

Philosophical Theories of Art: A Survey from Plato to Schopenhauer

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***Abstract :** Philosophy of art western approach deals with western philosophical perspectives on art. It includes all theoretical discussions of art ranging from Plato to Schopenhauer. Art is one of the cultural activities of man through which he reaches his ideas, values, feelings, aspirations and reactions to life. The generic purpose of art is to provide aesthetic experience and enjoyment to the recipient. Art give outlet to the artist himself to reveal and express his innermost aspirations, feelings, sentiments and also the impressions of life. Aesthetic experience in its essence is indescribable and it does not occur in terms of conscious thought. The theory of art in West begins with the Plato's imitative theory which proposed that art is imitative in nature. Aristotle also argued that art is representation of the ideal. Both Plato and Aristotle were forced to establish a theory of art based on their metaphysical views about the nature of the world. Immanuel Kant, representative of intellectualist theory said that art and beauty gives only a subjective satisfaction, we cannot speak of the beauty for the object them. Benedetto Croce propounded an expression theory of art. Schopenhauer profoundly presented the theory of art as the withdrawal of the will.*

***Keywords :** Aesthetics, art, Philosophy of art, Theories of art, Emotion.*

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I. Introduction

The philosophical support of art is traditional. It represents the complete fusions and synthesis of the consciousness for art and beauty that had been expressed in the very beginning of philosophy and it is continuous to the present day in different forms. Aesthetics is the branch of philosophy devoted to conceptual and theoretical enquiry into art. The recognition of aesthetics as a separate branch of philosophy coincided with the development of philosophy of art. There must be a medium for every art, where the work is communicated to the recipient, the listener, the observer or the reader. Aesthetics has a long history in the West. In the course of its development, not only aesthetic views changed, but also the range of questions it embraces, its subject and its purpose. The Greek natural philosophers viewed it as a part of philosophy which served to present a picture of the world into later it concerned itself with poetics and nature of beauty and art. It is necessary to understand what beauty and art mean generally to us and the important place they occupy in our life. We wonder why we get such a pleasure where we have an experience of worldly things that is for example bed of flowers with variety of colors, shapes and sizes, there are events and phenomena like sunrise, sunset, rainbows, thick cloud formations etc. In nature, there are faces and fingers of human beings which attract the beholders and invite admiration from them. There are birds and animals, landscapers, twinkling stars and shining full-moon which have transformed human beings into artist and poets. Such objects have a striking appearance, form and meaning for us. Beauty for a common man is the power of attracting human sensibilities possessed by certain things in nature. The awareness of beauty comes in the form of an enjoyment and delight that we experience whenever we have a contact with such things. It is a mystery which calls for understanding first of all the characteristics which make things beautiful and also the secret of our own psychology of enjoyment derived from these objects. The very motive that derives man to make something creative is to expose his inner sensitivity to life. Impressed by the grant form in nature, the artist may try to show his appreciation for them by creating objects, which have close resemblance to natural object revelation of certain underlying universal truth of life which may make him a poet or a painter who can represent it through symbols or abstract methods. The relationship between art and reality can be presented in the form of philosophical theories of art.

II. Plato-Imitative Theory of Art

Plato is the first philosopher who made a systematic analysis of the mimetic tendency in art. He had two theories of art. One is the imitative theory may be found in his dialogue *The Republic*, and seem to be the theory that Plato himself believed. His imitative theory is based on metaphysical ideas. Plato saw physical world as a poor decaying copy of a perfect, rational, eternal and changeless original. The greatest sign of art was its imitative nature according to him. For him, work of art is the imitation of the most beautiful and best life. According to Plato, all artistic creation is a form of imitation that which really exists in the world of ideas in a type created by God, the concrete things man perceives in his existence are shadow representation of this type. The beauty of a flower, or a sunset, a piece of music, is an imperfect copy of Beauty itself. Therefore, the painter, the tragedian, and the musician are imitators of imitation. Plato says art imitates the objects and events of ordinary life. In other words a work of art is a copy of form. For Plato, form is perfect ideal, but they are also more real than physical objects. He called them the really real. The world of the form is rational and unchanging; the world of physical object appearances is changeable and irrational, and only as reality to the extent that it succeed in imitating the form. Thus the artist's work is an imitation. Plato's second theory of art is hinted at in his shorter dialogue *Ion*, and in his exquisitely crafted *Symposium*. According to this theory the artist, perhaps by divine inspiration makes a better copy of the true than may be found in ordinary experience. Thus the artist is a kind of prophet. Plato made certain statements about art which are considered to be of utmost value to the later thinkers on art. These statements are mentioned here under.

- Art is an imitation of nature.
- Art is a product of emotional propensity and not intellectual faculty of man.
- Art shows a mirror-like reflection of all the aspects of outer forms of life but does not enlighten the viewer about the essential and inner truths about reality since such essences can never be imitated by the artist.
- Imitation is always of the external form of the object and cannot be anything more than that creation of art, poetry in particular, is not in a normal state of the mind, but in a state of 'muse' or some kind of fit of madness. The poet is an inspired soul' or a 'possessed spirit' according to Plato.

III. Aristotle—Representation Theory of Art

Aristotle, disciple of Plato, while speaking the same language of his predecessors, modifies the theory of imitation into a theory of representation. His work *Poetics* exposes a fresh and revolutionary way of dealing with art and has been considered as an invaluable contribution to philosophical theory of art. In art, it is, the nature, which is considered as our model, perfect in itself to some extent, but which can be modified in art to represent the ideal. Art attains its complete being only within the mind of a person for whom it is created. But the subjective emotion felt by a person is deeply grounded in human nature and so it has a sort of objective validity. Thus, the truth of art is subjective because art is an immediate experience of an experiencing mind. This change of approach to art is basically due to the change in the metaphysical theory of Aristotle. According to Aristotle, there are four kinds of causes working in nature which is very dynamic. It is impossible to imagine a form that can be without matter and matter without form. It is evident that forms in nature are not copies or appearances of ideas in Aristotle metaphysics. Art is of course an imitation or emulation of forms in nature. Imitating in this sense is impossible for various reasons. Aristotle points out that the difficulty in producing the artifacts which bear resemblance with nature is due to the difference of material used by the artist as his medium. The artist in fact can make his objects brought out in an artificial manner more meaningful by making them representative of a class. If art is too strange it is not possible for the recipient to establish that feeling of identification and familiarity and he will stop taking any interest in it. In Aristotle's theory, he makes the representational aspect more important than mere presentation of forms. The representation is of inner truths, complexities of life and emotional bonds which bring men and women into love-hate relations. These aspects are not imitated but represented in the form of contents. This according to Aristotle is the goal of art, and not imitation or emulation for its own sake. The concept of Catharsis in Western aesthetics arose out of speculation on Aristotle's remark in his *Poetics* that in a tragedy there should be, among other things, incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewithal to accomplish its Catharsis of such emotions.

IV. Immanuel Kant-Intellectual Theory of Art

Kant occupies an important place in the development of German thought as a real speculative genius. According to Kant, art is not the pure beauty. Artistic beauty is not a beautiful thing but the beautiful representation of a thing. Art may be there to represent natural ugliness. Kant also admits that there may be artistic production without any concept. Similarly the aesthetics theory of Kant is little influenced by

moral consideration. Kant made art autonomous and non-moral, nevertheless he spoke of art being a symbol of morality and founding this moral feeling on the basis of the universality and necessity of aesthetic judgment. The beautiful, he maintained has nothing to do with moral bias. This feeling creates a contrast between our sense of beauty and our sense of morality. Beauty involves a spectator's attitude as morality demands participation and stimulation within us. Kant believes that the key of the situation is our judgment of a pleasure universally communicable, yet independent of concept. Kant substantiates the statement that the aesthetic judgment gives no information about the nature of the object. Kant assumed the existence of a common aesthetic sense for if we did not, may makes no universal judgment about beauty, still Kant emphasized beauty gives us only a subjective satisfaction we cannot speak of the beauty for the object themselves. In this way Kant objected to aesthetics realism according to which we derived beauty from the object themselves. Kant beauty implied liberation from selfishness and wants. The genius creates spontaneously and is dominated by original inspiration. It is impossible to achieve academic greatness in arts again according to Kant the artistic genius has to constituting elements namely imagination and intellect.

V. Benedetto Croce- Expression Theory of Art

Benedetto Croce, an Italian philosopher came to a philosophical interest which is deeply colored by the problems of criticism and aesthetics. Croce assumed that, the identity of art and beauty and distinguishes this from what is commonly called the work of art. Beauty is not the quality of the things but like every other values it comes into being as a nature of spiritual activity. This spiritual activity is the aesthetical experience of the man who finds beauty in the Cathedral or in a tragedy or in a sunset. A man rich in such experiences has the artistic nature richly actualized even if there is no stimulus of communication. The true work of art is not dependent up on communication; it has its very being on expression. For him, art is an expression of impressions. Every intuition is also an expression, according to Croce. Intuitive activities possess intuition to the extent that it expresses them. The word expression is generally restricted to the verbal expression also such as those of color and sound. The expressions, whether it is pictorial, verbal or musical or in whatever, in other forms it appears as an expression in an inseparable part of intuition. Intuitive or expressive knowledge is identified with the aesthetic and artistic fact, as works of art are examples of intuitive knowledge according to Croce. Some philosophers called the view that art is an intuition of and all together special

sort. They say that art is an intuition but intuition is not always art. Artistic intuition is a distinct type differing from intuition in general. It has been thought that art is not a simple intuition but an intuition of the same way as the science. Croce, art is an expression of impressions, not expression of impression. It cannot assert that intuition which is generally called 'artistic' differs from ordinary intuition as intensive intuition. Certain men have a greater attitude, a more frequent, inclination fully to express certain complex states of the soul. These men are known as the artist there is no science or lesser intuition as distinct from a science of greater intuition, nor one of ordinary intuition from artistic intuition. Intuition for Croce is imagination, the fundamental notion of Croce's aesthetics and one of the cardinal points of his philosophy, is the identification of this intuition with expression.

VI. Arthur Schopenhauer-Contemplative Theory of Art

Schopenhauer profoundly presented the theory of art as the withdrawal of the will. The elevation of the mind to the will-less contemplation of truth, is the function of art. The object of science is the universe that contains many particulars; the object of art is the particular that contains a universal. Art is greater than science because the latter proceeds by laborious accumulation and cautious reasoning, while the former reaches its goal at once by intuition and presentation; science can get along with talent, but art requires genius. Genius is the highest form of will-less knowledge, The lowest forms of life are entirely made up of will, without knowledge; man in general is mostly with and little knowledge; genius is mostly knowledge and little will. This involves some passage of force out of reproductive into intellectual activity. The fundamental condition of genius is an abnormal predominant of sensibility irritability over reproductive power. Genius is simply the complete objectivity, i.e. the objective tendency of the mind. Art alleviates the ills of life by showing as the eternal and universal behind the transitory and the individual.

VII. Conclusion

This paper tried to explore the historical progression of philosophical theories of art a survey from Plato to Schopenhauer its evolutionary landmarks, concepts, theories and problems as well. Art is one of the cultural activities of man through which he reaches his ideas, values, feelings, aspirations and reactions to life. The generic purpose of art is to provide aesthetic experience and enjoyment to the recipient. Art give outlet to the artist himself to reveal and express his innermost

aspirations, feelings, sentiments and also the impressions of life. Philosophy of art deals with most general principles of aesthetic experience and the basic questions regarding art in general. The study of art and beauty had an ancient origin both in the East and West. Philosophy of art is the theoretical attempt to define and understand art and the beauty, to discover the norms which transform some physical objects to acquire the status of art and beauty. It also includes three stages of aesthetic experience, aesthetic expression, and aesthetic appreciation. Philosophy of art becomes necessary to define the methods and grounds for appreciation of art. Artistic activity will be meaningless if there is no one to appreciate it and judge its value. Aesthetic experience in its essence is indescribable and it does not occur in terms of conscious thought. It is felt as an emotion, which however, differs from and transcends mundane emotions and sentiments. The aesthetic experience involves valuable judgment and therefore presupposes critical faculty, which dispassionately evaluates both merits and demerits of the art product. The world is full of things and objects, both natural and manmade which attracts our senses and mind. It has attracted the attention of world's great thinkers who have contributed towards building up the theories of art. When we came to the Western philosophy of art has also a long history. Plato claims that ordinary art affects badly on the audience because it represents imagination rather than truth, and nourishes their feeling rather than reason. Aristotle, on the other hand treats imitation as a basic human faculty, which express itself in wide range of arts. For him, to imitate is to produce a copy or mirror reflection of something but involves a complex mediation of reality. The theories of Imitation, Representation and Expression are the most well-known theories about art, based on the historical developments in the philosophical thinking.

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