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## Art as a questioning process

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# ART AS A QUESTIONING PROCESS

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Honors in the Major Program in Philosophy  
in the College of Arts and Humanities  
and in The Burnett Honors College  
at the University of Central Florida  
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Thesis Chair: Dr. Bruce Janz

## **ABSTRACT**

The topic of this thesis is, broadly, the crisis of postmodernity and the solution that French rhetorician, Michel Meyer, presents in his theory “problematology.” Meyer looks to relocate the focus of philosophical attention on the question as opposed to the answer. Meyer calls preoccupation with answers “propositionalism.” Propositionalism can be likened to the looming scientism that threatens philosophy in general. Meyer shows, through an examination of questioning, how philosophy can be rescued from obsolescence without being detracted to scientism.

Although Meyer’s philosophy is promising, it could not be considered thorough if it did not address art. Using Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s definition of art as externalized experience, this thesis will explore whether or not Meyer has examined the important relationship between art and philosophy. Through analysis of his three main books in English along with multiple essays, this thesis shows that, although Meyer did not examine art to a great extent, his philosophy contains underlying themes that correspond to the art world.

If Meyer’s philosophy is shown to be thorough enough in every respect, it could serve as a new starting point for thought. Meyer’s philosophy has the potential to pioneer a new paradigm of thought that has not been previously explored.

## **DEDICATIONS**

This thesis is lovingly dedicated to my parents and family, thank you for your unwavering love and support.

For my professors, thank you for your leadership and for serving as a great inspiration to me.

For my friends, thank you for the late night conversations about philosophy and for keeping my spirits high throughout this process.

And for Dan, thank you for being my best friend and an amazing supporter everything that I do.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .....	1
CHAPTER 1: WHAT IS PROBLEMATOLOGY? .....	5
How is Problematology Radical? .....	6
The Role of Questioning Throughout History .....	7
What is a Question? .....	14
Problematological Implications in Rationality .....	16
Problematology and Science .....	19
CHAPTER 2: WHAT IS ART? .....	25
What Does Art Do? .....	27
CHAPTER 3: WHAT IS PROBLEMATOLOGICAL ART? .....	35
Meaning and Reading .....	35
Rhetoric, Language, and Reason .....	40
Of Problematology .....	43
Has Art Been Properly Addressed? .....	45
CONCLUSION .....	51
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	53

## INTRODUCTION

This thesis is primarily about the French thinker Michel Meyer and his philosophy. Meyer emerges in a time where philosophy is threatened. His philosophy seeks to reorient thought to focus on the problem, hence the name of his theory: problematology.

The primary argument of my thesis is if Meyer is able to properly address art, then problematology is a viable solution to the crisis in thought of the present day. There are some secondary points I must address in order to assess this. I will explain what the crisis of modern thought is. Next I will explain what problematology is. The next issue to address is the definition of art and why it matters. Lastly, I will assess whether or not Meyer has addressed art properly.

One of the threats to modern thought is postmodernity. Postmodernity is, as the name suggests, a response to the philosophy of modernity. It is the general suspicion of metanarratives. A metanarrative is any overarching narrative that explains reality. Absolute truth is only one of the metanarratives that postmodernity doubts. In the wake of postmodernity, it is difficult to proceed with philosophy in a meaningful way. No method can be deemed the best because the means of measuring success are under suspicion. So, philosophy must find a new way to operate.

The scientific method has long been a threat to any competing methods of thought. In postmodernity, the scientific method can be a tempting path for philosophy to take. This trend in thought is called scientism. It is not to say that science is anything

negative but, the universal acceptance of the scientific method in every aspect of thought is dangerous. Scientism is particularly dangerous when it comes to the public understanding of science. Laypeople are too far removed from technical scientific research to understand what science truly does. This can be particularly dangerous when public opinion is informed solely by scientific research. For example, economics, pathology, and climate science are fields in which the negative effects of a insufficiently informed public are very apparent. The public bases its decisions on scientific research that scientists conducted. The public is not close enough to the actual research to understand the real results of this research. Those actually close enough to the research are in the minority. This is not, however, simply a case of laypeople being deprived of certain information. These people trust entirely in the scientific method; they wholeheartedly trust that the information gathered is sufficient to predict the future and explain the past. Public opinion is often outdated and reluctant to change. Laypeople misinterpret what science actually does. Public opinion on scientific matters determines the choices people make. If the public is too eager to accept scientific findings it leads to a stifling in thought, laws based on faulty information, lives being lost, and so much more. Scientism leads people to believe that science is all that is needed for decision making and, thus, critical thinking falls by the wayside. Philosophy is thusly threatened with obsolescence.

In times where thought is under such threat, art is also cast aside. Aesthetics is sometimes considered a boutique branch of philosophy, enjoyable in its own right, but



not quite as important as the other branches. Art is considered enjoyable, certainly, but not as essential as ethics or epistemology. We live in a society that values concrete facts and science. It can be difficult to see the value of art in a world like this. It is not capable of solving the energy crisis or curing cancer. But despite all this, art is still, along with science and philosophy, a crucial pillar of the human experience.

Philosophy has a unique role to play in our lives. Philosophers like Michel Meyer, Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari have tried to explain this role, why it is important, and also, how it is distinct from other aspects of life. Deleuze and Guattari plainly state that philosophy is about the formation of concepts. The object of science is function and propositions.<sup>1</sup> The object of art is to create an experience external from the artist-creator that can be experienced by anyone; art is enframed.<sup>2</sup> These three unique ways of dealing with the chaos of existence have their own roles in the matter. None of them are prioritized over the others. The human experience would be incomplete without all three. Michel Meyer takes a similar position in his philosophy of problematology. I use Deleuze and Guattari's distinctions between the three pillars of thought because they are particularly well suited for this project.

Problematology is a philosophy that proposes we redirect our attention towards the question-answer process. Meyer thinks that the question has fallen by the wayside in an attempt to make philosophy more scientific. Meyer proposes a solution in the face

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<sup>1</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 117.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

of postmodernity and the scientism of analytic philosophy. Meyer's solution not only explains how philosophy will be altered, but also addresses how science and art will change. Meyer has written multiple books and essays which I will use to gain an understanding of his philosophy as a whole. In these sources, Meyer has reformulated science so that it is problematological. He also discusses frequently the previous conceptions of science and how they are harmful. This will be my benchmark to measure his aesthetic theory. In order for Meyer to have truly escaped the scientism of which he accuses his fellow philosophers, Meyer must address art with the same rigor that he approaches science.

Meyer references art quite a bit throughout his books, mostly in the form of literature. He goes into a lengthy explanation of why fiction is important. I will focus on his explanation of fiction as a parallel for Deleuze and Guattari's concept of art. This will not only give a clear picture of Meyer's philosophy of art, but will also give us a better understanding of the importance of art in general in the formation of any world view.

## CHAPTER 1: WHAT IS PROBLEMATOLOGY?

Problematology is a radically new philosophical theory formed by Michel Meyer, a contemporary French thinker. Meyer is a student of Chaim Perelman, a rhetorician, whom Meyer draws from heavily. Meyer, like his mentor, focuses on rhetoric, namely the question-answer pair. He founded the European Center for the Study of Argumentation. Based on his interest in rhetoric, he founded a new way of thinking he calls “problematology.”<sup>3</sup>

Problematology is an attempt to move thinking back to the question. It has long been the role of philosophy to ask questions (philosophy is often defined as “radical questioning”) but Meyer has not seen philosophy truly question questioning itself. Meyer sees this as the primary goal of problematology. Problematology is based on the idea that the mind operates interrogatively and all thought processes should be performed in light of this. Argumentation is a crucial aspect of our thought processes; we argue so that we can learn more. Meyer thinks that argumentation has lost sight of one of its crucial elements: the question. The question enables arguments to move forward; it is the driving force of rhetoric. To lose sight of this is to fall into the trap of “propositionalism”. Meyer contrasts problematology with propositionalism, the name Meyer gives philosophies that do not properly address the question. He details the history of propositionalism leading up to the contemporary philosophy. Though this

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<sup>3</sup> James L. Golden and David L. Jamison, “Meyer’s Theory of Problematology.” *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 3, no. 174 (1990): 329.

historical analysis, Meyer is able to show that problematology is especially noteworthy because of its historical relevance; it responds to the crisis of postmodernism. After the loss of the foundational subject, Meyer founds philosophy upon questioning itself, which he considers absolutely primary.<sup>4</sup>

### ***How is Problematology Radical?***

Problematology is a radical new philosophy because it prioritizes questioning in the face of resolution-based philosophies. Propositionalist philosophy has long sought after *resolutions* to questions and discarded the question itself. The term “resolution” is important because it implies that once it is found the question is no longer an issue; it implies that answers do away with problems. This is why Meyer believes that propositionalist philosophies are “groundless pursuits.” The answers to questions are not seen as dependent upon the questions but are seen as autonomous facts. Meyer insists that answers are important and understanding the relationship of the question-answer pair is vital, but the question is never rendered unnecessary. Understanding the relationship between question and answer is an important part of Meyer’s philosophy because it introduces us to the underlying thought process of discovery.<sup>5</sup> Without the question, you only have an unfounded statement; a major component of the information is lost.

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<sup>4</sup> Michel Meyer, *Of Problematology: Philosophy, Science, and Language*, trans. David Jamison, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 1-26.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

Although there are limitations to considering a philosophy problematological, it is not a method. Because of the nature of a problematological philosophy, Meyer cannot claim that his philosophy is the only correct one and everyone must follow it in a certain method; insisting that philosophy should have one method is propositionalist thinking. Problematology can only be descriptive, not prescriptive. It can, however, posit that questions are foundational. Questions are, obviously, at the basis of every interrogation. To question this is self-defeating. There is no real method to problematology, only an understanding of the question-answer pair. Meyer calls the difference between question and answer “problematological difference.”<sup>6</sup>

### ***The Role of Questioning Throughout History***

It is important for Meyer to consider the roles of questioning in the philosophies that come before his. He considers these philosophies to be propositionalist and qualifies this by going into lengthy explanations of how they were not problematological enough. His explanation of why the propositionalist philosophies are failures also helps elucidate how problematology can remedy philosophy. He draws upon an expansive historical background in order to illustrate the widespread problem. His references span from the Greeks to logical positivism. Throughout history, philosophy has been threatened because it was not scientific enough; it has also been criticized for not being practical enough. In response to these criticisms, philosophy became concerned with

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 25.

justification. Philosophy attempted to become more like science in order to maintain its relevance in an increasingly scientific world; this is where Meyer sees the downfall of philosophy. He feels that philosophy and science should have a reciprocal relationship, but in our current situation the relationship ends up one-sided, with a push for more scientific philosophy.

I will begin with the earliest philosophy that Meyer critiques, the Greeks. Meyer addresses the philosophies of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle and how these great thinkers shaped philosophy into what it is today. The dialectic, an important argument model throughout history, grows through these thinkers. The dialectic method began with Socrates questioning the authority figures in Athens; this is where Meyer sees questioning at its strongest.<sup>7</sup> Of course, Socrates did not write down any of his philosophy, it was written by his student Plato. The differences in their philosophies can be seen in the differences between the early dialogues through the later ones as Plato came to find his own voice. Meyer focuses on the role of questioning as the distinguishing factor between dialogues and also between Socrates and Plato. The early dialogues are appropriately called the Aporetic dialogues. The name comes from the word *aporia* which is a philosophical puzzle or doubt. The main feature of these dialogues is the importance of questioning. He forces the authority figures of Athens to critically consider what they claim to know. It is really no wonder he was put to death. Socrates uses this method in order to establish what is really known. For Socrates,

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<sup>7</sup> Michel Meyer, "Dialectic and Questioning: Socrates and Plato," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 17, no. 4 (Oct. 1980): 281-82.

questioning was the method to reach truth. The Aporetic Dialogues typically end without resolution; the main feature of them is questioning rather than answer.<sup>8</sup> The main conclusion Socrates famously draws in regard to what he knows is simply that he knows nothing at all. This is contrasted with the sophists of his time who only asked questions so that they could provide their own answers. The dialectic method is important because it is a dialogue, typically between two people, with no real authority, wherein both parties are held accountable only to the question. Despite his frequent use of the dialectic method, Socrates does not really explicate the method or theorize about it; he simply practices it. This is why Socrates is not the ideal problematologist for Meyer; he certainly values questions but only in practice, not in theory.<sup>9</sup> The Middle Dialogues feature a more refined dialectic. Plato was not satisfied with the aporetic nature of the early dialogues and moves towards a more propositionalist form in the Middle Dialogues. Plato uses the hypothesis in order to make progress in the dialectic method. The early dialectic method is less directional, it is more like wandering. Plato uses the hypothesis as a temporary answer of sorts so that the dialectic can move on, rather than dwell on the aporia. This is how Plato makes the dialectic more scientific. The dialectic changes from doubt and questioning to analysis and synthesis.<sup>10</sup> The lattermost dialogues move away distinctly from the idea that doubt is a source of knowledge and Meyer sees them as propositionalist. They shift from an interplay of

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 282.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 283-84.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 285-87.

analysis and synthesis to Plato's Theory of Forms. The Theory of Forms assumes certain things in its questioning. When we ask "What is X?" we already assume that "X" is a distinct object that can be inquired about. Meyer explicitly addresses this aspect of the Theory of Forms in "Dialectic and Questioning: Socrates and Plato",

When we ask what a table is, we must already know something about the table in order to know what we are asking about. In inquiring into what things are, we become conscious of them, and we had to be conscious of some of their properties before asking the question, otherwise there would be no difference between asking 'What is the sky?' and 'what is the mud?', both would represent only one unknown, Y, and it would no longer be the mud per se, or the sky per se, we are investigating but a confused and undifferentiated reality.<sup>11</sup>

Aristotle, Plato's student, departs even further from the dialectic method of Socrates. Aristotle preferences science above the dialectic and thus analysis, synthesis, and hypothesis become the mode which Aristotle uses to establish knowledge.<sup>12</sup>

As mentioned above, questioning slipped into a secondary role as dialectic grew to prominence as the method of thought. The dialectic method made its first emergence through Plato in response to Socratic radical questioning as an interrelation between question and answer. For Plato, the dialectic provides the circumstance for questioning to take place in; it is the social context that affects the questioning process. Through Plato, the Socratic dialogues came to emphasize the answer, not the question. The

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 288.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 281.



dialectic eventually evolved into a system for producing answers. Dialectic progressed into a relationship between analysis and synthesis; it eventually became scientific. The dialectic became analysis based on synthesis that is based on analysis. This is the classic flaw of circular logic. The dialectic distanced itself from the logos of its origin. Logos, in this sense, is reasoning, or in a problematological sense, the relationship between question and answer. The relationship between question and answer is important to logos because to understand the difference between question and answer is to understand the movement of reasoning. Once the dialectic has moved away from the logos, it is only reliant on identity claims. Without the foundational relationship of the question-answer pair, there can be nothing to dialectic other than the interrelation of predefined variable, i.e., propositionalism. Thus, the problematological difference is crucial to the dialectic in order to save it from propositionalism.<sup>13</sup>

This mindset can be seen pushed to its extreme in logical positivism, a mindset Meyer frequently cites as an enemy of problematology. Logical positivism is a philosophical trend that says that philosophy has a very limited role, dictated by scientific reasoning. It says that propositions only gain meaning when they are expressed in a universal language and are grounded in empirical observations. Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, one of the landmark works in logical positivism, argues that anything that cannot be empirically verified is an abuse of language. A question can only be asked if it can be answered and once a question is answered in logical

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<sup>13</sup> Meyer, *Of Problematology*, 66-129.

positivism it is destroyed. Meyer obviously disagrees with the destruction of the question once it is answered, but he draws inspiration from the idea that a question is only a question if it can be answered. It is a testament to problematology that Meyer is able to draw something useful from a philosophy that should be considered the complete opposite of his. Through the open mindset Meyer develops in problematology, he is able to benefit even from logical positivism.<sup>14</sup>

Another philosopher Meyer draws upon heavily is Heidegger. Throughout his work there are multiple references to Heidegger's thought. He is an important philosopher for Meyer because he actually comes close to what Meyer would consider problematological thinking. Heidegger represents an emergence of self-problematization.<sup>15</sup> Heidegger is a philosopher who had a problem with the preconceptions of other philosophies. He is a major inspiration for the postmodernists for the same reason; he rejected the foundations laid down by his predecessors. He attempted to escape the influence of the philosophies that came before him by pioneering a new self-critical philosophy. His philosophy represents a change because other philosophies typically assert things and problematize the theories that come before them whereas, Heidegger's philosophy was critical of itself along with being critical of philosophy's foundations in general. The only flaw Meyer sees in this is his preoccupation with ontology. Instead of being so self-problematizing as to problematize problems, Heidegger took his philosophy in the direction of ontology. This is a flaw

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 42-43.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 29.

because it is not purely problematological; it is problematizing ontology. Heidegger elevates ontology over problematology. Meyer writes,

What is striking in the two cases is that the question of being did not lead Heidegger to ask himself about the being of the question, but rather, his primary concern was to ask himself about the being through which such a question arises and which, for the same reason, is different from all other beings.<sup>16</sup>

For Heidegger, questioning is a means of accessing being. This is an issue for problematology because questioning is not subservient to any cause. For Meyer, questioning is foundational and nothing, not even ontology, comes before questioning. Through Meyer's analysis of Heidegger we can gain an understanding of how truly radical problematology is. We can also gain an understanding of the importance of questioning in problematology; it is truly the most important aspect of thought. Heidegger was a radical philosopher but Meyer tries to surpass this to truly delve to the foundation of thought: questioning.

Through all of these comparisons to a wide range of philosophies we have gained a better understanding of Meyer's thought. The points where Meyer deviates from his predecessors illuminate how his philosophy is radical. Meyer prioritizes questions over everything else in philosophy, even ontology, as seen through the comparison with Heidegger's philosophy. Questions are also emphasized, along with answers, but in no way are questions dissolved by answers. The question that leads to the answer is always important; an answer can never stand alone as an autonomous

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 33.

fact. These aspects of problematology can be seen through his comparisons to positivism. We have gained a clearer picture of the philosophy of problematology by examining how Meyer treats other philosophies. We can gain an even clearer picture by exploring the question-answer pair.

### ***What is a Question?***

It is important to understand what a philosophical question is if we are truly to understand Meyer's philosophy because the only defining element of problematology is understanding the difference between question and answer. In order to differentiate between question and answer we must first identify what a proper philosophical question is and how a question could possibly not be a question in the proper sense. Questions derive their name from the word *quest*; a quest implies a target, a quest for something. Questions, too, must have a target, an answer. A question is not truly a question if it is unanswerable. This provision eliminates nonsense from the realm of philosophy. Also, questions that could be continually deliberated because they lack a real answer are eliminated. The answer does not have to be achieved, however, and probably could not be, realistically. The answer just has to be something that would be agreed upon by all people if they had all the evidence and an infinite amount of time to decide.<sup>17</sup> Despite this, questions are not simply occasions for answers to come about,

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<sup>17</sup> This closely resembles a pragmatic definition of truth, not that Meyer would necessarily subscribe to this. I just feel it is a good description of what an answer would look like.

questions are important in their own right. Firstly, they are what allow answers to be considered as such; without the questions, the answer has no meaning. Examining and understanding the relationship between question and answer is the only foundation left in philosophy. All that can be examined in a meaningful way is founded upon this pair; anything else is a groundless pursuit. It is, thus, essential to understand what a question is.

A question, in order to be a true, problematological, question, cannot be defined in simple grammatical terms as a sentence ending in the symbol “?”. Meyer writes, “An interrogative sentence is already an answer, though a problematological one, which shows that problems can also be stated if, for example, it is necessary to make them known to obtain a solution.”<sup>18</sup> In this Meyer shows the duality of questions. Even in the question an answer can be found, so too can a question be found in an answer, a problematological answer. Meyer emphasizes the dual nature of the logos in problematology. It is about seeing the question and the answer in statements. In order to point towards a problem, a question must state that there is a problem and that it can be solved.<sup>19</sup> A real question must be truly interrogative, a quest for information. It must also be a quest for a certain answer, as noted above. Meyer sums up this nicely, “Generally speaking, the problematological is therefore the very link which associates questions with answers...an apocritical answer, repressing its answerhood, also reveals the problematological link to question as a question whose answer consists of finding

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 210.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 211.

that to which what is said is an answer.”<sup>20</sup> Problematology is essentially about the move from question to answer and understanding that our reasoning is based in both, not just the answer.

### ***Problematological Implications in Rationality***

In his book, *Of Problematology*, he gives multiple examples of how to redirect thinking to focus on the questions rather than the statement. For example, problematology could be a theory of meaning. A proposition is viewed as the answer to a question and the question it answers becomes the source of meaning for the proposition. This allows for a duality of meaning and reworks the hermeneutic process. Meyer gives the following example in his book, “If I say ‘It’s one o’clock’ to tell someone that it’s time to sit own to lunch, then it is clear that I wanted to say something other than what I *factually* did say.”<sup>21</sup> The statement “It’s one o’clock” can have multiple meanings and through problematology we can explore some of them by imagining what question the proposition is an answer to. It could be the answer to “What time is it?” or “Do you want to get lunch?” By identifying the question it is an answer to one can understand the meaning of a proposition as well as understand the possible duality of meaning.<sup>22</sup>

Another application of problematology in thinking is science. Science is one of the things (along with language and philosophy) Meyer explicitly addresses with

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 212.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 241.

<sup>22</sup> Michel Meyer, *Rhetoric, Language, and Reason* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 65.

problematology. Beyond allowing for greater philosophical exploration, problematology allows science to progress. Meyer thinks we should focus more on the question in scientific research. One of the key tenants affected in the reworking of scientific knowledge is in the experiential component of scientific discovery. Meyer reminds us that the questions we are asking affect the experience and observation of the scientific method. In order to achieve less skewed results. I will go into more detail about how exactly Meyer expounds on science in the next section because it serves as a great comparison for how Meyer discusses art.

Problematology also serves as a critique of the traditional conception of history. Traditional history deals with individual events with breaks in between. For example, there was World War I and then there was World War II with a break in between the two, this is not to say that there are not events in between the two, but rather, that there is a definite break between the two wars distinguishing them from each other. There are different causes, different people involved and although they may be related, they are distinct events. There is another view of history called historicity. Historicity is different from history because it views the past in light of the present. Historicity views the past in terms of how it brought us to the present. For Meyer, both are failed attempts at viewing the past. History fails because it is comprised of autonomous historical facts. Historicity is also an improper way to view the past because it tends to stifle questions. As an alternative, Meyer proposes a new way of viewing the past problematologically.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Meyer, Of Problematology, 155.

The principal and most broad-spectrum application, and the one I will be discussing in my essay, is the application of problematology to philosophy and thus, thinking in general. Problematology introduces a new way of thinking. The previous applications are examples of how problematology changes the thought process in an obvious way. Through these examples we can see how problematology functions as a thought process. The issues that arise in the above examples are because of a lack of foundation. Problematology provides the foundation necessary to unify the conception of the world so that we may proceed rationally. Meyer believes that the crisis of propositionalism leads to “overrationalism,” that is overreliance on propositional rationality.<sup>24</sup> Propositional rationality leads to manipulated thought. Thought is not in the pure form that it takes in questions, rather, it is distorted by the propositions it is based upon. Questions do not have this same ability to manipulate because they do not attempt to posit anything in the positive sense, but only serve as a reminder that all is questionable. Propositional mentality is based on the idea that justification is the proper method for checking facts. The only issue with this thought is, as stated above, it can be manipulative and cannot truly ground itself; it only measures itself against its own system. This is not to say that science should be abandoned entirely; as we see above, there are problematological methods in science. Meyer does not just speak out against traditional scientism. He also criticizes, as I explained in the preceding section, many other philosophies.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 131.



## ***Problematology and Science***

Meyer goes into great detail about science and its implications upon philosophy and expounds about what a problematological science would look like. I think it is important to examine this because it is ideally how I think Meyer should treat art. In order for Meyer's treatment of art to be satisfactory, it should resemble the way he writes about science in that he examines two aspects of it: art's implications on thought and what problematological art should look like. I find science and art to be equally important in their shaping of human thought and should be treated accordingly. I will go into more detail about why art is important in the next chapter. Now I only wish to explain how Meyer treats science in his philosophy of problematology to serve as a comparison to the way he examines art. I will not go into every reference to science in every work by Meyer, I will only cover the references to science in *Of Problematology: Philosophy, Science, and Language* and one of his essays, "Science as a Questioning-Process: A Prospect for a New Type of Rationality," because I think these offer a thorough enough explanation to grasp what I am trying to convey. These texts take explicit issue with science and its relation to problematology.

The first aspect of Meyer's thought on science I will discuss is how science has influenced philosophy. Meyer first analyzes how science has harmed thinking. This can be seen most clearly in the logical positivists as they attempted to make philosophy

scientific. Science is seen as a corrupting influence on philosophy.<sup>25</sup> Even in their mutual origin in Ancient Greece, science is seen as a rival of philosophy. Plato strives for a more scientific dialectic and Aristotle completes the scientizing of philosophy. Science is seen by Meyer as a driving force of propositionalism. It's true that science is structured this way; science is entirely based on justification. As Meyer writes, "Justification makes science closed upon itself: even if primary propositions are justified in that closed space by their being fruitful within it."<sup>26</sup> Science is a closed system; it is only justified based on the idea that justification justifies. Meyer points this out as a something that philosophers do not consider when they seek to found their philosophies on science. Meyer sees scientific philosophy as a move away from the question, toward propositions. In science, the problems no longer exist once there is a solution. For Meyer, this is the flawed aspect of scientific philosophy. Meyer believes the question is just as important as the solution it led to. It is hardly the attitude of science in general to be so short sided, but rather, the view of people wishing to make all thinking follow the scientific model. Science is a fine model for research and discovery but it is just that. Scientific reasoning need not be prioritized over every other kind of thinking simply because it can justify itself. Justification, as mentioned above, is only relevant within the scientific schema. Meyer sees the reliance upon justification as a major problem. Meyer

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>26</sup> Michel Meyer, "Science as a Questioning Process: A Prospect for a New Type of Rationality," *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 131-132, (1980b): 50.

does not want to do away with science, but rather, abolish the cult of justification that prompts propositionalism.

It is not fair to place all the blame for propositionalism on science and Meyer is certainly not anti-science. Science, like so many things in philosophy, has been misused. Science, as mentioned above, has been placed above all other thought processes and applied where it need not be. It can be corrupted by scientific thinkers who believe they have somehow found the truth over and above all other possible truths. Science has no greater claim to truth than other theories. Meyer emphasizes this in his idea of how science should be. Meyer does not think science belongs in the study of truth because it cannot really contribute anything of substance outside of the schema of science. Philosophy is meant to seek the truth and in doing so philosophers cannot fall back on science as an autonomous foundation.

We feel so compelled to believe that science is absolutely true because the conclusions of science are based on our own perceptions. Our perceptions lead us to the conclusion that justification works and this is based on causality. It seems to the observer that events are causally related and we implant this preconception on all of our observations. This leads me to the next point of criticism Meyer gives about science: the idea of experience. The role of the observer is not simply one-sided; the observer is influencing the observation as much as the object being observed. Meyer emphasizes this point saying, "Experience is not apodictic; it is indeed here that we find the difficulty of understanding modern science, which has been produced by the destruction of a

purely a priori Cartesianism, which was more mathematical than physical.”<sup>27</sup> He calls Cartesianism “mathematical” because it operated in a closed system of variables that were understood as such. Science today relies on physical evidence rather than variables. It is still a closed system but the variables appear to be less assigned and more *discovered*. It is this idea of discovery that Meyer takes issue with. The idea behind Meyer’s conception of modern science is that there is a world out there that we can discover through our experience. He cites the example of the principle of causality, science is not purely empirical. Meyer writes, “...science depends on a principle of causality which is rooted in subjective regularities.”<sup>28</sup> We cannot hold onto the idea that we are gathering something from the outside world without inputting our own conceptions. Firm believers in science as a truth method would like to believe that everything we know from science is true absolutely, but based on science’s reliance on causality, we cannot say that science is the ideal truth method. Science relies on partial observers to make connections about causation so that we can predict the same results will happen again. This is a fine method for science but it is not a method for finding absolute truths in philosophy. So how can science be saved? Obviously we cannot become impartial observers; to think that we have achieved this would be foolish. Meyer offers another option, a problematological alternative for science.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Meyer, *Of Problematology*, 265.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 269.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 265-66.

Meyer wants to change our conception of science from a process of justification to a process of questioning. Meyer wants us to conceive of science in a problematological way. Problematological science is not without factuality or progress; instead it involves a sort of self-awareness that reminds us that it is not autonomous. Meyer likens this to problematology itself, "...problematology tries instead to retrace the path of factuality's emergence and explain what gave the impression of autonomy."<sup>30</sup> Rather than make an apodictic declaration that factuality is not autonomous, problematology traces the path it took to reach the point where it was considered autonomous. Thusly, in problematology we are able to make claims and so can we in problematological science. In problematology, we question along the way to find out what is known. Science as a questioning process involves this same method.

One may object that this model of science is unproductive and hinders the progress of science. Meyer addresses this concern by explaining how a problematological approach to science can further progress by removing the blinders of propositionalism. He gives a historical anecdote to elucidate this. Semmelweis was a doctor trying to find out what was killing pregnant women in 1844. There were many explanations already about what was killing these women but no one could put a stop to the deaths. Some said the women suffered a shock from seeing the priests on their way to give patients last rites but when they prevented this from happening, the deaths continued. He eventually witnessed the death of a fellow doctor while performing an

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 281.

autopsy and accidentally cutting himself. Semmelweis concluded that it must be something contaminating the blood of these women. He then proposed that no one be permitted in the maternity ward without cleaning their hands and the death toll fell. Meyer explains that the Semmelweis kept questioning. He tested the shock hypothesis and when it failed he returned again to what the cause of these deaths could be. He drew upon the experience of the doctor's death as well as the lack of deaths in births that occurred outside the hospital. He put these experiences in question and broke from the common hypothesis (women were dying of shock) in order to form a new hypothesis. Semmelweis problematized his experience to prevent further deaths of pregnant women.<sup>31</sup> It is clear that justification still plays a role in this model of science but not the kind of justification that suppresses answers.<sup>32</sup>

Above is my concise explanation of Meyer's ideas about science. Meyer explains misconceptions about science and how problematological science would look. I will use this model in the next chapters in order to determine how thoroughly Meyer has examined art. In the next chapter I will explain what art is and how it relates to philosophy and science and why it is possible to use Meyer's explanation of science as a measuring tool of Meyer's explanation of art.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 293-294.

<sup>32</sup> Meyer, "Science as a Questioning Process," 55-56.

## CHAPTER 2: WHAT IS ART?

In order to assess whether or not Meyer addresses art properly, I must first explain what I mean by art. What qualifies as art is a hotly contested subject in philosophy. Art can be classified many ways, for example, being confined to only the fine arts (classic examples include painting, literature, etc.) or broadened to include applied arts (for example, craftsmanship). In order to avoid the typical problems with this classification, I will use a more theoretical definition of art rather than one based on what art is composed of or how it is made. Confining art based on its medium can lead to trouble because it can be easily contested by offering counter examples of things that seem to be art but do not fall into the parameters. To avoid this, I borrow my main conception from Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in *What is Philosophy?*

I will call definitions of art based on its medium “surface” definitions of art because they examine art based on its appearance rather than its accomplishments. Examples of surface definitions of art include limiting art to the traditional arts, defining art as something beautiful, or defining art by its physical byproducts, to name a few. Many problems can arise from surface definitions of art. Firstly, they can be exclusionary. It is difficult to set parameters to art because it is such a creative act; sometimes the goal of an artist is to send a message by breaking from the restrictions set down by surface definitions of art. Performance art, for example, is a category of art that is difficult to place in any surface definition of art. Often times, performance art is created in order to test the limits of creativity. Furthermore, when art is defined based on

what is composed of, some works that I do not wish to include in my definition of art are classified as such simply because of their composition. For example, with photography it becomes difficult to draw the line between family vacation photos and Ansel Adams if we are simply defining artistic photography as the production of photographs. Although they can include non-physical art forms, definitions of art based on beauty also fall short. Like materialistic definitions, beauty based definitions fail because they are too inclusionary. Nature is often beautiful, yet not art. The craftsman works to create beautiful products, but is not creating art. Also, beauty is a hotly contested subject in its own right and basing our conception of art on it does not really give us much to go on. Limiting art to the traditional conceptions of art is problematic because artists have been attempting to shed this notion for decades. In order to be really creative, some artists have attempted escape velocity from traditional definitions of art. One of the most famous examples of boundary-breaking art, Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*, is a urinal that the artist did not even make, yet he calls it art and it makes an ironic statement about what can and cannot be considered art. Duchamp makes a statement with his *Fountain* about the definition of art by making a piece of art that would not have been considered art by any surface definition. Deleuze and Guattari offer a definition that does not fall into these traps.

Deleuze and Guattari describe art in terms of what it does, rather than what is done to create it. I feel this classification is more appropriate for my purposes; i.e., to address how problematology should deal with art and in order to do this, I need to have



a definition of art that is properly suited for problematology—one that is not propositionalist. I cannot have a definition of art that falls short of the guidelines Meyer gives for a properly problematological philosophy. Therefore, in order to assess Meyer's philosophy of art, I must measure my definition of art against problematology. My definition of art must not rely on so-called autonomous fact, but rather on something more problematological.

For Deleuze and Guattari art is defined in its actions, and through this alone it is already clear to see how this definition is more problematological than surface definitions because it is less constricting. They draw distinctions between art, philosophy, and science in *What is Philosophy?* in order to elucidate what art is rather than strictly posit a definition for art. They define art based on what it does compared to what science and philosophy do. "Art preserves, and it is the only thing in the world that is preserved"<sup>33</sup> Art can be seen contrasted to everything else based on this description. Art creates an experience. It attempts to recreate the human experience detached from the experiencer, so that the experience may be shared.

### ***What Does Art Do?***

It is important to discuss what it is that art does that makes it art. Art is unique, Deleuze and Guattari say, in that it preserves. This is evidenced by the novel, for example, in which the characters enact the same happenings over and over, preserved

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<sup>33</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 163.

to do so in the same way for all of eternity. The features of an art piece do not change. The statue never alters its position. Even if the materials that make up the art piece fade or are destroyed, the art does not really change. For example, a performance art piece cannot possibly stay around forever, but the experience that was created cannot change. Art does not preserve by reifying its structure; it preserves by its very nature. It is something entirely different from everything else in this. Art is created as something to produce an experience. It is created so that the experience can then be had by the masses. This experience is meant to be externalized so that they are independent of the artist, thusly, art preserves. This externalized experience is what separates art from the fluid world. Art is meant to preserve the externalized experience so that it may be shared. Art is “a bloc of sensations, that is to say, a compound of percepts and affects.”<sup>34</sup> Percepts are perceptions without a perceiver. Affects are affections removed from the initial feeler. These sensations, removed from the original source become something that can be shared. Art is, thus, able to exist independently and for itself. It is important that art’s ability to stand alone is not understood in the same way that Meyer criticizes propositionalist philosophies for their attempt at standing alone, I mean that the art stands apart from its creator. It becomes the task of the artist to create an independently standing experience; this is the creative task of the artist. Thus, art can be judged<sup>34</sup> by its ability to stand alone and create an experience. This contrasts with a representational theory of art that says art only mimics something else. If art was only

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 164.

mimicry, it would not stand alone as an independent experience; it would still require an understanding of the object mimicked. Art is a “monument” in that it commemorates a bloc of past sensation, but this differs from mimicry. It does not matter if the artist is working in marble, prose, or photography; the preservation and presentation of an experience is a defining characteristic of art.

In order to elucidate this theory of art, I will explain by way of the story of Damien Hirst’s *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living*. Damien Hirst is a radical artist today, working outside of the parameters of surface definitions of art. His pieces often include dead animals. One of his most famous pieces, *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living*, features a dead shark suspended in formaldehyde. The shark eventually decayed and was restored by stretching the skin over a mold. This restoration was not approved by the artist and Hirst offered to restore it himself with a new shark. This scenario presents an interesting classic philosophical problem: if all the parts of the original artwork have changed, is it the same work? According to a surface definition of art, the art work has changed physically and, since physicality is the only defining factor of art, the new shark and new formaldehyde is itself a new artwork. If examined using Deleuze and Guattari’s definition of art, it remains all part of the same artwork, except when the renovations were done by a third party. The artist made an externalized experience by suspending a shark in formaldehyde, the shark began to decay but the experience was preserved. Only when

the experience was altered by someone other than the artist did the piece cease to be the same artwork. It is the experience, standing alone, that makes an artwork.<sup>35</sup>

This definition is appropriate for my goals. It includes the aspects of art I would like to touch on—that art accomplishes some goal. This contrasts with the idea that art is simply beautiful and enjoyable as such; art attempts to communicate something. It is important that art be defined by how it does something so that the actions can be deemed problematological or not. Another benefit to this definition of art is that it is more problematological than the classic definition. It is problematological because it takes into account the idea that art cannot be limited by strict parameters. As a form of human expression, art must be able to be freer. Art as defined by Deleuze and Guattari has a more wandering-like characteristic that seems to suit problematology well. There is not a strict code which art must follow in order to be considered as such, rather, art flows as it might in order to recreate experience.

It is also problematological because of what it accomplishes. They contrast art to philosophy and science in what it does in the realm of human thought on the chaos of the universe. In order to understand what it is exactly that art does it is helpful to consider the metaphor Deleuze and Guattari provide. The thinkers liken art first to the

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<sup>35</sup> Martin Gayford, "Cohen Lends Hirst's \$8 Million Shark to Metropolitan Museum," *Bloomberg* (July 13, 2007), <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=newsarchive&sid=al4y8JCGHR.k&refer=muse> (accessed September 2012).

flesh. "Flesh is not sensation."<sup>36</sup> It is nothing without the rest what comprises the house. "Flesh is only the thermometer of being."<sup>37</sup> The next aspect of art is the framework of the house. The house provides the flesh which is "too tender" with the structural framework it needs, a background, a foreground, a basic environment. The third element, according to Deleuze and Guattari, is the universe. The house cannot stand alone with just the flesh; it needs the universe in which it can exist. In this way art is "like a passage from the finite to the infinite."<sup>38</sup> Art is likened to the construction of a house encasing the flesh within the universe. Again, we can see that art is not meant to stand completely alone like an "autonomous" fact, but rather it is within the universe.

Framework is an important feature of this art metaphor. The framework is the beginning of art. Deleuze and Guattari say, "Art begins not with flesh but with the house."<sup>39</sup> This can be seen in the importance of framing in the art world. Art is always framed; this framing serves as a reminder that it is art rather than something else. Even non-physical art is framed, for example, music is framed by harmonic themes, motifs, musical scales, and the like. The frame intimates to the viewer that the work has been composed and "Composition," write Deleuze and Guattari, "composition is the sole definition of art. Composition is aesthetic, and what is not composed is not a work of art."<sup>40</sup> Composition, however, is not only technique. Technique is important to creating

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 178.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 179.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 180.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 186.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 191.

great art, but it is not all there is to composition. Composition also requires a vision, a goal. Composition is the “condition that matter becomes expressive.”<sup>41</sup> Art is expressive matter and this is why it is so unique.<sup>42</sup>

Art achieves something very unique because of its nature. Deleuze and Guattari write, “...the peculiarity of art is to pass through the finite in order to rediscover, to restore the infinite.”<sup>43</sup> Art is the housing of flesh within the universe. It acquaints us with the idea of the universal through the structural expression of the particular. Perhaps the easiest way to understand this relation is to examine how Deleuze and Guattari envision the other forms of thought.

What defines thought in its three great forms—art, science, and philosophy—is always confronting chaos, laying out a plane, throwing a plane over chaos. But philosophy wants to save the infinite by giving it consistency: it lays out a plane of immanence that, through the action of conceptual personae, takes events or consistent concepts to infinity. Science, on the other hand, relinquishes the infinite in order to gain reference: it lays out a plane simply undefined coordinates that each time, through the action of partial observers, defines states of affairs, function, or referential propositions. Art wants to create the finite that restores the infinite: it lays out a plane of composition that, in turn, through the action of aesthetic figures, bears monuments or composite sensations.<sup>44</sup>

Art uses the frame, be it physical or otherwise, to order the chaos. This is why I feel art is a prime candidate for problematology. The frame presents the art as art. The frame is what detaches the art from the creator. It enables the art to stand on its own. It is also self-awareness. All of human thought is the framing of chaos, but art takes it a step

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 196.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 186-96.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 197.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 197.

further. Art literally frames the chaos. In this way art is admitting that it is just a snapshot or interpretation of the chaos; it does not try to claim autonomy or access to absolute truth. Elizabeth Grosz writes about this relation of science, art, and philosophy in her book *Chaos, Cosmos, Territory, Architecture*, "Twin rafts over chaos, philosophy and art, along with their more serious sibling, the sciences, enframe chaos, each in its own way, in order to extract something consistent, composed, immanent, which it uses for its own ordering (and also deranging) resources."<sup>45</sup> The frame admits that there is a partial interpreter of reality creating the art. Propositionalism lacks the admission that the frame makes. Just as propositionalist science does not see the partiality of experience, the propositionalist philosopher does not concede to their own partiality. They rely on science or some other method to give them facts. They do not see the frame around their own thought. In this way I hope to relate problematology to the framing of art. Problematology is self-aware as art is when it is enframed.

This can be further paralleled with the way Meyer envisions the three forms of thought and problematological implications within them. It would seem that art, as defined by Deleuze and Guattari, would be an ideal intimation of problematology. Problematology too seeks to relate to the chaos of existence but does so through the question-answer pair. This question-answer pair is the bare bones of logic, the process used in philosophy to form theory. This question-answer pair can also be seen as a frame of sorts. Logic cannot do without them, and they represent the same thing the

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<sup>45</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, *Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 8-9.

frame represents in art, a partial ordering of chaos. The similarities can already be seen between the thought of Meyer and the writing of Deleuze and Guattari. Both see mankind as seeking a means to discover the infinite through our finite means, or frames. Meyer's means are through the question, a means of examining the infinite without confining it to autonomous propositions. Now that I have defined art, I will draw on the parallels between Deleuze and Guattari's conception of art and Meyer's problematology and also assess whether or not Meyer has properly examined art in his construction of the philosophy of problematology.



## CHAPTER 3: WHAT IS PROBLEMATOLOGICAL ART?

In order to assess Meyer's treatment of art in his philosophy of problematology, I read his three main books in English in addition to multiple essays. I feel that this is a broad enough spectrum of works to get a thorough idea of what he thinks about art. I will go into detail about the aspects of each that touched on art and then assess whether or not Meyer's treatment of art is as thorough as his treatment of science.

### ***Meaning and Reading***

In chronological order, his first book is *Meaning and Reading: A Philosophical Essay on Language and Literature*. It is clear from the title alone that Meyer discusses the literary arts within this text. This book is primarily about meaning. Meyer explores the topic of meaning in language through literal uses and literary uses. Meyer draws upon the literary in order to contrast with literal use. He discusses what happens when language is used creatively, as opposed to communicatively. This book is primarily an exploration of meaning that is able to account for literature, but it does give insight into his conception of art, at least in the form of literature.

He distinguishes literary meaning based on its capacity to become *autonomous*.<sup>46</sup> This already seems like it may be a problem for my theory that art is problematological

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<sup>46</sup> Michel Meyer, *Meaning and Reading: A Philosophical Essay on Language and Literature*, (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1983), 1.

because Meyer criticizes thought that is considered autonomous. It is important that I distinguish between literary autonomy and propositionalist autonomy. Meyer means that meaning in literature is autonomous because it sets up a world of its own. It does not need to rely on the outside world for its references; it does not necessarily correspond to any sort of “reality.” In fact, Meyer refers to this autonomy as “relative autonomy”.<sup>47</sup>

Meyer writes,

Literature displaces ideological problems, or *ideas* if we prefer this word, and thereby acquires autonomy with respect to them. It institutes a new relationship with reality. Literature auto-contextualizes the problems that it creates, i.e., it gives them a specific form with respect to everyday language for which problems are totally external and, so to speak, ‘realistic’. This auto-contextualization is *poesis*.<sup>48</sup>

It is clear from this quote that Meyer sees the autonomy present in literature as something apart from the assumed autonomy in propositionism. The autonomy in propositionism refers to the belief that facts can stand alone. This auto-contextualization can be likened to the framing that Deleuze and Guattari discuss. Meyer brings up the autonomy of literature because he thinks it is an important problem to address in classical theories of meaning. He questions how we can find meaning in literature if it stands alone from the world of reality yet is still in the terms of reality. He finds a solution to this through problematology. It is not essential to my paper that I go

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 2.

into this entirely. What is important is the auto-contextualization that Meyer sees as an intrinsic feature of fiction.<sup>49</sup>

In addition to his discussion of auto-contextualization Meyer also explicitly references literature's implications in problematology. It is through its very nature of being independent of reality that literature is able to materialize the problematological difference. In literal language, the meaning is transparent; it is not tied up in a world of its own as it is in literature. Meyer writes,

The more a problem is expressed literally, the less the form counts as the means to mark the difference between what is problematological and what is the solution, since this is made clear in the text. The less literally or the more figuratively a problem is expressed, the more problematic the whole textuality is in comparison to habitual discourse.<sup>50</sup>

In an attempt to be more explicit, literal language (or habitual discourse) actually tends to be propositional because it lays out what is the problem and what is the solution. Literature forces the reader to think about the answer put forth in the context of the autonomous world and, because it is in a confined, self-contained, reality, the reader must consider the answer more carefully, causing questions to arise. Meyer uses fairy tales as an example to elucidate this point, "Fairy tales, for instance, confront the reader with problems that the tales were meant to resolve; the solutions offered are sometimes magical... The less a problem is explicitly described, the more it must be suggested."<sup>51</sup> We all recall stories from childhood that teach a lesson and there is a reason these

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 131-32.

lessons were taught via fantasy rather than explicitly; it is easier to understand the question-answer pair involved when it is disguised as a metaphor. The metaphor, although more cryptic, touches on our individual realities more than habitual language could because we can tailor it for ourselves; it gives rise to questions that we develop on our own. Literature is written in its own context as a means of escaping the problems that arise when we try to perfectly articulate reality. We cannot perfectly articulate reality; literature concedes to this and instead formulates its own reality. In this way literature materializes the problematological difference.<sup>52</sup>

Fiction materializes the problematological difference, but how does this explain the rest of what fiction does? Meyer summarizes the pleasures derived from fiction conceived in this way accordingly,

Fiction captures the reader's attention by temporarily freeing him from everyday and hence real problems. If the reader finds a solution in some literary discourse, the solution can only be fictional since the adequate resolution to a real problem must take place at the level of reality. Aesthetic pleasure is generated when we feel we have a solution to our problems in fiction. Thus, when fiction succeeds in releasing us from our problems, it solves them in a certain sense by giving us a sensation of aesthetic pleasure.<sup>53</sup>

It is important, however, to address explicitly how this differs from an ordinary understanding of literature. Typical understandings of why literature is beneficial say that it is enjoyable or used because it might be easier for people to understand. These things remain true, but Meyer's explanation goes deeper than this. Meyer's explanation

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 130-32.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 139-40.

is based on his philosophy of problematology and the importance of questions in general. Literature is beneficial because it gives rise to questions and all the other benefits simply follow from this.

In addition to discussing how literature is problematological, he also discusses how previous literary theories are flawed. He discusses the propositionalist theories on meaning and their shortcomings when it comes to literary interpretation. He mainly criticizes the substitution view of meaning for its breakdown when it comes to literary works. Again, he goes into a lengthy explanation of meaning that I do not need to go into here, what matters is that he criticizes the view of meaning as reference because of its shortcomings in literary theory. It is clear that he sees literature as something unique from ordinary discourse and the propositionalist interpretation of cannot account for its uniqueness. This can be paralleled to his critique of the propositionalist interpretation of science.

Although Meyer only addresses literature as a means of expressing a larger point, he still manages to explicate the implications of literature in problematology. His explanation of literature fits nicely with Deleuze and Guattari's explanation of art, but it does not even mention any other art forms. This is most likely because his book is about language, not because he does not consider them to be problematological. I think in this book Meyer gives a proper assessment of art and its role in problematology because he discusses the implication of art on problematology and also suggests how art interpretation could be more problematological.

### ***Rhetoric, Language, and Reason***

The next book chronologically is *Rhetoric, Language, and Reason*. It is part of a series of books on literature and philosophy. Again, it seems like, based on the title and the series it is a part of, this book will at least make mention of literature and maybe other art forms too. From the title we can also gather that Meyer seems to place a great deal of importance upon rhetoric and language which puts his focus on literature rather than other art forms into context.

Meyer makes his first mention of the arts in the introduction of the book. He mentions the move to postmodernity that was inspired by the crisis of reason. He writes, "The crisis of reason and of foundations will put problematicity to the fore in many areas of thought and culture, ranging from painting to literature, from philosophy to music."<sup>54</sup> From this we can gather that problematology will be important to the shaping of art in postmodernity because it will give art, among other things, a positive starting point in nihilistic times.

Meyer next discusses the implications of art on thought. He describes art as "a chaos which is organized and mastered thanks to a greater abstraction and figuration."<sup>55</sup> The arts have already shown the death of the subject. The subject is an important feature of art. In literature the subject give the story its unity. Without a spectator, the events of literature serve no purpose and become chaos again. The subject is who the

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<sup>54</sup> Meyer, *Rhetoric, Language, and Reason*, 5.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

literature is written for. There is no meaning without a subject.<sup>56</sup> Meyer's description of art is very similar to Deleuze and Guattari's because art, for Meyer, is an externalized relationship with the chaos of existence. Again, as in *Meaning and Reading*, Meyer reflects on the importance of fiction in expressing the meaning of reality. We can take the example of literary theory to understand this point. Most theories of interpretation say that there is not one true meaning in literature, it is susceptible to interpretation. The interpretability of literature prepares us for the idea that everything is interpretable. Fiction helps us accept the idea that everything is just an attempt to rationalize the chaos of reality. This is why Meyer claims that abstract art is the most realistic art, because it openly displays the nonsense in everyday life. We can see this clearly in the inspiration famed thinkers have drawn from postmodern and absurdist literature; works like Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and Kafka's *Die Prüfung* take on great philosophical significance.<sup>57</sup>

Kafka's *Die Prüfung* is an especially important example for Meyer. *Die Prüfung* means "The Test". It is a story about someone who wants to become a servant but first must pass the interview process. He is asked many things, none of which he can answer, he gets up to leave but the interviewer stops him saying, "Stay, that was only a test. He who does not answer the questions has passed the test." It seems to be an absurd piece of literature that has no meaning, but upon closer examination, it could be interpreted as metafiction. Meyer explains the metafiction in this context,

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 22-26.

The servant who cannot enter the house is like the reader who cannot understand modern literature. Any text evokes the question of its meaning to the reader—the ‘servant’ of the text—but the reader will only have access to the meaning of modern fiction if he understands that there is no longer a meaning to find.<sup>58</sup> (LRL 43)

Once we understand that there is not a meaning to find we are free to use our own personal meaning, so long as we understand that it is not *the only* meaning. Everything is questionable, thus enters problematology, a beacon of understanding in uncertainty. Problematology only asserts that everything is questionable.<sup>59</sup> Not only is everything in fiction questionable, everything in fiction must be questioned. Meyer calls this one of the “basic laws of fiction.” It is what makes fiction fictional. There is no preexisting context that the author and the reader share, thus the reader has to differentiate for themselves between the question and the answer.<sup>60</sup> Fiction serves as an intimation of the impossibility of true understanding and points in the direction of problematological understanding.<sup>61</sup>

Throughout the book Meyer emphasizes the importance of literature, and art in general, as an intimation of problematology. It may seem counterintuitive for Meyer to go into such detail about literature in a book about argumentation, but he feels that it is the best way to express the problematicity of rhetoric. Meyer takes it a step further by claiming that literature is essential to understanding argumentations by writing, “To neglect literature and to consider only logical reasoning is the worst thing that could

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 42-43.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 48.



happen to rhetoric: it amounts to a death sentence.”<sup>62</sup> It is clear that, in problematology, art interpretation is taken beyond aesthetic evaluation, to philosophical interpretation. In this manner, Meyer critiques the interpretations of rhetoric that have come before him, such as ones that disregard the importance of literature.<sup>63</sup>

This book clearly delves into the relationship between thought and art. Although Meyer addresses nonliterary arts more in this book than *Meaning and Reading*, he still appears to prioritize the literary arts. This may be because in this book he is talking about language and so his examples are primarily literary. In this book Meyer discusses both of the issues I previously stipulated would qualify a sufficient assessment of art. He writes about the influence of art in problematology and how problematology changes art interpretation. Art influences thought because it readies our minds to accept the chaos of reality. Problematology influences art because it elevates art to an essential role in rhetoric and it highlights the positivity of problematic art. Problematology also influences art through literary theory because it encourages the idea that there is a multitude of interpretations and they are shaped by the observer.

### ***Of Problematology***

The most recently published book, *Of Problematology*, is an exploration of problematology in science, language and philosophy as the subtitle states. The book

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 104.

mainly focuses on these three subject areas, but makes a few references to art, specifically the literary arts. The lack of references to art in this book is probably due to the fact that it is a move away from the previous books' concentration on literature. Instead, it explores other aspects of thought and their relationship with problematology.

*Of Problematology* mostly references art in passing and most repeat ideas he already addresses in previous books. Since most of the ideas are already addressed in the previous sections, I will only mention them instead of going into detail about them again. I think it is still important to reference them so that we can get an idea of how he addresses art in all his books.

Meyer mentions, as he did in previous books, that literature is on the cutting edge, pushing thought further than philosophy could, for example, during the crisis of postmodernity. Also, the philosophers that introduced postmodernity often used poetics to express their philosophies.<sup>64</sup> He mentions poetry while discussing Heidegger, a thinker with a strong connection to poetics. Heidegger thinks the thinker should become more like the poet, a sentiment Meyer certainly shares in some respect. (OP30) Meyer also mentions Sartre in this regard, as a thinker who turned to the literary arts in order to explore thought more freely.<sup>65</sup> He mentions Kafka again and the short story, "The Test".<sup>66</sup> As in his previous books, he mentions theories of meaning and literature to show how problematology is a more complete theory of meaning because it can

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<sup>64</sup> Meyer, *Of Problematology*, 28.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 250-52.

account for literary meaning. This leads to a discussion of fictionality and the auto-contextualization that makes it difficult to use traditional theories of meaning to interpret.<sup>67</sup>

In *Of Problematology*, Meyer does not introduce anything about art that he had not already written about in any of his previous books. Still, these references are important to understanding problematology fully. It shows that, despite writing a book that is not about literature, Meyer still finds it necessary to mention it in order to elucidate his theory completely. The fact that he includes these references is a testament to the importance Meyer places on art.

### ***Has Art Been Properly Addressed?***

Through these references in his texts, we can get a clear picture of art and problematology. Firstly, I will discuss the preoccupation with literary arts that overshadows the other arts. Next, I will address the similarities between Meyer's theory of 'auto-contextualization' and Deleuze and Guattari's "enframing" and how this property makes art problematological. Finally, I will discuss Meyer's theory of art and how this improves upon previous theories of art. I feel that these three points give a proper summation of problematological art.

Meyer only really discusses the literary arts; he fails to discuss any other art form in detail. There are multiple reasons this may be the case. Meyer may genuinely think

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 238-241, 256.

that literary arts are the best way for human thought to be expressed creatively. This is a common view among philosophers. Literary arts are considered the highest form of art because they are no longer held back by the constraints of physicality. In literary arts, the only medium is language. Another reason Meyer prioritizes literary arts could simply be because he is preoccupied with rhetoric. He focuses mainly on language and argumentation, it seems logical that the art he would discuss most often is textual. He never addresses the lack of non-literary art in his books, so I cannot conclude on his intentions in this matter. Although I consider the exclusion of non-literary art a shortcoming in his philosophy and would like to see more writing from him about non-literary art, I cannot use this as evidence that his philosophy is deficient because I cannot discern his intentions.

The next matter of discussion is Meyer's concept of "auto-contextualization" and Deleuze and Guattari's "enframing." I feel that this is the strongest part of Meyer's discussion on art. Meyer writes that this is the aspect of art that makes it problematological. Meyer writes that the very thing that makes literary work fiction, that its context is not the same context as reality, is the same thing that makes it problematological. This is also the aspect of art that causes difficulty in interpreting art with a traditional theory of meaning. If the very thing that makes fiction unique is the same thing that makes it problematological, fiction is the only thing that could perform the role in problematology it does. In this way, Meyer shows how important literary arts are while also giving a unique theory of meaning. Another positive aspect of "auto-

contextualization” is that it nicely translates into the non-literary arts and, thus, makes it possible for us to envision Meyer’s discussion of problematological art extending to the non-literary. Meyer even extends his idea of auto-contextualization beyond art. He discusses the shortcomings in questioning because it is “unadequately housed in a structure limited by external considerations.”<sup>68</sup> It is clear that the auto-contextualization of art, and of thought in general, can help us find the most fundamental element, the pure question. Meyer’s theory of auto-contextualization aptly fulfills the qualification I laid out previously, that he address how art influences thought in problematology.

The final matter I will address is the difference between previous theories of art and Meyer’s theory of art. This addresses the final qualification that I have previously laid out, that Meyer’s theory address how problematology improves upon how we view art. *Meaning and Reading* is the book that most explicitly addresses previous theories of meaning, but all the books address this. This shows that, even when meaning is not the focal point of the book, Meyer still finds it necessary to address meaning in the literary context.

Meyer talks about theories of meaning that have come before him and how they inadequately accounted for literary meaning. For example, he explicitly criticizes Gottlob Frege’s propositional theory of meaning in *Of Problematology*. In order to improve upon previous theories of meaning, Frege came up with the principle of composition. This principle states that meanings in propositions are in the constituent terms. For two

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 35.

propositions to mean the same thing, their constituent terms must mean the same thing. The problem Meyer sees with this theory of meaning is that it overlooks the most difficult part of formulating meaning; it is merely analyzing the sentence, not reality. In Frege's theory, to understand meaning break down an exchange based on the sentences, and then break down the sentences based on the words, and then use the meaning of the words based on their relation with reality. This already seems like a cumbersome (and impossible) process for Meyer, but the real problems come in interpretation of literature. Works of fiction are auto-contextualized and, therefore, have no relation to external reality. Meyer thinks that we need a new theory of meaning that can give the same kind of consistent method for understanding in literal speech as in literary arts. Frege's theory neglects the difficulty in corresponding speech with reality in a meaningful, precise way. An example of a phrase where Frege's theory of meaning would fail is in metaphor or poetry. Take any metaphor, for example, "Life is a box of chocolates." In Frege's theory of meaning we would break down this metaphor to the words it is made up of. Life refers to a certain static aspect of reality and a box of chocolates refers to a certain static aspect of reality. This, however, is not how metaphors work. Metaphors are meant to have multiple interpretations whereas Frege's theory of meaning is meant to be scientific and exact. In Frege's theory of meaning, metaphors must be nonsensical, literally saying nothing true, yet, metaphors do communicate something. The very point of a metaphor is to communicate something personal to each individual, something that Frege's theory tries to avoid. Instead of this

theory of meaning, Meyer proposes a problematological theory of meaning. Meyer's theory of meaning relies on understand based on the question that propositions answer. This theory of meaning can be used in literal speech as well as literary text. Meyer's theory is hermeneutic; it is a back and forth process rather than the one-directional interpretation of Frege. In this manner, Meyer addresses previous theories of meaning in the case of art and improves them with problematology.<sup>69</sup>

In order to elucidate exactly what problematological art looks like, I will give a few examples of instances wherein problematology enhances our understanding of art. In problematology, art is valued for its ability to inspire more questions. For example, kitsch paintings, like those of Thomas Kinkade, do not inspire more questions. Kinkade's paintings follow a certain format and are meant to make us feel a certain way. His paintings do not cause us to ponder anything. They are rather unoriginal and uninspiring. The paintings of Pablo Picasso, for example, are very thought provoking. They were done in a radical new style that inspired many questions. We are, thus, able to value Picasso's work for its problematological import over Kinkade's. Problematology views art in regard to the questions it is answering as well as the questions it inspires.

Through all these examples, we can see that art plays an important role in the philosophy of problematology. In order to qualify Meyer's philosophy as complete, I set as a requirement, that it address art as the pillar of thought that it is. I think that it is clear that, although he primarily focuses on literary art, Meyer sees art as a crucial part

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 236-41.

of the human intellectual experience. He examines art with the same rigor and dedication that he gives to science. As Deleuze and Guattari point out in *What is Philosophy?*, art, science, and philosophy are the three pillars of human thought. They all shape one another and are also shaped. It is important that a philosophy give a thorough examination of all three, as individual entities because they are so different, yet they not one is more important than the other. Obviously, as a philosophy, problematology is going to be primarily about the formation of concepts, but in order to be a complete one it must address its sisters of thought, science and art. Meyer not only does this thoroughly, but he also points out the shortcomings in other philosophies because they fail to do this. Meyer understands the importance of a holistic view of human thought. It pairs nicely with his philosophy of problematology in general, a philosophy that is not preoccupied with any one aspect of thought. Problematology is all about remembering the question when formulating thought. It is important that we not neglect any aspect of thought because we deem it unimportant. Problematology is a holistic theory of thought wherein we remain aware of the different aspects of thought and critically examine the differences between them, thus gaining knowledge from their uniqueness. It only makes sense that such a theory would be particularly adamant about addressing art.



## CONCLUSION

Now that we have finished our examination of Meyer's philosophy of art, what have we gained? Meyer's philosophy stands strong against the crisis of postmodernity as well as against the threat of scientism. Unlike the synthetic platforms of propositionalist philosophies, Meyer offers a problematological foundation to thought. In this foundation, we can find the evidence to overturn the propositionalism of the modern day. Meyer's philosophy offers an escape route from the tyranny of justification. How does this change the scenario discussed in the introduction?

With problematology, it is possible to see the value in things without adhering to any sort of hierarchy of thought. In propositionalism, we are forced to prioritize justified statements over the wanderings of the artist. Art is necessarily superfluous in propositionalism because it offers no quantifiable knowledge; it is only recreational and cannot be a source of knowledge. Art interpretation thusly suffers. Art is valued in terms of dollars, as a status symbol. The real value of art is lost when it is quantified, just as the value of knowledge is lost in propositionalism. There is a real violence being done to the human experience when we only prioritize the justifiable. Meyer highlights this as the question, but it is clear that it is much more than just questions; it is the human experience that is lost. When we believe that science can present us with facts that stand alone, we ignore certain aspects of humanity for the sake of "progress." We ignore the curiosity that brought us to the point; we neglect the basic desires of ourselves. We are curious beings attempting to make sense of the chaos of existence,

there are multiple routes for this curiosity to take, no one is better than the others and an understanding of them all, as unique and important, is essential to fully experiencing humanity. Problematology is also important for philosophy. Philosophy, faced with the crisis of postmodernity, is under the threat of either becoming meaningless or adhering to scientism. Neither one of these options is a desirable path for us to take. Problematology as a new paradigm for thought can rescue philosophy from these pitfalls.

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