In 1984, Arthur Danto wrote an article with the telling title 'The End of Art.' Just a few years earlier, Richard Rorty had declared the end of philosophy and Michel Foucault, the end of politics. A few years later, Francis Fukuyama was to declare the end of history. So, on the face of it, Danto's thesis fits in nicely with the 'endism' that was popular in the 1980s. In important ways, however, I believe it also stands out.

For instance, if you were to ask the average man whether history and politics came to an end in the 1980s, he would not know what you are talking about. By contrast, if you were to suggest that art came to an end a few decades ago, that suggestion would probably not fall on deaf ears. More than one, to say the least, would agree, for it is no big secret that the man in the street has a rather low opinion of contemporary art. Art-making is not the same as it used to be and numerous people think this is a real problem (and not just a pseudo-problem invented by some armchair philosopher).

Judging by some of his remarks in 'The End of Art,' one might think Danto to be one of those opponents of contemporary art and a perfect philosophical representative for the malcontent of the man in the street. In reality, however, Danto is nothing of the kind, as I shall attempt to demonstrate in my paper.

Firstly, there is a marked difference between the disappointment usually expressed by people who do not appreciate contemporary art and Danto's disappointment in 'The End of Art.' In a nutshell: Danto is a fervent admirer of modernist art. The discovery that anything can be art is described by him as the end point, but also as the high point, of that exciting period of artistic revolutions that began at the end of the 19th century. What he seems to regret most, as a consequence, is that this era of transgressing and extending frontiers finally came to an end in the late 1960s. People who dismiss contemporary art, on the other hand, usually do not like modernist art either and the discovery that anything can be art - even a urinal or a commonplace Brillo Box - is considered by most of them a low point rather than a high point. Accordingly, their greatest concern and regret seems to be that art has not yet recovered from the crisis that started at the end of the 19th century. Secondly, Danto's disappointment did not last long. In later writings he explicitly renounces his earlier pessimism and presents himself as an ardent advocate of contemporary art. In his book After the End of Art, Danto's aim is "to show something of what it means to take pleasure in post-historical reality". And in his book The Madonna of the Future, he comments on his famous thesis about the end of art: “When I first wrote about this concept, I was somewhat depressed. (·) But now I have grown reconciled to the unlimited diversity of art. I marvel at the imaginativeness of artists in finding ways to convey meanings by the most untraditional of means”.

So, Danto's 'arthphihiostcrisisophory' can certainly not be looked upon as an articulation, let alone a justification, of the unease and displeasure many people experience when confronted with contemporary art. Some will say that this is actually to his credit, but I tend to disagree. Danto, who calls himself an historian, has always drawn attention to the great turning points in art history and has made painstaking efforts to explain what is distinctively new about modernism and 'post-historical reality'. Nonetheless, he has never offered an explanation for one of the most remarkable characteristics of the period that put an end to traditional art, namely the manifest and sharp division of public opinion since the end of the 19th century. For though some have welcomed the new art enthusiastically, countless others have utterly rejected it and unlike Danto, most of them are yet to renounce their pessimism. Now, since this relates to a fairly large number of people, one cannot just dismiss the issue, as Danto did in his own case, by saying that all these people are depressed. Sureley they must have a point. Danto cannot account for it, however, and continues to paint a rather rosy picture of how things are.

In my paper, I would like to place Danto's conviction under closer scrutiny. I wish to show that there are some problematic aspects of contemporary art which are neglected by the author of After the End of Art and The Madonna of the Future. Naturally, this does not mean that those who have a black view of the art world are entirely correct. I only think that the rosy picture does not tell the whole story. To substantiate my point of view, I intend to focus upon three comparisons to be found in the books just mentioned. Although, as everyone knows, no comparison will hold water for very long, I believe these particular comparisons or analogies are faulty in a quite significant way.
"Is Danto gloomy about the end of art? Not in the slightest. . . . Danto is nothing if not cheered by the prospect of an art world in which everything is permitted."---Roger Copeland, Wilson Quarterly. "If you are seriously attentive to contemporary art, you are already aware of Danto and his general positions, and owe it to yourself to read this book. If you are not, but are genuinely curious, you would do well to follow him. . . . Arthur C. Danto, Johnsonian Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at Columbia University, is Art Critic for The Nation. His books include The Transfiguration of the Commonplace, Embodied Meanings, Beyond the Brillo Box, and Encounter and Reflections, winner of the National Book Critics Circle Prize in Criticism. Arthur Coleman Danto (January 1, 1924 â€“ October 25, 2013) was an American art critic, philosopher, and professor at Columbia University. He is best known for having been a long-time art critic for The Nation and for his work in philosophical aesthetics and philosophy of history, though he contributed significantly to a number of fields, including the philosophy of action. His interests included thought, feeling, philosophy of art, theories of representation, philosophical psychology, Hegel's Last Friday, Arthur C Danto, one of the most important American philosophers and art critics of the second part of the 20th century, died at the age of 89. Danto was born in Ann Arbor in 1929, and raised in Detroit. After studying with the great French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty in Paris, he became professor of philosophy at Columbia University in 1950.Â He also declared the end of art. Following Hegel, the American thinker suggested that in our post-historical or postmodern era there are no stylistic constraints, that is, no special way that works of art have to be. In this condition, where it is not possible to outline the meaning of art by examples, that is, as the outcome of a clear historical development, it is necessary to declare its end.