

JOSEPH MARGOLIS What, After All, Is a Work of Art? Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press 1999. Pp. xi + 143.
(cloth: ISBN 0-271-01866-8); (paper: 0-271-01866-8).

This book is the outcome of a series of lectures on art-related topics which Margolis gave in various places, including Finland, Russia, Japan and the USA, from 1995 through 1997.

Mainly these lectures vividly distill views which Margolis has developed more fully elsewhere. Also, as his readers know, Margolis has an unusually all-encompassing and closely integrated series of views on almost all of the main issues concerning both art and philosophy generally. Thus the task of a reviewer of this book is the difficult one of somehow coming to terms and finding something useful to say (in a brief compass) on the full sweep of Margolis's philosophy as encapsulated by these lectures.

First, a brief summary of the topics covered by the lectures. In the Prologue, 'Beneath and Beyond the Modernism/Postmodernism Debate', Margolis argues that the debate confronts us with a bogus choice, which should be avoided using the path laid out by his own general views. Chapter 1, 'The History of Art After the End of Art', discusses the views of Clement Greenberg and Arthur Danto on the topic. Margolis finds the positions of both writers to be undermined by the invalidity of their views about the nature of art. Chapter 2, 'Relativism and Cultural Relativity', defends Margolis's own characteristic, constructivist brand of relativism against opposing non-relativist positions.

Chapter 3 is the title lecture, 'What, After All, Is a Work of Art?', in which Margolis explains and defends his own definition of art, according to which artworks are physically embodied and culturally emergent entities. A pivotal issue is his view that the intentional attributes of artworks are not determinate prior to interpretation, but instead that they are determinable through, or as a result of, interpretation. This enables Margolis to allow (with the aid of his rejection of a bivalent logic) for the possibility of incongruent interpretations of what is numerically one and the same artwork, and hence to reject views such as those of Beardsley and Hirsch who deny such a possibility.

Chapter 4, 'Mechanical Reproduction and Cinematic Humanism', is the most specific and thought-provoking lecture in the book. Margolis offers various perceptive criticisms and alternate offerings on prominent views on cinematic art, including those of Walter Benjamin, Panofsky, and Krackauer. And the book closes with an Epilogue in which the author gathers up some main threads in his views.

In my comments on Margolis's views I shall concentrate on two critical issues arising from the book which arguably are serious areas of vulnerability, or at least

in need of much further discussion, in his philosophy of art. (Due to space limitations these comments are of necessity brief and broad-brushed.)

First, Margolis is purporting to tell us what a work of art is, or to provide a definition of art. Admittedly he is not attempting to provide an essentialist definition which is immune to historical revision, but any kind of definition should at least tell us both what works of art have in common with other similar things, and also tell us how they differ from other such things. (Both the *genus* and *differentia* of art should be provided.) Yet Margolis, while very richly illustrating how art is closely related to other human and intentional activities, has almost nothing to say about how artworks as a class differ from other classes of entities.

To be sure, Margolis can be very perceptive in, for example, distinguishing the medium of film from other art media, as demonstrated in Chapter 4 of the book. But he basically tells us nothing at all about any ways in which artworks in general might differ from the objects of other human, intentional activities (such as science textbooks.) Failing such an account, the definitional part of his project must be judged as at best significantly incomplete, for Margolis tells us basically nothing at all about what is specifically *artistic* about artworks.

My second major concern about Margolis's overall project is as follows. In many of his writings, including this book, he makes much use of the idea that various pervasive aspects of intentional or cultural concerns (including art) require a many-valued rather than a bivalent logic. (Chapters 2 and 3 are most relevant to this issue.) Now I do not deny that this may be true, but Margolis's descriptions of his supposed multi-valent logic are so vague and programmatic that he gives us virtually nothing to go on in appraising his suggestion.

Also his motivation for introducing this specific line of solution to problems in criticism is very unclear (at least to me.) Certainly, everyone can agree that there is an initial theoretical problem, in that (for example) there do seem to be equally good but apparently contradictory interpretations of some artworks. Nevertheless, several other ways of handling such problems come readily to mind which do not require Margolis's extravagant hypothesis of a non-standard logical structure for artworks.

For example, a meta-level, consistent analysis could be given, as follows: it is true that interpretation A can be given to artwork X, and it is true that interpretation B can be given to the same artwork. But that statement is consistent whether or not interpretations A and B are contradictory with each other. Hence the apparent problem dissolves.

Another approach, strangely neglected by Margolis, would use the distinction between aptness and truth. (The neglect is strange because Margolis himself uses the distinction to suggest 'apt' as one of the additional values for his supposed logic (p. 50.)) If aptness and truth are indeed distinct concepts, then

there is nothing to prevent two interpretations of an artwork being equally apt, even if those same interpretations are also contradictory. Hence again, the supposed problem is unproblematic after all, and no non-standard logical structure is needed.

To conclude, my overall view of this very stimulating book is not that Margolis is wrong about art, but instead that he simply has not yet articulated a complete philosophy of art (in spite of his voluminous writings), nor thoroughly enough argued against the virtues of more economical hypotheses about art and intentionality.

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