

THE IDEALISTIC THEORY OF BEAUTY

: W. T. STACE

Prof. T. State in his book on the meaning of beauty defines beauty as the fusion of an intellectual content consisting of empirical non-perceptual concepts with a perceptual field in such a manner that the intellectual content and the perceptual field are indistinguishable from one another and in such a manner as to constitute the revelation of an aspect of reality. His whole contention seems to be against the usual intuitionists view which maintains that because intellect is the organ of understanding and analysis, it cannot give us the true picture and life and aspect of beauty that is objective. In fact, it is a well known theorem of psychology that to analyze an emotion is to destroy it. Beauty according to intuitionists is an emotion a feeling- that is so full of content and richness that it cannot be analyzed except at the peril of its vanishing away under it. Intuition as direct perception would give us knowledge as a vision of reality which mere feeling cannot as such give, it also grants feeling which intellect cannot grant. Thus the intuitive method of appreciation has been claimed to have superiority over any other method of beauty valuation or creation.

Prof Stace does not believe in the existence of intuition and mysticism. He is a sceptic regarding the 'knowledge by acquaintance' of Russell and of Bergson's intuition which almost resemble sympathy with an object. He considers such a faculty or performance as atavism or as a bizarre manifestation of pseudo-knowledge as well as creation. He chooses, therefore, the well-known and well proven and trustworthy instrument of intellection for this. He contends that conceptual thinking cannot lead vagaries of mysticism. Again he does not think that beauty is quite a different thing from other forms of knowing, needing another kit of instrument or faculty. He holds that intuition does not solve the problem of beauty : it just postpones its solution.

From the definition already given, we find, according to Prof. Stace, that beauty is implied in existence of certain forms or certain ideas. it is seen – a very strange feature in beauty – that it begins to give us more and more significance and increases our

admiration and attraction - and our enjoyment heightens in direct proportion to it- the more we contemplate on it. The aesthetic feeling instead of vanishing, as in ordinary feelings and emotions when and intellectualized or contemplate. Therefore beauty must possess says Profs. Stace an *intellectual content* a concept, which becomes more luminous with feeling the more we extract it out its indistinguishable matrix and define its presence.

Yet we cannot relegate beauty to the realms of essence alone. Mere contemplation of the progressive order of essences in our consciousness of the progressive order of essences in our consciousness may grant us intellectual ecstasy which is a resultant affective sign implicit in all cognitive experience. Plato's description of our progressive correctly the mode of attainment to the fullest experience not merely of significance but also the growing tension of affective sign which is progressively being summed up in the effort of conceptual experience. But beauty is not merely the apprehension of the ultimate form of beauty nor is it the intellectual ecstasy that follows on such an apprehension. Ecstasy there is, and this ecstasy is not of the senses as such but it is of the state of the whole attendant affective state. There is always a mistaking of these two phases, the cognitive and affective which go along with one another in a more complete manner than in other experiences.

Beauty however is nor merely conceptual intimacy. It is related to a perceptual field. "It is of the senses", says Prof. Stace. It is objective not only in the sense we affirmed of ideas, but also in the perceptive sense as physical object amongst other objects which are all experiences by a subject . Beauty is an experience, physiological in nature, organic to all experience. A type of emotion grows with its contemplation. Contemplation of objects leads to greater appreciation and intimate knowing and heightened tension of the organism as a whole due to certain processes within us having come into play.

Ordinary perception cannot itself make us aware of the nature of beauty. It can at best provoke the mind to grasp the object presented in terms of concepts. This cognition may lead to the apprehension of value. Prof. Stace thus comes to the

conclusion that beauty whilst it is conceptual and perceptual as well as emotional is definitely the apprehension of value. But value, as we shall see later on, is dependent on the concepts, the forms and significances, the ideal and not on the perceptual fields or the objects perceived. Value, Prof Stace contends, pertains only to the concepts and can never belong to the perceptual fields as such or to the imagination. This tendency to grant value to the ideas alone is Hegelian or Platonic, the one when ideas are essences *not made* by the mind existing independent of knowing minds, the other when these ideas are mental constructions or thought constructs, dependent upon Mind. Hegel's view is that which is adopted by Prof Stace.

Prof. Stace arrives at his concept of beauty as conceptual or intellectual. But what are concepts? It is well known that some of these concepts (viz. mythical monsters) cannot be brought into relationship with the perceptual field. By perceptual field, Prof. Stace does not mean the canvas or sculpture that could be perceived with the senses, but only the Universe of Nature, the Objective Mind of Hegel. No doubt in Art we do represent ideas in a perceptual field. Prof. Stace does make a distinction between perceptual field conceived as nature and the artistic creations. Those that are capable of being related with a perceptual field he calls *empirical*, and those that are not capable of being brought into relation with a perceptual field he calls *non empirical*. The concepts themselves are not perceptual in nature but they could be related or relate themselves by a process of 'ingression' with a perceptual in nature but they could be related or relate themselves and are yet capable under certain circumstances to peer through the perceptual field. Perception is something that *occurs* to them. "These concepts which include the whole wealth of man's intellectual life are always free abstractions (floating ideas as Bradley would say hungering for a foot-hold in some plane of experience) and have no territory in the world of concrete experience."

It follows that any of these non-perceptual and empirical concepts could be brought into relation with the perceptual field. In nature, this process occurs spontaneously. There is the revelation of the concepts to the mind *through* the perceptual data of sensation of the objects themselves. Here beauty is the *recognition* of the concepts of the concepts indistinguishably blended within the sensorial or

perceptual field. The recognition of the concept in the sensorial field accordingly is an *act of discovery* which grants a peculiar feeling of pleasure due to satisfaction of the discovery which grants a peculiar feeling of pleasure due to satisfaction of the discovery of these invaluable conceptual features. The recognition as a revelation of inward treasures in the mine of the perceptual field is a supremely valuable experience, it is tremendously fused and a harmoniously presented whole, not merely a whole of parts.

In the case of an artist, the relation between the concept and the perceptual field which is restricted to a canvas or marble or bronze or even sounds and notes, is achieved in his creative capacity as subjective mind. This process of relating is recognized by the artist himself as a constraint and an obligation to represent the meaning in some thing tangible, audible and perceptible. The concept takes its birth in his thought, having had its period of incubation in his technique and manner and knowledge, enters into perceptual field as an art-product, vying with natural beauty.

Prof. Stace does not however recognize the independence of natural beauty from subjective mind. Hegelians usually seek to explain this existence of meaning in objects as due to the operation of *Objective Mind* which is the Absolute standing over (against?) in the form of Nature. Concepts existing in objects or Nature seek the medium of subjective finite minds to come to self-revelation perhaps because in that wise alone could they attain a self-coherent, self-active, self-fulfilling universe. Thus so far as the subjective artist is concerned, he feels the constraint of the object as if it were a call to reproduce its being as adequately as he possibly could. This, like all other conceptual hankering, is an occasion for *ingression* into perceptual recognition and reduplication. Idealism can only say that all concepts are perceptualised by minds since so far no other manner of ingression has been witnessed.

To proceed, every theory of beauty has to explain the ugly. How could we explain the ugly? What is it? What are the concepts involved? At first look, ugliness may be considered to be the negation of the beautiful, may even be the non-existence of the beautiful. Beauty is not only the organic fusion of percepts and concepts but also (what

we have not yet explained) the feeling of pleasure that goes along with the fusing itself, as it were throwing a unique halo over the entire process of experience and experience as culminated. This feeling of pleasure is not identifiable with the feeling that goes along with every sensation though several thinkers identify beauty with the sense-feeling. Stace however takes the latter view that beauty is almost sense-feeling when he states that "the element of sensation both in perception and in beauty is identical" Since this is so, "the difference must lie in the concepts involved" An analysis of the concepts which we have defined as non-perceptual but empirical reveals two factors, those concepts which produce pleasure and those which positively provoke repulsion. "If beauty be defined as a fusion of empirical non-perceptual concepts with a perceptual field, then is a species of beauty" This position is not so simple as we shall presently see. The main question is whether intellectual ecstasy see. The main question is whether intellectual ecstasy in the presence of the Ultimate Form of beauty has any relation to the sensorial affective reaction that we get when perceiving an object? Further we have the problem of radical distinction between empirical concepts and non-empirical concepts leading to the view that non-empirical concepts have no, and can have no, place in beauty. These issues are not definitely answered by Prof. Stace.

We are told that repulsiveness or attractiveness is quality *with in* or inhering in the concepts. But this is to take too much for granted since concept is a meaning and an intellectual entity merely. And when it is said to go along with or possess a particular well-defined quality of the affective kind, we have got a right to ask now this quality ever came to be attached to it? it is during the realization of the concept as in my mind which set up certain affective sensations within me or is it a quality belonging to the objective concept as such? Prof. Stace has no answer for this. But the acceptance of the inherence in the concept of an affective experience would lead us to consider the instinctive adherence to particular other ideas. This instinctive reaction to man originates not in concept would be something other than a concept. If Prof. Stace accepts the Platonic view then concepts would possess an effective quality but an affective quality different *in kind* and not merely one of degree from sensuous feeling. But having identified the two, Prof. Stace has no other option except to have recourse to something else to settle the matter. He, therefore takes up

for comparison moral values to define the instinctive adherence of repulsion or attraction. He is shrewd enough to moral values to define the instinctive adherence of repulsion or attraction. He is shrewd enough to remark that the "novelty of his theory consists in holding the view that the ugly yields a *pleasurable* aesthetic sensation instead of a painful one" But this is to confuse the two senses of pleasurable and the ugly, one of them being moral and the other aesthetic.

But to return to the theory which he claims to be novel, we can only say that we are more fascinated by the ugly than by the really ordinary. Is fascination a kind of pleasure? Not in all cases, because we are fascinated by what is painful also. So fascination cannot be beautiful, nor is fascination itself any itself any state of pleasure. It is in almost all cases a state of *tension*, it is a state of attention and exploration and absorption in the form of the presented, with a one – pointedness of interest. Psychologically then it is impossible to agree with Prof. Stace in the view that the ugly or beauty is not available within the concept itself but in the organism of the subject.

In order to explain ugliness as really of the pleasurable kind and not of the painful kind, Prof. Stace brings forth the question of moral value or disvalue. This it must be pointed out at once is to being in an extrinsic criterion. This is to declare that beauty can never be intrinsic. It is with reference to moral value that a thing is beautiful or otherwise. This view then does not seek to find out what principles or concepts are involved in the appreciation of the beautiful but merely affirms the hedonistic view of life is one of pleasure and hedonism is antagonistic to the idealistic metaphysical morality, and since hedonism according to Prof. Stace is an ugly view of beauty, beauty must certainly hold a painful quality as more befitting its nature, because to realize in life the ideal life is a difficult affair and a trying endeavour. Obligation is itself a painful thing.

Not that Prof. Stace does not distinguish between the two kinds of values, the aesthetic and the moral. A constant competition goes on between these two kinds of value. "A feeling of aesthetic value is destroyed by the much stronger feeling of moral disvalue. All those objects which are usually described as *wholly* ugly appear to be of

this nature". (p.82) Prof Stace thus wants to show that in the history of aesthetic, aesthetic has always been governed by the moral sense of the people and hierarchically speaking, (that is relatively speaking in a Hegelian manner) aesthetics is over-valued by morality. This is manifestly a one-sided view and not proved by facts. Prof Stace being by offering a solution in purely by a profound reversal of the usual explanation of beauty as pleasurable and says that it is the ugly that is really pleasurable and not beauty. By thus confusing the issue on this matter and in this manner, he affirms that to get out of this *impasse* is possible by a reference to moral value, wherein we do find, so to speak, that pleasurable is immoral and morality is rather a painful affair. He attaches an instinctive description of moral values to which he tags on beauty.

It would have been better and more legitimate if he had considered the original solution on the basis of fascination. Instead of lightly brushing aside fascination as always pleasurable (which it is not really) he ought to have held that the distinction between ugliness and beauty lay precisely there. Prof Stace though acute enough when he analyses the concepts is not sufficiently open-minded when analyzing the emotions. There is a fundamental difference in the pleasure evoked by a desirable object and the pleasure evoked by beauty itself. To quote the words of John Laird : " In its finer essence, beauty is free from all appetites, not merely from lustful and everyday appetites. This reception of beauty on our part, this pathic flavour that clings to it, is the first thing to note entirely artists and have little executive capacity are the results of the *reception* of beauty not the consequence of any aesthetic impulse." (Idea of Value, p. 153)

Thus we find that Prof. Stace having failed to fulfill his criterion of beauty according to the fusion of a moral criterion- value questions that merely seek to prop up a theory of beauty based on pure concepts. Pleasurable ness is introduced to belittle the theory of beauty based on enjoyment and ecstasy of direct knowing or reception, by linking up pleasure with ugliness. An extrinsic test is utilized, the subjective appreciation belittled the objective nature of fusion is never explained, and Prof Stace stays where he ever was before he began his investigations into the nature of beauty.