

him to have a clearly defined aim for his investigation. And his lack of discernment among the various types of argumentation, as well as of the rules of dialectics, prevents him from making his investigation in an intelligible order.

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***Painting and Reality.* By Etienne Gilson. New York: Pantheon Books, Inc., 1957. Pp. xxiv + 367, with index. \$7.50.**

The procedure followed by Gilson in this series of lectures is characterized by him in the Preface as "not a philosophical approach to painting, but, rather a pictorial approach to philosophy." By this description, Gilson seems to mean that as a philosopher he is asking himself philosophical questions about what he knows about a certain art, thereby contributing to what philosophy can learn from the art of painting.

In many important respects, Gilson succeeds admirably in his endeavor. In conformity with his announced objective, he does not, except for an important qualification to be noted later, fall into the tendency often found among philosophers to argue *a priori* from philosophical principles to conclusions in another science. He knows what the philosopher can understand about painting and he also appreciates what the philosopher cannot know about painting. He is thoroughly sympathetic with the painter's approach to his art, drawing generously not only on the painter's own remarks and explanations, but also using felicitously his works to illustrate and confirm the observations Gilson makes himself. The numerous plates appearing throughout the book are not mere decorative appendages; they are used to manifest and confirm points Gilson is making. He writes lucidly and intelligibly about matters which the painter, the philosopher, and the reasonably well-informed reader can share and discuss with each other. No one can fail to increase his knowledge and even appreciation of painting considerably as a consequence of carefully reading this book.

Specifically, several points of interest can be noted. The first chapter clearly distinguishes between the physical existence and the aesthetic mode of existence of a painting, a distinction often blurred or ignored in treatises on art. Whereas philosophers often tend to generalize too

quickly and too superficially about art and aesthetic experience, Gilson constantly reminds us of the important differences among the various arts, e. g., that the relation of the painter to his work is quite different from that of the poet to his poem or the composer to his quartet.

On the one hand, Gilson recognizes that the activity of painting originates in a more or less changing image arising from contact with reality, thereby indicating the sense in which intuition is the starting point of the painter's activity; on the other hand, he emphasizes the fact that the plastic forms themselves are the true subject of painting, and not events or things in reality. He has no difficulty in establishing the intrinsic connection between painting and beauty, without making beauty in art something merely esoteric, nor does he confuse artistic beauty and natural beauty. He recognizes the intelligible character of artistic beauty and is quite aware of the sense in which pleasure or, better, delectation enters into aesthetic experience. "Paintings are not simply objects that are pleasant to see; they are objects that have been produced by artists in such a way that their sight pleases the eye." This sentence succinctly differentiates pleasure in the ordinary sense from artistic pleasure. The artist produces objects which are not found in nature but which "ought to be there," and which are justified by the special sort of pleasure realized in apprehending them.

Gilson's final chapter, an appraisal of the significance of modern painting, shows how thoroughly sympathetic he is with the aims and accomplishments of modern painting. He sees modern painting as destroying and condemning nothing that belongs to any of the legitimate activities of man; rather, art has recovered its place among man's creative activities. Indeed, Gilson pushes the creative aspect of art rather far, at times straining the analogy with divine art and compromising the meaning of "religious" by maintaining that "all truly creative art is religious in its own right." The book as a whole also leaves the general impression that painting has really come into its own only during the past hundred years. Admiration for contemporary art need not involve a failure to discern the masterpieces of earlier times which, at the very least, equally realize the perfection of the art of painting.

Two serious reservations should be made about the book. One concerns a metaphysical presupposition underlying many of Gilson's remarks, and is the basis for the qualification alluded to in the second paragraph of this review. Gilson's approach to metaphysics is well known, representing as it does a somewhat singular view on the exist-

ential character of metaphysics. It is a view that at least is coming to be more soberly and critically evaluated. Whatever the merits of the view from the standpoint of metaphysics, the intrusion of such presuppositions about 'being' offers no revealing characteristics about a work of art as such. To judge works of art "by ontological norms only," or to hold that "all problems related to paintings must ultimately be understood in terms of being" is to depart from a treatment of art in terms of its proper formalities and appears to go directly against the sort of procedure Gilson indicated he would follow.

His particular metaphysical preoccupations may also account for some peculiar notions expressed by Gilson elsewhere. For example, in his desire to ascribe a legitimate meaning to "creation" in art, Gilson maintains that the painter causes "the existence of a self-subsisting and autonomous being." One's understanding of fundamental philosophical notions is further wrenched by the statement that painters "exercise an activity that closely resembles an act of creation, not only because they communicate actual existence, but also because they fashion and mold the very being they cause to exist. By imparting form to a given material, they turn it into a subject capable of actual existence—that is to say, into a substance." Some painters "do not hesitate to speak of their works as of so many *creations ex nihilo*. And indeed, *insofar as its artistic mode of existence alone is a stake*, nothing of it is given to the painter in natural reality . . . it is of the essence of a painting to be a self-signifying substance" (pp. 126-27, italics Gilson's). If these and similar remarks are not simply erroneous, but can be justified, it can only be at the cost of radically altering the meaning of such fundamental terms as "substance," "self-subsisting," "signifying" ("self-signifying"?) and even "being" itself. It would seem, rather, that Gilson's exaggerated existential thrust has led him astray at the level of fundamental metaphysical analysis, with corresponding repercussions at the level of the analysis of art objects.

The other reservation concerns the treatment of "imitation." It appears that nowhere in the book does Gilson present an analysis of this important term. Despite the numerous times the word is mentioned, there is no definition of it clearly stated. The closest approach to a definition is a phrase in apposition appearing on page 285: "representation of reality as it appears to be." This remark, along with Gilson's many disparaging comments about imitation in art, leads one to the conclusion that he has uncritically identified artistic imitation and copying. A sentence on page 254 confirms this point: "In imitational

art, the lines that constitute a figure mean the real object they represent."

Now, if imitation in art means what Gilson here implies, obviously "imitational art" is defective. It is true also that painters generally tend to identify imitation in art with copying, and one can sympathize with their rejection of imitation so understood. But this is just the sort of misunderstanding that a philosopher sensitive to art could remove. It is surprising that Gilson has not taken the trouble to analyze artistic imitation carefully since he could have drawn on St. Thomas for a developed notion of image and of imitation in such passages as *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 35, a. 1; q. 93, a. 1, and Book I of the *Sentences*, d. 28, q. 2, a. 1. With such passages in mind, as well as passages from other authors who have treated artistic imitation analytically from Aristotle to the present time, no one could identify imitation in art with copying.

It is not possible within the limits of a review to develop the positive notion of artistic imitation and to indicate the sense in which all art is imitative, but at least the suggestion can be made that there is no real opposition between artistic creation and artistic imitation. Imitation, indeed, is not artistic if it is not creative. There are, of course, varying degrees of realizing artistic imitation ranging from the artist's expressed image which approaches mere duplication or copying and is to that extent defective, to the artist's expressed image which is so removed from representing intelligible reality as to be defective in the opposite extreme. The mean, which is a perfection (although subject to considerable flexibility), is the judicious combination that produces creative imitation, and it matters not, in painting for example, whether the work is "abstract" or "non-abstract," "objective" or "non-objective," since these distinctions remain accidental and in a sense even misleading with respect to the proper end of contemplative delight. This end, shared in by both the creative artist and the beholder, is realized to the extent that some aspect of reality is interpreted and viewed anew in the expressed artistic image. Herein precisely lies the creative imitation of the artist and it is realized as much, though diversely, by the modern painter as by the great painters of the past. It is regrettable that Gilson did not subject artistic imitation to a careful analysis since it would have fortified his many otherwise penetrating remarks about painting and would have fully developed the title, "Painting and Reality."

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