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THE PHILOSOPHICAL BASIS

OF

AESTHETIC CRITICISM

Submitted to the Department of Philosophy
of Assumption College in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by

Ambrose G. P. McInnes, B. A.

Faculty of Graduate Studies
1954

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INTRODUCTION

The Problem

Contemporary critics are not hesitant to admit that the art they profess to follow has few, if any, rules or canons which could serve as a theoretical basis for their criticism.¹ At the same time, their attitude towards philosophers is one of scepticism. This could be the reason for their failure to provide their own art with the theoretical basis it so sorely lacks. But it is also possible that the philosophers from whom the critics might reasonably expect some help, have no help to give. Whichever of these two explanations is the right one, it remains that the critics must carry on without the benefit of knowing precisely what their art is, what rules their criticisms must follow, or even if their profession is any art at all. Despite this condition, unanimity among critics as to what constitutes their art is a desideratum for which some of them sincerely hope.

Assuming the rôle of reagent, Mr Christopher Fry has reminded the dramatic critics of the necessity of at least a common starting point.

"I think", he writes, "what I am most anxious

¹W.F. Thrall and Addison Hibbard, A Handbook of Literature (New York: Odyssey Press, 1936), pp. 103-104. "One who even among...critics, hopes to find an agreement and synthesis as to the nature of criticism - hopes, in short, to find truth - is lost. There are no standards to which all critics subscribe, a fact which may seem discouraging to the beginner but which is after all, the very life of criticism."

to do here is to ask that criticism should look more deeply into the nature of a play, and to pursue the reason for its nature, rather than to try to force it into a category to which it doesn't belong. If a criticism is to be understood and profited by, writer and critic must start from the same premiss."²

Mr Fry is recalling the critics' attention to the primacy of the work in the art of criticism. He advocates that the critic return to an awareness of his obligations by judging in conformity with the work of art, and not according to the preconceptions of the critic. He insists that unless the critic "start from the same premiss" as the writer, then there can be no profitable nor adequate criticism. The critic ought to "look more deeply into the nature of a play and to pursue the reason for its nature."³ In other words, Mr Fry is suggesting, from the view-point of the playwright, that the critic strive more honestly in his attempts to make contact with the whole play, both in its extension and in its depths. When the critic has done this then, at least the first condition for a valid criticism will be present.

Let us now call on another witness who, like Mr Fry, affirms the necessity of a common point-de-depart.

It is the view of M Maritain that the critic is not free to do whatever he pleases in his art of criticism. On the contrary, he must be guided primarily by the work to be judged. If

²Christopher Fry, An Experience of Critics (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953), pp. 25-26.

³Ibid.

the critic ignores this basic tenet and proceeds to judge the work from his own bent of mind, then, under such circumstances the critic does not judge the work of art, but rather it is he who is judged by it.⁴ M Maritain maintains that the critic before judging of the work as to its way of execution must discover the creative intentions from which it proceeds and the most secret things which stirred the soul of the author.⁵ The critic, therefore, as far as M Maritain is concerned, is very much removed from the bland indifference of a mere observer who passes judgment while standing on the outside. For M Maritain "...the critic is a poet and has the gifts of a poet, at least virtually."⁶ In this, like Plato⁷, he affirms that criticism which has not first been attracted by the rings of inspiration and invaded by the same madness which is in the poet, is in no way valid.⁸

⁴Jacques Maritain, Raison et Raisons (Paris: Egloff, 1947), p. 39. "Nous jugerons l'oeuvre d'art comme un objet qui nous est soumis, et dont notre disposition d'esprit est la mesure. En pareil cas, à vrai dire, nous ne jugeons pas l'oeuvre d'art, c'est nous qui sommes jugés par elle."

⁵Jacques Maritain, Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry (New York: Pantheon, 1953), p. 324.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Vide Plato, Ion, 533e-534b, trans. B. Jowett, in The Dialogues of Plato (New York: Random House, 1937), I, 289.

⁸Jacques Maritain, ibid., pp. 85-86. "...so that, for Plato, any effort of rational criticism remains inadequate if only rational, and necessarily presupposes the intuitive reception, in the unconscious of the soul, of the magnetic power conveyed by the poem."

There ought to be, first of all, an inspiration which the critic experiences from the work and which enables him to grasp the creative intuition of the artist displayed in his work. Once the intuition is grasped by the critic then he is competent to judge the work. So, above all, the critic is dependent upon the work to be judged as his initial point of departure.

In these remarks, both Mr Fry and M Maritain have rendered criticism a valuable service by observing that it is not just an arbitrary affair dependent solely on the whims of the critics. Rather it begins with a work to be judged. Moreover, if as M Maritain states the critic is a poet, at least virtually, then the rules of art which are derived from an understanding of what art is, will be the same rules employed by the critics in his art of criticism.

But these remarks, valuable as they are in describing the actual conditions and aims of contemporary critics and the ideal which their art should fulfill, do not answer the important question: who is to say what the work of art is? However, they do suggest that whoever is able to say what poetry is, is also able to say what criticism is. And, what is more, they suggest that if there is a philosophy of poetry, there is also a philosophy of criticism.

Yet, if there is such a philosophy is it to be found among the philosophers who have given the critics reasons for

their scepticism? It is one of the purposes of this thesis to show that it cannot be. The critics must first, however, be assured that the one thing which would stifle their utterances and which they fear most from the philosophers should not be forced on them, namely: a rationalization of their art. In fact, the philosophy which they may expect to provide a theoretical ground for criticism and for poetry must recognize the absurdity of rationalizing either poetry or criticism into mechanical formulae. But, at the same time, it must affirm the possibility of rules.

However, contemporary critics, in their effort to free themselves from the rationalizations that are alien to their art, eliminate the conditions under which rules are possible. But is this the fault of the critics themselves? To say, in effect, that criticism is criticism only when it succeeds in liberating itself from reason and, incidentally, from rules is a philosophical statement. If this is so, it is not the fault of critics qua critics but of critics who take to philosophizing. In other words, to rid criticism of philosophy that would contaminate it, they have adopted or elaborated a philosophy which paradoxically protects it from philosophy. Conceivably, then, the critics should welcome a philosophy which would dignify their art with rules without the fatal rationalizations.

This means that the oppositions which are the accepted bases for the exclusion of philosophy from criticism must be

resolved. The abstract, the necessary, the scientific, the logical and the rational elements associated with philosophy must be reconciled with the concrete, the contingent, the poetic and the intuitive elements found in criticism. Is such a reconciliation possible? Is there a philosophy capable of resolving these oppositions? On at least one issue to which these oppositions can be reduced, the answer to these questions is affirmative. This issue is that of the relation between the speculative and the practical. For the Ancients⁹ theoretical knowledge was not only possible but was necessary for an understanding of the very practice of an art. In fact, THEOREIN¹⁰, the Greek verb to see, to behold, etc., which corresponds to the Latin contemplari, carried with it a certitude which held in the speculative order as well as the practical. Concerning the possible application of such knowledge Aristotle wrote in the Physica¹¹: "...we shall take as actual that which is theoretically possible...since the case assumed is theoretically possible and the assumption of the theoretically possible case ought not to give rise to any in-

⁹This term signifies, in particular, the philosophers Aristotle and St Thomas.

¹⁰vide Greek-English Lexicon, ed. H. G. Liddell and others, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper, 1873), p. 636, col. c.

¹¹Aristotle, Physica, VIII, 242b36-243a4, trans. R. P. Hardie and R. K. Gaye, in The Basic Works of Aristotle, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), p. 342.

possible result" if the theory is true. But what is more important is to understand that from the practical activity of poetry and criticism, no theoretical knowledge can be immediately derived. The futility of such a procedure is no doubt responsible for some of the indifference to a possible theoretical basis for the art of poetry and its criticism.

There is still another ground on which the opposition of philosophy and poetry may be resolved. Philosophy, traditionally given to definition, and poetry dedicated to its art are happily united in the "mute" definition of the poetic art found in Archibald MacLeish's poem Ars Poetica,¹²

A poem should be palpable and mute
As a globed fruit

Dumb
As old medallions to the thumb

Silent as the sleeve-worn stone
Of casement ledge where the moss has
grown

A poem should be wordless
As a flight of birds

... ..

A poem should be motionless in time
As the moon climbs

¹² American Poetry and Prose, ed. Norman Foerster, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1947), p. 1492.

Leaving as the moon releases
 Twig by twig the night-entangled trees,

Leaving, as the moon behind the winter
 leaves,
 Memory by memory the mind -

A poem should be motionless in time
 As the moon climbs

... ...

A poem should be equal to:
 Not true

For all the history of grief
 An empty doorway and a maple leaf

For love
 The leaning grasses and two lights above
 the sea -

A poem should not mean
 But be.

Paradoxically, in advocating mute poetry which needs no explanation, Mr MacLeish shows at once, and in a very eloquent manner, the need for principles which would make his poetry understandable. He is, in effect, pointing out the need for understanding poetry in terms of the very being of poetry. Since a poem belongs to the special universe of art, it is in terms of that universe that it is to be understood. The basis for an intelligible understanding of poetry, therefore, would be found in discovering what poetry is. But in doing this, we must in no way violate what Mr MacLeish has said concerning the distinctive being of the poem. Here, then, is a poet unwittingly giving testimony to the need for a

philosophy of poetry, at the same time, acknowledging that it would be better to have no explanation if an explanation meant rationalizing his poetry. Along with the critics, the poets must be assured that there is a philosophy which can dispel their fear of rationalization. The elaboration of a theoretical definition and rules, does not necessarily prejudice the nature of the work to be done. On the contrary, this philosophy would provide the means for an intelligible understanding of poetry and its criticism without jeopardizing the life of either one.

However, further qualifications are necessary to establish our thesis. In all of this which has gone before we are anticipating a solution suggested by M Maritain, namely: that it is in the philosophy of nature that a theory of art is to be found.¹³

¹³Jacques Maritain, An Introduction to Philosophy, trans. W.I. Watkin (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1947), p. 263, n. 1. "The term aesthetics" writes M Maritain, alluding to the philosophy of art "...would be doubly incorrect here. Modern writers understand by the word the theory of beauty and of art, as though the philosophy of art were the place in which to treat questions concerning beauty considered in itself (such questions belong to ontology), and as though art were confined to the fine arts (a mistake which vitiates the entire theory of art). Moreover, the word aesthetics is derived etymologically from sensibility (AISTHÁNOMAI = feel), whereas art, and beauty also, are matters of the intellect, quite as much as of feeling.

Scholastic text books do not usually devote a separate treatise to the philosophy of art, and either study its problems in psychology alone, or, the better to explain the concept of prudence, in ethics. It would be necessary to classify the philosophy of art, like ethics itself, under natural philosophy, if we kept to the single standpoint of the specification of the sciences by their formal object." And he repeats on p. 271: "...If the philosophic sciences are classified from the standpoint of their specific character, ethics, which treats of the

But M Maritain has elaborated no such philosophy.¹⁴ It remains therefore, to inquire into the domain of natural philosophy and to see on what this assertion of M Maritain's is based.

At the outset, it would be profitable to ask: Does this apparently neglected field of natural philosophy qualify as a science which might provide a theoretical basis to criticism? The answer to this question requires that we consider the subject-matter of the philosophy of nature. How well qualified the philosophy of nature is to deal with this problem is discussed in the next chapter.

moral virtues and whose formal object is human actions and the philosophy of art, which treats of the practical intellectual virtues and whose formal object is human making, are divisions of the science of man, which itself belongs to natural philosophy (though it enters also into metaphysics)."

¹⁴His works, Art and Scholasticism, trans. J.P. Scanlan (New York: Scribner, 1936), Art and Poetry, trans. E.de P. Matthews (New York: Philosophical Library, 1943), Art and Faith, trans. John Coleman (New York: Philosophical Library, 1948) contain answers to many specific problems in art but no attempt is made in any of these works to implement the suggestive statement made in An Introduction to Philosophy and quoted above. His most recent work, Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry (New York: Pantheon, 1953), again deals with specific problems in art but leaves the statement concerning the possibility of a theory of art, rooted in the philosophy of nature, unanswered.

II

THE PHILOSOPHY OF NATURE

According to the perennial philosophy, natural philosophy has for its distinctive object, the being of sensible mobile bodies, ens mobile. It is the purpose of this chapter to discuss what the principles of the science of mobile being are and to explain the principles and/or causes of corporeal things.¹

The Principles

Aristotle, who is acknowledged as the founder of the philosophy of nature, points out at the beginning of the Physica that every organized body of knowledge starts with certain principles which are determined by the subject-matter under discussion. The Stagirite states²: "...in the science

¹It must be noticed here that there are two orders involved in any science, one in which real principles and/or causes are first and the other in which the principles of the science are first as causing the knowledge of conclusions. Vide St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae (Ottawa: Impensis Studii Generalis O.Pr., 1941), I.86.8.ad 1. "Dicendum quod in accipiendo scientiam non semper principia et elementa sunt priora, quia quandoque ex effectibus sensibilibus devenimus in cognitionem principiorum et causarum intellegibilium. Sed in complemento scientiae semper effectuum dependet ex cognitione principiorum et elementorum; quia, ut ibidem dicit Philosophus, tunc opinamur nos scire, cum principia possumus in causas resolvere.

²Aristotle, Physica, 184a 14-16.

of nature, as in other branches of study, our first task will be to try to determine what relates to its principles." Elsewhere he defines principle³ as "...something that is first from which something either is or becomes or is known."

The philosophy of nature, therefore, seeks the first principles of which corporeal mobile bodies are composed. Also, the causes involved in the process of mobility are considered because from the deliberation of the principles of mobile being natural philosophy arrives at the notion of cause. "Everything," says Aristotle, "that changes is something and is changed by something and into something."⁴ Generally cause is that which is necessary for the coming-to-be of a thing.⁵ So the philosophy of nature deals with the principles of nature and a knowledge of the causes of things.

In attempting to determine what the first principles of natural philosophy might be, Aristotle observes that: "...first principles must not be derived from one another nor from anything else, while everything has to be derived from them. But these conditions are fulfilled by the primary contraries, which are not derived from anything else because they are primary, nor from

³Aristotle, Metaphysica, 1013a 17.

⁴Ibid., 1069b36.

⁵Aristotle, Physica, 194b23.

each other because they are contraries."⁶

The fact that the first principles of corporeal mobile being are contraries he concludes also from an examination of generation.⁷ That from which a thing is generated must lack the nature of the thing generated, otherwise, that thing would have already existed and would not therefore be generated. A thing, consequently, is generated out of its opposite, or contrary. As a result, every generation involves contraries and therefore some contraries must be first principles.⁸

From these considerations, Aristotle concludes that contraries must make the two first principles of the philosophy of nature. But there must be more than two principles because contraries cannot act upon one another but only upon some third thing. Thus he concludes, "The same is true of any other pair of contraries; for Love does not gather Strife together and make things out of it, nor does Strife make anything out of Love, but both act on a third thing different from both."⁹ So contraries could not exist unless they were in something. Now since contraries do exist and are generated it must be assumed that besides the primary contraries some primary substance which is

⁶Ibid., 188a 26-29.

⁷Ibid., 188b 21-26.

⁸Ibid., 189a 10.

⁹Ibid., 189a 24-26.

their substratum and like them a first principle must exist. This Aristotle states in the following way: "there must always be an underlying substance namely that which becomes, and that this, though always one numerically, in form at least is not one."¹⁰ "Plainly, then, if there are conditions and principles which constitute natural objects and from which they primarily are or have come to be - have come to be, I mean, what each is said to be in its essential nature...everything comes to be from both subject and form."¹¹ He concludes therefore that the number of the first principles of natural objects which are subject to generation are three, for "it is clear that there must be a substratum for the contraries and that the contraries must be two."¹² However he adds that the contraries need not be two in the sense of two distinct forms for one contrary will serve to effect the change by its successive absence and presence.¹³

Aristotle has now stated the number of the principles of natural things which are required in generation. To the substratum he gives the name matter, to the contrary regarded as present in the matter the name form, and to the absence of this form from

¹⁰Ibid., 190a 14-15.

¹¹Ibid., 190b 16-20.

¹²Ibid., 190b 24-25.

¹³Ibid., 191a 5-2.

the matter, the name privation.¹⁴ These are the three primary principles of the generation of natural substances. The matter is the subject or substratum; the form and the privation which is the lack of form in matter, are the contraries. Thus in every generation or change some matter, lacking a certain form acquires that form. Throughout the generation, the matter persists, having first one form then another. It is for this reason that Aristotle describes matter as "the primary substratum of each thing, from which it comes to be without qualification and which persists in the result."¹⁵ "By form," he writes, "I mean the essence of each thing and its primary substance."¹⁶ The form of natural things however, does not persist but in every change a form is replaced by its contrary.

This analysis of change explains how nothing comes to be simply from being or simply from non-being; but rather, things come from something which is, at once, relative being and relative non-being. This is a substance with privation.¹⁷ This substratum is being inasmuch as it is something; but it is non-being inasmuch

¹⁴Aristotle, Metaphysica, 1070b 18-19: "...there are three principles - the form the privation, and the matter."

¹⁵Aristotle, Physica, 192a30-31.

¹⁶Aristotle, Metaphysica, 1032b1.

¹⁷Aristotle, Physica, 191b 14. "...a thing may 'come to be from what is not' - that is in a qualified sense. For a thing comes to be from the privation, which in its own nature is non-being.

as it is not the being that comes from it, since it lacks the form of that being. In short, as Aristotle says in the Metaphysica, "all things come to be out of that which is, but is potentially, and is not actually."¹⁸

This Aristotelian solution to the problem of change arises out of the distinction made between the principles of mobile being, between subject and form. It holds that every mobile being has two essential constituent principles; a substantial subject which is called prime matter and its perfection or act which is called substantial form. This analysis of ens mobile is called the hylomorphic theory. It is the fundamental doctrine of the philosophy of nature.

This doctrine recognizes that all corporeal bodies are constituted of the two-fold principles prime matter and substantial form.¹⁹ These principles constitute the very essence of mobile being. They are intrinsic first principles which do not arise from others nor from one another. Prime matter is

¹⁸ Aristotle, Metaphysica 1069b 19-20. For Aristotle change takes place and in every change something comes to be from something else. He considered that before change, the being from which the change started not only was what it was but was able to become something else. What a thing is Aristotle calls actuality; its capacity to become something else, he calls potentiality.

¹⁹ These remarks are dogmatically stated. For an account based on Aristotle and St Thomas vide K. Dougherty, Cosmology (Peekskill: Graymoor Press, 1952), pp. 102-122.

the purely determinable substantial principle in the essence of mobile being. The other principle, substantial form, determines the first act of matter. These are the intrinsic principles of mobile being qua mobile.

According to Aristotle prime matter considered positively is the first subject of which a thing is made. The term "subject" signifies that from which or out of which a thing is made, that is to say the primary substrate. Prime matter is the first substantial principle from which every mobile being is made in its essence; but it cannot exist except in conjunction with substantial form. Form, on the other hand, is that by which a thing is what it is and not something else. For this reason form is called act because it constitutes and determines a thing in a certain mode of being. The matter is the common element which remains while forms appear and disappear. In changeable being, substantial form is properly defined as the first act of prime matter. It is called act because it is the determining principle in mobile being. Substantial form is the principle of specification of being and the first principle of operation. Therefore, matter and form (that is, prime matter and substantial form) are to be conceived of as two co-principles which are naturally ordained for substantial union and which constitute a complete bodily substance, an existing

nature.²⁰

Generation and Corruption

The generation and corruption of things are rendered intelligible by these principles of mobile being. In the process of coming into being, there is required an underlying support which remains throughout the change and which allows the change to take place. This is the substantial subject of all change, prime matter. Also, the substantially new form towards which mobile being tends is the term of generation. This lack of form is the privation within the subject. When a new substance is generated a new substantial form is educed from the potentiality of matter. This means that prime matter is an imperfect substantial potentiality, a capacity for receiving substantial forms. Prime matter is altogether passive, yet is capable of receiving new substantial forms. This presupposes in the subject which passes to a new substantial act a capacity to this rather than to another form and also supposes in the subject a lack of such a suitable form. This privation of a new form in a suitable subject accounts for the appearance of a new substance. The new substantial form supplants the old. The corruption of one form is therefore the generation of another. The new substantial

²⁰Aristotle, *Physica*, 209b 23. "The form and the matter are not separable from the thing."

form is said to be drawn out or educed from prime matter by the activity of existing forms. At the sametime, the old substantial form is reduced to the potentiality of matter.²¹

It is the subject, the prime matter which undergoes and underlies this substantial loss and acquisition. The prime matter which was substantially constituted, for example, as wood is now the prime matter that is substantially constituted by the substantial determinants of smoke and ashes. Prime matter, therefore, is the substrate which is informed, and is the subject of substantial changes which occur in bodily being. Substantial form is the determinant of prime matter as an actual body of definite specific kind. Prime matter can lose its substantial form but not otherwise than by the incoming of a displacing substantial form. It is from this analysis of mobile being that Aristotle concluded that generation requires three principles. These are a common subject, the prime matter; secondly, a new substantial form to which prime matter naturally tends and thirdly, privation, the absence of the new form not yet acquired but which is suitable to the matter. Privation is only considered a principle of the generation of things because in so far as the generation has not achieved the substantial term to which it is tending, it is said to lack that term.

Moreover, the substantial term of generation is always

²¹K. Dougherty, ibid., pp. 118-119.

a formed nature. Aristotle points out that those things which are constituted by nature have present in themselves a principle of motion and of rest. Natural things are, in this sense, different therefore from those things which are constituted by art. The latter exist without any intrinsic principle of change.²² However, animals, plants and bodies are said to exist by nature because they have within them the natural principles of change. All bodies which exist by nature are composites of two natural principles; a principle of indetermination and a principle of determination. Since the latter is what constitutes a nature in act by determining the matter, it is the principle of life. The doctrine of hylemorphism holds that the life principle is the substantial form of the living body. It is an active and determining substantial principle which somehow unifies in structure and function the various heterogeneous parts and makes one organic substance of the whole. The substantial actuality of this principle is what causes life in a constituted substance.

Hylemorphism, therefore, holds that mobile being, compounded of prime matter and substantial form is a real substantial unity endowed with active and passive powers. It explains the opposite powers by the really distinct opposite principles, substantial form and prime matter. These essential

²²Aristotle, Physica, 192b 22-24.

parts of mobile being cannot exist separately; they are incomplete principles.

Prime matter is not determinate in itself; it is pure potentiality and can exist only in the compound along with substantial form. It is not brought into being by change but remains as the subject of new substantial forms. The substantial form actualizes the potentiality of prime matter and is the intrinsic reason why the substance is of one species and not another. Because of it, the substance has definite qualities and definite activities. Matter and form cause material substance, each in their own way by constituting it. This is effected by the action of an agent educing form from matter.²³

Thus, in studying the generation and corruption of mobile being the philosophy of nature is concerned also with a knowledge of the causes of these changes.

In all, Aristotle lists four causes²⁴ which account for the coming into being of things.

In one way "that out of which a thing comes to be and persists"²⁵ is called cause. It is the immanent matter in which something comes into being. This cause is called the material cause because it contributes to the production of

²³K. Dougherty, ibid., p. 114.

²⁴Aristotle, Physica, 194b 24 - 195a 30.

²⁵Ibid., 194b24.

the effect by assuming new substantial forms.

In another way cause is said to be a pattern or exemplar.²⁶ This is the formal cause. Its effect can be spoken of in two ways. First, it may be spoken of as an intrinsic form in which case it is called a species. The formal cause contributes to the production of the effect by communicating its own determination intrinsically to the matter, forming it actually into effect. The causality of intrinsic form is neither action nor passion, but determination and specification. By virtue of its intrinsic union with matter, the effect is produced and exists. Secondly, formal cause may refer to something extrinsic to the thing after which a likeness is made. In this latter sense an exemplar is said to be the form of a thing.

In another way, that "by which there is a principle of motion and rest"²⁷ is called a cause. It is spoken of as the principle from which change and rest first comes about. For example, "the counselor is a cause" for it is because of his advice that someone acts. Also the father is the cause of the son because of the nature in the father. So universally every maker is the cause of the made thing and the change, in the same way, the cause of change.

²⁶Ibid., 194b 26.

²⁷Ibid., 194b 29.

With respect to these causes, St Thomas comments,²⁸ that there are four kinds of efficient cause: namely, the perfecting, the preparing, the assisting and the counseling. The perfecting cause is that which completes the motion or change, as does that which introduces the substantial form in generation. The preparing or disposing cause is that which adapts the matter or subject for the ultimate completion. The assisting cause is that which does not operate for its own end but for the end of another. The counseling cause, in those things which act by intention, is that which gives the agent the form by means of which it operates.

Finally, there is the end or purpose "for the sake of which"²⁹ the process is initiated. In the process of generation the end is the formed nature. Consequently it is called the final cause because all the other causes are as means to the attainment of this good.

Thus in order for something to come-to-be these four

²⁸St Thomas Aquinas, In Octo Libros Physicorum Aristotelis, II, lect. 5, Parmae ed. (New York: Masurgia, 1949), XVIII, pp.270-271. "...quod quadruplex est causa efficiens; scilicet perficiens, praeparans, adjuvans et consilians. Perficiens enim est, quod dat complementum motui vel mutationi, sicut quod introducit formam substantialem in generatione. Praeparans autem seu disponens est, quod aptat materiam seu subjectum ad ultimum complementum. Adjuvans vero est, quod non operatur ad proprium finem, sed ad finem alterius. Consilians autem in his quae agunt a proposito, quod dat agenti formam per quam agit."

²⁹Aristotle, Physica, 194b 31.

causes are required. What comes into being must be of a determinate nature and therefore must have a form determining that nature. Also, what comes into being must come from something which has it potentially. This is matter. However the matter in order to pass from potentially being the product to actually being it, must be moved by an agent in act. This is the efficient cause. And finally, the efficient cause in moving the matter to actuality must tend in its action toward something determinate befitting its own determinate nature. That to which it tends is the final cause. So in every production of being these four causes are present.

Such then are the principles of the philosophy of nature. They explain the natural coming-to-be of things through a knowledge of their principles and causes.

Yet, returning to our original question, how can these natural principles be said to provide an adequate basis for a theory of criticism? Is there the possibility that the principles which explain the coming-to-be of things in nature might also explain those things which come-to-be by art? If this is possible, the philosophy of nature would be qualified as the science in which to find the theoretical basis of criticism.

III

THE PHILOSOPHY OF ART

The Notion of Imitation

Art, like nature, is concerned with the coming into being and the production of things. In the previous chapter we have seen that the principles which explain the natural process of generation, are found in the philosophy of nature. However, since art also involves a process of generation it is reasonable to conclude that these same principles should explain the coming into being of artificial things. There is no better way in which to verify this conclusion than to examine, carefully, the dictum: "Art imitates nature",¹ for this formula (at least in the philosophy that favours this conclusion) translates what is applicable to the natural process of generation, into what is relative to the process of artificial coming into being.

In examining the dictum, as such, it is necessary to note the two profoundly different meanings which the term imitation acquired when it is used in the philosophical background of Plato and Aristotle. Both agree that imitation² (MIMESIS) is an

¹Aristotle, Physica, 194a 21.

²Referring to the poets in the Laws, 719c, Plato makes the Athenian stranger say that art consists in imitation; "...art being imitative...". Also Aristotle in the Physica, 194a21, states that "...art imitates nature...".

essential characteristic of all art. However, the fundamental difference in their philosophical thought renders the meaning of imitation correspondingly different. This will be evident from the following examination of their works.

Plato

Plato defines art by first giving an explanation of its origin. Because of its obscurity, he describes its beginnings with the myth of Prometheus.³ The story relates how all the animals of the world except man were supplied by the gods with the necessary hair for the protection against the cold, with the claws to secure food, and to fight their enemies. But of all the creatures, the human being was left helpless, incapable of defending or of taking care of himself. Prometheus, therefore, moved by the inadequacies which befell man's nature, stole fire from Heaven and the arts of weaving and metal-working from Athena and Hephaestus.⁴ Thus this Platonic myth has art coming into the world in order to meet the needs of man in his fight for existence. Through the exercise of this gift of art, man "was not long in inventing articulate speech and names; and he also constructed houses and cloths and shoes and beds; and

³Plato, Protagoras, 320d-322.

⁴Athena was the Greek goddess of wisdom and Hephaestus the god of fire and master of the forge.

drew sustenance from the earth...and their art was only sufficient to provide them with the means of life."⁵ Here Plato puts forward one aspect of his conception of art. This is the exercise of human skill for the fulfillment of man's needs.

Plato presents a further aspect of art in the Statesman.⁶ In the art of carpentering as in all the skills, the knowledge of the workman is merged in his work. The master of any art is the one who knows best the function of his products. But, over the manual arts, there is the sphere of pure knowledge which professes the supreme art in which one learns to weigh and count all human functions "with what is fitting, having regard for the ideal standard."⁷ Since the philosopher alone is able to grasp the eternal and unchangeable truth Plato concludes that the "Royal Art" is that of, philosopher-king.

In order to determine whether poetry is a real art or not, Plato examines it in the light of the "Royal Art" of philosophy. The philosopher, whose views must always be rational, finds the poets wanting in understanding. Plato persists that poets compose on subjects they do not understand. In the Apology, Socrates relates how he questioned a group of poets on how well they understood their own words. "I presently recognized...that

⁵Plato, Protagoras, 320c - 322.

⁶Plato, Statesman, 258c - 259b.

⁷Ibid., 286b.

what they composed was not by wisdom but by nature, and because they were inspired like the prophets and givers of oracles; for these also say many fine things but know none of the things they say."⁸

Also in the Ion, Plato again judges on the office of the myth-maker. In their work, the poets are inspired by the gods, rather than guided by the knowledge or art of what they do.

"for all good poets, epic as well as lyric, compose their beautiful poems not by art, but because they are inspired and possessed...Seeing then that it is not by art that they compose and utter so many fine things about the deeds of man...but by divine power...for not by art does the poet sing, but by power divine."⁹

When the poet is composing he is not in his senses. He is the victim of the uprush of inspiration which deprives him of his rational faculty and therefore of art. "For all good poets... compose their beautiful poems not by art but because they are inspired and possessed."¹⁰ This non-rational inspiration denies the poet the name of artist because art admits only of the truth whereas the poet, "is often compelled to represent men of opposite dispositions, and thus to contradict himself; neither can he tell whether there is more truth in one thing

⁸Plato, Apology, 22c.

⁹Plato, Ion, 533c - 534a.

¹⁰Ibid.

that he has said than in another."¹¹ It is only with the true artist, the philosopher-king that there is present the scientific truth which is necessary for art.

It is at the beginning of Book X of the Republic that Plato employs the term imitation to denote the relation in which poetry stands to the truth of divine ideas.¹² He proceeds to show that what both the dramatic and the epic forms give are representations of appearances, and not the truth of the immutable ideas: illusion instead of reality. This poetry, he states, resembles painting in that both imitate things of the visible world, the one in words, the other in colour, as they appear to be, from this or that point of view.¹³ What the poet and the painter present are therefore not actual things - as things produced by the craftsman are actual - but merely copies or transcripts of those things. In that sense, both artists obviously fall short of reality. But even the work of the craftsman is shown to be none other than a copy, a defective copy of the original "idea" existing in the mind of God; so that he too fails to apprehend and reproduce reality. At the same time, the craftsman is said to stand nearer to the truth of things, for

¹¹Plato, Laws, 719b.

¹²Plato, Republic, 595. "...all poetical imitations are ruinous to the understanding of the hearers, and that the knowledge of their true nature is the only antidote to them."

¹³Ibid., 596. "And the painter too is...just such another - a creator of appearances."

he has some knowledge ("right opinion") of the things he makes, whereas the poet, with his imperfect copy, stands two removed from the truth, and all he attains to is mere conjecture. In short, Plato's charge against poets on this is that they produce only unsubstantial images such as a man might make by holding up a mirror to the things of the sensible world.¹⁴ The poet, therefore, in his imitations presents the external and the superficial for the whole, and the unreal appearances for the truth of things. For Plato, the poets indulged in servile copying and in reproducing partial images of the truth.

It is on the theory that the real world is the world of Ideas, that Plato judges the place of visible things and of poetry. All visible things are imitations or participations of the supersensible archetypes whose patterns have been followed by the Demiurge in fashioning the universe. Human artisans, in turn, make beds and other artifacts still further removed from the true models. But the poet is an imitator of imitations and is hence "thrice removed from the king and from the truth."¹⁵ He is not a genuine maker but a clever manipulator of appearances.

From Plato's exposition on imitation in Book X of the Republic it is clear that for any class of objects there is only one "idea" and that is universal and true. Now it is the

¹⁴Ibid., 594d.

¹⁵Plato, Republic, 595b.

wisdom of the philosopher-king or the "Royal Artist" to understand and contemplate the universal and the true. Artisans, on the other hand, deal with the things of the visible world. They make couches, chairs, ships and coats. In the third removed, however, poets and painters make images which are imitations of the visible world. The number of images that can be made is not limited, and they are not bound to any consistent logical truth. To Plato, it was a plain and obvious fact that the artist did not produce the objects of the visible world, but only their appearances. Because such imitations do not attain to the truth of things, Plato condemns them as "ruineous to the understanding."¹⁶

However, a careful reading of the Dialogues discloses that for Plato there are imitations and imitations. There are the imitations of the poets and the painters of his day which he condemns in the Republic.¹⁷ But there are also the imitations of the good artists and poets who concern themselves with truth and which he commends in the Laws.¹⁸ The rightness of an

¹⁶ Ibid., 595b.

¹⁷ On this point, it has been suggested by K. E. Gilbert and Helmut Kuhn in their work, A History of Esthetics (New York: Mac-Millan, 1939), p. 29, that "Plato doubtless had in mind as a particular instance of bad imitative art the new school of illusionistic painting coming into favor in his time, practised by Apollodorus, Zeuxis, and Parrhasius in which perspective and variations in tone were used to give the complete semblance of the outer world."

¹⁸ Plato, Laws, 668. "...we must assert that imitations... are to be judged of by the standard of truth, and by no other whatever."

imitation lies in the reproduction of the quality and proportions of the original for "the truth of imitation consists ...in rendering the thing imitated according to quantity and quality."¹⁹ Applying the case to a statue, there must be present the proportions of a body, and the true situation of the parts which is only obtained from a knowledge of the animal imitated. In other words, Plato is insisting that for an imitation, knowledge of the thing imitated is required, otherwise, it becomes a mirroring of things in their ephemeral state of becoming.

Mr J.W. Atkins remarks on this true notion of imitation as held by Plato and which stands in contrast to the kind of imitation spoken of in the Republic. He writes, referring first to the deceptive imitations:

"Of these conceptions, ...Plato makes frequent use maintaining that poets indulged in servile copying and in reproducing partial images of the truth. Yet," he continues, "Plato also advances beyond this position; and indeed this is the position he tries everywhere to refute, a fact which is not always fully realized. Alive as he was to an unseen reality existing behind the objects of sense, he conceived of an imitation of the ideal forms of that unseen world, ideas of justice, beauty and truth...And it is this kind of "imitation" that he associates with poetry in its highest form; but a process which represents things as they ought to be and not in their actuality."²⁰

Mr Atkins realizes and expresses in these words the twofold

¹⁹Ibid., 668b.

²⁰J.W. Atkins, Literary Criticism in Antiquity (London: Methuen, 1952), I, p. 52.

meaning of imitation as it appears in Plato's works. There are the deceptive imitations of the poets and painters who are lost in the infinite mirroring of appearances without ever rising to a knowledge of the world of ideas. On the other hand, there are the true imitations of the good poets and artists who understand what they are imitating. They transcend the visible world, as such, and through an understanding of truth of the ideal forms express true imitations. Truth is laid down by Plato as a kind of minimum requirement for a good imitation. This need for a "transcendental liaison"²¹ with truth is stressed by Plato as essential to good imitation. If it is lacking the imitations immediately fall back to the level of deception and superficial copies, without any concern for the supersensible intelligibility of the world of ideas. For Plato, imitation in this transcendental aspect, is chiefly a matter of intelligible representation of truth. But on this basis, as we have seen, the philosopher and not the poet is the true "Royal Artist" because it is his proper task to seek the truth.²² Yet this transcendental truth characterizes the whole of Plato's philosophy and it is essential for all true art, whether of the philosopher-king, of the poet or of the artist.

²¹This term is used by Rissa Meritain in Situation De La Poésie (Paris: Desclée, 1938), p. 17, to characterize the necessary connection which art must have with the world of the spirit and of intelligibility.

²²Plato, Republic, 480b.

Plato's inability to acknowledge the material element in art is due to the limitations which his theory of ideas forces upon him. Starting from the notion of pure being he found reality only in the world of ideas. Since the becoming of the sensible world was the simple antithesis of being, he was compelled to regard the visible changing world as that which is not. A philosophy of nature was therefore alien to his thought because the sensible world was only an illusion. Knowledge, in the Platonic system, is limited to the world of ideas. All else is the object of opinion. The view that reality is single, undivided and unchangeable amounts, therefore, to the abolition of natural philosophy. This lack of a philosophy of nature in the Platonic thought, moves M Maritain to write: "When the philosopher tries despite everything to give an interpretation of the world and to rise above common opinion, he can proceed only with the help of myths. The use of myths to interpret sensible nature is really indispensable in Plato's philosophy."²⁵ Since Plato has no philosophy of nature he is unable to justify the reality of either sensible nature or of the sensible manifestations of art.

However, despite his exaggerated essentialism, Plato had pointed out, at least negatively, that a philosophy of art requires a transcendent aspect. This is the element which

²⁵Jacques Maritain, La Philosophie De La Nature, 3e ed. (Paris: Tegu, 1935), p. 7.

raises art above the senses to the level of contemplation and which frees it from the tyranny of sensible imitations. True imitations, for Plato, must as a minimum requirement, involve the intelligible world. Although it was Plato's error to have posited this intelligible world outside of things, still this in no way distracts from his negative intuition into the need for a transcendent element in art. True imitation in Plato's sense would imitate things not as they appear to be, but as they are in the transcendent world of archetypes. These immutable, eternal natures were the only objects of true imitations.

Aristotle

As was pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, the dictum "Art imitates nature" furnishes a point reference on which the coming-to-be of art can be compared with the coming-to-be of nature. The term "nature" is taken here in its strict sense as was defined in the Physica of Aristotle. It is an inner principle of activity or the source of ontological striving in things which realizes the perfections of the beings so endowed.²⁴ Aristotle identifies nature as power of movement, with nature as form. The form or mode of structure of a thing is just that by virtue of which it moves, grows and comes to rest when it has reached the terminus of its movement. And

²⁴Aristotle, Physica, 194a 28-29.

conversely the power to move, grow and alter in a certain definite way is just the form or character of each thing.²⁵

For Aristotle, nature and art are the two main sources of the coming-to-be of things.²⁶ They differ in that nature has its principle of motion within itself, while "from art proceed the things of which the form is in the soul of the artist."²⁷ As nature is primarily a vital process working its way out through natural products, the developing and producing of things according to determining forms; so art is for him a making, a movement set up in some medium by the soul and hand of the artist.²⁸ In so far as art is a process of making, it imitates the vital processes in the world of nature. The point of comparison which Aristotle makes is that alike in those things which come-to-be by nature and by art, there is present in each one an union of matter and form. Aristotle affirms that "...all things produced either by nature or by art have matter; for each of them is capable of being and of not being, and this capacity is the matter in each..."²⁹ The natural development

²⁵Aristotle, Metaphysica, 1026a.

²⁶Aristotle, Metaphysics, 1032a 12.

²⁷Ibid., 1032a 31.

²⁸Ibid., 1032a 25. "...all other productions are called 'makings'. And all making proceed either from art or from a faculty or from thought."

²⁹Ibid., 1032a 20-22.

of form out of matter, in the process of coming-to-be, is what art imitates in its own process of generation. As the things of nature develop from within unfolding and expanding according to their own principle of motion, so in artificial generation art imitates the dynamic process of nature which proceeds towards definite ends by determined means. Aristotle's conception of "imitation" as applied to the imitative arts is said to emulate the coming-to-be of things in nature because a bronze bowl issues from the metal on the same essential plan as the plant grows from its seed.

Unlike Plato's Promethean myth on the origin of art, Aristotle places poetry among these goods which are the natural fruits of the human reason.³⁰ For Aristotle it is natural for man to make things. It is in this natural tendency for man to imitate that Aristotle finds one cause of poetry. Indeed man "is the most imitative creature in the world, and learns first by imitation."³¹ From experience and common testimony we know that man takes pleasure in imitating and in viewing representations. "To be learning something is the greatest of pleasures not only of the philosopher but also to the rest of mankind however small their capacity for it; the reason for the

³⁰Aristotle, *Metaphysica*, 980b 25. "The animals other than man live by appearances and memories, and have but little of connected experience; but the human race lives also by art and reasonings."

³¹Aristotle, *Poetica*, 1448b 7-8.

delight in seeing, is that one is at the sametime learning - gathering the meaning of things."³²

It is necessary to note that when he states that "Art imitates nature" and, again that "the objects of imitation are men in action,"³³ Aristotle is referring first to the process of generation in art and secondly, to the object of the imitative arts. The poet, according to Aristotle, in the engendering of a work of art, imitates the creative processes of nature; but his subject-matter is man, and the objects of poetic imitation, human life in all its manifestations.³⁴ As applied to poetry, imitation has a threefold object: "character, emotions and actions."³⁵

"By ETHE are meant the characteristic moral qualities, the permanent dispositions of the mind which reveal a certain condition of the will; PATHE are the more transient emotions, the passing moods of feeling; PRAXIS are actions in their proper and inward sense. An act viewed merely as an external process or result, one of a series of outward phenomena, is not the true object of artistic imitation. The PRAXIS which art seeks to reproduce is mainly an inward process, a physical energy working outward: deeds, incidents, events, situations being included under it so far as these spring from an inward act of will, or elicit some activity of thought and feeling."³⁶

³²Ibid., 1448b 12-17.

³³Ibid., 1448a 1.

³⁴Vide J. W. Atkins, Ibid., p. 81.

³⁵Aristotle, Poetica, 1448a 28.

³⁶S. Butcher, Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art, 4th ed. (London: MacMillan, 1907), p. 123.

Actions in the sense defined are for Aristotle the proper subject of imitations.³⁷ The arts imitate actions in their manifestations, and only the material objects, in so far as these serve to interpret the spiritual and mental processes. This is apparent in the very definition of tragedy. Tragedy is "an imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself."³⁸ Since it is an imitative art, tragedy is an attempt to act forth in concrete terms, but under controllable and intelligible circumstances, the universal and formal aspect of human life.

Since beauty demands that tragedy be complete and of a certain magnitude, there must be a proper distribution of parts. The completeness of a good tragedy lies in this, that it constitutes a whole in which beginning, middle and end of the action mutually implicate one another. Thus it seizes upon "what ought to be,"³⁹ the better thing, laying bare only the necessary sequence of events. Every beautiful work of art must be a certain appropriate size, both to remain true to its form and to provide suitable conditions for pleasurable contemplation. Beauty in art is "therefore impossible either in a very minute creature, since our preception becomes indistinct

³⁷Aristotle, Poetics, 1448a 1. "The objects the imitator represents are actions..."

³⁸Ibid., 1449b 24-25.

³⁹Ibid., 1460b 10.

as it approaches; or in a creature of vast size - one, say a thousand miles long - as in that case, instead of the object being seen all at once, the unity and wholeness is lost to the beholder."⁴⁰

In designating plot the most important element in tragedy, Aristotle was remaining true to his philosophical convictions concerning the primacy of form over matter, of act over potency. For character and thought are in potency to their actualization in the action of the plot. Thus plot is "the life and soul, so to speak of tragedy,"⁴¹ since it is the formal or actual principle in manifest operation. The imitation must be of one action; the universal must be focussed in a definite action. Just as nature herself is not merely episodic⁴² so also, "in poetry the story as an imitation of action, must represent one action, a complete whole, with its several incidents so closely connected that the transposal or withdrawal of any of them will disjoin and dislocate the whole."⁴³

While in the natural order the attainment of the end

⁴⁰Ibid., 1450b 38-1451a 3.

⁴¹Ibid., 1450a 37-38.

⁴²Aristotle, Metaphysica, 1090b 20. "But the observed facts show that nature is not a series of episodes, like bad tragedy."

⁴³Aristotle, Poetica, 1451a 31-34.

holds the place of the beautiful,⁴⁴ art completes and transcends nature by realizing ends beyond its ordinary capacity. Form is the principle of unity, a manifold variety in unity, an organic whole. The ideal plot must be constructed in an orderly and symmetrical fashion, "so as to enable the work to produce its own proper pleasure with all the unity of a living creature."⁴⁵ In the Politica it is noted that "beauty is realized in number and magnitude, and the state which combines magnitude with good order must necessarily be the most beautiful."⁴⁶ Thus beauty in art was scarcely distinguished from the state of well-rounded perfection in which artistic form had been successfully determined in its proper medium or matter.

In his well-known comparison of poetry and history, Aristotle awards the palm to the former on the grounds that it treats of the universal aspect of things, whereas history contents itself with particular facts.⁴⁷ For "the poet's function is to describe, not the thing that has happened,

⁴⁴Aristotle, De Partibus Animalium, 645a 24-26. "Absence of haphazard and conducivness of everything to an end are to be found in Nature's works in the highest degree, and the resultant end of her generations and combinations is a form of the beautiful."

⁴⁵Aristotle, Poetica, 1459a 20-21.

⁴⁶Aristotle, Politica, 1326a 33-35.

⁴⁷Aristotle, Poetica, 1451b 5-7.

but a kind of thing that might happen, what is possible as being probable or necessary."⁴⁸ A universal statement is about what a man will probably or necessarily do. The poet, represents things "as they were and are, or as they are said or thought to be or to have been or as they ought to be."⁴⁹ In any case, what is fixed upon in imitation and expressed in a concrete way is the universal, the principle of actuality which originates from the mind of the maker.⁵⁰

While "history has to deal, not with one action but with a period and all that happened in that to one or more persons however disconnected the several events may have been,"⁵¹ art must observe a stricter economy, adhering rigidly to the rule of form. If the artist is accused of adhering to things as they are, he may well retort, "that the object ought to be as described - an answer like that of Sophocles, who said that he drew men as they ought to be, and Euripides as they were."⁵² For the artist is anxious to achieve, if only in imitation, that transcendent goal towards which all nature is striving. The requirements of poetry or

⁴⁸Ibid., 1451a 37-39.

⁴⁹Ibid., 1460b 10-11.

⁵⁰Aristotle, Metaphysics, 1032a 32-61.

⁵¹Aristotle, Poetics, 1459a 21-24.

⁵²Ibid., 1460b 33-36.

of common tradition or the exigencies of a fuller reality quite refutes the objects of slavishly literal imitators. Should man, for instance, find fault with a painter because he portrays a hind with horns, they are only justified if such a technical mistake has some intimate connection with the total conception of the work of art. Aristotle will not tolerate art which is a slavish reproduction of facts.

It is on the guiding principles of the philosophy of nature that Aristotle erects his theory of imitation in art. To him becoming meant not an appearing and a vanishing away of 'deceptive shadows'. The process of changing things meant a process of development, an unfolding of what is already in act and in potency to further act. The concrete individual thing is not a shadowy appearance but the primary reality. There exists in each thing an intelligible and immaterial element which Aristotle calls form, in virtue of which it possesses a specific nature. This principle is not separate from things but it inheres in them as one of the factors which constitutes their substance. Thus individual objects, though mutable and corruptible, are no longer 'deceptive shadows'; they are reality. Aristotle's whole philosophy is centered upon real existence, whereas Plato's tends towards ideal essences. Like Plato the object of the intellect is the essences of things but these essences are in things and not outside of them. The essence 'humanity' as a universal exists only in the intellect - in

our mind, which extracts or abstracts it from the things in which it exists individualized, that is, the essence of Peter, Paul and John is humanity, or human nature and that it is only as an object of the intelligence that it exists necessarily. The essences of sensible things therefore possess no separate existence in a pure state; for Aristotle the whole Platonic world of archetypal ideas has no justification whatever.

Art, therefore, is no longer twice removed from the truth of things; it is the manifestation of a higher truth, the expression of the universal which is not outside of and apart from the particular, but presupposed in each particular. A work of art is an image of reality which is generated in the form and through which the form shows more apparent than in the actual world.

Consequently, "imitation" for Aristotle meant "imitating things as they ought to be."⁵³ There is no question of a bare imitation, of a literal transcript of the world of reality. The artist aims at something better than the actual. He produces a new thing, not the actual thing of appearance, not a copy of reality, but a higher reality - "for the artist ought to improve on his model."⁵⁴ There is a form which is present in each individual phenomena but imperfectly manifested because

⁵³Ibid., 1460b 6.

⁵⁴Ibid., 1461b 11.

the general movement of organic life is in potency to its perfection. Forms impress themselves on the mind of the artist through the instrument of the senses, and he seeks to give them more complete expression, to bring to light the ideal which is only half revealed in the world of reality.

"Beneath the individual, the transient and the particular the 'imitative art' finds the universal. It passes beyond the bare reality given by nature, and expresses a purified form of reality disengaged from accident, and freed from the conditions which thwart its development. The real and the ideal from this point of view are not opposites, as they are sometimes conceived to be. The ideal is the real, but rid of contradictions, unfolding itself according to the laws of its own being, apart from the alien influences and the disturbances of chance."⁵⁵

Here then, in general, is Aristotle's view of art as it is related to the notion "Art imitates nature."

Do the philosophers or theologians who come after Aristotle add anything to his thought? Or do they depart from it and seize upon some other principle of explanation. These are the questions which the next chapter will answer.

⁵⁵S. Butcher, ibid., pp. 150-151.

IV

THE PHILOSOPHY OF ART

The Notion of Imitation in Christian Thought

With the coming of Christianity, God as the Creator of all things was the central notion in theological and philosophical thought. Nature was the name for all that was created by God, and since it was created by Him, it was rejoiced in, as His Art. In its beauty and actions were seen the Divine Intelligence causing the seasons in their cycles and life in its actions. This exaltation of nature as the Divine Art grew to a great intensity in the writings of the Church Fathers. In arguing that sensible things are means of raising our minds to a contemplation of their Divine Creator, St. Gregory of Nyssa exclaims:

"For when we have concluded generally that no single thing existing, whether an object of sense or of thought, is formed spontaneously or fortuitously, but that everything discoverable in the world is linked to the Being, Who transcends all existence and possesses the source of its continuance, and we then perceive that beauty and the majesty of the wonderful sights of creation, we thus get from these and such-like marks a new range of thought about Deity, and interpret each one of the thoughts thus arising within us by a special name, following the advice of Wisdom Who says that 'by the greatness and beauty of the creatures proportionately the Maker of them is seen'".¹

¹ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, trans., Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, second series (New York: Christian Literature, 1893), V, p. 309.

St Chrysostom speaks of nature as God's creation with the same glorification:

"Look," exhorts the saint, "at the starry heavens, the great plains where the stag and doe freely browse about the fountains, and tell me whether one should be enraptured by the beauties of nature and by the marvellous works of the Creator."²

This awareness of Divine Creation had the effect of drawing man to nature. Since the wonder and delight experienced in nature was attributed to the Divine Art, there gradually arose a certain sacramental attitude toward sensible reality. Nature in its various forms displayed the intelligibility, the beauty, the order and the grandeur which are themselves the imprint of the Divine Maker and which refreshed the mind and body of man in his everyday existence. Christ Himself in His teachings summoned men to an appreciation of the beauty of the lilies of the field, which were more beautiful than Solomon in all his glory.

Early Christian writers, in their simplicity and zeal for the Word of Christ, found themselves considering all art which was not God's as something "artificial", and, therefore, to be discouraged. They were so absorbed in the beauty of the Divine Art, everywhere exemplified in nature, that they neglected the role which the human artist has in perpetuating, in a secondary sense, God's Creation in the sensible world. This

²vide Maurice de Wulf, Art and Beauty, trans., Sister Mary Gonzago Udell, O.P. (London: Harder, 1950), p. 128.

is quite evident when St Chrysostom writes in another place:

"When you look at gleaming buildings, and the aspect of colonnades allures your eye, then turn at once to the vault of heaven and to the free plains in which herds graze at the water's brink, Who does not despise all the creations of art when at dawn in the stillness of his heart he admires the rising sun, as it sheds its golden light over the earth; or, when resting by a spring in the deep grass or under the dark shade of thick-leaved trees, he feasts his eye on the far distance vanishing in the haze?"³

Thus we see how fully these early Christian writers recognized the beauty of nature as the work of Divine Creation, and even accentuated this recognition by a tendency to disparage, in comparison, the works of man. It was only with St Augustine that human art found its place in Christian thought.

In the meantime, in those cases where art did find expression in "imitations" of nature, the charge of artificiality" was based on one of two reasons. First, any attempt to imitate nature tended to diminish its sacramental character by directing man's attention away from its divine origin. Early Christians saw, as Plato did, the falsity involved in "imitations" which had no other purpose than to give an illusion of nature. Nature in its natural state was preferred to an illusion of it for it was the work of the Divine Artist. Any human art, therefore, in contrast to the Divine Art of sensible reality was called "artificial". Secondly, this

³vide Bernard Bosanquet, A History of Aesthetic (London: MacMillan, 1910), p. 129.

disdain for human art was further increased because of the decaying character of Roman art. At the advent of Christianity, the arts had lost much of their inspirational basis and had, in general degenerated into a purely sensuous display. Instead of being a means of inspiring man to a life above him, the Roman theatre indulged the sensuality of the body. Christians reacting to this illicit gratification of the senses rejected human art as fostering love solely for the things of this world.⁴ This attitude towards human art prevailed until the time of Augustine.

Like the earlier Christian Fathers, St Augustine found everywhere in nature examples of God as Artist. But he, more than any other Church Father developed its philosophical implications. These implications also included the place of man as artist. From his writings we can gain much insight into the early Christian meaning of imitation when used in art and applied to nature.

Philosophically, Augustine was indebted to the Neo-Platonist,⁵ Plotinus for many of his ideas. Whatever this relationship may have been, Plotinus does make several

⁴M. J. Adler, Art and Prudence. (New York: Longmans, 1937), p. 56. In referring to the early Christian attitude towards the arts, Adler writes that their love of God always decided what was to be loved in the world. He concludes: "Primitive Christianity did not compromise."

⁵Emmanuel Chapman, St Augustine's Philosophy of Beauty (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1939), p. 92, n. 15.

significant remarks on the nature of art which parallel much of what Augustine has to say. For this reason, he serves as an excellent introduction to Augustine's observations on art.

Plotinus

With Plato and Aristotle, Plotinus had himself adopted the transcendental idea of art as essential to its nature. Art was primarily an intellectual thing. The essential cause was the idea in the artist's intellect. This idea is the engendering form of art. "This form," wrote Plotinus, "is in the designer before ever it enters the stone; and the artificer holds it not by his equipment of eyes and hands but by his participation in his art."⁶ Without this participation of the artist in his art, there is no art. Art, if it is to be so, "must create in the image of its own nature and work by the Idea or Reason."⁷ The principle, therefore, of the beautiful object, namely the "Idea or Reason" in order to produce, must itself be beautiful in a "far higher and purer degree since it is the seat and source of that beauty, indwelling in the art which must naturally be more complete than any comeliness of

⁶Plotinus, Enneads, VIII, 1, 11-35 in The Great Books of the Western World, ed. Robert M. Hutchins, trans., Stephen Mackenna and E. S. Page (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1952).

⁷Ibid., VIII, 1, 37-38.

the external."⁸ It is on the side of the intellect that art has its source and life, "...every prime cause must be within itself, more powerful than its effect can be: the musical does not derive from an unmusical source but from music; and so the art exhibited in the material work derives from an art yet higher."⁹ It is in the higher art of the "Reason" that all art has its origin.

On the rôle of imitation in art Plotinus is most emphatic. In fact, he warns that arts are not to be slighted on the ground that they create by imitation of natural objects. On the contrary, it is a necessary condition that art imitate natural objects, just as natural objects are themselves necessary imitations of the Ideas from which nature has its source. In the arts, "we must recognize," he counsils, "that they give no bare reproduction of the thing seen but go back to the Ideas from which nature itself derives."¹⁰ In doing this, the artist transcends nature and in transcending it "adds where nature is lacking."¹¹ For those who fail in this, do so because they are

⁸Ibid., VIII, 1, 39-46.

⁹Ibid., VIII, 1, 52-57.

¹⁰Ibid., VIII, 1, 58-60.

¹¹Ibid., VIII, 1, 62. Emmanuel Chapman, St Augustine's Philosophy of Beauty, p. 110, n. 3 praises this above position in the following way: "Plotinus...brilliantly maintained that art is not a copy of a copy but ascends to the principles on which nature is built up."

undisciplined in the discernment of the principle producing beauty in Nature and knowing nothing of it, content themselves to "run after the outer, never understanding that it is the inner which stirs us"¹² both in art and in nature.

Nature, like the works of art, are the embodiment of the ideal archetypes in material forms. Yet these ideal archetypes in the World Soul are still more beautiful than the principles in nature for they are present in their purity. However, the artist must discover in some small way at least, the creative source of the very first Reason which is the principle of Beauty in nature. He can then take an image of it for as Plotinus says, "there can be no representation of it, except in the sense that we represent gold by some portion of gold."¹³

This "gold" is the hidden dynamic principle of all things that come to be by nature and by art. It is the "gold" of wisdom which everywhere presides at making.¹⁴ The artist himself goes back, after all, to that wisdom in nature which is embodied in himself. "This is not a wisdom built up of theories but one totality; not a wisdom composed or consisting of manifold detail co-ordinated into a unity; but rather, a unity

¹²Ibid., VIII, 2, 45-46.

¹³Ibid., VIII, 3, 14-25.

¹⁴Ibid., VIII, 5, 1-3.

working out into detail."¹⁵

This condition of "unity working out into detail" is what could be termed Plotinus' definition of the artistic process. It becomes possible only after the artist contemplates nature and with the "eye" of the soul¹⁶ participates in the principle of creativity that the Soul of Nature carries on and that is the source of creative energy within the arts.¹⁷ Once experienced, the artist sees "no mere bloom upon the surface" of nature but a penetration of the soul of man by the Soul of Nature. There is thus achieved a vision which no longer sees the divine as something external but which becomes it.¹⁸ To make explicit the unique meaning of this "vision" Plotinus wrote, "since sight deals with the external there can be here no vision unless in the sense of identification with the object."¹⁹ It is this identification which allows the artist to grasp the Ideas from which nature itself derives. The artist imitates these Ideas which are the principles of nature as well as of art and in virtue of which both nature and art subsist.

¹⁵Ibid., VIII, 5, 3-10.

¹⁶Ibid., I, 6, 9. By contemplation alone we can acquire the "only eye that sees the mighty beauty of the One."

¹⁷Vide K. E. Gilbert and Helmut Kuhn, A History of Esthetics, pp. 115-116.

¹⁸Plotinus, ibid., VIII, 10, 45-49.

¹⁹Ibid.

In brief, these are Plotinus' thoughts on art. Undoubtedly his insistence upon its essential transcendental character pointed the way for St Augustine.

St Augustine

Following in the philosophic tradition of Plotinus, Augustine considered art to be primarily the work of reason.²⁰ It is in the De Musica that Augustine lucidly points out the dependence of art upon reason. Like the lower animals, man makes; but unlike them, he makes according to reason. He cites the examples of birds making their nests and even artists making works according to clever imitations of sensible appearances. Neither, strictly speaking, possess art. The bird does so instinctively and does not possess a knowledge of his art. The same is true with some artists who do not possess a knowledge of their art but do so, through memory or clever imitation of appearances. The word "art" cannot be given to that which is the result of sensible imitation because

"...all who follow sense and what is pleasing in it commit to memory, and in this way by moving their body acquire a certain power of imitation; and that they do not have science even if they seem to do many things cleverly and skillfully unless they possess in the purity and truth of the intellect the very thing they profess or exhibit."²¹

²⁰ St Augustine, De Musica I, 4, 5, in The Fathers of the Church Series, ed., Ludwig Schopp (New York: Cima, 1947).

²¹ Ibid., I, 4, 3.

It is this "purity and truth of the intellect" which excludes any possible attempt to leave art exclusively on the level of the senses. It must rise to the level of the intellect where, for St Augustine, in a divine illumination, the mind becomes one with the thing contemplated and sees things in their pristine splendour. There and only there can art be truly engendered. The artist, in this purity of mind, sees things in the perfection which they could not attain in nature, and in his art, restores things to this level of delightful contemplation.²² What is realized exteriorly in the pleasing work of art is first seen interiorly by the artisan in his art.²³

St Augustine enriched his view of art with the knowledge of divine revelation. The revealed truth of creation made him profoundly aware of the fact that everything in nature was the product of the Divine Creator. In contemplating the sensible world all things spoke the grace of God's creation. Étienne Gilson alludes to this divine gratuitousness which reflects St Augustine's sacramental attitude towards created things.

²²This simple expression "delightful contemplation" contains the two aspects which St Augustine considered essential for an aesthetic experience. There is delight arising from contemplation. Vide E. Chapman, ibid., pp. 8-9.

²³Cf. E. Chapman, ibid., p. 111, n. 13.

"There is not one of His [God's] works which is not a grace..since they are made in the Image of the Creator..a grace so to speak universal and common to all."²⁴

St Augustine considered all created things in this sacramental light. Things in nature were the imitations of the forms in God's mind. God was Himself the Exemplar cause of created being and sensible things were primarily imitations of the divine forms.

Similarly, when the artist contemplated the Divine Art he rose to a direct imitation of the forms which nature itself imitated.²⁵ He would not concern himself with the falsity and illusion of trying to capture the imitations in nature of these forms. The artist, did not copy nature but transcended nature to those forms which nature itself copied. Such a transcending activity allowed the artist to visualize the forms of things in their perfections and to give expression to these in his work.

Augustine's notion of imitation in art, whether the Divine Art of nature or human art, stresses the ontological

²⁴E. Gilson, Introduction à L'Etude de Saint Augustin (Paris: Librairie Philosophique, 1943), p. 191. "Etant le Souverain bien, Dieu se suffit; c'est donc librement et gratuitement qu'il donne tout ce qu'il donne, et, en ce sens, il n'est aucune de ses oeuvres qui ne soit une grâce. ...En ce sens impropre la nature elle même serait donc une grâce, ...mais une grâce pour ainsi dire universelle et commune à tous.

²⁵E. Chapman, ibid., p. 111, n. 3. "Nature for Augustine was a copy of the ideas in God's mind, and art copies these ideas and not the copies in nature of these ideas."

basis of imitation. The emphasis falls on the contemplation of the intelligible forms which only the mind can see. To St Augustine, these forms or numbers constitute the intelligible principles for imitation in art.

St Thomas Aquinas

It was with St Thomas Aquinas that the earlier Christian Idealism of St Augustine came to an end. He performed the same service for St Augustine, as Aristotle had for Plato. The implication is that he reintegrated the real in the corporeal and ascribed due reality to sensible being. St Thomas therefore recognized the validity of the Aristotelian physics or natural philosophy. All existing things had forms which were immanent in them. They were not shadows of forms but were real in virtue of their own existence. Things were in act, they were actually moving and it was the mind's privilege to grasp the intelligibility of sensible nature. This point of contact between nature and the mind gave Thomism the advantage of knowing that which was never known by the Platonists; that was a knowledge of sensible reality. Thus the mind could know the sensible and real, as well as the intelligible. Since an idea reached the mind, only through the instrumentality of the senses, it followed that the mind must first of all be in contact with nature. So in restoring

the science of real things, St Thomas gave meaning once more to the Aristotelian dictum: "Art imitates nature."

St Thomas' notion of imitation in art follows that of Aristotle. Basically, it is the same; but he makes it more explicit. Art should imitate nature not by copying her work but by working as she does: Arts imitatur naturam in sua operatione.²⁶ According to St Thomas this notion of "imitation" finds its justification in the analogous relation existing between nature and art. Both nature and art find their source in intelligence. Nature is the result of the activity of the Divine Mind;²⁷ whereas art is the product of the human mind which has been brought to bear upon nature. Now, since all nature represents the work of the Divine Artist, the human artist should study it that he may learn to carry on the work of creation. The artist, in being a pupil of nature is, at the same time, the pupil of God.²⁸ He should conform

²⁶ St Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, I, 117, 1.
 "...Necesse est quod operationes artis imitentur naturae..."

²⁷ Ibid., I, 91, 3. "...omnes res naturales productae sunt ab arte divina: unde sunt quodammodo artificiatata ipsius Dei."

²⁸ "If the artist studies and cherishes nature ...it is not to copy nature but to base himself upon nature ...he must be God's pupil, for God knows the rules governing the making of works of beauty. Nature concerns the artist essentially, simply because it is a derivation from the divine art in things...The artist whether he knows it or not, is consulting God when he looks at things." Jacques Maritain, Art and Scholasticism, p. 50.

himself in so far as it is possible to the Creator's manner of producing in nature. Man as artist imitates God as artist in that the working of God in creation and human making both are products of intelligence. Art, like nature proceeds in orderly fashion, adopting and determining means suitable to the attainment of preconceived ends. Art, then, is human making in the image of divine making, for art imitates the processes of nature of which God is the producer. It is in this sense that Father Leonard Callahan interprets the Thomistic doctrine of imitation in art. He concludes that imitation in art is "not a servile copying of nature's models, but [rather] has recourse to nature as pupil to teacher. Art copies not nature but her ways."²⁹

St Thomas, like Aristotle did not, therefore, consider art to be a slavish imitation of nature. The doctrine of exact reproduction was not to be tolerated.

"Imitation as reproduction or representation of the real - in other words, imitation materially considered - is merely a means, not an end; it relates, along with manual dexterity to the artistic activity, but no more constitutes it. And the things made present to the soul by the sensible symbols of art - by rhythm, sound, line, colour, form, volume, words, metre, rhyme and image, the proximate matter of art - are themselves merely a material element of the beauty of the work, just like the symbols in question; they are the remote matter, so to speak, at the disposal of the artist, on which he must make the brilliance

²⁹ Leonard Callahan, O.P., A Theory of Esthetic, According to ... St Thomas Aquinas (Washington: Catholic University, 1947), pp. 93-99.

of form, the light of being shine. To set up the perfection of imitation materially considered as an end would therefore involve ordering oneself with a view to what is purely material in the work of art; a servile imitation absolutely foreign to art."³⁰

Besides, an absolute fidelity to nature is to limit art to the level of the eye, and to do violence to man's intellectuality. The artist studies nature not that he may photograph one of its aspects but to draw inspiration from it. To this extent art must depend upon nature. But the artist reflects upon the actual, then generalizes from the various forms of nature in order to envisage the object conceived in its ideal. Hence the "brilliance of form" of a thing is the resplendence of its ideal. The artist expresses this form by manifesting the intelligible principle through some sensible material. This is what Father Callahan terms "the essential of the artistic beauty according to the Thomistic theory - the expression of the ideal by the form; imitation is to be understood in the sense of manifestation of this principle of intelligibility, the ideal." He adds referring to art "...its mission is not to copy the real but to idealize the real and realize the ideal."³¹

But it is possible to say these things on art only if there is a philosophy of nature, distinct, at once, from

³⁰Jacques Maritain, Art and Scholasticism, pp. 45-46.

³¹L. Callahan, ibid., p. 100.

metaphysics and from the experimental sciences. Do modern philosophers generally subscribe to this view? This question will be answered in the next chapter.

MODERN AESTHETIC POSITIONS

The Philosophical Background

Rene Descartes, the father of modern philosophy, expressed a marked antipathy for poetry and for art, in general. This antipathy, however, was perfectly consistent with his philosophical system. To him, the only ideas that were worthwhile examining were clear and distinct ideas, for these alone were worthy of science, and capable of withstanding the "scrutiny of Reason."¹ Since his sole passion was to establish science on a firm basis, he was not interested in poetry and the like, for these did not help his science. This is particularly evident from what he wrote in the first part of the Discours De La Methode, concerning poetry and history.

"Besides, fictitious narratives lead us to image the possibility of many events that are impossible; and even the most faithful histories, if they do not wholly misrepresent matters or exaggerate their importance to render the account more worthy of perusal, omit, at least, almost always the meanest and least striking of the attendant circumstances; hence it happens that the remainder does not tell the truth, and such as regulate their conduct by examples drawn from this source, are apt to fall into extravagances of knight-errants of Romance

¹Rene Descartes, Discours De La Methode, ed. Etienne Gilson (Paris: Librairie Philosophique, 1947), II, p. 14.

and to entertain projects which exceed their powers."²

Poetry and history were two such fields which dealt with such extravagances and they were to be avoided for not representing the truth, that is to say, of clear and distinct ideas.

Nevertheless, Descartes, while he considered only clear and distinct ideas worthy of science, did make room for confused ideas when he included under the denomination "thought" everything within the mind.

"By the word thought, I understand all that which takes place in us that we of ourselves are immediately conscious of it; and, accordingly, not only to understand (intelligere, entendre) to will (velle), to image (imaginari), but even to perceive (sentire, sentir), are here the same as to think (cogitare, penser)."³

He designated generally by the term idea all that was in the mind. With this Descartes admitted the presence of any kind of ideas, whether clear and distinct, or confused.

One of Descartes successors, Gottfried Leibnitz saw the need for distinguishing within the mind, the clear ideas which belonged to science and the confused ideas which Descartes admitted but rejected as unfit for scientific knowledge. Leibnitz observed:

"An idea is obscure when it is not sufficient

²Ibid., I, pp. 6-7.

³René Descartes, The Principles of Philosophy, I, IX, in A Discourse on Method, Meditations and The Principles of Descartes, trans. John Veitch (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1929), p. 167.

to enable us to recognize the thing represented... Knowledge then is clear when it is sufficient to enable me to recognize the thing represented, and is further either confused or distinct; confused when I cannot enumerate separately the marks necessary to separate one thing from others...Just as we often see painters or other artists who judge very correctly that a work is good or defective, without being able to account for their judgment, and who reply to those who ask their opinion, that, that of which they disapprove lacks something, I know not what..."⁴

Thus, though artists judged with confused perceptions they still possessed a grade of intellectual knowledge. Leibnitz held, therefore, that there were two grades of knowledge. The confused ideas made up of "little perceptions" such as the vague congeries of the dream-state, and the distinct and clear knowledge of scientific explanation. It was on this level of confused perceptions that Leibnitz placed the artist's knowledge. He makes proper judgments but cannot say why. "Taste as distinguished from understanding consists in confused perceptions of which one cannot adequately render an account."⁵ It was obvious to Leibnitz that these ideas were simply neglected by Descartes, and they needed to be distinguished from the clear ideas of scientific explanation.

Christian von Wolff made note of this difference between clear and confused ideas and agreed that the distinction

⁴The Philosophical Works of Leibnitz, trans. G.M.Duncan, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Tuttle, Morehouse & Taylor, 1908), pp. 28-29.

⁵vide K. F. Gilbert and H. Kuhn, A History of Esthetics, p. 228.

was in accord with the light of reason.^{5a}

A. G. Baumgarten who inherited the rationalism of Wolff, and the distinction made by Leibnitz, claimed for the confused ideas the right of an independent science. He isolated a region of the mind, the "lower apprehension" and located the confused ideas there. The mind, therefore, had an "upper" and "lower" region. The "upper apprehension" was the faculty of distinct and clear ideas which was proper to philosophy. But the logically precise ideas appropriate to science did not suit poetry. It was, therefore, from the region of the "lower apprehension" that the confused ideas and adumbrations of poetry, beauty and art were to be found.⁶

According to Baumgarten⁷, reason was competent to deal with these confused ideas as an independent science. The science gave the rules for knowing sensibly, and was occupied with the perfection of sensible knowledge. He concluded that this part of rational science (that is to say, that part which was as rational as the part that dealt with clear and distinct ideas) was called Aesthetics.

It is significant to note that that, which Descartes

^{5a}Ibid., p. 290. "Baumgarten's philosophical father, the schoolmaster Wolff, gave his successor little more than the pedant's method and care."

⁶Ibid., pp. 289-295.

⁷Vide Benedetto Croce, Aesthetic, trans. Douglas Ainslie, (London: MacMillan, 1909), p. 275.

excluded as being unworthy of reason is now dealt with by reason. Poetry, art and beauty now come under the light of reason. None of the omniscience of reason is denied. In fact, reason makes another conquest; art falls under the domain of rationalism.

But with Kant this consideration of Aesthetics as a separate science met with definite opposition. Kant saw no reason to consider Aesthetics as a separate science. He specifically criticizes the rationalistic method of attempting to base taste on reason. It was hopeless because taste or the confused ideas of the "lower apprehension" were always empirical.

"The Germans" wrote Kant, "are the only people who currently made use of the word 'aesthetic' in order to signify what others term the critique of taste. This usage originated in the abortive attempt made by Baumgarten, that admirable analytical thinker, to bring the critical treatment of the beautiful under rational principles, and so to raise its rules to the rank of a science. The said rules or criteria are, as regards their chief sources, merely empirical, and consequently can never serve as determinate a priori laws by which our judgment of taste must be directed."⁸

It was on this account that Kant refused to accept Baumgarten's "aesthetic region" as a separate science. Kant maintained that what Baumgarten dealt with separately, could be treated under Criticism: (The Critique of Taste).

Moreover, Kant wanted to reserve the name "aesthetics"

⁸Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: Humanities Press, 1950), p. 66.

for his critical reflections on sense cognition. Kant was aware that there existed an activity other than the intellectual. This new department of knowledge was that of "aesthetics" which was based not on reason in the sense of Baumgarten, but on a priori principles. He speaks of these principles of sense knowledge in the first section of the Critique of Pure Reason.

"The effect of an object upon the faculty of representation, so far as we are affected by it, is sensation. That intuition which is in relation to the object through sensation is entitled empirical. The undetermined object of an empirical intuition is entitled appearance. That in the appearance which corresponds to sensation I term its matter; but that which so determines the manifold of appearance, I term the form of appearance. That in which alone the sensations can be posited and ordered in a certain form cannot itself be sensation; and therefore, while the matter of all appearance is given to us a posteriori only, its form must lie ready for the sensations a priori in the mind, and so must allow of being considered apart from all sensation."⁹

Thus sensations do not enter the mind, until the mind has given them form. This is neither sensation nor intelligence. It is pure intuition, the sum of the a priori principles of sensibility. Kant, therefore, concludes: "There must, then exist a science that forms the first part of the transcendental doctrine of elements, distinct from that which contains the principles of pure thought and is called Transcendental Logic."¹⁰ This new science he calls the Transcendental Aesthetic and it is a

⁹Ibid., pp. 65-66.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 66.

constructive means by which man acquires sensible knowledge.

Consequently with Kant, the explanation of knowledge is an aesthetic one, that is to say, a construction or production of knowledge, wherein sense experience gives the matter of knowledge and reason gives the form of knowledge. The result is a composite, a tertium quid, which was valid scientific knowledge. Knowledge, for Kant, was essentially a productive activity.

According to M Maritain the whole Kantian theory is, in reality, an artistic making. He accurately describes this when he wrote: "Des lors connaître c'est fabriquer nous ne connaissons que ce que nous faisons. Voilà l'axiome secret qui domine toute la philosophie spéculative de Kant."¹¹ So the axiom "to know is to make" is a terse statement of the Kantian theory of knowledge. The mind molds the raw material of experience as a sculptor molds his marble.

Thus Kant in his theory of knowledge made unwitting use of aesthetic principles (i.e. in the sense of the Aristotelian principles of natural philosophy) in order to give an explanation of sense cognition. Since Kant, therefore, had an aesthetic to explain knowledge, any explanation of art would have been absurd because it would have involved a reduplication of what he

¹¹Jacques Maritain, Reflections Sur L'Intelligence, 3e ed. (Paris: Desclée, 1930), pp. 34-35.

had already said concerning knowledge.

Moreover, all of Kant's theory of knowledge was for the sake of providing justification for the science of physics which, epistemologically speaking, was the only true science with objective validity. This point M Gilson has observed when he wrote¹² concerning Kant,

"...he not only considered Newton's method as the only valid method, but also that he took the fact for granted that the real world was exactly as Newton had described it. The Critique of Pure Reason is a masterly description of what the structure of the human mind should be, in order to account for the existence of a Newtonian conception of nature and assuming that conception to be true to reality."

But this physics does not deal with those problems which Baumgarten would treat in his Aesthetic. Thus by making it the business of the understanding to deal with these problems, Kant had no philosophy of art, if by philosophy of art is meant, at least in one of its important parts, an explanation of the matter and form of works of art.

Physics being what it was since the days of Descartes and little changed as far as it is a type of science when Kant reflected upon it, had nothing to do with the problem of art and beauty. This same physics being a substitute for the philosophy of nature,¹³ left the philosopher of nature (the

¹²Stienne Gilson, The Unity of Philosophical Experience (New York: Scribner, 1937), p. 229.

¹³Vide Jacques Maritain, La Philosophie De La Nature, p. 37. Descartes believed in a philosophy of nature which was identified

Aristotelian physicist) unemployed. The one place remaining for developing a philosophy of art was metaphysics. But with Kant this had given away to criticism.¹⁴

If, through pride or some other understandable human motive, the poets wanted a science to explain art, they had little else to do than accept Kant's critical-philosophy.

In consequence, when the modern aesthetician came to the subject of art, he found that he had only two possible disciplines where a theory of art could be discussed. The first was in the realm of metaphysics; the second was in physics or empiriological science, erroneously called the philosophy of nature.

However, in metaphysics, the modern rationalistic disdain for anything sensible excluded the possibility of providing the natural principles of nature, much less of art.

in his mind with a logical mathematical explanation of things. Since by his own definition ("That the nature of a body consists ...in extension alone," The Principles of Philosophy, I, XXIII, p. 174) the constitution of natural bodies was reducible to extension, the only possible knowledge of them was through a mathematical reading of the sensible. Thus the philosophy of nature was made into a mechanistic conception which denied all knowledge of sensible reality except quantitative knowledge. Such was the Cartesian philosophy of nature which took the place of the Aristotelian natural philosophy in modern thought. It is known also as empirical science.

¹⁴Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason, trans. N.M. Smith, Preface to Second Edition, p. 30. "It is therefore the first and most important task of philosophy to deprive metaphysics, once and for all, of its injurious influence, by attacking its errors at their very source."

The same was true in the empiriological sciences. Sensible reality, having been reduced to the common denominator of quantity was knowable only in terms of observation and measurement. The result was the same as that produced by a metaphysical or spiritualist ivory towerism. Neither metaphysics or empiriological science was competent to deal with the natural principles of nature.

The position of the modern aesthetician is thus clearly marked off. If he limits his theory of art to explanations that an invocation of exclusively metaphysical principles permits, he can treat only of the transcendental or "vertical" aspects of art. If, however, he turns to other sources for his principles, none of them will be philosophical. He is left, therefore, in the difficult position of elaborating an aesthetics either on the double foundation of metaphysical principles and empiriological principles, or on the single foundation of an arbitrary set of principles. The latter alternative is not without merits, for at least, it gives an unity to his explanations which the hybrid aesthetics lacks. But in either case, the principles thus used to establish a basis for aesthetics invariably prove to be inadequate and unsatisfactory.

One contemporary aesthete who has given testimony to the futility of rooting aesthetics in any such double foundation, or in any arbitrary set of principles, is Benedetto Croce.

In an appendix to his Aesthetic,¹⁵ he enunciates five aesthetic misconceptions which result directly from this confusion over what constitutes the proper foundation for the science of aesthetics. In this classification Mr Croce considers those erroneous conceptions which stem from attempts to justify aesthetics on ground foreign to the nature of art. For this reason the classification provides an excellent opportunity of viewing the different conflicting aesthetic conceptions, and of seeing in what way they fail to present an adequate basis for a theory of art.

Of the five misconceptions which Mr Croce examines he begins with empirical Aesthetic. This conception is limited to the level of aesthetic or artistic facts. These artistic facts can be gathered together in order to classify them under different types. However, according to this school, such facts cannot be reduced to any one philosophical explanation. The logical ideal of this aesthetic is the cataloging method of zoology or botany. The empirical aesthetic states the fact that this is a work of art but it does not know what it is that explains this fact. "This aesthetic", Croce writes, "when asked what art is, replies by indicating successively single facts and by saying: 'Art is this, and this, and this too is art, and so on indefinitely'."¹⁶

¹⁵Benedetto Croce, Aesthetic, pp. 371-403.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 371-372.

The whole conception is determined by the empirical approach which admits the possibility of an infinitely different number of artistic facts.

The second Aesthetic classification Croce terms practicism. He explains that this conception is distinguished from the preceding, in that "the aesthetic or artistic facts are not merely empirical or nominalistic groupings together, but that all of them possess a common foundation."¹⁷ This common foundation is placed in "the practical form of human activity."¹⁸ The various manifestations of this aesthetic, he continues, have been called hedonistic, utilitarian, moralistic and so on, according to the pleasure, usefulness or virtue of the aesthetic fact. These facts are therefore considered in terms of the effect which the aesthetic fact may be put to use, that is to say, according to the needs of the particular human being. Such is the aesthetic of practicism, which places the value of art in the practical benefit attained through it.

The third aesthetic school which Croce lists is the intellectualist. In this conception, aesthetics "recognizes the reducibility of artistic facts to philosophical treatment" and "explains them as particular cases of logical thought,

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 372.

¹⁸ Ibid.

identifying beauty with intellectual truth..."¹⁹ He continues to state that "for this Aesthetic, what is prized in art, is what is learned from it."²⁰ In the light of this conception, "art would be the whole mass of easy and popular truths; or it would be a transitory form of science, a semi-science and a semi-philosophy, preparatory to the superior and perfect form of science and of philosophy."²¹ Thus this intellectualist Aesthetic conceives art to be the vehicle for intellectual truth and a direct means of attaining knowledge. Art is therefore subjected to didactic intellectualism and aesthetics becomes a manual for pedagogy.

Mr Croce's fourth Aesthetic is called agnostic. The grounds for this Aesthetic school springs from a negation of the validity of either the empirical, the practical or the intellectual Aesthetics. It finds these conceptions too evidently false because "it is...loth to admit that art is a simple fact of pleasure or pain, an exercise of virtue, or a fragmentary sketch of science and philosophy."²² On the contrary, this Aesthetic knows that art cannot be resolved into an empirical concept; it knows also "that pleasure and pain are

¹⁹Ibid., p. 372.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid., p. 373.

²²Ibid., p. 373.

united with aesthetic activity only indirectly; that morality has nothing to do with art; that it is impossible to rationalize art, as is the case with science and philosophy, and to prove it beautiful or ugly with the aid of reason."²³ It is at this point that the agnostic aesthetic breaks down because it is unable to say what the principle of art is. The agnostic aesthetic is content therefore to consider art as unexplainable.

Up to this point, Croce's analysis reveals the inadequacy of any of these pseudo-aesthetics to explain what art is. Even his last classification of mystical Aesthetic shows the futility of attempting to explain art in terms other than its own nature. According to Croce, the mystical Aesthetic would consider art as "the highest pinnacle of knowledge."²⁴ But Croce points out the absurdity of such an explanation. "How," he asks, "can art ever be superior to philosophy, if philosophy make art its object, that is to say if it place art beneath itself, in order to analyse and define it?"²⁵ Such contradiction leaves no justification for a mystical theory of art.

It is in this order that Mr Croce classifies these five erroneous schools of aesthetics. However, in retrospect it appears that Mr Croce's classification is itself, based on the

²³ Ibid., p. 373.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 374.

²⁵ Ibid.

modern division of science into the empirical and the metaphysical in which the philosophy of nature is taken for the empirical science. As such, in Mr Croce's classification, the philosophy of nature has been ignored as a possible basis for the theory of art. Nowhere in these five misconceptions does the philosophy of nature enter into consideration. In empiricism and practicism, the justification is on the empirical level of botany or psychology. In the intellectualist and mystical conceptions the justification derives from metaphysics and the supernatural. None of these, either in themselves, nor in any combination, are capable of dealing with the principles of nature or of art. Further examination of these various aesthetic theories discloses the reasons why.

In the first place, the mystical Aesthetic does not qualify as a valid explanation of art because it confounds the natural sphere with the supernatural. True mysticism is rooted in faith and has its end in an inner growth of contemplation.²⁶ It would be a contradiction for any aesthetic to persist in claiming that it obtained the natural principles of art from the supernatural sphere of mysticism. Art belongs to the natural order and to confuse it with the supernatural is wholly unreasonable.

²⁶Vide Charles Journet, The Wisdom of Faith, trans., R.F. Smith, S.J. (Westminster, Maryland: Newman Press, 1952), pp. 3-13.

On the other hand, the empirical Aesthetic considers art to be another kind of phenomena. All artistic facts are evaluated according to observable characteristics. By refusing to take into account the intelligible or transcendental aspect of art, it fails to see the intrinsic principles of art. The empirical Aesthetic, in denying the possibility of a philosophical basis, suggests that there is no fundamental intelligibility to art. The purely descriptive reading of this Aesthetic finds itself in the paradoxical position of filing and cataloguing and sorting the various kinds of artistic facts, without knowing what it is that makes the facts "artistic". The chief criticism of the empirical Aesthetic is this: it stops short at a material description of artistic facts and considers that this is all there is to be said on the subject of art. Such a presumption refutes itself. No matter how well it describes the artistic facts, description is always description, and under no circumstances does it become an explanation of art.

M Eugène Veron, a celebrated aesthetician of the late nineteenth century did not hesitate to show the short comings of the empirical Aesthetic. Upon this point he wrote: "Aesthetics is perforce limited to the statement and registration of facts, and to their classification in the order most probable. So far, then, it ceases to be a science in the

complete sense of the word."²⁷ The empirical Aesthetic leaves the principles of art unexplained.

Nor is the Aesthetic of practicism capable of answering our quest. As we have seen, this conception judges art in terms of its effect. It contends that everyone, even the most phlegmatic, admit aesthetic pleasure to be a fact. It cannot be denied because all have felt that agreeable experience of sensibility when one contemplates something of eminent beauty. However, this aesthetic fails to see that this experience is essentially a by-product, an effect of the work. To make this aesthetic thrill, the very basis of art is to put undue stress upon feeling and to ignore the work of art. It is indeed a little lopsided to consider the effect as primary, without considering the work of art which to begin with, makes the aesthetic pleasure possible. For this school, the value of art is dependent solely upon the pleasurable effect which it is capable of arousing. Consequently, art is conceived as a therapeutic means of restoring people to a state of equilibrium and emotional harmony. In this practicist Aesthetic, art is only good when it is serving a practical purpose, whatever it may be.

The fault of this aesthetic theory is rather patent. An aesthetic which is based on so deceptive a phenomena as emotional or psychological effects is left open to the charge

²⁷ Eugene Veron, Aesthetica, trans. W.H. Armstrong. (London: Chapman and Hall, 1879), p. vi.

of subjectivism. Art has no objective value, it is entirely a matter of individual caprice. Aesthetic practicism reverts to the emotional value of art and to whatever use this effect may be put. This aesthetic of practicism, whether it deals with aesthetic facts or with the psychological reaction to these facts, is always accentuating the merely empirical and descriptive character of art. The question of the principles of art still goes unanswered.

Moreover, the intellectualist Aesthetic identifies art with intellectual truth. It rationalizes art into a minor form of scientific or philosophic knowledge demanding of art the same truths which are given by the natural sciences and metaphysics. But rational knowledge is peculiar to the philosopher and the scientist and not to the artist. "The activity of art," says M Maritain, "is not in itself an activity of knowledge but of creation; art aspires to creating an object in accordance with the objects inner needs and its own good."²⁸ To elaborate a theory of art on an intellectualist foundation would be to confuse making with knowing. Kant is the historical example of this position.

Finally, there is the agnostic Aesthetic. More than any of the previous aesthetic conceptions this agnostic theory points the way to the true philosophical basis of art. To

²⁸ Jacques Maritain, The Range of Reason. (New York: Scribner, 1952), p. 17. (Only in English edition).

repeat what Mr Croce has said: this aesthetic knows that art cannot be resolved into an empirical concept. It shows that pleasure is united with the aesthetic activity only in an indirect manner. It realizes that morality, as such, has nothing to do with art. It also sees the impossibility of rationalizing art, as is the case with the empirical and intellectual aestheticians. In short, it clearly sees the futility of building an aesthetic either on the double foundation of metaphysical and empirical principles or on the single foundation of an arbitrary set of principles. While rejecting these theories, it discovers that art must have its own principles and origin; but just what these are it cannot say.

This frank admission of failure to state the principles of art is the most honest approach made by these various pseudo-aesthetic theories. It stems from a realization that art has its own principles; but that the agnostic school lacks the proper philosophical basis whereby to elaborate a theory of art.

From the consideration of these various aesthetic conceptions Mr Croce proceeds to elaborate his own doctrine of aesthetics, keeping in mind the inadequacies of these previous positions. He calls his doctrine, the aesthetic of pure intuition. Just what this means Mr Croce states in the following way:

"Hitherto, in all attempts to define the place of art, it has been sought, either at the summit of

the theoretic spirit, above philosophy, or, at least, in the circle of philosophy itself..... Why not invert the attempt and instead of forming the hypothesis that art is one of the summits or the highest grade of the theoretic spirit, for the very opposite hypothesis, namely that it is one of the lower grades, or the lowest of all? ...If we compare Art with the three forms [natural or positive Science, History and Philosophy] it must be declared inferior, that is to say, less complex than the natural Sciences, in so far as it is altogether without abstractions. In so far as it is without conceptual determinations and does not distinguish between the real and the unreal... it must be declared inferior to History. In so far as it fails altogether to surpass the phenomenal world, and does not attain to the definitions of the pure concepts, it is inferior to Philosophy itself... Art is governed entirely by imagination; its only riches are images. Art does not classify objects, nor pronounce them real or imaginary, nor qualify them, nor define them. Art feels and represents them. Nothing more. Art therefore is intuition."²⁹

One commentator has evaluated the negative aesthetic conception with singular exactitude.

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One commentator has evaluated the negative aesthetic conception with singular exactitude.

"Benedetto Croce's doctrine... seems often to consist of a tautology hedged in by negations. Art is art, and art is not morality, religion, politics, truth, sensation, emotion, pleasure. Furthermore, art is art, and it is dance, music, architecture, lyric, dramatic, comic, tragic, only in an incidental way. The inwardly conceived expression, the essence of art, may be wedded to all kinds of conventions, beliefs, and materials and thus be diversified into a wealth of individual works. But the universal concepts of esthetics find no foothold in this sphere of boundless contingency."³⁰

Mr Croce, by identifying art with intuition, would

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 383-385.

³⁰ K. E. Gilbert and Helmut Kuhn, A History of Aesthetics, p. 555.

destroy the field entirely by infinitely extending its limits. In this regard, Mr Irving Babbitt very well says that "The formal element in art has vanished away more and more, until nothing has been left but pure expression."³¹ Croce's aesthetic conception, instead of giving an explanation of what art is, reduces art to a state of non-entity.

What then can be concluded from the consideration of these various pseudo-aesthetic conceptions?

They all reveal that art lacks an adequate philosophical explanation either when it is rooted in metaphysics or in the empiriological sciences. If considered a branch of metaphysics, only the transcendental aspects of art may be considered; and if allied with physics or empiriological science, a consideration of art is limited to its material manifestations or the physical reactions to these manifestations. The agnostic Aesthetic calls for principles but finds no philosophical basis capable of revealing what these might be.

It will be the purpose of the concluding chapter to present the philosophy of nature as that philosophical basis on which an adequate theory of Aesthetic may be founded.

³¹ Irving Babbitt, The New Laocöon (Cambridge: University Press, 1910), p. 219.

VI

CONCLUDING NOTE

Art and the Philosophy of Nature

From the preceding chapter, it is sufficiently evident that the very beginnings of modern Aesthetics had its source in the subjectivism of modern philosophy. Art, along with nature, had been reduced to a purely subjective phenomenon. For this very reason, modern philosophy was unable to provide an adequate basis, either for art or for its criticism.

It was because of this failure of modern philosophy to account for the theoretical basis of art that we undertook, in our second chapter, an examination of the Aristotelian philosophy of nature. The one aspect of natural philosophy in which we were particularly interested was the process of natural generation, for this is what art is said to imitate. We related the doctrine of generation which states that the coming into being of natural things involves three necessary principles. These principles are being in potency, which is matter, non-being in act, which is privation, and that through which something comes-to-be in act, which is form. These principles of generation reveal that everything which comes into being does so for the sake of an end, and an end is that which always appears as the final result of a development. This development is always in accordance with natural

principles, and by a continuous process attains its completion in the term of generation, which is a formed nature. This is the process of generation which takes place in natural things.

Moreover, both Aristotle and St Thomas point out the parallel which exists between natural and artificial generation. While they make a distinction between human making and natural generation; nevertheless, they recognize that the process of coming into being is common to both. The example which they use most frequently is the art of sculpturing. It is in the De Principiis Naturae¹ that St Thomas speaks of the principles of generation as they are applied to art. When a statue is made from bronze, the bronze which is in potency to the form of the statue is the matter. The shapeless and undisposed principle is the privation, and the shape, because it is called a statue, is the form. But St Thomas cautions that the form of the statue is not the same as the substantial form in the natural sense. The bronze, before it receives the form of the statue, has existence already in act, and its existence does not depend upon the shape of the statue which is really only an accidental form. He, therefore, points out that all artificial forms are, philosophically speaking, accidental and that all human art operates only on that which is already constituted in existence by nature.

While for Aristotle and St Thomas, art is certainly disting-

¹ St Thomas Aquinas, "De Principiis Naturae, Opuscula XXI" in Summa Philosophica accedunt praecipua eiusdem doctoris philosophica Opuscula, eds. P. G. Roux-Lavergue, E. D'Yzalquier and E. Germar-Durand (Paris: L. Girard, n.d.), p. 408.

ished from nature, yet like nature it pertains to a certain kind of coming into beings:

...with contriving and considering how something may come into being which is capable of being or not being, and whose origin is in the maker and not in the thing made; for art is concerned rather with things that are, or come into being by necessity, not with things that do so in accordance with nature, since these have their origin in themselves.²

This citation clearly shows the generative process common to both nature and art. Natural objects have their principle of action from the nature of things; the form of the artifex comes to it from the mind of the artist who imposes this form on suitable material.

The products of art...require the pre-existence of an efficient cause, homogeneous with themselves, such as the statuary's art, which must necessarily precede the statue.... Art indeed consists in the conception of the result to be produced before its realization in the material.³

St Thomas adopts the same viewpoint in the De Principiis Naturae⁴. The principles of matter, form and privation are insufficient to explain generation. A statue, in order to be produced, needs an agent in order that the form might pass from potentially being the statue in the mind of the artist, to actually being it in the bronze. The form of the thing generated he calls the term of generation because the form exists only in that which has been made to be. Thus what is made is in the state of becoming as long as the

² Aristotle, Ethica Nicomachea, 1140a10-16.

³ Aristotle, De Partibus Animalium, 640a30-33.

⁴ St Thomas Aquinas, ibid., p. 410.

thing is coming-to-be. From this he concludes that it is necessary to have besides the matter and the form, some principle which acts. This he calls the efficient, moving or agent cause, or from whence the principle of motion is. Also, like Aristotle, he affirms that everything which acts, does so only by intending something. Consequently, it is necessary that there be some fourth cause, that is to say, that which is intended by the agent. This he calls the end.

This, then, is St Thomas' analysis of the four causes which account for the coming into being of things. A statue, in order to be produced, needs first of all, something out of which it is produced, something which is made into it, as the bronze is made into a statue. This is the material cause or the matter. The matter alone, however, cannot become the thing unless it receives a certain form or pattern. The bronze must receive a certain shape in order to become a statue. The structure or pattern is the formal cause. But it is not the nature of bronze to shape itself into a statue. The sculptor must act so as to impart the proper form which he has in his mind. This third cause which moves the matter to receive the form of the statue to be produced is the efficient cause, for the sculptor is the efficient cause to the statue. Finally, even given the matter, the form and the efficient cause, this particular effect will not be produced rather than some other, in fact the efficient cause will not even begin to act at all, unless there is some end or goal aimed at in the process, something "for the sake of which" the whole process takes place. With St Thomas'

example the good-to-be-attained is the formed statue and it is end which determines the activity of the three prior causes. The end is the final cause.

Now in the process of artificial things, art is nothing other than the right conception which directs the making of things.⁵ The form emanates from the mind of the artist. This form is the fruit of an intellectual process which began with images of the senses and by preceding experience, is said to "generate" this "inward word which belongs to no nation's speech".⁶ Itself immaterial, the form in the artist's mind is the principle of generation. The sculptor who, through the form of the statue which he possesses in his mind is able to cause the statue in matter. The art of sculpturing is the principle of movement which contributes to the production of the effect by acting upon the bronze and moving it from potential possession of the form to actual possession of it. The sculptor is the extrinsic cause of the statue; while the bronze is the intrinsic cause. The form of the statue pre-existing in the artist's intellect and will as the end to be attained by his art, is an extrinsic cause. However, the same form realized in the bronze is an intrinsic cause.⁷

⁵ St Thomas Aquinas, Summa Contra Gentiles, I, 93 (Taurini: Marietti, 1938), p. 84. "...ars est recta ratio factibilium".

⁶ St Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, I.93.7. ad 3.

⁷ Vide St Thomas Aquinas, In Metaphysicam Aristotelis Commentaria, XII, lect. 3,4, ed. M.-R. Cathala (Taurini: Marietti, 1935), pp. 690-695.

This whole question of the coming into being of things, either by nature or by art would, of course, admit of more development than is possible here. For the present, what must be brought into focus is the fact, that the philosophy of nature, of all the branches of philosophy, is the only one capable of explaining the coming into being of natural things. Furthermore, from our consideration of the dictum, "Art imitates nature", particularly in the Aristotelian-Thomistic conception, we were able to see the relation of art to the philosophy of nature.

But, in order to see the complete meaning of this dictum we must turn to two passages in St Thomas' commentary on the Physica of Aristotle. There he makes explicit its unique meaning. At the same time, he presents the justification for the philosophy of nature as the theoretical basis for a philosophy of art.

In the first consideration, he asserts that the argument for the statement "Art imitates nature" is as follows:

The principle of artificial operation is knowledge; but all of our knowledge is drawn from sensible and natural things through sense; thus we produce a likeness of natural things. Therefore natural things are imitable through art because all of nature is ordered to its end by some intellectual principle, so that thus the work of nature seems to be a work of intelligence to the extent that it proceeds towards definite ends, by determined means; which art also does in its operations.⁶

⁶ St Thomas Aquinas, In octo Libros Physicorum Aristotelis, II, lect. iv. "Ejus autem quod ars imitatur naturam, ratio est, quia principium operationis artificialis cognitio est; omnis autem nostra cognitio est per sensus a rebus sensibilibus et naturalibus accepta, unde ad similitudinem naturalium in artificialibus operamur. Ideo autem res naturales imitabiles sunt per artem, quia ab aliquo principio intellectivo tota natura ordinatur ad finem suum, ut sic opus naturae videatur esse opus intelligentiae, dum per determinata media

In this argument, St Thomas makes three significant points concerning the generative process of art. Art has, first of all, the source of its activity in knowledge which is gained originally from the sensible world. Art is secondly, a productive or engendering activity which produces a likeness to natural things. And thirdly, this creative activity of art imitates in its own sphere, the productive activity which is characteristic of natural generation. Both proceed in their generative processes towards definite ends (the formed nature or the form in the mind of the artist) by a determined means (the matter whereby the term of generation is a nature formed or a work of art proffered).

On this very point, M Maritain has a capital text which, despite its length, must be quoted here in order to bring to light the notion that art is by its very essence productive, and that it is this activity to which the Aristotelian-Thomistic notion of imitation owes its meaning.

D'où il suit que l'art, tout en étant productif par essence, suppose toujours un moment de contemplation, et l'oeuvre d'art une mélodie, c'est-à-dire un sens animateur d'une forme. C'est là-dessus qu'Aristote se fondait pour déclarer l'imitation inhérente à l'art; ce qui, comme l'indique bien ce mot d'imitation, se rapporte d'abord et selon le plan de visibilité le plus apparent... à une connaissance (spéculative) préalable à l'activité d'art et présupposée par elle, mais extrinsèque à elle; à la connaissance, à toutes les connaissances, à toutes les connaissances ordinaires à l'homme que l'artiste se procure en ouvrant ses yeux et son intelligence sur les choses du monde et de la culture. L'activité d'art commence après cela, parce

ad certae fines procedit: quod etiam in operando ars imitatur." English translation, R. A. Cekourek, An Introduction to the Philosophy of Nature (St. Paul, Minnesota: North Central Press, 1951), p. 116.

que c'est une activité créatrice et que, de soi, elle demande à l'esprit, non par d'être formé par une chose à connaître, mais de former une chose à poser dans l'être.⁹

This productive activity, characteristic of art, shapes something in existence, instead of being shaped by things. The shaping, by the artist, of something into existence (secundum quid) follows the same process and principles of natural generation. M Maritain is here reiterating for the contemporary mind, the sense in which the Aristotelian-Thomistic notion of imitation has to be understood. It cannot be taken in its superficial and popular meaning of a servile copy of the sensible; rather, it must pass from this empirical level to the level of the mind where art is, in itself, a spiritual activity which has its end in the production of a form. It is this engendering activity of the mind which, properly speaking, constitutes the inherent meaning of the term "imitation" in art. It is in virtue of this engendering activity which ends in the production of a work of art, that art is said to imitate the productive activity of nature.

But St Thomas' considerations of the dictum "Art imitates nature" do not stop here. In fact the dictum receives from the Angelic Doctor a considerable expansion which for our purposes is of prime importance. St Thomas, keeping in mind the validity of the notion of imitation, establishes this pertinent conclusion.

Art imitates nature; therefore, natural science should be to natural things, as artificial science is to artificial things. But the same artificial science knows the matter and form up

⁹ Jacques et Raïssa Maritain, Situation De La Poésie (Paris: Desclée, 1938), pp. 100-101.

to some definite term; for example...the builder considers the form of the house as well as the bricks and wood which are the matter of the house, and it is the same in all the other arts. Therefore it belongs to the same natural science to know both the form and the matter.¹⁰

In this passage St Thomas, in virtue of the analogous relation which exists between art and nature, establishes the justification of a philosophy of art based on the principles of the philosophy of nature. The principles of natural generation when transposed into the sphere of the philosophy of art are able to account for artificial generation, in the same way, that they do in the natural philosophy. The philosophy of art will be able, therefore, to employ the same principles of understanding artificial things, as the philosophy of nature uses in order to understand natural things. In other words, just as in the philosophy of nature, prime matter and substantial form are to be conceived of, as the two co-principles which constitute a complete bodily substance; so also, but in an analogous fashion, in the philosophy of art, where artificial things are constituted as works of art.

Moreover, in the natural order, a living body is generally

¹⁰ St Thomas Aquinas, In octo Libros Physicorum, II, iv. "Ars imitatur naturam; oportet igitur quod sic se habeat scientia naturalis circa naturalia, sicut se habet scientia artificialis circa artificialia, sed ejusdem scientiae artificialis est cognoscere materiam et formam usque ad aliquem certum terminum; sicut medicus cognoscit sanitatem ut formam, et choleram et phlegma et hujusmodi sicut materiam, in qua est sanitas. Nam in contemperatione humorum sanitas consistit. Et similiter aedificator considerat formam domus et lateres et ligna, quae sunt materia domus; et ita est in omnibus aliis artibus; ergo ejusdem scientiae naturalis est cognoscere tam materiam quam formam."

understood to be more than a collection or composite of parts. A living body is something more than the sum of its parts, where "something over", something substantial, something other than the body-structure, something which makes the body live. The doctrine of hylomorphism holds that the life principle in a living body is the substantial form of that body. It is an active and determining substantial principle which somehow unifies in structure and function the various different parts, and makes one organic substance of the whole. Similarly, in the artificial order, the same holds true, but in a secondary way. When the form in the artist's mind has been imposed on the proper material, there results a "brilliance of form" shining on the appropriate material. The parts are organically linked to the whole and the principle of coherence is the form. This principle of order extends its control over each detail of the ensemble, giving the work an artistic dynamism of its own.

Mme Raissa Maritain, an exponent of this philosophy of art which acquires its energizing principles from natural philosophy, makes use of the hylomorphic theory to elucidate the nature of poetry. In her essay, entitled Sens et Non-Sens en Poésie, she writes:

Le sens poétique se confond avec la poésie elle-même. Si j'emploie ici l'expression sens poétique plutôt que le mot poésie, c'est pour marquer que la poésie fait être le poème, comme l'âme fait être le corps, en étant la forme (en langage aristotélicien) ou l'idée (en langage spinoziste) de ce corps, en lui donnant une signification substantielle, un sens ontologique. Ce sens poétique...est substantiellement lié à la forme, immanent à l'organisme de mots, immanent à la forme poétique.¹¹

¹¹Jacques et Raissa Maritain, ibid., pp. 13-14.

This is a good example of natural philosophy providing a philosophy of art with the principles capable of explaining the dynamism of poetry. Such principles do not rationalize art because they provide the philosophical basis for an understanding of what poetry is, in itself. A philosophical explanation of poetry is possible therefore, if it is given in terms of the principles of the philosophy of nature. There need be no fear of the rationalization of poetry because these principles, when transposed to the universe of art, give an explanation of the distinctive being of poetry. The theoretical principles of matter and form, when applied to poetry, do not prejudice the nature of the work to be done; on the contrary, they provide the means for an intelligible understanding of poetry and of its criticism, without jeopardizing the distinctive life of either one.

Many contemporary aestheticians realize the need for these principles of matter and form in order to explain works of art; but what they fail to see in their use of these principles, is that they derive their unique significance from the philosophy of nature. Professor T. M. Greene, in his work, The Arts and the Art of Criticism, is typical of this approach to art. In a painstaking analysis of the terms "matter" and "form" as they are applied to the six major arts, he consistently uses the terms as the two most general categories into which all art may be reduced. For him, they are purely logical in conception, and descriptive in meaning. "Form", he defines, "as the expressive organization of matter", and "matter" as "that

which has been expressly organized".¹² Nowhere in his exposition does he realize the philosophical implication which the philosophy of nature gives to these terms. Consequently his analysis of art rarely rises above the level of description.

From the foregoing considerations, it is evident that the philosophy of nature can qualify as that theoretic science on which to base a philosophy of art. It therefore remains for contemporary Thomists to elaborate an Aesthetic which would be engrafted on the Aristotelian philosophy of nature. Such a philosophy of art, knowing what constitutes the being of artistic working will be able to say, without prejudicing the work to be done, what a work of art ought to be, and thereby give to the poet and the critic alike the philosophical principles which both poetry and criticism possess.

¹²Theodore Meyer Greene, The Arts and the Art of Criticism (Princeton: University Press, 1952), p. 32.

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VITA

- 1930 The author, Ambrose G. P. McInnes, was born of Irish and Scottish parentage at London, Ontario, on the 21st of April.
- 1936 The author's primary education was begun at St Mary's Separate School and was completed at St Martin's Separate School, London.
- 1944 The author entered De La Salle High School, conducted by the Christian Brothers and five years later matriculated. During this period he participated in various drama festivals and oratorical contests. In 1947 he won a regional award for public speaking. It was at this time, that he developed a great liking for painting.
- 1946 Having shown some progress in his artistic endeavours, the author attended summer schools during the next three summers: the University of Western Ontario, 1946; the University of Western Ontario, 1947; and the Banff School of Fine Art, 1948. It was at this latter summer session that the author sold his first painting. It was bought by the Canadian National Railways.
- 1949 In the autumn of this year, the author registered in the Liberal Arts course at Assumption College, Windsor, Ontario.
- 1950 The author was privileged to make the Holy Year Pilgrimage to Rome and to assist at the summer sessions of the University of Fribourg, Switzerland.
- 1952 After having successfully completed the Degree of Bachelor of Arts, the author commenced post-graduate studies in philosophy at Assumption College. The same year he was awarded a World University Service Scholarship. This entitled him to attend an international seminar at the University of Leiden, Holland, and to take part in an UNESCO conference at Delft, Holland.
- 1953 The author returned to Assumption to begin work on his Master's thesis.
- 1954 The required thesis was completed in May.