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The Aesthetic Judgment and Its Criteria of Value

The moralist: "He wants to know what is good in what is good that makes it good; and the whole wretched difficulty is that one is forced to reply either that what is good in what is good makes the good in what is good good, or that it is, in fact, made good by things which are not in the least good at all."

William H. Gass, "The Case of the Obliging Stranger" (1957)

It seems to me that the aesthete is often faced with the same difficulties as the above-mentioned moralist. He also asks himself: what is beautiful in what is beautiful that makes it beautiful? And his answer to this question is sometimes tautologous—it is the *beautiful* in the beautiful that makes it beautiful, or he is forced to reply that it is, in fact, made beautiful by things which are not in the least beautiful. The question could be reformulated as the problem of the relation between the aesthetic judgment and the criteria of value on which it is based, and the logical character of these criteria.

Ever since the time of Socrates the quest for the essence or Form of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty has been regarded as the special field of the philosopher. The quest for the proper understanding of these notions has been long and tortuous and not altogether as barren as some modern thinkers who decry Metaphysics believe. Even if some of the problems of the philosopher have turned out to be pseudo-problems, and we no longer ask "What is Truth?" or "What is Beauty?" but rather "What do we accomplish in various contexts by saying "this is true" or "this is beautiful," we still continue our quest; but our method has become more down-to-earth and our object of inquiry more limited.

In this respect, Logic and Ethics have fared better than Aesthetics, probably because of their greater impact on practical thinking and on conduct. *Beauty* was the last of the three great terms to be brought down from its pinnacle, and even in our time idealist aestheticians like Croce, Carritt and Collingwood pursue their quest for the essential nature of Beauty or Art.

I shall pose our initial question in another way and shall probably arrive at different conclusions. I shall not look for a universal property, Beauty, common and peculiar to all those objects in which it supposedly inheres, nor shall I assert categorically (as do the naturalists) that 'beauty' is merely a shorthand term for a list of observable characteristics. I shall start from a concrete example of an aesthetic judgment and shall try to work out its implications, and shall, I hope, justify the assumption that it does fairly represent all judgments of its kind. My question, then, is: "*What makes any judgment an aesthetic one?*"

When I say: "'St. Agnes' Eve' is a beautiful poem" I am making an aesthetic judgment. How do I know? Let us suppose that my answer is: "Because it is a judgment about a poem, that is, a work of art, which is the special object of which any judgment is an aesthetic judgment." But then what kind of judgment is "This poem is written in Greek" and what kind of judgments are "This mountain is beautiful," "This child is beautiful," "This jet-airliner is beautiful," "This mathematical solution is beautiful," and so on? Here we surely have a non-aesthetic judgment on a poem, and judgments on non-aesthetic objects about which the *same* thing is said as was said about "St. Agnes' Eve"; judgments we should assume to be aesthetic, since the *same* word 'beautiful' is used. Nor need we assume that these are 'loose' or 'stretched' uses of the word. In all these cases 'beautiful' could clearly and unambiguously mean at least 'not ugly and not neutral in aesthetic appeal.' It is, therefore, *not* the special object of judgment by reference to which we can distinguish the aesthetic from other types of judgment.

If there is no special object of aesthetic judgment, perhaps there is a special quality or characteristic common to all the different objects of which aesthetic judgments are made; that characteristic in virtue of which they are called beautiful? But if we ask, "What is the common and peculiar feature possessed by a mountain, a child, an air-liner and a mathematical solution in virtue of which all are called 'beautiful,'" we find that there is no possible answer to such a question. They are called beautiful for possessing different features. The word 'beautiful' cannot serve either to summarize or to classify *these* features.

Then perhaps the differentia of the aesthetic judgment lies in the special kind of emotion which forms the ground of the judgment. I. A. Richards's theory seems to favor this account.¹ Perhaps when I say "'St. Agnes' Eve' is a beautiful poem" I simply assert: "Synaesthesia has occurred." But if this is the distinguishing feature of aesthetic judgments, 'synaesthesia' must be a suitable name for the very different emotions which, for example, a symphony, an epigram, and a gesture (all beautiful in their way) may cause us to experience; moreover, since the judgment that a poem is a bad poem is as typically aesthetic as its contrary, we should have to find a 'negative synaesthesia' to supplement this positive emotion-based account. And since the typical emotional result of great works of art, if it can indeed be isolated, seems to be paralleled by that produced sometimes by a mystical experience, not to say drugs, it would seem impossible to regard 'synaesthesia' *both* as a straightforward description of a certain range of emotional responses *and* as the distinguishing feature by reference to which aesthetic judgments are to be defined.

When in fact are we likely to have to distinguish a judgment as an aesthetic one? Surely when we have to justify it. When I say: "'St. Agnes' Eve' is a beautiful poem" and am asked "Why"?, I may answer: "Because it encourages young lovers to escape from home," it can logically be

retorted: "But you said it was *beautiful*, not that it would have a morally desirable effect."

If, however, my answer is: "'St. Agnes' Eve' is a beautiful poem because by means of his language the poet makes us feel and see or experience a special atmosphere, transports us to a certain time, a certain place, a certain season; because the old nurse, the beadsman, the maiden and her lover, as well as the background of the medieval castle against which they move, fit perfectly together, seem *perfectly right*; therefore, I call it a beautiful poem," then, although it is possible to disagree with the reasons given for my evaluation, one would concede, I think, that they are the *type of reasons or refer to the type of criteria* relevant to the *aesthetic judgment* and irrelevant to the moral, sociological, psychological and historical judgments which can also be passed on the poem. It is to be observed that the *type of reasons* offered for a judgment give often the best means of identifying the experience on which the judgment is grounded. These being my reasons for my judgment, it is plainly *aesthetic* and not moral satisfaction I derived from the poem.

If it is the type of reasons offered in explanation of a judgment of the type 'X is beautiful' that show it to be aesthetic, then Aesthetics becomes the clarification of "the principles on which we select the special set of criteria of value that are properly to be counted as relevant to aesthetic judgment or appraisal."² This is J. O. Urmson's view, and it might appear dry and prosaic when compared with the emotive language of many aestheticians, including Richards. But Urmson makes it clear that his account of the logical analysis of the aesthetic judgment must not be taken as excluding emotions as a necessary if not sufficient ground for the judgment (in a sense which allows us to say that if emotions are absent we can adjudge an object as 'aesthetically indifferent'), or as implying that our usual aesthetic judgments are, as a matter of fact, such a pure aesthetic type.³ We can and we do evaluate the same object from

many different points of view, very often in a single but complex judgment; and the type of reasons we adduce to support our judgments of an object is the best indication of the point or points of view from which we judge it.

If we can now take it that we know at least in principle how to distinguish an aesthetic judgment, we can go on to consider what my judgment meant. Does the judgment 'X is beautiful' mean no more than 'From the aesthetic point of view, X *appeals to me*'? Obviously it means more. The very fact that we formulate our aesthetic judgments by saying 'X is beautiful' and not 'X is beautiful *to me*' or 'X *appeals to me aesthetically*,' indicates that not purely personally valid standards of judgment are presupposed. What would constitute the *validity* of such standards is a difficult question, but is certainly not settled by their general acceptance. That there are or that there are not generally accepted standards is irrelevant to the propriety of a use of 'beautiful,' though general acceptance of such standards as between participants in a discussion is important for its (derivative) *informative* effect and for profitable discussion, instead of an interchange of claim and counterclaim which gets us nowhere.

This characteristic of presupposing without mentioning the use of generally valid descriptive criteria shows a use of the word 'beautiful' like a use of the word 'good' to be *evaluative* rather than purely descriptive. The descriptive function of such words is minimal; they are primarily used to do a different job from the descriptive one. Roughly speaking, to describe is primarily to classify as conveniently as possible for informative purposes. To evaluate is not primarily to aim at information. But evaluation, like description, is a job that can be properly or improperly done (as all linguistic jobs can).

The *criteria* by which a value-word like 'beautiful' or 'good' is being used can be set out as *descriptions* to be fulfilled by objects which are to be called 'beautiful' or 'good.' But these criteria may well differ for

different types of objects; they may therefore tell us what is meant by calling X beautiful (that, for example, it [being an apple] is red, round and shiny), but not what 'beautiful' means. We may say, perhaps, 'beautiful' means 'good from the aesthetic point of view,' or simply 'aesthetically good,' though there are uses of 'beautiful' that are more restricted than this, as is shown by our tendency to distinguish between, for example, the sublime, or the vividly expressive and the beautiful.

In any case to call an object 'aesthetically good' instead of 'beautiful' does not get us very far, since it is the replacement of a specifically aesthetic value-term by an even more general evaluative word. But though not enlightening when stated in general terms, this replacement helps perhaps by directing our attention to the relevant features of particular uses. For, only the *context of use* (the explanations or justifications offered) can tell us in any given use what jobs other than evaluative the words 'good' or 'beautiful' are doing there. Of evaluative jobs, only such contextual investigation can make clear which sort of evaluation is being done.

Thus "That man would be good" (for a model for 'Youth and Strength') would be *aesthetic*.

"That poem would be good" (for encouraging the men) would be *moral*.

"That was a good/beautiful stroke" (because it scored 4 runs) is probably a sporting evaluation, but if the reason given were "Because it was made effortlessly with a fine smooth movement and a perfect control and timing," it would be *aesthetic*.

In *The Principles of Art* R. G. Collingwood says: "The words 'beauty', 'beautiful', as actually used, have no aesthetic implication" . . . "We speak of things as beautiful, with no less frequency and no less accuracy, when their excellence is one that appeals only to our senses: a beautiful saddle of mutton or a beautiful claret."⁴ Now Collingwood's 'beautiful' mutton *may* not have had aesthetic appeal, though if it hadn't (e.g. if it

hadn't *looked* good as well as tasted good), it is not clear why it was beautiful rather than good; but the test whether a use of the word is aesthetic or not is neither the *class of objects* to which it is applied, nor the quality of the object, nor the special emotion evoked by it, but the *type of reasons* or criteria offered in explanation.

We notice that many judgments which enter into, or express, or are grounded on an aesthetic experience like reading a poem or looking at a painting, are not concerned with evaluation but are concerned with noticing and understanding the relevance of certain facts, observable or remembered. These would surely count as aesthetic judgments but not evaluations, and would be formulated as descriptions; but would constitute descriptions made *relevant to a final evaluative judgment* by reference to the general criteria on which the judgment depended; hence, their aesthetic character is again derived from the special type of evaluation to which they are relevant. Probably *most* of our comments on works of art (aesthetic remarks) are in forms that *combine* description and evaluation in a single predicate—balance, brilliance, masterly performance, rhythm, organic unity, academic, amateurish, imaginative, conformist, original, repetitive, stolid, hesitant, and so forth.

As I said before, the task of the aesthete is to try to find which, if any, are the relevant criteria of merit in the aesthetic judgment in general, and perhaps give some indication of the criteria proper to certain judgments in limited contexts. But to say that the aesthete must set down criteria of aesthetic merit does not mean that he must set down precise *defining characteristics* p, q, r, such that *any* object that has them must be graded accordingly. For, even if we can formulate our reasons for saying of a given object, "This is beautiful," it does not commit us to any generalized application of such reasons (as perhaps is the case with the ethical judgments). I might say "H. Moore's sculptures are made beautiful by the distortions he employs," where this is recognizably a *reason* for my judgment, yet it does not imply "Any work

employing distortions (or 'distortions involving holes through the middle') would be beautiful." Admittedly this leaves the question as to *how* it can be a reason for the above judgment unanswered. The solution must no doubt lie in the extraordinary complexity and precision of the complete grounds for any aesthetic judgment on any object; a salient feature may be picked out for notice as especially relevant to this view, but by itself it would probably be useless as a general criterion.

To sum up the above:

1. "X is beautiful" by itself never *entails* or *is entailed* by any special description, though in a loose sense it *implies* that there is some special description which fits X and which serves as the ground for its aesthetic assessment as beautiful.

2. The reasons for grading a given object X high aesthetically can be set out as *descriptions*.

3. But these descriptions cannot be generalized into generally applicable standards so that every object that exhibits them must, and no object that does not exhibit them may, be equally evaluated.

There are different criteria regulating our judgments that *Le Misanthrope* is good and that *King Lear* is good, although we evaluate both of them as good. Our emotional response to them is only *one* of our reasons for commending them, the one as being good comedy, the other as being good tragedy. And if we compare *Le Misanthrope* with *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as being good comedy, we must further subdivide our criteria so that we can commend the one for different features from those relevant in the case of the other.

If, then, there are no sets of precise and generally applicable criteria of what is beautiful, whence do we derive our standard of aesthetic value in tragedy, in comedy or in any other form of literature? Is it just something in fact public and commonly accepted, fixed and eternal, as we presuppose in expressing the impersonal form of an aesthetic judgment, or is it, on the contrary, for ever "suffering a sea-change," here

today and gone tomorrow, so that our use of this form is misleadingly impersonal? In the light of the history of art-appreciation we can see that neither the one nor the other is the case. Aesthetic, just like ethical criteria, are neither absolutely immutable nor continuously fluctuating. They have a *relative permanence*: at a certain time, at a certain stage of cultural and moral development, there are certain accepted criteria with reference to which moral conduct and works of art are judged. That does not mean that the *accepted* standards of judgment are necessarily the *right* standards. Every moral reformer and every innovator or genius in art sets out to change the existing ethical or aesthetic standards and to try to establish others in their place.

Let us take some examples from the history of art-criticism and art-appreciation which corroborate the foregoing. My examples come from the different fields of music, painting and poetry.

In the field of the aesthetics of music (and hence of music-criticism and appreciation), a revolutionary change began with Eduard Hanslick's book *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen* published in 1854. He was out to overthrow the emotive-content theory of music and to prove its autonomy as an art-form. It had, he declared, no meaning, no reference beyond itself; the only ideas music could express were musical ideas: "The theme of a musical composition is its proper content." And again: "In the art of music there is no content opposed to form, because music has no form over and above its content."⁵ In view of this revolutionary aesthetic it was natural for Hanslick to reject programme music or Wagner's musical imitation and representation of emotions, as aiming at quite the wrong features of musical merit. Whole bodies of music criticism now presuppose Hanslick's view, though it has never totally displaced its rival. To understand the descriptive force of evaluations of musical works, one must know which view of music and therefore which criteria they presuppose.

In the early twentieth century Clive Bell and Roger Fry brought about a similar revolution in the criticism and appreciation of painting, by the establishment of new standards of value. They rejected the view that the representative element was either important or relevant to the value of the painting; and they suggested that its value lay in the aesthetic emotion aroused by the contemplation of the spatial relations of plastic volumes. Art-critics, they held, should not be concerned with anything but “with lines and colours, their relations and quantities and qualities,”⁶ and in their own criticism of different paintings and painters, their actual critical judgments and evaluations were (explicitly or implicitly) made with reference to *these* standards.

To turn to another field—poetry. Just as Hanslick declared the autonomy of musical significance and Bell and Fry declared the autonomy of the significance of visual form, A. C. Bradley declared the autonomy of poetry. Poetry, he said, is for Poetry’s sake: “For its nature is to be not a part, nor yet a copy, of the real world . . . but to be a world by itself, independent, complete, autonomous; and to possess it fully you must enter that world, conform to its laws, and ignore for the time the beliefs, aims, and particular conditions which belong to you in the other world of reality.”⁷

The belief shared by these aestheticians is the autonomy of the world of art, the separateness of music, painting and poetry from the ordinary world. Their standard of aesthetic merit in music, painting, and poetry, was formal or non-representational, and their specific judgments on this or that piece of music, painting, or poetry, naturally presupposed these standards.

We see therefore that specific critical judgments are fully intelligible only if they derive from, and refer back to, certain critical standards. How do we acquire such standards? One answer might be that of B. C. Heyl: “They are working hypotheses or codified principles which critics

formulate as they study and appreciate works of art." These critical principles form "a specific frame of reference towards which specific judgments are directed."⁸

The view that we derive our standards from the study and appreciation of works of art gets the blessing of authority from Aristotle's procedure in the *Poetics*, where he was seeking to establish standards of judgment for tragedy for the first time. He insists that a work should be judged by artistic standards, which, in the case of tragedy, he derived empirically from a detailed study of past and current Greek plays. Aristotle's specific judgments on different tragedies are made by reference to these standards.

Yet, as is well known, these standards, or a mistaken view of them, were taken to be not empirically derived and applicable to one period but authoritative and applicable to all tragedy. In the neoclassical period of the seventeenth century (especially in France), critical judgments were of the form: does it or does it not conform to the principles of Aristotle and, in particular, does it or does it not conform to the famous unities of time, place and action? (the first two of which were, of course, mistakenly attributed to him).

At least at this period there *was* an accepted standard of judgment (in this case in tragedy), and the critical problem was to apply it in particular instances. But whether in fact this simplified the critical problem, whether critical judgments really operated in this way, rather than being first made directly and then so formulated so as to use the Aristotelian framework, is perhaps a questionable matter. In any case, since Aristotle's standards had been derived from Greek plays which could only have been written at that particular socio-political period of the Greek city-state, at that particular historical time, the attempt to uphold them as eternally valid, unless supplemented with a gift for stretching their application by interpretation, was doomed to failure. Revolution built up; other critical standards were perforce established

because new *types of tragedy* were being written. With the first performance of Victor Hugo's *Hernani* in 1830, the conflict between the Classicists and the Romantics was brought into the open. Although their controversy was ostensibly about the formal aspects of the drama, the adherence to the three unities hallowed by Aristotle's authority and the tradition of French Classical tragedy, the true controversy was much deeper: it was about the new content the Romantics were trying to express, and it was *this* that determined their new dramatic techniques.

In contrast to French dramatic literature, the Elizabethan dramatists do not seem to have been troubled by Aristotelian standards, perhaps for the simple reason that they were quite obviously writing different kinds of plays. As Lytton Strachey puts it, "Racine's tragedy of crisis is one of 'concentration' for which the unities are perfectly adapted; but the Elizabethan drama in general, and Shakespeare's in particular, is one of 'comprehension', of varied characters and complex plots, for which the unities simply will not do."⁹

In this sense, every genius in his work truly creates the standards by which his work and that of his followers is judged, by creating new forms, new techniques, new effects, and hence different kinds of excellence.

Was there a standard for a discussion-play until Shaw's plays? No. Was there a standard for the psychological drama until Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*? No. Was there a standard for a modern epic play until Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*? No. And in our own time were there standards for plays like Claudel's *Partage de Midi*, not to mention the plays of Ugo Betti, Osborne, Beckett? But now there *are* standards of excellence, established by these works, and our judgment of this or that play is usually not simply: "Is this a good or a bad play?" but: "Is this a good or a bad play *of its kind*?" And in adding 'of its kind' we implicitly refer to some standard, principle or criterion of a general *kind* of play by which we are judging this one. Thus when I say "This play is a good

one," I do not judge it according to some standard of 'goodness' in plays in general, valid for all plays everywhere, nor do I judge it as 'good' only according to my own private principles, valid only for me here and now. And in my discussion with others as to the merit of the play, I assume that they too base their judgments on some critical standards and not merely on their personal likes or dislikes as the sufficient criterion of 'good' and 'bad.'

Our aesthetic standards are primarily evaluative and derivatively descriptive. To say "X is beautiful" means "There *are* standards or reasons for grading X high aesthetically." Insofar as these standards are generally known and accepted, the judgment can be used descriptively as true or false. In the past, some aesthetic standards were regarded as universally valid (though extremely imprecise), that is, as objectively correct or incorrect. Often these were explained as directly depending on a specific philosophy (Plato, Aristotle, Hegel). These standards were usually believed to concern (perhaps indirectly) observable features of the *objects* judged. The view that standards are derived from and concern reportable effects on the person judging, though held in a much more subtle form by Hume and Kant, is in its crude form a characteristic of our own time. The shift of emphasis from the object to the subject, which began with the Romantic writers and critics, has gradually led to a denial of the necessity of any but a personally relevant standard in aesthetic judgment. A case in point is the history of the judgments passed on Leonardo's "La Gioconda" from Vasari to Freud.¹⁰ The reasons for regarding the painting as valuable or beautiful have been: First, its perfect resemblance to a live human being (Vasari); then, its incarnation of the eternally feminine (Theophile Gautier and Walter Pater saw in it the very symbol of mysterious womanhood); and lastly, its externalization of the artist's unconscious desires (Freud regarded it as the projection and sublimation of the painter's Oedipus complex). It is a remarkable fact that the painting is regarded as beautiful by all these

critics, although the standards they use (verisimilitude, adequate symbolization, embodiment of unconscious desires), differ so completely. It might indeed make one wonder whether we do not think up reasons to fit our judgments (as Kant claims), rather than *have reasons* that lead us to *make* our judgments. However, so far as logic goes, the fact that reasons are felt to be in place for calling the painting beautiful shows that the judgment "X is beautiful" presupposes the use of *some* standard, and in a loose sense it implies that there is some special description related to this use which fits X. Sometimes we can formulate our reasons why X is beautiful; at other times, we are unable to do so. The judgment "X is beautiful but I cannot say why" is not self-contradictory. But even if we *can* formulate the reasons for our judgment, this does not commit us to generalizing our judgments. This is perhaps the main difference between aesthetic and ethical value-judgments.¹¹

Our ethical and aesthetic standards or principles are neither universally and eternally valid nor wholly fluctuating and subjective. The aesthetic standards are derived from the particular objects, the works of art, in which laymen, critics, and artists find qualities which they value. These affect us both emotionally and intellectually, but our states of mind are not identifiable independently of the objects arousing them, nor are we directly evaluating our states of mind when we seem to be or when we are evaluating the objects. Thus "X has a beautiful structure, tone, design, representational content, development of themes, etc." clearly applies to the object, and not merely to one's states of mind.

If new arts arise in the future or the existent arts develop techniques for which there is only a minimal descriptive vocabulary (as in the case of abstract painting) and no criterion of judgment except personal like and dislike, some sort of critical standard or intelligible frame of reference will have to be established. Otherwise, we shall have to treat all works of this art as indeterminate in value and all judgments on them will be equally purely subjectively valid. This is already happening now.

If this is an accurate account of the logic of an aesthetic judgment, let us consider how we come to make such (logically) complex judgments.

Urmson in his analysis of 'good' as our most general value-term, has adopted the technical term 'grading-label' as being of general application and not so emotionally charged as our usual value-terms like 'good' or 'beautiful'.¹² He showed that in our everyday life there are many cases of physical grading (apples, cars, shoes), and in most of them our purpose is practical, that is, we place these objects in order of some practical merit, mostly of economic value. For illustration he chooses the case of apples, where the purpose of grading them is their marketing. For this purpose, the Ministry of Agriculture's formula for grading apples (i.e. their 'grading-labels' together with the "explicit criteria for their employment") must be accepted, because it provides the generally applied standards for a specific purpose (the marketing of apples), shared by all those concerned with the business. These are convenient, generally accepted standards directed at giving value-words a precise *descriptive* and, in this sense, *informative* content. If a retailer orders 'Extra Fancy' apples he knows very accurately what description of apples he will get from the producers.

Now in the case of ethical and aesthetic grading, the situation is far more complex. In ethical judgments, although primarily evaluative and not directed at information or description, our purpose in making them is still usually practical—to guide conduct in certain desired ways. But in aesthetic judgments the question why we make them at all is difficult to answer. We probably make them for various reasons in different situations; perhaps just an interest in evaluation, an exercise of discriminative appreciation; perhaps to express approval or disapproval to others; perhaps for encouragement or commendation or the reverse. But what is common to ethical and aesthetic judgments is :

1. The impossibility of an ultimate appeal to established authority.

2. The absence of generally accepted criteria.
3. The vagueness of the usual moral and aesthetic grading labels, e.g. 'kind,' 'graceful.'
4. The diversity of aims we have in assigning value to actions, to people, and to works of art.

Only when criteria are accepted can 'grading' words be used successfully, that is, can you know not only how I evaluate a given object but what I mean descriptively when I use these words of it, and only then can the question as to whether the criteria can be applied in a special situation or to a special object or feature of it be determinable in the way that an empirical question is.

But in aesthetics the very fact that our aesthetic judgments do not have an immediate practical purpose and effect permits different aesthetic criteria to be held by different people. Every new aesthete begins by setting up new criteria for the application of the same aesthetic value-terms like 'beautiful,' 'admirable,' 'impressive,' 'great.' Such criteria are, for instance, concerned with "significant form," "aesthetic emotion," "empathy," "synaesthesia," "symbolic equivalents," "socialist realism." Then every work of art which has or produces these significant forms, emotions, movements, organization of impulses, symbols, or characters presented in a socialist-realistic way (to a greater or lesser degree), is graded accordingly as beautiful, indifferent or bad. However, as we have noticed, aestheticians and critics, if they are to be of any help, must make their value-judgments first and then derive a criterion. Anything at all that Richards finds beautiful he can say produces synaesthesia in him; anything at all that Clive Bell feels to be beautiful he can find has significant form. But real disagreements about what is beautiful or is not beautiful are nearly always in terms of particular qualities of particular works of art whose universal relevance to

evaluation is not explicitly claimed, and not in terms of these vacuous general criteria.

To sum up the difficult question of the logical character of aesthetic standards: We found that an aesthetic judgment presupposes some standards as being valid for other judges, though not necessarily for other objects; that we must allow different criteria for different *kinds* of object, and even for different objects; that these criteria will not be universally and eternally valid for all objects (because they would then have to be formulated so vaguely as to be vacuous), sometimes not even more generally than for the *one* object judged; but they must in some sense be valid for everyone judging (or perhaps rather for everyone with a similar cultural background), and perhaps relevant for objects of a 'kind' (though this may only be definable *by reference to the one judged* ("plays like this one"); also that there are some criteria relevant to, and applicable only within, different *art-forms*, and within the *same* art-forms only to certain artists, genres, schools and cultures (e.g. we use different criteria for the appraisal of Egyptian and Greek sculpture).

It may be held that this presupposition is unjustified — that there are no standards which can be considered valid in any other sense than that the person using them in fact uses them, no doubt in virtue of his personal preferences. If this were true it would mean that by its logic the impersonal form of value-statements is always misapplied; is always misleading. This seems an unduly pessimistic position to adopt; it seems possible to agree that there are various standards for which good reasons can be offered which can for various art-forms and within various cultural groups be regarded as valid, and as properly presupposed by impersonal value-judgments in those fields.



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Notes

¹ C. K. Ogden, I. A. Richards, and J. Wood, *The Foundations of Aesthetics* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1921); I. A. Richards, *Principles of Literary Criticism* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1924).

² J. O. Urmson, "What Makes a Situation Aesthetic?" *The Aristotelian Society*, S.V. (1957): 83.

³ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁴ R. G. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947), 38-39.

⁵ Quoted by Susanne K. Langer in *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951), 237, 225.

⁶ Clive Bell, *Art* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1914), section 1, chap. 1.

⁷ A. C. Bradley, *Oxford Lectures on Poetry*, 2d ed. (London: Macmillan, 1909), 5.

⁸ B. C. Heyl, "Relativism Again," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 5 (1946): 54-61.

⁹ Lytton Strachey, *Landmarks in French Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955).

¹⁰ George Boas, *Wingless Pegasus: A Handbook for Critics* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1950), 211.

¹¹ Cf. Stuart Hampshire, "Logic and Appreciation," in *Aesthetics and Language*, ed. William Elton (Oxford: Blackwell, 1959), 161-69.

¹² J. O. Urmson, "On Grading," *Mind* LIX, no. 234 (1950): 145-69.