

ESTHETICS AND PROPERTY

by

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Esthetic values as a class are differentiatable from other categories of value as the immediate value emotively evoked in the concrete expression or artistic embodiment of a more abstract conceptual value. The class of esthetic values can be subdivided into three descending levels from that resulting from: purposefully created human art--the highest level of esthetic experience since it relates conscious and explicit values in the concrete form; incidentally produced or derivative esthetic experience from conscious organization, symbol systems or matter transforms; and lowest on the scale are esthetically pleasing patterns found in non-purposive phenomena.

The most rewarding esthetic experience is one which involves the explicit expression of the artist whose work purposefully embodies the highest aspirations of personal identity in a concrete form which offers a total configuration of inspiration. At a lower level, beauty can be appreciated in the functioning power and grace of a steel mill or the engineering complexity of an oil refinery or the deliberate arrangement of a railway yard or of an electronic circuit board. Natural phenomena does retain esthetic value for man in its concrete representation of epistemological principles but its non-purposive character can only evoke a less than total response. The difference is analogous to the choice between communicating with a stone and an intelligent being.

Esthetic values represent a special problem but as a class cannot be divorced from more basic philosophical premises such as the volitional nature of humans and the social-ethical correlary of the metaphysically derived absolute right to life free from coercion. The institution of private property is seen as the only ethical-moral context in which esthetic values can be experienced unimpeded by the possibility of tacit complicity against more fundamental values. In this sense, public "property" is regarded as an incompatible ethical-moral context for the experiencing of esthetic values.

These fundamentally antithetic proprietarian institutions and the ethical-moral contexts which they imply are identifiable as: (1) free market esthetics in which esthetic values are judged and purchased by individuals to maximize personal standards, and (2) the authoritarian expropriation of esthetic values based on collective-bureaucratic assignment of standards. In both cases, capital must be

invested in creating or maintaining esthetic values. Freely available esthetic experiences do not exist since all such value requires effort. Even the scenic attraction of a natural landscape requires effort in traveling to the site if nothing else. Thus, the problem of maximizing esthetic value as is the case in any endeavor applies to public as well as private actions, although, in the case of public actions, accountability is difficult to assign and the unwilling as well as the indifferent are forced to suffer the mischoices of some obscure bureaucrat or committee.

Esthetic values result from the psycho-epistemology of the individual. It is the fundamental approach to the world which the individual holds either as explicit concepts or as an implicit sense of life which determines his esthetic values. An individual's psycho-epistemology results from (1) how he values his own life, (2) how secure he is in dealing with reality and whether he is willing or not to make choices and accept full responsibility for his actions.

The fundamental metaphysical nature of man is that his existence is dependent on making choices and transforming matter. The voluntaristic nature of man differentiates him from other living species which are primarily limited to range of the moment responses to environmental stimuli. Humans are not genetically preprogrammed by instinct, their survival ability does not depend primarily on mechanistic responses but on abstract and indirect knowledge. However, this "epistemological capacity" requires a careful development of values.

An esthetic value is logically a tertiary refinement and application of more basic philosophical values. Since man's existence requires the transformation of matter, it is this basic premise of existence from which esthetics must originate. Truth, in effect, is "Beauty" but only Truth can cause Beauty and not the other way around. And since man's nature is by force of his existence as a choicemaker and material transformer, a rational, conscious evaluator, the irrational and the immoral can hold no beauty.

Esthetic value does not constitute a class of value apart from other categories of value such as metaphysical, epistemological, ethical or economic. Esthetic values involve standards that can and ultimately must be logically explicit. The only standard by which esthetic value can be judged is in relation to the life of the individual. All esthetic value is experienced by individuals. This does not render esthetic valuation any less potentially objective as a category than any other set of knowledge since these are all known and experienced solely by individuals. Esthetic value results from the same basic principle of cause and effect which is the root of human existence (and all other existence as well). The identification of artistic value involves more than the stimulation of the senses as the term "esthetic" implies. The act of valuing implies the existence of a standard. The individual in appreciating anything at least implicitly must choose one value over another. Even the absurd statement that one likes everything equally well is logically unsupportable since something is valued above nothing.

Esthetic values are commonly regarded as formed through an essentially emotional response and thus effectively beyond logical definition. However this view implies a theory of human psychology which is logically and empirically unsupportable.

An emotional response in a healthy individual derived from prior learning--which is primarily a process of the conscious abstraction of perceptual information into conceptual ideas. Emotions are not disconnected from intellect any more than the sensory apparatus is disconnected from the conscious conceptual center of the brain. An emotion is a spontaneous and exceedingly rapid evaluation derived from previously acquired concepts. Emotional responses result from a process of self-programming (or the lack of it), in which case the individual is alienated from his own feelings. Conflicts produced by self-alienation may bring about the rejection of one's feelings or the attempt to blot out the capacity for rational thought. An individual's emotional response is not disconnected from his intellectual values but in fact is the product of these values. Once the individual identifies what it is that motivates his emotional response to an esthetic value, he can relate an esthetic response within the hierarchical frame of his values.

All art, whether it is intended to do so purposefully or not, is the concrete embodiment or the characterization of the psycho-epistemological values held by the artist. And all artistic or "esthetic" appreciation is an intellectual and emotional reaction to the values expressed in the esthetic element. The degree to which the artist and the appreciator of artistic works are explicitly aware of the values being expressed, is not only a matter of intellectual integrity but an indicator of mental health.

The intellectual dichotomizing of emotion and intellect, a by-product of the theological division of body and soul, has promoted the "special case" approach to esthetic values. Under this medieval carryover from a prerational age, the appreciation of art or any esthetic experience is relegated to the realm of mysticism. This has prompted the rise of the school of Naturalism in the arts and the "Wilderness" cult. Both of these movements are expressions of an undercurrent of resentment for human accomplishment and for volitionality.

The intellectual leaders of this movement have drawn support from the widespread psychopathological disorientation and personality disintegration which unfortunately afflicts the majority of persons living in an altruist-collectivist society. The objectively unfounded and thus mystical division between artistic-esthetic values and other logical categories of value required by the intellectual establishment is analogous and directly related to the altruistic moral requirement of self-denial. This requires the division and opposition of self against self. In turn, the prevailing condition of self-alienation is also directly related to the prevailing school of psychological theory which posits subconscious emotion as inherently out of phase and in conflict with the conscious intellectual process and abstract conceptual values. These three levels of alienation reinforce and feed upon one another.

Esthetic values proceed logically from more fundamental standards and not the reverse. The metaphysical, epistemological and ethical premises by which one lives, necessarily dictate the character of one's esthetic values. Were the reverse to be true, one would logically have to substitute feeling for consciousness as a tool of cognition. This does, in fact, occur in the majority of cases. The overwhelming body of intellectual thought and art is presently influenced by the attempt to reverse logic and have esthetic values dictate moral-ethical values and to substitute feeling for conscious thought as a tool of cognition.

This approach to esthetic values is heavily influencing policy-making in the public sector. Because of this, it has become impossible to set objective esthetic standards and prioritize scarce public funds and facilities with any degree of effectiveness. Popular whim and fancy based on range-of-the-moment feelings and fads heavily influence public decision-makers. Under these conditions, there is no reasonable means for decision. Valid arguments are no longer considered, and the weight of pressure groups becomes decisive. Increasingly, it becomes a matter of might making right and of the ends justifying the means. And in the shuffle, the respect for individual property rights and individual esthetic choices are repeatedly disregarded and diminished.

As a result of these conditions, esthetic values as expressed in the arts and in the applied arts such as architecture are increasingly taking on an unhealthy aspect. Public buildings more often display a dull and repetitious monumentality. Public parks, while providing open and green spaces, provide little else in terms of creative innovation or inspiration. The dynamism and brilliance exhibited in industry and science, the products of a capitalistic society, are not reflected in public sector esthetics. In the broadest sense, that is in terms of this entire civilization, the esthetic dichotomy produced by the collective-public process and private initiative can be demonstrated in the evaluation of a public park as an institution and its meaning as an esthetic experience.

Assuming a well-designed public park with a landscaping of trees, shrubs, flowers, lawn areas, appropriately dotted with ponds and streams, one could have what is generally held to be a valuable public amenity.

However, at its best, a park is a site conducive for rest and recreation. The level of activity permitted in a public park is limited to non-productive uses. Although physical activities permitted in a public park can be useful in maintaining health, there is no scope for activities leading to the material growth of the individual. The public park does not permit activities or functions which involve material transformation such as farming, industry, residence and commerce--all basic to life. As such, it is an artificial environment which is alien to the basic nature of man and thus constitutes one of low appeal to healthy esthetic values.

A public park does not permit privacy, protection or a full range of social relationships. The public nature of a park prevents the

enforcement of proprietarian segregation. One's actions are privy to all, which is an extreme regression back to tribal society.

Privacy is a basic condition of civilized life. It stems from the basic metaphysical nature of man. The occupation of a physical space and the existential requirement for transforming matter requires the mutual recognition of conditional entry, a feature of human relationships which can only be enforced under proprietarian segregation. Private property means being able to prevent or sanction entry to other persons, it means being able to carry on activities unmolested by others, it also permits accountability in terms of trespassing on the rights of others. These qualities which are essential to the life of a purposeful entity are denied in a public park. Any person can meddle in the activities of another under this situation. It belongs to everyone and yet to none. There is no legal or moral defense against intrusion. In terms of basic values, a public park can only stand for the implied right of unconditional entry into one's life. This is a basic quality of all public "property."

Social relationships permitted in a public park are truncated and distorted. As a result of the lack of privacy and proprietarian restraints, one cannot hold a gathering of friends without fear of intrusion or molestation. Intimate sexual activities are generally prohibited and in any case would be open to intrusion and public view.

Forming new acquaintances and creating friendships is sharply constrained since physical proximity does not result from explicit invitation but by chance and unselected encounter. No matter what the actual character of the individuals involved, the social encounter permitted and engendered by a public facility can only be coloured by normal suspicion and apprehension. The acceptance of a person in such an ambiguous setting requires a very lengthy and difficult process of mutual screening and validation--at least for a reasonable individual.

The initiation of casual conversation by a stranger places the addressed individual and the initiator in extremely awkward positions. The setting in a public park is very ambiguous, one cannot assume even the range of definable purpose for being there. The initiator of conversation places himself in the position of accosting a stranger, and the person addressed is placed in an uncomfortable position of responding and tacitly permitting an unsolicited acquaintance or of showing ill will by not responding.

It is in this context that the remaining possible virtues of a public park must be examined since it has been demonstrated that esthetic values do not logically exist apart from other values and are derivative from metaphysical epistemological and ethical premises. The prime requirements for human life are choice and purposeful transformation of matter. A public park does not permit the most basic esthetic choices --with whom and under what conditions one shall relate.

It does not permit or engender the most important purpose and activity of human life, without which life cannot continue and is essentially meaningless, that of applying one's mind to creating value in the concrete. Man's existence requires a purposeful direction of

material processes. The activities permitted in a public park imply a diseased or infirm state requiring restoration and revitalization. Recreation which means diversionary past-time or refreshment from toil is indeed a valuable concept for the individual. There is a valid requirement in the life of the individual for rest and variation of activity. However, the existence of a public park implies considerably more than this. It implies that man's work, his place of work and his products are morally inferior to sessile plants and ferile animals. In fact, the theoreticians and supporters of public parks have gone as far as proclaiming that any evidence of human occupation and activity is a defilement of the land.

Esthetic appreciation of the worthy features located within a public park can not take place in a moral vacuum. Plants are indeed valuable, intrinsically because they represent a living entity asserting itself over the inanimate forces of nature. The intricacy of life processes and behaviors, the variety of forms and colors, and the range of adaptive triumphs are among the valid esthetic pleasures which can be gained from observing plants and animals. But when a vegetated site has been set aside for the specific purpose of demeaning the fundamental values of man's existence as a volitional and purposeful entity, no intelligent individual can respond favorably within the context of more basic values.

A moral individual can not pursue esthetic pleasure in a public park knowing full well that, not only is the park a symbol of anti-capitalist opposition to the creative and productive capacities of man, but in itself, constitutes the expropriation of the basic rights of other persons. The acquisition and maintenance of the property by the state implies that many individuals are being forced to pay for the pleasures of others. The moral person must reflect that the maintenance of this public park requires the initiation of force against those who would protest against theft of their earnings. He or she must also consider that the existence of such a park constitutes a tacit rationalization that force can be initiated against the individual under any pretext of serving the needs of others.

Aside from the moral values which obviously does not permit the enjoyment of esthetic values in a public park, does the condition of joint ownership per se interfere with esthetic pleasure. Assuming that group ownership of a private park is purely voluntary and devoid of negative moral implications: would there be any limitations on an esthetic experienced resulting from its status as a jointly owned property?

The only limitations placed on use of the park would be clearly stipulated in the original covenant or contract. Each participant would be free not to enter the contract. Users of the park would be known to each other, at least in terms of their investment and their responsibilities. Each individual would be free to enjoy the esthetic pleasures of the park without fear of intrusion or molestation. More importantly, the individual could enjoy his pleasures with full assurance that no other person was being forced at the point of a gun

to pay for his esthetic choices.

In sum, public "property" is a contradiction in terms. It not only does not lend itself to any efficient form of accountability, economic or moral, but it is esthetically undesirable. The present bureaucratically sponsored outcry for "green open space amenities," and the wilderness cult is symptomatic of a profound set of philosophical contradictions and a widespread psychopathology. These result from a historical inheritance of a social metaphysic based on altruist self-denial and of its modern political correlary: collective-statism. Ethical altruism, which leads to the individual's psychological alienation from himself, is founded on epistemological mysticism which denies cause and effect and asserts contradiction as the only universal principle.

It is in this historical and intellectual setting that esthetic values are claimed as autonomous from the basic premises of existence, identity and consciousness. The intellectual alienation of esthetics from reason closely parallels the psychological alienation of intellect from emotion, the alienation of man from his works, and in essence the alienation of the individual from himself.

In this grotesque nightmare setting of antivalues and antihuman attitudes, the individual is expected to enjoy public facilities paid for through involuntary servitude. He is asked to lend approval for the preservation of animal populations and the conservation of wilderness areas with full knowledge that individuals left free to create could provide life giving commodities on the markets of an impoverished world.

The indictment for this crime against the basic values of human existence must fall squarely on the purveyors and supporters of all forms of altruism, collectivism and mysticism. Those who would give moral sanction to the gratification of one person's wants by the theft of another person's earnings are guilty of a monstrous crime against all humanity. Those who would sacrifice man's esteem for that of beasts and plants, or mind to emotion, or individual rights for collective interests, are the enemies of Truth and Beauty.

The monuments of public esthetics whether they be justified as preserves of natural wealth or as the embodiment of cultural values are in actuality altars symbolizing the sacrificial blood of untold millions to the vanity and power lust of bureaucrats and despots. This dark age of faith and force which has expressed itself in the authoritarian monumentality of statist savagery continuing from the pyramids of the Egyptian pharaohs to the ludicrous wedding cake "skyscrapers" of Soviet architecture, is now taking on a new expression in the wilderness parks and cloverleaves of the American variety of would-be totalitarian squanderers.

Fortunately this long night produced by the eclipse of human freedom is being broken by the first glimmer of a new dawn of individual liberty. It can be predicted that those who supported and administered the esthetic monuments to power and loot will not be remembered in the

future for having contributed to the cause of Beauty but rather as apologists, grafters and faithful Quislings for the slavemasters of altruist-collectivism.