

شماره بیست ماهنامه انگلیسی دانشکده را در منوی بین الملل بخوانید

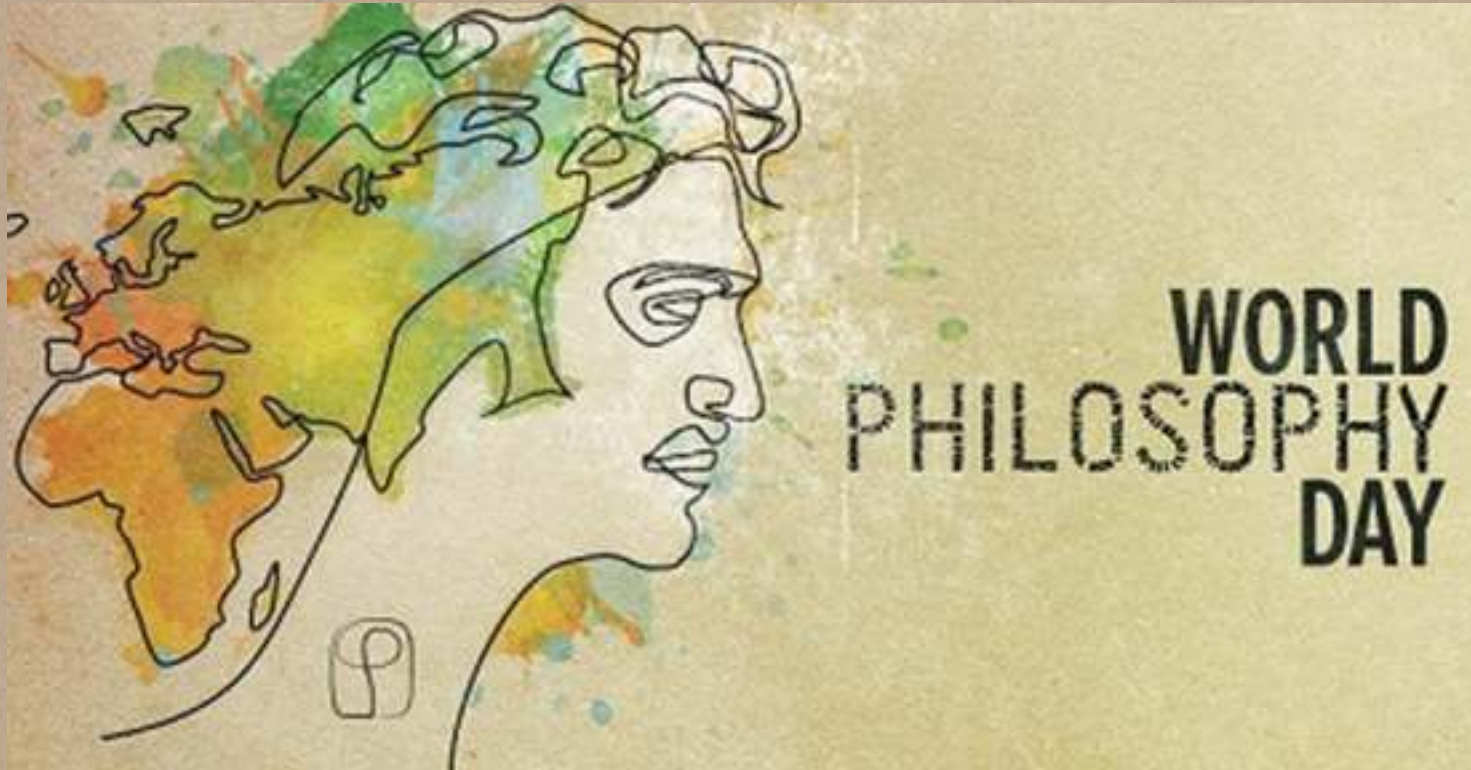
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Chorus of Dervishes

by Mojtaba Nourani



"Chorus of Dervishes" is the title of a famous piece of music by Ludwig van Beethoven, which is the fourth part of a work called "The Ruins of Athens". The use of these march-like elements, and the Turkish and Islamic character and tone, in this masterpiece, have distanced Beethoven from his musical personality to some sage orientalist who has Goethe's whims.

In this story, Athens, which is the temple of Minerva (the goddess of art and wisdom), and the "Ruins Of Athens", which points to the destruction of the temple of Minerva, is a reference to the destruction of Athenian art and culture during the inter-religious war. Minerva wakes up from a 2000 year sleep and encounters surprises in search of Athens and the Parthenon, she finds the Parthenon destroyed and Athens occupied by the Muslim Turks, which shows the superiority of Islamic culture and mysticism. In conversation with Helen (the goddess of beauty and perfection) and Mercury (the messenger of the gods), Minerva asks about the wonders of the time in which she is located! In one of the episodes, she hears voices from far away. Men who dance come near and sing! The reason is asked from Mercury. Mercury replies: "They are worshiping with song, a God whose name you have never heard. The gods of the north wind and the west wind also make their voices heard. They are dervishes who are coming to perform their rituals and praise Muhammad."

Then the "Chorus of Dervishes" is performed. The poem is in German, but the word that is constantly repeated and is completely recognizable to the ordinary listener is the word "Kaaba". It seems that Beethoven put this word into music in a way that evokes "Tawaf", which shows his awareness in studying Islam. In addition, the fast movement of the stringed instruments, which is not similar to a Tarantella, as well as the escalating process of the music, both follow the logic of the "Sama" dance, in which the Dervishes who come from afar enter and leave the stage in the same way. For this reason, the music fades out at the end, which is not a common phenomenon in the dynamism of European classical music.

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In the poem, there is a direct reference to the phenomenon of "Shaq Al-Qamar", "Boraq", and the name "Muhammad" and "Kaaba" itself. As the dervishes arrive on stage, the music begins. After this piece, the very famous and familiar "Turkish March" is also performed.

The poem, by August von Kotzebue, set to music by Ludwig van Beethoven:

In the folds of your sleeves,
You have carried the moon and shattered it,
Ka'abah! Muhammad!
You mounted the radiant Borak and,
Flew up to Seventh Heaven,
Great Prophet! Ka'abah!



An Interview with Noël Carroll

Nadia: Noël Carroll! Thank you for accepting my invitation. Your work has long been accessible and nurturing for our academic environment, particularly in the field of philosophy of art. Many of your books are available in Persian including "On Criticism", "Theories of Art Today", and "Philosophy of Art: A Contemporary Introduction". Although I always advise my colleagues and students to avoid using translations. So Noël! Thank you very much for your presence!

Noël: Thank you very much! Thank you for the very generous introductions. I'm very honored to be here. The only thing that I'm not happy about is that it's electronic! I would much more prefer to be with you in person and to meet with you and talk with you on one-to-one basis. Maybe someday! I hope! For now this is what we have! So let me start by briefly summarizing what I'm going to be talking about. The goal of my talk is to advance an approach to the critical evaluation of works of art and this approach I call 'the purpose-driven approach'. It develops and refines views of art that I've introduced in previous work. It's a little different than the view in "On Criticism" which is available in Persian.

I hope it's an improved view. It uses the idea of a constitutive purpose that regards artworks as singular. I'll try and explain what those terms mean as time goes on. For that reason this approach is in contrast to the hedonistic approach to criticism which we can call "the taste model" which was initiated in the 18th century and is still alive and well today.

So in this paper I'm going to argue that the hedonic taste model which is non-cognitive and reductive should be abandoned in favor of my purpose-driven approach which is cognitivist and pluralistic. So now let me start. The notion of taste became especially important in the philosophy of art in the 18th century. It developed I think during the period of the emerging bourgeois class in Europe which had increasing leisure time to invest in engaging with artworks and this increased engagement encouraged philosophical examination of the practice, and at that time taste became a leading concept to what's involved in our interaction with artworks. Now at the time this wasn't an utterly eccentric way to treat the subject because taste was associated with pleasure and the leading conception of art at the time was that the Fine Arts were conceived as a matter of the imitation of the beautiful in nature; where beauty in turn was often thought of that which engendered pleasure, especially to sight and to hearing. So beauty was defined by its effects on the subject understood in terms of what's aesthetically pleasant or delightful.

So by taking taste, notably gustatory taste, as an analog for our interaction with artworks, philosophers like David Hume regarded the consumption of art as primarily a non-cognitive affair, a matter of feeling and pleasure.

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Like the pleasure you feel when you taste the delicious food. Hume as a result recommended that critical disagreements about the value of artworks would be best referred to the feelings of pleasure of those who we called ideal critics, and I'll talk a little bit more about them in a bit. Now in this talk I'm going to argue that this model of critical assessment is no longer plausible, as a quick review of our critical practices reveal. Our critical practices nowadays are cognitive through and through, most frequently involving interpretation. So I submit that taste was never really an adequate model for the critical appreciation of art even if it might have appeared well motivated in the 18th century. But despite its inadequacy many philosophers, if only tacitly, continue to work within the taste model of appreciation. In this I think they're committed to a failed paradigm, one we should have abandoned long ago. And then instead I'll try to offer an alternative framework. The one that's much more fitting to contemporary practice, and I would argue was actually always better suited to the task of evaluating art. So in short I say philosophers should forget taste. Now it seems to me there are three major uses of the notion of taste in philosophy of art. There's personal taste, critical taste, and taste as quality detection. Although I'm not going to talk about that last one. In fact I'm not really going to talk very much about personal taste either. Personal taste pertains to what individuals like, and despite some current discussions about this, I don't think it is of much philosophical interest. People like and take pleasure in different things. Allegedly, this often conflicts with critical claims of artistic excellence. Furthermore, it's presumed that we should align our personal taste with that which has been critically ascertained to be better or the best. And this is supposedly the rational thing to do, because such alignment would supposedly give us greater pleasure.

But I'm not convinced we should be forced or even tempted to surrender our personal taste. We might hold on to them along with our more educated evaluations. After all, everyone agrees that there exists what we call guilty pleasures. I think the mind is commodious enough to accommodate both. Critical taste is different than personal taste, and there are at least two reasons to think this. First, critics themselves acknowledge having these guilty pleasures. They admit that they like things that are less than the best. It's eminently possible to like an artwork that you think has low artistic value. For example an exacting literary critic may take pleasure in routine mystery or pedestrian thriller novels. It's both logically and psychologically possible, in other words, to critically evaluate something positively that one doesn't like or take pleasure in. There's no contradiction here. You may recognize that something is good of its kind even when you have no liking for the kind. For example you might recognize that a given Rococo painting is a good example of that style without being attracted to the style. So it's psychologically and logically possible to critically evaluate an artwork positively, even if it gives you no pleasure. Just as it's logically and psychologically possible to evaluate something negatively that pleases you. Critical taste is the taste that's in question in this talk. When I recommend that philosophers forget taste, it's with reference to taste in discussions about the criticism of art. Specifically I mean to be challenging the role that takes place in critical evaluation and its relevance to critical disputes.

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I'm denying that the value of artworks consists just in its capacity to generate pleasure; as well as the alleged pleasure of the so-called ideal critics. Briefly then going back to the 18th century, by analyzing judgments of taste to gustatory taste 18th century philosophers intended to oppose the rationalist tendency to regard judgments of artworks as a matter of reasoning inference or the application of concepts. In his "Of the Standard of Taste", David Hume says: "It's evident that none of the rules of composition are fixed by reasoning a priori, or can be esteemed abstract conclusions of the understanding." That was a quote. Instead Hume says they have to be discovered by means of experience. Specifically the experience of beauty where beauty itself is conceived to be a sentiment, a thrill, or pleasure, or delight; an affection that elicits our approbation. Because we relish the work we approve of it. Given the subjective nature of these judgments, critical disagreements would appear to be inevitable with respect to art, just as they are in respect to gustatory taste. If you like mustard and I like ketchup; well, there's no disputing that particular judgment. Hume argues though that disputes over artworks can be resolved by consulting a jury of ideal critics who in virtue of their exemplary possession of certain traits, track the feelings of pleasure that are the natural responses that unprejudiced, suitably informed and sensitive humans, would have to the artworks on the basis of our natural constitution as human beings. The relevant characteristics of these critics according to Hume are five: Their strong sense, united to delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by comparison, and cleared of all prejudice. So the common experience of pleasure on the part of this group of critics who possess these qualities are, for Hume, the true standard of taste and beauty. Appeal to their joint verdictive taste is where settles disagreement. So if you and I disagree about an artwork, we consult the ideal critics, and the ideal critics will tell us which one is better on the basis of their experiences of pleasure. Now Hume does invoke what he calls strong sense.

The ideal critics must possess strong sense; but it's important to note it's not an essential element of that exercise of taste. Strong sense or good sense overcomes prejudice and discerns the relationships between aspects of artworks. Taking note, for example, of the ways in which the part of the work serves its purpose. But in this way good sense, so to speak, merely prepares the critic to issue the judgment of taste. The critical judgment itself is non-cognitive. It's the feeling of pleasure on the part of the ideal critic who's attuned to the aforementioned qualities to respond as a perfect specimen of human nature. Note this account of appreciation and critical engagement with art seems far too simplified to characterize the traffic with artworks of critics and informed lovers of art. First, the focus on beauty is too narrow. Not all art aims at beauty, nor even at eliciting pleasure. Some art is meant to disturb, to distress, to shake up, enrage, hammer, rattle, affront, shame, and disgust. That's among distort feelings. Much modern art is aimed at engendering puzzlement and even unsettling puzzlement and terminal perplexity rather than pleasure understood in the ordinary sense. And some art is predicated on raising feelings such as reverence, admiration, respect, and solidarity that aren't reducible to pleasure. Indeed certain kinds of awe may preempt pleasure by inspiring terror. Some art, moreover, is designed to block feelings altogether, sometimes to the purpose of stimulating thought, and even in order to promote a thesis that's intended to be scrutinized cognitively. Now given these cases, not all critical verdicts would appear to require the sorts of feelings Hume had in mind. Some art could even promote pure cognitive responses.

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But also given the logical and psychological possibilities, a critic could issue a positive evaluation of a work for which she feels no particular affection. Either because she is emotionally indifferent or just not into that kind of art. It follows that critical judgments need not be rooted in sentiments, including feelings of pleasure. A critic may be able to size up an artwork dispassionately. Actual critical debates contesting appreciations and evaluations of art are not navigated by consulting ideal critics. Nor various philosophies on such are debates typically guided by attempts to induce comparable experiences in competing. Because such debates are made in terms of rival descriptions, interpretations, and analyzes; the longs with comparisons and contrasts with other works; classificatory considerations, art-historical, intellectual, and cultural-historical contextualization including even socio-political contextualization. That's how most serious critical debates are conducted today and arguably how they should have been conducted in the past. Now in response, the friend of Hume is going to say: "Well Hume agrees with all of this or all these observations about critical debate. Recall what he says about strong sense and good sense. He grants there may be a great deal of reasoning going on prior to the judgment of taste." It paves the way for the judgment of taste, but it's not a proper part of the judgment itself. The Judgment itself is just based on feeling pleasure. In contrast my point is that there need not be an experience of pleasure in order to reach a critical assessment. Nor as a declaration of such an experience an element in issuing a critical judgment. Taste need not be consulted. One can put forward one's argument and leave it at that. Now this calls for an alternative model of criticism. So here it comes: I call it the purpose-driven approach. Arthur Danto makes a useful suggestion regarding what such an alternative might look like, contrasting his modus operandi as a critic to that of Clement Greenberg's, the most important American art critic of the second half of the 20th century.

For Greenberg the task of the critic is to recognize aesthetic value intuitively. Greenberg illustrated what he had in mind by describing how he would engage a new work of art when he was visiting an artist studio. Greenberg would stand with his back to the painting as the lighting and its position were adjusted, and then when he was signaled that all was ready, he'd whip around and see whether or not he would experience a value. Greenberg didn't speak of beauty, but of experience in value. So he didn't have the limitations of beauty talk. But he was still self-avowedly operating within the taste model, since for him it's the immediate experience of value rather than intellectual operations upon which his judgments were based. In contrast, Danto argues that critical judgments are essentially a cognitive affair. For those of you who know Danto's work, you know that following Hegel, Danto maintains that something is art only if, first, it has a content or is about something, and second, that it articulates or presents in a form appropriate or adequate to what it is about. For example, a temple dedicated to a martial god, like Ares or Mars, should employ the most austere door columns, whereas a temple dedicated to a floral god, like Chloris, should use the most ornate Corinthian columns. Danto regards an artwork as an embodied meaning. That is, its content is what it means, and that must be embodied in a form that's appropriate to whatever it means. Here form is to be understood as the human form. An artwork has a meaning which it gives a body to, or fleshes out, or embodies by means of the way it articulates its medium. This conception of art gives Danto the critic his marching orders, identify an interpretation of the intended meaning of the work, and then identify the choices the artist has made that convey the intended meaning, that articulate it, that advance it, that realize it, reinforce it, or embody it, and so on.

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Also take note, if the form fails to do that; that that's the critical work basically. No feeling of the sort that Greenberg invoked of value need obtained. The critical judgment is simply a matter of determining whether or how the critic has discovered a form that's appropriate or adequate to expressing or embodying the intended meaning of the art object. Now, needless to say one liability of Danto's account is that it's grounded in a theory of art that's too narrow. His theory supposes that all artworks have meanings: theories or theses or possibly expressive properties. But surely, some art might be, in a manner of speaking, beneath meaning. Some fine art for example might be designed to be simply visually stimulating, or interesting, or pleasing, or just beautiful. I doubt we would have any reservations about classifying such a painting as art, but it would not be art on Danto's theory. Furthermore, to the extent that Danto's theory of art is compromised so is his conception criticism. But I do think Danto's framework is highly suggestive and I think it can be amended in a way that makes for superior characterization of critical judgment. The key adjustment is to drop the idea that every artwork has a meaning and replace it with the proposal that every artwork has a constitutive purpose, or a set of constitutive purposes that are realized and articulated by an assembly of the form that are appropriate or adequate to securing the constitutive purpose of the work. That is, the purpose or purposes that constitute the particular object as the artwork it is. Let me say something quickly about that. Let's take an example of a movie. So what's the purpose of the movie? Somebody says well the purpose of a movie is to make a lot of money! That's true. But that's not the constitutive purpose of the movie as the artwork it is. The constitutive purpose of the movie as the artwork it is might be, for example, to point out certain social issues of the day. Like Farhadi's recent film 'Hero'.

I'm sure that Farhadi would like to make money with the movie too, but that's not its constitutive purpose. It's not what makes the film the artwork it is. So each artwork has a specific purpose or set of purposes that are essential to its being the particular artwork it is. Those are what I'm calling constitutive purposes. In terms of making or creating the artwork the constitutive purpose or constitutive purposes govern or control the artist's choices. With respect to reception, identifying the constitutive purpose enables us to understand the work. To comprehend, for example, why X is a part of it or why the character is a certain way. That is the purposes provide the unifying ideas that give the artworks parts and elements the relevance or significance that it has. Now that's not a theory of art, because lots of things have constitutive purposes that aren't artworks. Fishing hooks do for example. But I think it's enough, it's eminently serviceable for setting out what the itinerary of criticism is. The critic identifies the intended constitutive purpose or purposes of the work in it and says whether the choices the artist has made satisfy those purposes successfully or not. The work is good in part if, or to the degree, that it realizes its purposes; and imperfect to the degree that it fails to. For example the constitutive purpose of a novel may determine what are traditionally thought of as its stylistic parts. For example the constitutive purpose of Camus's novel 'The Stranger' is to communicate the meaninglessness of existence. So to that end, Camus adopts an effortless mode of expression. Since emotions are what typically connect us to the world and what gives the world meaning, the virtual erasure of emotive language from Camus's text reinforces the feeling that Meursault's world is without sense.

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Now although the way I've presented this account appears suspiciously linear I don't think you should constitute it that way. That is, I'm not suggesting that first you identify the purpose of the work and then go on to determine whether or not it's been realized. I imagine that the critic uses her sense of the kind of choices the artist has made as pointing to the purpose, while glimmerings of the artist's purpose suggests significant patterns of articulation as the critic investigates the purpose and forms of the work simultaneously, searching for a reflective equilibrium adjusting hypotheses about the form of the work to hypotheses about the purpose of the work, and using the one to correct and modify and adjust the other. Another worry of this view is that it's too intellectual, that it doesn't have any place for the emotions. This, too, is based on a misunderstanding. The critical judgment itself is not an effective or an emotional episode. Nevertheless the critic will use her emotional responses and otherwise effective reactions in order to identify the purpose of the work as its various structures, in addition to ascertaining whether or not those structures have been successful or not. For example one's emotions will help you identify a play as a tragedy; not only will help you identify the purpose as the tragedy, but also will enable you to gauge how much it succeeded. If you're Aristotelian you'll ask how much pity and fear did the work succeed in adjusting. But to summary critical judgment is not an effective response. But that doesn't imply that emotions don't play a role in engaging the work, which emotional responses then provide evidence relevant to the critical judgment. This should be especially obvious when we recall that the constitutive works of many artworks is the arousal of certain emotions. For example comedy to arouse amusement, comic amusement, or tragedy, pity and fear; or suspense. Some genres have the emotion they aim at eliciting as their very title.

Think of the name of the genre 'horror'. Or various kinds of romance genres or melodrama are called 'tearjerkers'. The very name of the genre would tell us the emotional constitutive purpose that it's aiming at. A similar problem may appear to arise with beauty. Even as I've argued, beauty is not a feature of all artworks, some, in fact many, especially traditional artworks, are beautiful. So how on this account does beauty fit into a critical judgment? Well, in two ways. First, it may be the purpose of an artwork to simply be beautiful, to impart visual pleasure if it's a work of Fine Art. But notice that often beauty is not the primary purpose of the work, even in the work that's beautiful, but a means to an end. Rubens's painting of 'Marie de' Medici's Arrival in Marseille' is a beautiful painting, but the beauty of the painting serves the purpose of celebrating and endorsing her union with the French monarchy. Many religious paintings, Christian religious paintings, portray the Virgin Mary as beautiful as a way of underscoring her goodness. Just as demons are represented as ugly in order to communicate their moral lonesomeness. In such cases beauty and ugliness are deployed to realize the constitutive purpose of the painting to advance its intended function. And also although beauty is often a means to the end of the work of art, it also can be an impediment. Orson Welles supposedly complained to Luchino Visconti that he photographed the fishermen in his film 'La Terra Trema' so they looked like fashion models, which was at odds with the realist ambitions of the motion picture.

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What about disagreement? When critics disagree about the value of the artwork they are most frequently disagreeing about whether or not the work has satisfied its purposes. Claims are advanced that will be supported or disputed in terms of descriptions, observations, and interpretations; classifications, analyzes, comparisons that are presented on their behalf. These are not joined in terms of invoking pleasure or failure, but by reference to the text of the object itself. For example, criticizing the construction of the character in J. D. Salinger's 'Franny and Zooey', John Updike charged: "Salinger loves the Glasses more than God loves them. He loves them too exclusively. Their invention has become a hermitage for him. He loves them to the detriment of artistic moderation." Now another critic, Janet Malcolm, criticizes Updike on the basis that he neglects pertinent textual evidence—statements, for example, by other characters who feel just like Updike does about Seymour Glass—thereby suggesting that it's not excessive love that Salinger is waxing in, but that it's irony. But the charge is based on close evaluation and scrupulous analysis of the texts themselves.

On my view what fixes the constitutive purpose of the work are the intentions of the creator. Despite the so-called intentional fallacy and the related notion of the death of the author, hypothesizing the purpose or purposes of the creator is not a compromised affair. There are multiple defeasible grounds for proposing that an artist was or is aiming at such and such an aim. This evidence is plentiful. First of all, there's the work itself which is the primary evidence.

Also the art kind or kinds or genres to which it belongs; its artistic, intellectual, social, and religious context; in addition to the creator's pronouncements and diaries, manifestos, interviews, letters, and notebooks; as well as the testimony of the artists families, friends, acquaintances, and peers.

This evidence is all open to criticism in various ways, and each in its way can support our hypotheses about the critics' intended purposes. Critical disputes, in other words, are still primarily cognitive in nature. Now just to finish up, let me point out that the purpose-driven approach I'm recommending as superior to the taste model involves a number of different elements: the constitutive purpose of the work on the one hand, and the realization or embodiment of those purposes in the form of the work on the other hand. This involves the critic making two kinds of assessments of the artwork. In accordance with one sort of assessment, the critic determines whether or not and to what extent the form of the artwork articulates, advances, or embodies the constitutive purpose of the artwork. Does the artwork satisfy it or not the ends to which it was intended? Typically most of one's criticism is spent working this out, showing to the reader, showing to the audience how the artwork actually is assembled in such a way; that the choices facilitate its purposes or fail to. But now important to notice here is that since artworks have different constitutive purposes, they'll differ in several subtle ways. One consequence of this is that the purpose-driven approach to criticism treats artworks typically as singularities, as unique singularities. So the emphasis on the constitutive purpose often virtually entails a kind of pluralism. That is, the purpose-driven approach is pluralistic because it focuses on specific constitutive purposes and the consequence on their distinctive forms of articulation.

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So unlike certain competing views such as the taste model, the purpose-driven approach is not reductive. But in addition to gauging whether or not to what degree the artistic choices intended to realize the work are adequate to the constitutive purpose, the critic often also has to assess the very purposes that constitute the end or aim of the work. And this can involve two distinctive critical evaluations. First, the critic has to ask whether the purpose was worth the effort; or whether it is the case, as Horus might put it, the labor of mountains produces a mouse! Was it worth writing a 2000 page novel in order to break the world record for the number of semicolons in a fantasy novel? Similarly, the critic may question whether or not the purpose of the art was too easy a go which to aim in the first place. And in addition the critic also may have to ask how much or how little value the purpose has a part from its connection to its formal articulation. This may involve questions about the value that serving that purpose—moral, political, spiritual—has within the culture at large. It may be argued that these assessments or purposes of the work may be more difficult to resolve than the question of whether or not the form discharges its purpose, but I want to say they're not in principle always irresolvable. In fact, there are some questions where such evaluations may be no-brainers. 'The Divine Comedy' as a summary of the moral and theological insights of its epoch is certainly of greater cultural value than a short by The Three Stooges. Because a work may have multiple purposes and because those purposes themselves can be evaluated in different ways, critics may often arrive at mixed evaluations of the artworks that preoccupy them. I don't find this to be a problematic implication to my view. Most artworks are a mixture of plus and minuses. Let me stop there so that people will have the opportunity to pose questions and objections. I'm very open to hearing what I have to fix and what I have wrought.

Maedeh: Thank you so much Noël! It's an enriching session. If I may start the Q&A, the purpose-driven approach seems to allow us to recognize more productions as artworks. Is that correct?

Noël: I see what you're getting at. I would put it slightly differently, but it may come down to the same thing. My objection to the taste model is that it doesn't accommodate every kind of artwork. For example, 'Visions of Hell' by Hieronymus Bosch; that's not meant to give us pleasure, that's meant to terrify the sinner by showing, like, what the eternal punishment will be. So the taste model doesn't seem to be able to accommodate all of the things that we would want to count as art pre-theoretically, so to speak; whereas actually the purpose-driven model is designed to be much more inviting, much more accepting of a whole different range of purposes. The only difference between the way I just said it and the way it was posed is that it's not that the purpose-driven model is a definition of art. We have to talk about other ways in which we determine what's the artwork or not. Once we've determined what the artwork is or not, the purpose-driven model will be able to handle the range of artworks much more commodiously, much more readily than the taste model. But it doesn't give us a definition of art. We have to tell a different story about how we tell what the artworks are from the non-artworks. How we go about telling the difference between a steamroller and Saint Peter's Cathedral.

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Noël: I think there are these two parts to the question. Let me get response to the first part. I don't know if the questioner will be happy with this, but I did try to away of not denying financial motivation of many artworks, possibly most; not denying its relevance, but distinguishing that as, let's say, one of the genetic purposes of the work, from its being a constitutive purpose; and that was by saying that the constitutive purpose determines the identity of the work as an artwork. Just as what determines, let's say, the constitutive purpose of a tractor as the kind of automobile it is has to do with certain features of its engine and its tires, etc. so that it can can pull heavy weights. And the constitutive purposes of a tractor will be different than the constitutive purposes of a race car. Now they're both automobiles and they're both manufactured in order to be sold, but the particular constitutive purposes as the kind of automobile they are is separable, in principle, from the fact that they're objects made to be sold on the market. So that's how I try to do that. Maybe the questioner will think that doesn't succeed, but at least that's where I attempted to make that distinction. I was less certain about what's involved in the second half of the question. I'm not sure I can give an adequate example. Maybe this just shows that I'm a kind of a steep down to the core! But I don't think that the interest in Iranian films internationally has to do with some kind of interest in showing flaws in Iranian society. I think they have to do with their works as the kind of works they are. I mean I think in Farhadi's 'A Separation', that's about showing—as many of the films, as 'Hero' is also about—showing the kind of ways in which individuals are caught in social situations that are almost impossible to extricate oneself from; where it seems almost at every turn there's some kind of problem or there's some kind of moral consequence that has to be confronted and seems almost insoluble. I don't think anyone outside of Iran, say at the Cannes film festival, doesn't recognize that as a human challenge, and one that Farhadi is able to illustrate by the stories and the manner of cinematic constructions that he adopts. But I confess I might not have really understood the second part of the question well enough.

Mahmoud: The constitutive purpose seems to be usually triggered by the financial purpose, as you mentioned in Farhadi's work. Now, I received a question which deals with an ongoing debate in Iran about how the financial purpose might result in a dark portrayal of the country in a way which is not pleasant for its nationals. Well it's imaginable why probably Iranians don't like themselves to be depicted in the eyes of the international audience as miserable creatures striving to free themselves from social or financial troubles. I myself remember visiting India shortly after 'The Slumdog Millionaire' had boomed by winning the Oscars and I saw many Indians who didn't like the film's portrayal of Indians. Now the questioner asks your take about how the financial purpose affects the constitutive purpose of the films. It seems when Iranian films target the international festivals their social concerns are boosted. The confirmation and endorsement the festivals show to socially and morally challenging films seems to affect the orientation of Iranian films going to festivals.

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Mahmoud: And your general take on Iranian Cinema?

Noël: Well I have to say Farhadi is certainly someone who those of us who love cinema in the west have our eye on. But certainly even before Farhadi, in the 90s, many of us considered Abbas Kiarostami perhaps the greatest living director in the world. So I think the interest, especially among lovers of cinema in the west, in Iranian cinema is at least 30 years old, if not more. You'll know what the film I'm talking about is and you can tell people what it is in Persian. The film about the young boy who's looking for his mate to give him his homework back.

Mahmoud: 'Where Is the Friend's House?'

Noël: Yes, that's in English but I don't know what it is in Persian.

Mahmoud: 'Khaneye Doust Kojast?'

Noël: To me that's almost the most perfect film. Absolutely perfect film. And which realizes its constitutive purpose perfectly!

Mahmoud: I also see it as his best film and as you may know it was not appreciated in Cannes. After a few other movies he was gradually recognized in Cannes and he finally managed to gain Palm D'or for another film who some, including myself, don't see as good as 'Where Is the Friend's House?' Does it show a flaw in the festival system that this probably best work of Kiarostami was not recognized at a time that it should have been? Or it's just a natural part of the game?

Noël: Well I'm not a sociologist, but I do think that what you're describing is quite common. I mean I suppose there's a bright light and there's a dark light that you can shine on it. First I'll say the dark light. Sometimes awards are given retrospectively. Think of the American Academy Awards. Sometimes they're given because people realize they should have given them to earlier films. Al Pacino got an Academy Award for best acting for a film called the 'Scent of a Woman' which is dreadful! But he was given it, I think, because people thought at a certain point: He's made so many great performances we we better give him one before he dies! So I call it dark because it's kind of face saving on the part of the organization. The other side of it, which may be more excusable, is that with a very early film, or a first film, people may be conservative they want to make sure that it's not the saying: "A flash in the pan". So they don't want to give away the most elegant award. They want to have enough time to know that their judgment is a settled judgment about the quality of the work. Because very often, I mean we all know this, sometimes we go to a movie or we go to a gallery exhibit and it overwhelms us. And then a few weeks later we go back and we go: "Actually it was very flashy, but now I see it really doesn't have as much substance as I suspected it had." So we all know that sometimes we need to eat some time to make a settled judgment. And that may be true with an initial work. So if we want to be charitable we'll say, well maybe the conservatism about the early great work was just a worry that they wanted to take more time to make sure. Then, of course, when they were sure they did the second thing I said. They gave an award for it that they should have given earlier.

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Mahmoud: Like the Lifetime Achievement Award which was given to Hitchcock by the American Film Institute years after his Oscar nominations. I think he didn't win any Oscars.

Noël: No, that's right. Neither did Charlie Chaplin. They also gave him a Lifetime Achievement Award. They also did it to many actors like Kirk Douglas who never received an Academy Award. The Lifetime Achievement Award is their last chance to avoid retrospective embarrassment.

Mahmoud: An embarrassment which happened about Kubrick. He didn't receive a major award and there wasn't the chance for a lifetime achievement award either.

Noël: Yes, they finally learned that they should do it early so that they either don't die or aren't too afflicted to come and receive it.

Maedeh: One last question. Any updates to your view on psychoanalytical approach in criticism?



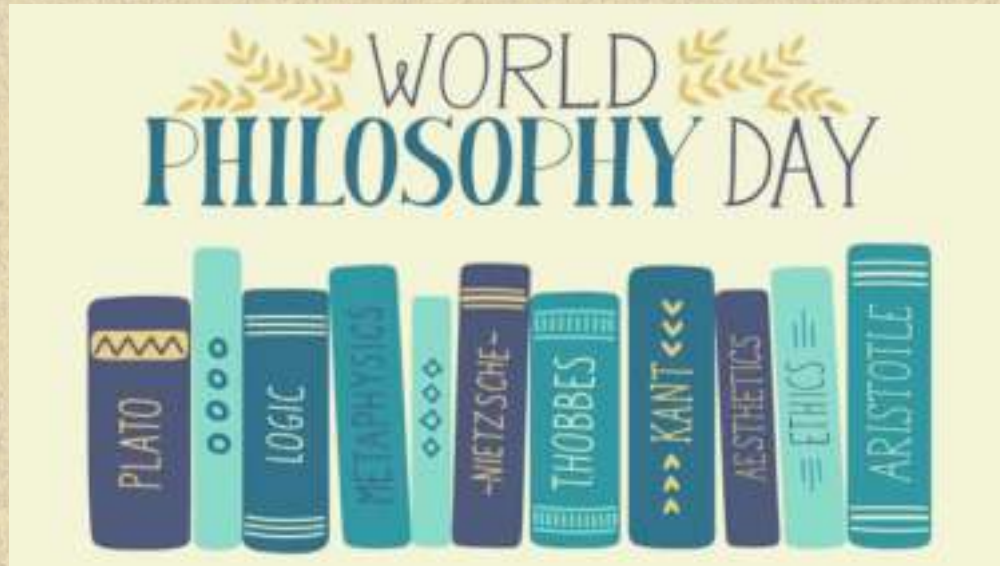
Noël: I apparently have a reputation for being opposed to the Lacanian psychoanalytic theory. Now I'm emphasizing the word theory here; the theory where it's a general method that can be used with anything. Of course if we're talking about criticism, criticism of particular works, then I certainly acknowledge that in certain cases psychoanalytic criticism will be relevant. Why? Well, because psychoanalysis is a part of the cultural heritage of large parts of the world, the western world, and advanced in industrial countries like Iran. That's part of people's cultural background. So just as you would criticize a Soviet film of the 20s and ask about its connections to various Marxist ideas—say Eisenstein's film 'The General Line', what's that relationship to what Marx and Engels said about the countryside—well likewise with many of works by contemporary American authors, you would apply psychoanalysis because that would be part of the intellectual baggage that they would bring to the work. Just as we make reference to Catholicism in analyzing Dante's 'Divine Comedy', if you're going to look at Clive Barker's horror films then you are going to also make reference to the very kind of Lacanian psychoanalysis that I say you shouldn't apply to everything. But you would apply it to Clive Barker because its evidence is right there in the work. You would be remiss as a critic not to point out to your audience how certain psychoanalytic ideas are structuring that work.

Maedeh: Noël Carroll, thank you so much for spending time with us!

Noël: I'm very grateful to you for this opportunity. As I said I hope sometime we'll be able to meet in the flesh!

Nadia: Thank you for your invaluable contribution! Thank you again!

Noël: And thank you! Have a good day!



penned by

Nadia Magtouni

The Mystery of a Missing Book

FTIS GAZETTE

Ibn Sina's mystic approach is mostly referred to his missing book under the title of al-Hikmah al-Mashriqiyyah. The question is:

“Do exist such a missing book or not?!”

In a conversation with Professor Gutas, he explained his approach to the issue:

“When I was a student in university, I was taking a class on Islamic philosophy and I thought I should have a look at Ibn Sina. At the time, early 70s, the prevailing approach to Ibn Sina was basically that he was yes, a philosopher, but primarily he was a mystic, that is, what was understood to be his Hikmah Mashriqiyyah was the guiding of the real expression of his philosophy.

I was not very much interested in mysticism. I was much more interested in philosophy. So I said let me see what Ibn Sina did. And I chose as a subject, Ibn Sina's Commentary on the Anima of Aristotle. I thought well, let me see what Ibn Sina has to say about Aristotle's views on the soul which is a highly philosophical work. How much can he make mysticism out of it?

To cut a long story short, I found nothing mystical about it but extremely interesting and philosophically acute analyses of Aristotle. And then I tried to understand better what Ibn Sina says. So I started reading Shifa and this and that and the other. And of course, the more I read the more enchanted I was by the power of his thought, by his arguments, by the whole system that he was putting together.

Of course, he mentions the Hikmah Mashriqiyyah; he mentions the Mashriqiyyoon. He says if you want to find out more about this subject go and read what the Mashriqiyyoon have to say. So well, who are these Mashriqiyyoon? That's always been a problem and again the available literature at the time said that the Mashriqiyyoon were the Eastern, the Oriental philosophers. Again, no name; perhaps the ancient Iranian philosophers, the pre-Aristotelian Greek philosophers; primarily what Suhrawardi has to say about some of the earlier tradition. That didn't really seem very right to me. And I said I have to look around and what Ibn Sina really means with Mashriqiyyah. And it turns out he was referring to his own brand of Aristotelian philosophy as he developed it.

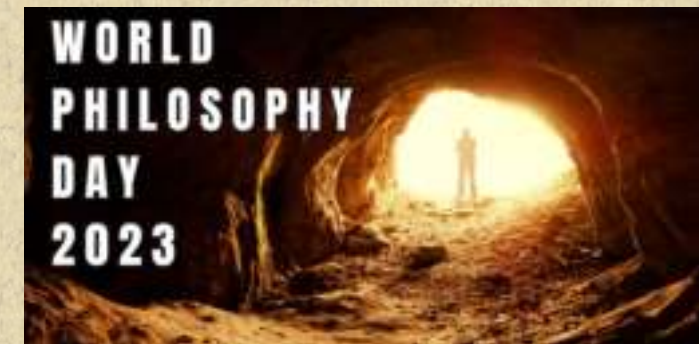
And of course, Mashriqiyyah is not the Orient; it is simply Khurasan. Just as Maqrib is west, Mashriq is east and most near east that is Khurasan. And he was of course from Khurasan himself. So Hikmah Mashriqiyyah refers to his own brand of philosophy that he developed at a certain point. Because in many other works of his, he speaks how the philosophers from Baghdad, the Aristotelian philosophers are not saying this properly and they're making mistakes here and there. So as I was trying to see what he meant by this, I had to read more and more Ibn Sina and find out what the whole thing was all about. And that's what gave rise to my book Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition Introduction to Reading Avicenna's Philosophical Works. As I was trying to teach myself how to read Ibn Sina, I thought I would put it down in writing and have people read it themselves as well! Don't assume that he's this or that or the other! But read every work of his and try to understand it!

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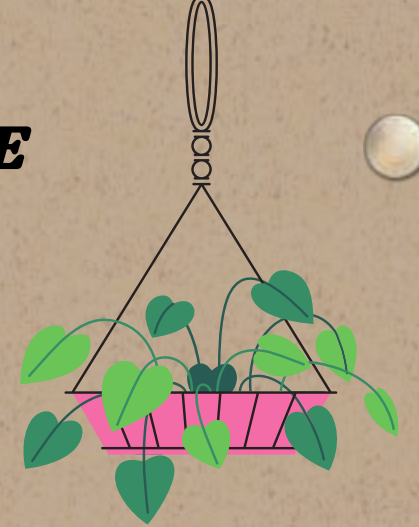


I tried to understand what he says. The issues that were most crucial about his mysticism or his oriental philosophy turned out not to be that. And I found out that he's a highly logical author. As a matter of fact, I came against the preconceived notions that he was a mystic.”

Nadia: Well, for me also, preconceived notions are not welcome! I do get to underscore your approach to Ibn Sina, which I absolutely give a preference to. However, probably the mystic approach of Avicenna would not contradict his logical system. I am not going to argue the issue. Just as a matter of fact, when you read the work of people of Avicenna’s time, or near his time, i.e., Suhrawrdi and Ibn Tufail, they have spoken about such an approach called al-hikmah al-mashriqiyyah in such a book called al-Hikmah al-Mashriqiyyah. So at the time did exist such a book at least. Maybe you find second Avicenna in it. Then I would ask librarians, if you have any info on the whereabouts of this book, please text us!



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