



A Philosophical Review on the Issue of Whether the Cognitive Value of An Artwork Contributes to Its Aesthetic Value

Bir Sanat Eserinin Bilişsel Değerinin Estetik Değerine Katkıda Bulunup Bulunmadığı Konusunda Felsefi Bir İnceleme

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Abstract

In this article, it is aimed to clarify the issue of the possibility of cognitive value contribution to the aesthetic value of an artwork. In this context, it is considered what the underlying factors are in perceiving and value attribution process in developing cognitive value and aesthetic epistemological aspects with reference to cognitivism and anti-cognitivism thought. Accordingly, comparison of these two main concepts was made by looking into different approaches and explanations about art and perceived knowledge about an art piece. Thus, at the same time, it was tried to illustrate the role of two groups as known “cognitivists” and “anti-cognitivists” by considering their “comfort zones” in the possibility of cognitive value contribution to the aesthetic value of an artwork.

Keywords: Cognitive value, Cognitivism, Anti-cognitivism, Aesthetic value, Artwork

Introduction

In order to understand “the possibility of cognitive value contribution to the aesthetic value of an artwork”, first of all, the issue of what the cognitive and the aesthetic values of an artwork are needs to be examined from the perspectives of two main groups: the cognitivists and the anti-cognitivists. This is of paramount importance to making a definition of the cognitive value of an artwork. Then, it is important to explore whether there is really an artistic value in an artwork. As a final step, it should be explained whether the cognitive value of an artwork can contribute to its aesthetic value. At this point, cognitivist and anti-cognitivist considerations are involved in the main discussion about cognitive and aesthetic values of art. These two main groups have their own supporters in the philosophy of art, so this constellation factor generates a special “comfort zone”.

In the history of philosophy, many movements can occur consecutively and concurrently in a field, such as in the philosophy of art. Within the context of this article, we can say that comfort zone is the attitude of belonging to a particular intellectual group. In other words, it is based on an intellectual group philosophers belong to reflect the common thought rather than irrelevant and independent thinking. In the light of “comfort zone”, both cognitivists and anti-cognitivists handle this essay question in their own way. In addition, we may also encounter the questions of when cognitive value emerges in an artwork, how we acquire this value from an artwork, what the aesthetic value of an artwork means, and if so, whether this is useful knowledge.

In order to consider the main question “Can the cognitive value of an artwork contribute to its aesthetic value” in detail and answer it in a philosophical way, another question should be asked to this question at first. The question to be asked in this context is; “According to two main groups, what is the possibility of cognitive value contribution to the aesthetic value of an artwork?” Following this main question, it is necessary to support this main question with two main sub-objectives: Firstly, objective a: What is the role of group mentality and culturally conditioned “comfort zone” in defining or recognizing a piece of art from cognitivist perspectives? By concentrating on this objective, it is tried to

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understand the cognitivist views about the connection between cognitive value and aesthetic value in the same artwork, and the contribution of the cognitive value to aesthetic value of an artwork. At the same time, it is considered the effect of “comfort zone” on the cognitivist mentality. Secondly, objective b: What is the role of group mentality and culturally conditioned “comfort zone” in defining or recognizing a piece of art from anti-cognitivist perspectives? Through this objective, it is tried to explore the anti-cognitivist rejections against the connection between cognitive value and aesthetic value in the same artwork, also some objections to the existence of aesthetic value and aesthetic knowledge of an artwork. In this regard, the result obtained will be associated with the research question. At the same time, the effect of the “comfort zone” on the anti-cognitivist mentality will be evaluated.

In the light of all this, firstly what cognitivism is will be explored and secondly, anti-cognitivism's own ideas, arguments and claims will be explored with reference to the main essay question and objectives 'a' and 'b'. For the purpose of this article, here is our first objective that guides us to understand what is the possibility of the cognitive value of an artwork contribute to its aesthetic value, according to the cognitivist comfort zone.

Objective a: What is the role of group mentality and culturally conditioned “comfort zone” in defining or recognizing a piece of art from cognitivist perspectives?

The question of “whether the cognitive value of an artwork contributes to its aesthetic value” should be examined in many different aspects. According to some groups such as cognitivists; an artwork generally includes an aesthetic value. They consider that we can obtain some knowledge by concentrating on an artwork. At this point, our feelings, our experiences, our perspective on life, our intellectual level, and so on helps us to obtain knowledge from an artwork. So, this acquisition helps to improve the art value of an artwork. In this case, an artwork can be evaluated whether it has an aesthetic value or not. For this purpose, I want to define what aesthetic value is based on “The Concept of the Aesthetic”:

Aesthetic processing has a profound impact on our everyday lives. It influences our choices regarding romantic partners, where we wish to live, how we dress, which objects we surround ourselves with, and the activities we pursue in our leisure time (Wassiliwizky & Menninghaus, 2021: 437). According to Shelley, the term “aesthetic” has come to be used to designate, among other things, a kind of object, a kind of judgment, a kind of attitude, a kind of experience, and a kind of value (Shelley, 2013: 1). In this case, “aesthetic” generally reflects an aesthetically value. We can acquire this value by viewing an artwork. It can be said as the most common ways; looking a picture or a sculpture, reading a literary work, watching a film, listening to a song, and so on. An artwork issue can be discussed in two stages: First, the contribution of the artist to his own artwork. And second, the consideration of an artwork by followers.

In this context, the contribution of artist includes considerable importance for aesthetic value of an artwork. The main purpose of artists is that adding their own feelings and experiences about life and events when creating an artwork such as a painting, or a literary work. A song cannot exist without feelings of its composer. At this point, we can talk about the cultures of music genres, such as rock music. Rock bands usually focus on to reflect their own feelings about life, emotions, and political issues. A rock song cannot become meaningful without its composer’s perspective in the lyrics. For example; “The Show Must Go On” which is one of the best rock songs by the English rock band Queen includes impressive messages for Queen’s fans. According to them; “The show must go on. Inside my heart is breaking. My makeup may be flaking, but my smile still stays on” (Celebrating Queen, 2022) means that Freddy Mercury will die because of terminal illness. The sad truth about Mercury has been the subject in lyrics. On the other hand, it can be seen as just a beautiful song for some people who are not a strict follower of Queen. At this point, the connection between an artwork and fans -cognitive proximity- is a changeable thing. Obviously, the intending meaning has a degree of significance of an artwork set out by the artist who creates it, but more importantly how such an artwork is received, perceived, and interpreted by the masses in terms of cognitive proximity. As a result, the aesthetic value should be handled by considering two different aspects; artists and followers.

If we reconsider the example of rock band and followers by referring to “cognitivist group zone”, we can see better the relationship between an artwork and its follower. First of all, cognitivist perspective says that art can be a guide for our lives. It means that our feelings such as love, ambition, regret, and so on can get in touch with a character in a novel. Therefore, the novel can reflect us the feelings of characters, and we can find the meaning of our feelings. Gaut states that literature in particular can give us a kind of philosophical knowledge, knowledge of the nature of our concepts, particularly moral concepts such as that of sympathy, and, according to him, moral philosophy can give us an ‘outline’ of the good life, so he defends that we need the kind of moral vision that finds its fully embodiment only in works of literature (Gaut, 2005: 437).

At this point, when we have an emotion for the first time, we may ask what it means. Sometimes, it does not make a sense for us to feel something. For example, people who fall in love for the first time can feel full of enthusiasm, and they want to find something similar to their feelings. So, we can learn the knowledge of possibilities and the knowledge of actual things from an artwork such as a novel, or a film. In this context, cognitivist perspective states that "...how a situation can be interpreted, of how a situation might feel to someone... Art can give us knowledge about not just what is possible, but what is actual... literature can teach us about what is actually the case." (Gaut, 2005: 437). So, we can accept that an artwork can teach us something about experiential things such as fall in love.

Through artworks, we can describe our emotions in our minds. In this regard Gaut states that art can teach us the significance of events, and literature can help someone to make sense of, or find meaning in, events that previously had been meaningless to him (Gaut, 2005: 438). Therefore, people usually want to listen to music, read a novel, or watch a film, because our feelings are being depicted by artworks like it happened. In this case, a composer's approach or a producer's mentality can be meaningful as long as they match our feelings.

To sum up, the portrayal of emotions can be equivalent to the knowledge of an artwork. For this purpose, cognitivist perspective considers that "knowledge of what it is like to be in love, or suffer the loss of a child...and that is does this by broadening our experience to encompass things we might never otherwise have undergone or felt." (Gaut, 2005: 438). Thus, we can say that cognitivist concept wants to reach some knowledge in real life such as the knowledge of the moral, our emotions, or experiences.

In the light of all the facts mentioned above, "cognitivist group zone" wants to clarify the subject by using epistemological arguments. According to cognitivists, cognitive value of an artwork is based on the epistemological perspective. Therefore, cognitivists usually focus on the possibility of obtaining knowledge from an artwork. So, the theory of cognitive value improves the aesthetic value of an artwork has a paramount importance for them.

At this point, aesthetic aspect cannot be ignored. For cognitivist group zone, we can accept that we can obtain knowledge through artworks. However, we should handle the issue of whether art is the source of all knowledge. We cannot say it is an artwork, although a product can give us a cognitive value. For example, a tool, such as a lance, from ancient times can give the knowledge about the value of itself. Also, we can learn the culture and the society of ancient times through this tool. In spite of all these things, we cannot accept that the lance is an artwork. Moreover, different styles emerged in the world of art. For example, modern art movement is in great demand nowadays. However, non-competent people try to be artist, and they want to create an artwork, especially in photography art. Contemporary arts want to create extraordinary artworks, but this mentality leads to eliminate the density of art. Although some people accept these as an artwork, many people say that these photographs cannot be considered as an artwork. In this context, we cannot obtain knowledge from these "new generation" artworks due to their artists or their styles. The art works of these artists are current and they are good example for us to understand informed and familiarized opinions of the masses and the specialists.

Objective b: What is the role of group mentality and culturally conditioned "comfort zone" in defining or recognizing a piece of art from anti-cognitivist perspectives?

After describing and illustrating the cognitivist perspective by considering epistemic and aesthetic concepts, we should consider some objections from the anti-cognitivist perspective. In this case, if the group zone of anti-cognitivists has reasonable grounds, it means that cognitivist perspective is not an irrefutable definition. So, this comparison can help us to demonstrate whether art is a source of knowledge or not for us. For this purpose, it is necessary to define why art cannot be called a source of knowledge for anti-cognitivists.

First of all, anti-cognitivists think that art is not a source of knowledge about the world. According to this perspective, the source of knowledge should be based on reality such as science. So, anti-cognitivists think that these truths are away from rationality, because they are not based on epistemological concept. In this context, Stolnitz says that how should there be truth without knowledge? According to him, we have scientific truth and scientific knowledge, historical truth and historical knowledge. Understandably, for once truth has been established as that and therefore accepted by a judging mind, it is knowledge. Then he asks why we hear so little of artistic knowledge (Stolnitz, 1990: 191). In this case, obtaining knowledge of an artwork has a controversial condition, because truths of art include a fictional structure for

anti-cognitivists. At this point, they consider that cognitivist perspective defends the “artistic truths”. For someone, these truths can be source of knowledge, but perhaps we should accept these truths as “taking pleasure”. Thus, we can say that these truths like a product that created with the help of the emotions. If emotions are involved in the issue of obtaining knowledge, we might have redrawn the boundaries of the meaning of truth.

Furthermore, anti-cognitivists think that the issue of obtaining knowledge from an artwork includes an uncertain situation. We can say that emotional inputs give only products about emotions. We can see this link by looking at people who want to find a similarity between their feelings and the content of an artwork. Therefore, it seems that the knowledge of art gives us the knowledge of emotions as a product, by helping to find the meaning of our feelings. At this point, anti-cognitivist perspective calls all these products as “banal”. According to Gaut; “if they can say what they have learned it is completely banal; and this seriously casts doubt on whether they have learned anything worth mentioning.” (Gaut, 2005: 439). It is seen that what is called “banal” here is a serious criticism against the knowledge of an artwork. In addition, to say that this is “banal” regarding the knowledge of an artwork also includes the meaning of “superficial knowledge”. So, the group zone of anti-cognitivists does not give a chance to artworks, because they defend that art does not include the reality of the actual world. According to them, knowledge must reflect the actual world. In this case, anti-cognitivists usually claim that people cannot learn knowledge from an artwork even if it has knowledge about something emotional or ethical. The main reason for this argument comes from the view that the knowledge of a work of art is fictional. The existence of fictional characters depends on the imagination of the novelist. In other words, they don't exist in real life. For example, Dostoyevsky told us ethical dilemmas experienced by Raskolnikov after killing a pawnbroker in “Crime and Punishment”. Even if readers feel as if it is real, the behaviours and dilemmas of Raskolnikov did not actually happen on any specific or unspecific day and time in real life. Or the person known as “Raskolnikov” has never experienced such a thing in real life as in the novel. It is assumed that Raskolnikov is a real man within the bounds of novel, but he is not a real person. So, events in a novel are the things that will be possible in the real life too, but it does not mean that all the events in the novel really occurred in the real world. In other words, just because something is very close to reality, or like real, does not mean that it is real. For this reason, according to those who defend these views on art, there is no reason to believe any artistic truths or ethical advice.

Some views of cognitivism in aesthetics defends that the particular cognitive framing of an object; (fiction vs documentary), the location of a performance; (concert hall vs metro station), or the social context; (being alone, with friends, or strangers) are situational factors to be considered, to explain as much variance as possible in aesthetic experiences (Newman and Bloom, 2012; Kaltwasser, et al., 2019; Wassiliwizky and Menninghaus, 2021: 441). Anti-cognitivists state that if we mention about knowledge, it must be reliable, and it must reflect some truths about the real world. Gaut states that; “Art must refer to that world; but it does not. Knowledge is not simply a matter of true beliefs: the true belief must not be accidentally acquired, and the belief must be justified, or, depending on one’s epistemic theory, reliable.” (Gaut, 2005: 440-441). In this regard, anti-cognitivists mention that the knowledge of art does not support that world, because they, especially literature, do not be part of actual life. At this point, for example, a script of a historical movie must include some fictional things sooner or later. Otherwise, it would be a documentary instead of a movie. Especially movies inspired by real events or characters, unlike documentaries, deal with the main subject “inspired” by real events or “based on” real events, and tell the whole story according to some fictions and arrangements. For example; “Inglorious Basterds” which is a well-known World War II movie written and directed by Quentin Tarantino includes a scene about the death of Hitler. Hitler was trapped in a small theatre in Paris, and he was killed by dozens of bullets in Tarantino’s fictional world. However, this situation is different in the history books. So, he has tried to rewrite the history of the whole wide world by fictionalising this scene. Another example; the famous TV series “Peaky Blinders”, a British crime drama television series written by Steven Knight, is about a gangster family epic called the "peaky blinders" set in 1900s Birmingham, England, after World War I. It is known that there is such a gang in reality and that the story of the series is based on it. On the other hand, "Thomas Shelby" (played by Cillian Murphy), the main character and gang leader in this series, which is known to be inspired by a real gangster family, is not a real person according to historians. A Birmingham historian Carl Chinn says in an interview that “Mr Murphy’s character never existed, while the gang itself were active earlier than the show portrays. It’s really interesting to look back at the mythologised version of the story and the reality.” (Byfield, 2022). As mentioned before, no matter how close a story is to the truth, it loses its claim to be “real” because fiction gets involved. As a result, this is a situation that affects the authenticity of knowledge coming from the artwork.

Thus, when we consider all these causes, anti-cognitivist perspective criticised the possibility of obtaining knowledge from an artwork. A major part of this criticism is based on epistemological issues. The group zone of anti-cognitivists does not consider that an artwork is a source of the truths about the real world even if some anti-cognitivists agree that artworks contain knowledge. According to them, this type of knowledge does not have a value in terms of epistemological point. As a result, we cannot mention the possibility of cognitive value contribution to the aesthetic value of an artwork in accordance with anti-cognitivist perspective.

Conclusion

Within the limits of this article, it was aimed to examine and investigate whether the cognitive value of an artwork can contribute to its aesthetic value. Art is always so impressive for humanity, because it includes creativity and imagination. So, we can accept that art is a kind of activity that people feel pleasure. The enjoyment of art is very diverse. This sometimes happens when the music of a song affects us, sometimes when the lyrics of a song reflect our current feelings and emotions, sometimes when we feel that the lead character in a movie has similar aspects to us, sometimes when we find ourselves in the magical and magnificent fiction of the movie, sometimes when we match our own feelings in the composition of a painting, sculpture or poem. This impressive aspect of art can also add some things to people, not only emotionally but also in terms of the knowledge to be obtained from the work of art, according to the cognitivist thoughts. On the other hand, anti-cognitivist thoughts have also emerged that address the issue from the opposite dimension, stating that a work of art does not need to provide knowledge to people. In this context, the function of an artwork has been one of the main points such as what we learn from an artwork in the philosophy of art. For this purpose, cognitivist and anti-cognitivist perspectives argue the function of an artwork by considering epistemological aspect. As we have seen in Objective A and B, the value of an artwork has great importance in this discussion.

At this point, aesthetic value of an artwork is available especially for cognitivists. The availability of aesthetic value makes no difference for anti-cognitivist perspective, because they consider it is more important to focus on the possibility of cognitive value of an artwork. In the light of this consideration, anti-cognitivists state that artworks do not have a cognitive value. So, we can say that anti-cognitivist perspective rejects the possibility of obtaining knowledge from an artwork. In fact, the cognitive value of an artwork cannot supply knowledge about the reality of the actual world. In this case, we cannot talk about any contribution to an artwork's artistic value.

On the other hand, cognitivist perspective claims that cognitive value is available, so it can contribute and improve the aesthetic value of an artwork. For this purpose, the feelings of artists and people have great importance for this contribution. At this point, cognitivists usually consider that emotions refer to obtain knowledge, because they believe that people explore their emotions with the help of an artwork. However, anti-cognitivists consider that emotions cannot be premise of any knowledge in real life. To sum up, this conflict seems inconclusive, because both sides have strong arguments in terms of philosophy of art. **ÖNERİLER**

Öneriler araştırma sonuçlarından çıkarılmalıdır. Özel olmalıdır. Çalışmada ulaşılan sonuçlar dikkate alınarak ilgili kişi ve kurumlara, araştırmacılara veya uygulayıcılara yönelik öneriler yazılmalıdır. Öneriler ayrı başlık kullanılmadan sonuç ve tartışma bölümünün sonuna da eklenebilir.

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