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DIDEROT'S ANSWER TO THE PROBLEM OF PERCEPTION IN THE 18TH CENTURY AESTHETICS[1]

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ABSTRACT

The 18th century witnessed the transformation of aesthetics into an independent philosophical discipline. In this period, two main traditions emerged, based on which we can categorize aesthetic theorists. The first of these is classical or rationalist aesthetics, and the other is empiricist or subjective aesthetics. Because classical/rational aesthetic theories were largely based on Cartesian metaphysics, they also inherited the difficulties faced by Cartesian metaphysics. For Descartes, sense-perception is not a reliable mode of cognition and truth only comes out of the ideas of pure understanding. Where Descartes' philosophy came to a dead end was that it could not convincingly explain how the concepts in our minds represent reality that is independent of us. This problem also manifested itself in the rationalist aesthetics. Similarly, the empiricist theory inherited the weaknesses of the empiricist epistemology. The main problem of empiricism was to overcome subjectivism and reach universal principles that make sense of the world surrounding us. To overcome the relativism of the empiricist epistemology, empiricist theoreticians claimed that there is an intuition, a common feeling shared by all human beings. However, this common feeling could not be proven empirically. Diderot created a new aesthetic theory that aimed to reconcile rationalist and empiricist aesthetics by redefining the term perception. This article discusses Diderot's innovative effort to create a new aesthetics free from the limits of rationalism and empiricism.

Keywords: Aesthetics, Diderot, 18th Century Aesthetics, rationalism, empiricism.

[1] Bu makale yazarın yürüttüğü doktora çalışmasından türetilmiştir.

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18. YÜZYIL ESTETİĞİNDE ALGI SORUNUNA DİDEROT'NUN CEVABI

ÖZET

18. yüzyıl estetiğin bağımsız bir felsefi disipline dönüşmesine tanık oldu. Bu dönemde estetik kuramcılarını kategorize edebileceğimiz iki ana gelenek ortaya çıktı. Bunlardan ilki klasik veya rasyonalist estetik, diğeri ise empirist veya öznel estetiktir. Klasik/rasyonel estetik teorileri büyük ölçüde Kartezyen metafiziğe dayandıkları için Kartezyen metafiziğin karşılaştığı zorlukları da miras aldılar. Descartes'a göre duyulardan gelen bilgi güvenilir bir bilgi tarzı değildir ve hakikat yalnızca saf anlama yetisinin idelerinden ortaya çıkar. Descartes'ın felsefesinin çıkmaza girdiği yer, zihnimizdeki kavramların bizden bağımsız olan gerçekliği nasıl temsil ettiğini ikna edici bir biçimde açıklayamamasıydı. Bu sorun rasyonalist estetikte de kendini gösterdi. Benzer şekilde empirist teori, empirist epistemolojinin zayıflıklarını miras aldı. Deneyciliğin temel sorunu öznelciliği aşmak ve bizi çevreleyen dünyayı anlamlandıran evrensel ilkelere ulaşmaktı. Kuramcılar, estetikte empirist epistemolojinin göreceliğini aşmak için, tüm insanların paylaştığı bir sezginin, ortak bir duygunun var olduğunu iddia ettiler. Ancak bu ortak duygu empirik olarak kanıtlanabilir değildi. Diderot, algı terimini yeniden tanımlayarak rasyonalist ve empirist estetiği uzlaştırmayı amaçlayan yeni bir estetik teori kurdu. Bu makale Diderot'nun rasyonalizm ve empirizmin sınırlarının ötesine geçmeyi amaçlayan bir estetik kuram yaratma çabasını tartışıyor.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Estetik, Diderot, 18. Yüzyıl Estetiği, rasyonalizm, empirizm.

1. INTRODUCTION

The term “aesthetics” was coined by Alexander Baumgarten in his doctoral dissertation *Reflections on Poetry* [lat. Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus] in 1735 (Baumgarten, 1954, p. 96). Later in his *Aesthetica* (1750), he defined aesthetics as the science of sensory knowledge and attempted to create a systematic framework for understanding beauty, art, and aesthetic experience. However, way before Baumgarten borrowed the Greek word *aisthēsis* (sensory perception) to define the realm of concrete knowledge, and attempted to found aesthetics as a sub-field of epistemology, philosophical inquiries on aesthetics had already started in the late 17th century and continued through the 18th century under the rubric of “critique of taste”. Questions regarding the nature of beauty, where it lies, whether it has a certain set of rules, whether it has a moral side or it is merely a sensation accompanied by pleasure were asked by many theoreticians. This was a result of a new way of understanding and appreciating art. From Ancient Greece to the Roman Empire, from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, art enchanted its audience and caused reverence. Artworks that embellished the walls of sacred places and adorned cities conveyed moral, political and most importantly religious values to people who walked and lived among them. Starting with the late 17th century, the power that the aesthetic object holds became merely one of the aspects of the aesthetic experience. Instead of making its spectator feel insignificant and causing the feeling of humility, art started to stir the imaginations of people who interacted with it. Thinkers from

different countries and different philosophical traditions redefined art and brought all its aspects under scrutiny. A century later, Hegel pointed out this shift in how intellectuals thought about art:

> We are beyond the stage of reverence for works of art as objects deserving of our worship. The impression that they produce is one of a more reflective kind, and the emotions they arouse require a higher test and further verification. Thought and reflection have taken their flight above the fine arts (Hegel, 1920, p.12).

France was where the main problems of aesthetics were defined and elaborated on in great detail in the late 17th century. First, theorists of arts such as André Félibien (1619-1695), Charles Le Brun (1619-1690), Dominique Bouhours (1628-1702), René Le Bossu (1631-80), and Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux (1636-1711) created a framework to discover the nature of beauty and arts. Shortly after, in the first quarter of the 18th century, numerous British and German philosophers participated in the discussion. What was the change that prompted 18th-century theoreticians to write volume after volume about beauty, its principles and its nature? What caused the proliferation of theories and the birth of the genre of art criticism? What sparked the interest of all these philosophers to write on aesthetics in an unprecedented way?

Up until the 18th century, aesthetics was considered the field of subjectivity and relativism because it was concerned with the nature of beauty and art, which are founded on sensory experience. Whereas philosophy had been considered as the spokesperson of truth and universality. Since its birth in Ancient Greece, philosophy has been mainly interested in objectivity. The world in which we live is already chaotic and ever-changing. It is the realm of becoming. Starting with the first philosophers, philosophy's ultimate goal was to go beyond the world understood by the senses and reach the immutable nature of things. As philosophy developed, and directed its attention on the realm of values, philosophers sought to stabilize values in ethics and politics. This was only possible if there were ideas independent of our imagination. The philosopher's duty was to be in pursuit of these ideas and to go beyond the sensible world. As Plato stated in "The Analogy of the Divided Line" in Republic, the sensible world would only be understood by the sensory knowledge and knowledge acquired by sense was just a representation or the shadow of true knowledge (Plato, 509D-511E). For Plato, art belonged to the realm of sensory knowledge and therefore it had no relation to true knowledge.

For centuries, as a result of the emphasis put on certainty and truth since the beginning of philosophy, any human activity that relied on senses such as art was not considered sufficiently philosophical. After Plato, Aristotle[2], Augustine[3] and a few others wrote about beauty, we had to wait

[2] Aristotle, *Poetics*.
[3] Augustine, *Epistles*, 18.

until the late 18th century to see aesthetics considered an independent field of philosophy. In this period, philosophers still continued their quest for certainty and truth wherever they thought they could uncover it. However, the main task of philosophy became understanding human nature and experience with all its aspects, prompting thorough inquiries on the sensory, emotional and aesthetic dimensions of human nature. Thus beauty, which is one of the central concepts of human existence, was elevated to a status worthy of philosophical inquiry. Crousaz in the first paragraph of his *Traité du Beau* (1714), explains why he thinks beauty is a subject worth serious philosophical treatment:

> Undoubtedly, few terms are used more frequently by people than the term "Beauty"; but none of these are so vague as to their meaning, or so obscure as to their idea. We always pronounce it, yet we do not agree on the meaning we should give it (Crousaz, 1714, p. 1).

This justification that Crouzas put forth as to why philosophers should be interested in aesthetics was influential during the 18th century and was later used by Scottish philosophers Thomas Reid[4] and David Hume[5] as well as French philosopher Yves-Marie André.

1. Rationalist or Objective Aesthetics

Under the rule of Louis XIV, through a royal decree or by royal patronage, the institutions known as "Royal Academies" [fr. Académies Royales] were established to promote arts and sciences.[6] King Louis XIV played a key role in the creation of several of these institutions. His main goal was to enhance the prestige and influence of French culture. The following decades witnessed a vibrant confluence of artistic movements, followed by philosophical theories on art. Theoreticians of these theories were artists or important people who decided on the criteria for accepting artwork or artists into these academies. For example, André Félibien was the official court historian to Louis XIV and a chronicler of the arts. He was also the secretary to the Royal Academy of

[4]Thomas Reid in his *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, repeats the same thought: "Beauty is found in things so various, and so very different in nature, that it is difficult to say wherein it consists, and what there can be common to all the objects in which it is found" (Reid: 1988, p. 608).

[5]Four decades after Crousaz published his book, Hume begins his essay "Of the Standard of Taste" in the same manner: "As this variety of taste is obvious to the most careless enquirer; so will it be found, on examination, to be still greater in reality than in appearance. The sentiments of men often differ with regard to beauty and deformity of all kinds, even while their general discourse is the same."

[6]The Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture [fr. L'Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture] was founded in 1648 in Paris, France. The Royal Academy of Dance [fr. L' Académie royale de danse] was founded in 1661 in Paris, France.
The Royal Academy of Music [fr. L'Académie royale de musique] was founded in 1669 in Paris, France.

Architecture. Charles Le Brun was a painter and he served as the court painter to Louis XIV. Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux was a poet. What was common among these men was that they all based their theories on the principles of Cartesian metaphysics. They attempted to create a theory that would help them compare artworks and artists objectively. As David Funt states in his book on enlightenment aesthetics, "they had made the last noble effort to stabilize the realm of aesthetics values" and they thought that they found the unshakable rules and maxims to judge artistic creation (Funt, 1968, p. 16). If there were no fixed principles independent of the human mind, there would be no way of judging arts and taste. For example, for Boileau, an artist doesn't invent new ways of creating something beautiful. Beauty is not a creation of the imagination of the artist. The principles of beauty are derived from the reason itself and they correspond perfectly to the nature of beautiful things. A real artist does not invent but discovers the unchanging rules of artistic creation. The beautiful and the true have the same source. For this reason, the artist should love reason:

> Love Reason then: and let whatever you write
> Borrow from her its beauty, Force, and Light
>
> (Boileau, 1710, canto I, verse 36-37).

Then, what does it mean that an artist should love reason? To understand this, we must turn to Descartes and follow his process of reaching clear and distinct ideas. Descartes in his *Meditations*, to reach the truth of being, starts questioning every idea he has regarding himself, nature and even God. First, he rejects any idea acquired through senses, since senses are often inaccurate. Then he rejects mathematical truths on the assumption that an evil demon might be tampering with his ability to follow a mathematical proof (Descartes, 1996, p. 15). This would mislead him to an incorrect conclusion. In the end, the only thing that he cannot reject is himself thinking about the truth. It is absurd to claim that "I can think but I might not exist". Without the existence of the thinking being, there is no thinking. Thus he reaches his conclusion: "I think, therefore I am". For Descartes, this statement was self-evident and consisted in clear and distinct ideas.

Rationalist theoreticians followed the same method in aesthetics. Descartes, in his metaphysics, removed all the accidental qualities of reality to reach the essence of being. Like Descartes, a true artist would go beyond the qualities understood by senses, and reach the essence of beauty. What an artist should imitate is not the nature he sees, hears, breathes in, and touches. It is the essence of nature he must imitate. So, what is the essence of nature for an artist? In *Principles of Philosophy*, Descartes explains that we understand size and figure, differently than colour, odour, or flavour:

> For when we observe somebody, although we are as certain that it exists insofar as it appears to have color as we are insofar as it appears to have figure; yet we know much more

> clearly what it is for that body to have figure than what it is for it to have colour. (Descartes, 1982, p. 70).

Applying this passage to aesthetics, academic painters prioritized drawing over colouring (Funt, 1968, p. 24). This is just one example of how 17th-century thinkers and artists applied cartesian principles in their works. For Descartes, the proper way of reaching truth was deduction from clear and distinct ideas. Félibien, Le Brun, and Boileau attempted to determine certain rules such as clarity, unit, and symmetry. In his Traité du Beau (1715), J. P. Crousaz reiterated the same principles:

> Variety tempered by uniformity, regularity, order, and proportion certainly do not make chimeras; they are not from the realm of fantasy, it is not caprice that decides them. We have therefore just established real characteristics of Beauty, characteristics based in nature, and in truth. (Crousaz. 1724, p. 16).

Crousaz also claimed that essential beauty lay in regularity, proportion and symmetry. This was a common thread among the rationalist theoreticians. For them, nature had two layers. The first layer is about the fleeting and accidental qualities. But behind those qualities, there is the essence which is unchanging and fixed. It is the same for beautiful things. What makes them beautiful is their essential properties like their figure which is symmetrical, regular and proportion. However, just like Cartesian philosophy, rationalist aesthetics did not remain unopposed. All the criticisms of Cartesian philosophy were also valid for rationalist aesthetics. The biggest and the most influential challenge to Descartes' philosophy was John Locke's empiricism and the emerging opposition rested their theories on Locke's empiricist principles. They rejected the idea of theory innate ideas, the ideas Descartes described as clear, distinct, and self-evident. In this approach "Thus taste is no longer classified with the logical processes of inference and conclusion but placed on a par with the immediacy of the pure acts of perception—with seeing and hearing, tasting and smelling" (Cassirer, 1951, p. 304). For empiricists, perception was more or less the same as sensation. Sensation was the only source of knowledge and the "ideas of pure understanding" and "the knowledge of essence" were just speculations. This was the first challenge against Descartes' rationalism. While the empiricist theories of aesthetics were multiplying and gaining recognition, fewer theoreticians who followed Boileau, Le Brun and Crousaz published their theories. A Jesuit mathematician and philosopher, Yves Marie André, also known as Père André, was one of the few rationalists in the 18th century. In this Essay on Beauty, André brought Cartesian metaphysics and Christian theology together. For André, Essential Beauty existed independent of all institutions, even divine:

> Is it possible that there have been men, and even philosophers, who have doubted for a moment that there is an essential beauty, independent of any institution, that is the eternal rule

> of the visible beauty of bodies? Would not the slightest attention to our primitive ideas have to convince them that regularity, order, proportion, and symmetry are essentially preferable to irregularity, disorder, and disproportion? (André. 2010, p. 3).

André also claimed that Natural Beauty is dependent on God, because, without the guarantee of God, there is no way to verify if our ideas about the objective reality correspond to the true nature of things: "I say, secondly, that there is a natural beauty, dependent on the will of the Creator, but independent of our opinions and tastes" (André. 2010, p. 5). This problem was the most important problem that Descartes needed to solve. How could we be certain that our innate ideas represented the objective reality, that we perceive through our senses, that surrounds us? Descartes had solved the same problem by asserting that God is good and he would not deceive us. In Descartes' system, God guarantees that our ideas are true to the reality independent of us. Thus in Cartesian epistemology and ontology are woven into theology. André extended this way of thinking to aesthetics. This constituted the weakest point in rationalist aesthetics, as well as Cartesian metaphysics. One needs to have faith in God to be certain that his ideas and the reality independent of him are connected. Otherwise, even our clearest and the most distinct ideas might be the figment of our imagination.

Diagnosing this flaw in Cartesian philosophy, a new school of thought known as empiricism emerged and rejected the theory of clear and distinct ideas and prioritized sensation. Building on Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689), empiricist theoreticians of aesthetics tried to overcome the difficulties that rationalist aesthetics inherited from Cartesian philosophy.

2. Empiricist or Subjective Aesthetics

Hume summarizes perfectly the aesthetic point of view based on empiricism:

> "...a thousand different sentiments, excited by the same object, are all right: Because no sentiment represents what is really in the object. It only marks a certain conformity or relation between the object and the organs or faculties of the mind; and if that conformity did not really exist, the sentiment could never possibly have being. Beauty is no quality in things themselves: It exists merely in the mind which contemplates them, and each mind perceives a different beauty. One person may even perceive deformity, where another is sensible of beauty; and every individual ought to acquiesce in his own sentiment, without pretending to regulate those of others. To seek in the real beauty, or real deformity, is as fruitless an enquiry, as to pretend to ascertain the real sweet or real bitter (Hume, 1989, p. 230).

For Hume, the sentiments we get from an artwork are real and they do not need extra proof because we immediately confirm their existence when we have them. Whereas "all determinations of the understanding are not right; because they have a reference to something beyond themselves, to wit, real matter of fact" (Hume, 1989, p. 230). Here, we see the empiricist theory of sensations. Empiricists such as Locke, Condillac, and Hume considered sensations as the most primitive and immediate fact of human nature. The immediacy of sensations requires no proof. There is no need for a divine guarantee. Hence, the difficulty the Cartesians faced was overcome. Their way of understanding the world was upside down. In order to explain experience, rationalists resorted to innate ideas. This was the only way to establish certainty, in reality, independent of us. However, in reality, it was the opposite. All ideas come from experience, not the other way around. Resting their aesthetic theories on these premises, empiricists such as Du Bos, Hutcheson and Hume claimed that not reason, but sensation judges beauty. This way, the ontology of aesthetic experience changed. For rationalists reason, through a logical inquiry, was capable of judging beauty. For empiricists, it is our emotions that decide if an artwork is beautiful or not. For rationalists, beauty was independent of our understanding and existed in an object that is beautiful by nature. In short, for them, beauty is in the object. For empiricists, beauty is not in the object but in our sensations. We do not find something beautiful because it is, but rather because human nature finds it beautiful. As a result, the source of beauty is human nature, in particular emotions within us.

Du Bos, whose Critical Reflections on Poetry and Painting "was in the library of every educated European for over half a century", and most probably in Hume's library, gave one of the first accounts of empiricist aesthetics (Cameron & Young, 2021, p.1).[7] Du Bos emphasized the active participation of the subject with his interaction with the object in the aesthetic experience, and claimed that this interaction results in a feeling in the subject:

> I aim to give everyone an account of his likes and dislikes; I aim to instruct others about the nature of the sentiments arising in them. Thus I cannot hope to be believed if I cannot in my book manage to make the reader recognize what happens inside him: in short, the most intimate movements of his heart. One scarcely hesitates to reject as distorting the

[7] Du Bos was friends with Pierre Bayle and John Locke, two prominent intellectuals of the 17th century. "After spending time together in London, Du Bos and Locke maintained a regular, even affectionate, correspondence. Du Bos played a fairly substantial role in the popularization of the French translation of Locke's Essay Concerning Human Understanding, prepared by Pierre Coste (1668–1747). Du Bos had been sent to London to meet Locke at the request of their mutual friend, Toinard, who was eager to get Locke's advice about the French translation of Toinard's own Latin translation of Locke's Essay" (Cameron & Young, 2021, p.6).

> mirror in which one does not recognize oneself (Du Bos, 2021, p. 95).

Here, what Du Bos means by the term "sentiment" is a feeling or an opinion that is based on a feeling. It is this sentiment, "the most intimate movements of heart" that decides if a work of art is beautiful. For this reason, Du Bos is the first to establish introspection as the specific principle of aesthetics and to defend it against all other merely logical methods as the real source of all sound knowledge (Cassirer, 1955, p.303). Du Bos asks a simple question: How do we judge a work of art? What is the process of judging beauty? We look at a work of art or we read or listen to poetry. And then what happens? We feel something. We don't contemplate the supreme beauty, then think of its principles, and finally try to understand the work of art with which we are interacting follows these principles. "The main attraction of poetry and painting, the power that they have to move and please us, comes from the imitations that they can make of objects that can engage us" (Dubos, 2021, p. 141). We feel its beauty. If a work of art affects us, it is beautiful. If not, it is not.

Empiricist theoreticians overcame the problem of "the divine Grantor" by simply following the process of what happens when someone engages with a work of art. However, another problem emerged when the aesthetic judgement is based on sentiments. If beauty is not a quality in things, and rather it exists merely in the mind that perceives it as Hume says, and if a work of art is beautiful if it touches our heart as Du Bos claims, can we have any rule, any principle or any measure to compare two works of art? Does not art become the realm of subjectivism and pure relativism? Neither Du Bos nor Hume accept this conclusion and claim that a truly beautiful work of art moves everybody if they know how to appreciate art. For Hume, when we compare works of art to works of philosophy, we see that the realm of philosophy is more subjective. Whereas in art, great works are always appreciated and loved by almost everybody:

> Theories of abstract philosophy, systems of profound theology, have prevailed during one age: In a successive period, these have been universally exploded: Their absurdity has been detected: Other theories and systems have supplied their place, which again gave place to their successors: And nothing has been experienced more liable to the revolutions of chance and fashion than these pretended decisions of science. The case is not the same with the beauties of eloquence and poetry. Just expressions of passion and nature are sure, after a little time, to gain public applause, which they maintain forever. ARISTOTLE, and PLATO, and EPICURUS, and DESCARTES, may successively yield to each other: But TERENCE and VIRGIL maintain a universal, undisputed empire over the minds of men. The abstract

> philosophy of CICERO has lost its credit: The vehemence of his oratory is still the object of our admiration (Hume, 1989 p. 243).

As Hume claims, great artists are respected by people who are interested in art. When we look at a painting done by an artist, we understand that it is a work of art, and when we look at a drawing done by someone who has never drawn anything, we do not consider it as art. Similarly, when someone who is a beginner starts playing the piano, we do not call him a great artist. Hume and Du Bos claim that all human beings, since they share the same nature, share an internal sense that differentiates beauty from other things. Thus they aim to overcome the threat of complete subjectivism. This is because "people of all times and all countries have similar hearts" (Du Bos, 2021, p. 598). That is why depictions of love in the writings of the ancients touch all nations and all ages even though they are very different (Du Bos, 2021, p. 168). Here it appears that empiricist philosophers find a solution that goes against the principles of empiricism. In order to avoid complete subjectivism, they appeal to an innate capacity shared by "all people" that can find beauty in works of art "in all times". Let's not forget that Du Bos says "People of all times and all countries have similar hearts", not the same heart. For him, this capacity does not exist fully developed in human nature. It needs to be cultivated. Otherwise, people might make incorrect claims that show their ignorance:

> "Whoever would assert an equality of genius and elegance between GILBY and MILTON, or BUNYAN and ADDISON, would be thought to defend no less an extravagance, than if he had maintained a mole-hill to be as high as TENERIFFE, or a pond as extensive as the ocean (Hume, 1989, pp. 283-284).

A similar assertion was made by another empiricist Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746) in his *Inquiry*:

> There seems to be no necessary Connection of our pleasing Ideas of Beauty with the Uniformity or Regularity of the Objects, from the Nature of things, antecedent to some Constitution of the Author of our Nature, which has made such Forms pleasant to us. (...) That the Constitution of our Sense so as to approve Uniformity is merely arbitrary in the Author of our Nature (Hutcheson, 2004, p. 74).

Here, like Descartes, Hutcheson suggested that the creator of nature designed us in a way that we would enjoy uniformity and regularity. In other words, we find works of art beautiful because God created us with an internal sense that appreciates certain qualities.

The internal sense, or what Diderot later referred to as "the sixth sense", was an innate capacity that the empiricist invented to overcome pure subjectivism. Without the sixth sense, it was impossible to put forth universal

aesthetic claims. Empiricists who adamantly criticised rationalists because of their claim regarding God guaranteeing the universality of our aesthetic judgements had to appeal to an innate sense that could not be proven empirically. Just like rationalist aesthetics, empiricist aesthetics found itself in a predicament.

3. Diderot and the Problem of Perception

A materialist and a good student of empiricist philosophy, Diderot rejected the Cartesian philosophy. The intuition that empiricists invented to overcome relativism was a lazy solution. For Diderot, Hutcheson "has done less to prove *the reality of his sixth sense*, than to make us feel the difficulty of developing the source of the pleasure that beauty gives us without its aid." (Diderot, 1963, p 69). Diderot knew that the idea of a "sixth sense" was a dead end, as it was not compatible with the empiricist epistemology. Empiricists claim that all knowledge is derived from the senses, yet this innate sense cannot be shown through our senses. For this reason, Du Bos, Hume and Hutcheson do not try to prove the existence of it directly. Instead, they claim that some artists and their masterpieces are loved by everybody, and present this as proof of the innate sense. Diderot took notice of this inconsistency, and to understand where the problem lay, went back to the beginning and analysed how art functioned.

For Diderot, the main problem in empiricist theory is that sensation and perception are commonly used interchangeably. However, even though perception includes sensation, these two terms possess notable distinctions. Sensation is obtaining physical data through the senses. We look at an object and see its figure, shape and colour. For example, when we look at a painting, we see its size, the colour used, and the objects in it. All these elements that consist of the painting fall upon our retina. Perception starts after sensation. All the different objects, colours and how they are used come together and create a story. We interpret the painting. We try to understand it. This process is a conscious state, not a mere sensation. At the end of this process, we perceive the painting. It is not a mixture of colours anymore. It tells us something. This is perception. The painting presents itself to us, and while perceiving it we add something to it from us.

> It is necessary thus to agree that we ought to perceive in objects an infinity of things that neither the infant nor the man born blind perceives in them at all, although they are equally painted on the ground of his eyes; that it is not enough that objects strike us, that it is necessary besides that we be attentive to their impressions; that, consequently, one sees nothing the first time he uses his eyes; that one experiences, in the first instants of vision, only a multitude of confused sensations which untangle themselves only with time and by habitual reflection on what passes in us (Diderot, 1875a, p. 319).

Sensation, as empiricists claim, is the initial process of receiving physical information through the senses. Perception, on the other hand, involves interpreting and understanding information obtained by the senses. Perception involves not only seeing the material side of the artwork but also understanding the meaning that the artwork conveys. Perception goes beyond mere sensation as it involves cognitive processes and conscious interpretation. As a result, perception is subjective and created by the subject's background. The cultural and educational background of the individual, his past experiences, and his beliefs play a key role in how he perceives the artwork. Diderot, in his article *Beau in the Encyclopédie*, cites D'alambert and stresses the importance of the spectator's participation in the aesthetic experience:

> Mr. d'Alembert said in the Preliminary Discourse of the Encyclopédie, a speech which deserves to be cited in this article, that after having made an art of learning music, one should make one of listening to it: and I add that after having made the art of poetry and painting, it is in vain that we have made the art of reading and seeing. (Diderot, 1876a, p. 36).

Here, Diderot underlines the connection between perception and language. We understand our surroundings and interpret our experiences through language. In addition to the language we communicate in daily life, we created more systems of signs: "We have instituted signs for the eyes, the letters; for the ears, articulate sound…" (Diderot, 1875, p. 294). Our understanding is constantly modified by signs. Each sense has its unique system of signs. "It is by means of these systems of signs that sensation is organized and becomes available as usable experience" (Funt, 1958, p.38). Without a language, the world is a realm of disorganized, disconnected multiplicity. To satisfy our needs, and understand ourselves and others, and the world in which we live, we make categorisations. In this way, we can organize and systematize a great amount of experience. We create systems. This is how we turn random data into knowledge and bring sensation to consciousness.

For Diderot, systems we create by utilizing specialized languages are not fixed and final. "Have a system, I agree to it; but do not let yourself be dominated by it (Diderot, 1875b, p. 23)." Even if we have the most advanced system, at any moment we might realize that we left out something important that would change our conclusion. This is because systems consist of perceptions, and perceptions ultimately rest on past experiences. We focus on something and turn "a multitude of confused sensations" into a meaningful one: "Perception is clarified by past experience, the series of experiences confirming the present perception (Diderot, 1875a, p. 328)."

Now, when we apply Diderot's theory of perception to judging art, we understand what empiricist philosophers meant by "the internal sense". Based on our past experiences, humans are inclined to find certain works of art beautiful. Most of the time, our judgements are already conditioned by our past experiences. When we judge something or someone, we use a set of

principles we acquired organically just by living in a society over the years. These principles are so ingrained in us that they manifest themselves as sentiments or feelings:

> I venture to assert that whenever a principle is known to us from the earliest childhood, we make an easy and sudden application of it by habit to objects placed outside us, we will believe that we judge it by feeling; but we will be forced to admit our error on all occasions where the complication of the relationships and the novelty of the object suspend the application of the principle (Diderot, 1876a, p. 27).

For Diderot, "the internal sense" or "the sixth sense" is nothing but a conditioned intuition. When a person finds an artwork beautiful as soon as he sees it, it means that the style of that painting is familiar to that person's understanding of beauty, which is a product of his past experiences. Diderot claims that if the same person encounters a work of art that bears no similarity to any work of art he has seen before, he feels confused. This is because he had no reference point to judge this new object he encountered for the first time (Diderot, 1876, p. 27). Let us illustrate this with an example and think of a scenario. A person who only listened to German folk music now listens to Irish folk music for the first time and finds it beautiful. Then he listens to Turkish folk music and does not like it. In both cases, his judgement rested on a feeling, an intuition. For Diderot, this is because both Irish and German folk music are in the Western music theory that consists of twelve pitches. Whereas Turkish folk music has a completely different musical system. Therefore it is strange to him. In this situation, this person's judgement is not a result of some internal sense as they say. Similarly, it is not because Turkish folk music is inherently bad. It is because his judgement is conditioned by his past experiences.

This brings us to two forms of judging. When the experiences that created the principles from which one judges an artwork are not present to the consciousness, we call it a judgement of instinct. When one knows that the principles he uses while judging are the result of his past experiences, even if those experiences are not present, it is called a judgement of enlightened taste (Diderot, 1876b, p.76). Here, Diderot warns us about our unconscious tendencies and biases. Our mind creates a framework that sets the limits of our judgement, even our perceptions. But this framework is not fixed like Kant's categories. It is based on the context in which we grow up. The specifics of one's mental schema completely rest on his individual experience. The only thing that is innate is the mind's ability to create a schema, a framework to turn sensations into perceptions and perceptions into complex judgements.

Diderot convincingly shows us that intuition is not an innate sense by making a distinction between sensation and perception. However, we are still burdened by the problem of pure subjectivism in aesthetics. Every person has

unique personal experiences that lead them to their judgements. This means that people of similar experiences will make similar judgements and vice versa. Is there any way to make universal claims in the realms of aesthetics while accepting that conditioned perception is subjective? To answer this question we need to draw our attention to Diderot's explanation towards the origin of our ideas. For Diderot, our ideas are not innate as Cartesian philosophers claim. Diderot asserts that our ideas are based on our experience. For example, the notion of beauty, symmetry and proportion are" experiential like all others; they have also come to us by senses; and if there were no God, we would have them nonetheless. (Diderot, 1876a, p. 25)." We acquire the notion of proportion and symmetry or any other, in experience. Then we interpret reality through these notions. For this reason, whether these notions are accurate and correct or not, depends on their usefulness in practice. "Utility circumscribes everything (Diderot, 1875a, 25)". Here, Diderot presents an initial illustration of pragmatism before the prominent pragmatists such as William James and John Dewey. Our judgements consist of ideas that come from experiences, not from pure understanding. As long as these judgements are consistent with our expectations and future experiences, they are accurate:

> As long as things are only in our understanding, they are our opinions; they are notions, which can be true or false, granted or contradicted. They only take on consistency by linking themselves to external beings. This connection is made either by an uninterrupted chain of experiences, or by an uninterrupted chain of reasoning, which relates at one end to observation, and at the other to experience; (Diderot, 1875b, p. 13).

3. CONCLUSION

We can conclude that for Diderot, aesthetic judgment is neither sensation nor a logical deduction from pure understanding. All our ideas come from experience, and the judgments we make now are shaped by our past experiences. There are no definitive and fixed rules that every single artist should follow. Our perspective gets enriched by having diverse aesthetic experiences and knowing that our taste is already conditioned. This allows us to be open to works of art that are not familiar with what we already know. Our aesthetic judgments constantly evolve as long as we have new aesthetic experiences. Only by understanding this process can we make judgments of enlightened taste.

Diderot recognized the fluid and changing nature of aesthetics. These qualities made it impossible establish fixed rules and principles for artists. As a result of that, Diderot never attempted to formulate a series of defined principles regarding beauty. He said:

> "I must be expected to seek the truth, but not to find it. Can't a sophism affect me more keenly than solid proof? I am obliged to consent to the falsehood which I take for the truth, and to reject the truth which I take to be the falsehood: but what have I to fear, if it is innocently that I am mistaken? (Diderot, 1875a, p. 140)"

His aesthetic approach was based on two key concepts: "unity" and "dynamism", which are derived from nature itself. For him, art is a product of human beings, and human beings are a product of nature. They are organically related and form a unity. Human beings interact with nature through different senses, and each of these senses has its own unique language. However, there is an underlying unity of sensation that allows art to synthesize a whole. Great artists are the ones who can convey this unity through their art. An artist is a master of utilizing a specific language (the language of poetry, the language of sight or touch, etc.) to bring together diverse experiences and make them understandable and accessible to others.

Diderot's approach was a departure from prevailing philosophical theories of his time. He rejected the abstract principles of Cartesian aesthetics as well as the mechanical theory of sensation of empiricists. Taking the interconnectedness of human beings and nature as the starting point for his theory, he emphasized the organic relationship between art and the world around us.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding this research.

ETHICS COMMITTEE APPROVAL / PARTICIPANT CONSENT

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