthetic knowledge. The first point of criticism is an astute one — indeed, our aesthetic judgements are influenced by not only personal biases and preferences, but also “prevailing trends” as the author notes. For instance, Peking Opera — with its bright and bold face masks worn by performers — might be considered traditionally beautiful by the Chinese, but Western audiences frequently regard the loud colours of the masks as grotesque and discordant, since these combinations of bright contrasting colours are rarely found in Western art. Hence, even an expert might be affected by their cultural upbringing when they make judgements about art and beauty, limiting the capacity of art to tell us objective knowledge of the aesthetic realm. Similarly, art experts are also beholden to the preferences of the art movements of their time — while experts in the Classical age valued paintings with fine brushstrokes and realistic colours, experts in the Impressionist era lauded the coarse brushstrokes and unblended colours of artists

like Monet. Thus, it is clear that experts are not able to offer a perfectly objective evaluation of artworks — it seems that the inevitable subjectivity of art limits its capacity to contribute to knowledge about aesthetic properties like beauty.

The author's second criticism — that requiring art experts for knowledge lends to elitism — is, however, a weak one. Not only is it justified merely via a rhetorical appeal to the supposedly ludicrous claim that an average Joe does not know what art is, it is also tense with his earlier observation that there is "inherent subjectivity" in aesthetic judgement — logically, if aesthetic judgements were really subjective for everyone, the implication is that neither experts nor the common man has knowledge about what art is. Therefore, even though this criticism is a poorly justified one, a charitable reading of his argument here as a whole reveals that his conclusion does not depend on this largely tangential attack of elitism — so long as he demonstrates there is subjectivity in aesthetic inquiry, he sufficiently shows that objective knowledge from art is not possible. To that end, this flawed attack does not cripple his claim that art experts cannot give us objective knowledge from art.

The author proceeds to examine the possibility that art may give us knowledge by provoking introspection and eliciting emotion. However, he dismisses this possibility on two grounds — that emotional engagement cannot justify objective knowledge, and that artwork could be propaganda and thus be divorced from reality. These are more valid criticisms, insofar as the knowledge concerned are factual claims about the world. Scholars have observed that two obstacles stand in the way of art giving us objective knowledge about the world — the 'Warrant Challenge' and the 'Uniqueness Challenge'. First, given that art need not be a faithful representation of reality, (much like propaganda), it seems unable to justify claims about factual reality — for instance, it would be fallacious to conclude that Wakanda really exists after watching Black Panther, because film directors have creative licence to make up events, characters, and even countries depending on the story they wish to tell. Even if we could obtain justified true beliefs about the world from artworks, it is clear that artworks are far from the best source of knowledge about the world — even if Interstellar could tell us about time dilation, it is still, from an epistemic point of view, far better to justify one's beliefs about time dilation by referring to

a physics textbook, a far more reliable source. As such, the claims that art can give us about the world seem neither warranted nor unique, making the author's claim that artworks (as potential 'propaganda') cannot show us anything about the real world a well-founded one.

Additionally, the author is right that emotions from art fail to justify our beliefs about the world — indeed, while emotions can provoke understanding, they cannot directly form the warrants to our claims about reality. For example, while I can gain an appreciation of just how oppressive totalitarian regimes can be by experiencing the horror evoked by Orwell's 1984, the book cannot directly justify any claims about totalitarian regimes in the real world, inasmuch as the Big Brother of the book is merely a fictional character. Thus, the author persuasively demonstrates that eliciting emotions is not enough for art to be a source of knowledge about the world.

However, the author's overall argument has considered 'knowledge' in too narrow a sense — while it may be true that art cannot give us objective knowledge about aesthetic properties or factual claims, it is also evident that art can be a source of introspective knowledge about our own dispositions, as well as tacit knowledge in the form of skills. For instance, reading Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* can show us how we are as readers just as prone to premature judgement — as the author clouds our appraisal of Mr Darcy before revealing his meritorious character, we might be shown how we are also as prejudiced as the Elizabeth of the novel. While this is not "objective knowledge about the world", such revelations about ourselves certainly constitute knowledge as well. Further, art can also tell us about our own moral beliefs and intuitions — after reading Owen's *Dulce et Decorum Est*, we might also gain the knowledge that we believe war to be immoral. Hence, art can still give us knowledge about ourselves, a possibility that the author too hastily dismisses.

Additionally, art can also give us tacit knowledge in the form of skills, which is non-propositional in nature but knowledge all the same. For instance, a pianist can listen to Lang Lang's performance or read any art expert's commentary on Joe Hisaishi's playing and gain a newfound awareness of how to improve his own playing. As such, art can also

be a valuable source of 'know-how', even if it cannot contribute significantly to objective knowledge about the world.

Thus, while the author's argument about the fallibility of art experts and the unrepresentativeness of art vis-à-vis reality is largely a strong one, he does not manage to adequately justify his rather absolute conclusion that no 'genuine' knowledge is possible from art. Even as he rightly observes the inherent subjectivity of aesthetic judgements, he clings too tightly to an extremely narrow view of what 'genuine' knowledge is, neglecting the capacity of art to meaningfully expand our knowledge about our own beliefs, skills, and dispositions.

AO1: 14/15 AO2: 10/10 AO3: 5/5 Total: 29/30

### **Examiner's Comments**

Excellent piece that comprehensively deals with all the main premises and the warrant of the author's argument. Good awareness of the author's argument. Evaluation is clear, concise, and insightful, sufficiently discussing relevant issues to do with the nature of construction of knowledge in aesthetics. Well done!