

Influence of Kant's Aesthetics on the Aesthetics of Collingwood

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Abstract

R. G. Collingwood is supposed to be one of the most important Aesthetes of 20th Century. He was a multi-talented person having original ideas in the fields of Philosophical History (his most famous book is 'Idea of History'), Aesthetics and Anthropology. He was a practitioner in the field of Archaeology and Music. His second most famous book is 'Principles of Art.' He is supposed to be an original philosopher of Art too. His Philosophy of Art has much to do and has much connections with the Aesthetics of Immanuel Kant. Kant was a multi-dimensional genius, presenting before the world very original and outstanding ideas about Metaphysics, Epistemology, Ethics and also Aesthetics. This article is an attempt to understand the influence of Kant's Aesthetics on the Aesthetics of Collingwood and to present before the readers the great similarities between the Aesthetic ideas of these two philosophers. According to Kant, Aesthetics is the fourth most important function of human mind. Apart from pure reasoning, pragmatic thinking and moral concerns, Aesthetics is that aspect of human mind which deals with beauty. The problem with the Aesthetics of Kant or the Aesthetics of Collingwood is that both of the philosophers present Aesthetics as the divider and in the humble opinion of the writer of this article it is not divider but a connector – connector of moral, pragmatic and pure reason.

Keywords: Aesthetics, Philosophy of Art, Art and Craft, Art Falsely So Called, Art Proper.

Introduction

The *Principles of Art* by R. G. Collingwood has three portions (Collingwood, 1937). The first complete portion of the book is about the fundamental differences between Art and Craft that is between Art Proper and Art falsely so called (Collingwood, 1937). Collingwood presented many distinctions between Art and Craft for example, according to him, Art needs no planning, no pre-supposed notions and no objective other than the desire to express. He presented many kinds of Craft also for example, if a person presupposes the amusement or entertainment of his or her audience than it cannot be considered as Art Proper but 'Art as Amusement' - a specific kind of craft. If a person presupposes a reformation or propaganda (negative or positive), it should be considered 'Art as Magic' – a different kind of craft (Collingwood, 1937). If a person presupposes the imitation of the world around or the imitation of a human personality this kind of craft should be named 'Art as Imitation.' If a person presupposes a stimulus to instigate or motivate his or her audience with a conscious planning, then it should be considered 'Art as Psychological Stimulus.'

Apart from being extremely explicit, Collingwood in this portion of the book presented countless examples of the above-mentioned kinds of Craft. Commercial movies (especially the movies having aggressive and sexual content), Imitative sort of landscape, portrait and still life, pre-planned and well-trying jokes etc. are considered Art falsely so called and not Art Proper by Collingwood. According to him, Art neither should be pre-planned nor pragmatic or result oriented (Collingwood, 1937). Art should not be like a moral or ethical campaign. In simple words for Collingwood, Art is nothing but a sort of internal and subjective expression and the motive behind any form of Art should not be other than self-expression. Interestingly, in the whole portion of the book Collingwood never discussed the Aesthetics of Kant. He discussed the philosophy of Kant with second and third portion but with different context. Surprisingly, the fundamental distinction between Art and Craft and the formulation of different kinds of Craft on the other have much to do with the Aesthetics of Immanuel Kant.

Kant in his famous book *Critique of Judgment* distinguish Aesthetic experience from all the other kinds of experience (Kant, 1793). For Kant, Aesthetic experience is different from Moral, Pragmatic, and Scientific experience. Kant explained Aesthetic experience in the following three phrases (Kant, 1793).

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- i. It is Disinterested Interest.
- ii. It is a Free play of Imagination.
- iii. It is Subjective Universal.

If we look to see the above mentioned three outstanding phrases of Kant, then the whole distinction of Art and craft by Collingwood seems nothing but the practical implementations of these maxims.

Research Questions

- i. Can Aesthetics be that subjective as Collingwood thinks of it?
- ii. Is the process of creating Art more important than the final products?

Research Objective

The fundamental objective of this research is to explore different kind of philosophizing in the field of Philosophy of Aesthetics.

Art Proper

For Collingwood, Art Proper is nothing but the idea in the mind of the artist (Collingwood, 1937). For him technique, craft and medium are nothing but the externalization of that particular idea. Interestingly, the problems with the Aesthetics of Collingwood are the same as Kant's. In *Critique of Judgment* Kant was primarily interested in the segregation of Aesthetic experience from all other kinds of experience and in *Principles of Art* Collingwood tried to distinguish Art Proper from all other kinds of 'Art falsely so called' (Collingwood, 1937).

From the Aesthetics of Kant and from the Philosophy of Art of Collingwood, one can conclude the following results.

- i. Art Proper or Proper Aesthetic experience cannot be political.
- ii. It should not be used for social awareness.
- iii. It should not be used for some pragmatic purpose.
- iv. It should not be conscious, deliberate and pre-planned.

The above-mentioned conclusive points cannot be accepted by Marxists, Aesthetes, Formalists in Aesthetics and also the Objectivists in the field of Aesthetics (Popper, 1992). We can discuss the objections raised by these schools of Aesthetics one by one.

- i. Karl R. Popper altogether rejected the Expressionist Theory of Croce and Collingwood and gave his novel and original point of view.
"I should perhaps start with a criticism of a widely accepted theory of art: the theory that art is self-expression or the expression of the artist's personality, or perhaps the expression of his emotions. (Croce and Collingwood are two of the many proponents of this theory.)" (Popper, 1992, 61).

In his intellectual autobiography *The Unended Quest* he objected the Expressionist Theory by saying that the self-expression of the artist or the personal biography of him or her has very little importance in creating and appreciating Art (Popper, 1992). It is not the subjective and personal feeling of the artists that create a good Art but actually it is the Art itself which is responsible for the changing moods, feelings and emotions of the artists. For Popper, before the emergence of the Expressionist Theory in Art, artists owed much to nature, cosmos or God for their inspiration and motivation. With this theory, artists replaced God or nature with their own selves. That is why Popper considers this theory as a Theology without God (Popper, 1992). For Popper this theory carries many fallacies. This theory is too subjective and too personal despite being Objective and self-autonomous.

- ii. The Aesthetics of Kant and the Philosophy of Art of Collingwood cannot be accepted by Marxists Aesthetes. They people are of opinion that Art should also be used for social and political change (Sheppard, 1987). It should not be too subjective, personal and individualistic. For Marxists, Aesthetic Experience or creation of Art out of this experience, cannot be considered that isolated. Art should not be considered that much idealistic as Kant or Collingwood think about it.
- iii. Tolstoy is supposed to be one of the great writers of 20th Century. Apart from being a great novelist, he has been very interested in the Philosophy of Art. He wrote an interesting book *What is Art* (Tolstoy, 1899). Tolstoy is of the opinion, that Art should be for humanity at large and the emotions conveyed through any Art form should be used and expressed for the betterment and better representation of the great majority of the people. According to Tolstoy,

- Art should be simple, natural and sincere. It should not be too intellectualized and personal. He even rejected his own novel *Ana Karenina* on these grounds (Tolstoy, 1916).
- iv. In the discussion of Art and Craft in *Principles of Art* the whole focus was on taking a presupposition less start. It is in accordance with 'Free play of Imagination' of Kant. My humble opinion in this regard is that this imaginative expression cannot be that free. While creating and appreciating Art one has to be with some sort of presupposed notion for example, the love of humanity (in the case of Tolstoy), the love of Nature as in the case of Wordsworth and Coleridge (Wordsworth & Coleridge, 2003), the love of Jesus Christ (in the case of John Milton), the love of Proletariats (in the case of Marxist thinks). Karl Popper seems right in insisting that personal and subjective lives of the artists are of merger importance.
 - v. Aesthetic Experience can be an experience of vision, dreams and imaginations (in the view of Romanticists) (Langer, 1979). But one cannot ignore the conscious and deliberate elements in creating and appreciating Art. We can take one example that is after creating a poem and before it's publication, when a mature and professional poet reconsiders it and re-examines it, isn't it a conscious and deliberate effort? Without this conscious and deliberate effort and without revising the scripts (in case of fiction writing), can we consider ourselves a mature and professional writer?

In short Kant (while segregating Aesthetic Experience from all kind of experience) and Collingwood (while segregating Art Proper to Art falsely so called) went too far. Now in their thinking there is no room for social or political change, a message of moral or ethical nature or an inspiration from God, Nature or Universe. Popper is right considering these artists as the people who are too self-centred and too subjective.

The importance of Technique, Medium and Craft

Any philosopher who is primarily concerned with the subjective and personal expression of the artist and any artist who values the subjective expression much usually undermine the role of technique, Craft or Medium. They people value the artistic idea and consider craft as nothing but the externalization of that particular idea (remember by artistic idea they do not mean a conscious and deliberate notion (Kul-Want, 2010). This Romantic point of view carries many problems in Aesthetics. They are as follows

- i. Craft is not always passive in the production of Art. It is a very important element that sometimes changes, alters or develops the artistic idea.
- ii. The medium of an Art form is different from its skill or craft for example, the medium of poetry is language, the medium of painting is two-dimensional space, line and colours, the medium of a dancer is his or her own body. The medium of any Art determines its character, limitations and delimitations.
- iii. The Aesthetics of Kant, Croce, Collingwood and all the philosophers and artists of Romantic Movement could not explain some important elements in creating and appreciating Art.
 - From where does the creative idea come from? – From God, from Nature, or from cosmic forces?
 - What is Imagination actually? And how it is different from logical and rational arguments?
 - If the artistic idea comes from some Metaphysical realm even then it cannot be conveyed or shared by other people without Craft, Medium or the proper manipulation of technique.

Abstract vs Tangible

In order to understand the concept of Art Proper by Collingwood properly, it is but necessary to understand the different forms of Art and their individual uniqueness. For Collingwood, Art Proper is nothing but an idea in the head of the artist (Collingwood, 1937). This concept seems very abstract and very idealistic. This concept seems most suitable for the Art of poetry. A novel and creative poetry can exist in the mind of the poet only and the process of writing it on the page and sharing it with others can be considered nothing but the externalization of that particular artistic idea. But what about Architecture or Sculpture? Can anybody construct a building or make a sculpture without proper planning or presupposed notions? Obviously not. Music is supposed to be the most abstract from of Art. Music is not imitative, representational, linguistic (in case of instrumental music) and

tangible (like sculpture) or visual. But even in music, we do find a 'Thingness' in the shape of strikes on the drum or movement of the vocal cords or playing the instruments with hands etc. According to Collingwood, a song or a symphony is the result of an artistic idea in the mind of the artist or in the words of Kant 'it is a free play of imagination.' Practically it is not the case. When a composer or a symphony maker use human voices or musical instruments as his tool, it is not always the idea but the gathering of instruments and voices which determine the mood and tune of the composition. The influence of Romanticism can easily be seen on the Aesthetics of Kant and the influence of Kant's Aesthetics can easily be understood by comprehending the Collingwood's view about Art. Basically, these kinds of Aesthetic theories prefer abstract over material, idea over matter and subjectivity over objectivity. Popper is quite right criticizing the Expressionist Theory and considering it too subjective and too personal. Artistic idea can be achieved from both sides. It can be achieved from the internal and personal being of the artist but it can also be achieved through the proper manipulation of words, notes, colours and lines. In short, the role of technique, medium and craft is not that merger as Collingwood thinks of them.

Discussion

Plato is supposed to be a thorough Idealistic philosopher. For him the material world is nothing but the imperfect copy of the ideal world (Flew, 1989). And the World of Ideas or the World of Forms is objectively existent. That is why, his metaphysics is also called Objective Idealism. Plato tried to understand the phenomenon of Art through his metaphysics. It was an indirect way to try to grasp the phenomenon of Art. There is a famous saying of him

'Art is the imitation of the imitation doubly removed from reality, lesser than truth' (Plato, 1908, 46). In the point of view of Plato about Art, we come across his two presuppositions.

- i. The material world is the copy of the Ideal world.
- ii. Art is nothing but an imitation of the outer world.

The first presupposition determines the indirect way of looking at Art. The second presupposition is simple false. Every Art form cannot be termed as the imitation of the outer world, but why I discuss the Platonic idea about Art here, is to present a full-fledged abstract and idealistic view of Art. Aristotle wanted to replace the metaphysics of his teacher with his own. (Ackrill, 1981). He presented his famous dualistic philosophy according to which everything in this universe is composed of matter and form (Stace, 2010). The views of Aristotle about Art are also the combination of Art and craft that is idea and matter. Idealism or Materialism in philosophy are the examples of Monism i.e., an attempt of the philosophers to understand the universe through one single, sole principle. Dualism has its own problems and Aristotle is a great example of unsuccessful Dualism. But in my humble opinion, Aristotelian paradigm explains the phenomenon of Art much better than Platonic or any other idealistic philosophy. In this paradigm, there is a room for craft or the material form of any art. Popper's objective view of Art is also interesting. In this point of view, the products of Art (in their tangible forms) are much more important than the mental process behind.

Conclusion

Art is the general term for different forms of art that is Performing Arts, Visual Arts, Poetry and Fiction etc. In philosophy these forms of Art are divided or categorized as Spatial Art and Temporal Art. Every Art form has its own craft, medium and technique. The individual character of the Aesthetics of Immanuel Kant is that it takes so much interest in the process and not the products of Art. Taking inspiration and motivation from Kant's Aesthetics, R. G. Collingwood presented the concept of 'Art Proper' which is extremely subjective, personal and mental. According to Collingwood, 'Art Proper' is nothing but the artistic idea within the mind of the artist. There have been other kinds of Aesthetics and Philosophy of Art which revolts against this extreme subjectivity, for example the Marxist school in Art Criticism, the Formalist school in Art and the Objective theory of Art by Karl Popper. In this article, it has been attempted to understand the influence of Kant's views about Aesthetics on the Philosophy of Art of Collingwood. It has also been attempted to understand the merits, demerits, limitations, importance and the individual uniqueness of the Aesthetics of both of the philosophers.

Recommendations

Philosophy divides different forms of Art in Spatial and Temporal categories. It is the recommendation of the writer for readers to understand the importance of these categories and try to

understand the abstract and tangible, subjective and objective, Romantic and Formalist schools in Art, in order to get a deep understanding of the phenomenon called Art.

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