



Reflection

Truth, Beauty, and Ethics in Art, Science, and Health: Interdisciplinary Reflections and Philosophical Perspectives

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Abstract:

Since the beginning of history, humans have felt compelled to try to understand the reality we live in. Scholars, scientists, and humanists have tried to systematize knowledge and spread it for the benefit of society at large. Today, universities are the institutions where knowledge from various disciplines is gathered so that the interaction among them allows a better understanding of reality. No single discipline contains a specific truth in itself. Rather, different disciplines observe and study the same reality, but they approach it from different and specific points of view. The truth expressed by art, the truth studied by science or the truth explored by health disciplines are not different truths. They are the understanding of the same reality studied from different approaches. Greater communication and integration among the different disciplines that coexist in a university enhance the ability to deepen and broaden our understanding of reality. Investing in cooperation in research and teaching work among the different faculties and departments of the university fosters interdisciplinary knowledge that enriches the entire university. This talk offers some reflections in the field of art, science, and health with some ethical and philosophical considerations.

Keywords: Aesthetics; Goodness; Ethics; Reality; Values; Interdisciplinarity

1. Introduction

1.1. *University and universal knowledge*

When the first universities appeared in Europe in the Middle Ages, they took the name “university”, meaning that the knowledge taught there was not isolated knowledge, but related to each other. That is to say, humanistic, scientific, artistic, and mathematical knowledge, among others, is brought together in the same institution and allows students to acquire knowledge from different integrative perspectives. This greatly enriches student's knowledge.

Although in today's society there is increasingly greater specialization in work, and this allows for further study in different fields, the role of the university still includes the function of uniting different specialties and building bridges between the different branches of knowledge, in order to achieve a more comprehensive knowledge of reality.

1.2. *The different objects of knowledge*

In this short article we will try to make a philosophical reflection on the relationship that exists, in the university environment, among three important types of knowledge: science, arts and medicine. To achieve this, it is necessary to analyze the objects of these types of knowledge and see the relationship that exists among these objects of knowledge.

Sometimes we talk about certain types of knowledge without giving a concrete definition of the knowledge to which we refer, and this brings with it the consequent problem of moving away from the topic of discussion and not being able to set limits on our debates. For this reason, the first step will be to properly define some terms.

2. The objects of study of science, art and medicine

2.1. *Science*

Aristotle calls “science” (episteme) all the set of knowledge that aims to understand reality. Thus he recognizes the existence of a science that studies what is as it is, and is not identified with any of the sciences we call particular (Aristotle, 1933).

Scientific knowledge is obtained in a methodological manner through observation and experimentation. It follows a specific methodology, requiring a hypothesis, experimentation, and analysis of data obtained to reach conclusions.

2.2. *Art*

We could explain what art is by referring to simple definitions to try to understand knowledge: “art is that human activity that produces beauty,” or “that activity that represents or reproduces reality”, “that creates forms”, “that expresses”, “that produces aesthetic experience”.

Heidegger states in one of his essays: “The essence of art would be, then, this: putting the truth of the entity into operation” (Heidegger, 1988). In this definition of the German existentialist philosopher, we can already observe the relationship between truth and essence of art, which we will delve into later.

2.2.1. *Medicine*

From birth and throughout our lives, we have visited doctors and hospitals, even without studying medicine. It is therefore not difficult to understand that the aim of medicine and health sciences is to find the causes of diseases in order to resolve them, curing patients and providing them with well-being. The health of the patient is the good that medicine seeks for man.

3. Truth, goodness and beauty.

In 13th century scholastic philosophy, Thomas Aquinas defined transcendentals as certain necessarily derived aspects of being (Aquinas,). In a simple way we could say that the

transcendentals of being are fundamental properties that everything that exists shares, because they derive directly from its existence. Traditionally, four properties are considered: unity, truth, goodness and beauty. Let us analyze the last three.

3.1. *The truth and the good*

The Greek philosopher Plato, in his epistemological theory, considers that the Good is the supreme idea, which is above all others. It is the ultimate source of all knowledge, truth and reality. The good is the goal of knowledge (Plato,). If we ask ourselves what makes a doctor's diagnosis or a judge's sentence good, we will conclude that only one thing makes them good: the truth, that is, that the doctor's diagnosis tells us what really happens to us, and that the judge's verdict conforms to what really happened. In this way we can say that acting well is acting in accordance with the truth.

A question that Pilate already asked Jesus, and that every man asks himself is: What is truth? And in the words of Thomas Aquinas, truth is "the correspondence between understanding and reality" (Aquinas,).

Thus, we will not say that a person is tall or nice because everyone thinks so, but because that person is tall or nice, all those who affirm it conform to the truth. It is reality that constitutes the foundation of truth, and knowledge is true when it manifests and declares the being of things. For this reason, error is not knowledge, since knowing something falsely is equivalent to not knowing it.

Opinions are not a source of truth; we must strive to understand the reality of things well and not just be informed of opinions.

Returning to Platonic theory, we can conclude that good, the highest knowledge, is achieved when the truth is known and respected.

3.2. *The good and the beauty*

For Aristotle, educating a man was teaching him to have good taste in acting: to love the beautiful and hate the ugly (Lorda, 1993).

We call an entity good because of its relationship to appetite in that it possesses the characteristics of the perfect and perfectible of others. Things in which we perceive perfection do attract us. The truth and goodness of things cause pleasure to those who contemplate them. This property of causing pleasure in this way is what we refer to when we say that something is beautiful.

The level of pleasure that we experience when we see a piece of handmade ceramic is not the same as when we see Rembrandt's famous painting "The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Tulp". In the ceramic piece we observe a sensible beauty, because the harmony of the forms and colors attract us. But in Rembrandt's painting, in addition to sensible beauty, we experience an intelligible beauty contained in what the famous painter wants to convey to us.

Intelligible beauty is linked to truth and moral goodness; hence ugliness is proper to error, ignorance or vice. All good things produce joy when they are attained, but things that are beautiful engender a special pleasure in the mere fact of knowing them.

Although the contemplation of beauty always brings with it a delight, beauty is not pleasure or pleasantness, but those properties that make its contemplation pleasant. Like goodness, beauty is not an attribute that has its origin in the will of the one who wants it, but a perfection of the desired object: things would continue to be good or beautiful even if there were no men to appreciate or desire them (St. Augustine,).

3.2.1. *Objective beauty and the perception of beauty*

Although we say that things are good in themselves, we have experience that some good things are not good for everyone. Consider, for example, a chocolate cake. The cake is good for one person, but harmful for another who is allergic to lactose or gluten. But this does not mean that good is subjective: the need to drink water is not a whim, it is a truth independent of our subjective opinion. Similarly, objective values such as peace, justice, friendship will always remain valuable for all humans. In this sense we can say that good is what suits a thing, what perfects it.

Something similar happens with beauty: all beings possess greater or lesser beauty depending on their perfection; however, for a person to appreciate the beauty of things there must be a proportion between that person's cognitive abilities and the beauty this person perceives. For this reason, just as not all humans have the same capacity to understand concepts and reality, not all humans have the same capacity to be amazed by a work of art. A certain aesthetic education is necessary to perceive the beauty of some artistic manifestations.

Although sometimes, in the artistic field subjectivity seems to predominate, beauty is an attribute of beings. The beauty of an object does not depend on what each person likes. If it were so, it would make no sense to talk about beauty and ugliness.

3.3. *Truth and beauty*

Is art a luxury for human beings to embellish their lives or is it a necessity? As a starting point, we could say that a man has been moved, by his own interiority, to represent or express something of the external reality or of his interior since the beginning of human existence.

It happens that sometimes we watch a film in the cinema and we come out excited by the experience we have had during the screening. Let us suppose that what we have seen is an adventure and fantasy film. We can safely say that if we saw the same film again, but this time changing its original soundtrack for the soundtrack of a melancholic film, the impression would be absolutely different. The same story with music that does not suit it well, distorts the film. Relaxed music does not express the agility of the adventures of a fantasy film.

If, while admiring Michelangelo's statue of David, I simply thought it was beautiful, but if it gave me the impression that I was looking at Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte instead of King David, the statue would not fulfill the purpose for which the sculptor sculpted it. With his sculpture, Michelangelo wanted to convey beauty, but also a real historical fact.

We have said above that beauty is not an attribute that has its origin in the will of the one who likes it, but in the observed object. This helps us to understand that to the extent that we are able to know the observed object, that is, reality, we will be able to understand the beauty contained in that object.

4. Conclusions

There is no one truth in medicine or health sciences, another truth in painting or literature, and another truth in physics or chemistry. The reality studied by different disciplines is the same, but each discipline approaches it from its own unique perspective. When studying the human body, a doctor is more interested in health, an artist in proportions, and a biologist in the composition of tissues. The connection between all knowledge, of the human body in this example, from different perspectives is what makes this study comprehensive and more complete.

The study of a question made by several disciplines: what they have in common with the reality being studied, will be a good and beautiful study to the extent that the knowledge we acquire through it corresponds to the reality studied.

The more disciplines there are that study the same reality, the more complete our knowledge will be, making it richer, more beautiful, and better.

When medicine, art, and science approach a better understanding of the object of their studies, they become more perfect. Therefore, the connected study of these disciplines also helps to improve them as branches of the study of knowledge.

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