

THE ETHICAL LOGISTIC APPLIED TO AESTHETIC EXPRESSION AND CRITICISM

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IT is the common attitude of philosophers of art to say that it has no intrinsic ethical obligation at the moment of conception; that it is the expression simply of a certain idea, recollection, reverie, dream or inspiration; that the ethical consideration only enters the situation *after* the work has been completed and the public begins to discuss its merits or otherwise take an active interest in its meaning, symbolism, usefulness or artistic significance. This, I believe, is the usual error of a false psychologism, to overlook the fact that *any* artistic idea or inspired conception, when it is genuine and not a mere caricature, has a moral origin, and in that measure at least is the beginning of a spiritual creative process which is ethical and conscientious to the last stroke of the brush, chisel, graver or pen. Of course we know that the long-haired cubists and futurists are usually quite unmindful of the moral or ethical bearing of their work, but how many of them enjoy such tokens of love and immortality as we give to those scrupulous geniuses who have given us the classical traditions, the Renaissance style, or the valid modern syncretisms? These artists are immortal because they *were* conscientious and exercised a scrupulous sense of ethical values throughout the course of their work; they did not try to wheedle fame and fortune out of any sham romanticism, ugly art, or symbolized profanity. No moral-minded artist ever feels that he is inspired at all if he has no more than these to give his genius creative power.

The eristic, however, is proverbially adamant. He will argue that the logical end of any certain psychic activity (which includes art creation) need not necessarily be a worthy end in the ethical sense, nor even an end of *any* positive melioristic value. He might as well go on and say that an artist's work need not necessarily be artistic, nor have any other purpose than to gratify the artist's desire

to give his idea external representation regardless of whether it is vulgar and ugly or beautiful and exemplary. Such a notion is as irrational and imbecile as it is antisocial and rhyomistic: we are too lenient if we only say it is ridiculous and unconscionable. If the said psychic activity started out with some malicious aim and selfish assumption of rights or relative deserts, and was pursued only in view and counsel of these until it did at last realize its forward purpose, its end (being concerned in nothing beyond the bare consummation of this purpose) could be considered logical enough in itself and by itself, but would by no manner, means or subterfuge of sophist apology be truly justified or proven morally and socially defensible. Readily enough could it be logically whole and valid to *that* extent, but that should not satisfy a true philosophy of the action because, on further examination, we would find that its pursuit was quite unethical, morally monstrous and socially criminal. And I believe that such latter findings would soon serve to show us whether the activity was even worthy and permissible, much less artistically creative or melioristic.

Artists are still human beings, even though lost in reverie or dreamy inspiration, and it is human to have some sense of responsibility about whatever we think or plan to do. Even the criminal takes care that no one has opportunity to prove his responsibility for the crime: he himself feels that he is responsible but he does not want anyone else to feel that way, for his days are numbered as soon as they do. Whether artist, laborer, saint or sage, the conscientious individual has ever before him the problem of how to hold himself duty-bound and responsible: ever conscious of and contributory to that regulative social demand that whatever he thinks or does shall be good, constructive and useful instead of malicious, destructive or harmful to society. This is his sense of ethical responsibility, and if he has it to start with it will always be a factor in his every thought or inspiration and will not cease to operate just because he happens to be an artist or aims to preserve the logical end of his activities. He knows that the empirical adequacy of his ideals and aims must be conjoined with a higher moral and social adequacy so that the development of his mental powers and the synthesizing of his aesthetic conations will be validated in view of ethical standards and sublimated in view of a richer nobler spirituelle. If he does this often enough it will soon become his habitual metier and there will be no actual antinomy between his purpose and his conscience, between his performance and his ordinary respect for others. And if

he is normally intelligent, even though not intelligent and erudite on the philosophical scale, he will be able to see that if all his neighbors and fellow men in the world shared the same progressive rectitude of aim and solicitude of conscience there would soon be little moral failure left to differentiate our human destiny from that grander cosmic teleology which is the meliorism of the world.

Autotelic art guarantees from the start that there shall be no compromise or spoliation; but not the autotelic artist or patron of art, for with them the whole apocalypse and genesis of aesthetic beauty are taken as existing only for their personal ends or pleasure. Bentham must have really been reading Nature through a reflector instead of a refractor when he made excuses for hedonism as against ascetic virtue and gave other questionable sanctions to this caricature of human spiritual power. He should have remembered that famous Pythagorean maxim: "Look not in a mirror by a torch." His work in jurisprudence (public ethics) and morality (private ethics) could have proven the summum bonum to consist in the highest welfare and happiness of the greatest number, without so heavily cartooning human nature with algedonic deformities. If the true nature and end of art is autotelic, then the artist who aims to be worthy of his genius, as well as the patron who anxiously preserves his intelligence and aesthetic sympathies, should be willing to consecrate their spirits to art for its own sake and not their own. As soon as they turn back and begin to *use* art to gratify their own desire or pleasure, I feel sorry for the future of that particular age of art.

A philosophical logistic of morality and art may be pursued in two general directions: the analytical-reductive and the synthetic-constructive; and each of these in turn may be pursued under the heads of pre-logical analysis and post-logical synthesis. Thus their common functions in the cultural series can be intelligently appreciated and shown to be both complementary in aim and supplementary in practical sanction and support. In the simple apodictic function of the first reductive pursuit we have paradigmatic analyses by example and associative allegory grounded in empirical symbolism, while in the complex function of the constructive pursuit we have analogical syntheses by means of convergent unity, homogeneous experience, equality of ratios, inductive cognates and proportional syllogisms. And subdividing these functions into their anterior and posterior logical phases, we have for the first a reductive paralogical analysis into divergent plurality, heterogeneous experience, dispar-

ity of perceptive or associative ratios, and various singular problematic thrills; while for the second synthetic construction we have factitious anagoge, hermeneutic interpretation, Cabalism, theopathic experience and mystic sublimation, the complex functions of which may arise from both fair and unfair assumptions, being partly valid and partly invalid in their deductive cognates, and turning on both anagogic and apogogic (or dyslogistic) proportions. But all the while we are pursuing this technical explication we should not lose sight of those simpler relations which the actual practice of morality and pursuit of art are bound to force upon our process of assumption and debate. It is these less noticeable relations, I believe, which are really essential features, perhaps also vital factors even, in whatever philosophical procedure we may devise, for we will continue having those very positive public entities called morality and art regardless of how analyze or interpret them.

In the drawing of any such parallel between morality and art it is indicated that though both aspire to the same ideal of cultural meliorism, yet in the pursuit of this ideal aspiration one seeks after the external, and the other after the internal economy and effect of such pursuit. On the individualist scale this is to say that there is an objective and a subjective pursuit of the cultural affections which pass under the general terms ethic and aesthetic, and that each of these has a public and a private phase of pursuit. On the more social, cosmopolitan scale it means that the subjective affections and delights are given inferior importance relative to those items of otherness-than-ourselves which signify the public welfare and through this the enlightenment and ennoblement of all humanity. The position I wish to stress is that both manners of approach and procedure are melioristic through progressive culture, and do not rest content with a mere self-satisfaction or superficial hedonism. The latter do not even represent an intelligent individualism, so how could the same tactics pass on to represent an enlightened moralism in cosmopolitan culture? The latter is the field of real ethics, while the former is the field of pseudo-ethics as Aristotle demonstrated long ago.

The realism of morality and art is what permits them to be described and translated in normative as well as formative terms. If Spencer had been a realist he would not have seen any occasion for saying they were subjects for descriptive but not normative science to interpret. It is under aspect of this very realism that man's sense of duty joins forces with his consciousness of beauty in the

external world (normal and formal justice, or subjective and objective symmetry) and strive together against his less noble disposition in favor of self-pampering desires and satisfactorist sanctions. Thus the science of reality is both normative and descriptive because it examines and seeks to understand both the internal and external aspects of spiritual activity which result in morality and art. These two phases of scientific application we call ethics and aesthetics, and ever since Plato adumbrated their relations and common goal as the beautiful and good (*kalokagathia*) we have felt sure that the same essential encratic scruples applied to all genuine love of beauty and virtue whether they marked man's action or man's creative expression. Hence there is a taxis or symmetry between these two provinces of the human spirituelle, as when they overlap in a moral aesthetic of *good art* or in the aesthetic morality of "beautiful and heroic deeds of valor"; and when we try to hold them apart as being distinct and disjunctive activities, neither one can be seen as fair and good to man's genuine cultural advantage.

While Aristotle's empiricism regarding kalology or theory of beauty (as in his *poetics*) did not permit him to recognize a pure aesthetic or philosophy of the beautiful, sublime, unique or picturesque, because these were aesthetic emotions rather than separate entities, yet he did allow that poetry, which is perhaps the first of man's active aesthetic predilections, is for his intellect the straightest road to pure thought, and took the Pythagorean value of music, which is the first of man's passive aesthetic predilections, as being for his soul the magic realm wherein are found both the profound and the sublime in ideal harmonies. Meanwhile he claimed that the plastic arts (sculpture, painting and architecture) are still bedraggled in materialism, still limited to the pseudo-art of an anthropomorphic symbology, and under threat of gradual suffocation are breathing heavily under the yoke of a finite aspiration. Fortunately they have survived thus far and have even progressed in some few instances regardless of the finitude of their symbolism and aspiration, for the slightest aspiration, even when finite or automorphic of its author, is yet an eventual item in the full program of aesthetic interpretation. Nothing that is in the least aspirant toward better things can justly be left out of the chronicle of man's cultural meliorism because, as Hegel said, out of a transcendental aesthetic pure reason brings only an eternal aspiration, and in the infinite variety of such eternal functioning we should expect no stoppage, no surcease of progressive effort or ambition. The *kanon* of Polyclitus, Ros-

setti's *shell* or Hogarth's *line of beauty* were only meant to inspire our own creative power to carry on the torch, not rest our lazy arms upon the palette and smear the colors where they don't belong.

This is intended to show us how a free and various prologue to an actual aesthetic morality introduces us to the ethical argument of social responsibility and personal scruples of conscience as being prime necessities to the genuine pursuit of either morality or art. We are lead in fact to consider these ethical values under two of their most prominent aesthetic aspects, viz: first, the utilitarian, that is, how well adapted to man's use, instruction, delight or legislation, showing that mere pleasure-seeking and satisfaction make up one only of the lesser aims in morality and art; second, the teleological, that is, how *highly* appreciative of the purpose of life, man's destiny in the cosmic order, man's contribution to the melioristic conjunction of body and soul as a *better* form of existence than bare insentient materialism. Under either aspect it will be readily seen that an honest and constructive eschatology is the best field from which to derive criteria for judging what are fair and unfair, valid and invalid, durable and ephemeral values in either morality or art; we cannot even get at the true utilitarian valivism without carrying our inquiry to the point where *ends* decide the adequacy of *means*. At this point there is no real distinction between what is individual or particular and what is social or cosmic because the same theory of ends will cover both fields of value; the same aspiration and sense of responsibility will control both spheres of interest and activity, whether the dominant function is ethical or artistic. And after a few years' discipline it will not be difficult to see that the felicity-interpretation is inadequate to cover both ends and means when we consider man's cultural function in its dual role of ethic and aesthetic, but that the melioristic code has sufficient scope to include both teleology and utility in its theory of human culture and spiritual refinement.

But an inquiry of this dimension proceeds on the ground that the discretion which sees the common cultural function of morality and art is itself a unit in the constituency of human nature and the melioristic purpose of life; it is the ground in philosophy which says that the universe is homogeneous in its function and its ends, no matter how multifarious its forms nor how heterogeneous its structure, because first causes are rational and persistent while the so-called final causes are only empirically dative and hence ephemeral. Thus we say that a man is an artist or a moral agent when

he meets this homogeneous requirement that both the function and the end of his activity shall bear values of meliorism, constructiveness, idealism and sincerity of spiritual affection rather than those of pejorism, destructiveness, spoliation or vulgar commercial applications. His proper *end* in pursuit of the moral aesthetic is neither utilitarian self-interest nor romantic sentimentalism, but a clear discretion and courageous will to be reasonable and make all his works and deeds symmetrical with all else that is orderly and good, beautiful and exemplary in the world. By so conducting himself he will get back to the fountain head of true spiritual life and show that Locke's objections to the "innate practical principles" were directed only against those which bore an empirical stamp and did not dispute those lofty ideas which are the bulwark of our culture and our spiritual progress in the world.

From all this it seems that the proposition that the foundation of a philosophical ethic should be one which underlies both the empirical and romantic (utilitarian and hedonistic) is not wholly indefensible nor wanting in credentials at the bar of common spiritual law. The rules of three and pageantry that have attended the historical course of morality and art prove how readily they may be based upon either ascetic or romantic motives, but the end to which this various motivation led proves which sort of procedure guaranteed the richest result, the noblest and most durable achievement. The romantic procedure truly enough produced the most pleasant and delightful results, but they were far more shallow and ephemeral than those of the ascetic and rigoristic persuasion because they failed to come by the actual knowledge of disinterested morality and art by *living* them day after day as did the ascetic, monk or hermit. In this there was a deeper spiritual communion and refinement than was ever reached by the hedonist's sensory empiricism and false felicity. Hence, with the truer aesthetic basis of a philosophical ethic squared to the ground of spiritual facts and cultural acts, we are in better position to concern ourselves with the determination of those less-utilitarian but more-teleological and melioristic values which are essential to such qualifications as merit, generosity, beauty, justice, simplicity, honor, inspiration, private counsel or social advantage. The proposition is that we begin to see that the will-to-betterment which these values signify comes of a purer spiritual stock than do the merely animaloid pursuits of pleasure, utility or satisfaction; it is verily the *soul* of morality and art, for without it they soon lapse back into mere selfishness and hedonism.

There is, however, a second consideration of the points of jointure and disjunction between ethics and aesthetics which may as above intimated start from what we discern and relish as moral conduct and beautiful things. Taking moral conduct to be beautiful human activity, it permits of various pursuits equally in rectitude regarding their intimacy with conscientious duty; that is, for instance, that though the various races and nations have different moral codes, yet their intimacy with or duty toward such standards as they have is what concerns the rectitude of those pursuits even as they vary one from the other. This rectitude in each particular case may be determined from how it co-ordinates in effecting an efficient preservation of the social organism in its striving toward betterment and a realizing of its determining power amidst the ethical and artistic pluralism. On a scientific basis the co-ordination of the world's various moral criteria with the equally various codes of art appreciation (a necessity left undetermined by both Bentham and Pater's hedonism, and not sufficiently sublimated in Mill's utility-valuing) must involve a constant and homogeneous adjustment of each particular standard, so as to maintain what Professor Green used to call "the will to know what is true, to make what is beautiful, to endure pain and fear, and to resist the allurements of pleasure, all in the interest of some progressive and melioristic form of human society."

Thus may we see wherefrom a conception of what is beautiful in morality and what is moral in beauty can be derived, not by any specious abolition of the superficial distinction supposed to exist between the moral and the aesthetic activity, but by mutual translation, that form of cultural identity wherein each is interpreted in terms of the other. Some of these common terms being sense of duty, responsibility, innocence, beauty, generosity, justice, nobility, sanity, serenity and sympathetic feeling; and the honest activity in line with their pattern will produce no ugly art nor selfish individualism because they are positive terms in a progressive melioristic series and counsel no false ideal nor orectic urgency. And again, it was not a valid distinction which Kant made between what is benevolently imperative and what is privately urgent, because we can see that it is not a contradiction for us to regard ourselves as in duty bound to promote the welfare or cultural improvement of others in order that our own lives may be more peaceful and secure. Public and private morality have the same, not different, rules and regulations which guarantee safety and social order; as Kant him-

self later said, "the ends of any subject which is an end in himself ought as far as possible to be my ends also, if the conception of him as an end in himself is to have its full effect with me." Hence, in either an approbative ethic or a moral aesthetic we do well to concern ourselves in knowing wherein another requires our aid or inspiration, and to discern the direction in which an helpful service will be the most effective and conducive to carry on the vital evolutionary process of humanity in general.

Elihu Root has recently said that "the things one has an opportunity to *do* are substance, while the things one tries to *get* are shadows"; whence under the proposition of an equable benevolence there is a poise or judicial balance of motive that puts it before us under an aesthetic aspect and rules that so far as morality and art are concerned man's pronominal goods shall have subjective and objective but no possessive case. If there is any empirical point around which ethics and aesthetics may revolve in a mutually braced and cross-referenced union, it must surely be this of moral beauty or the rationally balanced ethical motive which eventuates in generous doing or creating, never in selfish getting and owning. It may at least be viewed as a permissible philosophical union for the purpose of showing how these two fields of cultural activity may be made to co-ordinate in furthering man's spiritual evolution, encouraging his shy fidelity and inspiring his as-yet-too-worldly aspiration to make vital transcription of the eternal verities. It might show also the necessity for some sort of valid conception of the laws of beauty and duty as criteria for art appreciation as well as for ethical approbation, for it is for the most part the same sort of conduct which makes men *good* artists and *useful* citizens, only their talents are differently applied. At least the proof of such validity would come out in the results of a thorough aesthetic education where the genius and taste for beauty, as well as the ability and conscientious will-to-justice, would create just those works or achievements which are the crowning glory of human artifice and virtue.

An intuitive ethic, in holding that the human conscience is able to assign immediate moral values to any presented action, may very well be accused of presupposing that such presented action *has* a moral value which it may recognize. But this manner of attack is itself unjust, in that it itself presupposes a "right and wrong" dilemma in the presupposition which it seeks to attack, and therein requires, even for itself, the defense of an intuitive ethic. Now if there *really* are any immediate a priori judgments which we re-

tain, while forgetting the logical processes which led to them, they are not *actually* a posteriori (though they may very well be so, theoretically) because their recollection in time of need is not the result of an experienceable logical process, but rather may be and often is quite as immediate and non-empirically reasoned as is any other intuition a priori. And with such an intuition *not* of an absolutist, undevelopable nature, its derivation should not be the ground of our intolerance toward its influence on either ethical, aesthetic or even epistemological conceptions. Hence, whatever in an ethical connection approximates to an excellency of deportment in any human activity, is in that degree aesthetic in the sense of being noble, generous, unworldly, benevolent and beautiful, and is therefore subject to the same inquisitive analysis and critical appreciation which we apply in the methodical interpretation of the sublime, the good, and magnanimous, the beautiful, and all else whereof we seek a knowledge and a cherishing.

The aesthetical teaching of Plotinus was that the beauty we see in the external world results from the infusion into and superiority of spirit over matter, while in ourselves the sense of beauty comes of the mastering of soul over physical desires; and that either situation is knowable to us because such spiritual prerogatives demonstrate the operation of reason in nature. The ecstasy we experience upon examining an object results from our confidence and appreciation that it has an inherent beauty, that it is beautiful in itself regardless of any ideas we may have as to its use, fate, pedigree or progeny. Schelling and Tieck, Schopenhauer and Carlyle, those sweet and sour romanticists respectively, revived this phase of Neoplatonism when they practically agreed, though in positive and in negative terms respectively, that art has primary need of moral nobility if it is to be real and durable art. In Tieck's opinion, "it is a noble aim to produce a work of art that transcends the utilities of life, a work of beauty which shines forth with its own splendor and complete in itself. The instinct to produce such a work more directly points to a higher world than any other instinct of our nature." And Schopenhauer agreed with him in even stronger, though negative terms, saying: "A work of genius is not a thing of utility. To be useless is its very patent of nobility. It exists for itself alone."

Under the ensign of morality and art every phase of our cultural enterprise should take care to be honest, legal and devout: for without these credentials on our voyage we will have miserably failed in the venture of life even though we bring back both Holy Grail and

Golden Fleece. It is not enough either to work out technical and logically perfect schematisms of what a moral aesthetic ought to be if during the procedure we neglected the actual practice of our own aesthetic morality. We must bring both intellectual discernment and emotional sobriety, both moral discrimination and spiritual aspiration, to the scene of our work else whatever we think or do, plan or create, will be in some way angular and hysterical, ugly and repulsive. Of course, both positive and negative aspects of the adjectival predication would be read in everything substantial we tried to do, but whenever we limited our creative function to realizing those works and achievements only which were just and *good*, melioristically useful and inspiring, we would begin to take part in the grand spectacle of Progress, that eternal procession whose main event (for us) is the cultural redemption and spiritual transfiguration of man.