

BOOK REVIEW

THE PATHS OF AESTHETICS

By Prof. Dr. Metin Izeti, “*The Paths of Aesthetics*,” Logos-A,
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The book “The Paths of Aesthetics” by the author Prof. Dr. Metin Izeti, a longstanding lecturer of the subjects of Philosophy of Art and Aesthetics at the University of Tetova, published by the publishing house “Logos-A” from Skopje, is among the rare ones in the Albanian language, perhaps even the first of its kind, distinguished for its chronological compactness, adequate selection of topics and analytical and critical examination of the main issues of this philosophical discipline.

The very title chosen for this book speaks of an internal challenge of the author himself to offer the reader not only a conventional history of the development of aesthetics, but also to penetrate into new paths unexplored so far, placing beauty and art in a meta-philosophical dimension and in relation not only to the external but also to the spiritual.

Right from the introduction, the author reminds us that “the purpose of the philosophy of art or aesthetics does not lie in searching for recipes for artists, but in trying to clarify what is beautiful in general and how it is being displayed in the existing works of art,” (Izeti, 2023), thus preparing us not to expect any claims to describe rules for anything.

In parallel with this, other dilemmas arise related to the issue of redefining aesthetics, even raising the question of whether the entire issue has been fairly posed.

Regarding the first dilemma, the author, after examining many developments that have occurred in this discipline in a chronological manner, while referring to the permanent dilemma of whether aesthetics should be a philosophical discipline or should it seek its definitive independence, concludes

that nevertheless “beauty must definitely remain as the fundamental and necessary concept of aesthetics, but on the condition that it is discussed in its three basic forms: as essential beauty, natural beauty and artistic beauty, both within the framework of their individuality and that of the conceptual and functional difference between them.” (Izeti, 2023, p. 18) The author first refers to Albert Camus, who, warning about the reality of the logic of theory which aims to unify the world, concludes that “it would be the only way to desolate the world, to cleanse it of reason and concept, namely to deafen and blind the world just as theory itself is.” (Izeti, 2023, p. 14)

In the first chapter, we are offered a broad picture regarding the structure of aesthetics, initially directly answering the question: What is aesthetics? “Aesthetics is the science about the essence of the aesthetic concept” (Izeti, 2023, p. 25). Thus, the correct understanding of the category of aesthetics as an elementary category is considered vital since it will help solving the two problems that have been the cause of confusion in aesthetic analyses: first, the solving of the relationship between beauty in art and beauty in nature, but also of the relationship between beauty and ugliness within the aesthetic category, which would consequently eliminate “the problem of directly identifying aesthetics with beauty, but without degrading the function of beauty within art.” (Izeti, 2023, p. 25)

And then, by decomposing other important issues such as the subject and its tasks, but also the numerous aesthetic categorizations, which the author identifies with the meanings of aesthetic notions and methods based on the evolutionary meanings that have permeated them historically, he rightly concludes that the entire aesthetic tradition is built within the framework of some of them: the Beautiful, the Sublime, the Tragic, the Comic, the Ugly, Harmony, Mimesis, Catharsis, Kalokagathia. (Izeti, 2023, p. 70)

The second chapter begins with the historical course of the journey of aesthetics from antiquity to the present day. What should be highlighted here is that before putting forth the surveys of art in ancient philosophy, the perception of ancient Egypt in ancient philosophy is presented, which had a decisive influence on the shaping of Greek philosophical thought. The author joins other scholars in concluding that art and philosophy were deeply influenced by ancient pre-antique cultures such as Chinese, Hindu, Persian and especially Egyptian, among other things due to its friendly perception “as others who do not threaten them economically, politically or in any other sense” (Izeti, 2023, p. 208), mainly due to the antiquity of their civilization as well as due to the existence of geographical barriers.

ers, which would probably not have been the case if Egypt were on the European continent, evidence of which was the lack of this proximity to the Roman Empire, which was then considered as the center of Western Europe's gravity.

The continuity of philosophical thought on art and beauty is built on the natural continuity beginning from the Pre-Socratics, then focusing on Plato, who with the concept of art means the habit of doing something in a certain way, without any consciously applied method, and Aristotle, with the famous thesis that in a tragedy there must be events that cause pity and fear, to purify those emotions in the beholder, and ending with the Plotinus's Neoplatonism.

The author arrives at the conclusion that, just as in Plato, in Aristotle we find *techne* as a central concept, and most of his theses are formed as a complement, correction and/or criticism of Plato's views, although later distinctive tendencies are observed, such as Aristotle's rejection of Plato's story on the origin of art as a gift from Prometheus. "Plato defined (as Aristotle later did) art as 'mimesis of practice', but in a completely different direction: for Plato, the object of art is the practice of people in the sense that it comes to light if they achieve good or evil, but since Plato's perfection is man's exclusive goal, he condemns art whenever it interferes with the achievement of this goal." (Izeti, 2023, p. 251)

Third chapter is dedicated to Medieval aesthetics, and as Umberto Eco also makes us aware of this period which is often unfairly overlooked and with the reasoning that it was in this period that ethics took the place of aesthetics, to which the author gives the duly importance. What is characteristic and should be highlighted is the presentation of beauty through the prism of Muslim culture as well as the final part of the chapter titled "The fascination with beauty & Sufism and aesthetics" which begins with the statement that aesthetics has been an important field of religious life during different periods of Islamic history. The author emphasizes an indisputable fact, a silent distrust among theologians and jurists who did not agree with the poet's instinct, the musician's ear, the painter's eye from the provenance of Islamic Tasawwuf. "They needed them to write a poem or adorn a religious ceremony, but they rarely trusted them as partners on a professional scale." (Izeti, 2023, p. 302) The same situation, at least according to the statements of Saint Augustine, also prevailed in Christian theology, where it is claimed that art with its sensual forms hindered the contemplation of God and that it had the potential to deceive man and detach him from the truth.

The fourth chapter, titled "Aesthetics of the New Age," includes the most important period of development, that of its constitution as an independent

discipline, where the author rightly devotes the central place to its founder Baumgarten, who determined its name and the field of study despite the evident interest since antiquity, but without leaving aside the important contributions of Kant and Hegel, to continue with the important developments of the 20th century with authors such as Heidegger, Wittgenstein and Adorno.

Thanks to Baumgarten, the author notes, aesthetic knowledge once again stands out in the 18th century as a specific knowledge and, unlike logic, which expands mental knowledge, aesthetics takes on the task of perfecting, improving and sharpening human sensory knowledge. (Izeti, 2023, p. 322) While for Kant's contribution to this discipline the author rightly uses the general assessment of his philosophy, that of the "Copernican twist" also appreciated by Hegel for "the first reasonable word in aesthetics," who had adopted some elements of Baumgartenian aesthetics, among other things, for the division of cognitive powers that he found, where "the power of judgment held a middle position between reason and sensible knowledge" (Izeti, 2023, p. 332), thus facilitating the work on the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* published for the first time in 1790. As for Hegel, he states that the very true spirit of his philosophy is best reflected in aesthetics, and emphasizes his opinion that "the idea is the unity of subjectivity and objectivity, and in a beautiful artistic work, this unity is represented in the union of spiritual content with external or material embodiment." (Izeti, 2023, p. 345)

That we are not simply dealing with an ordinary book that describes only the historical and formal consequences of aesthetics is proven by the fifth chapter in which aesthetic themes are authentically elaborated, where special importance is given to its relationship with religion, which is unjustly overlooked exactly because of the danger it carries. The author quite boldly resolves some of the long-standing dilemmas, also of a religious nature, which mainly have to do with the relationship between beauty, art and God. Thus, in the elaboration "Religion and Art," referring to the old conflict between culture and religion which dates back to the Renaissance, the author arrives at the conclusion that religion and art are not mutually exclusive, on the contrary, "Religion cultivates the spirit of love, while the feeling of love creates art. In that case, love is the source of all creativity and consequently of all culture, it is the initial ability to produce and create." (Izeti, 2023, p. 382) This interaction between religion and art culminates in spiritual art because to be spiritual, art must grow from faith, which would return the spirit to art, namely art would restore the essential dimension – artistic, sacred, eternal that is not pres-

ent in the modern art. Thus, the decades-long crisis of culture would be resolved, namely, the author insists that religion is the only and unique effort for their salvation. "Culture is an internal and organic phenomenon; it is a spiritual phenomenon and touches the deepest layers of the human soul; thus it can be said that religion, independent of all civilizational achievements at the specific moment, introduced a new spiritual dimension into the culture of humanity, a spirit that was supposed to revive the very substance of culture." (Izeti, 2023, p. 381)

The author also raises the concern of what he calls "The consuming ideology of postmodern society" which has a decisive influence on the culture of living and shapes our habits by influencing the value system where the most important thing is "having" and not "being." "The society of the spectacle produces an infantile, self-destructive generation that does not know how to face the increasingly demanding challenges of life. A hypnotized person is a blocked person, who in the absence of critical reflection on reality is increasingly less willing to resist collective manipulations and demagoguery." (Izeti, 2023, p. 418)

The necessity of art-making is seen by the author as part of man's cultural efforts, even in the expression of the divine idea, and it is precisely the aesthetic dimension that can come to his assistance because rational discourse loses its power. Even the issue of beauty itself is not only in the field of art, philosophy, psychology, but also in religion and metaphysics, it is an integral part of faith and cannot have any purpose outside of it and is completely dependent on faith and worship. (Izeti, 2023)

One of art's functions according to the author, by mediating between reason and emotion, past and present as well as future, is to make reality more transparent; it also actualizes it, makes it more complex and mystifies it. (Izeti, 2023, p. 426) Even its nature is one that always marks world's complexity since artists have always produced new questions and puzzles from conclusions and thus are participants in the creation of the truth about the world.

Finally, we may conclude that the analytical reviews of key concepts and eminent authors from this field, and the numerous illustrative examples are proof of the broad theoretical support and in-depth knowledge of Prof. Dr. Metin Izeti in the field of philosophy in general and aesthetics in particular, while the selection of topics and issues from this scientific field and their critical treatment make this book welcome, especially for students of art and philosophy who have so far been faced with a deficient literature, but also for all those who are eager to deepen their knowledge, including professionals who deal with the issues in question in a specialized manner.