

ESTHETICS

By

George A. Blair

Ndala

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By

George A. Blair

Ndala
4049 Victory Parkway
Cincinnati, Ohio 45229

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PREFACE

0.1. Being scientific about art If philosophy is, as I think it is, a science, and is therefore based on factual data, then it is no small problem how one is to approach esthetics. How do you get scientific about art and beauty? It may well be a fact that Michelangelo's David is beautiful; but if it is, this fact is not the kind of fact that science can handle.

The beauty of the statue is not an observable datum for scientific investigation, certainly, whether it is there in the work of art itself, or is "in the eye of the beholder," as the saying goes. It could even be argued that beauty is thought to be in the beholder's eyes just because there is no scientific sense in which you can say it is there in the work of art.

On the other hand, it seems silly to say that just because some people don't find the David beautiful it isn't "really" beautiful (for them), while it really is beautiful for those who find it so. This makes the trash that you find on the front of greeting cards "as much" real art as a painting by Rembrandt, and the verses inside "as good" as Shakespeare's sonnets.

No, that way lies madness. It cannot be that the stuff on the Tube ranks with Sophocles, any more than the fact that some people think that evolution is nonsense makes them "as right" as the biologists who have studied the subject.

0.1.1. "Open-mindedness" We must beware of the closed-mindedness that goes by the name of "open-mindedness": the opinion that "everyone has a right to their own opinion." What this view is really saying is, "You hold your opinion, and I'll hold mine; but don't you go trying to change my mind by talking to me about facts."

As you can see, that's really closed-mindedness. Real open-mindedness is the willingness to let evidence govern one's views—so that a person will hold a view because he has evidence for it, and will change that view when new evidence indicates that he was wrong. Such a person cares about facts, and does not say that one opinion is as good as another; and he is even dubious about whether anyone has a "right" to hold an obviously false opinion. He might even—horror of horrors!—try to persuade others who hold opposing views that they are wrong.

And who is he, the others say, to tell them that they are wrong and he is right? It isn't who he is, but the evidence he has, that matters.

Now we are going on the assumption, in this book, that it is at least possible to find evidence on matters of beauty and art, evidence that can show that the Philistine is objectively wrong and that certain things are really beautiful and can be known to be so.

Those who are so locked into the opinion that there is no objectivity about beauty and art had better read no further, then; what will be said from now on will simply annoy them.

0.2. Preliminary definition of beauty But this still leaves us with the problem of how to approach beauty scientifically. Granted, we can't directly investigate it scientifically; but people do experience it, and experiencing is something that psychologists deal with, and so do philosophers. The experience itself might be able to be approached scientifically; and so indirectly we

0.2. Preliminary definition of beauty

may be able to get at what the experience is an experience of, through the experience itself.

PRELIMINARY DEFINITION: *Beauty is whatever can produce an esthetic experience.*

This is not a terribly helpful definition at this point, because in the first place, we don't know what sort of experience an esthetic experience is, or even if it is a distinct type of experience (as opposed to being just a name for several different sorts of experiences); and in the second place, we don't know whether esthetic experiences are actually “produced” by anything or not.

That sounds as if I am actually subscribing to the “eye of the beholder” theory of beauty, which I just got through castigating. Actually, I am not. What I am saying is that, if the investigation is to be scientific, we can't start with the conclusion and then try to find data to prove our prejudice; we start with some admitted fact, and let the chips fall where they may.

What the definition does for us, then, is simply provide a starting-point. Instead of riding around on our philosophical steeds looking for the Holy Grail of “beauty,” we can take out our philosophical scalpels and go into the laboratory and start dissecting experiences until we find the esthetic type or types of experiences; and then we will investigate that to find out if it is spontaneous or not—and if it isn't, then we know where to look to find beauty.

0.3. Plan of the book So the plan of this book is this: First, we will investigate experience in general, to find out if any experience is objective, and if so, what makes an experience objective.

In doing this, we will discover that some of our experiences are not objective, and do not refer to anything outside themselves—as, for

instance, when we imagine a unicorn, there is no actual unicorn which we imagine. But other experiences refer beyond themselves to reality; these are objective experiences, and their object is actually something existing independently of the experience itself.

Next, we will have to investigate how we know the characteristics of this “reality” that causes us to have an objective experience. It is one thing to know that there is something-or-other “out there” that I am responding to, and another thing to know what it is; but we can't really have any objective experience that means something unless we can say more about the object than that there is one.

This investigation will lead us into an examination of what facts are, and what truth is; and, interestingly enough, we will find that truth is not the same as reality (nor are facts the same as realities), though it is through facts and truth that we get at reality, and can say something objective about it.

The discussion of truth will lead to a discussion of falseness, and this, interestingly enough, will allow us to define “good” and “bad”; it will turn out that “good” is just “true” looked at from a different point of view, and “bad” is “false” considered backwards.

Once we have considered experience in general and its relation to facts and objectivity, we will then look at emotional experiences, because in them the esthetic experience is hidden.

First, we will consider what emotions and perceptions have in common, and in what respects they differ. This will allow us to see that there can be an objective component in an emotional experience, which can then be used—analogously to perceptions—in getting at facts based on it.

The esthetic experience, then, will be the experience that learns facts based on emotional data rather than perceptions; and the reality which gives rise to these facts will then turn out to be beauty.

There will then follow an analysis of what beauty is, based on what

0.3. Plan of the book

it must be in order to be able to produce the esthetic experience; and this will include how esthetic facts are like perceptive facts (i.e. “scientific” facts), and how they are unlike them; why you do understand something factual about the world through the esthetic experience, but why the fact you learn this way cannot be translated into a “scientific” fact or set of facts; why the scientist cannot as a scientist even be aware that there are esthetic facts about the world.

In the course of the discussion on beauty, we will be able to get at a definition of ugliness which is different from the opposite of “prettiness”; we will find that some unpretty things are beautiful, and some pretty things are ugly.

We will then take up the subject of art, which is the production of something beautiful (in the sense we will have discovered)—or is the making of an esthetically meaningful statement. Art will then be investigated by analogy to perceptive statements (“scientific” ones), showing the similarities and differences; and while we discuss this, we will have occasion to give some objective meaning to inspiration, genius, style, and so on, which are recognized to have some application to artists, but which are pretty fuzzy terms.

The results of this investigation will also allow us to have some objective grounds on which to distinguish good art from bad art; we should not only be able to discover why bad art is bad, but the various ways in which it can be bad; and we should be able to do this in a scientific way, and not merely make dogmatic statements about it.

0.4. Dogma and science As long as I have mentioned the terms, let me distinguish dogma from science. It is often thought that statements are “dogmatic” when they are asserted as facts, or as true, and not as “well, this is my opinion.” But that's due to the dogma that “everyone has a right to their own opinion,”

which I mentioned earlier on; you're supposed to be wise if you think that the fact is that we can't really know what the facts are.

DEFINITION: *A dogmatic statement is one that is asserted as a fact without evidence to support it. It is to be accepted as true simply on the authority of the person who makes it.*

The term came into being because of the Dogmas (the “things taught”) of the Catholic Church. Since Catholics believe that God has revealed certain facts, and that these facts are “mysteries”—unable to be established by observable evidence—then these mysteries are to be accepted by Catholics as facts simply because God said that they are facts (and the presumption for the Catholic is that the Church is transmitting them without falsifying them). To ask “prove it” of a Dogma of the Church is to miss the point; you accept it or you don't.

DEFINITION: *A scientific statement is a statement that is to be accepted as a fact based on the evidence that supports it.*

The evidence might be absolutely compelling (so that the statement cannot actually be doubted) or it might be more or less cogent (so that it is possible that the statement might be in error). But the point is that, absent evidence to the contrary, the reasonable person will accept the scientific statement as a fact.

An example of a scientific statement that cannot be doubted is “There is something.”

Try to consider this as false. That would mean that you would be thinking that there is nothing at all. But you are aware that you are thinking—and that is something. So you can't doubt that there is something, because if you do, there is the doubt, and that is

0.4. Dogma and science

something.

So, you see, the statement that there is something is not a dogma, even though it has to be accepted as a fact; it is absolutely certain, not because someone says you have to accept it, but because of the evidence you have that a doubt is not nothing, and your little experiment of what is implied in your trying to doubt it.

There are, of course, scientific statements that it is possible to doubt. Einstein's theory that bodies fall because of a warping of space-time has, at the moment, no real evidence to indicate that it is false; but it is quite possible that (like Newton's theory of gravity before it) some new evidence will come to light which will show that space-time is not really something that can be warped by massive objects.

But until such evidence comes to light, it is not up for grabs what space and time are really like. Why? Because Einstein's view has a lot of evidence to support it, and other views do not; you have reason to say that Einstein is right, and no reason to say that he is wrong; and so a reasonable person would not "disbelieve" him simply because it can't be proved that he can't be wrong.

Our object in this book is to formulate a scientific theory of the esthetic experience and of what produces it. This is a rather formidable task, and will involve some pretty abstract thinking, and a good deal of concentrated effort. But the rewards are, I think, worth it; it will give us a reason for studying works of art beyond simply that they are nice to look at. The artist has something true to say about the world, and something which cannot be discovered any other way than through his art—and by approaching his art properly.

0.5. Scientific method Basically, the way we are going to treat things scientifically will be to use a generalization of scientific

0.5. Scientific method

method, which tries to make sense out of situations that don't seem to make sense in themselves. I have treated the method elsewhere in some detail, as well as why it is scientific; so let me give here only the most basic things that a person will need to know in order to follow the arguments in this book.

Science is looking for the causes of effects.

DEFINITION: *An effect is a set of facts which, taken by themselves, form a contradiction. That is, it is something that happens and yet seems impossible, because we know of some fact that says it can't happen the way it actually happened.*

DEFINITION: *A cause is the fact which makes sense out of the effect. That is, it is the "missing" fact which, when added to the effect, lets us know that there wasn't really a contradiction there. It is, in other words, the fact we didn't know—and our not knowing it made it seem as if the impossible had happened.*

Thus, a person whose pocket has been picked might reach into his pocket for his wallet, and find the pocket empty. "That's funny;" he says, "I thought I had my wallet in there." The effect he has noticed (why he thinks the situation "funny") is that he seems to remember putting the wallet into his pocket, and he knows that once it gets there, it stays there—so it should still be there. But it isn't. Based on the information he has, a contradiction has occurred.

He thinks of various explanations: possible causes, possibilities that could make sense out of the effect. He considers that he might not have put his wallet into his pocket (and his faulty recollection then makes sense out of the effect); but he tests this and finds that his wallet is not where he would have left it if that explanation were true, so he rules it out as false.

0.5. Scientific method

He then hears someone say, “I saw someone reach into your pocket,” and so he formulates the explanation that his pocket was picked. This, the true explanation, is the cause; and if he can find the one who picked his pocket, he can assure himself that he has found the cause.

Now since this study of esthetics is an exposition of a theory (a detailed statement of an explanation that I think is the cause of various effects dealing with the subject of esthetics), I am not going to go into great detail formulating various explanations that turn out on investigation to be false. What this book is about is the result of a scientific investigation into esthetics, not a description of the investigation itself. Hence, it will be a statement of the basic cause of the esthetic experience, and a description of what the effects are that lead to this cause, as well as why this particular cause explains the effects in question.

To go through an analysis of why this theory is more likely than others to be a description of the cause of esthetic experience would be to write a treatise on esthetics, and make the book much, much longer than it already is; The subject is, I think, complex enough already that a rather brief treatment of the positive position it comes to is in order, rather than going down and rejecting all the blind alleys that have been historically traveled.

CHAPTER 1

CONSCIOUSNESS

1.1. Experience The object of the investigation at this point is to discover how the esthetic experience fits into the general scheme of our experiences; if it can be included in the type of experiences we call “objective,” then there is some hope of finding a reality or aspect of reality which deserves the name “beauty” and is not dependent on the experience itself. That is, if beauty is something objective, then the esthetic experience will depend on it, and beauty will not depend on whether someone happens to have an esthetic experience or not.

Note that this chapter will not deal directly with aesthetics; it will treat the characteristics of any experience. We will concentrate on the esthetic experience later, as one class of experiences.

1.1.1. Consciousness First, then, let us consider our consciousness.

TENTATIVE DEFINITION: *Consciousness will be taken to mean awareness, knowledge, thinking, seeing, hearing, feeling, etc, imagining, remembering, emoting, dreaming—any act where “we know what is going on in our minds.”* It will not include acts of our minds “below” the conscious level, nor any act that would not be

1.1.1. Consciousness

called in some sense an act “of our mind.” The characteristic of consciousness is that a conscious act is aware of itself (as well as aware of whatever might be its object).

Thus things that you once knew but have forgotten might be “in your mind” somewhere, but are not conscious until you remember them; and when you are remembering them, you are aware of them, and aware that you are aware of them.

It is not our purpose to investigate how an act of consciousness is also conscious of itself; we merely state this as a fact, so that acts of consciousness can be recognized and distinguished from acts (which can be acts of our minds) that are unconscious.

1.2. The mind We will first investigate consciousness to show what explains why consciousness is subjective.

1.2.1. First effect The first effect that leads us toward the source of the subjectivity of consciousness is the strange fact that we all know that we are not always conscious: we lose consciousness from time to time (as when we lapse into dreamless sleep).

Now how could we know this? Obviously, we cannot be aware of our unconscious state while we are in the unconscious state, because then (by the definition above) we would be conscious and not unconscious.

Thus, we have an effect. We are (now) conscious of the fact that we were unconscious (last night, say); but while we were unconscious last night, we were not aware of our unconsciousness, because we couldn't have been. As far as our stream of consciousness is concerned, the moment when we lost consciousness and the moment when we regained it would have to appear as the same moment. A little thought will show why this must be the case.

1.2.1. First Effect

Then how do we find out later that we were unconscious? It must be because the contents of our consciousness after we wake up make no sense unless we assume that we were unconscious for a while.

That is, the cause of our knowledge that we lost consciousness is the fact that our consciousness after waking up is an effect—and the cause of that effect is our loss of consciousness.

What I am saying is this: You went to sleep and it was dark out, and the clock said 12:07. An “instant” later (so it seems), you wake up, and the sky is bright, and the clock says 7:22.

You now have two possible explanations: either (1) you didn't lose consciousness and the earth slipped suddenly on its axis, and the clock spun instantaneously through more than seven hours; or (2) you lost consciousness, and the earth kept turning normally and the clock didn't go mad.

Obviously, the second explanation is the only rational one, and so the cause of the observed difference must be your loss of consciousness.

1.2.2. Second effect Now we will take our periodic loss of consciousness as a fact, and notice a second effect that arises out of it:

Our single stream of consciousness is actually many separated streams of consciousness.

That is, when you wake up, one and the same consciousness reappears. The consciousness you had before you went to sleep and the one you have when you wake are not simply “the same” in the sense in which your consciousness is “the same as” (i.e. similar to) mine. There is one stream of consciousness which got interrupted by sleep and takes up again where it left off—so that the moment of loss and the moment of regaining are perceived as the same moment, and you can remember yesterday's consciousness, just as you can

1.2.2. Second effect

remember what went on in your consciousness an hour ago. But you can't "remember" anything in my consciousness, however much mine might be "the same as" yours.

But how can one single consciousness be actually many different consciousnesses—because if the periods of consciousness are separated by periods of unconsciousness, that means that the consciousness did not exist as such while you were asleep?

1.2.3. The mind as cause The answer to this problem is that there must be something that connects the various different consciousnesses into a single stream of consciousness, making this stream yours as opposed to anyone else's.

DEFINITION: *The mind is the whatever-it-is that explains why differences in a stream of consciousness are all parts or aspects of one and the same consciousness.*

This kind of definition (where no effort is made to find out what it is that you are talking about, but you define a cause as simply "whatever causes" the effect in question) is called an operational definition, because it is used in science to define "what operates" in terms of its being "whatever operates in the way in question." The idea is that you might not be able to observe the operator, but you can observe the operations, and so you can define the operator as what is doing the operations.

What it amounts to is that, since we know that effects must have causes, we can define the cause just as the cause of the effect in question, without bothering to make a search for it.

1.2.3.1. Properties of the mind But one thing that is known about the cause of an effect is that it has all the properties

1.2.3.1. Properties of the mind

necessary to explain the effect. Otherwise, it couldn't be the cause. Hence, we can know a few things about the cause, just because no matter what it really is, if it didn't have at least these properties, it wouldn't be able to produce the effect.

One of the properties that the mind must have, for instance, is that the mind must exist during our periods of unconsciousness. If it didn't, then what would connect the "old" mind with the "new" one that woke up when we did? Obviously, whatever connected the "old" consciousness with the "new" one; but that is what we defined as the "operation" that the mind performed. So this "other" thing that connects would be by definition the mind itself.

So the same consciousness wakes up again because you have the same mind before, during, and after sleep; it is just inactive in sleep, and is reactivated when you wake up.

And this implies that your consciousness is the activity of your mind. That is, consciousness is at least one of the acts that the mind does.

1.2.3.2. Subjectivity Connected with this is the fact that each person has his own mind. That is, since the mind makes all the parts of a stream of consciousness to be one stream of consciousness, the mind is also what separates one stream of consciousness from another; it is what makes your consciousness yours and not mine.

And since consciousness is the activity of the mind, it follows from the fact that each person's mind is unique to him that the mind is the source of the subjectivity of consciousness.

That is, it is the fact that your mind is only similar to mine and is not the same one as mine that accounts for why your consciousness is "private" to you, and is (probably) only similar to mine.

1.2.3.2. Subjectivity

Since your consciousness is private to you and I can't be directly aware of it, then I can't know what the experiences you are having actually are. In order to do that, I would have to be conscious with your consciousness—and that is impossible. So I can only argue from the fact that our bodies are structured similarly that in all probability our minds are also similar—and so when I see something green, the probability is rather high that you get pretty much the same impression when you look at the same object.

But since our bodies are not exactly alike, then it is also likely that our minds are not exactly alike; and so in all probability one person's subjective impressions of a given object will be to some extent different from another person's subjective impression of the same object.

1.3. Approaching objectivity It might seem that, precisely because each of our acts of consciousness is an act of a subjective mind, then we are always locked into subjectivity, and can neither know anything about reality as it is “out there” independently of our impression of it, nor can we ever be sure that what we say about things can ever really be agreed to by anyone else. We can only go by the likelihood that we experience things pretty much the same way as others.

But actually, in that case, it's even hard to say that there even are any other people who actually exist. Why? Because my experience of them will be, of course, my consciousness of them; which is an act of my mind. But how do I know that there is any person “out there” that this act of my mind refers to? That is, how do I know that this act of my mind is a reaction to something different from itself? And if I don't even know that, then it's silly even to raise the question of whether this supposed “person” I experience (who might be just a figment of my imagination) is “having” an experience “like” mine or

not.

It sounds like this is another of the roads down which madness lies. It's absurd to say that there really might not be any other people, and that everything is just the play of my mind. So the question is not whether we “really” know about things outside of us, but how we know.

1.3.1. Third effect The effect that lets us “bypass” the subjectivity of our consciousness and know about things as they really are is connected with the possibility that our consciousness of others might be a figment of our imagination.

The fact is that we can classify acts of consciousness into two types: imaginary-acts (and acts—such as concepts of unicorns—that are based on imaginary-acts), and reactions (such as perceptions and perception-based concepts).

Since the contents of an imaginary-act is not different from the contents of a reaction (except sometimes in the degree of vividness), then it can't be that imaginings have some special quality about them (like being in black-and-white) which would distinguish them from reactions.

That is, whatever you can experience as a perception can be reproduced (in, for instance, a dream) as an act of pure imagination. You can even dream that you aren't dreaming, and convince yourself in a dream (by pinching yourself in it, for instance) that you're awake. You dream in color; your dreams can be perfectly logical, and waking life can be fantastic at times—and so on.

So what allows us to distinguish these two classes of experience?

DEFINITION: *Imaginary acts* are acts where the consciousness recognizes that the mind is acting spontaneously: that is, that the mind

1.3.1. Third effect

is producing the consciousness “on its own,” without reacting to anything outside itself. The characteristic of imaginary acts is that we have control over them, and can change them at will.

This is something of an oversimplification, but it is generally true.

DEFINITION: *A reaction is an act where we recognize that the mind is acting in response to something, or is reacting to something other than itself. The characteristic of a reaction is that the particular form of consciousness is being forced on us; we see this way because something outside us is making us see this way.*

The distinction is based on the fact that the act of consciousness is aware of itself as an act; so it recognizes, generally speaking, when it is doing something by itself, or when it is responding to something else. As I say, there are complications with this (we can have hallucinations); but this is not the place to discuss them, since they turn out to be complications and not falsifications of what was said.

1.3.2. Existence as cause The fact, then, that we have these two types of consciousness, is obviously only explainable on the grounds that reaction-type consciousness is caused by something outside itself. If it weren't, there would be no way to distinguish the two classes.

DEFINITION: *Existence is whatever-it-is that we react to when we have a reactive-experience. And since you can say that by definition a re-action responds to an act, we can say that existence is activity.*

That is, take “activity” in its broadest possible sense, so that it would include not only acting on something, but being active without having any particular effect, and would also include “being passive” (i.e. reacting) within it, and you have the sense in which

1.3.2. Existence as cause

existence and activity are synonyms.

Note that this is not a strictly rigorous argument; but it will do for our purposes. If you want the whole story, consult *Modes of the Finite*, Volume 1.

Note also that by saying that existence is activity, we don't know what existence “really is, as it is out there;” if you examine what you mean by “activity,” you find that your direct experience of it is your experience of your own consciousness (which reacts to itself, as I said); and any other activity is analogous to this (because you react to it consciously when you know it). So all you mean by “activity” is “what I react to consciously”—which is what we mean by “existence.”

1.3.3. The object of consciousness Since, in the reactive-consciousness, the reaction is responding to existence, then it refers to the existence as to what it is “about,” so to speak. That is, when you see the field in front of you, your visual impression recognizes that it is a reaction-to something (the field); and so it “talks about” the field.

Strictly speaking, it is not existence itself which is the object of our consciousness, but *being: that which “has” existence*. The idea is that we experience different, limited cases of existence, and *these* are what our experience talks about. But to pursue this distinction would get us deep into metaphysics with no particular benefit to our own investigation, and so for the moment, let us say that “existence” as we use it here is either existence in the strict sense or being.

In that case, existence is the object of consciousness. Existence is what consciousness “talks about” when it “talks about” something, because it is what the consciousness refers to as what caused it.

Note that imaginary consciousness has no object. When you imagine a unicorn, the “image” of the unicorn is simply the form of the act of imagining, and doesn't “talk about” any unicorn. You pre-

1.3.3. The object of consciousness

cisely recognize that there aren't any unicorns, or that the image doesn't refer to anything at all.

So not all acts of consciousness have objects; only reactions do.

Now the real problem of objectivity is connected with the fact that reactive-consciousness is just a reaction. Immanuel Kant got to what we have called "existence"; but he called it "(x)", because, though we might know that there was a something-or-other responsible for what he called our "sensations," we could know nothing at all about what it is; even whether there was one something for all sensations, or whether each one was produced by its own something, and whether the sensation was at all like what produced it.

In general, we can say this: The form under which we react to something is not at all like the existence which we react to. How we can know this is an interesting question which we will get to in a minute; but in general, I think you would be willing to admit that sound-as-you-hear-it doesn't sound like molecules of air hitting each other (which is what the activity is); and green-as-you-see-it doesn't look like inframolecular resonance of 5000 angstrom units wave length—or as only different in degree from heat-as-you-feel-it, as is true of the activities; and the way fur smells is not a copy of little particles of fur—and so on.

1.4. Fourth effect But there is something that Kant didn't notice that will allow us to say something about the existence as it is independently of our reaction to it.

If we look at two different objects at the same time with the same eyes and the same mind, we notice that we have different visual reactions to them.

1.4. Fourth effect

That is, as I look at the computer on which I am composing this, I see grey keys, a light grey background for the keybed, and a beige screen with little white letters on it. Now I am using a single visual apparatus, but reacting in different ways. Since I recognize the consciousness as reactive-consciousness, then why do I have different reactions?

1.4.1. The cause The explanation cannot lie in my visual apparatus, because that is the same, and the reactions are different. It must be that what I am reacting to with my eyes is somehow different; otherwise, the difference in the reactions becomes a contradiction: we would then have the same reactive mechanism reacting to the same thing, and having different reactions to the same thing at the same time. There would be nothing to account for the difference.

Once again, there are complications here, many of which for our purposes we can ignore. But we can generalize what was illustrated above in the following way:

In general, if acts of reactive-consciousness are related among themselves in a certain way, the existences will be related among themselves in the same way. That is, if two reactions (as reactions) are the same as each other, then that means that the activities (existences) that caused them are the same as each other; if two reactions are different, this means that the two existences are different from each other; if things are perceived as beside each other, the activities are in fact beside each other; if a reaction is the result of some other reaction, this is because the existence that produced the first one was the cause of the second existence—and so on.

So we don't know the thing-as-it-actually-exists-in-itself, because we only know it by reacting to it, and the reaction is not like the act it reacts to. But we can know about the thing, based on the way our

1.4.1. The cause

reactions are related among themselves; this relationship has to be caused by a relationship of the same type among the things, or the relationship among the effects is a contradiction.

That is, we don't know what greenness as an act "really is" out there; but we do know that whatever it is, grass has it, and tree leaves have it, and "go" traffic lights have it, because these all cause the same type of reaction in us—and we have just put the label "greenness" upon "the act that causes the type of reaction I get when I look at grass and trees and go lights and so on." Well, what is that act? I don't know; but I know that grass acts that way, or I wouldn't see it as I see it.

Spend a little time on the paragraphs above, so that you see what they are driving at. It is a subtle concept, but one that is crucial for understanding everything else in this book.

1.4.2. Why we can agree And this explains why two people (who may not have the same subjective reactions to things) can agree on what they are talking about.

Suppose when you look at grass, your reaction is like this (*), and mine like this (#); the point being that yours is different from mine. Suppose when you look at blood, your reaction is like this (%), and mine like this (@). Then what happens when you look at an emerald? Your reaction will be (*), and mine will be (#); and when you look at a ruby, yours will be (%) and mine (@). And when looking at the leaves of trees, your reaction is (*) and mine (#), and when looking at stop lights, yours is (%) and mine (@).

Schematically:

grass, emerald, leaf blood, ruby, stop light

you * * * % % %

me # # # @ @ @

Thus, even though your reactions are not the same as mine, when your reactions are the same among themselves, mine are the same among themselves, and when your reactions are different from each other, so are mine. So when the objects are the same as each other, each of my reactions will be the same as each other; and this will also hold for you.

Hence, we both will be able to know the same relationship, even though your reactions are not the same as mine. So if “green” means, “whatever grass has in common with emeralds etc.,” and is not “green-as-I-see-it,” then you and I mean exactly the same thing by “green.”

Think about this too. It is also crucial for understanding what follows.

1.4.2. Why we can agree

CHAPTER 2

UNDERSTANDING AND TRUTH

2.1. Facts We can say, then, that what we know objectively is not the thing-in-itself, but relations the thing has—either relations within parts of it, or relations to other things-in-themselves.

DEFINITION: *A fact is a relation among existences.*

So, it is a fact that grass is like leaves and go lights and emeralds. It is a fact that existence causes us to react (that is how we know existence; through its relation to our consciousness). It is a fact that heavy objects fall down; it is a fact that hydrogen combines with oxygen to form water.

Hence, even though the existence itself is the object of consciousness, facts about existence are obviously what we objectively know, as you can see from the examples. So what we know objectively is not the object itself, really; it is facts about the object. And the reason we know facts and not the existence-in-itself is that we know about the existence by means of our subjective reactions.

But by comparing our subjective reactions, we are able (sometimes—and this we will discuss later) to “bypass” the

2.1. Facts

subjectivity (the part of the reaction that is “mind-produced”) and filter out, as it were, the part that is objective, based on the fact that similar effects have to have similar causes, and so on.

2.1.1. Properties But there is another step we have to take to understand our objective knowledge.

DEFINITION: *A property is the aspect of existence by which it is related to some existence.*

It is a fact that grass and emeralds are similar; what it is about grass (as an object) that is similar to emeralds (as objects) is the property we call “greenness.” You could, in fact, say that it is a fact that grass and emeralds are similar in greenness—and if you did, you would be speaking a little more accurately, because it is also a fact that grass and emeralds are similar in materiality, tangibility, substantiality, and any number of other ways.

Any fact, then, has three aspects or characteristics to it, just because it is a relationship: (1) the relationship itself (in this case, similarity); (2) the objects related (in this case, the grass and the emeralds); and (3) the property in each object by which it is related to the other one.

I should point out that in other branches of philosophy, “property” is a technical term that has a slightly different meaning; it refers to one of the many ways a complex unit (called a “thing”) behaves. For our purposes, a detailed analysis of existence involving form, quantity, systems, things, matter, and energy, would only add to confusion of an already complex enough subject; and when all is said and done, what we are now calling “properties” (that strictly should be called “forms of existence”) will turn out to be the forms of existence which are in fact properties of things.

2.1.1. Properties

In fact, what we usually mean by the “object” of our knowledge is some thing (and not a single act or existence), and since “property” is pretty easily understood, I see no reason to complicate matters unduly.

What should be noticed here is that the property is known by means of or in the fact, not in itself. That is, we know greenness through our discovery of the similarity of emeralds and grass, and we know it only as “the whatever-it-is by which grass is similar to emeralds.

Why is that? Because, though the emeralds and the grass are acting on us in a greenish way, we don't know what that way is, because we only know it through our reaction (the way green appears to us), and our reaction isn't like the act. So we only know that the two acts must in some respect be alike because our reactions are like each other—and we call that respect, whatever it is, the “property” of greenness.

So when we say the grass is green, we are not saying “grass is 'green-as-I-see-it.'” We are saying “Grass has some unknown property, but whatever that property is, it is like the property that emeralds have”—and for the sake of not making long circumlocutions like this we use the word “greenness” for the unknown property that things like this have in common.

A very indirect way of knowing things; but it is the only way we have, given that our reactions, because of the uniqueness of our minds, are subjective reactions to existence.

2.2. Understanding Now it is not enough simply to connect reactions in our minds in order to be able to get at facts, because any two objects can be related in an infinity of possible ways; so a mere connection among the effects will only tell

us that there is a relation among the existences or objects.

To know what the relation among the existences is, we need to know what the relation among the reactions is; and this “grasping of what the relation is” is a special act of the mind, distinct from the reactions themselves.

DEFINITION: *Understanding is the act of the mind by which we grasp what the relation is among reactions and/or imaginary acts (and therefore among the existences—if any—that caused them).*

DEFINITION: *The intellect is the ability we have to understand.*

Note that the intellect is not necessarily a part of ourselves, or a “something” we possess in our brains or somewhere; it is just a name for the fact that we are able to understand; it is what is called technically a “faculty” of ours.

It is not our purpose here to analyze understanding and its implications for the intellect; the term “intellect,” in fact, was really only mentioned to make clear that experiences or consciousness is “intellectual” when it deals with acts of understanding, and not simply reactions or imaginings. Intellectual activity is a distinct activity from reacting or imagining, though it involves comparing reactions or imaginary acts.

2.2.1. Concepts Now the act of understanding has two “dimensions” to it, so to speak: (1) it grasps the relationship itself between the associated reactions or images, and (2) it is conscious, and so is aware of what it is doing, as well as containing the consciousness of the reactions or images within it.

So “within” understanding, there is the intellect's proper activity, and the fact that it is conscious. There are implications to both of

2.2.1. Concepts

these.

First of all, the grasping of what the relationship is means that the act of understanding simultaneously knows in one single act (a) the relationship itself (i.e. whether it is similarity or causality or position or whatever), (b) the reactions or images related, and (c) the property in the reactions or images by which they are related in this way.

The reason that it knows these all together is that you can't know any one of them without knowing the others "first," as it were. How could you know what the relationship is without knowing what was related and the property which related it to the other images? Or how could you know the property without first knowing the images that had it, and the relation which it established (since the property only means "the whatever-it-is that makes these related with this relation)?

And so on. So it must be one single act that grasps all three "dimensions" of the relationship at once. So when you know that all trees are similar, you simultaneously know that they all have some property in common, and you know what objects you are talking about when you talk about trees.

DEFINITION: *A concept is the form of the act of understanding.* That is, the concept is both the relationship in question and the property by which the reactions or images are related. The concept does not contain the images, however. The act of understanding contains them, but they are in themselves a different set of acts among which understanding grasps a particular relation with a particular property; so the form of the act of understanding does not contain as such these images or reactions.

Thus, the concept involved in the understanding that grass is like emeralds or go lights is the similarity and the greenness. But it

2.2.1. Concepts

doesn't contain as such the particular grass that you happen to be looking at or the emerald that you are imagining at the moment.

Notice that you have to express the concept in two different ways (or rather, you can express it in either of two ways): as the relationship or as the property. (E.g. "similarity" or "greenness"). This is because, though the concept is both at once, our words used to express the concept can't be two different things at the same time (because they are not "self-aware"); and so in expressing concepts in words, we have to split apart its two dimensions, as if it were two different things, and could be one or the other. But it is really both.

2.2.2. Abstraction Since the concept (as opposed to the complete act of understanding) doesn't contain within it the particular reactions or images it was derived from, it is said to be abstract. It "ignores" (abstracts from) these images; and it recognizes itself in its self-awareness as able to apply to any other image or reaction that has the same property.

DEFINITION: *Abstraction is the fact that understanding occurs by way of a concept which implies only one property (out of many) in the reactions or images, and is "separated" from the images or reactions themselves, and so is applicable to anything with the property in question.*

Abstraction is twofold, then. Whenever you understand something, you do it by way of relating your reaction to some other reaction or image; and since the relation is one relation, what you get out of the act is one relation with one property.

Thus, when you understand a certain similarity between grass and emeralds, you understand similarity in color or "greenness." In that act of understanding, you do not understand (for instance) that grass is living and emeralds aren't—which is a different relationship—nor

2.2.2. Abstraction

do you understand the similarity in, say, materiality (which, though it is the same type of relationship, is a different relationship with a different property).

So in the first place, understanding “abstracts” only one property from the images. You never understand all about anything in any act of understanding; you only understand one aspect of it.

In the second place, understanding “abstracts” the concept and recognizes it as applicable beyond these reactions. So you understand that “greenness” can also apply to other things besides grass and emeralds; and so when you see algae, say, you simply apply the already-formed concept to it and understand that it is green.

2.2.2.1. Universality The fact that a concept applies to an infinity of possible objects (all objects that have the property, or that are related in the way in question) has a special name:

DEFINITION: *Universality is the characteristic of a concept by which it is applicable to an infinity of possible objects.* Thus, all concepts are not only abstract, but by that very fact universal.

2.2.3. Understanding as conscious That is enough about the form of the act of understanding itself. But I said that understanding is also a conscious act, and so it “contains” more, so to speak, than just the concept.

The act of understanding is aware, not only of itself, but of the reactions or images in which it understands the concept; hence, it is aware whether these are reactions (and refer to objects) or images (and have no object).

So if you understand that unicorns have four legs (i.e. that they have parts related in this way), then in that very act you understand

2.2.3. Understanding as conscious

that this particular “four-leggedness” does not apply to any object, because you know that the unicorns of your experience are imaginary. You may know that “four-leggedness” can apply to reactions; but until you actually see a four-legged thing, you don't know if it does.

On the other hand, when you understand that the grass you are looking at is like emeralds, you are immediately aware (i.e. without any indirection or “medium”; right in the act itself) that the real grass has the property of “greenness.” Why? Because you are immediately aware that the grass-impression you have is a reaction-to some existence, and not an act of your mind alone.

This fact that understanding, as conscious, is aware of whether the “sensations” related are reactions (and have objects) or images (and don't)—and consequently whether there is a relation “out there” among the objects or not—has traditionally been called “the judgment,” as if it were another act of the mind beyond the formation of the concept itself.

I think that this is a mistake, and I think that to consider it a different act from concept-formation makes a hash out of our act of understanding. But this is not the place to enter into a discussion of the pros and cons of the issue.

In any case, I do not divide intellectual activity into two acts: concept-formation (traditionally called “simple apprehension”) and judgment; the “judgment” is simply the act of concept-formation (or application) as conscious. As conscious, the act of understanding contains not only itself, but the conscious aspect of the reactions or images from which it drew the relation (the concept).

For our purposes, what is significant about understanding as conscious is that it is in this aspect of understanding that we

2.2.3. Understanding as conscious

understand what the facts are “out there.”

That is, since the conscious acts we grasp relations among may be images (and have no object) or reactions (with objects), then some of the concepts we form (those among images) will not refer to facts (because there are no objects related in this way), and others will refer to facts (when the conscious acts were reactions). So to know one from the other, we have to know the nature of the acts from which we drew the relation—and this is what understanding as conscious knows.

Thus, when I understand that all unicorns bark rather than whinny, I understand that this is not a fact, but an imaginary relationship—because I know that unicorns don't exist. But when I understand that grass is green, I understand that this is a fact, because there is grass, and it really is like emeralds.

2.4. Truth Alas, it isn't all that simple (however complicated you may think it to be so far), and so we have to take a few more steps before we can branch off the path to that of the esthetic experience itself.

I have been talking as though every time I grasped a concept from a set of reactions, it was automatically the case that I understood a fact about the objects that caused the reactions.

But anyone who has ever tried to understand anything at all complicated knows that sometimes you understand a fact, and sometimes you understand a concept that you think is a fact, and it turns out later that the relation you thought was there, wasn't. You were wrong.

How can this be?

It's actually because generally speaking the object we are trying to understand something about doesn't act directly on our brains, but only does so through a more or less complicated causal chain, and

that sometimes variations in the intermediate stages between the object “out there” and the act on our brain make the act not what it would have been if it acted directly on it.

Let me illustrate, and what I just said will be somewhat clearer. You are looking at this page. Now put on sunglasses, and what happens to your reaction to the color of the page? It looks greenish rather than white. Why? Because the glasses filtered out some of the light and let the green through; and so your reaction to the page is a reaction by means of the altered light that came through the glasses.

If you didn't realize that you had the glasses on, then you might say, “The page is light green,” thinking that that was a fact about the page, when in fact, the page isn't light green, but white.

A more normal instance of that kind of thing would be what happens when you pick out clothes. You might think that a suit is a certain color and then find later that it isn't, because you didn't realize that in the store, you were looking at it under fluorescent light; but then out in sunlight or under incandescent light, it looks different—in this case, because the light itself is a different color (and so the light it reflects will be slightly different).

2.4.1. Error So it is possible that, because of some foul-up in the chain of causes by which the object acts on your mind, you might have a reaction that implies a relation that is not the fact: you might draw a concept from the reactions that does not reflect a fact.

DEFINITION: *Error occurs when we understand an object to be related in a certain way, and this does not correspond to the fact.* That is, we think that a certain concept applies to an object, and it really doesn't.

The concept itself, of course, is not really erroneous, since it's just

2.4.1. Error

the relation (and the property in question); it's only when we apply the concept to a given reaction-set and understand the concept as applying also to the objects that we make a mistake.

To put this another way, “greenness” can't be a mistake; you only make a mistake when you say, “This object is green” and it really isn't.

Notice that you can't make a mistake with applying concepts to imaginary-acts. “This unicorn is blue” can't be mistaken, because there's no fact involved; that is, if your image of the unicorn is blue, then the image is all the “unicorn” there is; and so there's no chance of your subjective impression being a mistake.

(The astute person might say, “Yes, but you could say that the unicorn was blue and you might actually be imagining it as white. Then it's not really blue.” The answer is not that the unicorn isn't “really” blue—because there is no unicorn—but that your statement is a lie. You didn't make a mistake; you just said what you knew was not a fact. But if you imagine it as white, you can't think you're imagining it as blue, because the act of imagining is conscious.)

2.4.2. Definition of truth Based on the definition of error, we can now come to a definition of truth.

DEFINITION: *Truth occurs when we understand an object to be related a certain way, and this corresponds to the fact.* That is, my understanding is true when I think the grass is green, and in fact it is. My understanding grasps as a fact a relation which is a fact.

Again, the concept itself is not true; it is the concept as applied to the reactions and the reactions as known to be reactions to some object; and therefore it is the concept as understood to be a fact about the objects. Schematically:

2.4.2. Definition of truth

reaction A Existence 1
 c
 o ...agreement = truth f
 n a
 c ..disagreement = error ... c
 e t
 p
 t
 reaction B Existence 2

Note carefully that in the truth relation, the understanding of the fact must agree with the fact, not the other way round. The fact is the standard of comparison; if there is disagreement, then it is “fixed” by finding the proper concept (the one that is the same as the fact) and thus bringing the understanding into agreement with the fact.

2.4.2.1. Other senses of “true” Now then, there are some different meanings of “true” that we ought to consider before we take a second look at the relation above. One of them we already saw.

DEFINITION: *Truth as opposed to lying occurs when the statement a person utters as a fact agrees with the understanding he has of what the fact is.*

His understanding may be either true or in error; but he is “telling the truth” when he states what he thinks the fact is. If he deliberately states as a fact what he thinks is not a fact, he is lying.

If a person doesn't realize that he has said something that doesn't mean what he thinks it means, then even though that statement doesn't reveal what he thinks is the fact, he is not lying. Such a

2.4.2.1. Other senses of “true”

statement is an erroneous statement. He has made a different kind of mistake. In the first kind of mistake, he thought the fact was something that it wasn't. In this kind of mistake, he thought his statement meant something that it didn't.

DEFINITION: *A statement is true as opposed to false when it states as a fact what the fact is.*

So statements have two kinds of truth: they are “true and not false” when they agree with the fact; and they are “true and not lying” when they agree with what the speaker thinks the facts are. Given that the speaker can be in error, then the same statement can be false and true (i.e. not a lie), or true (i.e. not false) and a lie.

To create a far-fetched but possible combination, it is possible for a statement to be true and in error at the same time. Let us say that a person is colorblind and thinks that grass is a certain shade of red. He also thinks that “chartreuse” is a word that means that particular shade. He then says, “Grass is chartreuse,” thinking that what he says is true. Because of the double error, he has in fact made a statement that is true (i.e. agrees with the fact).

There are other combinations of the different senses of “true”; but let this be enough to illustrate that when you use the word, you have to be careful of what sense you are using.

2.5. Goodness There is one last complication that we have to add before we get into the next chapter and the esthetic experience. Since the truth-relation is a relation, it can be approached from either end. It might seem obvious why we have to make our understanding of the fact agree with what the fact is, but why couldn't you take your understanding of the fact as the standard and demand, as it were, that the facts agree with it?

2.5. Goodness

There isn't any reason why you couldn't; and in fact we do occasionally. When you say of a broken faucet, "There's something wrong with that; it has to be fixed," you're actually taking your idea of what a faucet does as a standard for judging what this faucet is doing, and finding a kind of "reverse error"; and so you want to bring the fact into conformity with your understanding of the fact (which you would express as your understanding of the way the fact "ought" to be).

But it turns out that we use different terms to refer to the truth-error relationship when looked at in this way:

DEFINITION: *Goodness occurs when the fact agrees with our understanding of what the fact is.* That is, we call an object "good" when the facts about it are what we expect them to be, based on our understanding about that type of object.

Thus, from our experience with dogs, we expect certain appearance, behavior, and in general a certain set of properties from dogs. When a dog has all these properties, we say it is a "good example of a dog."

DEFINITION: *Badness occurs when the fact does not conform to our understanding of the fact.* We call an object "bad" or say that "there is something wrong with it" if it doesn't measure up to our understanding of what it "ought" to be.

Again, a "bad" dog would be a dog that did not behave in the way you expect him to behave (usually based on how you trained him). But we would also say that a dog that looked sick "had something wrong with him" and we would consider that to be bad. A dog that looked ugly would also be a "bad example of a dog," as would a dog that was too stupid to be trained, however benevolent his disposition.

2.5. Goodness

Note that moral badness or evil is also based on the same relation. We expect a human being to behave consistently with what we understand to be his human nature. When he acts so as to contradict what we consider his “true nature,” we consider his actions morally wrong—and if we think he did it deliberately, we consider him evil. He did not behave as we would expect a human being to behave.

Now since in goodness and badness, the standard of comparison is a given person's understanding of what the kind of thing he is observing is “really supposed to be like,” it follows from this that goodness and badness are subjective terms. There is a certain objectivity to them, based on how accurate has been the observation upon which we formed the understanding that we use as the standard with which to compare the facts; but in the last analysis, comparing reality with our idea of it and expecting it to live up to our idea is a subjective enterprise. Reality is what it is, and the fact that we expect it to be better is our problem, not the reality's.

An enormous amount could be said on this topic, but I think this gives us enough to be able to discuss the esthetic experience as one class of experience and find out whether it has a relation to any property of any object, and if so what.

CHAPTER 3

THE ESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

3.1. Emotion I said in the preface that what was special about the esthetic experience was that it was based on emotions. From now on, then, we are going to be considering emotions and their implications for objective consciousness.

DEFINITION: *An **emotion** is the conscious aspect of a human drive or instinct.* That is, it is the instinct insofar as it is conscious.

3.1.1. Instinct Now instinct is one of the organizing functions of the human mind; and it has some peculiar qualities that we will have to investigate in order to understand how an emotion can be, in a rather indirect sense, a reaction to some object.

DEFINITION: *Instinct is the organizing function of the brain by which energy is directed from the reactions to motor nerves giving responses appropriate to the body in the condition it is in.*

Energy in the brain has a conscious “dimension” to it; and so when some object produces a stimulus, then this appears in

3.1.1. Instinct

consciousness as what I called a “reaction.” As energy moves around the brain, it stimulates other nerves, producing various imaginary images. When it finally moves to the motor nerves, it moves out of the brain to various muscles, consciousness no longer occurs, and behavior happens. But the “directing-ness” (the flow along predetermined pathways according to some “program”) appears in consciousness as an emotional overtone of the reactions and/or images involved.

What is important here is that instinct monitors the state the body is in and directs energy from the incoming stimulus to the behavioral response depending on the condition of the body.

That is, what the “program” called instinct does is twofold. It is, in the first place, constantly in touch, as it were, with the various systems of the body, so that the various needs the body has to maintain its equilibrium are registered here.

Secondly, built genetically into the instinct's program is a sort of file of images (which, of course, are possible reactions); and based on the particular state of the body, the program matches a given image with a certain behavior-pattern and sends energy to the appropriate motor nerves.

Thus, when your blood-sugar falls below a certain level, then this calls up the image of food, memories of where the food might be, and directs you toward the likely place for finding it. And all this shows up in consciousness as, first of all, the feeling of hunger, then images of various foods (together with the anticipation of satisfaction and a greater hunger-feeling), awareness of acting, and then the feeling of satiety after eating (when the instinct's program indicates that the need is filled). The “desire” for food and the “satisfaction” felt are the emotions involved.

Again, when you are crossing the street and a car suddenly swerves

3.1.1. Instinct

toward you, instinct—programmed to react to any large object moving suddenly in your direction—goes into its “emergency” mode. You either run “without thinking” or you freeze—and in either case, the emotion that comes into consciousness is “terror.”

The reason for the two different behaviors is that our instinct's program was built genetically, and so it responds to situations our organism tended to face before we were civilized. A large animal coming toward you might make it more beneficial to run away (if you were far enough from it to escape), or, if it were too close, more beneficial to remain absolutely still so that it wouldn't notice you. Not very helpful for out-of-control cars, but it worked fine with tigers and so on.

3.1.2. Human instinct In animals, instinct is the highest and directing faculty; they have no control over it, and it controls them. Humans are different. As you can see from concentrating on something, you can control your attention, and keep some things in consciousness as long as you want, and other things out of consciousness. By doing logic, and by deliberately deciding how to act when confronted with various situations, you also see that you can consciously control what response is going to be attached to what stimulus in a given situation, irrespective of the emotion involved.

As you can also see from your own experience, we don't have absolute control over our instinct. It's hard to concentrate when there is some strong distraction (i.e. when the instinct is pulling us in a different direction); and if you have an emotional attraction to candy, say, it might not be easy to refuse an offered piece. Sometimes, if the instinct is very strong, it is impossible in practice to control it.

But the point is that we do have some conscious control over our instinct. And it is the faculty of the mind that I earlier called “the

3.1.2. Human instinct

intellect” that does this (except that when we are controlling our behavior consciously, we call this faculty “the will”).

This control enables us to “shut off” the program, so that it doesn't automatically operate, and so we can base our behavior on understanding the facts about what will benefit us here and now rather than on some automatic response to a general type of situation. So, if we see a tiger caged up, we might feel fear; but we block our instinct from causing us to run away, because we know that in fact we are in no danger. If we see a strawberry shortcake, we might feel attracted to eat it; but if we know it will make us fat and not actually benefit us, we can avoid eating it.

And since intellectual knowledge is factual, objective knowledge, then in general it is to our advantage to base our actions on understanding what the facts are rather than blindly following instinct.

3.2. The esthetic experience Now this fact that we can feel an emotion and prevent the behavior of the particular instinct allows us to use the emotion as a peculiar kind of reaction-consciousness.

An emotion can be considered, not in relation to the behavior it tends to cause, but in relation to the object that caused it.

You are at the zoo, and you look at the tiger there just beyond the pit that keeps you safe. He looks over hungrily at you and roars; and you feel a certain kind of fear.

Now instead of just ignoring the emotion (because you know you don't have to run away), you can pause to notice the fear and compare it, say, with the fear you had when John yelled at you the other day—noticing how the two fears aren't exactly the same, but

aren't all that different either.

You have just had an esthetic experience.

And you might express it by saying, "John roared at me like a tiger." Here, notice that John's voice didn't sound anything like the tiger's roar; John didn't look like the tiger when he roared; John's "roar" wasn't as loud as the tiger's—and so on. The more you try to analyze what the image of John has in common with the perception of the tiger, the less you find that they are the same.

Yet you know that he did roar like a tiger. Then what do you mean? That he made you feel emotionally the way you felt when the tiger roared at you. The emotional overtone of the perception of the tiger was similar to the emotional overtone of the remembered experience of John's yelling at you.

Take another example: the typical metaphor of the smiling meadow. Where are the teeth in the smiling meadow? The lips? How can you smile without a mouth? Obviously, there is no perceivable similarity between the sunny field and a smiling face. But when you look out on the meadow, you feel emotionally the way you feel when someone smiles at you. The meadow is emotionally, not perceptually, like a smiling face.

DEFINITION: *An esthetic experience is an act of understanding based on the emotional overtones of reactions or images.*

It isn't just the emotion, but some relationship understood *through* the emotion, that constitutes the esthetic experience.

Being frightened when the tiger roars is not an esthetic experience, and neither is feeling happy looking at a sunny meadow. You have to relate the roar with something and the meadow with something

3.2. The esthetic experience

based on the way they make you feel in order to have an esthetic experience. Understanding a relation based on anything other than the emotional overtone (say, that the tiger's roar is in the key of e-flat) is intellectual, but is not an esthetic experience.

3.2.1. Its emotionality It can now be seen, I think, why it is so hard to talk about the esthetic experience. It is not only not a simple reaction to some object, it is not even an act of understanding based on a simple reaction; the “reaction” it is based on is an “overlay,” as it were, of another reaction—and there is some question, if this is the case, whether there can be any objectivity at all when we have got so far away from the object itself.

But let us approach the question of objectivity slowly, by first discussing the implications in the fact that the esthetic experience is based on emotions. And to begin this, let me make a definition which is convenient for our purposes.

DEFINITION: *A perceptive experience is an act of consciousness that is either a reaction to some existence or is an act of imagining.*

Strictly speaking, perceptions are distinguished from images; perceptions are “organized wholes” of reactions (unifications of all the information coming into your mind at any given time—so that you see a complex object, not just a color), and images are “reawakenings” of stored perceptions (so that they aren't as such reactions to anything) or combinations of parts of stored perceptions.

But since it's a nuisance to write and read “perceptions and/or images” to distinguish them from emotions, then it's convenient to have a single term which will mean “the non-emotional type of consciousness.” And I have chosen “perceptive” consciousness or “perceptive experience” as that term.

3.2.1. Its emotionality

3.2.1.1. Emotions and perceptions Let us first note about emotions that they never appear in consciousness by themselves; they are always a conscious dimension, or aspect, or overlay, or overtone, of some perceptive experience.

The reason why this must be so is clear when you recall the function of instinct (which is what appears in consciousness as an emotion). Instinct is not a way of reacting to an object, exactly, but is the program that matches the proper behavior to the bodily state-perception complex. So instinct won't operate unless there is some perceptive experience that it can connect with the bodily state and use to direct behavior.

Secondly, let us observe that every perceptive experience will have an emotional overtone. The reason is that, as soon as you have a perceptive experience, the program that connects this experience with behavior has to be operating, or the organism is liable to be destroyed. Instinct is operating whenever we are conscious, precisely because it is the faculty which integrates consciousness into the whole organism for its survival.

Thirdly, notice that the emotional overtone will not always be the same for the same perceptive experience. The reason for this is that the emotional overtone depends on two things: the perception and the bodily state at the time of the perception. If the perception is the same, but the bodily state different, then the emotion will differ. Imagine a strawberry shortcake just before lunch, and you will get one emotional overtone. Imagine one after you have just eaten six of them, and you will get a different emotional overtone.

3.2.2. Objectivity in esthetics It is this last characteristic which creates a greater problem of objectivity for esthetics than for other aspects of consciousness. Perceptions tend not to be affected by the bodily state of the perceiver, and so variations in

3.2.2. Objectivity in esthetics

perceptions are due to variations in the objects perceived. There are some exceptions to this, which we discussed when talking about error; but the point is that the exceptions are exceptions. When energy of a wave length such as grass emits comes into your eyes, you tend to have the same reaction as you do to grass, whatever your bodily condition happens to be.

Emotions, however, depend on the bodily state at the moment, and vary not only with variations of the objects, but with variations in the bodily state of the perceiver; and that is why they seem so much more subjective than perceptions.

Note, however, that both emotions and perceptions are actually subjective. It is not that the perceptions are “like” their objects, and emotions aren't. You don't see green as if it were very energetic heat (as it is, in fact). It can't be stressed too much that the perception of the object is a form of consciousness, and is not a “mental copy” of the energy that caused it.

The reason that perceptions seem “more objective” than emotions is not that they aren't subjective reactions, or that they are like the object's activity, but that they don't vary with variations in the bodily state of the subject, and emotions do; hence, when you understand a relationship between perceptions, you can almost automatically assume that this implies a relationship outside the body; but with emotions this is obviously not the case.

Is there any way we can circumvent this second level of subjectivity and get at something about the object? We saw how the first level (with perceptions) could be circumvented using relationships. Is the esthetic experience (which also uses relationships) objective, or does it fall down at this second level of subjectivity?

To answer this, consider whether it would mean anything to say that John roared at you like a tiger if he timidly said that maybe you

3.2.2. Objectivity in esthetics

might possibly be mistaken, or whether you could call the meadow smiling if the rain were beating down and the wind were whipping the grass and lashing at the cows. If you think that kind of landscape made you feel the way you feel when a person smiles at you, then you probably need a psychiatrist.

It does seem, then, that certain esthetic statements are objectively true, and others objectively false. So again the question is not whether we can gain objective esthetic knowledge, but how and in what sense we can.

3.2.2.1. First level of objectivity There are actually several levels of objectivity that can be attained by esthetic understanding. First of all, consider what happens when you are perceiving two different objects at the same time, and you get different emotional overtones from the perceptions. You are talking to Frank and John, for instance, and you feel friendly toward Frank and hostile toward John.

Now your bodily state is obviously the same in both cases, since you feel the different emotions at the same time. Hence, the only explanation for the difference in the emotional reactions must be some difference in Frank and John.

But what is it that makes one of them cause a friendly emotion in you and the other a hostile one? We don't know. It might be something to do with what each of them is saying to you, something about the manner of speaking, their physical appearance, ways you remember of how they related to you in the past, or any number of other things; but probably all of these combined.

The point here is that something about the way Frank as a whole is acting on you (in the bodily state you are now in) makes you react with a different emotion from the way you react emotionally to the way John as a whole is acting on you. There has to be some

3.2.2.1. First level of objectivity

difference in their actions, or you can't explain the different emotions.

DEFINITION: *An esthetic property is a property discovered in an object because of its effect on our emotions.*

We are going to discuss esthetic properties in detail in a later chapter. For now, let us table the issue of whether the property is a distinct something about the object, or whether it is the same as a perceivable property (or the same as some combination of perceivable properties).

All we are interested in at this point is that we have discovered through our emotions a difference between Frank and John. And if we go back to the smiling meadow, then we can see that if the feeling you get when looking at the meadow in back of Frank is the same as the feeling you get as Frank smiles at you—and yet you still feel hostile toward John—then it must be that there is some similarity between Frank and the meadow; otherwise, why would you feel the same?

The first level of objectivity, then, circumvents the present bodily condition by comparing similarities and differences in emotions that are occurring at the same time, and arguing that these must be due to similarities and differences in the objects that caused the perceptions which have these emotional overtones.

It is a more indirect way of getting at objectivity, but it works.

3.2.2.2. Second level of objectivity But this is not the only way you can achieve esthetic objectivity. In the popular song, “Song Sung Blue” there are the lines, “Funny thing/ but you can

3.2.2.2. Second level of objectivity

sing/ it with a cry in your voice/ and before you know it/ get to feelin' good/ you really got no choice.”

What the song is saying is that no matter what your mood, the “song sung blue” will make you feel good; evidently, then, there are some things that have pretty much the same emotional effect on us no matter what bodily state we happen to be in.

A second level of esthetic objectivity circumvents one's present bodily condition altogether, when it is observed that a given object has the same effect on us no matter what our bodily state.

So if, no matter when you talk to John, he makes you feel hostile—even when you are disposed to “love the world,” as we sometimes are—then there is something about him that always “rubs you the wrong way.”

Now that may be just an incompatibility between you and John; whatever John's effect on others, the esthetic property he has creates negative emotions in you; but the fact is that he must have some esthetic property that clashes with your bodily nature, or you wouldn't feel that constant hostility no matter what your disposition as you began talking to him.

Here, then, we have escaped the present bodily state of the perceiver, but not the perceiver's individual bodily nature.

3.2.2.3. Third level of objectivity Is there any way we can even get around this? Consider what happens when you mention to someone else, “You know, I don't know what it is, but whenever I talk to John, I feel like punching him.” The other person answers, “Really? He seems all right to me.”

This indicates one of two possibilities. Either the person you are now talking to has not noticed the esthetic property that bothers you,

3.2.2.3. Third level of objectivity

or your individual bodily nature is different from his.

In the first case, you might say, "Have you paid attention to the tone of his voice? He always sounds to me as if he's sneering secretly at me." If the other person says, "I never noticed that," and then comes to you some other day and says, "You know, I think you're right about John. He really is rather disagreeable, isn't he." This seems to indicate that the reason you and he disagreed about John in the first place was that he was unaware of an esthetic property John had.

But if he comes back and says, "I don't know what you're talking about; he doesn't seem to me to be the sneering type," then, presumably, it isn't a question of his not noticing something that was actually there; John's esthetic property is one which affects you one way and your friend another way.

A third level of esthetic objectivity circumvents one's own individual bodily nature, when many people agree on the emotional effect produced by a given object.

Of course, if people disagree, then each person just knows about the esthetic property as affecting himself as an individual. There is a property "out there" in the object in this case, but there is no way to point it out to anyone else, because either they can't see it, or it affects them differently.

If people in general agree that they are affected emotionally in a given way by a given object, then the esthetic property is such that it tends to affect "human beings as such" in the way in question.

The common metaphors we use are obvious instances of this third level of objectivity. Everyone knows what is meant by "the smiling meadow," because in fact there is the same esthetic property in sunny fields and smiling faces; and what that means is that something about

3.2.2.3. Third level of objectivity

each is capable of awakening that pleasant emotional experience in human beings in general.

There is a fourth level of objectivity that is possible in science, but closed to esthetic understanding. In addition to using human beings as receivers of activities, science also uses receiving instruments, which are, of course, not like human bodies, but can be affected by the acts that affect human bodies.

If both a human body and an instrument are affected by a given type of activity, then relations among the effects on the instrument can be compared with relations among the conscious reactions in the person; and in this way, the peculiarities of the human body itself can be circumvented, and a new level of objectivity is reached: the act in question is now known as capable of “affecting a receiver in general” in certain ways, and not just affecting human receivers.

But this is not possible with esthetic knowledge. The reason is that the emotion depends on the bodily state of the perceiver, because it is the conscious dimension of the program by which he adapts himself to his environment. No non-human receiving instrument would or could have any read-out which would make it enough analogous to an emotion to be at all useful as an “esthetic instrument.”

No, the nature of esthetic knowledge is such that an investigation of esthetic properties by means of instruments is impossible; there will never be a “scientific esthetics” in that sense. But this does not mean that esthetic properties are not real, or that they aren't “out there” in the object. It just means that we can only know them as “what is capable of affecting me (now or in general or as human) in a certain emotional way,” and not “what is capable of affecting an instrument to this degree.”

3.2.2.3. Third level of objectivity

Here is another place, I think, where it would be wise to stop and ponder. The temptation is very strong to let the variation due to the emotion's monitoring the bodily state blind us to the fact that at times the particular emotion must have an external cause, and that we can compare these emotions insofar as they are externally caused and so know relationships among the causes.

But this sort of procedure is exactly what we do with respect to perceptions, when we learn facts by comparing perceptions as the effects of objects. The only difference is that we don't have to bother so much with the perceptions in being sure that the perception is in part due to the bodily condition of the moment.

But since the emotion is only partly due to the bodily condition of the subject, it can be used as a special "perceiving organ"; and comparisons among emotions do get us at facts about the objects that caused them.

Yes, facts. It is a fact that the meadow is like a smiling face; it is a fact that John is esthetically unlike Frank, and that he sometimes roars like a tiger. These relationships are not only in our minds; they were caused by some sort of relationship among the objects—and by definition, these relationships are facts.

CHAPTER 4

ESTHETIC CONCEPTS AND FACTS

4.1. Esthetic facts What the preceding chapter tried to show was that there can be objective esthetic knowledge, and that therefore there are such things as esthetically known facts. In other words, esthetic knowledge is not some airy “truth” which is supposedly “true” at some ethereal level beyond our earthly plane, but real, honest-to-God, down-to-earth factual knowledge, that can be right or wrong.

DEFINITION: *An esthetic fact is a relationship among objects known because of a relationship among emotional overtones of their effect on us.*

DEFINITION: *A perceptive fact is a relationship among objects known because of a relationship among the direct conscious reactions to them. That is, by a relationship among the perceptive experiences of them.*

In the cases where we have achieved one or another level of esthetic objectivity, as discussed in the preceding chapter, esthetic

4.1. Esthetic facts

facts are as much facts as perceptive facts; that is, the relationship as understood in consciousness implies an actual relationship of some sort in the objects that caused the consciousness; and this is true with both types of facts.

Notice—and this must be stressed again and again—that nothing more is known about a perceptive fact than about an esthetic fact; a perceptive fact is not “more factual,” certainly. Further, it is not that we know “what's really out there” when we know perceptively and know “indirectly through what's in here” when we know esthetically; in both cases, our knowledge is described by the second formula and not the first.

4.1.1. Their uniqueness But now is the time to make explicit something hinted at in the preceding chapter and then left hanging: An esthetic fact cannot be “replaced” by either a perceptive fact or a set of perceptive facts. An esthetic fact cannot be known perceptively.

Why is that? Because the emotions respond, not to some particular form of energy or type of forms or energy (as the eyes respond to electromagnetic energy), nor do they respond to a set of forms of energy. Since the emotions are the conscious aspect of our program dealing with how to behave facing the environment, they respond to things: patterned wholes of energies as integrated into various units; and thus, it is how these perceived acts go together into an integrated whole that my instinct responds to, based on its monitoring of my bodily state.

Thus, my positive feeling toward Frank and my negative feeling toward John might be largely due to what they are saying; but it is what each is saying as integrated with everything else I am perceiving about him that causes the feeling. And it isn't simply the sum of all

4.1.1. Their uniqueness

that I perceive about Frank that causes me to feel friendly; it is how that set goes together into a unified whole that does the job.

So my perceptions will give me a lot of facts about Frank: that he has a soft voice, that he is saying things I agree with, that he is smiling, that his hair is brown, that he is looking me straight in the eye, and so on and so on. But nowhere in these facts, even were I to list all of them, would I find the explanation of the friendly feeling—because it is these facts all together as together.

So if I happen to like Frank in the same way that I like Henry, then this implies that Frank is the same as Henry. But Henry is blonde, he never looks you straight in the face, and so on. Some of the perceived properties Henry has may be the same as those of Frank, and some may be different. But my emotions (supposing I have bypassed the subjective side) tell me that Frank and Henry are really the same, and really different from John.

What I am saying is that this similarity of Frank and Henry is a real similarity; but that it this relationship does not reduce to a similarity in certain perceived properties—any more than the smiling meadow is smiling because there is any sense in which it appears like a smiling face. But that does not mean that it isn't really smiling.

4.1.1.1. “Translating” art This explains why critics of poetry and art are apt to be adamant about the fact that you can't reduce the meaning of a poem to a prose (i.e. perceptive) statement. The poem means what it says, and no “translation” into perceptive terms does anything but distort it and miss the point.

Take Shakespeare's 73rd sonnet, for example:

That time of year thou may'st in me behold
 when yellow leaves, or none or few, do hang
 upon those boughs which shake against the cold:

4.1.1.1. “Translating” art

bare, ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.
 In me thou see'st the twilight of such day
 as after sunset fadeth in the west;
 which by and by black night doth take away—
 death's second self, that seals up all in rest.
 In me thou see'st the glowing of such fire
 that on the ashes of his youth doth lie
 as the deathbed on which it must expire;
 consumed with that which it was nourished by.
 This thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love more strong,
 to love that well which thou must leave ere long.

Clearly, the poem is “about” old age, and the fact that a younger person loves Shakespeare when he is old. The first stanza is the relationship between age and winter, the second about the relation between age and nightfall, and the third about the relation between age and a dying fire; and then there is the ending that, because I am about to die and leave, you love me more.

Having said that, it seems that I have said what the poem means. But the point is that that isn't it at all. What is the relation between age and winter? The particular one Shakespeare is talking about is the one you get from feeling how you feel when you see the one or two yellow leaves, the branches shaking in the cold wind, how you feel when looking at the ruins of a church, thinking of birds' song as its choir, gone—and so on. If you just say “yellow” leaves means “autumn” leaves, and you don't feel what he wants you to feel, you have misunderstood the poem.

You also have to read it aloud, with feeling, and hear the sound of the words; because Shakespeare was a dramatist and expected that the sound would enhance the emotional tone. Change “yellow” leaves to “withered” and see what that does to the sound of the line.

4.1.1.1. “Translating” art

Change it to “golden” and see how it contradicts the meaning of the line; change it to “autumn” and see how it makes it flat; change it to “flaming” and see how it makes the line too strong, both in sense and in sound. No word must fight the feeling of despair and irony at the apparent signs of life.

There's nothing wrong with saying what a poem is “about” in perceptive terms, any more than there is anything wrong with saying that this book is “about” the esthetic experience as a way of knowing facts about the world. That's what it's about, but that isn't what it says. People mistake the prose statement of what the poem is about for its meaning; and its meaning is something totally different. The poem states a fact, really, about love in old age; but it is a fact that only the poem can reveal.

4.1.2. The esthetic and the ethical Esthetic facts must therefore be distinguished from perceptive ones. But there is a further distinction that must be made: esthetic knowledge is not like ethical knowledge, which also in practice is intellectual, but has something to do with emotions.

This brief discussion must not be taken to imply an exploration of the whole realm of the ethical; it simply deals with the area where ethical knowledge and esthetic knowledge can be confused, and tries to show how they are different.

When we are confronted with a stimulus, then, and feel an emotion connected with it, this emotion, as I said, is the conscious aspect of our brain's programmed call to action based on its monitoring of our bodily state and its matching of stimulus and response.

Now if we consider the action called for by the emotion in relation to our goals in life and our present reality (i.e. whether the act is objectively consistent either with what I want to be or what I now am), then we are having an ethical experience.

4.1.2. The esthetic and the ethical

DEFINITION: *An ethical fact is a relationship between an action and the agent performing the action: specifically, whether the act is or is not consistent with the agent.*

4.1.2.1. Esthetic distance Ethical facts are facts, then; and ethical knowledge is intellectual (since it deals with relationships); but ethical facts are not esthetic facts.

The difference is that esthetic knowledge ignores the action called for by the emotion, and ethical knowledge precisely concentrates upon that action. Esthetic facts concern themselves only with the emotion as caused by the stimulus, and have nothing to do with the emotion as a call to action.

Thus, my hostile emotion toward John might make me want to punch him. If I pay attention to this, however, I get outside the esthetic realm into the ethical, where I have to consider whether this is a good or bad thing to do. In order to use the emotion for an esthetic experience, I have to ignore this aspect of it, and just consider it in relation to emotional overtones of other perceptions—in which case, I might discover that John is like a snake.

The ethical realm, therefore, gets in the way of the esthetic, which is purely theoretical (in the sense of discovering facts, not deciding what to do).

In order to have an esthetic experience, a person has to have enough control over his emotions that he can have the emotion without acting on it at all. If you are to use your emotions as pure “receiving instruments” for information, then you can't use them to act by, or you will be distracted from what they tell you about the object.

Notice that you can't suppress or repress the emotion itself; because you have to have it in order to learn about the object from

it—and the more strongly you feel it, the better. But you have to block its call to action. This is a very tricky business.

DEFINITION: *Esthetic distance is the characteristic of the esthetic experience in which the emotion is felt, but its call to action is ignored.*

If esthetic distance is not kept, several things destroying the esthetic experience are apt to happen. The first and most obvious thing is that you get distracted by the call to action, and can't pay attention to the relationship between this emotion and emotional overtones of other perceptions—and so no esthetic experience is possible.

For instance, I was once in a performance of Beethoven's Wellington's Victory music, and in the middle the gunshots were not imitated, but were produced by someone firing blank cartridges offstage. The noise was so loud, realistic, and unexpected, that everyone was frightened; there were murmurs in the audience, indicating that the musical experience was ruined. You can't listen to the musical relationships when your emotions are telling you, "We're being attacked! Get out!"

This same characteristic is one of the things that makes pornography bad art. Pornography is not simply the depiction of sexual activity, nor is it just the vivid depiction of it. It is the depiction of it in such a way that a normal person would become sexually aroused by it; and since the sexual instinct is the second or third strongest we have (after hunger and fear-survival), its call to action will distract the viewer or reader from the esthetic meaning of the work, and lead him into fantasies of his own. In that sense, pornography is like rhetoric: it is a call to action using the esthetic experience, rather than a discovery of facts by the emotional overtones of experiences.

4.1.2.1. Esthetic distance

Secondly, there is a more subtle need for esthetic distance on the part of an artist. When Wordsworth defined poetry as “emotion recollected in tranquillity,” he was referring to this sense. If a person is too deeply involved in an emotion, it tends to spill over in his consciousness, and everything else he experiences or recalls while under its spell has the same emotional overtone—and so would be esthetically the same. Thus, when you are in love, everything wears a smile—but, as the song says, “smoke gets in your eyes,” and you can't see what's there, esthetically.

A person writing poetry in this state will then make comparisons that are not objectively valid, because the secondary objects do not in fact produce the emotion he feels when considering them.

Therefore, the artist (who wants to say something esthetically meaningful) must be able to feel the emotions, but he must have enough distance from being involved with them that he can tell when the object is producing the emotion and when the emotion he feels is just a spillover from his present state. That is the “tranquillity” he needs.

4.2. Esthetic concepts Now, as I said in discussing understanding, the relationship itself and the property as understood is called the “concept.” I mentioned that concepts are abstract and universal; and on the face of it, it would seem that esthetics doesn't deal with them, since art and beauty are concerned only with the individual and concrete. But this is a mistake, partly due to Immanuel Kant's theory of esthetics, but also partly due to a natural misinterpretation of what is going on.

We must remember, first of all, that esthetics deals with anything understood through emotional overtones, and not simply with what is called “great art”; great art is to the ordinary esthetic experience as a treatise on philosophy is to the ordinary ideas about what life is.

Hence, some pretty mundane ideas are in fact acts of esthetic understanding. Words like “attractive,” “repulsive,” “pleasant,” “ugly,” “scary,” “good tasting,” “calm,” “nervous,” and so on are words whose meaning can be understood only if you know what the emotion involved is; and so they express an ordinary, trite esthetic experience—one so common that we want to refer to it often enough that we have a word to express it.

“Great art” expresses an act of esthetic understanding that is very complex and brand-new (at least in some respect); and so there isn't a word already in the language that can give the meaning intended.

4.2.1. Their abstractness But as the words above indicate, there seem to be esthetic concepts, and they seem just as abstract as perceptive ones. And in fact, this is always the case. Esthetic understanding comes by way of an abstract concept.

For instance, the smiling meadow reveals only one aspect or property of the meadow: the respect in which it is emotionally like a smiling face. The meadow is also green, warm, open (perceptive concepts) and inviting, lazy, tranquil, and so on (esthetic concepts)—and these latter are not the same as smiling. No, the smilingness tells you something about the whole meadow as a whole, but it only tells you one something about it, and it leaves out all sorts of other facts that are also true of the meadow.

So the concept of “smilingness” is an abstract one. And of course, that concept (which doesn't really have a word to express it) will apply to anything else that “smiles” at us—or gives us the same kind of feeling. So the concept is not only abstract, it is universal.

Yes, but what about great art? Isn't that concrete? Take Michelangelo's David. That huge statue is certainly a concrete object. But what it says is something esthetic about David as about to conquer Goliath (you can feel how he feels by looking at his face,

4.2.1. Their abstractness

and by looking at his body, you know he's going to win); about Florence, whose patron is David, about not underestimating the potential of your material (it was carved from a flawed block of marble that was thought to be junk), about the relation between ancient art and modern art (since the statue is of a muscular peasant, not the ideal of Greek beauty), and so on and so on. But it doesn't tell you all about David, or about Florence, or about carving statues, or about the ideal of masculine beauty; there are all kinds of facts about these things that can't be learned from the statue. It tells a great deal; it is a whole esthetic treatise on David, Florence, and art itself; but it says basically one very complex fact about these subjects as interrelated in it—just as this book says only one complex fact about beauty, art, and the esthetic experience in relation to experience in general.

So what is expressed by the David is in fact abstract—and would apply to anything else that had the same relationship. Of course, like this book, the relationship is so complex that application beyond the specific things related is unlikely.

4.2.2. Why art is concrete Then why are works of art always concrete and individual? The answer is that, first of all, they aren't all that way. Certain forms of poetry, for instance (like many of the Psalms), have very little imagery and rely very heavily on abstract words; but they “work” as poems. The Greek plays used a great deal of abstract words, yet they are very powerful as plays.

But that can't be the real answer, since these are the rare exceptions. And the answer, really, is simple. An emotion is an overtone of a perception.

Generally speaking, when we are in the “dry” mode of communication such as you are now finding in this book, the emotions involved are at a pretty low level—and the one most

prevalent is apt to be boredom.

But if a person is to understand something esthetically, he has to feel the proper emotional overtone, or the comparison made based on emotional overtones is esthetically meaningless. Generally speaking, the way to arouse an emotion is to call to mind a perception that is calculated to have the emotion as an overtone.

But that, of course, means that you have to use imagery and concrete objects. If the David is described to you, for instance, it is hard to get the emotional impact you feel when you see that enormous, gleaming, polished statue towering over you, frowning off into the distance (I have tried to awaken a feeble copy of the experience with these words—and you can judge how well I succeeded). But to discover what Michelangelo was trying to say, you have to feel the whole complex set of emotions that he intended you to feel—and you can't really do that without looking at the statue itself.

Notice, by the way, that, particularly for a person who has seen the statue, the little foot-high “copies” can serve to recall the esthetic idea, much as notes or a summary can serve to recall a book you have read. They aren't the same thing by a long shot, but they have their uses. But this, of course, serves to confirm that the concept itself is abstract.

So the need for concretion in works of art is not because the concept expressed is somehow “concrete,” but because the concept comes through emotions, and emotions are awakened by concrete perceptions.

4.2.3. The unity of the object Another aspect of art that critics stress is also explained in terms of the esthetic concept: that a work of art is supposed to have “unity.”

The reason for this is obvious, once you know what an esthetic

4.2.3. The unity of the object

experience is. Since it is an intellectual experience, it is the understanding of a relationship, and of course a relationship is a connection among whatever is related. But “unification” is another way of talking about “interconnection.”

Hence, if there are parts of the object that don't connect esthetically with other parts, the mind tries to find what the connection is, and finding none is confused. The assumption is, particularly with a work of art, that there is an esthetic connection of all the parts (or why have the part there?); and so if a part is there that is esthetically unconnected (however much it might be perceptively connected), the mind keeps trying to fit it in, and the result is not an esthetic experience, but the simple emotion of annoyance.

Thus, a bad novelist who is interested in the nuclear freeze movement might have one of his characters in a conversation give a kind of sermon on nuclear war; but unless this advances the esthetic thrust of the novel, then it is not only boring to the reader, but confusing and annoying; because he is trying to see its esthetic meaning in relation to the rest of the novel, and he neither gets the perceptive idea the author was trying to convey nor the esthetic idea that the author intended in the rest of the novel.

This, of course, applies equally in the perceptive realm. If I were to insert here in this book a section on Biblical translation (which happens to be a hobby of mine), you would wonder what it had to do with esthetics, and would try to find some connection with what this book is talking about; and if you couldn't find it, you would either consider yourself dense (because you would assume that I saw a connection you couldn't see) or think of me as a fool, who couldn't decide what he was talking about.

1.3. Esthetic logic It might seem that now is the time to discuss the esthetic version of truth, error, falseness, goodness, and

4.3. Esthetic logic

badness; but that is really the realm of beauty and art, which we will get to in the next few chapters. There is, however, one more topic that is still pretty much within the realm of the experience itself, and which needs comparison with its perceptive counterpart: esthetic logic.

DEFINITION: *Logic in general is the way in which one experience follows from another one.*

The kind of thing that is studied under the name of “logic” is a special case of this. What it is is the logic of statements as expressions of acts of understanding, and of how certain statements “follow from” other ones in the sense of being forced by what preceded under pain of contradicting what was said before. Thus, when I say that any man is an animal and any animal is a living being, I cannot say that there is any man who is not a living being without contradicting myself.

This is what is called “formal logic.” It is not, however, the only logic that exists. If, for instance, a man has for the past twenty years eaten an egg every day for breakfast, it is logical (i.e. reasonable) to expect him to do so today, in spite of the fact that he could without contradiction actually not eat one.

In fact, everything that involves multiple acts of understanding will have its own logic. The reason is simple. If we understand several facts in some general area of knowledge, then our understanding will want to understand how these facts go together. The facts themselves are relationships among objects; but if there are many of them, we can only understand the area as a whole when we see the relationships among the facts. Hence, we will fit the facts known into a sequence and pattern, so that we can see how they go together—and this, by the definition above, is a logic.

4.3. Esthetic logic

But since esthetic facts are known because of the emotional overtones of the perceptions, then the logic of these facts will in general be different from the logic of perceptive facts. That is, esthetically known facts will fit into different sorts of patterns from perceptively known ones; and the patterns for esthetic facts will be emotionally valid, as opposed to perceptively “reasonable.”

The “rules of composition” in music and art are actually the laws of the esthetic logic of the art in question—each art having its own logic. They were discovered through the years by trial and error, and are the ways in which esthetically known facts can fit into patterns and sequences that “feel” right, as opposed to those that “look” right.

Students have a great deal of trouble with these rules, for two reasons. The first is that they want to substitute perceptive logic for esthetic logic, and can't understand why their teachers tell them that what they are doing is bad. For instance, they paint landscapes with the horizon halfway up the painting, and large objects carefully distributed at equal distances from the center line—and then they wonder why the teacher says that their paintings are unbalanced. The reason is that the kind of balance they put into the painting was a perceptive balance, which unfortunately is not the same as an emotional balance; one side will feel heavier than the other.

Students writing novels make their characters into “the kind of person” that they want, and their teachers tell them that they “don't breathe,” or “aren't rounded,” or are “abstract.” Then they read Dickens, and find people like Mr. Micawber and Mrs. Gamp, and say, “But these are even more abstract than mine are!” What the teachers are saying (badly) is not that characters in novels have to be concrete (they are all abstract), but that they have to be esthetically logical, not perceptively so. Dickens's characters are extremely abstract and “one-dimensional,” but they “work”: they “fit,” or “feel

4.3. Esthetic logic

right”—except for his heroines, and to a lesser extent his heroes. There he failed, because he he was inventing a person who might be more complex than the Uriah Heeps and Peggotys, but was “what one would expect a good woman to be” in the sense of what comes out of manuals of ethics, not of one's emotional experience with people.

Dickens's characters are a beautiful example of the fact that art is abstract, not concrete; and at the same time are an object lesson (with the exception noted above) in what the difference is between esthetic logic and perceptive logic.

The second problem students have with the rules of the art is that “rules were made to be broken.” Great art seems always to violate the rules that were thought to be inviolate; and students chafe under the rules, because you can't do great art that way.

The answer to this difficulty is that a new insight involves a reorganization of the data in a way that was not discovered before; and so it looks like a repudiation of the rules. But this is not just true in the esthetic realm. Newton's discoveries on gravitation made him invent the mathematics of “fluxions,” which violated the known laws of mathematics and later came to be called calculus; Einstein's insights led him into describing things in terms of tensors and not vectors; Dirac needed a “delta” function that violated the rules of mathematics; Boole violated the cardinal rules of logic—and so on. Now all of these iconoclastic insights are part of what a student studies as “the system” of mathematics—with no notion of the fact that it was developed by way of denying what seemed to be eternal truth.

But that does not mean that you can get anywhere just by breaking the rules. Violate the known rules of formal logic, and you will talk gibberish; violate esthetic logic, and you will talk esthetic gibberish. When geniuses “violate” the known rules, it isn't because they don't

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know them, or don't want to follow them; it is because they have discovered a fact that shows them that the old logic is false in this situation. Violations of logic are forced on a person; they're not something that you undertake without extreme provocation.

The trouble is that students are apt to think that they are saying something new when they violate the old rules; but they have the cart before the horse, and wind up saying nothing. You have to have the new thing to say first; and if it absolutely can't be said clearly within the rules, you violate the rules—and while you are at it, create new ones (which add to, but don't repudiate, the old ones). What used to be logical doesn't become illogical, either in the perceptive or in the esthetic realm, simply by the discovery of a new way of arranging things.

But now it is finally time to talk about beauty.

4.3. Esthetic logic

CHAPTER 5

BEAUTY

5.1. The esthetic concept The preceding two chapters spoke of esthetic facts and their relation to the esthetic experience; but they did not say much about the property in the object that gives rise to the esthetic fact. That is what this chapter is about.

You will recall that a fact, as a relation among objects, implies that there is something in each object by which each is related to the others; thus, if grass is similar to emeralds and leaves, there is the greenness in each of them by which each is related to the others as similar. This “something” is the property.

DEFINITION: *An esthetic property is whatever it is that an object possesses by which it is related to some other object (or within itself) through an esthetic fact.*

Thus, the “smilingness” of the meadow is its esthetic property; the “pleasantness” of Frank is his esthetic property; the “snakeliness” of John is his esthetic property, and so on.

The first thing to note about the esthetic property is, as has been

5.1. The esthetic property

stressed in the preceding chapters, that it is a real property, but that it is a different property from any perceptible property or any sum of perceptible properties.

This is very hard to accept, so consider it again. It is absurd to say that the sunny meadow is not really like a smiling face—because in fact it does make a normal person feel the way he feels when a person smiles at him. But if that is true, then there must be something objectively in common between the meadow and a smiling face, such that a stormy field does not have it. That is the property.

Put it this way: the meadow has the power to affect us emotionally the way a smile does. but that is what any property, perceptible or esthetic is: the power to affect our minds in a certain way. We tend to think of perceptible powers as distinct “forms of energy,” as if they were not abstractions, but as it were “tangible” somethings; but in fact, all this “form of energy” really means (when you get down to the physics of it) is that the object in question has the power to affect some instrument in a certain way. It is fully as much an abstraction as the “smilingness” we are talking about, because in fact it is a way in which the thing as a whole behaves, and is not really some “part” of it. The greenness of the grass is not one of its elements; it is the way the elements that make up the grass behave because they are united into the particular unity that exists.

What I am saying is that the perceptible property only seems less mysterious and abstract than the esthetic one, because we are more familiar with perceptible properties, and so have ignored the mystery, falsifying it into something our minds are more able to cope with. In this sense, esthetics is a good corrective to science, because it makes us realize (by wierd concepts like “smilingness”) just what we are dealing with when we talk of properties.

5.1. The esthetic property

5.2. Esthetic truth I think that it will shortly become clear why I waited until now to talk about esthetic truth. It looks perfectly straightforward, but it has some rather peculiar implications.

DEFINITION: *Esthetic truth* occurs when the relationship understood esthetically corresponds with an actual relationship among the objects.

Can a person actually make an esthetic mistake? That is, can a person think some object is affecting him emotionally in a certain way, and it is not actually doing this?

The answer is, Yes, it is possible. I mentioned in talking about esthetic distance that if you are involved in a strong emotion, there is a spillover from it that affects all your consciousness; and you might think that the object is giving you the emotion when in fact the object itself has nothing to do with it.

For example, a person in love thinks everyone is friendly to him, and that those who are being nasty to him are just joking. If he were not in the grip of the emotion, he would realize that the people were in fact affecting him in all sorts of esthetic ways; but now they all seem the same. A depressed person thinks that objects are making him depressed, when in fact it is his mood that invests what the objects are doing with an emotional overtone that does not come from them.

The first level of esthetic error occurs when the present emotional state of the person is responsible for the emotional overtone of some perception, and the person thinks that the emotional overtone was due to an esthetic property in the object.

You will notice that this mistake is one where the first level of esthetic objectivity has not been reached. The person has failed to circumvent his present bodily condition.

5.2. Esthetic truth

A second level of esthetic error occurs when a person mistakes a habitual disposition of his for something produced by external objects. He then thinks that things have esthetic properties that they don't have.

For instance, the paranoid person thinks that everyone hates him; and if you try to convince him to the contrary, then you are just another one of the haters out to “get” him. He is assuming that his emotional condition is externally caused when it isn't.

But you don't have to be insane to commit this type of error, which essentially is a failure to achieve the third level of objectivity. It is, in fact, all too common to hear people say that there is nothing to some form of art that does not speak to them—assuming that if they are affected in a certain way, everyone is, and if they are not affected, no one “really” is. They assume that their reactions are always the “normal human” reactions, and if someone else is not affected the way they are, then this is because he is the oddball.

I don't think there is any way you can make a mistake on the second level of objectivity, in which you are affected in the same way even though you have different emotional predispositions; this would have to be due to a sameness in the esthetic property.

But what esthetic error amounts to is saying that there is a certain esthetic property in the object when in fact the particular emotional overtone of the perception was internally rather than externally caused; and the esthetic property in the object is either not there at all or is different from what it is thought to be.

5.3. Beauty Now in discussing the truth-relation a couple of chapters ago, I said that there was a different way of looking at it—whether the fact corresponded to what we understood that it “ought” to be—and that this wasn't called truth and error, but

goodness and badness. What is the esthetic counterpart of this?

DEFINITION: *Beauty is the presence of an expected esthetic property in an object.*

Beauty, then, is esthetic goodness, as it were. We expect an object to affect us emotionally in a certain way, and in fact it does affect us emotionally in this way. We don't then say that the object is good, but that it is beautiful. It has the esthetic property we expected to find in it.

Thus, a man expects to find women attractive to him; he looks at a woman who attracts him, and he says, "She's beautiful." A person expects that the sunset will give him emotions of peace and awe. He sees a sunset that affects him in this way and calls it beautiful.

Beauty, then, is in one sense the esthetic property, and in another sense it isn't. If the esthetic property is one you don't expect to find, you don't call the object beautiful.

5.3.1. The eye of the beholder Now it can be seen in what sense "beauty is in the eye of the beholder." It isn't that the esthetic property is in the person who says that something is beautiful; the esthetic property is either in the object or it's not; it's there whether the person responds to it or doesn't, or even (because of his bodily condition) can't. And we saw that you can think you are responding to a property that just plain is not there in the object. So the esthetic property itself doesn't depend on the observer.

But the beauty does, because it is the discovery of an expected esthetic property. So that, if a person hears a voice over the telephone and pictures the one speaking as a voluptuous blonde, and then sees her as a short brunette, he might think she is not beautiful, because he gets an esthetic reaction different from what he was

5.3.1. The eye of the beholder

expecting to get.

That is, the esthetic property is different from the expected one, and so the beauty is not there as such. However, it is there for a person who either was expecting to find it or had no particular expectations. It is also there for someone who has an open mind (in the true sense), and who is willing to accept whatever esthetic property he finds in the object.

5.3.1.1. Beauty and prettiness Notice that what is beautiful is not the same as what is pretty. Most people expect things to be pretty, and so confuse beauty and prettiness; but they are not the same.

DEFINITION: *Prettiness is an esthetic property that causes a pleasant emotion.*

Obviously, what is pretty can be beautiful—if you are expecting the object to be pretty in the way in which it is in fact pretty. In fact, people call a pretty thing beautiful (and not just pretty) if it is more pretty than they expect.

However, there can be prettiness that is out of place. A pretty funeral march, for instance, would probably not be beautiful to many people; neither would a pretty tragedy with pretty deaths in it. A pretty portrayal of battles and a war would probably be regarded by any knowledgeable person as an esthetic lie, and so would not be beautiful.

And conversely, many unpleasant things can be beautiful. I know of no more horrible situation to have to watch than Desdemona's murder by Shakespeare's Othello; yet the emotions of pity and terror, rage (at Iago) and disgust make sense: to one who knows, they are what should be there. It is a beautiful play.

5.3.1.1. Beauty and prettiness

5.3.1.2. Learning to appreciate beauty But wait. If beauty depends on what you expect to find, then why can I say that Othello is beautiful “to one who knows”? Isn't all this “education” in art a waste of time? Not at all. Just because beauty as such depends on expectations, it doesn't mean that you can't learn to find esthetic properties that are there but might escape your notice if you didn't know what to look for. And when you find them, then the objects are recognized as beautiful, even though you wouldn't have called them beautiful before.

There are several senses in which we can learn to appreciate beauty. First of all, there is emotional training. People tend to put emotions out of their consciousness; and so in order to appreciate beauty, we have to learn to recognize and be aware of our emotional responses to things. I said, remember, that absolutely every act of consciousness we have, whether it is a perception, an act of imagination, memory, or understanding, has an emotional overtone. Most of the time, however, we are paying attention to something else, and ignore the emotion altogether. In the second place, we need to be trained to be more sensitive to what the emotion is. If comparisons based on emotions are the basis of esthetic understanding, then we have to pay attention to slight shades of similarity and difference in emotional tones. Does the fear when you imagine a lion exactly resemble the fear when you imagine a tiger or a leopard? What is the difference?

In the third place, we have to learn how to have the emotion—even a strong one—and not act upon it; otherwise we get into the ethical and out of the esthetic realm. No one can appreciate the beauty of, say, Michelangelo's David if even the statue of a naked male body arouses sexual desire to the point of wanting satisfaction of it.

5.3.1.2. Learning to appreciate beauty

In the fourth place, we have to know what to look for in the object itself. A person may be able to respond emotionally to the colors and lines of a painting; but if he looks at Jackson Pollock's "drip" paintings only to find "what they look like," then he won't notice the interplay of colors and shapes, and he will miss the beauty. If a person is waiting for the melodies and rhythms in music, then if he listens to Karkheinz Stockhausen, whose music is often a progression of tone colors, he will only be confused.

So yes, study is necessary for any kind of complex esthetic property to be recognized. The uneducated will say that it is not beautiful, because they can't find what is there, and are looking for something simpler; but the lack of beauty is their fault, as it were, not the object's.

5.3.2. Ugliness The opposite of beauty, of course, is ugliness; which, in this theory of esthetics is esthetic badness—not a terribly surprising-sounding phrase. We certainly talk of bad art, and think of it as ugly.

DEFINITION: *We say that an object is **ugly** if it fails to agree with our esthetic expectations of it.*

There are several ways in which something can be ugly. First, it is regarded as ugly if it lacks an esthetic property we expect to find in it. For instance, an old woman is apt to be thought ugly by a young man, because he expects women to attract him, and her appearance is not sexually attractive.

But an object can also be thought to be ugly because it has an esthetic property the person doesn't expect to find, and therefore in some sense contradicts his idea of what it "ought" to be esthetically. A good deal of modern art and music, which is based on unpleasant

emotional overtones (dissonances, muddy colors, erratic shapes) is thought ugly by many people, because they expect to be soothed and pleased by art.

If natural objects are thought ugly, this is always due to unrealistic expectations on the part of the observer. The reason is simple. Natural objects were not designed to have a certain emotional effect on people. The fact that most sunsets have one type of effect does not mean that the next one can't produce sadness or despair, because of the arrangements of the clouds and so on; but if the observer thinks it ugly, that is because he was expecting awesome calmness, and he is refusing to conform his mind to reality. If he did, he would find the sunset beautiful, but in a different way from normal.

We have no right, in other words, to expect natural reality to conform to our expectations; when something seems ugly, the way to fix it is to change our expectations and learn something new about the way things are.

But art was made by human beings to express an esthetic fact; and as we will see in a later chapter, there are various ways in which the artist can fail in saying what he wants to say. He can, for instance, contradict himself esthetically; and if he does, what he produces is objectively ugly, however pretty it might be, and however much the people who couldn't spot the contradiction think that it is beautiful.

So art can be thought ugly because the person doesn't understand it, or because in fact it is ugly, and the person who says it is knows what he is talking about.

But it must be kept in mind that ugliness is not really the opposite of prettiness. What is not pretty is ugly only to those people who expect the object to be pretty. For instance, there are many people who would say that Ethel Merman had an ugly voice (For those under forty, she was a singer in musicals of the thirties, forties, and

5.3.2. Ugliness

fifties—consult your late-late show). Her voice certainly was strident and not pretty; but it fit; and if you “rode with it,” it was exciting.

Things out of context can be pretty or not pretty; they can only really be beautiful or ugly in context.

5.3.2. Ugliness

CHAPTER 6

CHARACTERISTICS OF BEAUTY

6.1. Transcendental beauty We are now in a position to discuss a question that has caused controversy in philosophy ever since the time of Plato: Is beauty a “transcendental property of being” or not? The issue is no longer one of burning concern; but I think its answer can shed some light on what beauty is.

DEFINITION: *A transcendental property of being is a property any being has simply because it exists.* It is not a property that is confined to some type of being, but “transcends” all the various categories that you can separate realities into. Traditionally, “one,” “good,” and “true” were the transcendental properties; but some people added “beautiful” and some didn't.

So the question is whether we can call something beautiful only if it is a certain kind of existence (or activity), or whether the mere fact that it is active is what would allow it to be called beautiful.

The answer, according to this theory of beauty, is that, since every perceptive experience necessarily has an emotional overtone, and

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since any emotional overtone is capable of being related somehow with at least some other emotional overtone, then it follows that anything capable of producing a perceptive experience of any sort will also produce an emotional overtone—which can be the basis for an esthetically understood fact about it.

Hence, any object at all will have some esthetic property, which would mean that it is beautiful for anyone who is willing to accept its presence in the object. Therefore, beauty is a property of any being at all, or is a transcendental property of being.

That is, it is always the fault of the observer if he finds no beauty in the object, because there always is some esthetic property in it, and an esthetic property is “beauty” once it is recognized as “belonging” in the object.

There are a couple of things to note here, however. First, those who conclude that beauty is a transcendental property seem also to conclude that the higher the level of reality, the greater the beauty: so that God is the “most beautiful” of all beings, angels and pure spirits next, man next, animals next, plants next, and inanimate objects least beautiful.

But something like Michelangelo's David is an inanimate object (a block of marble); and it seems silly to say that this is “really” less beautiful than a deformed cockroach; and Beethoven's ninth symphony is just vibrations of the air—so it would seem to have much less beauty even than the David.

Obviously, there is a flaw in the reasoning somewhere.

The flaw is that the degree of beauty does not depend (as we will see shortly) on the degree of reality of the thing in question, but on how intense an emotion it can cause, how complex a set of emotions it produces, and so on. But the intensity of the emotions depends on our instinct's survival-program, not on the degree of reality of the

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object.

That is, I react with terror to any large object moving swiftly in my direction, because it can crush me. This emotion occurs whether the large object is a car (inanimate) or a horse (animal). If the object is small (a dog), the emotion is apt to be less intense. Hence, the esthetic experience will be more or less intense in a way that does not vary with the variation in level of being of the object.

Similarly, while an animal or a human being may be capable of many complex emotionally-charged effects on me, this is true of any object. A scientist who studies atoms (a very low form of being) forms many different perceptive experiences of them; and each of these has its own emotional overtone—and so he can get an esthetic concept (if he wants to) fully as complex as any ordinary person contemplating an animal or a human being.

Perhaps this line of reasoning can be clinched with the notion of God, who is the greatest being. For most people, God is known very abstractly, as “the supreme being,” and, known as such, not very intense or complex emotional overtones occur when they think of God. Hence, he cannot be very beautiful to them; many other things are more beautiful than God.

Therefore, even though every being is beautiful, the degrees of beauty do not vary with the degrees of being of the object.

The second thing to note is that even non-realities can be beautiful. We can imagine as well as perceive; and acts of imagination also have emotional overtones. But acts of imagination, as we said, have no object; and so the “non-objects” have a kind of beauty, which can be very intense and very complex.

“What's Hecuba to him or he to Hecuba that he should weep for her?” says Hamlet. And Hamlet himself, as Shakespeare pictures him, is imaginary; yet he causes very intense and complex emotions. Now

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of course, for us, it is the play and the actors that cause the emotions and the esthetic experience; but for Shakespeare, it was the purely imaginary character that did it—and he existed in no meaningful sense of the term.

But the puzzle is easily solved by noting that it isn't the “non-object” Hamlet in Shakespeare's mind or imagination that “caused” his feelings (because there isn't any Hamlet even in Shakespeare's mind; he isn't a picture Shakespeare produced inside himself), but the act itself of imagining. That is, this particular act (whose form is that of “imagining in a Hamlety way” had the emotional overtone in question.

So the reality of the act of imagining is what had the beauty in question, not the Hamlet “inside” the act. It had the beauty Hamlet would have had if he had existed and caused an act like that.

To explore this further would get us into the vexed question of “possible being”; but let me leave the subject here.

6.2. Degrees of beauty But the mentioning of the fact that things are thought of as more or less beautiful than others means that we should explore how beauties can vary in degree, so to speak.

In the strict sense, esthetic properties do not have degrees as such; and so “more and less” are used only analogously with forms of energy, which in fact do have degrees. But this does not mean that “more beautiful” is a meaningless term, nor that it is not objective. What is the basis of the analogical use of “more and less?”

6.2.1. Intensity The first and most obvious variation in beauties is that of intensity.

DEFINITION: *A beauty is more intense than another insofar as it*

causes a more intense emotion.

This characteristic is what is often meant by “powerful” when referring to a work of art. The Spiritual, “Were You There When They Crucified My Lord,” for instance, is very simple; but it evokes the horror of the crucifixion quite vividly, partly by not trying to describe it; and as such it tends to be more intensely beautiful than other artistic expressions of the same event.

It is often the case that complex esthetic objects are less intense than simple ones; but this is not invariably so. Some of Shakespeare's plays, which are very complex, are also extremely intense; and certain symphonies or operas (Die Meistersinger comes to mind) can be very intense indeed, for all their complexity.

6.2.1.1. “Catharsis” If the intensity is very great, it can sometimes be overwhelming, producing tears. It is almost as if the world splits apart and you look into the face of God: it is so beautiful that you can't stand it; you want it to stop—it has to stop or it will kill you—but you want it to go on, even if it does kill you.

People (like C. S. Lewis) have drawn all kinds of Theological implications from this experience; but its explanation is, I think, much more mundane. You are having a very intense emotional experience—perhaps even, as when viewing a tragedy, an intensely unpleasant, even horrible, experience. But in and through the emotions of the experience, you understand the true meaning of what is happening. And since the fact understood satisfies the mind, it itself intensifies the emotionality of the experience in the direction of desirability (“It is a good thing, Lord, for us to be here”), and you think that the secret of the universe has been revealed to you.

That is, when we discover anything new, there is the “Eureka!” kind of joy we have; when the thing we have discovered is through

6.2.1.1. “Catharsis”

an intense emotion, this added joy can be overpowering, and we can tend to think that we have learned the meaning of absolutely everything.

There is a particular application of this to tragedy. To be an art, a tragedy must not simply produce emotions (as Aristotle mentions, those of pity and fear); but it must show by emotional overtones a fact about the lives of the characters who are involved in the drama. That is, the lives of the characters make esthetic sense precisely through the disasters that awaken our pity and fear.

Thus, the pity and fear become vehicles by which we understand the meaning of a life that, if simply experienced, would be horrible and meaningless. And it is truth understood by the emotions that elevates the emotional experience into one that is desirable and not horrible. So, for instance, in Hamlet, you see esthetically why all the deaths at the end were “right.” So the play is beautiful, because what it says is recognized as esthetically true.

Aristotle called this elevation of the unpleasant emotions “catharsis,” which means what happens after you take a laxative. His theory was that, experiencing the pity and fear by watching actors and not real life allowed you to have the emotions while you knew that the thing wasn't really happening, and so you could “purge” them out of your system. An interesting theory; but I think my view is closer to the elevation actually experienced.

6.2.2. Complexity Another way in which an object can be more beautiful than another is in complexity.

DEFINITION: *One object is more **complex** in its beauty than another when there are more elements related with more subordinate relationships.*

This in itself is obvious, but several comments are in order. First, since (as we saw) our mind, as relating, seeks to include all the elements into a single relationship, then the assumption is that there will be an overarching single relationship, no matter how complex the object is; any multiplicity of relationships will be subordinate to (and relate to) the overarching unifying one. Thus, however complex are the esthetic relationships in Bach's St. Matthew Passion among the parts of the music, between the music and the text, and the text and the events it refers to, these will all have to fit together into some esthetic grand design, or the piece will not “work” esthetically at all.

Secondly, a given object can simultaneously be more and less beautiful than a given other object. It can be more beautiful in esthetic complexity and less beautiful in esthetic intensity; and disputes about whether, say, Beethoven's last string quartets (which are very complex, but not excessively intense) are more beautiful than his third symphony (which isn't so complex, but is more intense) depend on whether you are a “cerebralist” and focus on the intricacies of the pattern, or a “romantic” and focus on the strength of the emotion.

Obviously, disputes such as these are silly. Who cares whether one is more beautiful than the other? It is like asking whether Einstein's relativity theory has more meaning in it than Aristotle's met-aphysical theory. They say something different; and the question is whether they are true, not whether there is a greater quantity of meaning. Nevertheless, it is because beauties can vary in different respects that we can get into disputes.

6.2.2. Complexity

6.2.2.1. Internal and external complexity Thirdly, the complexity of an object can be either internal or external or both. Internal complexity deals with the emotional overtones of perceived parts of the object and their interrelations; external complexity deals with the other objects referred to or suggested by the object, together with their emotional overtones and the relations between these and the object.

The Spiritual “Were You There” is internally simple, with a single melody, and words that simply ask a question and make a remark: “Were you there when they crucified my Lord [nailed him to the tree/ laid him in the tomb]? Sometimes it causes me to tremble.” But they make a person picture the crucifixion and the remark causes a new look at what one knows about it; and so the external complexity can be enormous—one discovers new emotions in imagining the events.

Bach's St. Matthew Passion is a work that has enormous internal and external complexity. First, there is the interrelation of the emotions directly produced by the music itself; secondly, there is the relation between the emotional tone of the music and that of the text it fits; thirdly, there is all of the emotional complexity of the events referred to by the Gospel narrative used as part of the text; fourthly, there is the esthetic complexity of the interpolated poetry reflecting on the events just narrated; fifthly, there is the external complexity of the congregational hymns interspersed, with their associations, not only with the Passion itself, but with the other times they were sung in church. And all of these fit together into one esthetically meaningful statement. It is no wonder that some works of art need to be studied.

People who look for what a painting “looks like” and can't appreciate modern abstract art are interested only in the external reference of the art object, and not in its internal esthetic complexity.

6.2.2.1. Internal and external complexity

Abstract art shows that art can have a meaning without “talking about” anything other than itself.

In this respect, abstract art is like pure instrumental music (i.e. music that doesn't have a “program,” in which it is “about,” say, a day in the country like Beethoven's sixth symphony). In this kind of music, the sounds have a direct emotional impact, and the meaning of the music is the interrelation of the sounds through their emotional overtones: the logic of the piece itself.

As the Bach passion reveals, music can have more than this kind of esthetic meaning; but as Beethoven's fifth symphony reveals, it need not have. All the “statement about life” talk when “explaining” the symphony is an attempt to give the music an external reference, when in fact it just says what it says.

6.2.2.2. “Inexhaustibility” Connected with complexity is a characteristic that many people have noted about beauty, especially the beauty of “great art”: it seems that there is something new every time you approach a work of art; some fresh meaning you didn't see before emerges, so that the work seems somehow “infinite.”

This, like the experience of being overwhelmed, makes art seem supernatural, but the explanation is actually down-to-earth. Since beauty affects the emotions, and since the emotional response is based, not only on the esthetic property, but on the state of the observer, then it is unlikely that an observer will be in exactly the same state when he confronts a work of art.

If the work is not simple and obvious, then his emotional condition will make him more responsive to some aspects of the work at one time and more responsive to other aspects at other times; as his mind integrates these different emotions into a unified whole, the meaning he understands will be different. Of course, it will only be somewhat

6.2.2.2. “Inexhaustibility”

different, but often it will be different enough to be remarkable.

The reason this happens with “great” works more than lesser ones is because of their complexity, and because the artist could integrate the possible emotional effects skillfully—so that the different states of the observer will not work out to his seeing a contradiction, but a new and valid meaning.

6.2.3. Clarity Another way in which something can be more beautiful than something else is that it can be more clear in the way it expresses what it wants to express.

DEFINITION: *One object is **clearer** in its beauty than another when there are fewer irrelevant elements and when the logic is presented in a way that follows the natural progression of ideas.*

I said earlier that the mind wants to interrelate everything it perceives into an understood unit. Insofar as it can do this, it is more satisfied than if there are loose ends that it can't exactly fit in.

A work of any complexity, whether esthetic or perceptive, will have some elements that either don't exactly fit, or elements that the observer can't fit in (because of some bias of his own). No statement is ever absolutely clear, for the simple reason that it is a material expression of something spiritual; and in translating the spiritual to the material realm, something is bound to be lost.

Nevertheless, the goal is to get the concept across as well as possible; so the objective is to minimize extraneous elements and make the logic as simple to follow as possible, consistent with the complexity of the subject.

A work can say something accurately, but be unclear, as we see in the perceptive realm from legal language and other cases of technical jargon. In the effort to be unambiguous, the language is tortured

into shapes that make it hard to follow. The same can happen esthetically; and that lessens the esthetic experience, because it adds the annoyance of confusion to it.

6.2.3.1. Ambiguity Ambiguity is supposed to be a characteristic of poetry and art; and this would seem to militate against what I am saying. For instance, the last stanza of Frost's *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*:

“The woods are lovely, dark and deep;
but I have promises to keep,
and miles to go before I sleep—
and miles to go before I sleep.”

by the repetition of the last line makes “sleep” ambiguous. Does he mean sleeping tonight, or death?

The answer is, of course, that he means both. The poem is perceptively ambiguous, because all it appears to mean is looking at woods on a peaceful evening, and then the last line makes the woods a kind of symbol of death as a release from responsibility. But the poem is esthetically clear, because the emotional overtones of the woods allow us to understand esthetically a true meaning of death and life. In the “prosy” descriptions, “His house is in the village, though,” we feel that death (after we have read the whole poem through once and found out what it was about) is not necessarily something terrifying, but matter-of-fact, and desirable, except for the fact that there are things to do in life first.

Note that to say that “Death isn't something really to be afraid of; but it sometimes has to be postponed until we fulfill our responsibilities” doesn't get the idea across as well as Frost; it is much less “believable” than when it is understood in the more complex way Frost presents it.

So “ambiguity” does not refer to esthetic ambiguity, where you

6.2.3.1. Ambiguity

couldn't understand through the emotional overtones which of several possible meanings was intended. The perceptive ambiguity we are referring to here can be coupled with esthetic clarity.

6.2.3.2. Logical clarity I mentioned that one component of clarity is clear logic. This is esthetic logic, of course. A set of statements may be logical, but may be so arranged that the logic is hard to follow; and this can happen both in the perceptive and esthetic orders.

For instance, the syllogism:

All German Shepherds are dogs, and nothing that whinnies is a German Shepherd; and therefore some dogs do not whinny. is confusing. Does the conclusion really follow from what was said earlier? (Keep in mind that in logic “some do not” does not imply “some others do”).

The syllogism is logical, but the way the terms are arranged, you expect that the conclusion is going to be talking about German Shepherds. If you arrange it clearly, it is easier to see that it follows: Some dogs are German Shepherds, and no German Shepherds whinny; therefore some dogs do not whinny.

So there is a difference between being illogical and having one's logic be unclear. What is illogical is false; what is unclear may be true, but is confusing.

Esthetic logic is, as I mentioned, the rules of art. When they are not followed, then one of three things is possible: either the object in question is illogical and esthetically false, the object is esthetically unclear, or the object is following a newly-discovered logic.

It is not always easy to decide which is right, especially with a new departure in art. The logic, however, is in question when the observer says, “Now why did he put that in this place?” That is an indication that for the observer, it doesn't “fit” emotionally—either

because the observer hasn't learned the logic, or because the artist didn't do a good job in presenting it. In general, for one who is trying to understand a new type of art, an object with clear logic might seem unusual, but it will be seen that "there is something there."

6.2.4. Precision Finally, some remarks should be made about the variations in precision of esthetic concepts. It is sometimes thought that "good writing" is always concrete and individual, and that writing in generalities is bad.

Like most rules, perceptive as well as esthetic, this is true only in some cases. It depends on what you are trying to say whether it makes sense to be specific. I remember a philosopher talking about Josiah Royce (or his philosophy) as "two eucalyptus trees." Why two? Why eucalyptus? Maybe he had some perceptive or esthetic concept that could be expressed only in this way; but I suspect that it was just because he knew that writing should be concrete and that "an oak tree" is trite. But the fact that I remember this analogy and nothing at all else about the paper he delivered is an indication that if you get too concrete you can call attention away from the point you are trying to make.

Since esthetic experiences depend on emotions, there is a greater need, as I said, for concreteness when expressing esthetic concepts, because you have to awaken the emotions in question. Abstract words like "scary" don't produce the emotion of fear; and so if you want to make a person understand esthetically the meaning of some frightening experience, you can't say, "it was terribly terribly frightening."

Nevertheless, sometimes you don't want more than a generalized esthetic concept; and the esthetic version of the two eucalyptus trees can get in your way. Notice the line in Shakespeare's poem I quoted

6.2.4. Precision

some chapters ago: “Death's second self, that seals up all in rest.” That's pretty trite; but he wanted it that way, because he didn't want the reader to think of death as horrible or to get too excited about it, since the point was to reinforce the notion of the irony and the strength of the love, not the horror of extinction.

Precision or preciseness, of course, means saying exactly what you want to say, no more and no less; but being too concrete can sin against precision as much as being too general.

I think that these ways in which object can be more and less beautiful will conclude the discussion of beauty as such. It is now time to pass on to the attempt to express something beautiful: art.

CHAPTER 7

ART, INSPIRATION, AND GENIUS

7.1. Statements At the end of the preceding chapter, I said that art is the attempt to express something beautiful. That would actually do for a definition of it; but I would prefer to define art in this way:

DEFINITION: *Art is an esthetically meaningful statement.*

Because of the confusion of beauty and prettiness, most artists nowadays would be more comfortable with this definition than with the other one; but since what is beautiful is what has an esthetic property (and thus is one of the objects in a fact known esthetically), the two definitions are just different ways of expressing the same thing.

But before we get into specifically esthetic statements, let us consider what any statement is.

DEFINITION: *A statement is the expression in perceptible form of an*

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understood fact.

There are several things to note about this definition. First of all, not all statements are made in language. A shrug of the shoulders, for instance, expresses the fact, “I don't know, and/or don't care.” This is as much a statement as the same thing said in words. Mathematical equations are statements; things said in sign language are statements. What is necessary for a statement to be a statement is not that it use words, but that it be in perceptible form. The act of understanding is itself not a statement, though it is what the statement expresses.

Note that you don't actually have to make the statement perceptible in order for it to be a statement; it just has to have that form. Thus, when we talk internally to ourselves (imagining ourselves conversing, for instance), we are making statements, because they have perceptible form and aren't just acts of understanding; but they aren't perceptible by anyone (not even ourselves, since in the strict sense we don't perceive what we imagine).

Secondly, a statement has to be the expression of a fact understood. This needs some qualification. Since we can make mistakes and lie, this means that a statement has to be the type of expression that could be that of an understood fact.

A mistaken statement is a perceptible expression of an act of understanding; but (because of the mistake), it doesn't express the fact the speaker thinks it does. A lie, on the other hand, doesn't express the speaker's understanding; but he wants you to think that it expresses a fact (as understood by him); and so it has to be able to express a fact.

But not every expression we utter is a statement. “Who's there?” is a question, not a statement. “Wow!” is an interjection, not a statement. “Go shut the door,” is a command, not a statement. Many of these expressions imply statements (e.g. “I don't understand

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who's there," "This excites me," "I want you to shut the door") but they aren't statements, because they express different acts of the mind from those of understanding facts.

Contradictions aren't statements either, because, though they have the grammatical form of a statement, they can't express either a fact or an act of understanding. Thus, the expression "This statement is false" is not only not false, it isn't even a statement (if it were, it would be false if it were true, and true if it were false); it would express the act of understanding that the speaker isn't thinking of what he is thinking of—and no one can think that.

The point is that not all statements use words, and not all things that use words are statements.

7.1.1. The purpose of statements The purpose in human consciousness of statements is to make it possible and relatively easy to have a given act of understanding. Within ourselves, statements make it easy to recall acts of understanding we have earlier had, and to arrive at new ones by combining statements and rearranging them (by logic, for instance).

But statements are also the only way we have of sharing our understanding with others. Since the actual act of consciousness is subjective and private, no one else can read our minds unless we produce something perceptible (such as a pattern of sounds or patterns on a page) which, by convention, can awaken in the hearer or reader an act of understanding like the one we had.

So statements are not necessarily just for communication; though if they are expressed externally, they would always have the ability to communicate.

7.1.2. Meaning Of course, what a statement communicates is called its meaning. But this needs a little

7.1.2. Meaning

elaboration.

DEFINITION: *The meaning of a statement is the relationship that the statement expresses.*

That is, statements are attempts to express what one thinks is a fact: a relationship among objects. But because the speaker can be mistaken about what the fact is, or because he can be mistaken about how to express what he understands, or because he can be lying, his statement might not actually express a fact.

The statement does, however, say that a certain relationship obtains among certain objects: it has the form of the expression of a fact. “This page is white.” The relationship actually expressed by the statement is its meaning. But this may or may not be the meaning intended by the one who uttered it. If a person thought that “white” expressed what grass and emeralds have in common, he might say, “Grass is white” and mean what we would mean by “Grass is green”; but the statement wouldn't thereby mean this.

Note well that you can't make a statement mean something just by wanting it to mean that something. You have to be careful to express what you mean. So what a speaker means by a statement (i.e. what he intends to express) and what the statement means are not necessarily the same.

7.1.2.1. Words We also say, however, that words have meanings. Words are conventional symbols of either relationships, properties, or objects. Thus, “fathering” expresses a relationship, “green” a property, and “John” an object. Since any expression of a relationship will involve objects, the relation itself, and the property in the objects by which they are related, it seems that every relationship that is expressed in a statement will have to be

7.1.2.1. Words

somewhat complex. It can be expressed sometimes in a single word, especially in what they call “inflected” languages, where the part of the word itself expresses one or other of the dimensions of the relationship; as in Latin. “currit” means “he runs” (and not “I run”).

But for the sake of economy, we want to use as few words as possible to express as many relationships as possible, and so we make them have multiple functions:

DEFINITION: *A word is used in its reference-function if it “points out” an object or set of objects. Thus, “humans” in the statement, “Humans are living beings” is used simply to point to the objects you are talking about: anything that has the property of being human. It does so through the property, perhaps, but the function in this statement is not for you to notice the property, but the object-set.*

DEFINITION: *A word is used in its meaning-function if it expresses the property or relationship that is to be understood in the statement. “are living beings” in the statement above is the term (word-group) that expresses the meaning of the statement (it is what you are to understand about humans).*

Some words, like “but” or “to” have neither reference nor meaning, but other functions in statements as they grow more complex. Words like “this” and proper names have reference but no meaning. But it is not, fortunately, necessary for us to go exhaustively into this for our purposes.

What is to be noted is that most (if not all) of the words that have meanings are not always used in their meaning-function, since they can also refer to the object that has the property or relationship in question.

7.1.2.1. Words

But more importantly, note that each statement expresses only one meaning, no matter how complex it is. Even though it may have fifty words in it, each of which (if used in other statements) might express a meaning, there is only one relationship expressed—provided the statement is “well-formed.”

This is another source of mistakes. a person might actually express two or more unconnected relationships in an apparently single statement. What he does then is confuse the person he is communicating with, because the hearer tries to connect them into a single relation and can't do it. He can't be understood by his hearer.

7.2. Inspiration The first task the artist has, then, if he is going to make an esthetically meaningful statement, is to have something to say; he has to understand an esthetic fact worth expressing.

Does this necessarily have to be some fact that no one has ever understood before? Not necessarily, as we will see shortly. But it seems reasonable to say that people are more interested in hearing something that they don't already know; and people are also interested in saying something that hasn't already been said by a lot of other people. So in general, the artist will want to say something at least to some extent new.

But how do you discover a new esthetic fact? Ah, there is the problem.

DEFINITION: *Artistic inspiration is the discovery of a new esthetic fact, in such a way that the form of its expression is suggested.*

A lot of words have been wasted rhapsodizing about inspiration as something divine, mystical, and the prerogative only of The Chosen.

But actually, it is simply understanding something that you didn't understand before. We have inspirations (or something essentially indistinguishable from it) in both the perceptive and esthetic orders whenever we learn anything we didn't know before, whether we are “taught” by the world around us or by some book or work of art.

Any inspiration seems like a “bolt out of the blue” because it tends to come after a more or less prolonged period of fooling around with the contents of your reactions and/or imaginings, fitting them together in various ways—when suddenly “the light goes on” and you see an interconnection you didn't notice before; perhaps the one you were looking for, perhaps a new one.

Artistic inspirations have the additional characteristic that, since the interconnection understood is based on emotional overtones, the understanding seems illogical (e.g., it doesn't seem logical that a field can be like a smiling face), and yet what is understood is recognized as true. It is also, of course, much more emotionally charged than perceptive inspirations, because the emotions are already actively involved in the act. I mentioned this when discussing catharsis. So the inspiration itself seems like some divinely infused knowledge—when in fact it is simply knowing what the emotionally-based relation is among the objects in question.

Of course, understanding a new esthetic concept is not much use if you have no way of expressing it. For a person who isn't a painter or poet, seeing a sunset might be inspiring; but it isn't exactly an artistic inspiration, because the person doesn't know of any way in which he could express just what he has understood. The best he can do is say, “Wow! Look at that!” to someone present; and later, “You should have seen that sunset! It was so beautiful!” All that that says is that he got an idea, but gives no hint of what the idea was.

7.2. Inspiration

7.2.1. Choosing an art form But this still doesn't help the budding artist. How do you go about getting esthetic ideas that can be expressed? The first thing that this theory would seem to suggest is that the budding artist should pick a form of art that he is interested in, and learn how to express things in it. Most people need to specialize, in order to be prepared to express esthetic ideas, as well as to sensitize themselves to esthetic nuances, so that they can get new ideas.

An analogy with the perceptive order will be helpful. Those who want to know new things in the perceptive order usually specialize in some science or academic discipline. A person, for instance, will start studying physics; and in his classes he learns facts that have already been learned, and in his labs he discovers facts that have already been discovered—and he is apt to be annoyed. But what he is really learning is two things: what the body of facts that the science knows is (so that he won't waste his time later discovering something that everyone already knows), and the skills and methods which people in the past have used to discover facts. The result is that he learns how to approach physical data so that new relationships will suggest themselves, and he knows how to handle those new relationships when the inspiration comes.

It is a lot easier to learn something new if you are in a relatively specialized area; but there are branches of learning, like philosophy, which specialize in generalities and cross-disciplinary studies; and there are people who seem to be experts in many disciplines.

This also happens in the arts. Michelangelo thought of himself as a sculptor, but he was obviously (as the Sistine chapel shows) one of the world's best painters; and he was a poet of distinction too. Leonardo, of course, is famous for being a scientist as well as an artist. There is no law that says a person has to confine himself to a speciality; it is just easier if you do, and most people can't handle

more than one specialized area.

So the first thing to do is to learn the craft: what the rules are, why they are what they are, and how to do what needs to be done when you are expressing this type of esthetic idea. Painters, for instance, have to learn the rules of composition, perspective, how colors combine and what they do to us emotionally, what effect various lines and shapes have emotionally, what the various media are and what can and can't be done with them and why, and so on. And he has to paint, paint, paint.

7.2.2. “Encouraging creativity” It used to be that art students would spend most of their time copying old masters and doing all kinds of things that students have always thought irrelevant. Nowadays, that seems to have given way to “encouraging creativity.”

I think that this, to some extent, is a mistake. It is due to the fact that teachers (from their own experience) have recognized that getting ideas is much more difficult than learning “technique” (what I was talking about), that it is much more interesting, and that even if you don't know the technique very well, if you have a great new idea, the technique doesn't matter much. (Beethoven, for instance, wasn't a very good orchestrator.)

All this is very true, and very irrelevant. It is sometimes possible that some genius can hit upon a new and valid idea without a lot of background of “technique” to build on; but in the first place, people like that are few and far between, like Mozart, and in the second place, like Mozart, even they can benefit from study.

In general, what “encouraging creativity” amounts to is the esthetic equivalent of letting the students babble on, hoping that eventually one of them will say something intelligent. It is like those wretched Freshman Seminars that cropped up in the 'sixties. The students got together and talked and talked about freedom, nuclear

7.2.2. “Encouraging creativity”

war (yes, even then); and neither learned anything from each other nor said anything worth hearing. How could they? Everything they said was innocent of any relation to evidence.

When Johnny is encouraged to paint, to “express himself,” he puts paint to the canvas, not to express some esthetic idea he already has, but just “to do something artistic.” His first reaction is to paint something that looks like something—and of course he fails, because he doesn't know the technique. To the extent that what he painted doesn't look like what he was trying to paint, he is praised by the teacher for being “creative”; and his failure is branded a success. By the same token, if he succeeds, he isn't being “creative” enough.

Of course, what the teacher is trying to show is that a likeness is not an esthetic statement; but what he is teaching is that randomness is art. Then as he paints randomly, he gets praised and blamed (it seems to him) randomly, because sometimes by accident he says something, and sometimes he doesn't.

If he survives, he catches on and learns the “technique” by trial and error, and then learns to express actual ideas. But this method doesn't really prepare him any better for getting ideas than the old “copy the past” method; and it is apt to handicap him, because good ideas need to be carefully stated, and he doesn't really have a good grip on the language.

Just as in the perceptive realm, too much can be made of grammar and “proper” speech, but this doesn't mean that learning grammar is a waste of time; so in the esthetic realm, “encouraging creativity” should not take precedence over learning the grammar of the art.

7.2.3. Genius Well yes, perhaps; but how do you get the inspiration? The answer is that there are no rules for getting ideas; real creativity can't be taught.

You can put yourself in the way of ideas if you study an art form.

As you learn the art form, you will see how objects are interrelated in the ways the art shows; you will see the esthetic properties of the objects in question. And this, of course, will make you emotionally more sensitive because of this type of esthetic property, and more disposed to find more intricate and subtle connections than a person who has not studied the form.

Beyond that, it is impossible to go. Finding a new idea means gathering together some reactions or images into a hitherto unnoticed pattern; and there can't be rules for doing this. It is the province of the genius.

DEFINITION: *Genius is the ability to form unusual associations among reactions and/or images.*

DEFINITION: *Intelligence is the ability to hold many images or reactions in consciousness at once.*

Genius and intelligence do not necessarily go together. When those with genius are not intelligent, we call them “odd,” “eccentric,” or “difficult”; though we are apt to think of very intelligent but traditional-thinking people as geniuses.

Since understanding is a spiritual act, there are actually no differences in our ability to understand as such. Whenever we are conscious of several objects, we can understand a relation among them.

Degrees of intelligence come from the number of objects we can be conscious of at once (or the number of parts or aspects of an object we can be conscious of at once). The more objects you can hold together in your consciousness, the more intricate the relation you can understand among them; if you can only pay attention to two objects, then you can only understand the simplest relations.

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However, relations among objects not only depend on how many objects there are, but on what they are. It is easy to get a relationship among grass, leaves, and emeralds; but how about leaves and King George III? If there is some relation between them, it would only be known by a person who considered the two of them together. But why would anyone do this?

This is the kind of thing that the genius-type mind does. It calls to mind other objects than the normal person would call to mind when presented with a given object. And since it does so, it can then understand relationships that would never occur to the normal person.

The classic instance of this is Archimedes, who was asked by the King to find out if his crown was made of pure gold or an alloy. Archimedes knew that a given amount of the alloy would have a different weight than the same amount of pure gold; but in order to measure the amount (volume) of metal in the crown, it would have to be melted down, which would destroy it. How could you find the volume of the crown without harming it?

He was getting into the bathtub as he pondered the question, and idly noticed that the water level rose as he got in.

That was enough. He leaped out of the tub and ran naked into the streets shouting "Eureka!" ("I got it!"). What had he got? Having noticed the water rise, he realized that it rose to get out of the way of his body. So sink the crown into a full bucket of water and measure how much water spills out of it, and you have the volume of the metal in the crown. Weigh the crown and compare it with what that volume of gold should weigh. (As I recall the story, it was not pure gold and the goldsmith lost his head.)

After the fact, it is easy to see what the connection is; but before it, who would think to connect the volume of a crown with taking a bath? That is what genius is.

7.2.3. Genius

It is the geniuses who come up with the new departures in both science and art; and very often they themselves don't know how they do it. Their brains have an unusual logic, and if they allow their brains to function without direction, then the odd pathways are traveled, often with startling results.

Perhaps the “encouraging creativity” is an attempt not to block this sort of procedure. Since I happen to be a genius-type, I am not very much in favor of it. In the first place, since the genius makes odd connections, he will seem strange to normal people. In the second place, ideas he understands will not be understood by people he tries to tell about them. It is no fun to have people think you are “different.” In the fourth place, if he really is a genius, then learning the traditional way of doing things isn't going to stifle his genius, but will only supplement it. From my own experience, I would venture an educated guess that if a person is the genius-type, he will revert to the natural logic of his brain as soon as he gets free from schooling. If he isn't, then sending him off on forays of randomness will only lead to maladaptive confusion.

Don't repine if you aren't a genius. You'll be much better able to get along with others, who will understand “where you are coming from,” as they say. And the fact that you can't make science or art take a totally new direction is no indication that you won't have something new to say. Those who followed Newton learned a lot before Einstein revolutionized physics again. Similarly, those who came after Michelangelo painted beautiful paintings, even if they weren't as radically different from the past as his were. Schubert was no Beethoven; but Schubert had something of his own to say nonetheless.

7.2.3.1. Non-creative art There is a place for the ordinary thinker in the art world. We tend in esthetics to focus so

7.2.3.1. Non-creative art

much on the genius and the new departure that we forget that there are many things that are said esthetically that are not what could be called “great art,” but have their use.

For instance, to take the visual arts, illustrators are needed who can illustrate things giving the proper esthetic meaning to what is being illustrated. Very often it would be bad to illustrate a book with pictures that were great art—because they would distract from the book by their own power, rather than reinforce it. N. C. Wyeth's illustrations of children's books tended to be better than the book itself; only really great literature could hold its own with him.

Advertisements need illustrations that help sell and don't call attention to themselves rather than the product. This takes a lot of intelligence, and not genius; genius is a handicap.

And there are plays that need to be written according to formulas for television, which people watch, not to be esthetically instructed, but to relax. They don't want to have to concentrate on learning something new. Essentially, what the writers have to do here is say the same basic thing, esthetically, week after week; but in slightly new ways, so that there is a certain freshness about each episode, but nothing profoundly different. This requires a good deal of intelligence, if not much genius.

For the musician, there is background music and popular music, which again fails in its function if the composer wants to get across new ideas: though sometimes he can sneak some in, as in the music for *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*.

As long as the esthetic statements made in these non-creative art forms are not lies, then there is no reason to despise them, any more than there is reason to despise your local physics professor or the researcher at Procter and Gamble just because he hasn't revolutionized physics or chemistry. There is applied art just as much as there is applied science; and both take a good deal of know-how.

7.2.3.1. Non-creative art

7.3. The performing arts Let me end this chapter by putting in something that could as easily belong to the next chapter as this one, and speaking of the performing arts.

It is sometimes thought that there is no creativity in being a performing artist, because all you do is express what the author or composer had in mind; nothing is really “yours” as an artist. But the performing artist is really more of a translator than a kind of esthetic typewriter or Dictaphone. The composer, playwright, or choreographer has some esthetic concept that he wants to express; and he writes it down in a form that doesn't express it unless someone plays it, or acts or dances it. Shakespeare's plays don't have the esthetic effect he intended unless they are acted; reading them is only a last resort if you can't see them.

The job of the musician, actor, or dancer is, first of all, to understand from the page what the author is trying to say, and then to translate that into the proper sounds, intonations, gestures, motions, and so on, that will produce emotions that will get across the esthetic idea as the performer understands it.

When he does this, he will find that his own personality has entered into the expression; it is now his “interpretation” of the author's work, and it will be different—often very, very different from others' interpretations, and sometimes even different from what the author thought he was saying.

There can, of course, be interpretations that contradict what is there in the author's text, such as a reading that produces sadness where irony was called for, or a staging that makes the text sound anachronistic, and so on; Handel cannot really be played as if he were Wagner without having the interpretation say the opposite of what the notes themselves say. Such interpretations are misinterpretations, and are bad.

But there can be departures from the author's original intentions

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that get across a nuanced version of what the text says and make it express a new, but legitimate esthetic idea. The criterion is whether the interpretation fits the text, not whether the author intended the particular interpretation.

So performing art is real art; it involves esthetic understanding and expression of the esthetic idea understood. What makes it different from the kind of thing that the author does is that the author found the idea in the world around him, and the performer found the idea in the author's work.

Just as a translator can make a bad translation, if what is said in the new language means something other than what was said in the old language, so esthetic interpretations must “stick to the text” in this sense. But just as a translator can make a literal translation that is hard to follow or good, and just as no two translations will be exactly alike, so performing artists put their own stamp on what is performed; and just as a translator can recast whole paragraphs to get the meaning across better, so it is not necessary to adhere slavishly to Beethoven's metronome markings—which is not necessarily to say that it is bad to do so; it depends on how well you can get the idea across.

7.3. The performing arts

CHAPTER 8

THE ARTISTIC PROCESS AND ITS RESULTS

8.1. The artistic process Let us then suppose that you have picked your art form and you have actually got some inspiration, whether profound or not. What I want to do here is describe what you as an artist are doing in expressing your concept, and how you and others can judge it.

Usually, the esthetic understanding is at the beginning rather vague: a general idea without all of its implications spelled out. To take a perceptive parallel, the original idea of this book was that esthetic understanding is like ordinary understanding, only it uses emotions as the basis of comparison. But at the beginning, it wasn't clear to me exactly in what way it was the same or how precisely it differed from perceptive understanding.

There follows a period of "gestation," where the artist doesn't really do much of anything, except let the concept roll around in his head. This would have been like my experimenting with various perceptive parallels to esthetic knowledge, seeing if they fit actual experiences as I observed them. The artist imagines himself expressing the concept, considering what he would do as various

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problems arise, and mentally testing whether the concept “works.”

What this amounts to is asking yourself whether what you discovered is a fact or an illusion. Did you really learn something when you had your inspiration, or were you just emotionally charged up, and only thought you saw something valid?

A lot of this goes on below the conscious level, only appearing as a kind of disturbance or dissatisfaction. What is happening is that your instinct is fitting things together and finding no problem, so that it doesn't bother you; but it is using up some of the energy that you would normally be using for conscious logic and reactions to the world around you, and so you know that something is going on.

Finally, there comes a point at which it is impossible to continue the process solely in your mind, and you have to test the concept out by actually trying to express it. The concept will be a lot more complex by this time, but still not necessarily all worked out.

8.1.1. The dialectic with the material Anyone trained in an art form will know basically how his concept can be expressed; but once he starts trying to express it, he will find that as he actually puts something down, on paper or canvas (or even practices a part in a play), what he has said has logical implications that he was not aware of, which will make demands on what follows.

To continue with the perceptive parallel, as soon as one sentence of this book was written, then the words and the content of that sentence had logical demands that could not be ignored. “If philosophy is, as I think it is, a science, then it is no small problem how one is to approach esthetics.” You can't just go on about how philosophy is scientific, because the immediate question is, “Why is it is problem? Explain yourself.” Further, there is the stylistic demand that the next sentence had better be short, or you have lost the reader.

8.1.1. The dialectic with the material

The same thing happens in the arts. As soon as any part of the concept is actually expressed, what has been said has its own reality with its own esthetic implications. These cannot be ignored, because the viewer or reader or hearer is going to be influenced by them, and will be confused if you start going off in what to him is an illogical direction without pointing where you are going.

Thus, the material you are expressing your idea in “talks back” to you, and you have to learn to “converse” with it—to listen to it as well as talk to it—so that together you can come as close as possible to expressing what you want to express.

That kind of interaction is called a “dialectic,” where the affected object enters into the causality of the cause that is acting on it, changing what the cause is doing as it itself is being changed. All artists are aware of the process. And it can even change the original concept radically, so that sometimes the actual concept expressed is not at all what the artist originally intended to express, but is something suggested by the work when he got it half finished.

This happens in the perceptive order also. For instance, in a course on the Philosophy of God once, I happened to be explaining one point in the argument using different wording from the way I usually put that point. I suddenly recognized that, when the step was put that way, it had an implication that I hadn't seen which made the whole argument invalid. I had to go back and recast the whole course from a different point of view; I learned a great deal from that alteration of a phrase, and my course now is not at all like what it used to be.

8.1.1.1. Respect for the medium This is another way of saying that an artist must have respect for his medium. That is, certain artistic materials have ways in which they “want” to behave; and making them behave in different ways does violence to them, so

8.1.1.1. Respect for the medium

to speak—and the violence shows in the finished work.

For instance, wood has a natural grain; and though you can carve it as if it didn't, going across the grain will resist the knife, and the finished product will show to some extent the grain as contradicting the contours of the statue. Oil paints, when laid on thickly, do not dry (because they dry from the outside in and form a skin that doesn't let the inside dry); and thick globs of them look sticky, and perhaps sag from their original position. A bassoon can play a high note; but it doesn't sound like a bassoon. When Stravinski made a bassoon solo in its high register the opening of his Rite of Spring, a member of the audience shouted, "What kind of instrument is that?"

But, as the Stravinski example shows, this violence is not necessarily bad. The whole piece is about barbarism; the ballet ends with a woman dancing herself to death as a primitive ritual. Hence, the wrenching of things out of harmony and rhythm and tone color was perfectly in place. Similarly, Rouault's painting of Jesus with the crown of thorns uses the sticky globs of paint to enhance the evil of the crucifixion while at the same time making the painting suggest a stained-glass window, which esthetically emphasizes the religious nature of the subject.

The point is that these examples of violence done to the medium are actually examples of respect for it; knowing what the use of the medium "says" esthetically, the artists knew what an abuse of the medium would say—and this is what they wanted to say.

8.1.2. The artist as judge But how does the artist "talk" to the work itself? How does he listen to it? He has, perhaps, a basic plan in view; but his attempts to express it involve doing things that have accidental side-effects. What I was saying above amounts to the fact that an artist (as opposed to the dabbler) is the person who capitalizes on the accidents, and makes them work for him.

8.1.2. The artist as judge

The artist is in a difficult situation here, actually. Since, in order to be able to produce a given emotion, it is usually necessary to feel the emotion, and since emotions tend to spill over into the rest of consciousness, the artist is always in danger of putting something down that “feels right” because he happens to be feeling the emotion beforehand; but it is not necessarily something that will make a person feel the emotion if he doesn't already feel it—which is what is necessary if the work is to convey the esthetic concept.

So the artist has to be able to achieve esthetic distance, which we talked about several chapters ago. Somehow, he has to be able to develop a detached attitude about the work, so that he can find out what emotions it does in fact produce, and can then put them into the pattern he needs for the expression of the concept in question.

Horace advises the young poet, “Put your poem in a drawer for nine years,” and then look at it. The idea here is that if you go away from it for a while and forget about it, and then come and look at it, it will then affect you the way it would a dispassionate third party, and you will know whether it “works” or not.

That is the best advice. But as time goes on, the artist can, even while working on something, get that detached, judgmental view of what he is doing, so that he knows that something is “right” in an objective way.

One indication that something is not right: if you have to justify it to yourself, then your esthetic logic is telling you that something is wrong with it (or why would you feel the need to justify it?). You may have all kinds of reasons why the work has to be the way you did it; but these are reasons of perceptive, not esthetic, logic.

And that is the meaning of “trusting your instinct.” You can't always trust your instinct, because emotions can spill over; but if they tell you that there's something wrong, then they tend to be very trustworthy. Unfortunately, they don't usually tell you how to fix it.

8.1.2. The artist as judge

The genius has to trust his instinct in a different sense. His instinct—actually, his mind—tells him that what he is doing is right. But if he has hit on a radical new departure, no one else is going to know what he is saying; those who pay any attention to him will be confused, but most people won't become angry or irate (which is what he expects); they won't even bother to notice him.

He will be constantly plagued with the thought, “Who am I to say that I am right and Beethoven [Michelangelo, Dickens, Newton, Aristotle, supply one] is wrong?” The only rational answer is “nobody”; and the conclusion is that the genius is wrong. But since he can't believe the conclusion, he makes the opposite conclusion, “Then I must be greater than Beethoven,” which makes him insufferable.

What he has to realize is that there is no satisfactory answer to the question, “Who are you to say that...?” It is the wrong question. What is at issue is whether the discovery is true or not, not who made it. The genius is not necessarily “greater” than geniuses of the past; he is simply someone who has happened to be in a position to see something that people of the past (because of their thought-patterns) couldn't see.

So he has to trust his mind and go on and say what he knows needs to be said, hoping that someone some day will be able to understand it. Certainly, if he doesn't say it, no one will; and if it is true, it is worth saying. If it isn't true—well, then, no harm was done by his saying it and not having anyone listen to him.

8.2. The artist as teacher This difficulty the genius gets into is one of the reasons why artists like to think of themselves as “expressing” something rather than “communicating” it; because if you are communicating and the other person doesn't understand you, it sounds as if you have failed. But I think that any artist who

doesn't at least hope that he will be understood, and who is doing his work just "to express himself," is a madman, not an artist.

The artist is essentially a teacher, then: someone who is conveying to others a fact or body of facts that he knows and the others don't. And, like any teacher, the artist has to submit both to the facts and to his students.

8.2.1. "Prostitution of one's art" First of all, he must have respect for the facts he has understood; which means that he must subordinate his own personality, his desire for fame, and his greed to the attempt to say as clearly and concisely what he knows to be true.

The person who doesn't have this submission to the truth of what he is saying is the one that other artists say has "prostituted himself" as an artist; he is willing to say what he knows is not true, as long as it will make him famous, or wealthy, or whatever. Notice, however, that this prostitution is not the same as the non-creative artist I talked of in the last chapter. There, the artist doesn't say anything new; but he doesn't say anything false either.

Is there a difference? Yes, indeed. A person who writes television plays which convey the esthetic idea that, say, doctors are all really dedicated heroes or that soldiers really fight out of patriotism—or on the other hand, that doctors are really gasping clods and all soldiers are cowardly sadists—is telling esthetic lies. Some are that way, but there is another side to the story. Granted, a play is an abstraction—but it must not esthetically convey that the abstraction is all there is.

But consider M*A*S*H. After the pilot program, there wasn't really a new esthetic idea expressed; all the episodes were variations on the theme that war is hell, but people are involved in it willy-nilly, and they try to make the best of it. No great genius is needed to

8.2.1. "Prostitution of one's art"

work out episodes. But the program was basically true, week after week; and that is one of the reasons why it was so popular. It respected the “realities of the characters”—which essentially means (since the characters weren't real and were in fact abstractions), that it respected the facts about wartime hospitals.

Put it another way. A teacher who tells his students just what they want to hear, whether it is true or false, is no teacher. There is nothing wrong with producing something which is “as you like it,” as Shakespeare did; but it can't be “as you like it” at the expense of the truth, or you are no artist.

8.2.2. The artist's style Secondly, the artist has to have respect for his audience. Essentially, this means that he has to be aware of the limitations of the people he hopes to communicate with, and to try to keep the art from getting in the way of understanding what he wants them to know.

And what this means is that the artist shouldn't be worried about acquiring a “style.”

DEFINITION: *The style of an artist or of an age is the individual characteristics of that artist or age that show up in the work.*

Everyone wants to be known as an individual, and distinguished from everyone else; and this leads to the temptation to “acquire a style,” so that it is easy to identify who did the work.

8.2.2.1. “Mannered art” But the trouble with this is that it shows up in the work, and conveys the esthetic idea, “See what I can do!” as little children shout to Momma. The observer is trying to learn something from your art, and is not really interested in grovelling before you; and if he gets the impression that you

8.2.2.1. “Mannered art”

would rather have him grovel than learn, you won't teach him anything, however true may be what you are saying. "What you are speaks so loud, I can't hear what you say," as the church member said to the hypocritical preacher.

This sort of thing is what they call "mannered." It is the conscious attempt at being "different," when the difference is not called for by the nature of the concept to be expressed, or the audience to express it to. It is distracting at best, and annoying at every other level.

But then how did poets like Gerard Manley Hopkins get away with lines like, "I caught this morning morning's minion, king-/dom of the daylight's dauphin..." Hopkins got away with it because he gives the impression that he thought this was the "natural" and "right" way to say what he wanted to say; and the reader sees that the idea is complex enough to support the weird language; it fits.

Unfortunately, though Hopkins thought that he had discovered the natural way to write poetry in English, no one else can write like that without writing mannered poetry which is obviously an imitation of Hopkins. That is, because the way of writing he discovered was his own unique style of expression. There is the difference between style and mannerism.

But then how do you acquire a style? By not trying to. By trying to respect as much as you can the concept and the people you are talking to: by trying as hard as you can to make yourself clearly understood. As you try, your own personality and biases, as well as the biases of the time in which you live, will show up. You will find tricks of expression that get across what you want to say, and connect the parts as you want to connect them. And when all is said and done, your audience will be able to identify your style—even though you might not be.

8.2.2.1. "Mannered art"

8.2.2.2. The artist's audience But who is the audience you are producing your art for? Sometimes the answer is clear. For the performing artist, it is the particular audience he confronts on this occasion. He learns from listening to them what they are responding to, and he adjusts his performance—always keeping respect for the text as his facts—so that they can understand better.

Occasionally, the artist who paints a picture or writes a book will have a specific audience: the one who commissioned it, or some group who will read or see it. Here again, it is his duty to make allowances for the particular characteristics of the ones he is primarily serving—so that, for instance, if he is writing for a group of feminists, he will watch his use of pronouns (whether he agrees that the generic “he” is “sexist” or not), because he doesn't want the negative emotions that he knows will be produced to get in the way of what he is saying.

But by and large, the artist is working for “the human race”; and what this means is that he hopes to be understood by any human being who takes the trouble to give his attention to him.

There are two things to note here. First of all, this means that the emotional reactions the artist tries to produce will be those of the “ordinary person.” That is, he will have to tune himself to the third level of objectivity I spoke of when discussing the esthetic experience, and eliminate from his work emotional reactions that are meaningful to him based on the peculiarities of his own nature. So, if he happens to be a construction worker, he might have tender feelings to the bulldozer he is driving. But if he hopes to be a poet, he can't expect others to feel this way when he mentions a bulldozer. “Little baby dozer, did you get fed today?” is just plain silly to the ordinary person.

8.2.2.2.1. Why art is universal This, not incidentally, is why the art of all cultures speaks to us. If the artist has succeeded in ridding himself of his own emotional peculiarities, then racial and cultural differences don't really matter; emotions are genetically built in, and don't really differ in any significant way by race, and certainly not very much by reason of historical or geographic setting. There are some differences, but not enough to make understanding impossible, or even, really, very difficult.

Read history to find out how different we are; read art to find out how much we are the same.

8.2.2.2.2. Audience sophistication The second remark about the artist's audience is that he has a right to expect a certain sophistication, education, and attention from his readers or viewers. Art is not for "the ordinary man" in the sense of just anybody, any more than a scientist has to confine his writings to what can be understood by any fifth-grader.

Art is not bad if it is difficult to understand, any more than Einstein's theory of general relativity is bad because it is difficult. Art is difficult if the concept it tries to express is complex and unusual; but if it is true, then it is worth the effort to understand it. And, like Einstein's theory, sometimes the idea can only be understood by those who have given some time to training in the area, however brilliant they might be. Non-physicists don't expect to understand anything but popularizations of relativity theory; but people seem to think that they ought to be able to understand any work of art without any education in the art form. They are wrong. Some esthetic concepts are simply closed to those who have not devoted years to the subject.

But then doesn't that make some art not universal? Not at all. The art still speaks to the common humanity we have; but it says

8.2.2.2.2. Audience sophistication

something so complex that we need to develop ourselves to be able to hear it. Einstein was writing for the whole human race, in the sense that what he wrote is humanly intelligible, and doesn't depend on your having a white skin or being a woman or something; but he was only speaking to a few, because few have developed their humanity to the point where they could listen.

8.3. Good and bad art So it does seem that there can be such a thing as “elitist” art, which only those who have devoted their lives to the subject can appreciate. Some modern music seems to be this way; it can only be followed, apparently, by those who have tuned their ears to blocks of tone color and sensitized themselves to that sort of emotional effect. For others, it is simply boring, because they can't pick out the proper nuances to notice.

But that doesn't make it bad art. True, the art won't be beautiful for the non-initiated, because they can't find the esthetic property that is there; and so are apt to think that there isn't one to be found. This would imply, however, that the elite are either lying, or there is an esthetic property which is hidden to those who don't give their time to discovering it.

But doesn't that mean that we can't really judge, because how do we know that we just aren't one of the elite? So there really isn't any objective meaning to “good and bad art”; there's just whether you find it beautiful or not.

No, it's not so simple as that. Just because you can't understand relativity theory, you don't assume that the physicists are trying to bamboozle you when they say that space-time is really curved; you assume that, since they've studied, they know what they're talking about and you don't.

So when the ordinary person can't see what is in a painting or a piece of music and the painters and musicians think it's great, the

presumption is in favor of the painters and musicians.

Conversely, when an ordinary person likes some work of art that is generally panned by those who are supposed to know, the presumption is in favor of the fact that it is bad, but it just happens to speak to the ordinary person because he's too ignorant to see the basic falseness. This happens in the perceptive realm too; all the "evidence" that is presented that seems to show that a fetus is not human is plausible garbage; but you have to be fairly sophisticated not to be taken in by it; even those who propose such arguments are often sincerely in error.

8.3.1. Sentimental art Then how can art be bad? In several ways. First, if it produces simply an emotional experience, and not an experience of interrelatedness through the emotions. That is, if there isn't really anything to understand, and all that happens is an emotional bath.

DEFINITION: *Art is sentimental either when it simply produces an emotional (but meaningless) experience, or when the emotional experience is unrelated to the concept expressed.*

That is, the emotions might be there, and there might be a concept there (even an esthetic one); but it doesn't come through the emotions. For instance, Joyce Kilmer's *Trees* says, "Poems are made by fools like me/But only God can make a tree."

Sorry, folks, but this is bad. Kilmer has spent several stanzas working you into having tender feelings about trees with mouths pressed to earth's breast and hair ornaments of nests of robins and so on; and then he drags God into it. But what does it mean? That trees are much more beautiful than poems; and so only God can make them? If so, that's nonsense. What he really wants to say at this point

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is that trees are really really lovely, ladies and gentlemen; but he does it by making you listen to a “humble” statement about himself and then thinking of God. And the singsong way it's written fights against it; it makes you suspect that he doesn't really believe it himself.

Now lots of people think that the poem is “just marvellous,” because it makes them feel really good. And they say, “How true! How very true! God is the only one who can make a tree.” Well of course; but that's a perceptive statement, not an esthetic one; the emotions are irrelevant to its meaning.

Notice that art doesn't have to be pretty to be sentimental. Tragedies in which the sorrow and so on just happen, or where the play or movie has a “moral” are sentimental; where the bad guy “gets his.” The reason for that is that the moral is a perceptive statement which doesn't come through the emotional involvement with the lives, but is just tacked on to satisfy the Moral Majority's craving to see that things do work out to a just conclusion. There is nothing wrong with showing how evil gets punished; but it has to be shown through the emotions themselves, and not simply said.

8.3.2. False art Art can also be bad if what it says esthetically is false. Aristotle says that a play must be “believable”; and what he means by this, I think, is that the statement made must not contradict what we know esthetically that the facts are. Sometimes bad art is made out of what actually happens (out of sudden conversions, for instance); but they aren't believable (unless we know that they actually happened) because we know that characters in fiction can be made to do whatever you want; and so they had better do what people do because of their common humanity, rather than something widely at variance with it. Fiction, for all its individual characters, makes a general statement; and that general statement

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had better be true.

Of course, it isn't just fiction that can be false. Those statues of saints that you see in churches say, "This is what it is to be a saint," as they *simper* heavenward. Small wonder that so many people will have none of sanctity, if that's what it is. And of course, it isn't. Let us be charitable and say that the sculptors of those things are fools and not liars.

8.3.3. Contradictory art Art can also be bad if it contradicts itself esthetically. However consistent it might be perceptively, if one part of it produces an emotional effect that says the opposite of what the rest of it says, it is an esthetic contradiction. Some of the early rock 'n roll songs were this way; they purported to be about social justice, but the music was a celebration of the emotions connected with sex. Some of the "Holy Holy Holy" songs that are now sung at Catholic Masses are this kind of a contradiction. The words deal with awe confronting not only the Almighty, but the mystical being present at and sharing in the crucifixion of Jesus; and the music says, "Bring out the tambourines and wine, boys, and let's have fun!"

8.3.4. Illogical art Finally, art that mistakes perceptive logic for esthetic logic is bad. This is the kind of art that "makes sense" to the person who knows nothing about art; but for one who knows, it is a mishmash. I need not say anything special here, because I already spoke of it when discussing esthetic logic.

These are the various ways in which works of art can be bad. But how do you actually know whether any of them have taken place, or whether you have simply missed the point that is being made?

Study. Take the "knowledgeable world's" word for what is really

8.3.4. Illogical art

good and study it until you see what the artist is saying; and then study it some more. After you can see what is great about what everyone admits is great, you will be in a reasonable position to say that bad works are in fact bad.

You will make some mistakes, of course. But this isn't just true in the esthetic order; they say that Einstein used to get tomatoes thrown at him. Critics can be wrong when confronted with revolutionary new ideas; but they are less likely to be wrong than people who haven't studied.

Is it worth it? Well, if this book is true, there is a whole body of facts just waiting to be learned about the world; and those facts can't be learned except by the appreciation of art and the beautiful in general. Science will never get you to these truths; the only way you can get there is by studying art.

Of course, there's no law that says that you have to learn esthetic facts, any more than that you have to learn physics or biology or philosophy. It's just that if you don't, you're that much more ignorant.

It's worth it.