

Chapter 2

The Phantom Aesthetic State

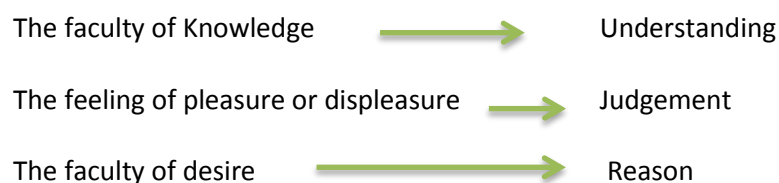
- Serious defect in aesthetics is the avoidance of considerations as to **value**.
 - It is true that an ill-judged introduction of value considerations usually leads to disaster, as in Tolstoy's case.
- Some of experiences to which the arts give rise, are valuable
- This fact is naturally depending upon the theory of value adopted.

The phantom problem of aesthetic mode

- All modern aesthetics rests upon an assumption which has been strangely little discussed, the assumption that there is a distinct kind of mental activity present in what are called aesthetic experiences.
- "The first rational word concerning beauty" – spoken by Immanuel Kant.
 - Kant attempt to define the 'judgement of taste' as concerning pleasure which is disinterested, unintellectual.
 - Thus arise, **the phantom problem** of the aesthetic mode or aesthetic state, a legacy from the days of abstract investigation into the Good, The Beautiful, and the True.

Will, Feeling, and Thought:

- The temptation - will, feeling, and thought was irresistible.
- The faculties of capacities are reducible to three.
- Kant said in *Critique of Judgement*:
 - The faculty of Knowledge
 - The feeling of pleasure or displeasure
 - The faculty of desireTheses faculties stood **understanding, judgement and Reason** respectively



‘Between the faculties of **knowledge** and **desire** stands the **feeling of pleasure**’ just as **judgement** is intermediate between **understanding** and **reason**’

- ❑ Kant went on to discuss aesthetics as appertaining to the province of judgement, the middle of these three, the first and last having already occupied him in his two other. (Critique of Pure Reason, and Critique of Practical Reason)

Immanuel Kant’s works:

1. Critique of Pure Reason
2. Critique of Practical Reason
3. Critique of Judgement

- ❑ With the identification of provinces of Truth and Thought no quarrel arises.
- ❑ Will and Good are intimately connected.
- ❑ The peculiar use of ‘emotion’ by reviewers, and the prevalence of the phrase ‘aesthetic emotion’ is one of them.
- ❑ The objections of feeling, some special mode of mental activity had to be found to which beauty could belong.
- ❑ Truth: object of inquiring activity, Intellectual or Theoretical part of mind,
- ❑ Good: willing, desiring, practical part.

It is true that many of experiences do present peculiarities both the in the intellectual interest and in the way (development of desires within them takes place and these peculiarities - detachment, impersonality, serenity). The **aesthetic state** as the starting point for an inquiry into the values of the arts. Ex: rectangular and red in parts – definition of picture.

All sorts of **experience** involved in the **values of the arts**, and that attributions of Beauty spring from all sorts of causes. Post Kantian writers have unhesitatingly replied, “Yes! The aesthetic experience is peculiar and specific.”

Aesthetic Emotion and Empathy

Sui generis - unique

A distinct **aesthetic** species of **experience** can take two forms. It may be held that there is some unique kind of mental element which enters into aesthetic experiences and into no others. Mr. Clive Bell used to maintain the existence of a unique emotion ‘**aesthetic emotion**’ as the *differentia*. But psychology has no place for such an entity. **Empathy** enters into innumerable other experiences as well as into aesthetic experiences.

Aesthetic mode

The **aesthetic mode** is generally supposed to be a peculiar way of regarding things which can be exercised whether the resulting **experiences** are valuable, disvaluable or indifferent. Experiences of ugliness as well as that of beauty, and also intermediate experiences. **The experience of ugliness has nothing in common with that of beauty.**

Sense of aesthetic is also found in which it is confined to experiences of beauty and does imply value. **A peculiar aesthetic attitude** is that it makes smooth the way for the idea of a peculiar aesthetic value, **a pure art value. A peculiar kind of experience, aesthetic experience** is an easy step to the postulation of a peculiar unique value, different in kind and cut off from the other values of ordinary experiences. This view of the arts as providing a private heaven for aesthetics, is a great impediment to the investigation of their value.

Concluding points of I.A. Richards about art:

Art envisaged as a mystic, ineffable virtue is a close relative of the 'aesthetic mood' and may easily be pernicious in its effects, through the habits of mind which, as an idea, as a mystery, it appeals.

Clive Bell

- British art critic and philosopher of art
- His aesthetic theory was focused on aesthetic experience
- In his book *Art* (1914), he claimed certain uniquely aesthetic emotion.

Vernon Lee

- British writer
- Vernon Lee was the pseudonym of Violet Paget
- 1856 – 1935
- Primarily for supernatural fiction
- She developed her own theory of psychological aesthetics in collaboration with her lover, Kit Anstruther-Thomson.

Her major works

- *Beauty and Ugliness: And Other Studies in Psychological Aesthetics* (1912)
- *The Beautiful*

Key words:

Aesthetic emotion

Aesthetic mood

Aesthetic experience

Aesthetic state

“The Result was aesthetic, the contemplative, activity which is still defined, in most treatments”

- Vernon Lee, *The Beautiful*.

“The alternative notion, that to be beautiful implies a relation entirely *sui generis* between visible and audible forms and ourselves, can be deduced from comparison between the works of art of different kinds, periods, and climates. For such comparison will show that given proportions, shapes, patterns, compositions have a tendency to recur whenever art is not distributed by a self-conscious desire for novelty.”

- Vernon Lee, *Beauty and Ugliness: And Other Studies in Psychological Aesthetics*

“To appreciate a work of art we need bring with us nothing from life, no knowledge of its ideas and affairs, no familiarity with its emotions”

- Clive Bell, *Art*

“It’s nature is to be not part, not yet a copy, of the real world, but a world in itself independent, complete, autonomous”

- A.C. Bradley, *Oxford Lecturer on Poetry*

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