

AN OBJECTIVIST LOOKS AT THE CONCEPT OF AESTHETIC VALUE

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In order to save this paper from trivial redundancies — which go so often with brainracking about the meaning of general concepts — I propose to advance and defend three unwonted contentions.

The first one has to do with defining the specific flavour aesthetics add to the mixed pie of axiological concepts. The current answer, naming ‘beauty’ as the appropriate notion, has to be denounced as an unavailing and misleading stop-gap. I shall try and replace it by the far more substantial term of ‘exemplariness’, incorporating all shades of what may be meant by ‘beauty’, in different cultural surroundings, together with its signifying transcendence, which may be called ‘evocation’.

My second concern is with the widespread confusion between aesthetic qualities as attributes of public objects, and the hedonistic value of apprehending them. I feel often staggered by the careless substitution, in speech and writings, of aesthetic value-realizations in the fabric of concrete reality, by the psychological value of experiencing those realizations. I shall, therefore, pay some attention to the problem of how and when aesthetic qualities become realized in objects offered to perception or apperception — i.e. in factual properties of what may be apprehended. The process of experiencing such objective qualities may be adequate or inadequate to their aesthetic nature, without constituting nor determining their aesthetic excellence. The distinction I have in mind is concurrent with the difference between the objective nature of phenomena and the subjective activity of their being discerned and valued.

My last uncommon contention comes down to a shocking view

on the aesthetic value-concept as the last cause of all motivational processes and the ultimate legitimation of all other axiological issues. In other words : I conceive of aesthetics as a foundation-value, incorporating and controlling the domains of ethical, practical and theoretical strivings and results.

In virtue of its definition the concept of aesthetic value appears to be the only intransitive end-value, in view of which all non aesthetic values and their realizations are instrumental.

To put the problems thus evoked in a more concise wording, I propose to present them in the form of three challenging questions:

1. how specific and substantial may the concept of aesthetic value be construed;
2. how objective may aesthetic qualities prove to be,
3. how valuable is the aesthetic value ?

1.

1.1. To seek for the contents of any specific value implies a twofold decision : the first concerning the general meaning of 'value', the second defining the kinds of qualities by which that general meaning is supposed to become specified in the desired sense.

Considering the distinctive meanings of the act of valuing, the object of valuation and the adjective of being valuable, no much room is left for the notion of value as an independent noun and self-determined entity.

Still, it would be grossly unsound and misleading to accept the rash identification of 'value' with what is effectively valued, or with the act of valuing. Such an easy pragmatism leads to a double confusion: between contradictory definitions of 'value', as a result of contrasting valuing of the same objects, and between the psychological process of valuing and the reasons for any valuation. Nothing can be less satisfying than contending that, because of judging something to be true, 'truth' would be synonymous with the shaping of the judgements or with the state of things thus judged. Yet many a theory on the nature of the aesthetic value rests on such a confusing conception. So-called aesthetic empiricism is based on the contention that, what is sensuously enjoyed is therewith aesthetically valued and therefore aesthetically valuable, thus becoming 'an' aesthetic value. Such a telescoping of false assumptions must needs be shown up.

To begin with, one has to remember J. Dewey¹ and the

distinction he rightly made between enjoying (or liking) something and valuing that same object. The latter is constituted by an act of prizing that may or may not accompany the feelings of enjoyment without being identical with them nor even being necessarily caused by them. It is perfectly conceivable to enjoy some instance of pseudo-artistic *kitsch* without, for so much, aesthetically valuing it. Further, it would be utterly irrational to claim something valuable for no other reason than one's personal feelings of liking it or on the only ground of one's intuitive valuation. I call such a claim irrational because of its being grammatically construed in a transitive way — suggesting a reference to some property of the object called 'valuable' — yet expressing no other meaning than the feelings of liking or the act of prizing, which it is falsely supposed supporting or legitimating. But even when the expression 'x is valuable' does refer to definite properties of any object, it does not concur with the meaning of 'x is a value'. Such an identification would come down to the substitution of objects of valuing by the criterion of valuation. Yet, such a substitution is frequently carried through by representatives of different axiological tendencies.

The same author who, so ingenuously, pleaded for distinguishing feelings of liking or desiring from acts of prizing or valuing, proved impervious at making any distinction between values and properties or objects that ought to be qualified by them. He even affirmed with some force that : 'there is *not* such a thing as value which is not the value of some particular thing, event or situation'². From this fallacious starting-point preferentialists have induced that all values are dependent on the way particular objects are apprehended by particular valuing agents³, whereas contextualists have identified values with particular circumstances wherein such objects are presented and become apprehended⁴. And eventually, so-called finalists have considered values to be determined by what valuing agents are motivated by⁵.

All this amounts to reducing the notion of value to a mere description of what is considered valuable (or to what is effectively valued) by any particular agent in any definite context or as a result of any arbitrary motive. Thus, the notion of value vanishes into thin air, being absorbed by preferences or motivations that seem to be mere travesties or auxiliaries of enjoyment (or liking, or longing for) from which all valuation has been originally severed.

In order to escape from such a circular reasoning, there is but one alternative : to restore the notion of value in its essential,

functional role, by acknowledging it as the independent ground of all acts of valuing, i.e. : as the abstract entity to which all properties or objects, situations or events have to be put to the test, in order to become candidates for valuation. Contending that no value can exist independently from particular objects means overlooking the existence, in the mind of men, of general value-concepts on the strength of whose contents the properties of particular objects may prove valuable. Surely, no value can exist by itself in any non conceptual thing without losing its independence as a criterion. And besides, nothing valuable can be discerned in any such thing without some value-concept to which its factual properties may be shown to conform.

The functional role of the value-concept implies, of course, its being duly defined by a set of predicates to which factual properties of objects may be conformable. And such a definition ought to answer three requirements :

(i) the kinds of predicates, conferred to each of the value-concepts, should be sufficiently specific for directing the testing activities of the valuing agent towards a definite domain of valuation, as well as for delimiting the realm of qualities in view of which objects may become candidates for valuation;

(ii) the wording of the predicates has to be sufficiently explicit for allowing their translation into factual properties of concrete objects, in order to decide as to the degree of fulness with which the meaning of those predicates has been realized in such factual properties:

(iii) the number of predicates must be sufficiently large and their mutual diversity so variegated as to transcend any personal preferences or cultural dependencies of any valuing agent.

To sum up : a value concept's functional efficiency depends on its classificatory definiteness, its substantial pregnancy and its meta-cultural completeness.

Those requirements, in so far as the aesthetic value-concept is concerned, will be met in the following sections.

1.2. The most general concept of value, i.e. the concept of being valuable in whatever sense, would be universally extensive yet completely void. It would expand over all parts and objects of reality and refer to all modes of valuation, without denoting any classes of objects nor conferring any kind of qualities. So, it would exactly match G.E. Moore's notion of 'indefinable good'⁶. Thus, such a

general value-concept, for ideally conceivable as it may be, remains inoperative where definite states of the world and the identification of their respective qualities are concerned. In fact, it would remain a purely formal entity of thought, lacking any informational meaning.

In order to become applicable to definite issues and acquire any meaningful substance, it has to be broken into different classificatory concepts, among which the aesthetic value is one of the most prominent.

When questioning ourselves about the methods for breaking up the unsubstantial notion of indefinable good into distinctive notions of well-defined *kinds* of good, we find ourselves confronted with a fundamental alternative⁷. By a first attempt we could decide for predicating the concept of 'good' by classificatory terms that would be derived from mental dispositions, inherent in valuing agents when reflecting upon their modes of encounter with different aspects of reality. In that case, definite value-concepts would be defined by psychological or behavioural notions, such as 'the aesthetic attitude'. That's what is considered by adherents of a subjective axiology as the only stuff the aesthetic value is made of.

But then, of course, we should not in the least have considered kinds of qualities inherent in states of the world, but rather states of the mind, characteristic of conscious organisms — particularly human beings — when reacting on the world. And those states of the mind constitute a particular domain of reality, whose different instances do not belong to the realm of values, but offer, in their turn, objects for valuation. So, it won't do to define any kind of good by mutually distinguishing aesthetical, ethical, practical or theoretical attitudes, whose distinctive features remain to be valued in their own right.

We have therefore to decide in favour of the alternative method for predicating the concept of 'good'. It consists in applying classificatory terms derived from different kinds of effects, by which objects or their properties may affect men. On that footing a first distinction may be made between properties of objects that affect men by informing them about *what happens to be the case*, and those others by which men are led to conceive *what might become the case*.

By the latter kind of effects, factual properties of objects function as incentives for changing some or all states of the world. Thus the properties from which they result become valuable to the

extent to which they bring about the mental anticipation and/or the material realization of new reality. Let us call the concepts involved in grasping such dynamogenetic properties of whatever objects (including situations and events), the concepts of transcendence-values.

If and when objects are considered with a view on the putative results that might be obtained by activating their dynamogenetic properties, the concept involved is commonly called 'practical value'. Its factual realizations become valued in operational terms of efficiency and usefulness.

When, on the other hand, objects are apprehended in view of the decisions to be made and the efforts required in order to activate their dynamogenetic properties, then the concept concerned is currently named 'ethical value' — its factual realizations being valued in motivational terms of duty, propriety and commitment. So it appears that both transcendence-values mutually differ in that the practical value emanates from the object's properties of potentiality, whereas the ethical value depends on the object's properties of appealing to men's intentionality. Neither of them, however, has to do with properties which are inherent in extant states of the world.

All effects by which men are affected by objects, because of their being as they are, resort under the category of immanence-values, i.e. those value-concepts involved in grasping the qualities of 'what happens to be the case'. If and when objects are approached with a view on translating the properties they offer to men's apprehension into more or less abstract descriptions then the concept involved is usually called 'theoretical value', whose realizations become valued in propositional terms of truth or falsehood, rightness or wrongness.

When however, those objects become apprehended in view of acquiring intimate and direct knowledge of their phenomenal nature, offering insight into their exemplifying significance, then the concept involved is that of 'aesthetic value' — the factual realizations of which being valued in aperceptual terms of 'exemplariness'.

So, it becomes clear that both the immanence-values mutually differ in that the theoretical value is derived from the abstractive approach of the object's actuality, whereas the aesthetic value depends on the object's properties of aperceptive actuality.

1.3. Thus, the problem of the aesthetic value-concept's specificity may be answered in an unambiguous way. Because of the domain of aesthetics being concerned with properties of states of the world, considered with a view at their apperceptive actuality, and because of the concept of value functioning as a criterion for valuation, the notion of the aesthetic value may be defined as: 'the functional ground for determining qualities of apperceptive actuality'.

But then, for sure, one might well ask for a more substantial analysis of what is meant by 'apperceptive actuality' as well as for what might be those qualities which have been subsumed under the general term of 'exemplariness'.

The notion of 'apperceptive actuality', in the way I am using it, embraces a fairly, large amount of different kinds of objects. It surely has to do with all concrete phenomena. But it also comprises representations of abstract entities, so as numbers, ratios and geometrical figures, next to general ideas and intellectual processes (thoughts and reasonings), as well as emotional conditions and processes (moods and feelings).

The extension over the domain of intellectual structures accounts for a twofold aspect of aesthetics, so as it is commonly understood. First, its application by mathematicians, logicians and metaphysicians for indicating the 'elegance' of an equation, the 'coherence' of a theorem or the 'pregnancy' of a worldview. In that way they confer to their intellectual achievements the status of candidates for aesthetic valuation. Further, it reflects the importance, accorded by artists and other aesthetically interested people, to the patterns of organization, i.e. the formal shape, of all sensuously perceived objects, apart from their material properties, in the strict sense. The concomitant extension of aesthetics over the realm of moods and feelings may be understood from a double point of view: (i) because of all affective conditions and processes displaying similar formal shapes and developmental patterns as observed in the matter of thoughts and reasonings; (ii) because of moods and feelings functioning as 'intentional properties' or 'tertiary properties'⁸, inherent in many a category of material objects — from artworks down (or up) to other artefacts and even to natural phenomena — assuring their expressive effects. However, in incorporating intellectual and affective entities into the field of objects whose apperceptive actuality may give rise to realizations of the aesthetic value, it has to be emphasized that this only obtains

where those entities become 'public objects' — e.g. by being worded or shown in visual or auditive forms. Indeed, the notion of 'apperceptive actuality' supposes sensuously perceptible instances, in order to display such factual properties as may prove to offer aesthetically valuable qualities.

This exigency follows from the nature of aesthetics being concerned with phenomenal appearances, so as they manifest themselves in the outer world, in the fabric of sensuous reality, in objective states of the universe.

For the same reason, pure mental images, whether of creative imagination or of personal recollection, should not be considered, in their psychological intimacy, as realizations of any aesthetic quality — for practically valuable as they may prove for elaborating aesthetic objects, such as mathematical, philosophical or artistic constructions. No thoughts nor feelings, no imaginings nor recollections offer, in themselves, any phenomenal features that might be either materially exemplar or evocative.

The definition of aesthetics, whether in its ancient meaning of 'aisthesis' or in the modern sense of 'what shows itself in its exemplariness' implies for any valuation to be concerned with exemplar things, and not merely with thoughts about, recollections of or feelings towards such things.

It seems, therefore, appropriate to avoid misleading locutions such as 'nourishing beautiful thoughts or feelings' or 'having in mind aesthetical imaginings or recollections' but instead to speak of 'thoughts or feelings that may be beautifully *expressed*' or 'imaginings or recollections of aesthetic *things*'.

1.4. But, just as I said earlier, the term 'beauty' seems inappropriate for expressing the aesthetic value-concept's full meaning. Not only, it proves too narrow a notion for encompassing the apperceptive qualities inherent in tertiary properties (i.e. qualities of evocation) but besides it has become to one-sidedly connoted with specifically western preferences for harmonious configurations of sensuously gratifying materials

In order to conceive of the aesthetic value-concept in its full extensiveness and cross-cultural adequacy, one has to construe its contents in a far more variegated way, as far as the factual data of apperceptive actuality are concerned, whereas its value-principle of 'exemplariness' should be duly explained and legitimated. The latter issue will be discussed in the second part of this paper, the problem

of what 'exemplariness' consists in being bound up with the question of how objective aesthetic qualities may prove to be. Let us first consider more closely the domain of facts the predicates of the aesthetic value-concept may be applied upon.

A primarily and fundamental distinction has to be introduced between the aesthetic value-concept's predicates related to factual data offered to blank perception and others that refer to properties which are susceptible of intentional apperception. These categories amount to the difference between so-called secondary and tertiary qualities, i.e. to the superimposed layers of texture and signification.

The notion of 'blank perception' is meant to indicate the exclusive absorption in 'material actuality'. That term should be understood in its broadest sense, including formal and kinetic aspects, next to the more literal meaning of materiality, denoting properties of mass and density, shades and colours, gradations of luminosity and tactile qualities.

Together, these predicates should encompass all humanly perceptible properties that might present themselves to any observing agent. As an extremely numerous yet finite set of descriptive terms they should denote and define all possible combinations of material ingredients and compositional patterns inherent in all parts and objects of publicly observable states of the world. They should not only account for the static effects of phenomenal identity but also for the processual properties of happening events. They not only concern so-called surface-properties, such as brightness or smoothness, but inferred constitutive properties such as solidity or fragility as well. And, more important still, the set of predicates concerned with material actuality has to be structured in a multi-levelled way, so as to allow for distinguishing indivisible parts or simple aspects from compound ensembles and interacting aspects — each of those levels constituting aesthetically valuable matters in their own right.

It is easy to see, from this first and very partial approach of the aesthetic value-concept's extensiveness, how immens the field of qualities, inherent in actual reality proves to be, and, hence, how huge the task of accounting for that concept's substance in its perfect completeness.

It is therefore obvious that the aesthetic value could not reasonably be considered as a mere embellishment of anybody's personal life, nor as the arbitrary and frivolous topic of individual preferences. It cannot even be fully elaborated on the basis of the only views and conceptions of any particular civilization. In

embraces and surpasses each and all of the separate cultural conceptions of taste and sensuous enjoyment. From the earliest evolvment of human interest in the properties and shape of apprehensible reality, throughout the entire evolution of man's interaction with his perceptual environment, the aesthetic value gradually unfolds itself in its innumerable facets. Each of our areas of living, all contexts and circumstances we find ourselves confronted with, and every phase of our individual and collective development add to the discovery of still new and striking aspects and modes of aesthetic qualities.

And so it becomes abundantly clear that the full extensiveness of the aesthetic value, i.e. the elaboration of its completely predicated concept, is a matter of historical expansion, ceaselessly growing with the growth of human alertness towards the immens variety of the world's phenomena in their manifold appearances. Nobody will ever attain the perfect comprehension of the total contents of the aesthetic concept; yet all of us may become able to conceiving or exploring some of the heretofore unobserved shades of aesthetic qualities.

1.5. An equally wide extensiveness of the aesthetic concept follows from its being concerned with properties of intentional apperception. Therewith is meant the detection of reality's signifying actuality. That term covers all modes of evocation, inherent in whatever objects. At a first level it has to do with the material properties of any instances of perception revealing the shape and identity of concrete objects and events, whether natural phenomena or artefacts, particular things or complex situations, static items or processual occurrences.

So, a definite instance of material actuality, such as a multitude of lines, combined with scattered dashes of greenness may reveal itself, at the level of denotation — the first mode of signifying actuality — as a tree. Both aspects of the object's actuality lead to different aesthetic qualities, as may be ascertained when comparing the geometrical and coloristic properties of lines and dashes of greenness with the shape and identity of a tree.

Yet, this level of denotation is but the modest threshold of the towering construction, built by the further modes of intentional apperception : the level of description, by which lines and dashes of greenness on a canvas may become the representation of a tree, next to the level of symbolization by which the representation

becomes an instance of expression (in an intellectual or in an emotional sense, dependent on its tertiary properties stylistically tending towards emblematic formalism or towards pathetic expressionism).

Finally, the signifying actuality of men-made objects may extend to matters by which realizations of non aesthetic values become integrated in aesthetic objects. Let us call that the level of value-evocation. This may result in the aesthetic presentation of practical, ethical or theoretical qualities by means of descriptive and/or expressive properties.

These abstract considerations may be illustrated by some obvious examples. Consider some piece of furniture, such as a chair or a stool. With a view at its denotational properties it may seem either trivial or exemplar, i.e. aesthetically neutral or valuable, whereas from a practical standpoint it may prove more or less comfortable, i.e. realizing to some extent the practical value of usefulness. However, when visually apprehending the chair, without testing it by bodily experience, one might gather, from its properties of design and material make, the impression of a well-defined comfortableness. In that way, the aesthetic dimension of signifying actuality extends over the subject-matter of the practical value : usefulness (in the sense of comfort) is made apperceptible, i.e. a predicate of the practical value-concept becomes integrated in the aesthetic field of evocation.

Needless to say, that the degree of realization of the practical quality of comfort and the degree of realization of the aesthetic quality of *evoking* comfort, are mutually independent : any chair may evoke a high degree of comfort and prove utterly uneasy to sit upon, or vice versa.

Besides, many a literary work contains descriptive statements wherein predicates of the theoretical value, so as truth or rightness, may become realized in a particularly evocative way. In such cases, descriptive and expressive properties of the literary text concur in conferring to the theoretical value-realization a supplementary quality : that of imbuing the abstractive actuality (rendered by the propositional form of the statement) with the sensuous properties of apperceptive actuality. But, of course the epistemological and the aesthetic value-realizations, for blended as they may become at the level of literary composition, keep their mutual autonomy inasmuch as their respective degree of excellence with regard to different axiological domains is concerned

So, extremely seducing descriptions may refer to fictional topics or truly fantastic matters. In that case the theoretical value becomes entirely subjected to the aesthetic power of imaginary evocation. Within such a literary context, truth or falsehood function as vassalized auxiliaries to the purely aesthetic quality of exposing the nature of alternative reality.

Similar examples may be produced with reference to the integration of ethical qualities in the domain of aesthetic evocation, so as the description of heroic deeds or the emotional expression of conflicting motivations, in ancient and modern tragedies alike. Thus, the aesthetic domain of signifying actuality incorporates the subject-matter of ethics, without, for so much, realizing any ethical quality. Actors, impersonating heroes, representing the performance of self-sacrificing actions or expressing the torment of moral conflicts, may be cowards in daily life, refusing for themselves all perilous motivations and avoiding any troublesome deliberation.

Such a dualism between aesthetically *showing* the psychological qualities of ethical volitions, and realizing ethical qualities in their own right, does not prevent aesthetics from proving the privileged field from where the entire axiological panorama may be overlooked, and within which the emotional dynamism of all categories of value-realizations may be experienced.

2.

2.1. Now we have still to explain ourselves about what makes mere factual properties into realizations of aesthetic qualities. Throughout the history of aesthetics and within the debate between champions and adverseries of objectivism in matters of aesthetic value-realizations, the former have been hampered in the advocacy of their views by two kinds of reasons : (i) the apparent impossibility for transcending particular cultural dependencies when defining the nature of aesthetic qualities; (ii) the obvious necessity for appealing to any observer's personal disposition in order to make aesthetic qualities of factual properties effective.

I now propose to tackle these problems. I shall try and overcome both obstacles by introducing the terms of 'exemplariness' and of 'self-unsealment' of reality; the former as a subsuming notion for indicating any factual property's aesthetic substance, independently of whatever cultural standard; the latter as a characteristic effect of states of the world by which aesthetic

qualities become inherent in factual properties, independently of any observer being apt or disposed for discerning them.

Let us first consider briefly how the question of defining the aesthetically valuable instances among the manifold kinds of factual properties has been answered, and why all efforts to arrive at a universally acceptable solution in those matters have hitherto collapsed. In western tradition three main attitudes towards the nature of aesthetic excellence may be distinguished. They are respectively based on idolizing beauty, markedness or newness as the last principle for aesthetic valuation. In art criticism these conceptions have become known as basic notions for classifying artistic products into classic, expressionist and experimental (or avant-garde) tendencies.

Each of these views is grounded on a definite selection of particular classes of factual properties which are then claimed warrants for aesthetic excellence, with the exclusion or rejection of their contrasting or negating counterparts.

To the advocates of classicism the notion of aesthetic value becomes realized in sensual materials, harmonious forms, so-called 'noble' subjects (with regard to denotational evocation), idealized stylization (concerning descriptive evocation) and sublime thoughts or lofty feelings (in matters of expressive evocation).

The adherents of expressionism take the opposite stand by considering rough materials, unbalanced forms, trivial or repelling subjects, so-called deforming descriptions and shocking expression to embody true aesthetic qualities.

As to counsels for the avant-garde, they swear by nothing but the unexpected, the alien or the unusual and, hence, by the effect of surprising. Thus it appears that for each of these tendencies, aesthetic qualities become determined by non aesthetic principles : manifest sensuous hedonism and mental exaltation with supporters of 'beauty'; ideological devotion to social indignation and/or to a pessimistic worldview with expressionists; informational density or complexity with the upholders of experimental art.

In fact, what proves objectionable with such kinds of objectivism is their common substitution of aesthetics by ethics : aesthetics governed by optimistic eudemonism with the priests of beauty; aesthetics subjected to the ethics of revolt and pessimism with expressionists and the ethics of sheer action and blind renovation with the supporters of newness at any price.

However, this does not mean that the apperceptive properties,

advanced by either of the former two of these tendencies as dominant aesthetic qualities, would not duly contribute to the realization of the aesthetic value. Any reasonable critic of classic and expressionist conceptions has to acknowledge the fact that the material and signifying qualities those conceptions recommend, cover, indeed, substantial parts of the domain of aesthetics. The flaw they are suffering from, results from their explicit or tacitly inferred exclusivism. The attitude of selection, by which particular components of the aesthetic value-concept (or particular fractions of apperceptive reality) are exalted as the only true and completely exhaustive realizations of the aesthetic value — this attitude brings about a failure to grasping the universal extensiveness of aesthetics.

By narrowing down the total field of aesthetic qualities to some of its sections, any ground for the autonomous foundation of the aesthetic value oozes away. Because no evident reason for the sole election of either classical beauty or expressionist markedness can be forwarded in terms of intrinsic, apperceptive excellence, any grounding of such a mutilating election must be underpinned by some non aesthetic value-principle. And in order to silence protests against such a defection from aesthetic independency it is no wonder that an appeal is made to a thoroughly prescriptive and ideologically enrapturing principle, such as ethical exaltation or social indignation. The defects of the third tendency, that of idolizing newness as the universal concept by which the whole of the aesthetic value would be warranted, are of a rather different nature.

On the face of it this theory looks as if presenting some advantage, compared by the foregoing, stylistic conceptions, because of its refusal to limit realizations of the aesthetic value to some definite kinds of material or signifying properties. Instead, promoters of the idea of newness as the general principle of aesthetic value, accept instances of all categories of factual data — whether sensual or rough materials, harmonious or unbalanced forms, noble or repelling subjects, idealized or deforming descriptions and sublime next to shocking expressions — if only they present hitherto unknown, unusual or unobserved features to such an extent that no former items of the same class might contain similar information. Because of its breaking through any definite selection of kinds of apperceptive qualities, this tendency seems to answer the requirement of cross-cultural completeness, advanced as a necessary condition for establishing any value-concept's universal validity.

However, by a closer examination, the defects of these theory

prove to be even more serious than those of the preceding ones. It appears, indeed, that, if newness becomes accepted as the necessary and sufficient ground for the aesthetic value in its full extensiveness, then we would be committed to deny any aesthetic quality to well-known objects we are used to be confronted with. Not only would such an inference seem hardly acceptable from the point of view of current experience, but, far from overcoming axiological subjectivism, it would, to the contrary, betray the very principle of aesthetic objectivism. It supposes, indeed, the substitution of intrinsic qualities by ephemeral relations between any object's date and place of origin and the informational condition of particular, apperceiving agents.

In the specific realm of music theory, such a relational conception has been differently justified by presenting either the effect of surprising (caused by any newness)⁹ or the more general effect of interestingness¹⁰ as the true object of all aesthetically valuable realizations. In that way we should be compelled to acknowledge the evanescent character of any aesthetic quality, conferred to any factual property. No recurrent natural phenomenon nor any artistic product of the past would retain any aesthetic excellence, once it has been duly integrated into the personal or collective memory of conscious and reflecting organisms. What's more : no predicate, denoting any substantial feature of material or signifying actuality, could be conferred to the aesthetic value-concept. The latter would become as void of intrinsic qualities as Moore's 'indefinable good'. And no realizations of the aesthetic value could retain that status for any appreciable lapse of time — although one author¹⁰ has tried to overcome this objection by contending that any property which has ever been truly 'new' may continue to provoke 'a sense of wonder' by reminding us of its erstwhile newness. This, however, seems a poor sophism, not only because of its substituting any intrinsic, aesthetic quality by the experience of surprising or interestingness with the apperceiving agent, but also by trucking such actual experience for its shallow recollection. Moreover, it is a well-known fact that many an aesthetic object which was originally full of new and unexpected features, becomes utterly boring, once its former newness becomes recognized as a *former* one. In fact, where psychological effects are concerned, 'a sense of wonder' becomes not so much revived by any passed newness reminded of, but more so by substantial properties whose aesthetic quality proves to be genuine, so as to exert a lasting impact on man.

2.2. The inadequacy of the foregoing methods for embracing the total field of the aesthetic value results from their respective selection of definite categories of aesthetic qualities, inherent in particular kinds of factual properties. In order to overcome such partial views on the aesthetic value, one has to replace the categorial approach by the introduction of a unique valuing principle, applicable to all aesthetic qualities, realized in whatever kinds of factual properties. Indeed, the exclusion of some kinds of properties from the set of candidates for aesthetic valuation (or, in contrast, the exclusive election of some definite kinds of properties as the only candidates therefore) deprives that valuation of any universal applicability. And, concomitant therewith, any restriction of the set of predicates, conferred to the aesthetic value-concept, to some categories of apperceptive qualities only, impedes that concept's meta-cultural completeness.

The unique valuing principle I have in mind, should be situated at a sufficient level of abstraction for transcending any particular, material substance, so as to cover the full extensiveness of apperceptive actuality.

Moreover, it has to present a satisfying ground for distinguishing between public objects that are valuable because of their apperceptive properties and those that offer merely trivial instances of the same kinds of properties. In order to meet those requirements, one might feel tempted to throw in the radical notion of 'perfection': all factual properties, conforming to some predicate of the aesthetic value-concept *in a perfect way*, would therefore become aesthetically valuable. And, viewed the other way around, all predicates of the aesthetic value-concept, preceded by that same notion would therewith express the only valuing purport of that concept's various aspects.

But, of course, the introduction of so radical a notion would be highly inconvenient, because it would commit us to the only distinction between fully valuable and completely valueless properties or objects, without any possibility for graduating their respective excellence or for comparing their mutual degree of aesthetic value-realization. Objects could merely be said to offer the full realization of smoothness or roughness or of any mode of descriptive or expressive evocation — or to lack any such qualities altogether. That would go against all facts of apperceptive actuality which offer a good many degrees of aesthetic excellence among different instances of the same kinds of objects and properties.

I, therefore, prefer the notion of 'exemplariness', indicating that, in order to become aesthetically valuable, any instances of smoothness or roughness (or whatever aesthetic quality) should offer, to a mutually different extent, 'examples' of the very nature of the particular kind or type of sensuous or psychological quality, expressed by the corresponding predicate.

The fact that factual properties may contain aesthetic qualities resides in their being exemplary for showing the true character of the classes of properties to which they belong. They may convey intimately 'felt' knowledge of what is expressed by the ideas to which the corresponding predicates refer; they show how smooth or rough the quality of smoothness or roughness may be; they display the unique identity of denoted or represented objects, or the striking shape of definite thoughts and feelings; they reveal the glint of joy and the gloom of sadness; in short : they disclose the intrinsic quality of all states of the world, the sense and moment of all parts and modes of apperceptive reality.

It is by exhibiting, to a definite degree of exemplariness, their apperceptive actuality's material or signifying specificity, that factual properties become aesthetic value-properties, i.e. aesthetic qualities. Thus, aesthetic qualities may be called 'objective' because of their realization by means of factual properties, as well as by becoming valuable by virtue of a criterion which is directly derived from the specific nature, inherent in the actuality of public objects.

To this claim of aesthetic objectivism, two objections might be opposed. First, that the factual properties concerned belong to the object's *apperceptive* actuality, whereas 'apperception' results from any subject's sensuous and mental activity. Further, that the criterion by which those factual properties may become valuable is dependent on men's imagining ideal states of apperceptive reality — by which the relative exemplariness of particular instances becomes determined.

The rejection of the former remark does not present any serious difficulty. In no conceivable sense may the notion of 'objective reality' be interpreted without taking into account the acts of perceiving and mentally identifying states of the world by living organisms reacting to their environment. Yet, man's sensory apparatus and mental organization, though co-determining anything's apperceptive actuality, do not function adequately without their being stimulated by specific features of particular objects, so as they are composed and shaped, independently of any perceiving agent.

The mere fact of any subject necessarily 'apprehending' reality, in order to realize that reality's apperceptive actuality, does not make aesthetic subjectivism anymore plausible. It only shows that objectivism, whether in practical or aesthetic matters, always refers to the fundamental and decisive share of the object's structural properties in the shaping of mental images by which their actuality becomes 'apperceptive' i.e. fitted to be mirrored in men's consciousness.

With regard to the second objection, a clear distinction has to be made between aesthetic subjectivism, claiming that all 'ideal states of the world', functioning as criteria for the aesthetic excellence of real states of the world, would be necessarily dependent on particular preferences, contextual contingencies and motivations of individual, valuing agents — and aesthetic objectivism as I conceive of it, contending that the criterion of 'exemplariness' is founded on the principle of 'self-unsealment', inherent in apperceptive actuality. I therewith mean, the way by which the fulness of all kinds of aesthetic qualities becomes gradually unveiled by mutually comparing their differently approximating realizations in sets of similar phenomena. Thus, images of 'ideal states of the world' are no arbitrary products of subjective imagination, but inferences induced by the aesthetic effects of real states of the world.

So, objectivism in matters of aesthetics becomes justified by both the realizations of aesthetic qualities and the criteria for their valuation being inherent in public objects; the former by the exemplariness of factual properties, offered to direct apperception, the latter by inferential images, derivable from the manifold and ever increasing approximations of ideal states of apperceptive actuality, throughout natural and cultural phenomena, by which the world's fundamental aesthetic disposition becomes unfolded.

By the very diversity of those approximations, embracing all phenomenal varieties, scattered over the planet's surface and covering all historical eras, whatever cultural dependencies by defining the nature of aesthetic qualities become objectively transcended.

And because of factual properties of public objects being the only depositaries of any aesthetic excellence, no personal dispositions of valuing agents — though necessary for activating the process of valuing — may ever constitute nor determine their true value.

3.

3.1. When accrediting the reasoning and conclusions couched in the foregoing pages, the aesthetic value proves to be of a pluralistic, melioristic and realistic nature.

Pluralism results from its unlimited openness to all material substances and evocative subjects, as well as from the essential equivalence of all methods of composing the former and stylizing the latter. Each kind of sensuous, formal and signifying entities refers to its proper image of ideal actualisation, towards which all instances of realization are tending. In that sense the domain of aesthetics embraces all varieties of man's looking at and thinking or feeling about all parts and objects of apperceptive reality. It answers all sorts of culturally or temperamentally determined needs and longings as far as experiencing apperceptive aspects of reality is concerned. It is not based on any hierarchy among apperceptive qualities, nor does it tend at establishing some such hierarchy — therewith barring the way to social presumptions or cultural arrogance in matters of taste or fashion. Thus, aesthetics may be said to teach tolerance by heightening the awareness of utter relativity, inherent in all personal or cultural standards and achievements — at least in so far as public objects, with regard to their apperceptibility, are concerned. All what happens to be the case may become aesthetically valuable by virtue of its particular kind of properties and to the extent of its realizing the fulness of their nature. But nothing that happens to be the case can ever exhaust the infinitely variegated contents of the aesthetic valueconcept, nor stop the creative process by which never thought-of aesthetic qualities in ever unseen modes of exemplariness may be discovered or disclosed.

So, the aesthetic value constitutes the domain as well as the instrument of everlasting freedom : whatever decisions have been made in the realm of producing, contemplating or valuing definite instances of apperceptive actuality, a lot of alternative options and qualities remain valuable in their own right, none of them proving ever contradictory to other choices, made by any other valuing agent.

Yet, aesthetic pluralism does not mean axiological indifference or triviality. Though equivalent with regard to differences among

kinds of aesthetic qualities which are offered to apperception, all instances of apperceptive actuality display particular and mutually distinctive grades of exemplariness. In that way, the concept of aesthetic value is of a melioristic essence. Whatever degree of exemplariness that might have been realized in any object, a higher degree of excellence in approximating the fulness of the same qualities may still be conceived. And whatever the number and diversity of predicates, conferred to the aesthetic value-concept, the discovery of heretofore unobserved qualities may constantly enrich that concept. This twofold process of meliorising — in the realm of aesthetic realizations next to the enlargement of the aesthetic concept — marks the aesthetic value as a non absolutist one. There is not and cannot be an absolute completeness in the predicating of that value-concept, because of the universe being an evolutionary one, producing permanently new states of the world from which formerly unknown qualities of apperceptive actuality may emerge. Besides, there is not, and cannot be an absolute exemplariness in the realization of any aesthetic quality, because of natural processes and human production being activated by creative energy from which may arise, at any moment and in the most unexpected way, some more excellent actualization of any aesthetic quality than was ever before realized or thought realizable.

Finally, the aesthetic value, is, by excellence, a realistic one. To the contrary of the practical and ethical values, which are concerned with 'what might become the case', (i.e. what is not part of objective reality, as long as the value concerned is applicable to it), the aesthetic value is definitively and exclusively anchored in material and signifying actuality. And differently from the theoretical value (which becomes realized by abstracting from any actuality what may be intellectually communicated *about* it) the aesthetic value resides entirely in the stuff and content *of* actuality. All what may be called an 'aesthetic quality' can only become *aesthetic* in so far as that quality becomes inherent in the sensuous fabric of reality. And all what may be thought of as constituting the *quality* that is said to be aesthetic, can only be conceived or imagined as a result of experiencing its exemplar approximation in some part or concrete object of reality.

It goes without saying that this claim of perfect realism in matters of aesthetics, is by no means contradictory to the widespread and fairly right conviction about the artist — a professional purveyor of aesthetic objects — being often highly divorced from current

reality when creating artworks out of sheer imagination. The error to avoid when appreciating the true meaning of this state of things, consists in identifying the artist's imagination with the artwork eventually resulting from it.

The former may, indeed, be essentially unrealistic as to its contents, but then, not being a public object, that imagination does not constitute an aesthetic instance. The artwork, to the contrary, is a new object of reality and, as such, may actualize some new or well-known aesthetic quality. The aesthetic excellence is not in the artist's imagination — for valuable as it may be in practical terms, i.e. as a means for producing artworks. Yet, whether these artworks may prove aesthetically valuable is not dependent on the practical value of the artist's imagination (bad artists may be just as marvellously imaginative as skilful geniuses) but wholly and exclusively on the exemplariness of such artwork's factual properties.

3.2. Now I suppose to have sufficiently set out my views on the nature and functioning of the aesthetic value for justifying my ultimate claim about aesthetics constituting an overall axiological aim and goal. To make this clear I propose to ask myself two questions which might well be considered, by academic standards, as out of bounds with any fashionable interest of learned philosophers — or even, perhaps, as of no scientific concern. Nevertheless those questions surely have to do with issues that are paramount among all matters people trouble themselves about, even to the extent of deafening more practical problems.

The first of these questions runs as follows: what do we actually mean when contending that something is 'good', in and by itself? The spontaneous answer to such an intuitive query has a pleonastic flavour. It amounts to saying that 'good *in se*'¹¹ are all such states of things that are valuable because of their being as they are. That is not quite the same as contending that 'good in themselves' would be all objects that we ever valued as such. Indeed, life has taught us the many ways and circumstances by which we ever abused ourselves, when valuing apparently excellent things which at second looks or thoughts, proved to be either trivial or boring. So we do not pretend to know for sure what states of things are truly valuable by themselves, i.e. essentially 'good *in se*'. We have to content ourselves with assuming that some such objects happen to exist, whether or not we are capable of acknowledging their intrinsic qualities. Yet, when looking more closely at the precise wording of our naïve

contention we cannot refrain from wondering *in what sense* things could be valuable by just being as they are. Surley not in the sense of usefulness, because then their goodness would not reside in how they happen to be, but rather in what might result from their functioning or developing, i.e. : in what they are *not*, or *not yet*.

The same inadequacy with regard to the requirements of being 'good *in se*' applies to 'good' in the sense of possessing ethical qualities. Moral decisions or deeds, ethical principles or strivings do not become axiologically legitimated by qualities that would be inherent in their factual structure. They only become so by qualities inherent in the motivations by which human beings may be induced to consider such principles, to make such a decision, to nourish such strivings and even, perhaps, to execute such deeds. But then, there is no axiological sense whatever, in simply being moved by such motivations. If not tending towards the establishment of states of affairs that are 'good *in se*' (though no longer ethical, for beyond all motivations) then the ethical qualities, conferred to the motivated subject as well as to the nature of those motivations, would prove to be vain pretences.

So it appears that ethical qualities, no more than practical ones, do not concur with the quality of being 'good *in se*'. They have nothing to do with things being as they are, but rather with 'what ought to become the case'; i.e. with what is *not*, or *not yet achieved*.

Now it seems obvious that, whatever the kind of good that may be psychologically preferred by various people, variously disposed, the ultimate good, from an objective or impersonal point of view, cannot reside in what might become or ought to become the case, but in what, effectively, proves to be the case. The immanent good of actuality is what seems worthwhile above all speculative good of potentiality or intentionality.

This, of course, does not amount to a confession of conservatism nor to a plea for immobilism. I do not claim that all things, being as they are, would be valuable. No more do I deny the advantages of being awake to the constantly changing face of our natural and cultural environment. I even assert the practical necessity and moral duty to contribute in the creation of ever new states of the world. But then, those advantages, that necessity and such a duty become legitimated by the direct, intrinsic value of the dynamism, inherent in the actuality of the process of changing, as well as by the intrinsic value of the eventual actuality of future states of things that may result from any creative or evolutionary progress.

In fact, the expression : 'all what happens to be the case' includes all what happens to be cases of changing and becoming. Yet, at all events, the ultimate value is in the actuality of things, whether extant, becoming or future objects.

Thus, practical and ethical values, for important as they may be, owe their axiological sense and importance to the prospect or the intention of achieving things, events or situations that are good by virtue of their actuality, i.e. by the way they are displaying the nature of their material and signifying properties. All this amounts to saying that nothing practical and ethical could be truly valuable if not intended to the realization of aesthetic objects. In that sense aesthetics prove to be a foundation-value, i.e. founding the axiological justification of any instances of usefulness and moral intentions and achievements.

A similar, though not identical but even more complex relation exists between aesthetics and the theoretical value. Truth or rightness, conferred to statements (about extant, becoming or future states of the world) cannot be justified if not founded on a true insight into the nature of their object's apperceptive qualities. But there is more to it. What would be the axiological sense of so-called 'pure knowledge' or of 'the search of knowledge for its own sake', if not to impart the searching agent with a full apperception of reality's material and signifying actuality in the broadest meaning of that term? In that respect theoretical qualities of rightness or truth seem to offer special modes of appreciating aesthetic qualities: either by intellectually taking in the signifying qualities of descriptive utterances, or by creating formal qualities of concurrence (i.e. of formal harmony) between such descriptions and the objects they are concerned with.

3.3. Finally I feel impelled to raise a second unscientific and perhaps philosophically improper question, this time about what could be thought of as a justifying factor in favour of the existence of the perplexing universe we find ourselves thrown into. Where should we turn our eyes to or bend our mind upon, in order to detect some legitimating prize for the aeons of slaughter and sufferings, of moral defects and social ignominies? Could there be some medicine for animating any 'walking shadow on the way to dusty death'; some reward for all that strutting and fretting upon the stage; some signifying theme to deafen life's sound and fury?

To most of us, poor players, all avenues for freeing reality

from absurdity seem closed. Taking the advice of science we appear to be confronted with the equally absurd alternatives of a pulsating and therewith aimlessly self-repeating universe, or of an infinitely expanding and thus eventually vanishing one. Devoting ourselves to the assumptions of religion there seems to be no more sense in acknowledging the enigmatic will of an incomprehensible deity. Consulting ethics the essential impotence of men for ever overcoming misery and moral indifference throughout the immensity of a non ethical universe becomes evident.

By some of us, however, a glimpse of significance may be discovered when awakening to the immanent qualities of apperceptive actuality; not merely to the shallow properties of material appearances, nor even confined to the more pregnant outlook of natural phenomena and to the visionary images conveyed by some works of art. Aesthetic qualities also radiate from the apperceptive actuality of intimate human encounters, either with one another in the shape and substance of intellectual discourse and in the expressive power of emotional intercourse, or with the world at large, in the adventurous achievements of creative labour and in the momentous spectacle of all exemplar instances of contingent reality.

Viewed under that most general perspective, the aesthetic value proves to be the only conceivable tool for justifying the existence of the universe 'as it happens to be'. Considered in this, its full extensiveness, aesthetics unites with spinozian ethics in that it also offers to men a road to inner freedom and an escape from human bondage.

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NOTES

¹J. Dewey, "Some questions about Value", in: *The Journal of Philosophy*, CLI, 1944, 440—455.

²Id., "The Field of Value", in: *Value*, ed. by R. Lepley, 1949, 65—77.

³B. Jessup, "On Value", *ibid.*, 125—146.

⁴L. Hahn, "A Contextualist looks at Values", *ibid.*, 112—124.

⁵St. Pepper, "Observations on Value from an Analysis of a simple Appetition", *ibid.*, 245–260.

⁶G.E. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, 1903, I, 6.

⁷Compare this notion of 'kinds of good' with M. Beardsley's 'good of a kind', in: *The Aesthetic Point of View*, 1982, 18.

⁸R. Scruton, *The Aesthetic Understanding*, 1982, 87.

⁹L. Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning in Music*, 1956.

¹⁰J. Kunst, "Social Cognitions and Musical Emotions, in: *Reason, Emotion and Music*, ed. Communication and Cognition, Ghent, (not yet published).

¹¹Within the scope of this article no room is available for a thorough discussion of the notion of 'intrinsic value'. I therefore refer to :
- C.D. Broad, "G.E. Moore's Latest Published Views on Ethics", *Mind* 70, 1961, 435–57;
- M. Beardsley, "Intrinsic Value", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 26, 1965, 1–17;
- R.B. Edwards, "Intrinsic and Extrinsic Value and Valuations", *Jn. of Value Inquiry*, 1979, 2, 133–143.