Sandra Shapsay’s illuminating paper argues that we may see artists and philosophers as epistemic partners rather than rivals, and it demonstrates that Schopenhauer is an important advocate of such a partnership. Although I do not think he is the “only … major philosopher” to advocate this—Theodor Adorno leaps readily to mind—I do think this position is less common than it should be in philosophy. It is a position with which, perhaps not surprisingly, I have enormous sympathy.

According to Shapsay, the specific partnership Schopenhauer proposes and exemplifies is a “symbiotic relationship between philosophy and the expressive arts.” In this relationship, philosophers can learn from the arts the new intuitive knowledge that they provide, and the arts can learn from philosophy the systematic and complete conceptions that it provides. Moreover, Schopenhauer thinks that each needs the other—although, in her modification of Schopenhauer for a contemporary context, Shapsay holds the more modest position that each is relevant to the other.

I take it that this more modest claim informs Shapsay’s criticism of Martha Nussbaum, who argues that realist novels both “make an indispensable contribution to moral philosophy” and “themselves constitute moral philosophy.” According to Shapsay, Nussbaum can make this argument only because Nussbaum herself provides a “philosophically-informed interpretation” of such novels, an interpretation that many other readers would not have and would not be

---

2 Shapsay, 1.
3 Shapsay 22.
The criticism appears to be that realist novels are philosophically over-determined in Nussbaum’s approach.

This criticism raises questions about the nature of the symbiosis between the expressive arts and philosophy. Is it a necessary partnership, such that the one cannot thrive or survive without the other, as Schopenhauer, on at least one interpretation, seems to think? Or is it simply a beneficial or convenient partnership, good for both partners when it occurs, but not strictly needed for the flourishing of each, as Shapsay’s more modest insistence on relevance suggests. In the first case, there would be a high degree of what biologists call “mutualism” in the relationship, and indeed the relationship would be “obligate” for either one or both of the partners. In the second case, the relationship could still be mutual, but not obligate for either partner. And of course there are other possibilities. I would be interested in hearing more about the exact nature of the symbiotic relationship Shapsay recommends for contemporary art and philosophy.

The discussion of Nussbaum also raises a related question. Can philosophy learn anything significant from the arts without turning the artworks it discusses into proto-philosophical documents? This is the sort of worry that many commentators on Hegel raise about his philosophy of the arts, which certainly attributes significant cognitive status to art: art is, he says, a mode of “sensuous knowing [sinnliches Wissen]” whose task is to apprehend comprehensive truth via sensuous configuration and thereby to present it for perceptual interpretation (Anschauung und Empfindung). Indeed, art is a form of absolute spirit for which truth is paramount. But one could ask a similar question about Schopenhauer’s interpretations of

---

4 Shapsay, 24.
5 Hegel, Aesthetics I: 101; 13: 139.
artworks as knowing and communicating “Ideas” that are “essential and enduring features of the phenomenal world.”

Alternatively, one could wonder whether, in order to learn or communicate what artworks cognitively achieve, philosophy must itself become artistic or quasi-artistic, such that many philosophers no longer recognize it as legitimate philosophy. This question frequently gets raised about Nietzsche’s critical appropriation of Schopenhauer’s philosophy. It also often shows up as a criticism directed at the later Heidegger’s “thinking,” which seems unduly “poetic” to some philosophers, and at writings by Adorno, who some have charged with turning philosophy in an “aesthetic theory,” where “aesthetic” is not a neutral description of Adorno’s subject matter but a pejorative characterization of the manner in which he does philosophy.

One reason we must confront such questions is because, in a long tradition going back at least to Plato, sharp lines of contrast have been drawn between the arts and philosophy—first, perhaps, by philosophers, but increasingly, since the Romantic era, by artists as well. Another reason is that within philosophy itself, especially since the divergence between logical positivism and existential philosophy after World War I, a rift has opened up between philosophers who privilege logic and the natural sciences as the most reliable modes of acquiring and testing knowledge, and philosophers who think such logicism and scientism are fundamentally mistaken and are bad for philosophy itself. To speak in shorthand, much of analytic philosophy inclines toward the first stance, and much of continental philosophy inclines toward the second, with pragmatism and feminism either sitting uncomfortably between them or declaring in Shakespearean tones “a plague on both your houses.”

---

6 Shapsay, 7.
In this context, Shapsay can be seen to be proposing a diplomatic compromise: the anti-logicists and nonlogicists can embrace the relevance of the art’s “first-order insights” for understanding “‘the human condition,’” and everyone else can avoid considering their relevance for “the narrower and more technical branches of philosophy where arguably,” she says, “the natural sciences may play [the role of a valuable partner with philosophy].” If one thinks that logic and the natural sciences are important cultural endeavors that both participate in “the human condition” and help shape it, however, this compromise will seem less than satisfying. So it appears to me.

One way out of this apparent impasse would be to ask what the arts, the sciences, and philosophy have in common, beyond their ability to partner with one or another of these branches of culture. Here I assume that the arts and natural sciences not only can partner with each other but also regularly do. On my own view, which is admittedly Hegelian in this regard, all three aim to achieve true knowledge. Moreover, each has elements of the specific pathway to truth that characterizes each of the others. Let me discuss the arts, and then the natural sciences, and then philosophy.

I have argued that the arts aim to achieve artistic truth, understood as the imaginatively cogent disclosure of insights. Yet the arts are not only imaginative, and, contra Schopenhauer, the insights they make available are not simply nonconceptual intuitions. A considerable amount of conceptual work goes into the making and interpreting of art. A composer of so-called classical music, for example, regularly employs concepts about rhythm, harmony, instrumentation, and the like. She will know and employ a significant body of music theory. Further, if you ask her to talk about how she composed her piece, she can offer any number of

---

7 Shapsay, 20-1.
insightful propositional descriptions and explanations. It is simply a bad Romantic myth to think that a composer, or any well-trained artist, for that matter, merely traffics in nonconceptual intuitions. The relevant distinction in this regard is not between intuitions and concepts but between concepts that are attuned to the artistic task at hand and those which are not.

Similarly, no serious natural scientist merely traffics in unintuitive concepts, and I suspect few natural scientists would say that they do. Doing science involves observation, experimentation, conversation, and a goodly dose of imagination, which shows up in the formation of hunches, hypotheses, and not-yet-tested theories. Although I think propositional knowledge and discursive justification are the primary pathway to scientific truth, there is much more to this pursuit than simply employing concepts in a logical manner, and much more to our interpretations of scientific results as well. A good high school science teacher probably would confirm this. The elements of imagination are indispensable within science, even though they must be honed to the theoretical enterprise.

What about philosophy? Clearly, like the sciences, it pursues propositional knowledge and discursive justification. This is one reason why many philosophers privilege logic and science, to the point of wishing or claiming philosophy to be scientific. At the same time, however, philosophy requires a goodly amount of imagination. In my own terms, it involves the intersubjective processes of exploring, presenting, and creatively interpreting the nuances of meaning available in what I call “aesthetic signs.” One see this, for example, in philosophy’s heavy reliance on thought experiments and linguistic metaphors, from Plato’s allegory of the cave to Descartes’ “evil genius” to Hilary Putnam’s “brain in a vat.” I would venture to say such elements of imagination are indispensable to good philosophy; not even the most hard-nosed logical positivist could avoid them.
Yet the propositional and imaginative elements of philosophical knowledge are neither scientific nor artistic. They are not scientific, because they involve a meta-level of abstraction, such that the concepts and propositions and arguments that philosophers develop and deploy, while they are about “the stuff of the world” (both the human condition, for example, and more specific endeavors such as art and science that now belong to the human condition), they simultaneously are about the concepts and propositions others employ within and about this stuff (think of Kant’s account of the categories and the forms of intuition, for example). To use Hegel’s phrase, philosophy traffics in “speculative propositions.” At the same time, philosophical imagination is not artistic. It does not rely, in the first instance, on what I call media of imagination—musical, visual, filmic, or choreographic materials and methods of production and use. Rather it relies on what, for lack of a better term, I would call “linguistic imagination,” what in an older tradition might have been called rhetoric.

The debate between logic and rhetoric is nearly as old as the Western philosophical tradition. Logic has had the upper hand in the mainstreams of this tradition. Yet there always has been a loyal opposition: Augustine, perhaps; Pascal; Kierkegaard; Nietzsche; the later Heidegger; Rorty, perhaps, and also Adorno. Attending to the voices of this opposition, and taking their objections seriously, is important if we are to forge a long-lasting and fruitful partnership between philosophy and the arts, and not simply a marriage of convenience. Yet doing this also is important, I would submit, for thinking carefully about the partnership between philosophy and science and not allowing philosophy to turn science into a thinned-out version of philosophy’s own self-imposed desiccation.
These issues are crucial for the future of philosophy as a critical theory of society. Adorno understood this. That’s why, in the Introduction to his book *Negative Dialectics*, discussing the relation between logic and rhetoric in dialectical philosophy, he writes:

In the rhetorical quality [of dialectical philosophy] culture animates society, [and] tradition animates thought; shear hostility to rhetoric is allied with the barbarism in which bourgeois thought terminates. … In dialectic, the rhetorical moment … takes up the cause of content [des Inhalts]. Mediating this moment with the formal logical [moment], dialectic tries to overcome the dilemma between arbitrary opinion and empty correctness. But dialectic leans toward content, as that which is open, not decided in advance by the system [nicht vom Gerüst Vorentschiedenen]: a protest against myth. What is mythical is what is ever the same [and cannot change] [das Immergleiche], which, as formal logicality, it finally starved itself into being [zur formalen Denkgesetzlichkeit sich verdünnte].

To conclude, permit me one last quote from Adorno, a passage near the end of *Negative Dialectics*, where his logical rhetoric and rhetorical logic give compelling expression to a partnership between philosophy and art in telling a socially critical truth. (Keep in mind that when Adorno mentions “wretched existence” and “the fungible world of exchange,” he is talking about life in an advanced capitalist society like our own):

Thought that does not capitulate before wretched existence comes to naught before its criteria, truth becomes untruth, philosophy becomes folly. And yet philosophy cannot give up, lest idiocy triumph in actualized unreason [Widervernunft] … Folly is truth in the shape that human beings must accept whenever, amid the untrue, they do not give up

---

8 Adorno, ND 56/66, my translation.
truth. Even at the highest peaks art is semblance; but art receives the semblance … from nonsemblance [vom Scheinlosen] … . No light falls on people and things in which transcendence would not appear [widerschiene]. Indelible in resistance to the fungible world of exchange [i.e., advanced capitalism] is the resistance of the eye that does not want the world’s colors to vanish. In semblance nonsemblance is promised.⁹

“The rest,” to quote Hamlet’s farewell, “is silence.”

⁹ Adorno, ND 404–5/396-7, my translation.