

Unqualified for Knowledge: When Dissent Ruins Everything

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ABSTRACT: The art of the world is a mirror of the souls of its people. The art of a specific time is a mirror of the people's souls in those times. This is how the author understands the impressive difference between the contemporary arts and those of the past. The movies of the 21st century, for instance, respond to the momentary needs of the soul of our fellow friends. They shape the inner needs of the viewers by indulging them with violence and many kinds of deprivations, which ultimately lead to the loss of wisdom. The paintings also have a vague message, giving the viewer freedom to participate in the cultural act of interpretation with his imagination. This paper attempts to show that we are under attack using the means of the natural affections, and we become therefore weaker spiritually and physically every day. To annihilate this attack, we need to re-learn the discipline of the “excellent ones”, of the “worthies” of the past. Otherwise, our knowledge and judgment will be harmed by our affections and our spiritual values will also suffer accordingly.

KEY WORDS: knowledge, epistemology, indulging, contemporary art, affections, excellent ones, affective epistemology

Introduction

The paper will focus on affective epistemology, and more specifically about the relationship between the effects of art on the human affections, and how can knowledge be distorted by the wrong way of doing art. The author argues that there is a strong relationship between affections and knowledge

or wisdom, because they are intrinsically related. This used to be common knowledge. But as with time, much valuable information has been rejected by humanity, and this fate happened to this axiom too.

The first part of the paper will show that there is an obvious change in the way art is produced, compared to the former centuries. The art in the 21st century has got rid of the limitations imposed by the common sense. The language, content and message of the movies have degraded. Images that are not acceptable by everybody have invaded the media. There is also a new and strong propagandistic dimension of the art. They seem to inspire violence, dissension and strife. They also weaken the morality of the viewer, even if the movies are rated for a general audience. Being morally accepted by the large majority, this rating is still fallacious because, in the long term, it changes the moral attitude of the viewer, stealing his peace of mind. According to James K. A. Smith, “the problem, however, does not reside primarily in plays’ immoral content but rather in the effect of drama on the soul’s development” (Coulter 2016, 43).

The second part of this paper argues that this change is taking place slowly in time, after the vexation of the affections, with chaotic effects on the mindset. Generally accepted rules are not followed and principles of life are abandoned. As soon as contention and strife come in life, wisdom – as little as it can be – will be lost.

The author pleads for a rational attitude towards life and art, as humanity settled it—the rational means constant vigilance towards the apparently innocent habits, or towards those habits that we lack.

Licetis perimus omnes - we all perish by lawful things

In the twenty-first century, a certain change became obvious in the narrative arts. In the past, the main characters were, at a certain level, seminal ones. They were models worthy to follow. They impressed with their allegiance to the truth, good and beautiful. The “El Cid” has continued to inspire his people on the horseback even after his spirit departed from him. The story of the two friends Damon and Pythias is famous because one of them offered himself to become a prisoner, putting his life in danger, in exchange for allowing his friend to go home and take farewell from his wife and children. Baucis and

Philemon are an example of *xenia*, hospitality towards the strangers, because they were the only ones from their town willing to host the disguised gods. They were φιλοφρονως, of a friendly mind. Even an anti-model as Ivanhoe's foe said something that remained after centuries a principle to follow: I have broken many a law, but I have never broken my word. The priest whose jewelry was stolen by Jean Valjean chose to show the thief that love is more valuable than justice, and justice without love could become cruelty. When the Turks have sieged the fortress of Eger, and most of the men gave their lives for protecting it, their wives and widows overtook their role, and fought against the enemy, for the protection of their community.

These are not characters who lived in exceptional times, which is irrelevant for us. On the contrary, they inspired many generations of readers and movie fans because they tried to do their best for their friends' interests or a larger community, although they were normal people. They became, in time, after exercising many years, hospitable or brave, the so-called "excellent ones," "the worthies." It was not a gift that others do not have, something unusual that would make them extra-ordinary. There were ordinary things transformed in their duty. And this is the kind of persons appreciated even by emperors, as Tertullian said about Augustus, that "gratius ei fuit nomen pietatis quam potestatis" (he prized more piety than power),

And still, they disappeared from the media, and their places have been taken by superheroes with nine lives and ten sizes, well versed in violence (even if they are apparently siding the good) and debauchery. The Latins would say about a change like this, that "*Nec quod innovatum, fuit semper melioratum*" (The innovation is not necessarily an improvement) (Lubac 1965, 13). There seems to be nothing natural, earthly in them, people that we meet every day. They are a mixture of supernatural force, luck and intelligence under the guise of normality. They are attractive from a worldly perspective because of their physical look, their skills in fights, and their worldly success. They are extraordinary, but not similar to any human. They are not even geniuses, because geniuses are still human. They are more than that: a mixture of gifts that did not need any practice to develop. This lack of practice makes these models unrealistic.

As the author pleaded above for a rational attitude towards life, including art, there are two questions that James K. A. Smith is asking

regarding the consumption of art. „What is expected from a theatrical performance? What effects are the actors intending to produce?“ (Coulter 2016, 43). As art has become a tool out of many that distract the attention from the essential issues of life, having a (de)formative aim, we need to evaluate carefully our interaction with it.

The vexation of the affections

Common sense and history teach us that the way to the stars is difficult and that it takes time. So is the attempt to reach the virtues. According to the New Testament, “the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence”, or heaven is not to be had “*sine sanguine et sudore*”, without pains, patience, violence. In the same spirit Ovid said “*sic petitur caelum*”, thus is heaven sought. Being superhuman means that there is no bridge between the movie characters and humans. In this context the Latin saying “*Non ignara mali, miseris succurrere disco*”, not myself unknowing of misfortune I learn to help the distressed, is not applicable.

This shift in what humans ordinarily would call “qualities” are the affections that were studied by scholars since antiquity. The change in the affections we resonate with is a sign of the change of affections in ourselves as well. So the large-scale shift of the affections in the media is a proof of the change in our mentalities. This change doesn’t represent just another perspective about life, but it mirrors the fundamental change in life itself. In other words, if we would call the right conduct ortho-praxy, and the right feelings orthopathy, than the orthopathy gives birth, or greatly influences ortho-praxy. This is also true conversely, as they are intricately related. And it is also true that defective feelings give birth to a defective praxis. It is impossible to have good practical results without a strong foundation. And it is not possible to reject thousands of years old principles, and still have a successful life.

Affections are forces of the human psyche that develop during a lifetime. Some of the affections are good, such as love, piety, self-control. People will learn them after many years of practice. They are not necessarily called “natural” because these affections do not appear from nowhere. There are also other affections, negative ones, which develop without too many efforts, and which destroy people and relationships. Some of these kinds of affections are fury

and hate, which produce dissentment, strife, division and so on. Needless to say, humans are more prone to choose the easy way of negative affections, because the positive ones need perseverance, self-sacrifice and humility.

These negative affections are produced in time as a result of the continuous attack on personality, in order to *de-form* it. The correlated effort for deformation is called vexation, and its ultimate goal is the weakening of the human mind and soul. It is not in our scope to give examples of how is this weakening taking place. There are different portals that allow vexation to be effective, and one is through the hormones produced by the body. Vexation could have positive or negative connotations. If it is aimed at the mortification of the body (even from an outside source), or if it is a voluntary penance, it could build up a healthy thinking. But the vexation of the good affections, aimed at the deformation of character, happening stealthily for the unprepared mind, can damage with irremediable effects the personality.

Moreover, this change of affections opens a dangerous and fallacious perspective for our knowledge about life. The overrated natural affections feed the natural affections in others, so violence will breed violence, and fallacy will breed obviously error.

Looking for knowledge at the wrong time

Knowledge can be explicit and handed down from one generation to the other, as the torchbearers do at the Olympic games. Professional knowledge, like that of the medical staff, mathematicians, chemists etc. are such explicit ones, because they can be easily transmitted to the new generations. Even skills, such as welding or carpentry can be taught to disciples.

There is also a form of knowledge that is almost impossible to express in words, that Polanyi called tacit knowledge (Polanyi 2013, 6). The features of somebody's face can be described, but it can be recognized with difficulty. The same is true about somebody's voice. If you heard it, you can recognize it. No description would guarantee that you can recognize it without hearing it. This knowledge that doesn't use words is called the tacit knowledge.

There is also an experiential knowledge that is neither explicit nor tacit. Some people restrict the term experience to what the Germans would call *Erlebnis* (Kim 2005, 47), a restriction of it to the five senses (Gelpi 1994,

2). I am referring now to more than that, the *Erfahrung* kind of experience, accumulated in time and connected to society as a collective memory (Benz 2020, 10). Knowing somebody's love needs more than words, and is not tacit, because it is easily recognized by third parties when authentic. True wisdom, or, on the contrary, folly, have similar features. Wisdom needs more than words to develop, and it is easily noticeable for those who are not simple-minded. But only the experience of the good is profitable and safe. The experience of the dark side, or its' shades of gray, could expose the person to risks. The persistence in the shades of gray is still between dangerous limits, as it can feed the negative affections manifesting themselves as stressful agents, and develop them. For example, it is a general knowledge that stresses of different kinds affect the good functioning of the body. If, for instance, the body doesn't get enough water, it produces a hormone called cortisol, whose role is to keep all the remaining water in the body. Its' side effect is that it also produces insulin resistance, which results in high concentrations of glucose in the blood. That is the first step towards diabetes.

Negative affections, or those from the shades of gray, are obviously agents of stress for the body. They not just affect the mental well-being of a person, but the physical one as well. This last one than affects the comfort zone of the person. They also inter-relate with each other, the physical and the mental, becoming detrimental for the good development of one's personality. This was well known since the Roman times: "*Satietas parit ferocitatem*", fullness breeds fierceness.

Self-indulgence (a euphemism of self-love) of all sorts is detrimental to physical and mental health, and it is heavily fed by today's consumerism. It has been noticed by the same Romans that "*Licetis perimus omnes*", that is, we all perish by lawful things. Gluttony is manifest in the ever-rising number of obese people. It is distasteful to some, and not noticeable for many. In the sexual dimension, the correspondent lack of balance could be pointed not in the continuous involvement in illegitimate sexual acts, but in the continuous indulgence in innocent "window-shopping", which ultimately will manifest in an unfaithful outcome of some sort. This was noticed by the ancient Greeks, who symbolized the excess of self-love by Narcissus, who entered in a state of narcosis (from *Narcissus*) which ultimately led to his death. It is this state of narcosis that is obviously dangerous for the ever-indulging postmodern

human. Healthy, logical thinking is replaced by information far from being relevant, as long as it serves the self-indulgence. And self-indulgence of any sort is viewed as foolishness and lack of wisdom, because they affect the health of the body and of society.

Indeed, it is the lack of unity and agreement between persons that seems to be the reason for the negative shift in knowledge and wisdom. History has proved that the greatness of a nation lasts as long as its unity is preserved. The Early Jewish literature and wisdom tradition, by ascribing an ethical dimension to wisdom, have noticed this relationship between the disappearance of wisdom and the problem of division. As Williams Drake stated regarding the way this kind of literature deals with the absence of human wisdom, “the outbreak of strife and division is also found in conjunction with this judgment.” (Williams 2001, 92). Williams is founding his opinion on apocryphal books such as II Baruch, IV Ezra, I Enoch, III Maccabees (Williams 2001, 73). For instance, IV Ezra 5:9-13, concerning the end of times, reads: “Salt waters shall be found in the sweet, *and all friends shall conquer one another; than shall reason hide itself, and wisdom shall withdraw into its chamber, and it shall be sought by many but shall not be found, and unrighteousness and unrestraint shall increase on earth [...] you shall hear yet greater things than these.*”

Another apocryphal book, I Enoch, speaks about the loss of wisdom as an effect of an act of judgment (Williams 2001, 66). If humans are found unworthy, it is still because of their hypocritical nature which deserves condemnation: “After that in the sixth week those who happen to be in it shall all of them be blindfolded, and the hearts of them shall forget wisdom” (I Enoch 93:8a).

Division and strife happen in places where there is no genuine love. Love is, obviously, the fundamental affect that guarantees the attainment of true knowledge which leads to genuine wisdom. Love manifests itself mainly by self sacrifice. It is putting the other’s interest before your own. But not just that. It also means building and maintaining a solid foundation of moral principles that were handed down by the former generations. We have to be honest, and acknowledge that to love is not easy, and it challenges in many ways. Some have spouses with medical conditions, or whose mental health is deteriorating. Others have natural affections that make them difficult to

live with. We succeed in love only if we are determined to make them happy despite the hardships we endure.

Genuine love is in no way an instant feeling, but an affect – as I stated above - that is built with lots of perseverance, and tested over and over again. It is the love that ultimately stands the test of time and life itself. Time seems to have an important role in the equation of affections, love, strife and wisdom. If the need for unity and love is neglected, and the time resources decrease at the expense of wisdom, there are small chances to still have enough clarity of mind and recover the loss of wisdom.

Conclusions

In James K. A. Smith's words, "theater is but another lure away from Being toward nothingness" (Coulter 2016, 45). This happens on a wide scale through our exposure to art, and the interaction of our affections with it. We have seen that the cultivation of the affections is what makes or breaks life. The cultivation of the positive affections, such as love or piety has a good effect on the relationships, while the negative affections, such as anger, are obviously damaging them.

There are affections that have a great influence on human personality, despite the fact that they are acknowledged as so. The appetite for good food can be as dangerous as the sexual appetite. And the sexual "window shopping", in the media or in real-life, as harmless as could seem, arousing the wrong passions, will become a habit that on the long term can harm relationships. Self-indulgence towards apparently small pleasures can lead to destruction, as the Latins observed thousands of years ago. There is a strong relationship between time, love, and wisdom (or the lack of it). Where hypocritical love endures, dissensions endure also. Dissension is causing the loss of wisdom. Ultimately, lack of love is producing folly.

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