

A COMMON SENSE REALIST VIEW OF

BEAUTY

Professor C .E. M. Joad is a well- known commonsense realist. As to what commonsense means., it is not exactly definable except in vague manner. It is what any man provided he thought and sensed or rather sensed and thought might deem fit to consider as valid and true and real. But such a common sense man must firstly provide himself with all the material with an open mind and find out for himself what are the relations that subsist between them and this with a disinterested mind. It would certainly be the 'ought' for the common man and not the 'is' of the common man. Thus what Prof. Joad considers as the Commonsense view at Beauty is really what any man endowed with 'commonsense' ought to think or feel as Beauty-a proposition that might not be accepted as quite common as any one mould admit.

Prof Joad's view of Beauty is merely a revival of Plato's theory. Beauty is objective and not subjective : it is immanent in the objects and is not a mental construction. It is, however, transcendent the senses and in that sense not a quality of sense as such. Prof Joad contends that his analysis of Plato's Idea of Beauty is the most correct and true. He holds that all the commentators of Plato's aesthetics watered down that theory to suit their ideological predilections, their understanding of the Theory of Ideas of Plato was not however, is prepared to stand by the definitions of Idea as given by Prof. Adams. "It is a singly independent separate, self-existing, perfect eternal essence, forming the objective correlate of our general notions." Thus what we apprehend or construct is an image at best a reflection of what is truly objective and transcendent to sense. It may well be right at this point to refer to a criticism that might be leveled against this possibility of representing the super sensuous or transcendent in the figures or matrix of sense ; if this were possible, there is not such an opposition between sense and Ideation as it is held to exist.

A solipsistic theory of beauty is unwarranted by facts. It is however. Logically irrefutable in as much as we cannot perceive an objective form of beauty except through

out senses and reactions. The egocentric predicament cannot be overcome or explained away if it is expressed in that manner. The objectivity of the objects would rest only on the common consent of many minds. Beauty would become a subjective notion: albeit universal. A pragmatic sanction such as universally useful or habitual is not likely to be a feature that makes for real existence. It would be really an illusion or 'fabrication' of practice and need. A criterion of beauty perilously dependent upon the consensus of opinion would be a very poor consolation. A solipsistic theory of beauty places a very loose and illogical criticism in the hands of individuals and leads to relativism in aesthetics.

A theory of mere votes is democracy run mad. Nothing would be intrinsically beautiful except perhaps the mind that makes it or creates it. But even this would be a judgment of another. A common sense view will only affirm the real objectivity of the beauty of the object and will only concede that the mind that makes beauty as genius at best.

There is a further difficulty regarding the Idealistic view or rather the Solipsistic view and that is that "Physical Objects cannot be beautiful if there is nobody to appreciate them". If Berkeley stated that *Esse est percipi*, these followers of Berkeley extend it to beauty by saying that Beauty is dependent on cognition by a mind. By abolishing knowing minds, we would thus abolish beauty. This thesis is at least a little more tenable than the epistemological view of Berkeley, in so far as it shows that Beauty is a quality of an object to be perceived by mind alone. But even this claim for Beauty being specially a mental activity cannot be substantiated, because Beauty is discovered by a mind not constructed by a mind. As Prof Joad affirms Sistine Madonna of Raphael will continue to be beautiful even when all the minds are abolished or blotted out. So have the beautiful temples of Angkor-Vat or Mexico. Idealists mean to affirm that "Beauty is a quality that supervenes on the union of mind and object when both are harmoniously joined and both are in a high state of perfection". This view implies that the appreciation of beauty implies and is identical with beauty itself. If only we can admit that a new

principle comes into being which is neither subject nor object but mere feeling can the former statement have any validity. In which case we would be near the Experience of the Ancient Rishi of India who claimed that utter experience of perfect and harmonious joining, that coitive consciousness greater than the subject or object is Bliss. But this view is unacceptable to Prof Joad who being a realist is rightly contending against the deluge of reason,

1 Essays in Commonsense Philosophy, 2nd edition. P.117

subject and object as we know it. "Unless we identify beauty with the appreciation of it and fiercely assert that they are synonymous terms, the conclusion that beauty is a relation between the mind and object and not inherent in the object is admissible".² Against them it must be urged that we appreciate beauty only because beauty is something other than our appreciation of it³. In fact we know, feel or sense an object as beautiful. It becomes clear why the solipsistic theory that makes existence dependent upon perception, beauty wrong in its conclusions upon perception, beauty dependent upon an appreciating mind is fundamentally wrong in its conclusions, though logically (?) foolproof. An original confusion between knowing and being between the subjective feeling- affect and the objective beauty is the root-confusion that vitiates it. Commonsense always has treated the object as other than the subject, in so far as expressions such as 'we have missed a beautiful sight for a long time' reveal.

It is true that beauty cannot be appreciated properly unless one is trained to appreciate it. This becomes very clear when we speak of artistic creations. So is it true of any other art. The eye for art is to be cultivated and trained, else we cannot be able to evaluate the beauty of any product. Not so is the case with respect to Natural Beauty. Perhaps Prof. Joad may ask us to provide any other word than this word, such as Kant used, Sublimity or grandeur etc. He avers that there is something intrinsically beautiful in a fine sunset "although the extent of appreciation amongst

2 Ibid. 117-8

3 Ibid .118

different people varies enormously. This makes it convenient for him to dismiss any discussion natural beauty. In so far as Prof. Joad avoids this aspect of aesthetic study, it is a defect. Natural objects achieve beauty in a manner that has yet to be achieved by man. Nature invites powerfully a mind to take into account its special nature powerfully a mind to take into account its special nature as Beauty. The invitation to beauty is what the artistic soul makes constantly to its audience. Nature does this in an unconscious and spontaneous manner.

Obviously it is not nature's display but our creation that is at work in the appreciation of beauty. In which case the whole of Joad's case which rests on the distinction between artificial beauty and natural sublimity, becomes entirely meaningless if not self-contradictory to its promise.

Prof. Joad's view is that if a man could ever act or create in conformity with rules and regulations, instructed in the technique of creating, he would be able to manifest beauty in his creations. He concedes, however, that it is certain that beauty like inspiration is absolutely independent of any rule, free and unpredictable. **A man may become a master of technique but inspiration might fail him. A man must educate himself all the same in the technique, possess the erudition and skill to manifest the inspiration when is prepared to choose him. (it is not quite comprehensible, however, whether any one could be called a master without having any inspiration at all.) Thus perhaps do Gods choose their disciples.**

Prof. Joad takes another example of Objective Beauty, namely that it is the belief of mankind that beauty is of the objects. He instances the works of H. G. Wells and other novelists to show that beauty is the hope of mankind, that it is the most desirable haven of man. Beauty thus is at once the goal and the way to liberation. This view is very much akin to tradition, though it is the modern tradition that Prof. Joad woos.

By thus refuting the idealist thinkers. Dr. Joad thinks he has substantiated the position of commonsense. It is true that in beauty there is undoubtedly the objective and trans-subjective phase namely the intrinsic form of beauty. By quoting the utopian thinkers, Poets and novelists, Dr. Joad seems to imply that mystic affirmation is the

correct attitude with regard to beauty. But Mysticism is not what Dr Joad really means to affirm. Dr Joad is a little touchy on that point. He is interested in claiming for beauty an objective, reality that mysticism of at least one type, and that is the most popular, refuses to grant, Dr Joad affirms that it is not necessary to imply that the subject has got something to do with an object when it is experienced. Nothing happens to the object except that it gets known. Like all true realists, Dr Joad contends that knowing is not an addition, is not an extra-quality that an object would lose when not known.

Whilst we might agree with Dr Joad that no object depends for its being on any knowing mind, since knowing is not an absolute relation, but a temporary one especially with reference to finite and mortal minds, we cannot see our way to accepting the view that artistic creations are of such a type. Dependence on mind is not available only with respect to natural objects. It is necessary for artistic creations, if not for existing or rather persisting for existing as art-creations. It is impossible speaking from the commonsense position, to claim that there is an objectivity, absolute and intrinsic in the imaginative constructions of plastic art. If we ask whether there is absolute reality in the novels and epics? They might have beauty but theirs a beauty that is of the imagines order not of the actual order. Dr Joad does not make a clear-cut division between natural beauty that is independent of any minds whatsoever, and the artistic creations which in some vital sense do demand the existence of minds. But this is not identical with the solipsistic insistence on the *presence* of mind. Natural beauty provokes our appreciation, holds us in utter amazement and wonder or in absolute sympathy quality of beauty which has not been noted is that beauty instead of making the mind takes possession of it, makes it lose itself in its being. It melts the mind rather than fills the mind .

Therefore , it follows that there should be a distinction maintained and remembered between experience of beauty and the creation of beauty. Objectivity involves for the object of beauty firstly that it is experienced as an object by a subject as something eminently desirable and enthralling and secondly that it is independent of any one knowing mind, and that it is that which chooses its subject or mind and not that it is dependent on any mind whatsoever. Prof .Joad does nor make clear this distinction, though as a realist he is bound to accept the view that the object is transcendent to the

cognitive relation with reference to a mind that it is other than the mere representation of it within the field of consciousness. Most theories of art then are not able to steer clear of this confusion. Whilst we have no objection to their confining themselves to art, that is something by mind into a particular pattern where reference is to Beauty the question of a unity underlying both the creation as well as expression has to be explained. The Common Sense realist view is just an effort to combine everything that is understandable and understood into a loose system, capable of pleasing neither the artist nor the Philosopher. By saying that the hope of the future is that the desirable this is beauty and not the ugly and that no one denies this hope, Prof, Joad commits the same mistake that mentalism does. The main point in the whole discussion is "Is Beauty Desirable.

We create the desirable; we appreciate the desirable; we hope for the desirable. This doctrine of desire is just a variant of the Utilitarian or hedonistic motive, since the definition of the desirable is an intriguing point. The idealist at least may say that the desirable is Reason or rational Self or Coherence; in aesthetics he will be prepared to affirm that coherence is harmony. Psychologically alone could it be effective only leads us to describe desire as a 'conscious' tendency towards fulfillment of instinctive needs. Beauty as the satisfaction of this primitive desires is at least as the satisfaction of this primitive desires is at theory as foreign to the understanding of beauty as the values in spite of individual needs. Of late some writers like the late Professor Samuel Alexander have sought to show that Art is social development understood in the context of the social life of people. It is an important point certain extent explain Art as modification of the creative instinct. What Nature perhaps has been doing unconsciously and on a lavish scale, art does in the life of the Human being consciously and slowly and in its own small manner Since this thesis is not of Prof. Joad who inclines to the view of Plato, we cannot consider that evolutionary stand- point of creation of beauty in this context.

Prof Joad's Platonism leaves us with the only result that the Form or rather Forms of beauty are objective, that is, independent of knowing minds, though to know it, minds alone are capable; that it is nor something constructed by minds from out of

many particulars as a sum of their characteristics or as abstractions out of them, that is to say, Ideas are neither representations nor general ideas. For each one of these ideas is a particular, individual, perfect and complete. They could be realized in concrete Art more and more as we strain to perceive them independently of the particular representations in nature through which alone, for our terrestrial existence, we could become aware of them.

We admit that the forms of Plato are intrinsically beautiful in the sense that they are intrinsically real and are not mental constructions nor general ideas those abstract conceptions which Berkeley so stoutly apposed. They form out realm of essences as Prof Santayana says: they might also be arranged in a hierarchical manner progressively more and more desirable or as belonging to distinct universes of desire- this also we may grant. That this hierarchy becomes equivalent to our evolving progress of consciousness from one type to another type may provisionally be admitted. But that these archetypes are intrinsically beautiful without being real is not so easy of proof. The entire point is that apprehension of the beautiful requires a tremendous effort of will and intelligence and sympathy or rather receptivity. If Beauty is infinitely desired as against mere wisdom and morality, it is because it brings into being the play of entire being of the individual. There is the co native one-pointedness. there is the effective flow into the mind as well as the enriching consciousness of intimate cognition. Beauty is a dual process increasingly brought into one united appreciation or, what is the same, realization. There is the necessity at least in the artistic creations for the mind to apprehend the higher and the more desirable arche-types unfolding a vaster vista of evolutionary progress or more correctly a fuller vision or subtle significances in the ordinary. Further arche-types are not individual particulars in the sense of mere objects. They are groupings and constellations of many things under one organization or gestalt. Each arche-type is an individual grouping of many other things and groupings. This grouping and regrouping it is that gives us delight, just as we never get any instinct in isolation so also here we never come across a pure particular archetype. A richer meaning has to be given to Plato's thought than what Prof. Joad grants Plato was more right when he subsumed the several archetypes under other arche-types progressively realizing the highest Arche-type – The Good. It showed that each arche-

type could be individually apprehended by a Seer as a perfect unity at any one time or at a time. It also promised to the Seer that if he persisted, he could apprehend the higher arche-type which included this too but gave him in return a supreme and more significant delight in a new configuration. This truth has been seriously missed by Prof. Joad in his exposition of the theory of Ideas., Prof Joad rightly , however grasps the truth of mysticism when he says that Him whom the idea chooses, he shall perceive and create not another.

It is increasingly clear why we refuse to consider the intrinsic meaning of beauty to lie in the arche-types as such, though at the same time we have subscribed to the view that the arche-types are desirable. As Kant said 'In Beauty the finality is pleasure'. It is achievement of satisfaction in reality which embraces our entire nature in all its parts not merely our affective or moral mental or intellectual that in a fundamental sense constitutes *rasa* , the essence of being. It is the peace of harmony that is stimulated by Natural Objects or Ideas of Plato or Art product and equally by our own creative activity that is the supreme secret of Beauty.