

THE INTER-RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AESTHETICS AND ETHICS: AN APPRAISAL

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The inter-relation between aesthetics and ethics is a persistent issue which has long been an object of scholarly debate. The very notion of beauty and morality has acquired new meanings, specific uses due to ongoing societal shifts. With a careful consideration of these new dimensions, this article is concerned primarily to outline the spheres where the unbound inventiveness of our aesthetic notion and rigorous regularity of our moral response meet, from an analytic perspective. There are significant connections between Aesthetics and ethics. With increased focus on its general philosophical underpinnings, it has come to be seen that this issue is not only as significant within the sphere of aesthetics and ethics but indeed also relevant to contemporary discussions in other related areas. The idea that a full understanding of aesthetics and ethics as two branches of study, is becoming increasingly widely accepted and that's why in the first section the author(s) are intended to clarify these concepts first. The connection between aesthetics and morality, the role of aesthetics in shaping and supporting human moral values has been emphasized by the philosophers. In this contribution, the views of some Western and Indian philosophers on the moral responsibility of art as an aesthetic endeavour is explored minutely. In a way of conclusion, it is subtly examined that how the feelings of disinterested pleasure and universality is initiated by Aesthetics. These two notions exhibit the central ideology of morality and by lucidly exhibiting these concepts Aesthetics becomes an inextricable part of morality.

I

Aesthetics and Ethics: A Subtle Analysis

The word "Aesthetics" found its origin from the Greek word 'aisthetikos' which indicates the inter-connection between the object and the sense organs. Alexander Baumgarten first used the word 'Aesthetics' in his *Philosophical Meditations on Some Requirements of the Poem* to illustrate the sensory perception, although eventually this word was attached to our sensation of beauty. Aesthetics is generally defined as 'the philosophical study of beauty and good taste'. As one of the branches of philosophy Aesthetics is concerned with the nature and appreciation of

art and also with the concepts which are used to interpret and evaluate the individual work of art. But it should be noted here that the scope of Aesthetics is broader than the philosophy of art. Sometimes Aesthetics is also defined as “critical reflection on art, culture and nature”. Art manifests itself as an inevitable consequence, when the endless beauty of the external world catalyses our aesthetic consciousness.

Aesthetics as separate field of study has been developed in 18th century Germany, though there was considerable evidence that Ancient Greek and Indian philosophers also undoubtedly contributed to the development of the traditions of Aesthetics. In the ancient Greek philosophical tradition, Epicurus, the famous Greek philosopher, explained Aesthetics as “highly developed quality of senses which enables a person to be informed by the “good life” through the intelligent enjoyment of physical, moral and spiritual beauty”. Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle have contributed a lot in the field of Aesthetics and surprisingly we see that what issues and problems regarding Aesthetics raised by these two prominent philosophers are also discussed even today.

Similarly, there is also a very rich tradition of Eastern Aesthetics, where art and everyday life have been inseparably intertwined. Ancient India was highly advanced in all spheres of life - in Philosophy, Ethics, and Aesthetics etc. The development of Art and Aesthetics has been reached to the high level of sophistication in ancient India. The *Natyashastra* of *Bharat*, written in the sixth century AD, as acknowledged by many people as *Pancama Veda*, occupies central position in the field of art. The main content of this Treatise is the theory of *Rasas*. Nine kinds of *Rasa* are explained here. These are *Śṛṅgāra* (beauty, eroticism), *Hāsya* (comic), *Karūṇa* (pathos), *Raudra* (anger), *Bībhatsa* (disgust), *Adbhuta* (marvelous, awe, inspiring), *Bhayānaka* (terrible, odious), *Vīra* (heroic), and *Shānta* (silent, peaceful). According to *Bharat*, all human emotions can be experienced through these nine *Rasas*. In Indian Aesthetic tradition, these nine *Rasas* are very fundamental of all human experiences and by evoking these *Rasas* in the mind (*Citta*) of the audience, the artist can create heightened dramatic and aesthetic feelings or experiences.

Aesthetic object is very important in case of any kind of aesthetic experience. This object does not simply stimulate an aesthetic sense in the individual but it uplifts the audience from the level of sense to the level of imagination, by which in turn, the individual reaches to the next level of Aesthetic experience. This imaginary level, this new world, is the new creation of the individual. In this new world, the individual meets with the 'dramatic personality, who contains within himself all possible heroic qualities, may be called the marks of a *mahapurusa* , say for example, like *Ram* or *Krishna*'. So, from Eastern perspective it can be said that, a true aesthetic object does not simply stimulate the aesthetic sense of the spectator but at the same time it improves his/her the ethical sense too. Aesthetics is concerned with the questions of "what is beauty, what is ugliness? Why do we consider certain things as beautiful and some other as ugly? Is there really any connection between art and morality? How beauty can improve our practical lives, and so on. Ethics or morality, on the other hand, concerns with the questions of right or wrong, good or bad concerning the deeds of persons. Both Ethics and Aesthetics are that two important parts of axiology, which is known as the study of value and also the value judgments. The essential role of morality or Ethics is to promote social consciousness regarding moral values for our harmonious existence with society. That is to say, 'Ethics or Morality is based first and foremost in social relations.'

II

Rethinking the Inter-relation between Aesthetics and Ethical Sentiments

While discussing the relation between Aesthetics and Ethics, we should consider the important point that, whether all works possess moral value or not? In the course of the analysis, we can ask the question that, "whether having moral value means that a work has Aesthetic value too, or to put the issue more precisely, whether moral value in a work contributes in some way to its aesthetic value too? Now, considering the issue regarding the inter-relation between Aesthetics and Ethics, we can mark out several alternatives. E.g., it can be argued that there is no relation between these two, and moral value and aesthetic value are completely independent. A particular activity might be high in moral value but same work may bear low aesthetic value. To address the issue, one may further argue that 'moral value and aesthetic value are related but that relation is neither important nor necessary. That is,

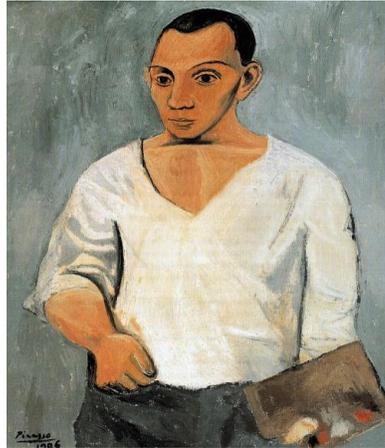
‘a work having high moral value is more likely to have aesthetic value but considering other related factors we compel to conclude that the work lacks aesthetic value’.

Question may arise that, whether sense of the morality of an artist is relevant to our judgment of the aesthetic value of his work itself. So far as Hitler was an immoral/unethical person, does it lead to lower our judgment of the aesthetic value of the painting done by that immoral person? Similarly, as Mother Theresa bears a highly moral character, does it mean that any artwork done by her would be aesthetically better for her higher moral character? In this way we may judge, if any action inspires people to be better with good moral character, then does it mean that the work has higher aesthetic value? These are some relevant questions in this context. Jürgen Habermas, German philosopher & sociologist and also a strong defender of modernity, in his “Theory of Modernity: An Unfinished Project”, pointed out that in modern thought the ‘formal separation of aesthetic and morality is deeply anchored’. According to him “Modernity is the child of enlightenment. It is anchored in reason and Democracy. And therefore, Habermas sees modernity as an unfinished project. It means that much more has to be done in the realm of modernity before thinking about the possibility of a postmodern world”. According to Habermas, “modernization is a process where society is increasingly separated into autonomous domains, each having their own ‘rationality’. Thus, science is about truth (or rather a specific version of truth), and therefore not about beauty or Ethics. Art is about beauty, and therefore not about morality or truth. Morality is central to religion, law and politics. In all three domains, people try, with varying success and levels of ambition, to separate morals from truth and beauty”. But, for Habermas for a wellbeing society Aesthetics and Ethics should be brought together.

Aesthetics and Ethics, two stimulating and insightful branches of study of human intelligence, are often seen to go hand in hand, not only practically but also theoretically, since they are both forms of value. For decades several controversies have been gathered around an archaic question that is, whether it is possible for our perception of beauty to unfold the notion of morality. From the dawn of human civilization our sense of sublime has shaped our emotions, imaginations and

experiences in magnificent ways which are reflections of our internal expressions. Our aesthetic consciousness vividly depicts every minute detail of our lives and the unique manifestations of these elements are entitled as art. Although Aesthetics as a humanitarian theory has a deep interconnection with human existence, it is still a matter of debate whether it is morally valuable as a human endeavour. Ethics elucidates the moral impacts of the actions; the individuals consciously perform in the social context, on the other side our aesthetic conceptions which are revealed through artistic gestures are also considered as intentional human activity. The question may arise that, whether it is possible to interpret aesthetic functions in the same way in which different moral practices are interpreted by the notion of right and wrong?

On the other hand, morality represents the rightness or wrongness of human action. In the sphere of Ethics, the good or bad outcome of a specific human action decides its moral value and aesthetic value of a content is judged by its ability to stimulate our senses. While Aesthetics emphasizes the elevation of human emotions, morality confines itself to the judgement of the goodness or badness of human behaviour. The aesthetic sentiments of the individual are expressed in various forms like literature, architecture, music, painting etc., but there are many artistic patterns which do not evoke any kind of positive or negative impact in terms of social morality. Although oil painting of a particular person or a great architectural masterpiece can be considered as a spectacular instance of art, it is not possible to judge them by any ethical criteria. For example, in spite of the fact that the aesthetic value of the self-portrait of Pablo Picasso is immeasurable in the context of artistic judgement, it is difficult to apprehend whether it has any effect on the moral lives of people. Picasso painted this portrait on 1906 in which he tried to highlight his features in a unique way. This portrait introduces his appearance with an innovative style which gives it a new dimension, it is impossible to attach any kind of moral liability with such a work of art.



From this perspective, it seems that Ethics and Aesthetics are poles apart in terms of theoretical and functional attitude, but morality and Aesthetics complement each other as an incomparable subsistence of human wisdom. All the moral behaviours are not expressions of beauty and not all the feelings of beauty inevitably lead to morality but, it is necessary to comprehend the fact that the vibrant components of art are able to flawlessly and distinctly elucidate the need for moral principles in one's life. Although our aesthetic wisdom is not compelled to analyse the ethical norms, still it can be considered as a way to understand the appropriateness of these moral rules. Many have thought by colouring the imagination with ethical vibes our aesthetic repercussions are capable of depicting morality; however, many thinkers have strongly opposed to this notion. We will discuss the relevance of Ethics in the domain of Aesthetics through a comparative discussion of some of these views in this section.

There has been a great dispute since the ancient times about the worth artistic expressions. Geek philosopher Plato indicated that our aesthetic experiences are completely devoid of any kind of factual knowledge, instead of providing truth, artists through their fictitious imaginary propensity deliberately wheedle people. This mundane world which is only a replication of the perpetual ideas is already imperfect. An artist only duplicates those incomplete constituents hence; according to Plato art is only a futile gesture of emulation. To illustrate this intention Plato in his Republic mentioned that- 'Therefore, imitation is surely far from the truth; and, as it seems, it is due to this that it produces everything because it lays hold of a certain small part of

each thing, and that part is itself only a phantom'.² With clear ambivalence towards artistic propensities Plato mentioned that, an individual who is profoundly infatuated with art, becomes indifferent towards the rest of the world and due to this asymmetrical feelings that exist in their minds they failed to properly comprehending the notion of morality. According to him artists are only driven by their blind emotions and passions, so, it is implausible for such self-indulged people to convey the real value of ethical norms through their work. Every artist expresses a surge of impetuous emotions through their art, which is similar to madness; hence Plato claims that such passionate individuals are unable to make the equitable choices, which evidently proves art to be irrelevant from the moral aspect.

We find the most important modern exposition of this query in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. Kant's view on Aesthetics is explained in the first part of his book "*Kritik der Urteilskraft*", translated as "Critique of Judgement". In Kant's explanation 'an aesthetic judgment is that which based on feelings and in particular on the feeling of pleasure or displeasure'. The most important and also interesting part of Kant's theory of Aesthetic judgment is his 'theory of judgments of beauty' and commentators are mostly concerned with this part. In the first section of the "Critique of Aesthetic Judgment" Kant distinguishes the judgments of beauty or judgments of taste from cognitive judgments. According to him, judgments of beauty are based on feelings, either on feelings of pleasure or feeling of displeasure. But this pleasure, for Kant, is disinterested in nature, where the term "disinterested" stands to mean that" - it does not depend on the subject's having a desire for the object nor does it generate such a desire". This peculiar characteristic of Aesthetic judgments distinguishes these from the judgments of the agreeable, i.e. judgments which expressed some sort of desire for some objects like food or drink or any other things.

Secondly, according to Kant, 'Judgments of beauty' have "universal communicability" meaning that when one makes a judgment seeing a beautiful object presented before him, he expects that whoever else will perceive the object, also judge the object as beautiful. Though, it should be borne in mind that this universality is not same "based on concepts". It means that though the judgments of beauty are

universal in character in one sense, yet these cannot be proved; since ‘beauty’ is not a predicate of an object as Kant puts “beauty is not a concept of the object”.

Thirdly, judgments of beauty are free or pure of any such interest. Interest is defined as a link to real desire and action and thus also to a determining connection to the real existence of the object. In the judgment of beauty, the real existence of the object is quite irrelevant, so these ‘do not presuppose any end or purpose’ According to Kant “Aesthetic judgment must concern itself only with form (shape, arrangement, rhythm, etc.), not sensible content (colour, tone etc.) since the later has a deep connection with the agreeable, and thus to interest”. This provides the main evidence in favour of Kant’s formalism in Aesthetics. The inter-connection between aesthetics and morality is a persistent theme of Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*. As Kant has admitted the universal validity of the judgment of beauty, the commentators argued that “the demand for universal validity made by a judgment of beauty amount to a moral demand so that Kant’s argument for the universal validity of such judgments depends on an appeal to morality.” If we go through the “Critique of Aesthetic Judgement”, we see that the interconnections between aesthetic and morality have been expressed in many ways. Aesthetic experience serves as preparatory ground for morality. “The beautiful prepares us to love something, without interest; the sublime, to esteem it, even contrary to our (sensible) interest”.

According to Kant, Beauty serves as the symbol of Morality; “*On Beauty as the symbol of Morality*”³ Aesthetic judgment stands in fundamental proximity to moral judgment and this is integral to human nature as they are moral agents. For Kant aesthetic judgments are objective and universal, as to say that certain objects are to be treated as beautiful for everyone. But here one may argue that in some cases, say for example, that of taste is absolutely subjective, since it varies depending on the class, cultural background, education of particular individual. Some researchers also argued that “all aesthetic judgments are culturally conditioned to some extent and can change over time”. I broadly agree with them and should like to add the point that it is a problem for us to make generalization regarding unification between aesthetic judgments.

According to Kant possession of rationality is the uniqueness of human being and being rational they have the sense of aesthetic interest, aesthetic experience. The faculty of Reason is the guiding principle of rational beings and reason had both the theoretical and practical applications. Kant argued that, “the guiding law of rational conduct is that of morality, enshrined in the Categorical Imperative, which enjoins us to act only on that maxim which we can at the same time will as a universal law”. In Kant’s philosophy “beauty is the symbol of morality”.

Many philosophers have attempted to explore the relation between Aesthetics and moral evaluations. They thought that Aesthetics and moral evaluations play the most vital role in shaping our social life but these two functions in the context specific ways. To speculate on the convergence between Ethics and Aesthetics we need to explain two extremely divergent ideologies, one of these views preaches that our aesthetic activities are not subordinate to any kind of moral compulsions. Art, that provides an impeccable aesthetic flavor to our senses should not be fettered with shackles of morality. The expression ‘Art for art’s sake’ came in existence when in 19th century French philosopher Victor Cousin formulated this slogan, which indicated that it is not necessary for art to consummate some higher purpose, the main objective of art should be the realization of sublime. According to this phrase art is not obligated to reflect any social, political or moral agendas, artistic exertions should be appreciated for their aesthetic affluence. For example, the color combinations, shapes or specific structures of an art object grasps our attention and fills our souls with an eternal bliss. Beautiful objects can move us only through its presence as it possess a certain intrinsic ability which embellishes the entire fabric of our imagination. So, the effectuation of certain objectives cannot be considered as the part of artistic wisdom. This particular doctrine which dis-articulates art from ethical liabilities is known as ‘Aestheticism.’ In support of this ideology Oscar Wild in the preface of his book ‘*The Picture of Dorian Gray*’ stated that “there is no such thing as a moral or immoral book. Books are well written, or badly written. That is all ...”⁴ these words reflect that he considered sheer joy to be the center of aesthetic observation.

Likewise, A.C. Bradley discussed that this particular phrase ‘Art for art’s sake’ exhibits that just as religion and culture, poetry may have an underlying

monumental value as it has the power to express great lessons and propagate commendable works, however its poetic value is not confined to fulfillment of all these purposes. To explicate the indubitable glory of poetry Bradley mentioned that "... this experience is an end in itself, is worth having on its own account, has an intrinsic value ...its poetic value is this intrinsic worth alone."⁵ According to Bradley, whenever a poet or the reader ascribes certain values on poetry it loses its natural form as every poetry is an expression of unrestrained contemplation. Poetic gestures are able to construct an exceptional, fictional world of glory which is not just a futile replica of this mundane world and to preserve the actual merit of poetry one has to participate in this realm of poetry. His observations on poetry ascertain that he believed autonomy and liberal observations to be the essence of every work of art.

British essayist Walter Pater in his book *'The studies in the History of Renaissance'* endorsed this concept and in the preface, he reminded us that there is no congruent universal formula to describe the notion of beauty. To appreciate the consciousness of beauty we need to discover the uniqueness of every object which is manifested through their quintessential forms. Pater's notion of beauty makes us realize that our tremulous wisps of passion are brightened by the artistic approaches; they evolve our dormant flux of desire and liberate our soul from the depths of infirmity. To corroborate the independence of our aesthetic wisdom Pater in the conclusion of this book stated that "... the poetic passion, the desire of beauty, the love of art for art's sake has most; for art comes to you professing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moment's sake."⁶ So, according to him art only enlivens our faded moments which are its soul objective.

On the other hand, English thinker Clive Bell has provided an extraordinary explanation of unrestrained beauty, he holds that it is not possible to examine an artistic activity in the same way in which the ordinary human actions are judged to be moral or a-moral. According to Bell, the internal structure of the ethical terms is complex and ambiguous, it is impossible to explain them through a certain definition. Although we can understand the transcendental notion of good, we cannot specify it as an object of the external world. Bell clarifies that the notion of good indicates a state of mind and from this aspect art can be considered as moral because

art stimulates our perception and provides unprecedented pleasures. Art as an intellectual process which enhances our introspective capacity, the mesmerizing enchantment of the aesthetic endeavors directly affects our minds and engenders in our hearts a stream of eternal joy. This joy symbolizes that goodness which is the main source of morality and art is considered to be an ethical activity as it transmits these benevolent feelings. To explicate the independent value of art Bell stated that "... the only relevant qualities in a work of art, judged as art, are artistic qualities: judged as a means to good, no other qualities are worth considering; for there are no qualities of greater moral value than artistic qualities, since there is no greater means to good than art."⁷ Arts influences our minds and shapes our imaginations, by uniting our scattered emotions. In this way some of the renounced critics of art have tried to disassociate art from morality but on the other hand some Western and Indian aesthetic thinkers have tried to explore the deep connection that exists between morality and art. It is true that art, the uninterrupted flow of consciousness, can never be explained by some inanimate ethical norms, but some basic responsibilities of art as a coherent human behavior must be acknowledge. To elucidate this concept British writer John Ruskin expounded that our artistic approaches should be able to gratify the spiritual, moral and objective requirements of human beings. It must be the primal goal of our every aesthetic exertion.⁸

Leo Tolstoy argued that art is a medium which is able to unite people irrespective of their diversities. He emphasized that art cannot be described as mere coruscation of external beauty, constructing pleasing objects or producing pleasure cannot be deemed as the sole purpose of art, it is not an exposition of dispersed emotions, art for Tolstoy is a combining force which can unite the whole human society. To express his observations Tolstoy in his book '*What is Art?*' stated that "Art, all art, has this characteristic, that it unites people. Every art causes those to whom the artist's feeling is transmitted to unite in soul with the artist, and also with all who receive the same impression."⁹ Art is a reflection of socially saturated human lives, so, it is impossible to disassociate art from our social existence. Some of the Indian aestheticians have also ascribed grave importance on art as a guiding principle of human life. Not only as an instrument to glorify our indolent movements, artworks as a medication which heals our spiritual and moral wounds. Bharat in his

'Nāṭyaśāstra' delineated the purpose of art in human life. He clarified that when *Devraj Indra* asked *Lord Brahma* to create something joyful which can be seen and heard at the same time, *Lord Brahma* at that time composed 'Nāṭyaśāstra' but, 'Nāṭyaśāstra' is not just a means of entertainment; it revives every delicate aspect of our lives. To illustrate how *Nāṭyaśāstra* can influence our worldly existence *Bharat* mentioned that,

धर्म्यमर्थ्यं यशस्यं च सोपदेशं ससंग्रहम् ।
 भविष्यतश्च लोकस्य सर्वकर्मानुदर्शकम् ॥ १४ ॥
 सर्वशास्त्रार्थसंपन्नं सर्वशिल्पप्रवर्तकम् ।
 नाट्याख्यं पञ्चमं वेदं सेतिहासं करोम्यहम् ॥ १५ ॥

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According to this verse 'Nāṭyaśāstra' enlightens the core objectives of our lives, it unravels the implicit ways to acquire the everlasting desires like virtue, wealth and glory. 'Nāṭyaśāstra' conveys some well-conceived advises which are uniquely depicted through the idiosyncratic manifestation of humanitarian emotions and actions. *Bharat*'s proclaimed that since 'Nāṭyaśāstra' can dismantle profound meanings of all scriptures, it must be considered as the precursor of all arts. From our daily needs to the stringent path of our eternal salvation, 'Nāṭyaśāstra' produces a quintessential meaning to exfoliate the uneven ages of our lives. In this way *Bharat* claims that our aesthetic experiences at its best is not just another theory which narrates the do's and don'ts of certain artistic practices. It is a synthesis of human imagination and emotions which can shape our life by encouraging the anthropocentric values. Many other Indian rhetoricians have supported this concept; one of them is *Bhāmaha* who in his *Kāvyālaṅkāra* said that -

धर्मार्थकाममोक्षेषु वैचक्षण्यं कलासु च ।
 प्रीतिं करोति कीर्तिं च साधुकाव्यनिबन्धनम् ॥ २ ॥

11

In this verse *Bhāmaha* also confirms that an excellent poetry can tie all the loose ends of our lives. Not only happiness and beauty but it also paves the way for pursuing virtue and wealth by elevating our consciousness to a new level. By exercising the art of poetry one can gain proficiency in all other arts which helps a

person to gain pleasure and reputation in his life. From the explanation of this verse, it may seem that art indoctrinates only the methods to attain the personal goals, but it is an incomplete picturization of artistic intelligence. Through rejuvenating the fragmented aspects of our lives art ameliorates our spiritual forces which strengthens our understanding of morality.

The concept of beauty and the notion of absolute good are the two inseparable aspects of the same entity and this perception of absolute good is the driving force of morality, which consolidates our faith in the admissibility of the ethical norms. Contemporary Indian philosopher Swami Vivekananda identified the concept of absolute beauty with this idea of ultimate good and truth. To comprehend Swami Vivekananda's reflections on Aesthetics we need to realize that as an *Advaita Vedantin* he considered the *Brahman* to be the sole Reality of this creation and this phenomenal world to be an illusion. He emphasized that *Brahman* who is the ultimate truth, symbolizes the absolute good and unbound beauty. According to him through the truth which exists in the art, the artists are able to gain the grace of the Supreme Being, when the artist comes to the brink of his pursuit; he becomes able to realize the ultimate beauty through self-realization. In support of his observation, he stated that the person who perceives a picture to discern its subtle beauty becomes more joyful than the seller of the picture as there is no barrier of profit and loss attached to him.¹² In the same way by overcoming all the obstacles of ignorance, a person becomes one with the Ultimate Good or Brahman. Art paves the way to enhance our internal abilities which enriches our moral attributes.

From the above discussion we can understand that, there is a difference of opinion between various Indian and western philosophers as whether the moral responsibilities of art exist at all. However, in an effort to maintain the uniqueness of art, those who have tried to detach art from morality, in many cases turned art into an insignificant fantasy, disassociated from the corporal existence of human beings. Aesthetics as the critical study of beauty can originate humanitarian values in us which lays a durable foundation for moral upliftment; it can restore the disintegrated social and ethical esteem. Aesthetic pleasure is a refined feeling of excellence and wonder and Ethics is described as a study which leads us to excellence by removing the veil of a-morality from our supreme self, but it is an extremely tenacious work to

perceive their underlying interdependence through their external details. Although it is usually imagined that moral influence suffocates artistic consciousness but the notion of ultimate good which is the central idea of morality, is presented by aesthetic efforts. We need to contemplate on how they collaborate with each other and to relate the aesthetic intelligence to ethical approaches we have to discover all the hidden traits that are engraved in artistic expressions.

III

Aesthetics and Ethics: Two Analogous Aspects of Human Wisdom

In this concluding section, we will try to find the latent attributes which accumulates the moral ethos with our aesthetic notion. As our aesthetic wisdom is enriched, we become aware of our surroundings and a healthy environment reflects our ethical sustainability. Social and moral harmony becomes fruitful when the person in society is entitled with a healthy mind. Aesthetic pleasure produces pellucid ripples of joy in our monotonous life which clears our vision of life. However, it is necessary to explain how our moral attitude comprises out of aesthetic intelligence. To point out the depth of relationship between Aesthetics and Ethics Joseph Brodsky says that “on the whole, every new aesthetic reality makes man’s ethical reality more precise, for aesthetics is the mother of ethics.”¹³ Brodsky analytically articulated his comments on this remarkable inter-relationship. To explain his observations through some arguments he stated that,

- “Mothers are valuable to their children when and because the relationship that exists between the mother and child provides the child with something of value.
- Aesthetics is the mother of ethics and does relate to it in a way that provides it with something of value.

Therefore, aesthetics is valuable to ethics.”¹⁴

In the light of these arguments what Brodsky wanted to state is that the lessons which are preached by a mother are always very valuable to the child. She prepares her child for the future with her care and affection, in the same way Aesthetics also provides some dynamic facts that can assist to properly establish moral principles in our society. Brodsky thus sought to discover the underlining link between Morality and Aesthetics, but there are some notions by which they become

valuable in our lives. The feeling of disinterestedness and the sense of universality are the values that are transmitted by artistic approaches and these values purify the notion of morality existent in the human mind. In recent times the modern society prefers material abundance to their moral development, the structure of our life is gradually crumbling due to the loss of moral trust. To reintegrate our ethical conviction, we have to take resort to a kind of selfless and holistic approach. Art can transmit some altruistic values in us, a glimpse of the sublime can unveil the obscure shadows of prejudices from our minds, which enables us to adopt a universal outlook.

Aesthetic delight is a feeling, in which there is no compulsion of desire, but it is important to understand, how our brain processes these feelings of pleasure and what kind of aesthetic pleasure can be acquired from artistic expression. We can clarify this aspect with the help of Neuro - Aesthetics. Human behavior is mainly navigated through our experience of pleasure. At the very beginning our pleasure - related activities were centralized around nourishment and cohabitation, but as we evolved the sensation of our pleasure expanded to more complicated inter-courses. The whole discourse of pleasure is handled by our nucleus accumbens and ventral striatum and opioids and cannabinoids are the chemical currencies in these nucleus structures which work together when we experience pleasure. The receptors are flooded whenever we get in touch with something pleasant. Generally, our pleasures are related to our desires. The chemical dopamine stimulates our striatum and influences us to fulfil these desires. When we perceive a thing of our liking, we start to gain pleasure from it and it becomes an object of our interest. To acquire these objects of our longing we begin to learn new strategies. However, not all the things, we desire can provide everlasting pleasure or a sensation of absolute bliss. In that case the neural structures such as the amygdala, the anterior cingulate cortex, the insula and the orbitofrontal cortex warn us about the upcoming unpleasant situations, and accordingly our functions are regulated by the prefrontal and as well as the parietal cortex. In this way we have learned to detach our feelings of pleasure from our cravings. We have to keep in mind that although in many cases our pleasure is followed by our blind desires but in the case of artistic pleasure it is an object of pure pleasure which is not governed by any kind of desire.¹⁵ Aesthetic activity provides us a kind of disinterested wisdom which can stimulate moral endeavours. Human being

as a self-indulged agent judges everything in terms of interest, but aesthetic intelligence removes the conservative conceptions from our mind and awakens the consciousness of the eternal unity.

It is already mentioned that Immanuel Kant explained that our conception of beauty should not involve any longing or desire. Kant portrays an overall impersonal form of beauty which can be considered as the base of conventional moral good. Our lives are plunged into misery due to the worldly allurements and dis-satisfactions; it is our conception of grace and beauty which steers our consciousness to a new horizon. The true perception of artistic notion propagates a sense of universality among us and this sense of disinterested beauty establishes the foundation of morality as the core quality of human life. Compassion, empathy, benevolence these basic traits of morality are vitalized by the impartial selfless feeling of aesthetic pleasure. Although some people think that our aesthetic expressions should never be bounded by moral chains but our moral involvement is indispensably related with our aesthetic senses. It is true that social repression incarcerates the spirit of art, however it is not possible to isolate art from the circle of human life. It cannot be denied that art plays an important role in stimulating human wisdom and encouraging social development. Through the transparent currents of thought aesthetic notion amplifies our dormant feelings of creativity and through this robust creative force we gain a universal outlook which removes all our mental parochiality and produces moral generosity.

To explain the nature of the universal feeling produced by our aesthetic passion, Indian rhetorician Avinavagupta explicated that when we watch a drama, the melodious songs and the remarkable acting mesmerizes us by removing all the worldly impurities from our minds. Our insight becomes blur because of all the mundane desires and affections which conceals the true nature of soul, that is pure bliss, but whenever we enjoy a spectacular dramatic presentation, our mind ignores all those futile and agitating emotions and becomes unblemished. Our mind discards the idea of specific time, place, environment etc. It only contemplates on a single aesthetic attitude which is cognized as the state of universalization (*sādhāraṇīkaraṇa*). Although not just drama, any kind of artistic representation can evoke this feeling in our mind. It is this conception of universalization which motivates us to realize the ultimate facts of our moral life. There are several concepts

which are not easily perceivable. Art helps us to realize these notions to our best. Such as the concept of peace is an abstract conception which is not easily accessible. One may use the word “peace” correctly or knows the theories regarding how to establish peace but actually attaining the feeling of peace is completely another experience. In 1949 Pablo Picasso painted ‘The Dove’ which was used by the Paris Peace Congress as a poster.



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This very picture originates a lenient and delightful feeling in our soul, which we cannot find only by examining the word ‘peace’ vividly. Art establishes a bridge between the sensation and the sentient being that facilitates our faculty of understanding to grasp the complex conception of our lives. People may exist, who are not even familiar with the word ‘peace’, but this very picture awakens a notion of mutual understanding among us by which they can realize the concept of peace. Art unites the society by conveying the essence of morality and empowers our inner capability to form a better world. Although it is not compulsory for an aesthetically sound person to be moral but to contemplate on the central notion of morality one needs to have an aesthetic over view. A famous artist can surely have self-conceited mentality; however it does not damage the intrinsic value of art.

Human being as an incomplete life-form always seeks perfection. They always try to grow into a superior being and art is another way of reaching that pinnacle of perfection. Realization of the true significance of art in our lives helps us to overcome all our weaknesses and expand our inner moral abilities. It is true that, the question of morality or immorality is not applicable for the content of every art but every artistic creativity helps us to transform ourselves to a higher being. Every aesthetic activity gives us an opportunity to reveal our prudence. Our sense of beauty gives rise to a certain notion of aesthetic knowledge which includes the conception of moral good. In this way by reinstating the basic pillars of our ethical life, our

aesthetic notion redefines the concept of morality. So, it is not possible for us to dis-articulate the moral facts from the Aesthetics as they are two inseparable aspects of human life.

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