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AN INQUIRY INTO
AESTHETICS

By

E. BRUCE GLENN

Prefatory Note

I want to thank the Editor of NEW PHILOSOPHY for this opportunity to put in print the following discussions of aesthetics. Originating as a series of six lectures presented to the Educational Council of the General Church in August 1965, they have been slightly amended for the printed page, and some material directed to educators has been deleted. What remains is, hopefully, the kernel from which a full-scale study will be made for the use of the New Church and its fledgling culture, in the form of a book.

The term "inquiry" has held an honorable place in the titles of philosophic treatises since at least the eighteenth century. It has usually connoted an exhaustive and original endeavor while at the same time acknowledging that all philosophy is by its nature open-ended and—one would hope—open-minded. Its use at the head of these discussions is more literal; for it represents a first tentative reaching among the concepts and principles that comprise the branch of philosophy called aesthetics. Hence you will find these pages both personal and eclectic. They are one man's view drawn from many other men. Because of the necessary compression in a lecture series, the references are both selective and brief; and documentation is not as thorough as I should like. I wish to give special acknowledgment to two men with whom it has been my privilege to associate: the Right Reverend George de Charms and the Reverend Hugo Lj. Odhner. It was Bishop de Charms who first stirred my interest in the abstractions of thought about the arts; my indebtedness to his doctrinal studies on the imagination in 1947 will be evident throughout these pages. Dr. Odhner's scholarly study of the human mind, drawn from both the Writings and the preparatory works of Swedenborg and now available in book form, has been a source of satisfaction and stimulation, especially in its consideration of the planes of the natural mind, the conscious center of our life in this world and the matrix of that spiritual world in which the arts have their origin and fruition.

E. B. G.

AN INQUIRY INTO AESTHETICS

I

The term "aesthetics" is to many people forbidding or even repugnant in its strangeness. Those who write on the subject cannot even agree on how to spell the word; and its connotations—both popular and philosophic—are such as to suggest that this is a good subject to stay away from. That I have the temerity not to do so will, I hope, convey the importance which I believe aesthetics has in the development of a distinct New Church culture.

Before affirming the need for a New Church aesthetic as a branch of our distinctive philosophy, and attempting an outline of what its features may be—which will comprise the bulk of these discussions—let us face some of the negative connotations in an effort to dissociate them from our minds.

Popularly, "aesthetics" means "languid, long-haired, and lavender," if you are the practical type, and if a moralist also, "the immoral doctrine of art for art's sake." The direct origins of this view are not far to seek; it sprang up in direct antagonism to the aestheticism of the late nineteenth century—a way of life of which the philosopher was Walter Pater and the high priest Oscar Wilde. The ridiculous lengths of the cult, which made art the supreme experience of life and refinement its highest virtue in opposition to the coarse realities of the industrial age, were scarcely caricatured in Gilbert and Sullivan's *Patience*. Bunthorne, the hero of *Patience*, was a fraud. The chief difference between him and those he satirized was that he admitted to himself his fraudulence. Thus he confided to the audience:

If you're anxious for to shine in the high aesthetic line as a man of culture rare,
You must get up all the germs of the transcendental terms, and plant them
everywhere.

You must lie upon the daisies, and discourse in novel phrases of your complicated state of mind,

The meaning doesn't matter if it's only idle chatter of a transcendental kind.

And everyone will say,

As you walk your mystic way,

"If this young man expresses himself in terms too deep for *me*,
Why, what a very singularly deep young man this deep young man must be!"

The error of the aestheticists lay in regarding the arts, the highest expressions of human culture, as a substitute for life, preferable to it. That this view could not spread its blossoms far in the strong sunlight of common sense, or long withstand the sharp, cold winds of criticism, is all to the good. However, the broad reaction against it has also kept from flowering the seeds of a true aesthetic philosophy in the minds of people generally.

As we shall see, a mistrust of the arts is not merely a legacy of the 1880's. It began with the first of the great Greek philosophers, and—probably because of the sensuous basis of the arts—has remained an active and antagonistic force throughout Western history.

I have been talking about aesthetics as a philosophy of the arts. This is a deliberate restriction of the term, which has meant a number of things, of varying breadth and depth, to a number of philosophers and other intellectuals since it was first used in the eighteenth century. This is not the place for a survey of the history of aesthetics. To those interested in a compact historical analysis of the subject, I recommend the article (under "a," not "e") in the 1962 edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. The first thing that would strike you, I think, is the great variety of differences and disputes among those who have discoursed on the subject. This is true of any philosophic pursuit; but it is compounded in this case by the subjective or individual nature of the material under examination. "De gustibus non est disputandum," "Chacun à son goût," "One man's meat is another man's poison"—these are the proverbial replies of the people to the tangled arguments of the theoreticians, most defiantly expressed as "I don't know anything about art, but I know what I like!" This maddening and unanswerable retort is merely rephrased by the theoreticians to mean, "Art is for the cultured few; let the rest watch TV"; and once again we are faced with the suspicious view that aesthetics is only transcendental talk.

This view, I believe, we in the New Church can and should reject absolutely. I believe we *can* because, as it seems to me, the disputes among aesthetic philosophers arise chiefly from ignorance or denial of the essentially spiritual nature of man, his origin, his destiny, and his arts. I believe we should reject the attitude of scorn or indifference toward the arts as anything more than entertainment for our leisure time, because they play a

signal role in the development of the spirit which is the real man. It is the delineation of that role with which these discussions are concerned.

By the arts I shall mean, in these discussions, those activities and objects which have for their end the awakening of a responsive delight in the imagination through the ordering of sensory images of various kinds. The arts in this sense are distinguished from those activities and products which have practical or utilitarian ends. The chair in which you are sitting is probably utilitarian in design and execution. It may someday be placed in a museum as an art object—though I doubt it, artistic design and individual craftsmanship of execution being rare in the mass-produced items of our civilization. If a utilitarian object has artistic appeal, it is in spite of its practical purpose.

These discussions will also not take cognizance, except in passing, of differences among the several arts; differences arising largely from the various materials and mediums employed. Thus, you may be disappointed to find that our purpose will not be to discuss the techniques of literature, schools of painting or sculpture, or the difficult abstractions of musical form. These discussions will offer neither a direct basis for creative art work nor specific rules for critical appreciation of works already created and in the public domain—that is, the libraries, concert halls, or museums. We shall be concerned, as a consideration of philosophic principles should be, with the basic concepts and relationships which place the arts, together, in the total picture of Divine purposes and human culture. Simply expressed, I find that which emerges as “the arts” to be best defined as “the affectional ordering of experience through the imagination.”

In restricting aesthetic considerations to the arts—for example, music, painting, sculpture, and literature—I am also deliberately excluding a broader concept of the subject: human response to nature as a realm to be appreciated for its beauty. To concentrate on the works of man and leave out those of God may seem peculiar in a New Church man’s approach to the subject. My choice is partly negative, forced upon me by my lack of background in psychology and inability to come satisfactorily to grips in my own mind with the abstract concept of “beauty.” But there are positive reasons as well, which I can best indicate from experience.

While vacationing one summer, I was struck anew by the ordered serenity of nature—the tall beeches and oaks, each finding its place in the sun and receiving its needed share of the life-giving water in the soil, or giving way quietly so that others around it might be provided for; the birds fulfilling the cycle of nesting and caring for their young instinctively, and filling the air with their song. Nor did I feel it was trite to sense a longing for this peaceful order in human affairs, a regret that it could not be so. But as I sat in a varying pattern of sunlight and shade, it came to me that this was a false regret. The realm of nature is governed by general influx; the Divine love and wisdom—which are its inner sun and water—pour in without check, *and without the provision for conscious reciprocation*. The human realm is governed secretly by the same Divine order; but to this is added the particular influx that is mediated by the minds of angels and spirits, and by which we have free choice and the opportunity for willing response that is denied to birds and trees.¹ Hence arise those multitudinous changes of state in and among men that are called “affections.” These are man’s by influx; but they are implanted and take root in the mind by means of an operation known as “imagination.” With this function of the mind and its use, our next discussion will be concerned. My point here is that while men can respond imaginatively to the order and beauty of nature, that response has become obscured and undirected since the fall of man, and it is in their artistic endeavors and works that the imaginative faculty finds its highest fulfillment. Thus I omit without compunction consideration of that part of the aesthetic realm which is our response to the beauty of nature in what Wordsworth called the elevating and calming of the spirit. In truth, all the images and forms that comprise a work of art are drawn from the physical realm; but it is their new shaping from the affections of the artist that sets them apart from anything found in nature, and gives to art its unique value as well as its own problems of moral implication.

In thus assigning to art a unique place in the mind and in society, I shall by implication differentiate it from the other fields that together make up a culture. This differentiation should

¹ “Man’s imperfection at birth becomes his perfection, and the perfection of the beast at birth is its imperfection.” (CL 133).

not imply opposition or superiority.² Such sniping is unworthy of those who strive to understand the Divinely ordered integrity of uses. With some, however, differences suggest a hierarchy of worth. Even the philosopher is notorious for his defense of his own view as higher insight; and the practitioner, whether doer or teacher, is usually worse. Thus we find the artist alternately exalted or despised depending on the speaker. Here is one "Defense of Poesie" by Sir Philip Sidney, Elizabethan statesman, courtier, soldier, theorizer—and poet. The tone is humorous; but an undercurrent of serious intent is worth noting, and we shall return to some of its implications:

We can show the poet's nobleness by setting him before his other competitors, among whom as principal challengers step forth the moral philosophers, whom, me thinketh, I see coming towards me with a sullen gravity, as though they could not abide vice by daylight, rudely clothed for to witness outwardly their contempt of outward things, with books in their hands against glory, whereto they set their names, sophistically speaking against subtlety, and angry with any man in whom they see the foul fault of anger: these men casting largesse as they go of definitions, divisions, and distinctions, with a scornful interrogative do soberly ask whether it be possible to find any path so ready to lead a man to virtue as that which teacheth what virtue is? . . .

The historian scarcely giveth leisure to the moralist to say so much but that he, laden with old mouse-eaten records, authorizing himself (for the most part) upon other histories whose greatest authorities are built upon the notable foundation of hearsay, having much ado to accord differing writers and to pick truth out of partiality, better acquainted with a thousand years ago than with his own age, and yet better knowing how this world goeth than how his own wit runneth, curious for antiquities and inquisitive of novelties, a wonder to young folks and a tyrant in table talk, denieth, in a great chafe, that any man for teaching of virtue . . . is comparable to him. . . . The philosopher, sayeth he, teacheth virtue by certain abstract considerations, but I only bid you follow the footing of them that have gone before you. . . .

The philosopher therefore and the historian are they which would win the goal, the one by precept, the other by example. But both not having both, do both halt. . . . Now doth the peerless poet perform both; for whatsoever the philosopher sayeth should be done, he giveth a perfect picture of it in someone by whom he presupposeth it was done. So as he coupleth the general notion with the particular example.³

I cite this not merely for its own quaint and amusing sake, but because some of the ideas lodged within will be more fully reflected in our subsequent discussions. But lest poetry be thought to

² See "Is There Room Here for the Arts?" *NEW PHILOSOPHY*, 1961, pp. 274-8.

³ Philip Sidney, *Apology for Poetry*.

have the last word, let me quote what a Victorian writer, Thomas Love Peacock, faced with the triumphant march of science, wrote:

The poet lives in the days that are past. In whatever degree poetry is cultivated, it must necessarily be to the neglect of some branch of useful study: and it is a lamentable thing to see minds, capable of better things, running to seed in the specious indolence of these empty aimless mockeries of intellectual exertion. Poetry was the mental rattle that awakened the attention of the intellect in the infancy of civil society: but for the maturity of mind to make a serious business of the playthings of its childhood is as absurd as for a grown man to rub his gums with coral and cry to be charmed asleep by the jingle of silver bells.⁴

This rejection of ~~the~~ need for the arts is a faint, petulant echo of an ancient view, as we shall note. But if our need for art is a thing of the past, of the race's childhood, then whatever has replaced it must needs fulfill a like function in the mind, or else some part of that mind has atrophied, some aspect of our culture has withered. We are faced with a dilemma: either the arts once performed a function now more ably fulfilled by some other discipline such as science or philosophy, or else the use once fulfilled by the arts no longer exists. There is, of course, a third alternative: that the arts do perform a peculiar function still needed by the mind and by society.

Whatever this need might be, it may be useful to ask, "When and how did it arise?" The earliest known art still extant is in the form of remarkable cave drawings in southwestern Europe. Anthropologists and archeologists dispute their function for the artist and his tribe; the public stares at them over the exciting bridge of the intervening centuries; the student of art delights in them for what they are—beautiful renderings of power, motion, and perspective, drawn with a degree of skill and insight that is highly advanced. They are truly human.

However little these cave drawings tell us about the origins of art, speculation from doctrine may not take us much farther; yet the speculation may be of use. It is a personal assumption that the men of the Most Ancient Church did not practice the fine arts. I do not think they had a need to re-create from their own affectional stirrings a world apart from that which lay around them. "Because the men of that church were in love to the Lord they had Divine truths inscribed on them, and thence they knew

⁴ Quoted in David Daiches, *Critical Approaches to Literature*, p. 130.

from influx the corresponding things in the natural man; in a word, there was with them spiritual influx, that is, influx from the spiritual mind into the natural, and thus into the things that are in it, and these were what they saw by correspondence as in a mirror."⁵

As for the world of nature, the most ancients, living in the order of their creation, found in it the representative harmonies of correspondence. Scarcely aware of their own sensory reception, they looked upon their landscape as a visible, tangible extension of the Lord's love and wisdom, an ordered profusion of Divinely ordained uses in form. Their own affectional response was so perfect that they could speak with angels; what need to labor over the shaping of a different world more consonant with their own desires? Indeed, their environment was, in a fixed way, like that which surrounds the angels as a fluid but tangible reflection of their own states, beautiful and harmonious beneath the light of the Lord's love. As Bishop George de Charms has expressed it, "What they picture in their imagination is what really exists, what is true, what has its being in God and from God stands forth to view in the universe of creation. The objects that appear around them are genuine forms of those spiritual realities. . . . They are correspondential forms . . . forms of all the countless uses . . . formed by the Lord Himself in the imagination of the angels. . . ." ⁶ Thus the realm of heaven in its beauty; and thus also, one may suppose, the kindling environment of the most ancients.

If this picture still pertained in this world, any discussion of the arts would be very different—wiser, for one thing! Certainly we would have much more to say about the nature and function of correspondence as the mode by which the creative power of the Lord, and the re-creative skill of men, bring spiritual substance into tangible form. Quite frankly, however—and I know there are many opponents to this view—I cannot find that, since the fall of man and the necessary separation of his understanding from his will, the doctrine of correspondence is of much direct aid in discovering and interpreting either the function of the arts

⁵ AE 617: 15.

⁶ George de Charms, *Imagination and Rationality*, Doctrinal Lectures, 1947 (unpublished): Lecture VI.

generally, or the response to any particular work of art. Certainly, the forms of art must still reflect, or correspond to, the affections which they embody; but I cannot but see this as an arbitrary choice on the artist's part, with the possibility of a very different response in the mind of the recipient.

More of this later. The fact is that in that descent to reliance on sensual knowledge, and therefore on self, which we call the fall of man, the unbroken harmony of the two worlds was lost. Sensory delights became paramount, as they still are with every awakening child and so remain with the unregenerating adult. Among the manifold consequences, the human imagination fell prey to fantasies of evil; and only by the balancing force of particular influx could the vision of good still be manifested in human response. It is for this reason, I believe, that the arts were born with the peculiar function of displaying the affections in a fixed and ordered representation. As we may eventually see, this order, to be true, must be directed by a rational understanding. In the spiritual history which we have been attempting to glimpse, order was achieved through Divine insistence on exact representation. The art work enjoined upon the Children of Israel—as for example in the vestments of Aaron and the furnishing of the tabernacle—was functional, what the modern historian of cultures calls “magical art” in that the various objects were presumed to have an operative power within them. The Children of Israel had no understanding of the spiritual representation of the things they were making; immersed in the sensual, they relied on strict conformance to Divine command in their making, as in all the works of their life. Perhaps the most symbolic work of art thus produced was the brazen serpent set up on a pole, the mere sight of which cured those bitten by the fiery serpents sent to punish the people for their rebellious dissent from the Divine will. As the sensuous had led them astray, so the Divine sensuous, good in itself, would provide the basis for salvation. In the next discussion we shall reflect on the way in which the natural mind of each man may also be ordered by the Lord, and the function of the plane of the imagination, and hence the arts, in this ordering. Of these things the Israelites knew nothing. Moses was told to fashion the serpent of brass; he did, and it worked.

Meanwhile, the Lord's coming was being prepared for by the intellectual and cultural stirrings of another group of people situated on a Mediterranean peninsula. The flowering of Greece took form, among other ways, in some of the most perfect art that we have—in literature, sculpture, architecture, and—we may suppose from the record, though time has obliterated most of the results—in painting, music, and the dance. Along with this artistic outpouring, Athens also saw the beginnings of philosophy, philosophy that embraced nearly the whole of human life as well as the worlds of physics and metaphysics. Thus, aesthetics—though the word was not employed philosophically until the 1750's—properly has a Greek origin; and Greek philosophy, so far as we can tell, first began to offer generalizations on the nature and function of the arts.

All later philosophic questions on art may be traced back, directly or by implication, to these first great philosophers: Plato and his highly independent student, Aristotle. And since these two men expressed widely differing views on the nature and place of the arts, our next discussion will begin with a look at these views, developing from this into a consideration of the function and limitations of the imagination as a plane of the natural mind.

II

One of the most ambitious projects ever undertaken by man was Plato's *Republic*—an analytic presentation of the nature and structure of a perfect society. Springing from the Socratic search for the meaning of the word “justice,” and developing out of analogy to the order of the human mind as Plato viewed it, the *Republic* is a monument of breadth and detail. Among other considerations, Plato (or Socrates) takes up the question of the arts and their proper place in the perfect state, and hence in the education of the rulers of the state, the philosopher-kings.

We are given warning of his approach to the arts as early as Book II, when he charges most fictional poetry (for example, *The Iliad*) with “a fault which is most serious . . . the fault of telling a lie, and what is more, a bad lie.” Obviously, this cannot be permitted in the perfect state; and so he opens the concluding book of the *Republic* with the following words from the mouth of Socrates:

Of the many excellences I perceive in the order of our State, there is none which upon reflection pleases me better than the rule about poetry.

To what do you refer?

To the rejection of imitative poetry, which certainly ought not to be received; as I see far more clearly now that the parts of the soul have been distinguished.

. . . All poetical imitations are ruinous to the understanding of the hearers, and the knowledge of their true nature is the only antidote to them.

Notice the completeness of his judgment by this point. Incidentally, in the intervening books Plato has also noted the need for regulation of music and the dance, and said some rather scathing things about paintings. The reason he singles out “poetical imitations” (or literature) for absolute banishment from the well-ordered state is, it appears, because literature deals more directly with ideas and is thus more dangerous. Of this distinction something will be said in our next discussion, in considering the relation of form and content in the arts. Now, however, let us assume that Plato is attacking (I do not think the word is too strong) the arts in general, and for two reasons: (1) they are mere imitations of reality; (2) they appeal to the lower elements of society and the mind.

Perhaps no word has caused more discussion and dissension in the history of aesthetics (with the possible exception of Aristotle's "catharsis" or purgation) than Plato's "imitation." Listen to what he means by it.

. . . there are beds and tables in the world—plenty of them, are there not?

Yes.

But there are only two ideas or forms of them—one the idea of a bed, the other of a table.

True.

And the maker of either of them makes a bed or he makes a table for our use, in accordance with the idea—that is our way of speaking in this and similar instances—but no artificer makes the ideas themselves: how could he?

Impossible.

And there is another artist,—I should like to know what you would say of him.

Who is he?

One who is the maker of all the works of all other workmen.

This is the barest reference to one of Plato's leading philosophic concepts—the doctrine of ideas—the idea, or ideal in the mind of God being the only reality, all physical entities being appearances or imitations of this. The doctrine of ideas has important bearing on the Platonic degradation of the artist as a mere imitator of imitations, thrice removed from reality.

. . . Do you see, [continues Socrates,] that there is a way in which you could make them all yourself?

What way?

An easy way enough; or rather, there are many ways in which the feat might be quickly and easily accomplished, none quicker than that of turning a mirror round and round—you would soon enough make the sun and the heavens, and the earth and yourself, and other animals and plants, and all the other things of which we were just now speaking, in the mirror.

Yes, he said; but they would be appearances only.

Very good, I said, you are coming to the point now. And the painter too is, as I conceive, just such another—a creator of appearances, is he not? . . .

Well, then, here are three beds: one existing in nature, which is made by God, as I think that we may say—for no one else can be the maker?

No.

There is another which is the work of the carpenter?

Yes.

And the work of the painter is a third?

Yes.

Beds, then, are of three kinds, and there are three artists who superintend them: God, the maker of the bed, and the painter?

Yes, there are three of them.

God desired to be the real maker of a real bed, not a particular maker of a particular bed, and therefore He created a bed which is essentially and by nature one only.

So we believe.

Shall we, then, speak of Him as the natural author or maker of the bed?

Yes, he replied; inasmuch as by the natural process of creation He is the author of this and of all other things.

And what shall we say of the carpenter—is not he also the maker of the bed?

Yes.

But would you call the painter a creator and maker?

Certainly not.

Yet if he is not the maker, what is he in relation to the bed?

I think, he said, that we may fairly designate him as the imitator of that which the others make.

Good, I said; then you call him who is third in the descent from nature an imitator?

Certainly, he said.

And the tragic poet is an imitator, and therefore, like all other imitators, he is thrice removed from the king and from the truth?

This is, of course, a serious charge against the artist, and Plato's scorn has been echoed down the ages by those less idealistically concerned for human welfare than he was. But he is savage enough, in his quiet philosophic way.

. . . Now do you suppose that if a person were able to make the original as well as the image, he would seriously devote himself to the image-making branch? Would he allow imitation to be the ruling principle of his life, as if he had nothing higher in him?

I should say not.

The real artist, who knew what he was imitating, would be interested in realities and not in imitations; and would desire to leave as memorials of himself works many and fair; and, instead of being the author of encomiums, he would prefer to be the theme of them. . . .

But Plato has a still more serious criticism of the arts. If the poet would restrict himself to encomiums, or hymns in praise of the gods and famous men, he might be permitted a grudging place in the state. But, says Plato, the poet is indiscriminate in his imitations.

We may state the question thus: Imitation imitates the actions of men, whether voluntary or involuntary, on which, as they imagine, a good or bad result has ensued, and they rejoice or sorrow accordingly. . . .

Were we not saying that a good man, who has the misfortune to lose his son or anything else which is most dear to him, will bear the loss with more equanimity than another?

Yes.

But will he have no sorrow, or shall we say that although he cannot help sorrowing, he will moderate his sorrow? . . . There is a principle of law and reason in him which bids him resist, as well as a feeling of his misfortune which is forcing him to indulge his sorrow?

And does not the latter—I mean the rebellious principle—furnish a great variety of materials for imitation? Whereas the wise and calm temperament, being always nearly equable, is not easy to imitate or to appreciate when imitated, especially at a public festival when a promiscuous crowd is assembled in a theatre. For the feeling represented is one to which they are strangers.

Certainly.

Then the imitative poet who aims at being popular is not by nature made, nor is his art intended, to please or to affect the rational principle in the soul; but he will prefer the passionate and fitful temper, which is easily imitated?

Clearly.

And now we may fairly take him and place him by the side of the painter, for he is like him in two ways: first, inasmuch as his creations have an inferior degree of truth—in this, I say, he is like him; and he is also like him in being concerned with an inferior part of the soul; and therefore we shall be right in refusing to admit him into a well-ordered State, because he awakens and nourishes and strengthens the feelings and impairs the reason.

. . . he is a manufacturer of images and is very far removed from the truth. . . . lust and anger and all the other affections, desire and pain and pleasure, which are held to be inseparable from every action—in all of them poetry feeds and waters the passions instead of drying them up; she lets them rule, although they ought to be controlled, if mankind are ever to increase in happiness and virtue.

I cannot deny it.

Therefore, Glaucon, I said, whenever you meet with any of the eulogists of Homer declaring that he has been the educator of Hellas, and that he is profitable for education and for the ordering of human things, and that you should take him up again and again and get to know him and regulate your whole life according to him, we may love and honour those who say these things—they are excellent people, as far as their lights extend; and we are ready to acknowledge that Homer is the greatest of poets and first of tragedy writers; but we must remain firm in our conviction that hymns to the gods and praises of famous men are the only poetry which ought to be admitted into our State. . . .

Plato ends the discussion of the arts by offering to listen if the poet or his defenders wish to try refuting his charges.

. . . Notwithstanding this, let us assure our sweet friend and the sister arts of imitation, that if she will only prove her title to exist in a well-ordered State we shall be delighted to receive her. . . .

. . . let them show not only that she is pleasant but also useful to States and to human life, and we will listen in a kindly spirit; for if this can be proved we shall surely be the gainers—I mean, if there is a use in poetry as well as a delight?"⁷

⁷ Plato, *The Republic*, Book X *passim*.

" . . . if there is a use in poetry as well as a delight. . . ." He does not deny the appeal of the arts; but this appeal is not only not useful in his eyes, it is harmful. In this view, of course, Plato is not alone. Substitute the name of Shakespeare for Homer, and you find on the one hand the tremendous popularity of his plays among the Elizabethan people of London, and on the other, the refusal of the puritan city fathers to allow their performance within its walls. The main difference is that they were less philosophic in their reasoning than Plato, and more strident; but this may be because they were faced with the practical fact and he was only theorizing about the perfect society.

And if society were perfect, Plato might be right. In the last discussion I voiced the tentative conclusion that the Most Ancient Church needed no recourse to the arts, for theirs was a state of order between internals and externals. Plato was seeking the vision of just such a state, in which the strata of society reflected the perfectly ordered mind. More than this, in describing the educational needs of the state, he was thinking of the education of those who were to rule, the philosopher-kings. Here is his description of these rare people:

For he whose mind is fixed upon true being has surely no time to look down upon the affairs of earth, or to be filled with malice and envy, contending against men; his eye is ever directed towards things fixed and immutable, which he sees neither injuring nor injured by one another, but all moving in order according to reason; these he imitates, and to these he will, as far as he can, conform himself. . . . The philosopher holding converse with the divine order becomes orderly and divine, as far as the nature of man allows.⁸

If there is any man whom this description fits, it is Emanuel Swedenborg. And it is a fact that Swedenborg took little apparent interest in the arts, as far as we can tell from his letters, travel journals, and other reflections of his activities.

It may be that the perfect state is better off without the disturbing influence of the arts, and that the philosopher, even in an imperfect society—or because of it—can do very well without them. But society is imperfect, as is the state of man's mind during its active development in this world; and the prompt, though indirect, reply to Plato was given by a philosopher whose ideas were shaped both by *a priori* reasoning and the experiences of life.

⁸ *Ibid.*, Book VI.

Aristotle, in his *Poetics*, answers both of Plato's main charges against art. He is somewhat at a disadvantage in not employing the winning form of the dialog, and in the fragmentary nature of the report left of his lectures which comprises the *Poetics*. Nevertheless, his reply is effective and, I believe, sound.

Aristotle accepts Plato's view of the arts as imitation, but redefines the term to a much broader meaning.

It is clear that the general origin of poetry was due to two causes, each of them part of human nature. Imitation is natural to man from childhood, one of his advantages over the lower animals being this, that he is the most imitative creature in the world, and learns at first by imitation. *And it is also natural for all to delight in works of imitation.* The truth of this second point is shown by experience: *though the objects themselves may be painful to see, we delight to view the most realistic representations of them in art. . . .* The explanation is to be found in a further fact: to be learning something is the greatest of pleasures, *not only to the philosopher but also to the rest of mankind, however limited their capacity for it*; the reason of the delight in seeing the picture is that one is at the same time learning, *gathering the meaning of things.*⁹

He concurs with Plato that the arts give delight, which to some, with Plato, may seem perverse. But Aristotle goes on to show that in this delight there is a use; the use of learning. Maybe the philosopher does not need this means of learning through delight; he can delight in Kantian abstractions. But there remain the rest of mankind who need and love to learn, "however limited their capacity for it," and who can learn through the response to imitations in art.

Whether art should be thus regarded primarily as an instrument of learning in the direct sense is questionable; but let us look at what is happening to the concept of imitation under Aristotle's shaping mind. He speaks of "the most realistic representations" of art. It is quite clear from the context of the *Poetics* that he does not mean what is usually designated by "realism." Quite the contrary; realism to Aristotle meant true to the meaning which underlies the external appearance. Plato complained that the painter of the bed shows only one side; Aristotle would reply that the painter of life, in whatever medium, can penetrate the accidents of time and place to the vision of the inner reality which is the substance of things. Far from being a third-rate imitator, the artist—more, for example, than the historian—pierces closer to the idea which is the reality within the mind.

⁹ Aristotle, *Poetics*, No. 1448 (italics mine).

. . . The poet's function is to describe, not the thing that has happened, but a kind of thing that might happen, i.e., what is possible as being probable or necessary. The distinction between historian and poet is not in the one writing prose and the other verse—you might put the work of Herodotus into verse, and it would still be a species of history; it consists really in this, that the one describes the thing that has been, and the other a kind of thing that might be. Hence poetry is something more philosophic and of graver import than history, since its statements are of the nature rather of universals, whereas those of history are singulars. By a universal statement I mean one as to what such or such a kind of man will probably or necessarily say or do—which is the aim of poetry, though it affixes proper names to the characters; . . .¹⁰

In short, as he says elsewhere, "A likely impossibility is always preferable to an unconvincing possibility." So much for Plato's dismissal of fiction as a lie.

Aristotle's concept of artistic imitation does not, at this point, answer Plato's other and more serious charge: that the arts stir the lower feelings and do harm to the orderly development of the mind and the state. Even if art does get closer to the true realities of the mind, it finds there evil things as well as good; the delight felt in its imitative power may be a delight in evil.

Aristotle's answer to this is tantalizingly brief. He apparently developed it as a basic principle somewhere in the *Poetics*; but it has survived only as a glancing reference in his definition of one type of literary art. "A tragedy is the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself; . . . with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions."¹¹

The qualities first mentioned in this definition, of completeness and magnitude, are matters of form. The famous and evasive phrase here is "arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions."

Catharsis, or purgation, is the purifying of something by the removal of harmful elements. Whatever might be the process implied here as taking place in the mind among the affections or emotions, one thing is clear. Aristotle is directly refuting Plato's statement that poetry feeds the passions, as fuel does a fire. Rather, in some way, the arts are like the controlling of the fire to cleanse and refine the feelings brought within the influence of its heat and light.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, No. 1451.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, No. 1449.

This is fanciful analogy, and cannot take us far. We shall return more analytically to the relation of art to the affections which it evokes, in a later discussion. Now I would simply appeal to your own experience, as Aristotle did to that of his fellow Athenians reflecting on their response to the works of Aeschylus and Sophocles. Give art the benefit of the doubt for the moment, and choose a play, a painting, a musical composition generally recognized as good or great. Does it stir your emotions wrongly? Does Othello or Macbeth make you burn with jealousy or ambition; or do these imitations of man's destroying loves rather allow you to see their terrible power and its consequences with a clarity and force that bring delight? Plato would not have allowed them within his state. To him they would be false because fictional; trivial because imitative; harmful because inciting to passion. To Aristotle their imitative power would be truer than history, serious in enabling the audience to learn with delight, and valuable in purging the mind's emotions.

Another way of viewing the differences between these two philosophers is to interpret what they say in the light of what we know from the Heavenly Doctrine concerning the development of the natural mind—that is, man's conscious mind while on this earth. Briefly, it is of three degrees, sensuous, scientific or imaginative, and rational. The middle plane, frequently referred to as the natural, partakes of both the sensuous and the rational if it is in its full development and order.¹² Here the sense impressions stored in the memory are gathered in two ways to form higher patterns: inductions and deductions—empirical conclusions, simply, from the relating power of reason; and perceptive ideas or images from the organizing power of the imagination, itself stimulated by love.¹³ For it is the faculty of the imagination, as Bishop de Charms has put it,

to bring together, order, and arrange into meaningful patterns the scattered impressions that pour in from the senses and that are retained in the memory. . . . It is the power of representing qualities that are above the plane of sensation. Thus it gives tangible form and substance to the moral virtues, to generalizations, to laws. . . . We see this representation in the symbolic imagery of parables, of poetry, and song. Also in music, painting, and every form of art.¹⁴

¹² See AE 1147.

¹³ See AC 3020.

¹⁴ De Charms, *Imagination and Rationality*, Lecture II.

Plato glimpsed the three-fold order of the mind in his Republic, and correctly saw that the governance and ordering must be from above. What he failed to see was that—in the condition of man since the Fall—the mind must develop in successive degrees from below. It is true, of course, that the direction is secretly from above, from the Lord through the formative power of the soul; but just as man must consciously and of his own volition open successively the spiritual and celestial planes of his mind to the inflowing Divine if he is to become an angel—so, to become a mature man on earth he must successively develop the sensuous, imaginative, and rational degrees of the natural mind. Where Plato assumes perfected order, the truth requires a successive ordering. Thus he saw the imaginative functioning of the arts as imitation which gave delight but was useless and even harmful to the rational governing of life; Aristotle more truly saw that the delight in art sprang from its accompaniment of learning—learning by degrees. Art, in short, is not just sensuous, but significant; its patterns, as Bishop de Charms noted, are meaningful as intermediate between sense impressions and rational thought.

The development of the natural mind in its successive openings is summed up in the following passage:

In order that it may be known what is the exterior and what the interior natural, which are of the exterior man, and hence what is the rational which is of the interior man, this must be briefly told. A man from his infancy even to childhood is merely sensuous, for he then receives only earthly, bodily, and worldly things through the senses of the body, and from these things his ideas and thoughts are then formed. . . . By external innocence the Lord reduces into order what enters through the senses; and without an influx of innocence from the Lord in that first age, there would never be any foundation upon which the intellectual or rational faculty which is proper to man, could be built. From childhood to early youth communication is opened with the interior natural by learning what is becoming, what the civil laws require, and what is honorable, both by instructions from parents and teachers and by studies. And from youth to early manhood communication is opened between the natural and the rational by learning the truths and goods of civil and moral life, through the hearing and reading of the Word. . . . With those who suffer themselves to be regenerated . . . by degrees or successively the rational is opened in them, and to this the interior natural is made subordinate, and to this the exterior natural. This takes place especially in youth up to adult age, and progressively to the last years of their life, and afterward in heaven to eternity.¹⁵

¹⁵ AC 5126.

This places the development of the middle natural, where the imagination has its seat, primarily in childhood and youth, and may thus suggest that Peacock was right in placing poetry among the useful things of the race's past. However, the planes of the mind do not develop and then stop; they continue to function, if that development is orderly, in association with the higher planes which they then serve as basis. The analogy to the continuing use of the Old and New Testaments by the Church in adult worship and thought is obvious. Another passage stresses the interrelated use of the separate degrees in this way:

Every man so progresses as he grows up from childhood. When he is a child he thinks and apprehends things from things of sense; when older he thinks and apprehends things from memory-knowledges (scientifics); and afterwards from truths. This is the way to the judgment into which man grows with age. From this it may be seen that things of sense, memory-knowledges, and truths are distinct, and even remain distinct—so much so that a man is sometimes in things of sense, as when he thinks only of what meets the senses; sometimes in memory-knowledges, as when he elevates his mind out of things of sense and thinks interiorly; and sometimes in truths which have been concluded from memory-knowledges, as in the case when he thinks more interiorly. . . . Man can also bring truths down into memory-knowledges and see them in these, and he can also bring memory-knowledges down into things of sense and contemplate them therein.¹⁶

Note especially the closing sentence of this passage. The appearance is that man builds upward from below. But just as the architect has already envisioned the completed house and its purposes before the foundations are laid, so the impulse and direction for the mind's ordering and development is from above—from the directive power and vision of love.

How does the artistic imagination respond to influx from above? A general picture is given in this brief passage. "When sensuous things are subject to the rational, then the sensuous things from which man's first imagination is formed, are enlightened by the light which comes through heaven from the Lord, and are also disposed into order so as to receive the light and correspond."¹⁷ This might well be a description of true art.

Yet this might seem to imply that the imagination, as the active force in the opening of the middle plane of the mind, is a merely mechanical or blind operation. That this is not so is

¹⁶ AC 5774.

¹⁷ AC 5128.

suggested in the following: "The rational mind is that which disposes all things as master of the house, and arranges them in order by influx into the natural mind; but it is the natural mind that ministers and is the administrator. . . . To this mind belongs all imaginative faculty. . . ." ¹⁸

How can art help in this ministering office? This central question will be considered in the following discussions, which will be concerned with dispelling what I regard as two generally held misconceptions about the arts—one having to do with form, the other with substance. For a work of art, like every other created thing, has both form and substance; and it is in the nature of these and their interrelationship that I believe we can find the true function of the arts as a mediating administrator between the rational mind which animates and directs, and the sensuous realm in which it works its ultimate effects.

III

I should like to open this discussion of the dual nature of art by emphasizing its unity—the organic oneness or integrity that is a work of art. Its twoness arises from the fact that as a creation of the imagination, it unites the world of spirit to that of the senses. And in true art, or the true reception of art, this unity of the two worlds forms a harmony based on true order. To quote again what earlier I called the closest description I know of what art is, "When sensuous things are subject to the rational, then the sensuous things from which man's first imagination is formed, are enlightened by the light which comes through heaven from the Lord, and are also disposed into order so as to receive the light and correspond." ¹⁹

This is not, of course, a condition limited to art. It can as easily be applied to the sciences, to philosophy, and other mental disciplines. It is, in short, a disposition of the natural mind in a harmony of understanding from which uses of all kinds are fulfilled.

¹⁸ AC 3020.

¹⁹ AC 5128.

Such unity, however, is manifested in art with a special strength. For art appeals directly to the senses and to the delights that find a powerful ultimate in sense response, in physical beauty. The manifestation of rational order or harmony through this ultimate form is therefore more clear and satisfying than with many other of the mind's activities. Let me testify from personal experience, however slight or inadequate: I know of no delight more full, I experience no more absorbing joy, than when I am in the act of writing a poem. I say this with the greater confidence because it is also the testimony of countless others, including professional artists of rank and renown.

Why should this be so? I believe it to be based on the unity, the integrity of creation; in the momentary union of will and understanding—a faint, finite reflection of the Lord's love and wisdom working as One to bring order out of chaos, in the purposeful creating and sustaining of the universe. I also suppose that it is a glimpse of the happiness which lies within that free and harmonious response to the Divine will which we call the life of heaven.²⁰

As God looked upon His work and "behold it was very good," so a true work of art will be good. Yet the introduction of the word "good" into a discussion of the arts (and I have expressly avoided the word till now) immediately raises problems over which the philosophers have argued since Plato. What makes a work of art good? Whatever the answer may be (and we will seek one in the fifth discussion), *it must embrace the work as a whole, in its integrity of substance and form.* You cannot, I believe, render separate judgments which are valid, on the "what" and the "how" of an art work; you cannot call it aesthetically good but morally bad, or morally good but aesthetically bad. To do so is to injure the unity from which the work draws its power to move, the harmony through which it performs its function as art. To separate aesthetic and moral judgment, to sever technical grace from spiritual force, is to destroy the work. Of course, if a work lacks either the substance or the form of art, we must recognize this, but such recognition does not involve judgment of it as art; for in that case it is not art at all, good or bad. We are concerned here with the error of misjudging true works of art on the basis of a false dichotomy or division. The splitting of the

²⁰ See DLW 14 and CL 384.

work of art is done both by philosophers and critics and by the public. It is the error of both the aestheticist who proclaims the validity of art for art's sake, regardless of moral impact, and the moralist who condemns the theme or subject of a painting or a play, and does not pause to notice the effect of the form on the viewer's emotional response to the theme.

The underlying cause for this false dichotomy arises from a basic misconception about what the two parts are which comprise its integrity. The false distinction frequently made is between *form* and *content*. This leads to the extrinsic theory of art. The form becomes a pretty package, ribbons and all, that we tear open in order to get at the contents. And while there are some who always exclaim, "It's too pretty to open," practical desire sooner or later prevails, and the pretty package goes into the wastebasket, while the object which it contained is held up as something entirely separable, the worth, triviality, or harmfulness of which has no relation to what contained it, its form.

Let us look at examples of this art-destroying error in the principal mediums that comprise the arts. Literature is probably the most frequent victim, being most susceptible to the separation of idea and image. The seventeenth century puritan, Andrew Marvell, wrote a poem called "To His Coy Mistress." The poem is a monologue addressed by a young man to the girl he is attempting to seduce. "Beautifully written," "carefully organized," "good in form," report students dutifully, having learned about rhythm and imagery—but a "bad" poem. Why? Because it advocates an evil. Not so. The *speaker* does; but the *poem* exhibits with clarity and power the bleak emptiness, the harsh unloveliness of the promiscuous and naturalistic love of the sex. The proof of the pudding is in the eating; the poem does what a true work of art should: it evokes an affective contemplation of, and therefore an effective response to, a truth about human nature presented with the power of sensuous ultimatum. We know so-called literary works that place fornication in the romantic trappings of a valentine, and others that incite the sensual directly. They are not art; "To His Coy Mistress" is.

To look at the other side of the coin, we have also read many verses in which the themes expressed are in themselves noble, and which have yet no strength to move through their forms. The jingly generalizations on motherhood or the grandeur of mountains

that are to be found in the pages of weekly newspapers—these are not poor art; they fail to be art at all because they fail to move, to unite the spirit with the senses through the formative power of the imagination. The reader who exclaims, “How lovely!” is persuading himself that he is reading a good poem because it contains such a fine idea. Yet he had the idea before. Nothing has been added; no perceptions of depth or power occur to strengthen in his mind that which he already knew, or give him a vision that lifts him to new realization.

Similar errors occur in response to the visual arts. People like or reject paintings for extrinsic reasons. A landscape looks like home; the event depicted is a patriotic one—or, conversely, that face is so sad. The reason Norman Rockwell is called an “illustrator” rather than an artist is that his pictures tell stories in a concentration on subject and the viewers’ past experience of reality. To carry this to its logical conclusion would be to make photography the highest visual art and to embrace Plato’s narrow view of imitation instead of Aristotle’s concept of the inner reality of the universal. On the other hand, a painting like El Greco’s “View of the City of Toledo” is not realistic at all, in the narrowly physical sense. Not only did he exaggerate the perspectives of height and distance, he actually rearranged the buildings to suit his purpose. The effect is a response that is both immediate in impact and inexhaustible in potentiality.

Response to what? The form of this picture—what is it the form of? A city? (content) A storm? (subject) But of what is form the form? The answer given in the Heavenly Doctrine is “substance.” Not content; not subject or theme, but substance—that which “stands below”—*sub stare*—and which form alone can bring into manifest being.

What is substance? To approach an answer to this, let us first consider music, the third great realm of the arts. Music has been called the queen of the arts; or, what is the same thing, it has been said that all art aspires to the condition of music. And this condition is simply that you cannot even in discussion separate the form and substance of a piece of music. If you try the form/content approach to music, you will quickly find that it has no content apart from its form, and this is true also of the other arts. Oh yes, there is program music, in which the sounds are meant to convey specific events or natural sounds; and I do

not deny that this is music. But even here, the musical worth does not depend on the importance of the event or our knowledge of it, any more than Salvador Dali's "Crucifixion" is necessarily a superior painting to Van Gogh's picture of cypresses or a vase of chrysanthemums.

The folly of trying to discuss music in terms of "content" is well illustrated by the jacket of a recording of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony, in the Academy Library. The commentator spends half of his fine print ridiculing various "wild" interpretations of the famous allegretto of the second movement. Then he proceeds to give his own version of its meaning, an interpretation no more valid or necessarily related to the musical form or the affectional impact than are any of those he scorns. How much better, because truer to the art they discuss, are those commentaries which elucidate the musical structure, through which alone not the "content" of the music, but its *substance*, can be experienced.

What then is the substance of Beethoven's 7th—of "The View of Toledo," or "To His Coy Mistress"? It is precisely what the Heavenly Doctrine means by substance. Like every other activity of the human mind, art is spiritual in origin. That is, while its forms are from the fixed ultimates of nature, its substance is from the world of the spirit. And spiritual substances are affections and the thoughts derived from them. The form/content error springs from failure to see man as a spiritual being. We, knowing these things from a revelation addressed to our rational understanding, should not make the same error.

There are purer substances, and those real, from which knowledges and thoughts come forth into manifest being; and whose variations of form when animated and modified by the influx of life from the Lord, present them to view; while their agreements and harmonies, in succession or simultaneously, affect the mind and constitute what is called beautiful, pleasant, and delightful.²¹

Art, it seems to me, is nothing more (nor less) than the creation, through sense impressions, of those agreements and harmonies—some successive, some simultaneous—by means of which the purer substances of the spirit—that is, affections—are presented to view. Affection is the substance of art as it is of the spiritual

²¹ AC 3726.

world, whether considered from the viewpoint of the artist or of the responsive recipient. For the embodiment of affections is similar in both, though probably of unequal strength. As angels and spirits inflow into the artist's mind and stir it to an affectional ordering of the sense images in the memory, which ordering is a new creation; just so, the ordered object—painting, symphony, poem—provides the basis for a similar influx into the mind of the listener or viewer. The source is the same—the affective presence of angels and spirits; and this fact should remove the arts from any assessment that places them as “fringe benefits” in the mind's development and life. By no other means are the affections which are the very man made tangible for his use with the same power and clarity.

If art has this integrity of substance and form, we cannot exalt the one at the expense of the other. The communication of profound insight into the spirit of man requires an equal dedication to the perfection of form. And art achieves the one by means of the other. Form without affectional insight is mere craftsmanship; the well constructed detective story is closer in nature to a mechanical puzzle than it is to *Anna Karenina*, even though it resembles the latter in medium, and the other not at all.

And, on the other hand, without form no insight is possible, the affections cannot be moved. The importance of form, and the qualities of the artistic form, will be the topic of the next discussion; and the nature of the affectional response that is its substance will be considered in the following one. I would note here in summation the simple definition given earlier of art, that it is an affectional ordering of experience. Experience is provided through the senses, on the mind's lowest plane; the affections come from the spiritual world; and the ordering is the activity which brings affections to conscious form.

“Order is the quality of the arrangement, determination, and activity of the parts, substances, or elements which constitute a form; from which is its state; and its perfection is produced by wisdom from its love, or its imperfection is the outcome of unsoundness of reason from cupidity.”²²

²² TCR 52.

IV

We have considered the union of substance and form which is the creative act, whether it be spiritual or physical; and art is both. It is the embodiment of an affection, which is its very substance, in a form drawn from sense images—first the ideal form envisioned in the thought of the imagination, and from this the fixed work brought into existence by skilled labor in a physical medium.

That this labor is a work of love, with its accompanying delight, is amply testified from experience. It is also the testimony of revelation.

Love . . . produces (thoughts and images) for the sake of the various affections that constitute its form. . . . Thoughts, perceptions, and knowledges therefrom, flow in, it is true, out of the spiritual world, yet they are received not by the understanding but by love, according to its affections in the understanding.²³

Love, in short, accomplishes all; it is the motive force of all creativity, Divine and human. As Bishop de Charms expresses it, "Every affection has within it the power to recognize whatever will promote its end or purpose. . . . This is characteristic of love, the very form of its activity, the inevitable law of its life." And further, "The love or affection of any particular use at once forms in the mind an imaginative picture of that use as if present—as if already achieved. It forms an ideal, visually pictured, marvelously endowed from sensations stored in the memory, presenting that use as eminently desirable. . . . The vision prompts man eagerly to seek its attainment. So long as the mind is held under the influence of the love, and in its light, it will persistently search for new knowledge, experience, and skill, without which the end cannot be achieved."²⁴

Thus the "agony" of artistic endeavor, and thus the "ecstasy" of its accomplishment in a form that is harmonious and complete. The point to be iterated here is that the form itself is dead, passive unless the life of love is in it.

In this sense, the real work of art is not to be found on canvas or the printed page, or in the air of the concert hall, but in the

²³ DLW 410.

²⁴ De Charms, *Imagination and Rationality*, Lecture IV.

imaginative response to affections that can flow in through these forms. Thus R. G. Collingwood speaks of "the work of art as an imaginary object." We may suppose that many an art work, in this sense, lives unrealized in the mind of the artist. His motive for striving to bring it to the world of physical actuality may be his own ulterior enjoyment; indeed, with some of the puzzling and esoteric images produced today in both the visual and literary arts (I cannot speak for music), this may seem to be the sole object. Yet the true use of art is fulfilled only when it is shared, when the affections expressed by the artist are re-created through the medium of fixed forms in the mind of the recipient.

And so, while we must recognize the stirring of love as both principal cause and desired effect, we must also acknowledge the necessity of form. The testimony of revelation is abundant. "The affections of love are exalted and perfected by means of truths, thus by means of wisdom."²⁵ Affections are fluid, protean; but truth is fixed. Again, "love has no sensitive nor any active life apart from the understanding."²⁶ That is, the loves that constitute a man's life cannot feel, nor can they act without the forms by which alone they come to conscious perception. Only by conjunction with the understanding can this take place. It may be worth-while here to note that this conjunction is of three successive kinds as the planes of the mind are opened to which an earlier discussion referred. On the sensuous plane, an affection for knowing gathers to it those first forms of understanding called scientifics, or *knowledges* in the memory. In the middle natural, or imaginative, a higher synthesis of these knowledges takes place, called *perception* of truth, from an affection for understanding. And on the rational plane, the highest degree of the conscious mind, *thought* takes form through the affection for seeing that which is understood—by which I understand the vision of use to which the prior forms of knowledge may be applied.²⁷

These forms—knowledge, perception, and thought—are spiritual forms of affection. Their natural counterparts are many and various, according to the use being effected. They include laws, systems of science, inventions, and also the arts. And all

²⁵ DLW 410.

²⁶ DLW 409.

²⁷ DLW 404.

these effects of love, on the plane of ultimate human uses, are dependent on the form into which they are cast. Without form they are nothing; they have existence by means of their form, and their quality is determined by that form.

The passages in which this is clearly stated are many. One of the most comprehensive occurs near the beginning of the work *The Divine Providence*, which opens with a review of teachings in *The Divine Love and Wisdom* concerning the creative unity of these two Divine attributes.

Any one who thinks intently can see clearly that a one is impossible apart from a form, and if it exists it is a form; for whatever has existence derives from form that which is called quality, and that which is called predicate, also that which is called change of state, also that which is called relativity, and the like; consequently that which is not in a form has no power to affect; and what has no power to affect has no reality. It is the form that gives all these things.²⁸

Form is the instrumental bridge, the cause in the creative chain of end, cause, and effect. Its importance should not lead to the supposition that it is the end itself; it is not an end but a means. Thus the fixed world, we are warned, should be regarded "not from some of its forms, which are merely objects of sight, but from uses in their succession and order. For uses are from life alone . . . while forms are only containants of uses. Consequently, if forms alone are regarded, nothing of life, still less anything of love and wisdom, thus nothing of God, can be seen in nature."²⁹

This warning is directed against those who interpret life's nature and meaning from the appearances of the physical universe. It applies also to those to whom the forms of art are desirable merely for their own sake—that is, for the sake of sensual delight as a form of the love of the world, or from acquisitive delight as a form of the love of self. Form separated from use, in short, is form separated from substance. This does *not* mean that an art work must have an ulterior or extrinsic function beyond its embodiment of the mind's affections. It does mean that the aesthetic function centers on the effectiveness with which the form evokes an appropriate affectional response. What appropriate response is to a work of art will be the central consider-

²⁸ DP 4. For a more comprehensive consideration, see the author's "The Function and Importance of Form," *New Church Life*, June 1961, pp. 285-8.

²⁹ DLW 46.

ation of the next discussion. Now let us consider some of the qualities that artistic form must have if it is to evoke that response.

Since the world of the arts is a human world, its essential qualities will not be different from the qualities that characterize other manifestations of life. This is recognized in the recurrent use of the phrase, "the art of. . . ." We say, "He is a master of the art of teaching, or arguing, or conversation, or cooking, or simply of living." This not only means that art resembles other forms of human activity; it means that life, practiced with skill and awareness, is itself aesthetic. Philip Phenix, to whose book *Education and the Common Good* I am particularly indebted in this discussion, puts it this way:

The products of the so-called 'fine arts' are exclusively devoted to esthetic purposes, but they are not the sole objects of esthetic concern. Still, they do have a special and distinctive importance, which to some extent justifies the custom of setting them apart as esthetic objects *par excellence*. Music, drama, painting, sculpture, poetry, architecture, and the dance fulfill a representative function in culture. They serve as standard-bearers for esthetic values, with a minimum of complication by concern for nonesthetic purposes.³⁰

One more point must be made before taking up the specific qualities that characterize aesthetic form. Not only are these qualities not exclusive to artistic creation or judgment; they are not man-made at all. Rather they are discovered by man as a reflection, in the worlds of spirit and of nature, of the Divine laws of creation, and indeed may be said to reflect the nature of the Creator.

For example, the most basic necessity of artistic form is harmony. Harmony may be simply defined as "variety in unity"—the combining of different elements into a congruous whole. And what is this but the finite shadowing of that great and awesome truth enunciated in the Writings and exemplified everywhere in creation: "In God-Man infinite things are one distinctly."³¹ That human perception cannot grasp the full meaning of this does not mean we cannot perceive it as the origin of the beauty and order spread before our senses and our thoughts.

To put it most fully and simply, I cannot conceive of a single quality that contributes to form a work of art that is not to be

³⁰ Philip Phenix, *Education and the Common Good*.

³¹ DLW 17.

found in the orderly and organic processes of all creation.³² What of those forms that arose as a result of man's decline into evil and falsity; they are certainly not of Divine order. I think the answer to this is twofold: (1) the ugly distortions of human evil do not deny the beauty of true order, but rather confirm it by opposition; and (2) the test of true form, *i.e.*, of the qualities that comprise a true work of art, is in the nature of the affectional response which it evokes. This hearkens back in a sense to the point made earlier about apparently bad works which evoke a good response, and whose badness is an appearance arising from confusion of subject or content with substance. However, the nature of aesthetic response will be more fully defined and affirmed in our next discussion. Now I stand on the assertion that if the qualities inherent in artistic form are to be found in a particular work, the affectional response to that work will be good; the moral and aesthetic judgments will be one.

In the following brief analysis of some of the chief essentials of artistic form, I suggest it will be useful if the reader selects a work of art—painting, poetry, or music—strongly familiar, and test the intrinsicity of the qualities as they are discussed, by their presence or absence in the work. It need not be a great masterpiece—opportunities range from a Schubert melody to the *St. Matthew Passion*, from a landscape of Manet or Wyeth to Leonardo's *The Last Supper*, from a descriptive lyric by Frost to *King Lear*. Obviously, the several qualities named will be found in different forms with different mediums of art, and in differing emphasis among different works in the same medium. It is my presupposition that all will be present in some form and degree. Thus, they should not be viewed as matters of technique, though these will carry them out; but as essentials of *forming* or *structuring*.

To reiterate, the first requisites of aesthetic form are unity, variety, and harmony. These are grouped because the last is the unition of the first two; but let us see them separately. *Unity* means that the work is synthesized into a complete whole. The very recognition that something *is*, denotes unity, a comprehensible pattern of completion. The delight we feel in the presence of unity is a response to its clear indication of purpose and direction,

³² See TCR 740 (or CL 12) regarding the spiritual origin of all the "rules of art."

an underlying end or love brought to realization—no mere aggregate of parts.

Artistic unity, however, is not mere oneness. While there has been recently exhibited a painting seriously titled "White on White," my perhaps limited perception fails to see in it anything that can elicit the remotest affectional response. To me, therefore, it fails artistically, as does the repeated sounding of a single note or mechanical ticking of a verse's meter. Unity is not monotony, but demands a combining of differing elements into a consonant whole that we call *harmony*. Nor does harmony preclude contrast or even conflict between these elements, but only that, in Phenix's words, "each contributes to, and does not detract from, the effect of the others." The place of conflict as a component of art, especially of conflict between good and evil, is an important aspect of aesthetics, to be taken up in our final discussion. Now let us note simply that harmony is a pleasing and effective combining of separate and differing elements that results in a complex unity. Thus, *variety* is a necessity of art. This means that each element must retain its distinct individuality while contributing to a greater whole; surely a sound principle when we consider that out of such an ordering heaven is continually being perfected, and that in God, infinite things are "one distinctly."³³

A corollary of harmony is *balance*. Each element in an artistic form or composition must be disciplined to keep its appropriate place, whether in a formal symmetry of classical balance or in the more organic and natural relationships of the romantic style. Obviously, balance implies wholeness, a relating of the part to the whole, in a purposive order.

This blending of tones and masses must not be done in such a way that the separate parts lose their identity. The picture must not, as it were, "run together." The quality of art form that maintains individuality or identity has been called *intensity*. Intensity is a word that connotes feeling; and this is precisely its function in form—to adjust the recipient's response appropriately to the feeling called for, whether it be in the vibrancy of a brass choir against the whole orchestra, the somber folds of a cloak, or the associational coloring of a phrase. In the measure

³³ See HH 56.

of intensity is frequently to be found the chief gauge of the artist's discipline—his control of his material so that it neither shrills with the imbalance of anger nor sobs in excess of sentimentality. The nature and quality of the recipient's response may hinge upon these factors; and the test of the art work is the recipient's educated response.

Associated with the quality of intensity is *integrity*. This is a special case of unity, singleness of purpose in which there are no effects introduced for their own sake as ornament or to lure the recipient away from a balanced response. The building with a false front is one flagrant violation of this principle, which declares that the work of art shall not deceive, that the outward form shall truly mirror the inward feeling. If lust masquerades as romantic love the result is not art.

In addition to an inner integrity, *truthfulness* to the larger issues of life is an artistic necessity. "True to life" must, of course, be taken in the broadest and deepest sense, as Aristotle envisioned it, not in the external view of Plato or many a modern realist. "Poetic justice," the melodramatic lie that proclaims that the hero always succeeds, is false because it measures success in material terms. Many a tragic hero succeeds through death or despair, in a larger portrayal of the truth of life.

Being true to the inner realities of life, art has the quality of *depth*. There are those who would measure the worth of a painting on how often you can look at it without growing tired, a piece of music on how many repetitions can still afford a fresh insight and response. This is perhaps too easy a measure; but certainly the complexity involved in even a simple work of art suggests that time is a sound tester. It may indeed test the recipient as well as the work. Superficiality is no virtue, in art or in life.

A society content with superficiality is also not likely to be concerned with *finesse*, the skill and craftsmanship with which a work of art is executed. The sketchiness of much contemporary painting seems a peculiar symptom of indifference to finesse; yet the care and knowledge with which the public selects its stereo systems and the records to play on them suggests quite the opposite. Regardless of what these disparate manifestations mean, the artist's patient discipline and sacrifice is a worthy human trait reflected in the power of his art.

Finally, I would name *ideality* as an inevitable quality of art. The whole view of aesthetics that has been presented in these discussions assumes that art offers more than we can draw directly from nature. Francis Bacon expressed it in these words: "(Poetry) was ever thought to have some participation of divineness, because it doth raise and erect the mind, by submitting the shows of things to the desires of the mind."²⁴

It may be thought improper to suggest, as has been done several times in these discussions, that the creations of man are an image of the Divine creation. It does not seem so to me. If man was created in the image of God, and flawed that image by his own choice, it is his life's purpose to mend the flaws, to do what is in his power to restore that image to its wholeness. To do so requires that he acknowledge that power to be truly God's alone; but it also requires his free acceptance and response. The ideality of art, its clarification and direction of the senses and the imagination through an ordered clothing of the mind's affections, is one way in which man may truly reciprocate his Creator's gifts. The qualities of form by which alone the arts can thus express man's humanity are, to repeat, not his own; they are ingrained into the workings of the universe, physical and spiritual. How they contribute to the ordering of the mind we will discuss next.

²⁴ Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*.

V

It is one of the great and repeated misconceptions about art that it constitutes a direct expression of personal feeling—that the artist, out of the serene or troubled depths of his soul, pours out his inmost emotions. Necessarily connected with this assumption is the notion that the recipient, if his reception be true, must be stirred immediately to—not by—the same emotion. The role of the understanding, the importance of form is by this view minimized or ignored, in absolute rejection of the truth considered in our last discussion that love cannot sense or act without understanding, that form gives quality.

Once again it is Plato in whom we find the first expression of the “emotive fallacy.” In his dialogue *Ion*, Socrates explains the poet’s state as “the madness of those who are possessed by the Muses; this enters into a delicate and virgin soul, and there inspiring frenzy, awakens lyrical and all other numbers. . . . The sane man,” he adds wryly, “is nowhere at all when he enters into rivalry with the madman.” Again, “The Muse first of all inspires men herself; and from these inspired persons a chain of other persons is suspended, who take the inspiration from them. For all good poets, epic as well as lyric, compose their beautiful poems not by art, but because they are inspired and possessed.”³⁵ Art, in short, is produced and received without art!

It is small wonder that Plato would not care to have such a person wandering around in his state, gathering in the unwary like a drunken piper and leading them down the path to the mind’s destruction.

This view of art received modern support both in the figures of the romantic era that ushered in the nineteenth century, and in some of their pronouncements on their art. Blake was a special case of real intermittent madness; but the eloquent and amoral Shelley, with his personal beauty and anguished lyric cry (“I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!”) became for many the symbolic representative of art. Even the quieter and sometimes prosy Wordsworth spoke of “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling,” and talked of poetry “carried alive into the heart by passion.”³⁶

That there is a kernel of truth in this viewpoint cannot be

³⁵ Plato, *Ion*.

³⁶ William Wordsworth, “Preface,” Second Edition of *Lyrical Ballads*.

denied; but whether nurtured by a philosopher's scorn (as in Plato's case) or by a revulsion against the dry misapprehensions of rationalism (as with the romantic movement), its half-truth is dangerous to the cause of art. Wordsworth wrote more truly, because he saw the mind's creative pattern more fully, in his famous phrase, "Poetry takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity."³⁷ Recollection is a re-gathering of images and their forming into an expression of feeling in a state, mind you, not of frenzy or passion, but tranquillity. This calmer view had already begun to take shape in the thoughts of philosophers more realistic than Plato in their understanding of the mind and its conditions. Aristotle had spoken of a "proper purgation of emotions" through tragedy, a very different concept from the inspired madness of Plato's poet. But it remained for modern philosophers and analytic critics to spell out in more detail the true nature of the feelings expressed in art. Let us hear a few of these—first, Schopenhauer:

"The Will, tyrant over scientific logic, is made quiescent in the aesthetic contemplation of beauty."³⁸ He goes on to theorize concerning the origin of this quiescence; it arises from the recognition that a sensuous presentation in art manifests the same passions from which the Overwill created the universe. Thus, he reasons, we sense the artist's creative function as one with that of the Divine Creator, and are freed from the struggle against a will outside our own, in what he termed "acquaintance with emotion."

I offer this theory by Schopenhauer not because I accept it—insofar as I understand what he means—but by way of contrast to the more rational explanation I believe is to be found in the Writings as to the origin of aesthetic feeling. One important offshoot of Schopenhauer's concept is the modern aesthetic doctrine of "empathy" (from the German "einfühlung" of Theodore Lipps), which sees aesthetic pleasure as a losing of ourselves by identification with the object being experienced. In this too I think there is a truth reflected: that our response to a work of art occurs through spiritual association by means of the images which embody the affectional substance of the art. This is not to ascribe magical powers to an inanimate object or

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World As Will and Idea*, Book III.

sensory image; the relationship is on the spiritual plane, between the minds of the artist and the recipient through associations with spirits or angels. The sensory form is merely the ultimating basis for such association; in itself it is passive, lifeless.

We have strayed somewhat from Schopenhauer's first point—that the will is quiescent in the contemplation of artistic beauty. Whatever the cause of the latest theory of it, this view has more support today among aesthetic thinkers than the opposite idea which I have already termed false, that the will is directly engaged in the creation and reception of art. Thus Benedetto Croce calls aesthetic feeling “expressive, not symptomatic or infective.”³⁹ The expression of feeling neither reveals the emotional state of the artist nor infects the recipient's emotions. This is important; for it says that true art is not a carrier of the diseases of the will, is not a breeder of the germs of evil, as Plato and some others have thought. On the other hand, it is not a clinical, antiseptic dissection of the will, for it does express and embody feeling. As Croce put it, art is a volitional experience in the understanding (the words are not his); the experiencing of the art object itself is the true activity of art, and it cannot be substituted for by a factual or scientific explanation. A work of art cannot be transferred into a different form without losing its integrity. If to a different art form, its substance will be differently qualified and will be lost. Paraphrase, in short, is no proper or adequate approach to the study or teaching of art. Analysis can also be at fault if it is viewed as the final end of the study; like all search for truth, if addressed properly to its object, it can help to deepen and clarify the affectional response.

Susanne Langer further defines the expressive nature of art by saying that it “objectifies the subjective realm. What the artist expresses is, therefore, not his own actual feelings, but what he knows about human feeling. Once he is in possession of a rich symbolism, that knowledge may actually exceed his entire personal experience. A work of art expresses a conception of life, emotion, inward reality. But it is neither a confessional nor a frozen tantrum.”⁴⁰

This seems another way of putting Aristotle's idealized version of imitation. It also helps to explain, partially, the miracle of

³⁹ Benedetto Croce, *Breviary of Aesthetics*.

⁴⁰ Susanne Langer, *Problems of Art*, p. 26.

genius. That is, it makes Shakespeare's authorship of thirty-seven plays comprehensible without having to conceive of him as a composite monster with fairly equal parts of Hamlet, Caliban, Lady Macbeth, Falstaff, etc., etc. It does *not* explain how and whence all these characterizations of human feelings came to Shakespeare, or the development of his marvelous skill to portray them. Genius, artistic as otherwise, has always the element of the miraculous and inexplicable. One would like to say that Shakespeare, along with Rembrandt, Beethoven, and others, received inspiration through rational perception from a love of truth for the sake of use. For this is the order leading to a true imagination. But it does not help much to explain our response to Lear's agony or the broken patterns of the funeral march from the *Eroica* or the look which Rembrandt bends on us out of his self-portrait. We respond to these works with more intelligence and appreciation when we know more about the forms by which that response is kindled; but we do not know finally how it was done. Nor, I suppose, did the artists—so there is something to be said for inspiration.

The separation of artistic feeling from self enables us to avoid the false judgment of a work of art which is based on a knowledge of the artist's life. A man can be an evil man on the civil and moral plane, and indeed on the spiritual plane that we cannot judge, and still create true works of art. The spiritual cause of this—that man's understanding can be lifted above his native will into spiritual light and thus respond to "borrowed" affections from others—will be considered more specifically a little later. It is mentioned here to emphasize the fallacy of judging the art by the man. The only basis for judging a work of art is its clarity and force in expressing whatever affection is embodied in it, and this by means of those qualities of form discussed earlier.

It is true that an artist may do his work from an evil as well as a good affection—from that well-known triumvirate of honor, reputation, and gain, rather than from a love of use. But these are extrinsic affections, and do not necessarily appear in the work of art itself. Indeed, if art were a direct communication of personal emotion, only a regenerate man could produce good art, and only other regenerate men could appreciate it. The closest I will come to agreeing with this view is to say that the regenerating man is more likely to receive in full beauty and vision the

inflowing affections from heaven into his enlightened understanding, and only the man in whom conscience has stirred the beginnings of a new will can respond to the art thus created. But as there are few regenerated men in this life, so there are few in whom the remains of good are utterly quenched.

Another philosophic commentator, Hegel, said that "in the experience of beauty, man for the first time contemplates his impulses . . . he now sees them externalized and begins . . . to achieve freedom from them."⁴¹

Immanuel Kant, in his difficult way, had said the same thing—that the judgment of taste (or beauty) is disinterested, apart from one's dependence on the object viewed and therefore freed from personal desire. He too uses the word "contemplative" to describe the aesthetic activity of the mind face to face with art.⁴²

On the basis of these views, a term has come into use and been widely accepted among those concerned with the philosophy of art. The term is "aesthetic distance," or sometimes, "psychic distance." In general it implies that the worth of aesthetic experience, the response to a work of art, depends on a recognition of its difference from life, and therefore a freedom from personal, practical involvement in the feelings expressed. The comic figure of the country boy who disrupts the performance on stage to straighten things out or warn the heroine against the villain, does not, as one writer remarks, constitute the ideal audience. As always with a consideration of the arts, the test of experience is valid. Would the man who believes his wife unfaithful and is torn between love and anger be a better recipient of the play *Othello* than a man happily married and holding hands with his wife in the theater? The first unfortunate could not possibly enjoy the performance; its implications would be too personal. Or, to be even more practical, could a composer listen with poised appreciation to a work which he immediately recognized as having been plagiarized from him? Certainly not; and yet the work is just as good, and his unknowing friend in the next seat can receive the full benefit of the music's beauty.

The explanation of "aesthetic distance," as given by Edward Bullough, for example, is that "the whole sensual side of Art is

⁴¹ G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Fine Art*.

⁴² Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, Book I.

purified, spiritualized, 'filtered' . . . by Distance."⁴³ The appeal of art is always sensuous; but to be art, it cannot be sensual. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* sums it up thus: The aesthetic experience, while bound up with the emotions which are its subject matter (substance), is at the same time an escape from their tyranny by imaginative contemplation of their quality. The article adds, "Failure to thus escape produces the thriller, or pornography, which only make our blood boil or our flesh creep."⁴⁴

I am interested that this wording is remarkably close to my own, in an article published in the *Academy Journal*, written before I had read the *Britannica* passage. To quote from that article,

If the function of art is the moving of the affections in a release from personal desire, then we can make one clear distinction. Art that does not effect such a release fails of its function as art, and should be classed rather as propaganda, which accomplishes its ends through engagement, rather than release, of personal desire. Whether its ends be in the realm of politics or pornography, whether it moves us for or against a cause, if it imprisons us more deeply within the will, it is not true art."⁴⁵

It had been the opening assumption of the article that the arts do effect, for the moment, such a release. This is their function, and, as I have already suggested, the great and whole delight that they bring to the artist, the performer, or the recipient. The release from personal, practical desire is, for me, the essential answer to the basic question about aesthetics voiced by Hamlet as he watched an actor weep in his fictional presentation: "What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba, that he should weep for her?"

Is this Aristotle's catharsis, the purging of emotion by its removal from personal attachment? I do not know. But whether this is so or not, let us not at this moment mistakenly exalt the function of art. Winfred Hyatt has sounded this warning: "Art belongs to the natural mind. . . . It can image interior things, but is not in itself the independent source of anything spiritual. . . . The true importance of art is in its perfection of the ultimate sensuous plane of the mind, and its true end that this plane should be in full correspondence with the rational and spiritual."⁴⁶

⁴³ *British Journal of Psychology*, 1912.

⁴⁴ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, "Aesthetics," 1962 Edition.

⁴⁵ *Academy Journal*, Literary Number 1964-1965, p. 21.

⁴⁶ Winfred S. Hyatt, "The Philosophy of Art," *New Church Life*, 1948, p. 309.

If art effects a freeing of the mind from the selfish native will, it is because in its form, through which "aesthetic distance" is maintained, there is embodied a higher affection. This is the rational love of truth for the sake of use. The freeing of the affections can come from no other source than this, which in turn is derived solely from the truths of revelation. In the words of Bishop de Charms, "Genuine reason, rational thinking, is inspired, not by the love of a specific objective, but by the love of truth—a passionate desire to understand. This love releases the mind from the binding chains of a particular affection, an emotional bias, and enables it to compare these affections calmly."⁴⁷

This is the contemplative effect of true art; not a cold reasoning response, devoid of the warmth promised by its sensuous beauty and harmonious form, but a living *appreciation* that unites the understanding's judgment with a grateful response of the heart. And through this is imaged that eventual union of the understanding with a new will which is the free submission of the mind to the will of God.

Art does not perform this greatest of life's duties; but it prefigures the reuniting of the mind in a new integrity, and by its office can strengthen and confirm the vision of the happiness and peace which accompany that integrity. We need not review here the history of the human mind with its necessary sundering of will and understanding. It is of importance only to note the reason for the separation:

To enable man to become a receptacle and an abode of the Lord, it is provided . . . that man's understanding can be raised above his own love into some light of wisdom in the love of which the man is not, and that he can thereby see and be taught how he must live if he would come also into that higher love, and thus enjoy eternal happiness.⁴⁸

This is the process of reformation; and every activity and use of life can and ought to be directed toward contributing to the process. More specifically, the ordering of the sensuous plane, in which the arts find their form and power, is described in the *Arcana Coelestia* as an exposition of the meaning of the dreams of Pharaoh's servants, the butler and the baker. The butler, who represented sensory knowledges of the understanding, could be restored to his master's favor; the knowledges of the memory

⁴⁷ De Charms, *Imagination and Rationality*, Lecture VII.

⁴⁸ DLW 395.

can be disposed in order to serve the rational understanding of truth. But the baker, who represented sensual delights of the will, was condemned to die. For his loaves were lost from the baskets in which he was carrying them, which were full of holes. That is, the goods of love, inflowing from the Lord through heaven, find no true resting place in the mind of the sensual man, through the development of higher loves.

Without these degrees as planes, good is not received, but flows through . . . down to the sensuous, and then, being without any direction in the way, it is turned into a foulness which appears to those who are in it as good, namely, into the delight of the love of self and of the world, consequently into the delight of hatred, revenge, cruelty, adultery, and avarice, or into mere voluptuousness and luxury.⁴⁹

This is an apt description of much that masquerades as art in a corrupted civilization. We need not specify by name. It is my view that such things are not evil art, as compared with good. They are not art at all, for they arouse the will, and thus fail to perform the function of art, which is the contemplative appreciation of affections made tangible through the ordering of the sensuous. True art is that which performs its function; and all true art is good. You will recall the passage, cited earlier, that made the middle natural, or the imagination, the administrator or ministering officer in the house of the rational man. Under its ordering power the sensuous things of the lowest natural act as true servants. "These sensuous things are received and made subordinate when they minister and serve as means to interior things, both for bringing forth into act and for seeing inwardly."⁵⁰ The arts provide a striking example both of bringing interior things forth into act, and of seeing inwardly. For "unless the exterior natural is made subordinate, interior truths and goods, and consequently interior thoughts which have in them what is spiritual and celestial, have not anything in which they can be represented; for they are presented in the exterior natural as in their face, or as in a mirror."⁵¹

This, then, is the mirror of art—not the mirror held up merely to nature, but to the affections of the mind, that they may be contemplated, evaluated, and responded to with delight.

⁴⁹ AC 5145.

⁵⁰ AC 5165.

⁵¹ AC 5168.

VI

It has been the assumption of these discussions that there exist, and may be discovered, certain principles regarding the nature and function of the arts, and that these principles are universal. Otherwise the study and application of aesthetics as a philosophy of the arts would be meaningless. A philosophy must begin by assuming the existence of universals that remain unchanged by the accidents of time and place.

This does not mean that a work of art can be objectively measured and given an exact meaning that is the same for everyone everywhere in all times. The temperament, experience, spiritual associations, and mental capabilities of an individual or specific cultural group will determine to a great extent the judgment and appreciation of a particular type or work of art. However, a philosophy of art assumes standards on which judgment and appreciation are founded. Two men may disagree as to the artistic worth of a particular work; but they should be able to agree as to what constitutes artistic worth, provided they are in accord as to man's essential nature and destiny.

There have always been those—and existentialism has increased their numbers in intellectual and artistic circles—who reject the concept of universal principles governing the arts. In their view, art is purely subjective, an expression of individual feeling which has only individual value. This introverted viewpoint has been cogently summed up by Philip Phenix.

There are no objective or universal criteria for esthetic excellence, and there is no way (or need) to resolve differences in opinion about esthetic values. The creative nature of esthetic activity, it is held, itself indicates that these values are made rather than discovered, and the fact that the creation is individual and free means that everyone in such matters is wholly autonomous.

Such a view destroys any basis for effective esthetic judgment. It amounts to an abandonment of the concept of qualitative excellence. The result is a thoroughgoing relativism which makes value judgments dependent on the accidents of circumstance and temperament. Evaluations can, of course, be made by statistical enumeration of preferences . . . (which makes) popularity the criterion of worth. Modern advertising depends heavily upon this fact.⁶²

⁶² Phenix, *Education and the Common Good*, pp. 64–65.

Lest the last phrase be misunderstood, the fact referred to is not that true value is measured by popularity, but that our society today acts as if it were. Phenix adds, "The people are not the source and measure of values, as they are when popularity rules, but the people are themselves measured by these values." Here is a clear recognition that the principles which should rule life are not made by man, though he must impose them on himself; they are discovered by him through experience and study based on the two foundations of truth, revelation and nature.

The principles of aesthetics outlined in these discussions may not be the most important ones in the field. I am not a professional artist, nor a theologian, nor a philosopher. Nevertheless, I have sought to bring together ideas from all these realms which I see to be consistent and true, from the conviction that a philosophy of the arts is needed as one of the foundation-stones of New Church culture, and in the hope, that these ideas will stimulate active thought toward the shaping and placing of that stone.

Should not that culture develop its own distinctive forms and works of art? This is a question frequently asked, and with a tone, sometimes, of impatience that it has not happened. It is my feeling that, just as Gothic art and architecture, musical and other liturgical forms, and a body of heterogeneous literature all evolved within the culture of the Christian Church, so too the New Church will in time develop distinct and enduring art works of quality and power. But this must be a matter of time and of organic growth from the life of the church; it cannot be imposed by fiat. Nor will it represent a complete break from earlier traditions—traditions whose religious roots were implanted in the very soil of the middle natural—the moral and social ground from which imaginative works spring up and flourish. Thus, while the New Church has received a rational vision of the Lord as the Divine Human, or as Divine love acting by Divine wisdom, the arts have no way to depict this except in the human figure or by some other concrete symbolism. Art, even for the New Church, will always have a sensuous basis.

Nor do I think that the newly revealed truths about life in the spiritual world will offer more than subjects about that world presented in traditional forms. If the premise of these discussions that the substance of art is the affections is true, *all* art is

about the spiritual world, even while it depicts scenes and people on this earth. And as will be noted below, much of the appeal of art lies in the contrasts and conflicts which are part of the fabric of this life as preparation for the harmonies of heaven.

To put it simply, the affections which rule the man of the New Church, and the sensory impressions he receives from the world about him, are not different from those of other men. His arts, therefore, will not essentially differ from those of the culture in which he lives.

Thus, if the function of the arts is valid and important, we turn to those provided by that culture, the heritage of what is loosely summed up as "the Western tradition." Nor need we fear to do so; for among the works of this civilization we can find much, derived eventually from prior revelations, that is of positive and effective appeal as representation of life's inward realities. What is required is a discerning and selective skill to seek truly and appreciate fully.

We need to seek beyond the easy and cheapening substitutes for the true re-creation of art—those so-called recreational products of the mass media in the pursuit of which so much time is wasted, and the response to which forms sensual calluses against the sensitive appreciation of forms more worthy of attention. The imagination in the grip of native tendencies creates many false and evil fantasies centering on self and the pleasures of the senses. And these appear as good to it, both in the mental vision of them and in whatever forms they may take in pictures, stories, and music. But these forms are not art; for the feeling they evoke is not the aesthetic appreciation of a higher affection in the understanding, but pleasure centered in self.

Art in itself will not remedy this human condition. The only force that will bring the mind into a new harmony of the exterior and interior planes, is conscience. And the self-discipline of conscience can gain its strength only from the direct power of Divine truth through the Word. Yet the contribution of the arts can be of great value in the ordered discipline of form; not just intellectual form, but the living forms which clothe affections. The unique function of the arts is twofold: the directing of creative expression, and the repeated presentation of powerful forms for appreciation. By the latter especially, the opposition of good affections to hereditary tendencies may be felt as real.

We must not expect instant delight. In a passage of the *Rational Psychology* describing the related activity of the spiritual mind and the animus, Swedenborg makes this very cogent observation: "The mind desires the end, the animus the effect."⁵³ And in the Writings: "The natural sees from the effect, but the rational sees from the cause."⁵⁴

The development of rationality will enfill the natural delight in form with a love of understanding what the form embodies, and eventually of the spiritual uses reflected therein. To this end, the qualities of form that compose a work of art can lend their discipline and strength. For, as noted before, they are the qualities not simply of art, but of an ordered mind and life. Unity, variety, harmony, intensity, depth, ideality—these are the signs of a poised, directed, and serene integrity. As aesthetic qualities, appreciated in the sensuous power of art and separated from the confused issues of practical life, their appreciation need not mark the aesthete or dilettante, but the whole man.

Hence the importance of art's capacity to portray evil, not in its own lurid glow, but in the clear light of objective understanding. We are told that truth takes on quality through the awareness of falsity by contrast, and good through the opposition of evil. Free rational choice is the ability to choose between good and evil uses. Is there a better means to present the motives and consequences of this choice than in the aesthetic distance of art? Bishop W. F. Pendleton, in his dedicatory address for the Academy Library in 1911, said it directly: "Even false and evil books have their use—a use, however, that is to be judiciously guarded, since the reading of such books is attended with danger to the youthful mind. But we are to realize, in our educational work, that our main purpose is not so much to preserve the young from infestation and temptation as to lead them by freedom and rationality away from the evil that is the cause of temptation."⁵⁵

It has been the thesis of these discussions that freedom and rationality are woven into the true response to a work of art: freedom in the balanced understanding of the affections thus presented, and rationality in the love of use which prompts the understanding. The arts do not substitute for life, but serve it.

⁵³ R.Psych. 309.

⁵⁴ AC 3533.

⁵⁵ W. F. Pendleton, "The Uses of Books," *New Church Life*, 1924, p. 380.

As Philip Phenix says, "The ideal character of the fine arts should not result in isolation from other spheres of life, but should enable them to be of greater service in lifting the esthetic level of all experience. . . . These specifically esthetic disciplines may thus be saved from the exclusiveness and fastidiousness that have so commonly reduced their power of elevating the whole level of culture."⁶⁶

We know that the power of elevation resides only in truth quickened by love. Robert Frost called poetry "a momentary stay against confusion." I think this is an apt description of the function of all art. An affectional ordering of experience, its power to bring order and clarity to the mind must come from outside itself—although it is my view that this power must inhere for it to be true art. All the disciplines are "stays against confusion," orderings of experience. Science is a working stay, its generalizations useful until dislodged by new data. History is a recorded stay, a reminder to men that life has meaning and continuity in the cause-and-effect chain of past events. Philosophy can be a more permanent stay, depending on the relation of its abstractions to spiritual and natural realities. And what of art? Each work of art, only a momentary stay, has its own unique values, of permanence in a sensory form that is renewed by each re-creation, and of appeal not to the inductions and deductions of reason, nor to the abstracting intellect, but to the perceptive understanding of those fluid changes of state we call affections, to which art gives body and which it thus impresses on the mind in its own way.

⁶⁶ Phenix, *Education and the Common Good*, pp. 74, 76.