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Aesthetics

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AESTHETICS

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BY

S. ZANE WISON

AESTHETICS

A banker remodels his bank. A girl buys shoes and purse to match a certain dress. The business man trades for a new car with more attractive lines and a brighter color. A young man selects pants to match a special sports jacket. None of these would openly admit a deep longing and love for art yet each has gone out of his way to artfully display his tastes.

Most people are not getting a sufficient amount of pleasure from art. They see their friends enjoying certain paintings, concerts, plays, or poetry and realize that there must be something there that they are missing. In the realm of art they feel like the people of the world before Prometheus brought them the divine fire:

Though they had eyes to see, they saw to
no avail; they had ears, but understood not;
but, like shapes in dreams, throughout their
length of days, without purpose they wrought
all things in confusion.
(Aeschylus - fifth century B.C. Greek dramatist)

At the same time as man concerned themselves with the necessities of life he has never considered the mere necessities of life complete cause for living. Man is capable of thinking and deciding, but too he is a creature of feeling and emotion. One's feelings and emotional reactions need to be cultivated if one is to become a mature person. Aesthetics offers a means of adventure to the human mind. it is here that one can gain insights

and surprises for the inquiring mind.

The human being is the only creature which has a capacity for boredom. Have you ever seen an animal bored? No. The creature man has an inward desire for something greater than himself. This something desired is in the abstract arena of the aesthetics. Indeed man does act like a creature evicted from paradise longing to return to that perfect state of truth and beauty.

Aesthetics has traditionally been defined as the branch of philosophy concerned with beauty and the beautiful in nature and art. Some say that the definition is too narrow for present day purposes. Therefore, aesthetics is stated to include a heterogeneous collection of problems that concern the arts primarily but also is related to nature.

The arts or fine arts as they are correctly referred to a total of eight fields. Webster's dictionary lists them as sculpture, painting, drawing, architecture, dancing, music, poetry, and dramatic art. Through these art forms man has been able to some degree to reach a plateau of higher thought and being.

Nature on the other hand covers a much broader field in that everything in nature has its own quality of being. One could say that nature is general in its presentation while the fine arts are specific in theirs.

Art and Nature complete eternally with each other in the great task of making humanity aware of what is true and beautiful and good. They are the two teachers in our classroom of a

world....It would be difficult to judge decisively whether Art or Nature is the greater teacher. Nature has more to tell us, but Art is better skilled for utterance.

It seems that every philosophical and literary thinker has a different evaluation of aesthetics. Even among the Greeks there was a difference of opinion which has only increased throughout the ages, and our modern knowledge of psychology has made the issue even more complicated. Because of this aesthetics enjoys a curious position in the subject matter of literature and philosophy. For many thinkers something other than aesthetics stands at the center of concern. Aesthetics, then, must stand on the fringe.

On the other hand, there is another and no less select band of thinkers for whom the aesthetics has a special and even key significance. One of these thinkers was Plato. Plato believed that it was through the aesthetic experience that some day men would find absolute truth.

German idealist gave aesthetics its highest estimate in modern philosophy. In Kant's Critique of Judgement art and beauty became the mediating and unifying link between scientific understanding and practical reason, feeling is the link between knowledge and will, purposiveness is the link between causal law and actua purpose. In this way Kant gave aesthetics a pivotal role in the structure of human experience. This primacy of the aesthetics was for Kant formal

regulative.

In the realm of arts Plato's idea meant that many different elements all worked in complete harmony toward the projection of one central theme or idea. Many modern theorists contend that aesthetics exists only in the mind of the viewer or hearer; that the artist must strike some note of recognition or suggestion that brings to the observer's mind a pleasureable experience or emotion that gives aesthetic pleasure. Still another theory would place the aesthetic value in the artist's personal interpretation of what he sees. This has given us much of what is called modern art and encompasses the work of both the impressionist and expressionist.

Kant's ideas were to become the basis of Schelling's early and middle thoughts. They set the stage for his transcendental idealism and his philosophy of identity. In aesthetic intuition Schelling located the highest insight which solves the problem that self-developing spirit sets to itself, namely, to know itself explicitly as the identity of freedom and necessity. In art, both in the beauty that is the goal of art and in the creative process of the artistic genius, the free and the necessary come together to constitute an absolute unity.

So from Plato to Kant and Schelling the centrality of aesthetics continues. And not only these but it continues likewise in the thought of every person that lives in one form or another. Great thinkers can only tell us why we like certain things not what to like. The whole race is bound together

in this great quest for the knowledge of truth and beauty.
Somewhere it is believed we will find the clue to truth and
beauty or aesthetics in the human experience.

As to what aesthetics really is everyone has his own
explanation. It seems to be connected directly with the
philosophy of the individual . If one is a pragmatist he
differs in thought from an existentialist. Opposed to expression
is realism, opposed to idealism is naturalism, opposed to the
poetry of symbolism is the poetry of statement; the classical,
the mannerist, the baroque move in a succession; the geometric
sculpture of earliest Greece and the sculpture of Chartres, that
of Canova and that of Henry Moore all emerge in the process of
artistics.

Keats might have been right when he wrote, "Beauty is truth,
truth beauty, that is all." But the problem is what is beauty,
or what is truth?

e.e.cummings wrote:

who are you, little i
(five or six years old)
peering from some high

window, at the gold
of november sunset

(and feeling that if day
has to become night
this is a beautiful way)

Welllll.....could be????????????

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