

Arts and Aesthetics

Human knowledge includes four different viewpoints on art:

1– Purely scientific viewpoint: Direct contact of the senses with realities. At times, physical devices may also assist our senses in contacting the facts around us. Science uses the senses and the necessary equipment to discover laws.

2– Theoretical viewpoint: In any branch of science, there are some unsolved, unproven issues called theoretical problems. For example, one of the theoretical issues of physics is whether electrons are waves or matter. We do not exactly know which one they are, so such problems cannot be considered as purely scientific.

3– Philosophical viewpoint can be categorized into three types:

a) general information of the primary results and products of science;

b) issues pertaining to the origin of the universe, not observable reality;

c) issues related to values, including the “Do’s and Don’ts” of moral ethics.

4– The religious viewpoint consists of recognizing and accepting realities and acting in accordance with them – provided that, of course, such a recognition and acceptance be man’s duty, and guide him toward the aim of his life. The religious viewpoint enables goal-seeking man to associate the scientific, theoretical and philosophical viewpoints with each other, and find them non-contradicting.

Four Various Viewpoints on Art

Art, another component of human life, can also be viewed from the four angles mentioned above:

1– The purely scientific point of view considers the observable outcomes of art and their content.

2– The theoretical viewpoint studies the role of the artist’s personal senses in his work compared to the role of reality.

3- The philosophical point of view takes the fundamental aspects of art into consideration.

4- The religious viewpoint consists of the knowledge of art and making use of it in order to achieve the evolutionary ends of life.

The Philosophical Viewpoint on Art

Here, we will only focus on discussing philosophical views on the arts. There are several points to keep in mind about philosophical analyses of art:

1- Most people and even many artists, consider the work of art as a device to merely impress people and satisfy them aesthetically. Many people only expect a work of art to stir a few waves inside them. However, the revolution inside the audience or spectators of works of art should be the start of an evolutionary metamorphosis in their character. The true artist does not tend to fascinate people, or stir up their feelings.

2- By means of the work of art, the artist makes contact with other human beings' souls, for a work of art can only have value to people; no animal is capable of enjoying or using it correctly. Hence, we may conclude that a work of art should be advantageous to both the artist's and the people's souls.

If an artist considers his/her work of art effective in the development or degradation of other human beings, he/she will use all of his/her mental and spiritual talents in order to create a work of art that can help mankind flourish and develop.

Although an artist uses abstraction and imagination on observable facts and mental concepts to create a work of art, many artists unfortunately only pay attention to the work of art itself, and ignore the modification, adjustment and activation of their own mental and psychological powers and potentials which should be the factor creating the work of art. If man's innate talents are discovered and devised properly, his feelings are purified and his works of art will be much more valuable. When an artist moves on the path toward perfection, his potentials are properly activated, his emotions elevated, and the work of art he creates will definitely help the progress and perfection of mankind, not just excite them momentarily.

3- Art for art's sake or art for man's sake? There are two different viewpoints on an artist's relationship with people.

a) Some believe that art is virtually desirable, for art conveys the genius of the artist, and no law or criterion should confine it. Limiting art will inhibit the artist's genius, for it is not his concern what effect his work will have on others. The artist's creativity should not be influenced for the sake of others. These people believe that "being interesting" is more important than the truth. It is sufficient that a work of art is appealing; whether it harms or helps others is of no importance. It should only entertain.

b) Some others believe that art, like other mental products of man, is for the society to use, so harmful works of art should not be displayed in public. This theory claims that art belongs to the society, not to art or the artist himself.

Art should belong to man – “human art for humans”, or “art for man in an intelligible life.” Thus, whether the society accepts the work of art or not is not enough. A work of art accepted in one society may be rejected by another; the proper criterion is man's development and perfection.

If an artist is not internally purified, his work of art may be not only of no use to man, but even harmful. Every artist creates his works of art by means of his own mental perceptions and internal tendencies. If Thomas Hobbes, for instance, were asked to produce a work of art about man, his pessimistic point of view would definitely dominate the result.

This is due to man's ultra-artistic value and the significance of the human soul.

Although some poems by poets such as Abul-Ala Moayyeri, some quadrants pertaining to Khayyam, and some of Sadeq Hedayat's writings are literarily quite interesting, the more interesting thing is the human souls which, having read such works, fall into deep anxiety, and end up in nihilism. On the other hand, Jalal-addin Muhammad Molawi (Rumi) poetry has saved thousands from nihilism toward God. Thus, unless minds are not purified and refined by correct education and training, “art for the sake of art,” although opening the way for activating genius, is absolutely unacceptable, for it may activate the genius of some illogical minds.

We must mention intelligible life here, for art should serve man in an intelligible life, not merely serve man. Otherwise, anyone, especially politicians, would begin to interpret humanity with his own mental perceptions. This is where all the various points of view and interpretations arise.

Human art for humans means not censoring art, but supporting man's intelligible life. Studying works of art should not be limited to form and appearance; content is also highly significant. Of course, in truly original art, “appearance, form, content, appeal and reality” make a single unit. A work of art that looks beautiful but is corrupt content-wise is not acceptable.

For example, if a filmmaker makes a movie defying man's freedom and free will, and skillfully proves that internal freedom does not exist, and that the only existent authority is that of law and power, will that make an acceptable work of art? Art in the West nowadays only serves to provide people's lives with variety and amusement, not to contribute to any development or to guide them toward an intelligible life. Do worthless works of art that show sex guide man toward perfection – or doom?

Pursuant Art, Pioneer Art

Like other phenomena related to man, art can be categorized into two kinds: pursuant and pioneer. Pursuant art depends upon the desires and tendencies of the society, and thus so does the artist. Some

characteristics of pursuant art are:

1– Since a pursuant artist depends on the people, he uses the people's desires and likes as the criterion for his work.

2– In pursuant art, the artist does not care what is proper or what should be. He merely selects what people like. Such art fades away quickly, and has no historical value.

3– Since pursuant art has nothing to do with the great goals of life, it cannot bring about true unity among people.

4– A pursuant artist cannot convey any great themes or elevated thoughts, for all he does is follow what the people want.

On the contrary, pioneer art does not obey the people's demands. Although a pioneer artist does not isolate himself from his people and surroundings, he does refine the current realities to extract the real truth and align them with intelligible life. He makes use of “what there is” to the benefit of “what there should be.”

In this kind of art, the artist purifies people's illusions and speculations. The pioneer artist tries to guide the people toward an intelligible life by means of his works of art. In pioneer art, the artist – who wants art for the sake of man in an intelligible life – begins with showing the universe like a small, objective, meaningful work of art which is beautiful and motivates others toward evolutionary development.

Modernism in Art

The human soul has a tendency toward modernism, which is itself valuable, for it arises from the desire for serious mental and psychological freedom for man in his four relationships (with God, himself, the universe and other human beings). If freedom in these four relationships reaches the level of development and prosperity, man's soul will achieve delight in his intelligible life. Although one should not be bound to the past, ignoring original realities for modernism is not acceptable, either.

Why does the human soul have a tendency for new, modern things?

- a) Removing boredom and monotony from his life,
- b) Possibly – or definitely – achieving newer, enjoyable facts that provide man with joy and liveliness,
- c) Modernism can expand man's self throughout the universe,
- d) Man feels that by means of modernism, he can free himself from imitating others' thoughts and knowledge.

True, original modernism in art is the one that can free man's spirit and soul to make contact with God, the universe and other human beings, and achieve spiritual joy.

Artists

Let us categorize artists into three groups:

1– Those greatly interested in the arts, who can fairly understand a work of art. Although they can't make forensic, accurate analyses of a work of art, their good taste for art helps them make sound judgments.

2– Professional artists who possess enough skill, talent and intelligence to create works of art. Some professional artists merely make works of art with limited creativity; others, however, also have a sort of artistic manner and finesse. Those are the ones talented enough to create real innovations.

3– Constructive, pioneer artists, who are capable of very strong mental and psychological artistic activities. Some of their characteristics include:

- Ingenuity and creativity,
- good choice-making,
- sufficient knowledge,
- accuracy and finesse in making a relationship with their work,
- the power to free themselves from rules that limit innovation, and
- the freedom they get from doing that, which causes creativity.

Pioneer artists have activated their intrinsic, hidden potentials and talents.

There are some points of importance in developing and activating potentials and talents toward creativity:

Art students should be trained so that their art serves their intelligible life, not mere pleasures and beauty.

Confidence and hope should be aroused and reinforced in them; they should realize that by means of patience and effort, they can move toward development and perfection.

Art teachers should also have the required patience and affection for their students.

Art students should realize the importance of paying attention to the great world they have inside them, and that they should pay attention to their work, not what others remark about it.

A healthy society also has an important role in stimulating and developing talents. An unsound, corrupt

society prevents the artist from making use of his/her internal powers.

Art students should avoid imitation. Of course, this is not easy, for all human beings tend to imitate others. Here is where the trainers' duty proves more crucial.

Art students should be trained so that they learn to appreciate their works of art for the sake of their own original, true self, not the praise they got from others; man naturally enjoys being praised and rewarded, but if artists work for rewards and praises, their works will aim to please the public, and lose all their originality and authenticity.

Various Types of Beauty

There are four different groups of beauty:

- 1- Physical beauty
- 2- Abstract beauty, like the beauty of freedom, science and legitimate power
- 3- Intelligible, value-based beauty, such as the beauty of justice, chastity and courage
- 4- Absolute beauty

We may, however, consider another classification, too:

- 1- Intellect-based beauty
- 2- Physical beauty
- 3- Physical beauty based on intellect-based, like intellectual ideals and ideas
- 4- Intellectual beauty based on physical beauty, like poetry containing fine, elevating meanings.

Some Western intellectuals disapprove of the above categorizations, and confine beauty to physical beauty. The human spirit, however, has beauties of its own. Eliminating fine, intelligible beauties from the human soul will make beauty rigid and spiritless. Our astonishment at the beauty of the spirit of a finely developed human being is sometimes so great that no physical kind of beauty can possibly ever match it. The beauty of the pure, chaste conscience of a human being can amaze a human being much greater than watching the blue sky amaze his eyes.

There are three reasons why ethics are sometimes separated from beauty:

First, the greed some people in the West have for gaining profits and advantage. If moral ethics keep its place in beauty, these greedy profiteers would fail, and many corruptions and misconducts would vanish.

Secondly, the inadvertent trend toward issues limited to the senses in the West.

The third reason is that if moral ethics are regarded as beauty, they would all immediately refer to God and religion, the source of all moral ethics. Since some Westerners, however, have no belief in God or religion, they have emptied arts of any form of moral ethics.

The Truth about Beauties

Much controversy exists among scholars of aesthetics on what the truth about beauties is. Some think beauty is an observable effect in which the human mind plays no role except reflecting it. They believe beauty is “virtually external.”

Some others consider a mental aspect for beauty, and believe it is the human mind that decides which phenomena are beautiful. They consider beauty as “virtually internal,” free from any sensory aspects.

Beauties are bi-polar, dependant upon both the senses and the structure of man's existence. We must criticize the first theory – that regards beauty as a merely observable effect – from several points of view.

1– If the human mind has no influence except for merely reflecting a physical fact, then where does the joy and pleasure in seeing beauties come from? Why doesn't man consider all physical things as beautiful? Why are only some of them beautiful to him? The pleasure and enjoyment we get from beauties shows that the human mind and spirit play a role in understanding and appreciating beauties.

2– Encountering beauties, we sometimes interpret and analyze them, using our internal feelings. In other words, our internal aspects and desires are involved in the artistic analysis and criticism.

3– Some forms of beauty are not observable physically; there are intellectual beauties that cannot be given any innately external aspect.

The second theory, which considers solely an internal aspect to beauty and defies any observable effect in them, should be criticized for ignoring the fact that not all natural phenomena appeal to the human taste for aesthetics; only some of them do. If beauty were not related with physically observable aspects, we would treat everything equally; however, it is not so, and some of them appeal to us more than others.

We can approve of the third theory, which on one hand believes that beauties are real – whether enjoyed by humans or not – and this is their virtually external aspect. On the other hand, it is only man who is capable of understanding, appreciating and enjoying beauty because of his mental and psychological structure; no animal reacts toward beauties. This is the virtually internal aspect of beauty.

The bi-polar quality of beauty makes beauty become a relative issue, for all phenomena are on one hand different – for instance, the beauty of a single flower is quite different from that of a bunch of colorful flowers of various kinds – and on the other hand, people also have different mental and spiritual states, and cannot understand and appreciate beauties the same.

The reasoning Plato and Jalal-addin Muhammad Molawi (Rumi) have presented defying observable beauty is also acceptable, for beauties are so diverse that no observable similarity can exist between them. As Plato believes, what resemblance can there be between moonlight and a brown flower with beautiful white spots? Secondly, observable phenomena are prone to change, so it is not possible to derive concepts that can be fixed, constant realities and serve as virtually internal or external phenomena that can be understandable for everyone. Accepting Plato's reasoning does not mean, however, that his theory of similarity is totally correct.

When discussing beauty, there are three points we should keep in mind:

1- There are realities inside man that “can be activated by means of more thought, useful experiences and purity in receiving intelligible beauties and ideals, for:

گر بود اندیشه‌ات گل، گلشنی ور بود خاری، تو هیمة گلخنی

(If your thoughts are as pure as flowers, you yourself are also as fine as a garden; if they are thorns, however, you are nothing but thorns, either. In other words, man's humanity depends on his mental state.)

Jalal-addin Muhammad Molawi (Rumi)

The human soul, by improving its pure, fine thoughts, can be a virtually internal garden of flowers; it does not mean that the flowers we see in the world are made by man's inside, for the human soul can mix with beauties.

عقل گردي، عقل را دانی کمال عشق گردي، عشق را یابی جمال

(If you are to understand reason and wisdom, you must devote your whole existence to reason and wisdom; it's like love, where you can't find the beauty of love unless you fall on love yourself.)

Jalal-addin Muhammad Molawi (Rumi)

As the Holy Prophet of Islam says, “If you want to see Resurrection Day – and, in general, anything – you must start a resurrection, an upheaval in yourself first.”

2- Beauties exist in the world outside, and can sooth the human soul. By making contact with the beauties of nature and intelligible beauties, man can overcome the fatalistic, machine-like quality of life, and make his soul delicate and tender.

3- In contact with beauties, man realizes that apart from creating the universe, God also provided enough beauty to please man internally, attract him toward God and make him move on the path to

divinity.

The Virtually Internal Pole of Beauties

Man's virtually internal pole in regard to beauties has several aspects:

1- Awareness about the universe: As a living being, man sometimes gains profound knowledge of the universe and the amazing events in it.

2- Variety-seeking in man's life: Monotonous affairs make man feel depressed and bored. Seeing even the most beautiful things without any variety will not please him. If someone looks at the same beautiful picture all the time, he/she will get bored, for the picture is a rigid result of the artistic taste and talent of its creator, not his/her mental states or artistic talent.

Observing a human being is not tiresome, however, for it conveys the glory of life and the universe. This is precisely the immensely significant point that separates a beautiful piece of natural scenery, with its special life and flowers rooted in the streams, from a work of art or plastic flowers, for the connection of a flower to the stream of the lively universe prevents it from becoming limited and lifeless; this is what prevents man's variety-seeking taste of life from getting bored.

3- Intelligible beauties: Ideals such as justice, freedom and sacrifice – essential to spiritual evolution – are regarded as beauties. If separated from observable beauties, the unity and balance between man's life and spirit will vanish.

The Virtually External Pole of Beauties

The aspects of the virtually external pole of beauties are:

1- The dependence of the universe upon God: By feeling himself and the universe dependent upon God, man can better observe the immense, wise glory and beauty in the universe. In other words, there is both beauty and order in the universe.

2- The relation between the part, the parts and the whole in beauty: When discussing beauty, we should not analyze each of its smaller components and search each one for beauty, and having not found it, question the total beauty. Although the whole consists of these parts, the quality of the whole is not necessarily derived from adding the quality of each one of them separately. In fact, the beauty arises from the human mind contacting the whole system.

The Differences between Observable Beauty and Intelligible

Beauty

We will now discuss some of their differences:

- a) Man perceives observable beauties by means of his senses, but he cannot directly do that in the case of intellect-based beauties, where he must use human values and principles; even if observable beauties have any influence here, it will only be limited to serving as a code or signal for intellect-based beauty.
- b) Observable affairs including beauty can be subject to quantitative calculations, but intellect-based beauties arise in the human character, which cannot undergo any calculations.
- c) Observable beauties lose their appeal after some time, whereas intellect-based beauty always remains attractive, like the pleasure man gets from the beauty of justice, free will or freedom.
- d) How the two forms of beauties are felt and witnessed is also different. In observable beauty, physically physical effects bring about the realization, but in intellect-based beauty, it is accepting the immensity of mental activities that is effective.

The Definition of Beauty

Beauty is the recorded effect of perfection, and perfection is being located on the path of what is deserved and proper – except for when the beauty is two-dimensional, like man, who may be externally beautiful, but immensely filthy internally.

According to this definition, all beauties, even the physically observable ones, have a trace of perfection in them. There are three reasons to prove this:

- 1– If a beautiful phenomenon consists of components, they must be proportionate and orderly. For example, if a flower is regarded as beautiful, its shape, situation and color must be well-balanced, so that every part of it is proportionate and harmonious.
- 2– Beauty has a virtually internal aspect, i.e. without man's intrinsic, natural interest in beauties, he could never appreciate them; the mere internal reception is a virtual greatness for man itself.
- 3– If a phenomenon is not beautiful, man will not enjoy it. This is quite apparent in the case of intellect-based beauties.

Suppose in a beautiful landscape, somebody very dear or close to us is killed brutally; will that piece of scenery still seem beautiful to us? If a few drops of the blood of somebody very dear to us, killed brutally in a crime, is placed on a work of art, and adds greatly to its beauty in the eyes of anyone not knowing about the killed dear one, will it also seem beautiful to us? Does the beauty of a beloved seem as

beautiful to others, too?

This is why we added this statement to the definition of beauty: 'except for when the beauty is two-dimensional, like man, who may be externally beautiful but internally filthy.' In Persian literature, this is described as 'a snake with beautiful lines and spots.'

گفت لیلی را خلیفه کآن تویی کز تو مجنون شد پریشان و غوی

از دگر خوبان تو افزون نیستی گفت خامش چون تو مجنون نیستی

دیده مجنون اگر بودی تو را هر دو عالم بیخطر بودی تو را

(Are you Leili, whom Majnoun is so crazy about?" the caliph asked Leili, Majnoun's beloved. "Are you the one who has him wandering in the deserts? You're not outstandingly beautiful; what has Majnoun seen in you that has caused such a storm in him?" Leili replied, " Yes, you should ask that, for you are not Majnoun. If you did see like he does, you would willingly devote everything you have, ready to face all the perils of both worlds.)

What Jalal-addin Muhammad Rumi means here is that if you watch this world – or even both worlds – with purity, you will become fascinated and infatuated by it.

Perfection and greatness is the basis for beauty, so the more aspects and dimensions of perfection and greatness a beautiful phenomenon has, and the more familiar its viewers are with those aspects, the greater the intuitive feeling of beauty will be. Such intuitive visions of beauty are something not many people can have.

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