

# PARTICIPATION AND PRODUCTION : A BRIEF NOTE ON THE PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACH TO ART

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## ***Abstract***

*The human mind is deeply engaged with the world around it. The cognitive and the contemplative are two related dimensions of this engagement. But there is another relationship in which man is not just a passive onlooker. Here he is a participant who seeks to create. This participation may be technical participation in which the main motive is domination over nature. In another form of participation the creative and aesthetic senses are domination and here man seeks to bring forth or elicit beauty. Human aesthetic sensibility has an apriori foundation and philosophers like Kant seek to analyse that apriori foundation. In art, as Heidegger pointed out, we find a creative preservation of truth. The truth that we find in art is not mere propositional truth. It is a truth connected with the revelation of a whole world and in a distinctive sense in a work of art truth establishes itself. Many works of art definitely contain moral messages as well. In Indian philosophy the aesthetic sensibility is connected with 'ananda' and this 'ananda' with its cosmic dimension has a moral implication as well.*

**Keywords:** *elicitation, establishment of truth, ananda, innate mental disposition, creative preservation, clearing, concealing.*

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

The desire to know and the desire to participate are the two profound motives that are behind our engagement with the universe around us. Aristotle in his *Metaphysics* wrote, "All men by nature desire to know. An indication of this is the delight we take in our senses; for even apart from their usefulness they are loved for themselves; and above all others the sense of sight. For not only with a view to action, but even when we are not going to do anything, we prefer seeing (one might say) to everything else"(Ed. Cooper, E. David and Fosl, S. Peter, 2010, p.590). In other words the cognitive relationship is one in which we are engaged with the world around us. Even when the need or desire to act is absent the desire to know is present. Here man is the onlooker, the dispassionate knower. In the second form man is a

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participant. He with his limited power seeks to create. This creation may be through the employment technology in which man exercises his power over nature through his scientific knowledge about the laws of the universe. The technological participation is guided by the Renaissance dictum, "Knowledge is power." The other form of participation is not connected with exercising control over the universe. It is connected with making or creating. Somehow man is endowed with an aesthetic sense. He perceives order and harmony in the universe and this perception produces in his mind a sense of beauty. This sense of beauty brings forth the creative spirit present in the human mind. It is an act of *elicitation* and the investigation of this process carries us beyond computational rationality. Man recognizes that the order and harmony that are perceived in the universe can be imitated and deriving clues from the perceived harmony man can go on to produce harmony using the materials that are in heart. The self confidence and the attendant creative urge is basically responsible for transforming man from the 'homo fabricator' to the 'homo creator.' This creation is basically here an artistic activity. In ancient India this creative artistic act of man was thought to be of divine nature. Without bringing in the idea of the other worldly divinity we can say that here we find a creativity that carries us beyond the dull confines of our everyday level of existence.

## II. METAPHYSICAL CATEGORIES AND THE IDEA OF BEAUTY

Interpretation of experience and analysis of concepts are two major philosophical activities. Interpretative and analytic tools and activities function generally within categorical frameworks. To construct categorical frameworks philosophers often pay attention to the social reality, powers and operations of the human mind and the linguistic framework within which human thought operates. Art and beauty were not generally placed in the centre of philosophical speculation and critical investigation. Philosophy's engagement with the social reality produced a form of contextualism and this contextualism made philosophers look for social and living contexts of artistic activity and the human attempt to produce beauty through creative acts. Socio – cultural basis of human artistic activity as a result came to be investigated.

What is the prior basis of human artistic sensibility? This question led to the philosophical psychological enquiry into the roots of human artistic sensibility and the human creative act. This investigation took an idealistic turn. Philosophers like Plotinus gave a mystical turn to the entire investigation. Referring to 'the beauties of the realm of sense, images and shadow – pictures' he wrote: "But there are earlier and loftier beauties than these. In the sense – bound life we are no longer granted to know them, but the soul, taking no help from the organs, sees and proclaims them. To the vision of these we must mount, leaving sense to its own place" (Ed. Hoefstadter, Albert and Kuhns, R ichard, 1976, p.144).

Kant employed his famous transcendental method to understand the nature of art. He recognized the cognitive and moral domains of the human mind and through employing the transcendental method investigated the foundations of the domains. The former resulted in his query into the theoretical domain and later in his query into the practical domain. But the aesthetic domain was recognized by Kant as a

distinct area of human experience. Kant stated that Nature, Freedom and Art are three areas and each area has its principles. Kant was not a relativist. He stated that judgments of beauty must be universally and necessarily valid for everybody and therefore they must be grounded in some universal principles. This is a very clear type of priorism and formalism. Kant stated that ‘beautiful art is the art of genius.’ He wrote, “Genius is the talent (or natural gift) which gives the rule to art. Since talent, as the innate productive faculty of the artist, belongs itself to nature, we may express the matter thus : Genius is the innate mental disposition (*ingenium*) through which nature gives the rule to art” (Ed. Hoefstadter, Albert and Kuhns, Richard, 1976, p.314).

Nature gives the rule(s) of art. But this rule of art is given through genius. Thus without a creator, an artist beauty cannot come into being and in the production of beauty certain apriori rules are operative and these rules are given by nature in the ultimate analysis. This Kant on the one hand stated that art has a universal and necessary foundation and on the other hand it has to come into being through the act of a genius in whom or through whom nature gives the universal laws. Kant investigated the faculties of the mind that constituted the (artistic) genius and stated that many factors are involved here. One is the spirit, which is ‘the animating principle of the mind’ (Ed. Hoefstadter, Albert and Kuhns, Richard, 1976, p.317). This principle is the faculty of presenting aesthetic ideas. By an aesthetic idea Kant understood “that representation of the imagination which occasions must thought, without however any definite thought, i.e. any *concept*, being capable of being adequate to it, it consequently cannot be completely compassed and made intelligible by language” (Ed. Hoefstadter, Albert and Kuhns, Richard, 1976, p.318). Kant was here touching the limit of language, which much later, in another way was reached by Wittgenstein. For Kant an aesthetic idea is the counterpart of a rational idea. Kant also discovered a parallelism between our judgment of the beautiful and our judgment of the morally good. Education of the moral feeling is necessary for the cultivation of the aesthetic taste. One can see here the root of Tolstoy’s quest for morality in art and his attempt to judge art in moral terms. Kant wrote, “... the true propaedeutic for the foundation of culture of the moral feeling, because it is only when sensibility is brought into agreement with this that genuine taste can assume a definite invariable form” (Ed. Hoefstadter, Albert and Kuhns, Richard, 1976, p.343). Production of, for Kant, is possible by genius and it is to genius operating as the faculty of aesthetic ideas, ‘the real foundation of human nature speaks to human feeling! In the imagination of the genius aesthetic ideas are provided. (Kant’s conception of imagination is complex and often full of apparent inconsistencies.)

### **III. ESTABLISHMENT OF TRUTHS**

The relation between art and truth is a major problem of the philosophy of art. Here we find the participation of the human mind and the production of truth at the same focal point. By participation we mean the engagement of the artist in the creative act and the engagement of the viewer in the act of appreciation. Truth here does not refer simply to the production of the observational process or the

ratiocinative process. It connected with the act of opening up to the heart and eliciting response by the discovery of something universal in the particular. Art does not simply function as an imitative mechanism. Symbolic acts are present here and these symbolic acts open up the universals and thereby reveal certain dimensions of truth.

Heidegger thought that in art truth actively establishes itself. The artist and the work of art are connected with the relation of reciprocity. Heidegger wrote, “The artist is the origin of the work. The work is the origin of the artist. Neither is without the other. In themselves and in their interrelations artist and work are each of them by virtue of a third thing which is prior to both, and namely that which also gives artist and work of art their names – art” (Ed. Hoefstadter, Albert and Kuhns, Richard, 1976, p.650).

In art we find what Heidegger calls the creative preservation of truth. Truth happens : it is always in the process of making and one way in which truth establishes itself is art. Art reveals truth. This point was explained by Heidegger with the help of an illustration. Heidegger took the example of a painting of Vincent van Gogh called ‘A Pair of Shoes.’ It was a painting of shoes, painted by Van Gogh in 1886. Van Gogh was fascinated by old shoes worn by peasants. He brought a pair of shoes in the flea market. His painting of shoes goes beyond just a physical object. Heidegger pointed out that this painting of a pair of peasant’s shoes opens up a vision of the world of the peasant. It reveals the whole of the world in which the peasant lived. The truth of the painting consists in this revelation. The artist enables the viewer to see some truth that would otherwise remain concealed or hidden. Here we encounter a specific form of truth. It is the truth of being and this truth of being is presented as a revelation. Truth here does not mean a narrow propositional form of truth dominated by the two truth – values of formal logic. Here truth refers to the revelation of an entire world which otherwise would have remained hidden from us. In the specific example under consideration the revelation is that of an entire world belonging to the life of a peasant. The artist and the viewer both are participants in the act of this establishment of truth. Through a revelatory act truth is established.

The act of artistic production is basically an act of bringing forth. The great Renaissance artist Michelangelo stated that in every block of marble a sculpture is lying hidden. The function of the artist is to bring it out. In a Sonnet addressed to Vittoria Clonna Michelangelo wrote,

“No block of marble but it does not hide  
the concept of living in the artists mind –  
pursuing it inside that form, he’ll guide

his hand to shape what reason has defined.” (Michelangelo, 2008, p.153).

So the artist, in this view, simply brings forth what is already present in a block of marble. The same can be said about, with little amendment, other forms of art. There is thus clearly, according to this view, an act of revealing in the creativity of the artist – something that is hidden is brought to focus, something which we may characterize as truth has been established. The artist pursues an idea. The idea is

transferred by him to the object. Through artistic creativity he creates something which is considered to be an embodiment of his idea. In so far as there is an idea, the idea has a universality. The produced object is within space and time. But the idea that it embodies goes beyond space and time and thereby opens up a universal dimension. It is the universality which serves as the locus of truth. The particular specific object of art but by space and time, historically, a singular creative impulse, ultimately becomes the receptacle of truth. This artistic truth, as we have noted, is propositional truth. By revealing a kind of world and totality of experience, it attains a universality and thereby expands our conception of truth. Our language of artistic appreciation crosses the limit of truth – functionality and turns out to be evocation. Most of the philosophical works on artistic creativity does not confine them to critical and descriptive language. Somehow the language becomes evocative. The evocative power of the artistic creation casts its spell upon the philosopher and often his / her language turns out to be evocative.

Heidegger, while explaining the nature of art, draws a distinction between clearing and concealing. There is an opposition between clearing and concealing. Truth is not found in clearing. Again truth is not found in concealing. Rather truth is to be found in establishment. Truth comes to being through the creative act of the artist and in this sense truth establishes itself in and through art. Artistic production and establishment of truth are therefore very closely related.

#### **IV. MORAL PARTICIPATION AND ART**

Throughout the entire history of art the close link between art and morality was recognized. Perhaps in the twentieth century a clear challenge has been thrown against this view. Some artists have even gone to the extent of declaring that no ‘proper’ art has anything to do with morality. Oscar Wilde had declared, “No artist has ethical sympathies”(Armstrong, John, 2001, p.135). The word ‘moral’ or ‘ethical’ has many senses. Definitely it is associated with evaluation by employing a standard and this standard is somehow connected with the idea of ‘good.’ No one can avoid the idea of ‘good.’ The only thing is that our ideas of good may mutually differ and we may not be prepared to argue out a proper conception of good. Many works of art definitely contain moral messages. It would be far from truth if we say that almost all great works of art have moral dimensions. In the Indian tradition art is connected with ‘ananda’ and this ‘ananda’ is of cosmic nature, having a clear moral message. It is the ‘ananda’ of our whole being in the harmonious relationship with the whole universe. This cosmic dimension is not bereft of moral considerations. The sense of tranquility or even the sense of turbulence evoked by great works of art has references to some moral dimensions. But someone must not think that his or her moral standard is the only moral standard. To condemn an artistic work simply because it fails to satisfy that moral standard is to take an one sided view of the case. Tolstoy thought that, “The universal infectiousness of true art stems from the religious feeling that is common to all humanity”(Tolstoy, Leo, 1994, p.XXI). In Indian logic it would be said that Tolstoy’s view here suffered from the fallacy of ekāntavāda.

## V. CONCLUSION

When an artist produces a work of art then it is an act of bringing something out. In this sense art is connected with revelation. It is opposed to concealment. The artist enables the viewer to contemplate and perceive truth which otherwise would have remained hidden. The artistic truth is not propositional truth. Great works of art can be condemned simply because it fails to carry a moral message. There is also the possibility of cultivation of the aesthetic taste. Of course there is an apriori foundation of our capacity for enjoying the beautiful. The aesthetic experience is perhaps a universal experience because of this apriori foundation present in our mental makeup. The production of a work of art by an artist and its enjoyment by the viewer requires a participation as well as an engagement. It is through this 'engagement' truth 'establishes' itself in a work of art.

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