

# THE PROMETHEUS CHALLENGE REDUX

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**Abstract:** Following up on its predecessor in this *Journal*, the article defends philosophy as a guide to making and analyzing art; identifies Cubist solutions to the Prometheus Challenge, including a novel analysis of Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. M.)*; defines a new concept of aesthetic attitude; proves the compatibility of Prometheus Challenge artworks with logic; and explains why Plato would have welcomed such artworks in his ideal state.

**Keywords:** aesthetic attitude, Cubism, Impressionism, Locke, mimesis, Monet, perceptual relativity, Picasso, Plato, primary and secondary qualities.

## First, Some Explanatory Background

**Question:** Cusmariu 2017 gave the impression that your artwork consists only of sculptures that meet the Prometheus Challenge. Is this impression correct?

**Answer:** No. Below are four pieces I made after learning stone carving at the Art League School in Alexandria, Virginia in 1998. *Family* was made the same year as *Counterpoint 1*. The transition to Mereological sculpture and a new paradigm occurred in a matter of months.



**Question:** What considerations guided the sculptures you created before applying philosophical theories such as Phenomenalism and Mereology?

**Answer:** I realized very early that sculpture could go in a new direction based on an elementary fact about vision: what we see depends on where we stand. That is, objects such as tables and chairs present one appearance from one viewing

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angle and a different appearance from another viewing angle.<sup>1</sup> This fact is not a cause for confusion. There is no need to walk all the way around a car, for example, to make sure that it is a car or that it is the same car. This lead to the following argument.<sup>2</sup>

### Argument A

A1. The appearance an ordinary object *X* presents at any viewing angle is consistent with the concept of *X*.

A2. If the appearance *X* presents at any viewing angle is consistent with the concept of *X*, the appearance *X* presents at a specific viewing angle is a basis for inferring appearances not presented at that viewing angle.

Therefore,

A3. The appearance an ordinary object *X* presents at a specific viewing angle is a basis for inferring appearances not presented at that viewing angle.

While figurative sculptures such as Michelangelo's *David* and abstract sculptures such as Archipenko's *Woman Combing Her Hair* are not ordinary objects, nevertheless, A1 and A2 are true of them and the argument to A3 goes through.

Moreover, it became fairly obvious that A3 has an aesthetic counterpart that is true of traditional as well as modern sculpture.

A3\*. Aesthetic attributes of the appearance an art object presents at a specific viewing angle are a basis for inferring aesthetic attributes of appearances not presented at that viewing angle.

The question at this point became whether sculpture could be composed such that A3 and A3\* were not true of them.

**Question:** Would you illustrate with examples?

**Answer:** *Bagatelle I* and *Bagatelle II* are my earliest experiments in perceptual relativity.

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<sup>1</sup> The concept of perceptual relativity can be traced as far back as Plato's *Republic*, specifically 598a5-a8 (Cooper 1997, 1202). See the section below on Plato's critique of art.

<sup>2</sup> Standard lighting conditions may be assumed for purposes of this argument. I realize that this assumption raises complications in the analysis of Cubist artworks where light is an aesthetic factor in its own right but they are not relevant to Prometheus Challenge artworks analyzed here and in Cusmariu 2017.



Thus, physical and aesthetic attributes of View-Ia are not inferable from those of View-Ib and vice-versa. The same is true of View-IIa and View-IIb.

**Question:** Did you make stone sculptures that built on the Bagatelles?

**Answer:** Yes. It is easy to see that A3 and A3\* do not hold for the two views of *Cleo* (2001) and *Nici* (2002), which are 180 degrees of arc apart.



**Question:** What other arguments define your Prometheus Challenge sculptures?

**Answer:** Arguments B and C express key aspects of these sculptures.

### Argument B

B1. If the appearances objects present are treated singly, their physical and aesthetic attributes can be treated singly.

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B2. If physical and aesthetic attributes are treated singly, one set of physical and aesthetic attributes can be apparent at one viewing angle and an incompatible set of attributes can be apparent at another viewing angle.

Therefore,

B3. If the appearances objects present are treated singly, one set of physical and aesthetic attributes can be apparent at one viewing angle and an incompatible set of attributes can be apparent at another viewing angle.

B4. In Phenomenalist and Mereological sculptures, appearances presented are treated singly.

Therefore,

B5. In Phenomenalist and Mereological sculptures, one set of physical and aesthetic attributes can be apparent at one viewing angle and an incompatible set of attributes can be apparent at another viewing angle.

## Argument C

C1. If  $X$  is an ordinary physical object, the appearances  $X$  presents displayed on a rotating carousel form a continuous set.

C2. The appearances Phenomenalist and Mereological sculptures present displayed a rotating carousel do not form a continuous set.

Therefore,

C3. Phenomenalist and Mereological sculptures are not ordinary physical objects.

## Philosophy as a Guide to Art and its Analysis

**Question:** In the abstract of Cusmariu 2017, you stated that you were able to make progress in sculpture thanks to philosophical analysis, which you described as “probably a first in the history of art” (Cusmariu 2017, 17). Were you implying that no other analytic philosophers have produced art?

**Answer:** No. I was aware that two analytic philosophers, Arthur Danto and Keith Lehrer, had also produced art – paintings and drawings. Danto worked on aesthetics and was also an art critic. He came to Brown for a talk when I was in graduate school. Lehrer is also a Brown Ph.D. Danto’s artwork can be viewed at [http://artcollection.wayne.edu/exhibitions/REIMAGINING SPIRIT.php](http://artcollection.wayne.edu/exhibitions/REIMAGINING_SPIRIT.php) and Lehrer’s at <http://www.keithlehrer.com/>. As far as I could determine, their artwork does not reflect identifiable theories of analytic philosophy.<sup>3</sup>

**Question:** While it is surprising that analytic philosophers who made art apparently did not find it necessary or useful to look to their own discipline for

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<sup>3</sup> In 1927, Wittgenstein carved a terra cotta statue of a young girl’s head that likewise does not reflect any philosophical theories or the influence of developments in 20<sup>th</sup> century sculpture such as Cubism. An image of this sculpture can be seen at <http://www.flashq.org/pix/sculptur.jpg>. Accessed 24 August 2017.

guidance, the fact that artists have not done so is not surprising. What is your explanation?

**Answer:** Reasons such as the following may be cited:

- Artists have expressed serious doubts that philosophy can yield anything they would consider useful or even relevant.

Tristan Tzara (1951, 248), chief provocateur of the Dada avant-garde, pointedly asked: “What good have the philosophers done us? Have they helped us to take a single step forward?” Barnett Newman went even further. Speaking in 1952 at the Fourth Annual Woodstock Conference, Newman famously quipped: “Aesthetics is for me like ornithology must be for the birds,” adding that he considered “the artist and the aesthetician to be mutually exclusive terms.” Anatole France (1895, 219) rejected the legitimacy of aesthetics on grounds that intellectual reasoning could never provide a basis for preferring one aesthetic judgment to another, adding “*les œuvres que tout le monde admire sont celles que personne n’examine.*” (The works that everyone admires are those that no one studies.) Wallace Stevens (1981, 488) poked not-so-gentle fun at “... the swarming activities of the formulae ... a philosopher practicing scales on his piano.”

- Familiarizing non-philosophers with the increasingly technical contexts of philosophy is not considered a high priority in academia.

Philosophy departments offer courses in the philosophy *of* art and occasionally philosophy *through* art but not philosophy *for* artists explaining how art can be *based on* philosophy. The divide between art and philosophy is especially wide in the case of what has come to be called, since the publication of Bertrand Russell’s “On Denoting” in 1905, analytic philosophy. Artists will find Russell’s analysis of “the so-and-so is *F*” utterly mystifying, likewise the puzzles (Russell’s term) it was intended to solve. Other key achievements will not fare any better, e.g., Tarski’s semantic conception of truth (Tarski 1944); Wittgenstein’s private language argument (Wittgenstein 1953); Quine’s critique of the analytic-synthetic distinction (Quine 1951); and Kripke’s attack on the identity theory of mind (Kripke 1980). The fact that most artists would find these milestones inaccessible does not lessen their significance, of course, but it is a strong indication that the conceptual divide between art and analytic philosophy is not easily bridged.<sup>4</sup>

- Logic, analysis and methodology in general are often seen as detrimental to the creative process in art.

The author of a book on Henry Moore reportedly offered to share his analysis with the sculptor, who demurred – the ‘paralysis by analysis’ syndrome that professional athletes also dread. Here is Tzara again, in the context of explaining Dada (Tzara 1989, 250): “There is no logic ... Any attempt to conciliate an inexplicable momentary state with logic strikes me as a boring kind

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<sup>4</sup> An attempt by the conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth to bridge this gap is discussed below.

of game.” Kandinsky went even further (Lindsay and Vergo 1982, 827): “Nothing is more dangerous in art than to arrive at a ‘manner of expression’ by logical conclusions. My advice, then, is to mistrust logic in art.” In a 1964 interview (Merkert 1986, 166), David Smith stated “I think the minute I see a rule or a method or an introduction to success in some direction, I’m quick to leave it – or I want to leave it.” The first of Sol LeWitt’s “Sentences on Conceptual Art” (LeWitt 1973, 75-6) reads: “Conceptual artists are mystics rather than rationalists. They leap to conclusions that logic cannot reach.” In “Lamia,” Keats famously wrote (Keats 2001 [1820], 205):

... Do not all charms fly  
At the mere touch of cold philosophy?  
... Philosophy will clip an Angel’s wings  
Conquer all mysteries by rule and line,  
Empty the haunted air ...  
Unweave a rainbow.

- Philosophers themselves have rejected the idea that, to be worth studying, their subject must show practical impact.

The following comments exemplify the point regarding aesthetics:

(Bosanquet 1892, xi): “Aesthetic theory is a branch of philosophy, and exists for the sake of knowledge and not as guide to practice. ... It is important to insist that the aesthetic philosopher does not commit the impertinence of invading the artist’s domain with an *apparatus belli* of critical principles and precepts.”

(Carritt 1914, 3): “Philosophical reflection upon our activities proposes neither an improvement of them nor a final formula which will save us from exercising them. It proposes simply to think about those activities, and the process of thinking is the valuable result. Aesthetics is for aesthetics’ sake.”

(Vivas 1955, 192): “Contemporary aesthetics tends to be an autonomous discipline concerned chiefly with problems of philosophic method and with epistemological issues, and to ignore the problems of criticism and the contemporary situation in art.”

- Expanding on Vivas’ comment, no philosophical discipline considers it to be within its purview to provide even basic conceptual guidance to artists.

The sort of analysis undertaken here and in Cusmariu 2009, 2015A, 2015B, 2016 and 2017 is without precedent.<sup>5</sup> While books and articles on philosophical

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<sup>5</sup> It would take us too far afield to determine the extent to which (if any) philosophical theories influenced other writers on art and as such might have preceded my efforts. I must leave for another time analysis of Arthur Danto’s contributions to art criticism, (e.g., 1988, 1997, 2005), who was a philosopher as well as an art critic; or the writings of influential art critics who were not philosophers such as Leo Steinberg (1972), Meyer Shapiro (1978 and 1997), Robert Hughes (1980), and Clement Greenberg (1961 and 1999). From a methodological point of view, however, my precedent claim is justified. Art criticism, including Danto’s, is descriptive and sometimes critical but not argumentative in the formal logical sense exemplified by, for

aesthetics discuss metaphysical issues such as the ontology of artworks and the meaning or justification of aesthetic judgments, philosophers consider it inappropriate to offer conceptual guidance to artists, not even by way of suggestions as to where artists might look if they wished to ‘get smart’ on what philosophy has to offer.

**Question:** What about David Smith’s comment (Merkert 1986, 166) that “the minute I see a rule or method, I’m quick to leave it.”?

**Answer:** The French poet Charles Baudelaire is closer to my way of thinking on the matter. As he famously remarked (1976 [1863], 715), “everything that is beautiful and noble is the result of reason and calculation.” Phenomenalism and Mereology are relevant to sculpture as conceptual guidance on how to think about physical objects, not as ‘rules or methods’ on how to make art. Sculpture should find such guidance valuable. After all, it is about creating objects with aesthetic properties.

**Question:** What about Sol LeWitt’s comment that “conceptual artists are mystics rather than rationalists”; that such artists “leap to conclusions that logic cannot reach,” which seems to be amplifying the point that Tzara was trying to make?

**Answer:** We should not confuse the process of discovery with its outcome. Just because the process of discovery often does not follow a predictable sequence of steps logically related to one another, does not mean that logic cannot fathom the discovery itself.

There may well be a sense in which LeWitt followed a path in creating his artworks that is not easily explainable in rational terms. The outcome, however, is predictably geometric. Moreover, placing his structures (as he called them) on a construction site might well render them indistinguishable from materials already there such as scaffolding or neatly stacked piles of iron bars. Not only that, the structures show an extremely rudimentary understanding of mereology’s aesthetic potential, which is also true of Donald Judd’s piles of bricks. David Smith’s steel volumes welded on top of one another at various angles are mereologically superior to LeWitt’s grids and Judd’s bricks but are still relatively elementary explorations of Mereology’s aesthetic potential.

**Question:** You would have to agree with Kandinsky that your sculptures exemplifying discontinuous attributes and interweaving forms owe their ‘manner of expression’ to philosophical theories about physical objects grounded in logic, such as Phenomenalism and Mereology (P&M), respectively. How would you persuade him that logic has not thereby set a ‘dangerous’ precedent in art and should not be ‘mistrusted’?<sup>6</sup>

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example, Arguments A-C above; or theoretical to the degree exemplified here and my other cited work.

<sup>6</sup> Kandinsky studied law and economics at the University of Moscow in the late 1880s and eventually became a professor. What exposure to logic he may have had is unclear; most likely Aristotelian logic. It is also unclear whether he studied philosophy at any point.

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**Answer:** Kandinsky's concerns can be allayed by noting that P&M sculptures block key physical and aesthetic inferences, of which there are three types: (a) within a single sculpture belonging to either solution category; (b) across sculptures within either solution category; and (c) across sculptures belonging to different solution categories.

**Question:** Would you illustrate each type with specific examples?

**Answer:**



(a) Physical and aesthetic attributes in *Alar-1* & 2 are not inferable from one another. This is also true of *Peace-1* & 2, *Counterpoint-2a* & 2b and *Counterpoint-4a* & 4b.

(b) The transition from wing to flame in *Alar-1* to *Alar-2* does not imply the transition from wing to bird in *Peace-1* to *Peace-2*. Likewise, the transition from the interweaving forms of *Counterpoint-2a* to those of *Counterpoint-2b* does not imply the transition from the interweaving forms of *Counterpoint-4a* to those of *Counterpoint-4b*.



(c) We are justified in generalizing and stating that the design of discontinuous attribute sculptures does not imply the design of interweaving form sculptures, and vice versa. This is not surprising because Phenomenalism and Mereology are not equivalent theories.

These points also address Tzara's concern that logic in art would be 'a boring kind of game.' Sculptures based on theories about physical objects from analytic philosophy certainly do not come across as 'a philosopher practicing scales on his piano' (Stevens); nor is it the case that 'all charms fly at the mere touch of cold philosophy' (Keats.) There is nothing boringly repetitive or dry-as-dust about them; there is not even a hint of a (predictable) distinctive style, which is often associated with a specific artist.

On the other hand, with all due respect, Henry Moore's reclining figures and Alexander Calder's mobiles are such that 'if you've seen one, you've seen them all.' Inferences from what is seen to what is not seen easily go through each time. If I may put it this way, the aesthetic 'delta' from one piece to the next is remarkably small.<sup>7</sup>

**Question:** Degas, Manet, Dali, Picasso and Lipchitz proved that incompatible attributes can be combined in an artwork without explicit awareness of the concepts and techniques involved. Isn't this true?

**Answer:** Yes, but ... Degas and Manet each made only one painting that applied mirror imaging. Dali made none<sup>8</sup> and only a few seeing-as pictures.<sup>9</sup> Lipchitz's output was prodigious but he made only one seeing-as sculpture. None of his Cubist sculptures meet the Prometheus Challenge.<sup>10</sup> Picasso produced only one other seeing-as sculpture, *Goat Skull and Bottle* (1951)<sup>11</sup> and only very few that meet the challenge, *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* (1907) being the most famous (see next section).

The real issue is whether more Prometheus Challenge artworks would have been created had artists been aware of the concepts and techniques involved instead of going entirely by talent and intuition. I believe so. I see no reasons why what was true of me couldn't be true of others as well.

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<sup>7</sup> Compare Henry Moore's *Reclining Figure 1936*, which can be seen at <https://gerryco23.wordpress.com/2011/08/19/the-hepworth-wakefield/henry-moore-reclining-figure-1936/> with one made more than thirty years later, *Reclining Figure 1969-70*, which can be seen at <https://static01.nyt.com/images/2016/04/05/arts/05COLUMBIA-web/05COLUMBIA-web-jumbo.jpg>.

<sup>8</sup> Dali's use of mirrors in a 1971 stereoscopic experiment does not solve the Prometheus Challenge. Image available at <https://www.salvador-dali.org/en/museums/dali-theatre-museum-in-figueres/the-collection/124/dali-seen-from-the-back-painting-gala-from-the-back-eternalized-by-six-virtual-corneas-provisionally-reflected-by-six-real-mirrors>. Accessed 5 July, 2017.

<sup>9</sup> See Descharnes and Néret 2013.

<sup>10</sup> See Wilkinson 1996 and Wilkinson 2000.

<sup>11</sup> See Spiess 1971, 178 for a photo of *Goat Skull and Bottle*.

**Question:** The conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth claims to have found useful guidance in analytic philosophy (Harrison & Wood 2003, 852-860). What about that?

**Answer:** While I applaud the effort, it is evidently possible to pick the wrong guidance or misunderstand it, as the following passages from Kosuth's essay "Art after Philosophy" show.

(Harrison and Wood 2003, 857): Works of art are analytic propositions. That is, if viewed within their context – as art – they provide no information whatsoever about any matter of fact. A work of art is a tautology in that it is a presentation of the artist's intention, that is, he is saying that that particular work of art is art, which means, is a definition of art. Thus, that it is art is true a priori (which is what Judd means when he states that 'if someone calls it art, it's art') ... To repeat, what art has in common with logic and mathematics is that it is a tautology; i.e., the 'art idea' (or 'work') and art are the same and can be appreciated as art without going outside the context of art for verification.

There is only space to indicate some of the problems with these comments.

- As the main philosophical source for his views, Kosuth uses A.J. Ayer's book *Language, Truth and Logic*, which he cites in a footnote but without giving the publication date (Harrison and Wood 2003, 860.) Thus, he fails to mention that he is quoting from a 1952 reprint of the 1946 second edition in which, with typical British understatement, Ayer admits (1952, 5) that he had underestimated the difficulty of the questions addressed in his 1936 first edition.
- Kosuth either was unaware or simply ignored the fact that by 1969, when his article was published, logical positivism had been battered by decades of criticism and was dead. Second, Quine 1951 presented serious objections to the analytic-synthetic distinction, one of the 'two dogmas of empiricism.' Third, Ayer held (1952, 113) that aesthetic judgments "express certain feelings and evoke a certain response" and would not have agreed with Kosuth's use of 'analytic,' 'tautology' and 'a priori' to characterize aesthetic judgments. Fourth, Kosuth's application of these terms to aesthetic judgments is non-standard and as such is philosophically suspect. Finally, quoting the views of a philosopher as the last word on an issue, e.g., "as Ayer has stated" (Harrison and Wood 2003, 858), is appealing to an authority that no philosopher would ever claim to possess.
- Kosuth's 'copy-paste' approach is naïve to say the least. Correct application of philosophical concepts to artmaking requires technical competence in the subject as well as awareness of the larger

controversies at stake. If Kosuth's conceptual art is based on logical positivism, so much the worse for it.<sup>12</sup>

**Question:** Okay, logical positivism is a dead end in art. What other philosophical theories can help artists 'take a step forward'?

**Answer:** As already noted, philosophical theories about physical objects such as Phenomenalism and Mereology make possible a sort of physical deconstruction of objects, which is but a short step from the sort of aesthetic deconstruction at the foundation of much modern art. Awareness of these theories would have enabled artists to move in new and exciting directions much earlier, independently of meeting the Prometheus Challenge.<sup>13</sup>

Potentially fruitful guidance from other philosophical sources can be cited as well – beginning, in fact, with Plato. For example, I show below in the section on Plato's critique of art that he was aware of perceptual relativity and made a point that has since become the merest commonplace in figurative art: the focus is on how objects appear; specifically, how they appear to the artist. As Argument B above showed, from this it is only a short step to taking the appearances objects present singly, as entities in their own right, and then combine them to produce artworks that no longer exemplify correspondence to reality – which explains much modern art. Artists could have gotten away much sooner from the mimetic, 'copy' mentality Plato criticized.<sup>14</sup>

Artistic guidance could have been obtained from Plato's solution to the problem of universals, his Theory of Forms.<sup>15</sup> The sharp ontological distinction between existence and exemplification has an aesthetic counterpart: artists can

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<sup>12</sup> Evidently thinking he was being original, the art critic Jacques Rivière wrote in 1912 (Harrison and Wood 2003, 191): "The knowledge we have of an object is, as I said before, a complex sum of perceptions."

<sup>13</sup> In an article titled "Art and Objecthood" (Harrison and Wood 2003, 835-846), Michael Fried never mentions philosophical theories about objecthood, nor does he define "objecthood." Philosophers have grappled for a long time with questions about the nature of substance, the distinction between substance and attribute, the relation between substance and attribute, the nature of attributes, and so on. In analytic philosophy, these questions quickly become technical and require advanced training to even comprehend. Second-order logic makes precise quantification over properties and relations. See Shapiro 2000.

<sup>14</sup> As far as I have been able to determine, artists have not attempted to deal with Plato's critique of art, certainly nothing comparable to Elizabethan poet Philip Sidney's celebrated *An Apology for Poetry* (Katherine Duncan-Jones 2009 [1583]). For example, the voluminous collection of Kandisky's writings on art, which is nearly 1,000-pages long, does not even mention Plato in the index (Lindsay and Vergo 1982, 922). The same is true of Motherwell 1951, a 400-page volume that includes selected writings of Tristan Tzara and other Dada painters and poets. Marius Hentea's biography of Tzara (Hentea 2014) also makes no mention of Plato. I have not found evidence that Tzara ever read philosophy books.

<sup>15</sup> In a 1912 essay (Harrison and Wood 2003, 188), Guillaume Apollinaire observed: "The young painters offer us works that are more cerebral than sensual. They are moving further and further away from the old art of optical illusions and literal proportions, in order to express the grandeur of metaphysical forms."

treat properties as entities in their own right and then combine them without exemplifying correspondence to reality.

Awareness of later philosophical developments such as the distinction between primary and secondary properties<sup>16</sup> (Locke 1924 [1690], Berkeley 1979 [1713], Nolan 2011) and Kant's critique of it<sup>17</sup> would have enabled painters to 'take a step forward' much sooner in their treatment of picture space. Primary properties such as shape and volume can be treated for artistic purposes as if they were secondary properties, the paradigm case being color, which became an end in itself in modern art.

**Question:** What specific philosophical theories can shed new light on key developments in art other than Phenomenalism and Mereology?<sup>18</sup>

**Answer:** Berkeley's understanding of the distinction between primary and secondary properties can be used to explain several developments.

- In *Impression, Sunrise* (1872), from which Impressionism derived its name, Monet did away with the centuries-old concept of a painting as a line drawing with color on it. He defined primary properties such as the shape and size of his boats and the space between them by means of patches of color.<sup>19</sup>
- Following Monet's lead, Seurat used thousands of tiny colored points to define the contents of picture space, including shape, distance, and perspective.
- In his landscapes, Cezanne also defined picture space by means of secondary properties, though his color patches are more sharply defined than Monet's.
- Rothko's multiforms push the relationship between color and space to the point of synonymy, as do paintings of other abstract expressionists such as Pollock.

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<sup>16</sup> As drawn by Berkeley (but not by Locke), the distinction is between properties that are said to "exist really in bodies" (primary) and properties that are said to "exist nowhere but in the mind" (Berkeley 1979, 22, First Dialog). The sweetness of honey is secondary while its viscosity is primary.

<sup>17</sup> Kant (1950 [1783], 37) rejected Locke's distinction, writing (original italics) "*all the properties which constitute the intuition of a body belong merely its appearance.*" A careful analysis of Kant's contributions to metaphysics and epistemology is Van Cleve 1999.

<sup>18</sup> Danto writes (2005, 152): "Giacometti was passionate about philosophical conversation but mainly about the phenomenology of perception. We used to discuss Bertrand Russell's idea that physical objects are logical constructions out of sense data." Giacometti's *Walking Man* sculpture series, for which he is most famous, seem to me to exemplify Solipsism rather than Phenomenalism.

<sup>19</sup> The cubist painter Fernand Leger (1881-1955) would have agreed with my analysis of Impressionism, writing (Harrison and Wood 2003, 202-3): "For the impressionists, a green apple and a red rug is no longer the relationship between two objects, but the relationship between two tones, a green and a red."

**Question:** What specific criteria would you use to argue that your Prometheus Challenge artworks that apply philosophical theories represent 'a step forward?'

**Answer:** Here are two criteria relative to the *Counterpoint* series: (1) whether the interweaving forms concept has been productive; (2) whether there is discernible progress from one artwork to the next in regard to basic aesthetic criteria such as composition and execution.

The productiveness of the interweaving-forms concept is easy to show. There are photos of ten *Counterpoint* sculptures in the Appendix of Cusmariu 2017 (47). I have seven more sculptures in the works, of which three have been completed. Seventeen artworks (three more to come) based on the same philosophical theory is evidence of productivity perhaps comparable to series of sculptures by artists such as Lipchitz's *Variation on a Chisel* (Wilkinson 2000, 53-57) and Smith's *Cubi* (Merkert 1986, 95-97).

As to discernible progress, let us compare photos of *Counterpoint 2* (C2, left) and *Counterpoint 10* (C10, right), made only about a year apart in 2002 and 2003.



The level of skill required to carve (and polish) C10 is significantly greater. C10 includes a lot more figures. C2 figures are all vertical but that is not the case in C10, which means more and more difficult compositional problems had to be solved. C2 figures appear locked in an embrace as the principal relationship, whereas the relationships exemplified in C10 are much more varied and there are more of them. C10 combines figurative as well as abstract volumes, whereas C2 volumes are largely figurative. Grain and color were fairly uniform in C2 but that proved not to be the case when I started to carve C10, which posed additional problems. These comparisons will yield similar conclusions about discernible aesthetic progress in other *Counterpoint* sculptures.

## Cubism and the Prometheus Challenge

**Question:** Does Picasso's 1907 masterpiece *Les Femmes d'Alger*<sup>20</sup> (LDA), which is considered to have launched Cubism, meet the Prometheus Challenge?

**Answer:** Yes. I only realized this while working on this article.

- It is now possible to answer correctly for the first time a fundamental question about LDA that sheds new light on this famous picture.
- I disagree with Arthur Danto that “nobody really understands it [LDA]” (2005 [2001], 124). Prometheus Challenge analysis does that.
- I disagree with Danto that “nobody is even able to say whether it is a success or a failure” (2005 [2001], 124).
- I disagree with Clement Greenberg that “[t]he *Femmes d'Alger*, superb as it is, lacks conclusive unity” (1961, 63).
- LDA is more than a success; it is a *tour de force*. The Prometheus Challenge is met by means of several solution types: mirror-imaging, image overlapping and seeing-as vision, giving the picture an extraordinary degree of ‘conclusive unity.’
- I disagree with received opinion concerning LDA's alleged resemblance to pictures by Cezanne (*Les Grandes Baigneuses*), El Greco (*Opening of the Fifth Seal*) and Matisse (*Le Bonheur de Vivre*), the last of which is supposed to have prompted Picasso to paint LDA. As a Spanish painter, Picasso most likely saw himself in competition not with two Frenchmen and a Greek but rather with his compatriot Velazquez and his most famous picture, *Las Meninas* (1656). LDA gives ‘*las meninas*,’ ‘ladies in waiting,’ an entirely different meaning.

The basic question that has yet to be answered correctly is this:

### ***How many figures does LDA show?***

Danto summarized the standard answer (2005 [2001], 124):<sup>21</sup>

Here are five women in all – three classical figures to the viewer's left, two masked women to the right, one of them, her back to us, squatting.

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<sup>20</sup> Though completed in 1907, LDA went on public display in 1916. It is now at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and can be viewed online at <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/79766?locale=en>.

<sup>21</sup> The standard answer may also be found in the following: Andersen 2002, ix; Blereau 2015, 14; Bois 2001, 37, 48; Chave 1994, 599; Cohen 2015, 25; Fry 1966, 12-15; Garb 2001, 55, 56; Gersh-Nešić 2015, 17; Golding 1988, 33-49; Golding 2001, 22, 26; Green 2001A, 5; Green 2001B, 129, 134, 135; Leighten 2001, 93; Lomas 2001, 104; Richardson 1996, 11; Rosenbloom 2001, 15; Rubin 1994, 69; curator Ann Temkin on the Museum of Modern Art website <https://www.moma.org/>; and Wikipedia.

### An Internalist<sup>22</sup> Analysis: Six Figures

*LDA* combines as well as anticipates several techniques exemplified in later Picasso pictures that meet the Prometheus Challenge.

- *The Three Dancers* (1925) contained an ambiguity in the middle figure that required special vision to detect (Cusmariu 2017, 34).
- *Bust of a Young Woman* (1926) shows overlapping images and shared body parts (Cusmariu 2017, 27).
- *Girl before A Mirror* (1932) used mirroring to show images inconsistent with one another and with the concept of mirroring itself (Cusmariu 2017, 27).

The number of figures *LDA* shows has been misunderstood because a key detail of the squatting figure has been misunderstood. The detail concerns what appears as the head of the figure, which has been interpreted as a 'mask' by Danto and many others. There are three sources of incompatibility here and as such three possible solutions to the Prometheus Challenge.

Incompatibility A: The head belongs to a customer in the act of having sex with the prostitute on top of him, her body completely obscuring his. A male head 'glued' atop a female body creates a jarring incompatibility and also comments on the revolting nature of bordello sex. The woman is shown without a head and the man with only a head. The implication is that neither is 'all there' as copulation is taking place.

Incompatibility B: The head is a mirror image of a customer sitting in a chair outside picture space trying to decide which prostitute to pick. Judging by the man's bewildered look, he is either a first-time visitor and dreads the experience ahead, or else is revolted by the appearance of the women available. The head bears some resemblance to Picasso as he looked in his 1907 self-portrait (currently at the National Gallery of the Czech Republic in Prague), who was known to have frequented bordellos.

Incompatibility C: The head image is ambiguous, being an overlapping male-female composite. To see the female aspect, block the right eye (on the viewer's left) and then compare the result with the head of the right-most figure, whose face appears scarred by venereal disease: The slope of the nose, the jaw line and the mouth all match.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Internalism in art criticism is what others have called formalism, i.e., an artwork is to be interpreted in terms of its aesthetic properties. Zangwill 2001 and Mitrović 2011 discuss formalism in aesthetics.

<sup>23</sup> Brassai 1999 [1964], 32 asks whether African art played a role in the creation of *LDA* and answers on behalf of Picasso that the painter saw African sculptures "only after he had completed the canvas."

### An Externalist<sup>24</sup> Analysis: Two Figures

Here is an analysis of *LDA* unrelated to the Prometheus Challenge based on the Christian doctrine of The Fall of Man (Genesis 3).

Eve is a prostitute in the Garden of Eden bordello, a postlapsarian 'fallen world.' On left, she is the welcoming madam holding open the curtain. The two nubile figures in the center are Eve using her charms to lure Adam. Next, Eve's face is scarred by venereal disease as punishment for biting the apple. As the squatting figure, she is servicing Adam trapped under her, his face distorted in climax.<sup>25</sup> In the foreground is a medley of forbidden fruit from the Tree of Knowledge. The serpent has slithered away.<sup>26</sup>

**Question:** Can you cite other Cubist solutions to the Prometheus Challenge?

**Answer:** Let us have a look at two Cubist artworks exemplifying image overlapping by Jean Metzinger (1883-1956). Metzinger was also a prominent art theorist (see Harrison and Wood 2003, 184-85, 194-201.)

Painted in 1913, Metzinger's *Woman with a Fan* is at the Art Institute of Chicago and can be seen at <http://www.artic.edu/aic/collections/artwork/9527> (accessed 19 September 2017).<sup>27</sup>

- Several views of a woman are superimposed a few degrees of arc apart.
- In the foreground view, she is shown in profile wearing a bowler hat, a heavy overcoat, and a colorful tie.
- In the middle-ground view, her head has been rotated clockwise slightly toward the light source. The right eye is shared with the foreground view, as are the lips. Wavy hair is now visible on left.
- In the background view, her head has been rotated clockwise again until she faces the viewer, some 90 degrees of arc away from the profile view. The wavy hair is now in upper right.

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<sup>24</sup> Externalist art criticism asserts the conditional "if non-aesthetic factors (psychoanalytic, political, social, religious, historical, etc.) are assumed, artwork *X* means *Y*." *Modus tollens* can show that the antecedent of this conditional is problematic by showing that "artwork *X* means *Y*" is problematic for various reasons, e.g., inconsistency with the artist's stated or implied intent. Outlandish forms of externalist art criticism are skewered effectively in Kimball 2004. The deeper issue is whether externalist art criticism commits the Naturalistic Fallacy (Moore 1903).

<sup>25</sup> Brassai writes (1999 [1964], 223): "Art is never chaste,' he [Picasso] tells me one day."

<sup>26</sup> This interpretation is consistent with Picasso's rebellious nature. He lived to be 91 and flouted a lot more than artistic conventions during his long life.

<sup>27</sup> Metzinger superimposed images a few degrees of arc apart in three other pictures: *Woman at the Window* (1912), *Nude in Front of a Mirror* (1912), and *The Smoker* (1914). Metzinger was a Pointillist early on, e.g., *Nude in a Landscape* (1905), *Woman with a Hat* (1906), and *Bacchante* (1906).



- The three views also share clothing attributes, e.g., the hat, the coat, and the fan.
- The three views could be superimposed over one another as animation cells and 'flipped' to simulate motion, resulting in a dynamic picture.

Painted in 1916, Metzinger's *Lady at Her Dressing Table* is in a private collection and can be seen at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Femme\\_au\\_miroir](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Femme_au_miroir) (accessed 19 September 2017.)

- A woman standing in front of a dressing table and holding a mirror appears simultaneously clothed and unclothed – note the bellybutton.
- Her left breast is seen from the front and from the side simultaneously.
- The right side of her face is flat and seems to be a mirror reflection, while the left side reflects the colors of her clothing.
- The rectangular shoulders and cylindrical neck contrast and are incompatible with the slender and realistically painted arms.
- Overlap between images associated with the woman and background shapes serves to provide balance and aesthetic unity.

### The Prometheus Challenge and the Aesthetic Attitude

**Question:** Is there a difference between the experience of perceiving artworks such as sculptures and the experience of perceiving ordinary physical objects? If so, is this difference to be described in terms of adopting an aesthetic attitude? How do you respond to objections to the effect that the aesthetic attitude is a myth?

**Answer:** George Dickie's critique of the aesthetic attitude in his well-known paper (Dickie 1960) seems to have withstood the test of time according to one recent writer (Zemach 1997, 33). Here is Dickie's case stated in proper argument form:

1. The aesthetic attitude has been defined in terms of 'distancing,' the mental state of 'being distanced,' and the mental state of 'disinterested attention.'
2. 'Distancing,' 'being distanced' and 'disinterested attention' mean nothing more than ignoring sources of distraction and focusing on the matter at hand – a play, a painting, a poem, a piece of music, and so on.
3. Therefore, adopting an aesthetic attitude means nothing more than ignoring sources of distraction and focusing attention on, or paying attention to, the matter at hand – a play, a painting, a poem, a piece of music, and so on.
4. If adopting an aesthetic attitude means nothing more than ignoring sources of distraction and focusing attention on, or paying attention to, the matter at hand, then, any sentence about adopting an aesthetic attitude can be paraphrased into an equivalent sentence in which the term 'aesthetic' only has non-aesthetic meaning.

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5. If any sentence about adopting an aesthetic attitude can be paraphrased into an equivalent sentence in which the term 'aesthetic' only has non-aesthetic meaning, then, belief in an aesthetic attitude is a myth.
6. Therefore, belief in an aesthetic attitude is a myth.

Let us link this argument structure to comments Dickie makes in the course of making his case.

Step 1 is based on Dickie's summary (56) of the way attitude theorists such as Sheila Dawson (Dawson 1961) and Jerome Stolnitz (Stolnitz 1960) defined 'aesthetic attitude.' Step 2 is based on Dickie's analysis of the concepts "distancing" and "being distanced" (57) and on his analysis of the concept "disinterested attention" (58). Step 3 follows logically from Steps 1 and 2. Dickie does not assert Step 4, though he hints at it in his comment (64) that "the aesthetic attitude collapses into simple attention." Dickie also does not assert Step 5, though it is needed to validly infer Step 6.

One way to deal with this argument is to note that 'one man's *modus ponens* is another man's *modus tollens*.' Accordingly, here is an equally valid argument that starts with the negation of Dickie's final conclusion, step 6:

- 1\*. It is not the case that belief in an aesthetic attitude is a myth.
- 2\*. Therefore, it is not the case that any sentence about adopting an aesthetic attitude can be paraphrased into an equivalent sentence in which the term 'aesthetic' only has non-aesthetic meaning – from 1\* and 5 by *modus tollens*.
- 3\*. Therefore, it is not the case that adopting an aesthetic attitude means nothing more than ignoring sources of distraction and focusing attention on, or paying attention to, the matter at hand – from 2\* and 4 by *modus tollens*.
- 4\*. Therefore, 3 is false. 1 or 2 or both are also false.

This strategy is moot unless it is shown that the argument from 1\* to 4\* is sound.

A basic distinction in the philosophy of mind is between an act (in the occurrent or the dispositional sense) and the object it is directed upon. Leaving aside whether the mental is the physical, we may legitimately speak of a mental act, such as perceiving, as distinct in some sense from a physical object, such as a tree, that the act of perceiving happens to be directed upon. Similarly, we may legitimately speak of the mental act, such as focusing attention, as distinct in some sense from the physical object or event that the act of focusing attention happens to be directed upon.

Regardless of one's theory about the nature of perception, it can be acknowledged that 'perceiving an object *X*' is shorthand for 'perceiving some property *F* that *X* has.' Similarly, focusing attention on an object or event *X*, at least in part, can be understood as shorthand for focusing attention on some property *F* that *X* has.

We can focus attention on aesthetic as well as non-aesthetic objects and events. Likewise, we can focus attention on aesthetic as well as non-aesthetic

properties of an object or event. For example, if one is focusing attention on the way compositional details are related to one another in a painting, one is focusing attention on an aesthetic property of a painting; while focusing attention on the relative height of the actors on the stage is focusing attention on a non-aesthetic property of the performance of a play.

Under what conditions is the act of focusing attention, which is neutral taken in the abstract, uniquely aesthetic? The answer seems to be that the act of focusing attention on an object or event is uniquely aesthetic provided that it is directed upon the aesthetic properties of an object or event to the exclusion of other properties. This leads to an intuitive account of adopting a uniquely aesthetic attitude toward an object or event: It means focusing attention on aesthetic properties to the exclusion of other properties the object or event may have.

So, on this understanding of 'uniquely aesthetic attitude,' we have the following:

- Premise 3\* is true because adopting a uniquely aesthetic attitude toward an object or event means more than 'ignoring sources of distraction and focusing attention on the matter at hand.'
- Premise 2\* is true because sentences about adopting a uniquely aesthetic attitude in the sense just explained cannot be paraphrased into an equivalent sentence in which the term 'aesthetic' only has non-aesthetic meaning.
- Finally, the aesthetic attitude as understood here does not entail 'disinterested attention' as some theorists have suggested. On the contrary, adopting a uniquely aesthetic attitude in my sense entails focusing attention on the aesthetic properties of an object or event to the exclusion of other properties.

Note that adopting a uniquely aesthetic attitude toward sculptures that meet the Prometheus Challenge is conceptually more complex. This is the case because special vision is required to focus attention on the aesthetic properties of such sculptures, namely, directional vision or seeing-as vision (or both), to the exclusion of other properties they might have.

Here is the definition of 'adopting a uniquely aesthetic attitude' I am proposing:

Person *S* adopts a uniquely aesthetic attitude toward *X* =df Either (a) *S* focuses attention on aesthetic attributes of *X* by means of standard perception, ignoring other properties *X* might have,<sup>28</sup> or (b) *S* focuses attention on aesthetic attributes of *X* by means of special perception such as directional vision or seeing-as vision (or both), ignoring other properties *X* might have, including

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<sup>28</sup> For a Platonic concept of aesthetic vision in the context of film analysis, see Cusmariu 2015B, 109-111.

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aesthetic properties on which attention could be focused without special perception.<sup>29</sup>

Someone sympathetic to Dickie's critique might respond that this definition must further specify what it means to focus attention on aesthetic properties, otherwise it is incomplete. For present purposes, however, operating at an intuitive level is sufficient.<sup>30</sup>

**Question:** What about Vincent Tomas' version of the aesthetic attitude, i.e., his concept of aesthetic vision (Tomas 1959)?

**Answer:** Capturing aesthetic content by means of seeing-as vision refutes Vincent Tomas' view on the nature of aesthetic vision. Here are two key passages:

When we see things aesthetically our attention is directed toward appearances and we do not particularly notice the thing that presents the appearance, nor do we care what, if anything, it is that appears. Put somewhat differently, in aesthetic vision the 'what' or 'aesthetic object' that we attend to when, as Schopenhauer says, we look 'simply and solely at the *what*,' is an appearance, and the question of reality does not arise (Tomas 1959, 53).

In every case of aesthetic vision, what is attended to is an appearance, and the question of what actual object – a picture, a mirror, or a man – presents that appearance does not arise (Tomas 1959, 58).

In *Slave Market with the Disappearing Bust of Voltaire*, Dali was only suggesting we are seeing images of Voltaire and two women. But from this it does not follow that "the question of reality does not arise" when we attempt to capture the aesthetic content of this picture. Dali put Voltaire's name in the title for a reason, so "the question what actual object presents that appearance" does indeed "arise." We should and do "care what it is that appears."

The aesthetic content of this and every other picture Dali made exemplifying the same kind of ambiguity cannot be captured by looking "simply and solely at the *what*." We must *see* the women's dresses *as* Voltaire's neck and vice-versa, as well as *see-as* the many other ambiguous details Dali put into this picture.

Seeing-as vision is indeed a form of aesthetic vision, as is directional vision. What else would they be, considering that they are necessary for the purpose of capturing the aesthetic content of works by Picasso, Dali and Lipchitz as well as my own?<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> This view of the aesthetic attitude assumes that there are such things as aesthetic properties (and relations). A defense of this position can be found in Cusmariu 2016.

<sup>30</sup> See Cusmariu 2016 for refutations of attempts to dispense with aesthetic properties.

<sup>31</sup> The Picasso, Dali and Lipchitz artworks under discussion all predate Tomas' article, so he had ample opportunity to test his views. None are mentioned in his article as potential counterexamples.

## Laws of Logic and the Prometheus Challenge

**Question:** Characterizing the Prometheus Challenge as combining incompatible attributes seems to suggest that artworks that meet the challenge assert that contradictions are in some sense true, which would be an undesirable consequence. How do you avoid this consequence?

**Answer:** Let us consider the six solution categories in turn and show that none assert that contradictions can be true.<sup>32</sup>

### Category 1, Mirror Imaging

- On my interpretation, the male mirror image in *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* (LDA) is not, inconsistently, intended to be literally glued atop the image of the crouching female figure. Rather, this is a compositional device meant to suggest the presence of someone outside the picture space looking at the women inside it.
- Degas, Manet and Picasso combined incompatibilities between base and mirror images to make psychological points. They were not suggesting that the concept of mirroring and the relationship between base and mirror images shown in their pictures correspond to reality.

### Category 2, Image Overlapping

- As noted above, a male head atop a female body in LDA is also not intended as a literal depiction. Overlapping body parts suggest disembodied figures by way of commentary on the revolting nature of bordello sex.
- Also as noted above, seeing-as vision is required to notice the fact that the head on top of the croucher is an ambiguous male-female composite and serves to identify the two sexual partners.
- Image overlapping in the Walter, Maar and Roque pictures conveys a psychological reality rather than a physical one. Picasso is showing how he perceived his relationship these three very different women and how they perceived their relationship to him. He was famous for being brutally honest in his artwork, even if it meant portraying himself and the people he loved in an unfavorable light.

### Category 3, Seeing-As Vision

Ambiguity is a simple way of dispelling the appearance of inconsistency. To cite a famous example from art, consider Magritte's painting *Treachery of Images* (1929), showing a pipe with an inscription underneath that reads "Ceci nest pas

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<sup>32</sup> In logic, the operative concept is 'inconsistent sentence,' which has a syntactic and a semantic meaning. Such technical subtleties do not matter for present purposes.

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une pipe” (“This is not a pipe.”)<sup>33</sup> The inscription will seem contradictory until it is realized that the demonstrative pronoun is ambiguous. ‘This’ can be taken to refer to the pipe in the picture, in which case the inscription is false; or it can be taken to refer to the fact that we are looking at a picture of the pipe, in which case the inscription is true. Magritte clearly meant the latter.<sup>34</sup> Once the ambiguity is realized, the appearance of paradox disappears.

Artworks requiring seeing-as vision to capture aesthetic content are ambiguous in the same way. Thus, Dali was not suggesting in *The Image Disappears* that a woman’s breast can literally be a man’s nostril; Picasso was not suggesting in *Bull’s Head* that a bicycle’s handlebars could literally be a bull’s horn; Lipchitz was not suggesting in *Mother and Child, II* that a child’s legs could literally be a bull’s ears; and I was not suggesting in *Ariel* that a ball a seal was balancing could literally be a person’s head. Visual ambiguity is exemplified in all these cases; contradictions are not being asserted as true. This is realized once special vision is applied.

#### Category 4, Directional Vision

Directional vision removes the appearance of contradiction by requiring viewers to shift focus from one direction to another. Once they do so, ambiguity becomes apparent.

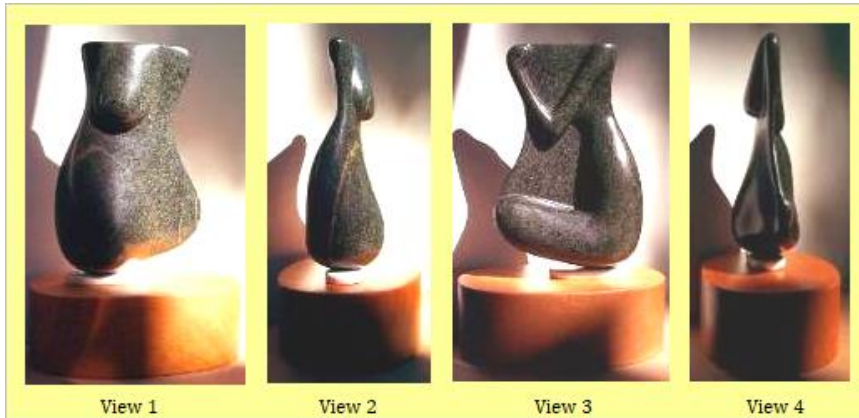
*My Prometheus* (left) suggested pride if seen from left to right and horror if seen from right to left. Both cannot be seen at the same time, so there is no inconsistency. Similar points apply to my *Leda* (middle) and my *David* (right).



<sup>33</sup> Image available at <http://collections.lacma.org/node/239578>, accessed 3 July 2017.

<sup>34</sup> For Magritte’s comments on this painting, see Torczyner (1979, 71).

Category 5, Discontinuous Attributes



Sense data are necessarily indexed to a perceiver at a time. The four views of *Eve* were shown as a sequence for the purpose of explaining a concept. The images were taken one after the other 45 degrees of arc apart and thus do not correspond to simultaneous sense data. Thus, I was not implying that *Eve* is simultaneously pregnant (View 2) and not pregnant (View1); or holding an apple (View 3) and not holding an apple (View 4). Discontinuous attributes sculptures do not assert that contradictions can be true. Moreover, because the sculpture is best viewed on a rotating carousel and is thus an event, incompatible events are being viewed sequentially and not simultaneously.

Category 6, Interweaving Forms

The appearance of contradiction can be dispelled by recalling that sculptures under this solution require seeing-as and directional vision to capture aesthetic content. The reliance of these modes of vision on ambiguity means that contradictions are not being asserted. *Counterpoint* sculptures are best viewed on a rotating carousel.

**Plato's Critique of Art and the Prometheus Challenge<sup>35</sup>**

**Question:** Would Plato have banned Prometheus Challenge art from his ideal state?

**Answer:** As a metaphysical Platonist,<sup>36</sup> I could neither ignore nor postpone this question. However, I am able to answer it here only for my own Prometheus Challenge artworks.

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<sup>35</sup> There is a large and growing literature on this topic. See, *inter alia*, Tate 1928, Grube 1980 [1935], Verdenius 1949, Golden 1975, and Janaway 1995. Janaway's book has an excellent bibliography. I will not be engaging in any sort of polemic with other interpretations or make an extensive effort to justify my own.

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Here is an outline of what I take to be Plato's argument against art in Book X of *Republic* (Cooper 1997, 1199-1223):

1. Art has property *M*.
2. Experiences of viewing something that has property *M* have consequence *H*.

Therefore,

3. Experiences of viewing art have consequence *H* – from 1, 2.
4. If experiences of viewing art have consequence *H*, then experiences of viewing art taken collectively probably would damage the health and welfare of the ideal state.<sup>37</sup>

Therefore,

5. Experiences of viewing art taken collectively probably would damage the health and welfare of the ideal state – from 3, 4.
6. If experiences of viewing art taken collectively probably would damage the health and welfare of the ideal state, then experiences of viewing art should be banned in the ideal state.

Therefore,

7. Experiences of viewing art should be banned in the ideal state – from 5, 6.

This outline makes it easier to understand what Plato found problematic and how he suggested the problem should be handled in his ideal state.

First, the outline makes clear that Plato's critique of art is not aimed at art as such.<sup>38</sup> After all, art that no one ever sees is causally inert. Thus, the argument could not have used (2\*) instead of (2) because (2\*) is false:

- 2\* Something that has property *M* has consequence *H*.

Second, it is also clear that *H* is unlikely to have the sort of impact that premise (4) claims if 'viewing' means sporadic, isolated or otherwise limited exposure to art, e.g., artist colonies and the like. Thus, Plato must be taken to argue that harmful consequences would arise at the societal level only if art (a) were to be made available to the general public and (b) unrestricted viewership

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<sup>36</sup> My interest in Plato's metaphysics began in graduate school and led to a Ph.D. dissertation at Brown University in 1977 titled "A Platonist Theory of Properties." Material from the dissertation eventually became journal articles. See Cusmariu 1978A, 1978B, 1978C, 1979A, 1979B, 1980, 1985 and 2016.

<sup>37</sup> As Grube points out (1980 [1935], 189), the critique of art is aimed at legislating for the ideal state envisioned in *Republic*, which "exists in theory, [not] anywhere on earth." (Cooper 1997, 1199, 592b)

<sup>38</sup> Art training in drawing could be useful in architecture and building construction, while stone carving could be useful in masonry. They would not be banned in the ideal state.



was permitted. It is this that the ideal state must prevent by passing laws banning displays of art. Plato, in effect, advocates censorship.<sup>39</sup>

**Question:** What are M and H?

**Answer:** M is mimesis. H is epistemic harm that Plato argues is caused by exposure to M.

**Question:** What is mimetic art?

**Answer:** Here are some relevant passages from Book X of Republic:

Yet, in a certain way, the painter does make a bed, doesn't he?

Yes, he makes the appearance of one. (*Republic* 596e8-9, Cooper 1997, 1200)

Now, consider this. We say that a maker of an image – an imitator – knows nothing about that which is but only about its appearance. Isn't that so?

Yes. (*Republic* 601b7-c2, Cooper 1997, 1205)

Then what do you think [a painter] does to a bed?

He imitates it. He is an imitator of what others make. (*Republic* 597d8-9, Cooper 1997, 1201)

If you look at a bed from the side or the front or from anywhere else is it a different bed each time? Or does it only appear different, without being at all different? And is that also the case with other things?

That's the way it is – it appears different without being so. (*Republic* 598a5-a8, Cooper 1997, 1202)

Then consider this very point: What does painting do in each case? Does it imitate that which is as it is, or does it imitate that which appears as it appears? Is it an imitation of appearances or of truth?

Of appearances. (*Republic* 598a9-b3, Cooper 1997, 1202)

These passages suggest the following definition applicable to visual mimetic art:<sup>40</sup>

D1. A work of visual art *W* about *X* is mimetic-1 =df *W* is a representation<sup>41</sup> of the appearance *X* presents.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Movies also have consequence *H* even though this "river of shadows" (Solnit 2004) is by and large intended as entertainment. For Platonist themes in the context of film, see Cusumariu 2015B.

<sup>40</sup> However, Janaway writes (1995, 106): "We cannot hope for a single definition of mimesis covering all uses Plato makes of the term."

<sup>41</sup> The term 'representation' covers more examples of visual art and is therefore preferable to Plato's term 'imitation.' Defining 'representation' is too complicated to be attempted here.

<sup>42</sup> *X* could be a real or a fictional object and the appearance represented in *W* might not be contemporaneous with the date of *W*. Thus, historical or religious artworks as well as artworks depicting fictional objects can be mimetic according to D1. *W* could be about multiple objects and still be mimetic. See D2 below.

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**Question:** Why not define mimetic art in terms of resemblance or approximation with respect to how an object appears rather than representation?

**Answer:** Here is that definition:

D1\*. A work of visual art  $W$  about  $X$  is mimetic-1\* =df  $W$  resembles or approximates the appearance  $X$  presents.

This won't do. (a) Plato's paradigm case of *mimesis* is 'copy' or 'imitation' in part because 'art is a copy of a copy' entails 'art is twice removed from the truth' but does not entail 'art resembles a copy'; (b) it is unclear whether viewing 'resemblance art' would have consequence  $H$ ; hence, (c) should be banned in the ideal state.

**Question:** Are your Prometheus Challenge artworks mimetic according to D1?

**Answer:** There are four categories of solutions to consider.

### Category 1. Seeing-As Vision



*Ariel* can be seen-as a seal and also as a spectator at the circus. Neither is (or was intended to be) a representation of the appearance a seal or a circus spectator presents. I used visual ambiguity to suggest that viewers consider circumstances in which they are prone to 'act like a trained seal.' My other seeing-as sculpture, *Swan Lake*, is also not D1-mimetic because no swan presents an appearance that includes the wake it leaves behind gliding on a lake as part of its body.

### Category 2. Directional Vision



My *Prometheus* and my *David* are abstract art, so D1 does not apply. *Leda* is based on Greek mythology. The attributes apparent from opposite directions – before the swan (Zeus) from left-to-right, and months later from right-to-left – cannot meaningfully be said to be representations of the appearance of a mythological being. The two views at most resemble the female figure in profile, which does not mean that *Leda* is D1-mimetic.

Category 3. Discontinuous Attributes

Phenomenalist sculptures are obviously not D1-mimetic. However, perhaps a definition of *mimesis* for such sculptures can be formulated that is consistent with Plato's paradigm case of mimetic art.

D2. A sculpture *W* is mimetic-2 =df Sense-data in *W* correspond to sense-data associated with familiar objects of experience.

It might seem that a Phenomenalist sculpture such as *Alar* satisfies D2.



However, 'correspond' cannot be understood literally here. The views shown only suggest association with familiar sense data under an interpretation. Views 1-4 do not literally correspond to sense-data associated with actual bird wings, while View 5 does not literally correspond to sense-data associated with a blade of fire. Real wings consist of feathers attached to bones linked together in various ways and do not literally look like what we see in Views 1-4. These views are an artist's concept of a wing rather than strict correspondence in the 'copy' sense Plato intends. The same is true of View 5: A blade of fire is not a solid object. Finally, *Alar* shows an aesthetic relationship between the alabaster stone and the three-part base underneath, not a literal relationship. Wings are attached very differently to the body of a bird.

Note that D2 requires all sense-data of a Phenomenalist sculpture to correspond to sense-data associated with familiar objects of experience. Therefore, Phenomenalist sculptures are not D2-mimetic.

**Question:** Why must correspondence hold for all sense data? Isn't it sufficient for the sculpture to be mimetic provided that correspondence holds for some sense-data?

**Answer:** Here is that definition:

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D2\*. A sculpture  $W$  is mimetic-2\* =df Some sense-data in  $W$  correspond to sense-data associated with familiar objects of experience.

D2\* entails that a Phenomenalist sculpture can 'go in and out' of *mimesis*, so to speak, from one viewing angle to the next. It seems clear, however, that *mimesis* is an all-or-nothing concept for Plato. To use Plato's example, this means that one and the same bed cannot present mimetic as well as non-mimetic appearances from one viewing angle to the next. If it did, we could not identify it as a bed or as the same bed.

#### Category 4. Interweaving Forms

Mereological sculptures such as *Counterpoint 8* are not mimetic-1 or mimetic-2; therefore, a new definition is needed.

D3. A sculpture  $W$  is mimetic-3 =df All part-whole relationships exemplified in  $W$  correspond to relationships exemplified by familiar objects of experience.



While some volumes in *Counterpoint 8* are identifiable as representations of female figures, part-whole relationships seen in their totality and from every viewing angle do not correspond to those exemplified by familiar objects of experience. Thus, Mereological sculptures are not D3-mimetic.

Because my Prometheus Challenge sculptures are not mimetic according to any of the Platonist definitions considered, it is reasonable to conclude that premise (1) of the argument outline is false if  $M$  is *mimesis*, hence the resulting argument is unsound.

**Question:** Perhaps your Prometheus Challenge sculptures should be banned because the experience of viewing them is epistemically harmful. What about that?

**Answer:** The True and The Good were fundamental Forms for Plato, so he probably would have been sympathetic to W.K. Clifford's "ethics of belief" (1879, 163-205), which can be construed as an attempt to combine the two Forms. Thus, Plato probably would have agreed that there is a *prima facie* duty for citizens of his ideal state to acquire true or rational beliefs as well as a duty to avoid false or

irrational beliefs. Therefore, he probably would have regarded as epistemically harmful experiences that would interfere with carrying out these duties. This suggests the following definition:

D4. Having experience *E* is epistemically harmful for person *S* =Df (i) Having *E* would discourage *S* from acquiring true or rational beliefs, or (ii) having *E* would encourage *S* to acquire false or irrational beliefs.

Here is a revised version of Plato's critique of art that relies on D4.

(3\*) Experiences of viewing art are epistemically harmful.

(4\*) If experiences of viewing art are epistemically harmful, then experiences of viewing art taken collectively probably would damage the health and welfare of the ideal state.

Therefore,

(5) Experiences of viewing art taken collectively probably would damage the health and welfare of the ideal state – from 3\*, 4\*.

(6) If experiences of viewing art taken collectively probably would damage the health and welfare of the ideal state, then experiences of viewing art should be banned in the ideal state.

Therefore,

(7) Experiences of viewing art should be banned in the ideal state – from 5, 6.

**Question:** This argument is valid. Which premise do you deny?

**Answer:** Grube writes (1980 [1935], 187):

Plato extends the meaning of artistic, cultured in art, far beyond art itself, to apply to the lover of all beauty, who (we may supply the thought from later passages) is again none other than the philosophos, the thinker. Such a one, were he an artist, Plato would accept and indeed welcome. There is nowhere any description of the type of work that he could create beyond the general principles mentioned already. That such works however are not impossible, and that they would be far more than a mere copy of things, we gather from scattered references: the artist could in the first place combine differently what he sees in nature, though one doubts whether any great art could result from this.<sup>43</sup>

According to Grube, Plato seems to have been confident that a philosopher-artist would understand the need to avoid *mimesis* and, moreover, would produce artworks that were “far more than a mere copy of things.” For purposes of the above argument, however, this is irrelevant. After all, artworks that are ‘far more than a mere copy of things’ may still be epistemically harmful in the sense of D4. The same may be true of non-mimetic artworks based on a philosophical theory such as Phenomenalism or Mereology; artworks that were created by “combining the features of different things,” as Plato put it at *Republic*

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<sup>43</sup> George Grube died in 1982.

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488a5 (Cooper 1997, 1111); and even artworks that incorporated Plato's notion of interweaving forms from *Sophist*. Unless it is shown that viewing such artworks is not epistemically harmful in the sense of D4, the above argument goes through and the ideal state would have no choice but to ban them despite their unique lineage.

To decide the issue with respect to my Prometheus Challenge sculptures, we need one more definition:

D5. Having experience *E* is epistemically helpful for person *S* =Df (i) Having *E* would encourage *S* to acquire true or rational beliefs, or (ii) having *E* would discourage *S* from acquiring false or irrational beliefs.

I'd like to show that, under their intended interpretations, my Prometheus Challenge sculptures are epistemically helpful. Therefore, premise (3\*) of the above argument is false and this argument is also unsound.

#### Category 1: Seeing-As-Vision

*Ariel* is epistemically helpful. Using the spectator-trained seal combination of attributes, the piece invites the viewer to ponder hard questions: To what extent is free choice present in our lives? Are we acting out of desires that are genuinely our own or are we caving to outside pressures, perhaps without even realizing it? Is self-deception ever a part of the decision-making process?

#### Category 2: Directional Vision

*David* is epistemically helpful. The sculpture is intended to encourage admiration toward acts of heroism while recognizing as legitimate and even rational the visceral fear experienced on the battlefield at the prospect of violent death.

*Prometheus* is epistemically helpful. The sculpture is intended to encourage admiration toward acts of defiance in the service of conscience while recognizing as legitimate and even rational the rage felt at the cruelty of the punishment imposed.

#### Category 3: Discontinuous Attributes

*Alar* is epistemically helpful. The sculpture invites viewers to consider that something beautiful might also be dangerous, e.g., 'every rose has thorns.'

*Eve* is epistemically helpful. Viewers can ponder the moral implications of the Biblical story as the pieces turns slowly on a carousel, e.g., the consequences of disobeying a divine command and yielding to temptation.

#### Category 4: Interweaving Forms

*Counterpoint* sculptures were epistemically helpful for me because each one encouraged a true belief about a potentially productive aesthetic relationship between two forms of art with an event ontology, (my) sculpture and music. This

belief began with *Counterpoint 1* and was confirmed by subsequent sculptures that also “combine the features of different things” in a way that resembles how voices are combined in music to produce a unified, coherent whole.

In conclusion, Plato should “accept and indeed welcome” my *Prometheus Challenge* sculptures in his ideal state, as they are “far more than a mere copy of things.”<sup>44</sup>

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