

ART AND MORALITY- AN ANALYSIS ON THE DIVERGENT VIEWS OF THE NATURE AND RELATIONSHIP OF THEM.

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Abstract

Both art and morality arise from a sense of anticipation about perfection. Morality always tries to attain perfect behaviour in a changing pattern of life, while art tries to provide a world of ideal construction. Analysis of art and morality reveals that this smooth view about the relationship between art and morality is not a unquestioned one. History of art and morality witnessed number of sharp battles between the advocates of autonomy of art and the defenders of moral values.

One can identify a strong disagreement between art and morality from the time of Plato onwards. Plato did not give any place to the artist and the poet in his 'Republic' and the system of education. He is the first sensor of art on moral grounds and condemns the pleasure of being 'deceived' by art as childish and unworthy. But this condemnation towards art couldn't be prevalent for a long time. Aristotle's graceful comment on art clarified the tie up of art and morality explicitly. Through this reappraisal he invests in art the capacity to represent universal truth of life, and so also bring about catharsis and purification of art. This sort of strong disagreement towards art as morally void enterprises and its reappraisal can be observed in contemporary situations.

This paper intended to make a comprehensive analysis upon the wavering currents regarding the relationship between art and morality. This descriptive analysis tried to make clear the divergence stand points about the art and morality by the prominent figures and systems of philosophy.

Key words: Autonomy of art, 'Art for art's sake', Art as imitation of imitation, Catharsis, 'Artistic creativity is an end in morality'.

Introduction

Both art and morality arise from a sense of anticipation about perfection. Morality always tries to attain perfect behaviour in a changing pattern of life, while art tries an attempt to provide a world of ideal construction. In this sense art and morality are two conscious activities towards perfection. But these conscious activities do not represent same methods or ways.

Art represents an attempt to make an escape from imperfect environment while morality represents an attempt to rectify the imperfect situation. No doubt this is an important difference in the case of art and morality. They make conscious efforts which are divergent to each other for same end. Professor M. Hiriyanna observes this point of difference between art and morality "That is no doubt, so, but there is one important difference in the case of art and morality. They signify an attitude of absolute disinterestedness. They imply that one and the same end may be

pursued in two ways” (M. Hiriyanna, *Art and Experience*, P.55). This observation makes it clear that, art and morality always attempt to criticize the life situations, which are deficient and imperfect. But these criticisms have not possessed life abandonment nature, they are positive and accelerate the conscious activities, which help the purification of desires and instincts from selfishness. Thus, art and morality have the same end with diversified means.

This smooth view about the relationship between art and morality is not an unquestioned one. Analysis of art and morality reveals that there are two diametrically opposing standpoints regarding the relationship between art and morality. According to one standpoint, art is autonomous and free from moral rules and obligations- ‘art for art's sake view.’ The other standpoint highlights art as the best and strong instrument for the propagation of moral views. The history of art and morality witnessed number of sharp battles between the advocates of autonomy of art and the defenders of moral values.

We can identify a sharp disagreement between art and morality from the time of Plato onwards. Plato did not give any place to the artists and poets in Republic and the system of education. He is the first censor of art on the moral grounds and condemns the pleasure of being ‘deceived’ by art as childish and unworthy. Both Socrates and Plato held Homer is responsible for making the Athenians superstitious and worships of fake Gods. Plato was very critical of all art forms and very particular to poetry. He talked of poets as persons who are emotionally charged and possessed by ‘muse’ or some kind of madness and they did not know the meaning of what they said. His condemnation of art mainly rooted in his metaphysical theory -idealism in which the nature is reduced as appearance or just a copy of the real. The artist is further imitating this form in nature and committing the grave sin of taking us away from the real and plunges us in a meaningless world of imitation. Through these remarks, Plato claimed, "Art was thus not only an imitation but ‘imitation of imitation’ or ‘appearance’ of ‘appearance’ of the real" (Shyamala Gupta, *Art, Beauty and Creativity*, PP 230-31)

But this condemns towards art couldn’t be prevalent for long time. Aristotle disagreed with Plato about his viewpoint about art and artists. In “*The Poetics*,” he argued that the poetry was not exactly moral teaching but that it disposed the mind to consider moral problems as interesting. He said that in looking a play on stage, an audience could experience a catharsis of the emotions associated with real tragic events, without having to experience them as first-hand participants. According to Aristotle, the goal of art is not an imitation or emulation for its own sake but the representation of inner truths, complexities and emotional bonds of real of life. His theory of catharsis strongly recommends the capacity of art, which depicts the gains and pains of real life. "His theory of catharsis pinpoints the capacity of tragedy to move the spectators thoroughly and by arousing fear and sympathy for the suffering characters, it brings about a purging of his narrowness of mind and makes him learn to identify himself with the human misery in general" (Shyamala Gupta, *Art, Beauty and Creativity*, P. 239).

This change of approach to art is basically due to the change in the metaphysical theory of Aristotle. Aristotle's graceful comment on art clarified the tie up of art and morality explicitly. Through this reappraisal, he invests in art the capacity to represent universal truths of life and so also bring about catharsis and purification of heart. These reappraisals of morality in art make a far-reaching influence in the years to come in the European thinking.

This sort of strong condemns towards arts as morally void enterprises and its

reappraisal can be observed modern and contemporary situations. Comparison of aesthetics with ethics is a common trend among the modern philosophers. In his Critique of Pure Reason, Kant expressed his attitude towards the relation of art and morality. Kant observed that morality is an independent enterprise and does not depend on any condition; one must have the will to be moral and such a will universally there in every rational being. That is why we expect everyone to be morally good, but we do not expect everyone to be an artist. Moral life presupposes a theoretical knowledge, which can be improved by external influences. But an artistic enterprise need not be guided by a theoretical thinking instead of personal talents and creativity. In this respect, Kant argued that these two spheres are not comparable.

In contemporary scenario, reappraisal of morality in art can be seen in Leo Tolstoy's standpoint-art as communication of emotions. Tolstoy's portrayal of Levin's life in Anna Karenina highlights the necessary bond between art and morality. Through this portrayal of Levin, Tolstoy pictures that art must have a social and moral purpose, which can guide the humanity towards progress. Peter K. Machamer and George W. Roberts observe this point; "... Tolstoy's portrayal of Levin's life in Anna Karenina....all these works present and command to us an account of good life for man" (Peter K. Machamer and George W. Roberts, "Art and Morality" The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism Vol. 26. N. 4 1968 PP. 516). Tolstoy holds the view that art being the means of communication of the feelings and emotion of the artist bears a moral responsibility of communicating such feelings, which can maintain and enhance the moral health of the society.

Tolstoy's convictions about the bond between art and morality couldn't exist for a long as unquestionable. In 1896 George Santayana presented a view about the relation between art and morality in his book The Sense of Beauty. He tried to distinguish rational and moral values on the conviction that moral values are based on reason, knowledge and will while the aesthetical values are based on feelings. He defines beauty as objectified pleasures. Santayana writes, "we have now reached our definition of beauty, which in terms of our successive analysis and narrowing of the conception, in value positive, intrinsic and objectified. Or in less technical language, Beauty is pleasure regarded as the quality of the thing" (George Santayana, Sense of Beauty: Being the Outline of Aesthetic Theory p. 31) Here Santayana simply made a demarcation between art and morality and treated art as a means for 'objectified pleasure' or enjoyment.

G. E. Moore overlooked art morality dichotomy and criticized the super imposition of the instrumental nature of art as means to moral goal. And he stated the necessary bond between art and morality in a different manner. "Thinkers like G. E. Moore advocates aesthetic enjoyment as an intrinsic moral value and that shows that instead of being a means, artistic creativity is an end of morality" (Shyamala Gupta, Art, Beauty and Creativity, p. 332)

Conclusion

The analysis upon the wavering currents regarding relation between art and morality we can draw some observations about the subject matter.

Divergent views about the relation between art and morality can be summarized as

- Art is an autonomous enterprise and devoid of moral inclinations.
- Art has a deep inclination with morality, and it act as a strong instrument for moral propagation.

- Art has an intrinsic moral value; artistic creativity has an end of morality.

These divergent stand points are due to wavering conceptualization among the thinkers- one making much emphasis on art and another to morality. Based on the emphasis they make different attitudes. But the two attitudes are essentially the same- these two arise from a sense of anticipation about perfection.

References

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