

THEOLOGY AND AESTHETICS

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ABSTRACT

In the exploration of Theology and Aesthetics, fundamental inquiries into the nature of aesthetics, art, and religion confront scholars. These inquiries delve into the essence of aesthetics, revolving around the enigmatic realms of artistry and beauty. Art, as a manifestation of innate creative impulses, captures the essence of life and culture, reflecting the zeitgeist of its time. Rooted in holistic structures and gestalt psychology, artworks emerge as intricate compositions embodying both the spirit of their era and the profundity of human emotions. St. Thomas Aquinas' definition of beauty as a source of joy through intuitive knowledge underscores the transcendent nature of aesthetic experiences, which often parallel quests for divine truths. Moreover, truth in art extends beyond mere sincerity, encompassing coherence, profundity, and universality, resonating with individuals and communities alike. As scholars grapple with these profound questions, the intersections of aesthetics, art, and religion offer fertile ground for exploration, leading to deeper insights into the human condition and the mysteries of existence.

Keywords: *Theology, Aesthetics, Religion.*

INTRODUCTION

In the journey of exploring Theology and Aesthetics, scholars are confronted with fundamental inquiries into the nature of aesthetics, art, and religion. These inquiries delve into the essence of aesthetics, revolving around the enigmatic realms of artistry and beauty. Art, as a manifestation of innate creative impulses, captures the essence of life and culture, reflecting the zeitgeist of its time. Rooted in holistic structures and gestalt psychology, artworks emerge as intricate compositions embodying both the spirit of their era and the profundity of human emotions.

St. Thomas Aquinas' definition of beauty as a source of joy through intuitive knowledge underscores the transcendent nature of aesthetic experiences, which often parallel quests for divine truths. Moreover, truth in art extends beyond mere sincerity, encompassing coherence, profundity, and universality, resonating with individuals and communities alike. As scholars grapple with these profound questions, the intersections of aesthetics, art, and religion offer fertile ground for exploration, leading to deeper insights into the human condition and the mysteries of existence.

From the first class of Theology and Aesthetics, students confront the overarching questions of "what is aesthetics?", "what is art?", "what is religion?", and "what is it all about?". It is widely understood that aesthetics pertains to the challenges posed by our fascination with art and beauty. Scholars embark on a quest to unravel the complexities underlying these concepts, delving into their multifaceted dimensions and implications for human experiences and perceptions.

Aesthetic experiences, akin to faith, involve a deep engagement with the intrinsic meanings of existence, leading to encounters with the divine. As art shapes cultural narratives and theological perspectives, it bridges the subjective and objective realms, offering insights into the human condition and the mysteries of existence. In this pursuit, scholars explore the interplay between subjectivity and objectivity, unraveling the symbiotic relationship between aesthetics, faith, and theology.

The exploration of Theology and Aesthetics provides scholars with a platform to contemplate the profound connections between art, beauty, and religious symbolism. Through rigorous inquiry and introspection, scholars navigate the intricate landscapes of aesthetics, unraveling its significance in shaping cultural identities and spiritual experiences. As they grapple with existential questions and theological conundrums, scholars embark on a transformative journey of self-discovery and intellectual enlightenment..

LITERATURE REVIEW

It is of the utmost importance to acknowledge that the ease with which news articles can be accessed in this digital age has increased the impact that media framing has on the perceptions of the general population. In their research, Suwarno and Sahayu (2020) highlight the groundbreaking effects of digital technology, which not only enables media outlets to convey information to a broad audience but also enables them to build narratives that resonate with a variety of audiences. As researchers delve deeper into the intricate theory of news media framing, it becomes increasingly evident that the media wields significant influence as a societal force, shaping and molding the perceptions held by the general public. In this context, the media emerges not merely as a passive conveyer of information, but rather as an active agent capable of controlling the narratives and impressions that permeate society. This influence extends to the very fabric of discourse, where subtle modifications in the diction or structures of news stories have the potential to profoundly impact the contents and relationships within the public conversation. By strategically altering language choices or narrative frameworks, media entities possess the ability to steer public opinion, shape social attitudes, and ultimately mold the collective understanding of various issues and events.

Suwarno and Sahayu's (2020) research objective is to uncover the media bias in the portrayal of Palestine and Israel during conflicts in 2019 and 2020 by prominent national and international news outlets, namely The Jakarta Post and The New York Times. Through meticulous examination, it was revealed that Palestine's reputation has been effectively obscured by the prevailing dominance of the Israeli military and government, which have maintained a more prominent voice in communication channels. Israel's communication strategy predominantly revolves around verbal clauses that assert a substantial involvement in various forms of discourse, including comments, announcements, intimidation tactics, and claims, primarily conveyed through oral communication channels. This strategic emphasis on verbal expressions serves to underscore Israel's active role and assertiveness in shaping narratives surrounding the ongoing conflict. Both The Jakarta Post and The New York Times have been cited for portraying the significant role played by the Israeli government or military in exacerbating the conflict, often by highlighting their warnings or statements that simultaneously assert authority over Palestine. Consequently, Israel faces accusations of deliberately provoking actions that have led to heightened tensions in the already volatile Middle East region.

Another researcher, Taha and Al-Khanji (2020), examined 32 news reports and eight articles. Subsequently, it was discovered through the analysis of those samples that the New York Times and Haaretz allocated a tremendous amount of coverage to Israeli political and military figures compared to their Palestinian rivals. The Guardian and the Jordan Times interviewed Palestinian civilian actors emphasizing the humanitarian distress and casualties, while Haaretz and the NYT quoted them as inciting lethal attacks, among other topics. The utilization of adverse themes in conjunction with unfavorable depictions of Palestinian political actors exposed prejudiced positions toward Palestinian Civilian Actors. Furthermore, the utilization of reporting verbs, uneven distribution of quotations, and word

counts of quotations from social actors indicated biased practices and the adoption of a single-party narrative in the case of the NYT, Haaretz, and the Jordan Times. Essentially, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict serves as a prime illustration of how ideology and political objectives influence the presentation of news reporting.

The comparative analysis between Al Bayan and Israel Hayom newspapers revealed a distinct contrast in their portrayal of the Israel-Palestine conflict. Al Bayan demonstrated a higher degree of criticism towards Israel while displaying a more sympathetic stance towards Palestinians, whereas Israel Hayom exhibited a more pro-Israel narrative. However, a significant shift occurred following the signing of the Abraham Accords by the United Arab Emirates in 2020, which aimed to foster global peace, particularly in the Middle East. This historic pact brought about a notable change in the editorial direction of Al Bayan. The normalization process led to a shift in the newspaper's perspective, with Al Bayan adopting a more pro-Israel stance and marginalizing Palestinian viewpoints. This transformation underscores the impact of geopolitical dynamics on media representation and highlights the evolving nature of regional alliances in shaping news narratives (El-nawawy, 2022)

Despite the fact that the literature that has already been written has looked closely at how the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is portrayed in the news, there still needs to be a significant knowledge gap on the differing stories that are told by Western and Middle Eastern media. Prior research predominantly utilized imbalanced news samples, resulting in discrepancies in their conclusions. This article seeks to fill this gap by examining media narratives pertaining to the Israel-Palestine conflict, with a specific emphasis on the contrasting viewpoints about Hamas as portrayed in Western and Middle Eastern media outlets.

METHOD

One suitable research method for this research is qualitative research. This method allows researchers to delve into a deep understanding of abstract concepts such as aesthetics, art, and religion through narrative analysis, in-depth interviews, participatory observation, or textual analysis. With a qualitative approach, researchers can explore various dimensions of complex and profound phenomena such as aesthetic experiences, perceptions of beauty, and religious meanings, providing a more holistic and in-depth understanding.

Qualitative research enables scholars to investigate the intricate intersections between theology and aesthetics, offering insights into how these realms influence and shape each other. By immersing themselves in rich, qualitative data, researchers can uncover the nuances of aesthetic experiences and their connections to religious beliefs and practices. Through in-depth exploration and analysis, qualitative research facilitates a nuanced understanding of the subjective experiences and interpretations surrounding art, beauty, and spirituality.

Moreover, qualitative research allows for the exploration of individual perspectives and subjective interpretations, shedding light on the diverse ways in which people engage with and derive meaning from aesthetic and religious phenomena. By embracing the complexity and diversity inherent in human experiences, qualitative research enriches our understanding of the intricate relationships between aesthetics, faith, and theology.

Overall, qualitative research offers a valuable approach for investigating the multifaceted nature of aesthetics, art, and religion, providing rich insights into the profound connections and meanings underlying these domains. Through qualitative inquiry, scholars can illuminate the complexities of human experiences and perceptions, contributing to a deeper understanding of the cultural, spiritual, and existential dimensions of life.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

What is Art?

A work of art e.g. a painting, sculpture or poem is the relatively finite result of the functioning of an innate artistic impulse. This impulse is a special manifestation of the more creative impulse, which embraces not only all manifestations of spirit but the totality of life. The organic structure of a work of art is defined here as a holistic structure in the sense it is propounded by gestalt psychology: “the form of the organism in which the whole and its parts are so interdependent that the whole seems to be the result of all parts and at the same time the condition of each of them”.¹

Every work of art is the child of its time. But also it often is the mother of our emotions. It follows that each period of culture produces an art of its own, which cannot be repeated. Efforts to revive the art principles of the past at best produce works of art that resemble (similar) a stillborn child. But among the forms of art there is another kind of external similarity. When there is, as sometimes happens, a similarity of inner direction in an entire moral and spiritual milieu, a similarity of ideals, a similarity of inner mood between one period and another, the logical consequence will be renewal of the external forms which served to express those insights in the earlier time. Like ourselves, pure artists seek to express only inner and essential feelings in their works. In this process they ignore as a matter of course the accidental. But there is another art also awakening prophetic power which can have far reaching and profound effects. The spiritual life to which art belongs and of which it is one of the mightiest agents, is a complex but definite movement above and beyond, which can be translated into simple artistic pieces.

Art give us the most creative images of ourselves, our world and our relations to one another. Human life is lived in and through symbols that shape and guide us in all we are and do: symbols of nature, symbols of ourselves who we are, what we can be, what we ought to be, symbols of our community and society, symbols of the sacred that permeates (occupy) all. Works of art set these symbols into images. So that through them we can see ourselves and our world, possibly for the first time. In art we find ourselves and forget or perhaps better transcend ourselves at the same time.

Art and Beauty

“St. Thomas Aquinas, who was as simple as he was wise, defined beauty as what gives pleasure on sight. *Id quod visum Placet*. The four words say all that is necessary: a vision, that is to say an intuitive knowledge, and a joy. The beautiful is what gives joy, not all joy, but joy in knowledge. Not the joy peculiar to the act of knowing, but a joy super a bounding and overflowing from such an act because of the object known. If a thing exalts and delights the soul by the bare (clear) fact of its being given to the intuition of the soul, it is good apprehend (see), it is beautiful”²

To speak about something is beauty, in one hand, the most natural view is that there is a quality that some things have and others do not. A quality which may be present in varying degrees in different things and absent from others, a quality which is called their beauty. The way we speak is to put that beauty is the object. Therefore when we say that an object is beautiful, we are attributing to that object a quality, namely beauty. In other words, beauty is an objective quality of things. But for Kant, the judgement of beauty should have nothing to do with the purpose or the function of an object, either real or imputed. Judgements of

¹ J. MARITAIN, “A Definition of Art”, in E. VIVAS & M. KRIEGER (eds) *The Problems of Aesthetic*, 1953, p.62

² J. MARITAIN, “A Definition of ART” in E. VIVAS & M. KREIGER (eds) *The Problems of Aesthetic*, 1953, p.62

beauty should be separated from judgements of the degree to which a natural object attains perfection in fulfilling a certain function. On the other hand, beauty is subjective. Statements about beauty do not describe any qualities of the object; rather they describe our responses to the object. Since there is no objective quality, beauty, sentences about beauty must be reducible to sentences about such responses.

But to experience the beauty of nature or pieces of art, “we must allow ourselves to be carried away by the aesthetic phenomenon. This experience of being grasped by the beautiful is one of the clearest models we have for expressing what is involved in the intuition of the divine. In fact, is more than a model. We may even say that our ordinary experience of the beautiful is already an encounter with ultimacy.”³

Therefore “our quest for beauty is a quest for the divine. That ultimately satisfying beauty for which we long but which continues to elude (inspire) us is what the word “God” means. And if that word has not much meaning for you, translate it and speak of the ultimately beautiful for which you are continually searching in the depth of your desire”⁴

Art and Truth

Truth is equivalent to sincerity. In the sense as the absence of any attempt on the part of the artist to work effects upon the observer which do not work for himself. A work of art is occasionally said to be true when it displays sincerity on the part of artist, when it reflects what the artist really felt.

The truth is acceptability of the things we are told. Their acceptability in the interests of the effects of the narrative, not their correspondence with any actual facts. It is in the sense that truth is equivalent to internal necessity or rightness. That is true or internally necessary which completes or accords with the rest of experience, which cooperates to arouse our ordered response, be it response of beauty.

Truth also is value for mankind. In Imaginative writing has its quite distinctive truth and falsity. For the truth that is peculiar to poetry, its validity is simply its value for men. Truth is a coherence of parts. Truth in art may sometimes be taken to mean internal coherence of a work of art, and falsity its incoherence. When thus used, truth and falsity becomes synonymous with beauty and ugliness respectively. If this is falsity, truth will be the harmonious tension of mutually fulfilling parts. And so is both expressiveness and beauty.

Truth may be used to denote deep significance or greatness. The truest work of art in this sense is that which is most profound, in the experience of which as a whole we are aware of a deep sense of reality. And often it will happen that in this harmonious satisfaction of our profoundest impulses we feel a tremendous conviction of knowledge, which is accompanied sometimes by a sense of the superiority of such knowledge to other forms of it.

After having visited Museum, I was very touched by father pieta. I asked myself it is truth? And which truth it represented? Therefore came to my mind that the truth which we have seen above is the truth about things. But for art we should not only recognize truth about, but also the truth to things. Art, for example, we speak of father pieta or a character in a novel being true to some human type in the life around us. Or poetry is chiefly familiar about universal truth but history is about particular truth. The character as described in father pieta, in novel or poetry probably or necessarily universal. But what of course if somebody did or what happened to him is a particular truth.

³ J.F.HAUGHT, *What Is God?: How To Think About the Divine*, 1986, pp.69-70.

⁴ Ibid. p.70

Art and Religion

The word religion is often used to designate these sacred traditions. But etymology, “religion is rooted the the Latin religio (response of awe / fear to a power outside the self) and relegere (to bind together, to yoke). Religion, originally referred to both an objective supra-natural reality and to inner-subjective response.”⁵ But globally speaking, religion or sacred traditions involve both personal and communal experiences of sacred mystery, and expressions of ultimate meaning, value and truth.

Art is inseparable from communal activities, upon which it has an immediate modifying or strengthening effect. But art also is valued for its own sake, for its contribution to culture, not for any further influence upon life and this freedom has come to be apart of its very meaning. Instead of being interested only in pictures and statues representing ourselves, our rulers, or our neighbourhood, we enjoy imitations of people who have had no effect upon our lives whatever and scenes which we have never visited, and we may visits to museums to see them. Instead of employing music to beautify our daily life, we leave that life for the concert hall, where we shut ourselves away for a few hours of absolute musical experience.

The development of relation of religion to life has been parallel to the development of art. For example, art like speech is a means of communication and therefore of progress, that is, of the movement of humanity forward towards perfection. Equally for religion. Religious perception in a society is like the direction of a flowing river. If the river flows at all it must have a direction. The direction in which more or less consciously, all its members tend.

The relation between art and religion is that Art express reality in images and religion express ultimate reality in symbols. Therefore religious art express religious symbols in artistic images. The religious content, namely a particular and direct relation of man to ultimate reality, is first expressed in a religious symbol and secondly in the expression of the symbol in artistic images. In this relation it can happen that in the work of art as well as in the encounter with it, the one of two expressions may better than the other.

Aesthetic, Faith Experience and Theology

Art is a quality that permeates an experience; it is not save bay a figure of speech, the experience itself. Aesthetic experience is always more than aesthetic. In it body of matters and meanings, not in themselves aesthetic, become aesthetic as they enter into an ordered rhythmic movement toward end. Aesthetic experience is “a manifestation, a record and celebration of the life of a culture, a means of promoting its development, and is also the ultimate judgement upon the quality of a cultures.”⁶ The aesthetic experience is an “experience of deep attention which involves the intransitive apprehension of an object’s immanent meanings in their full presentational immediacy.”⁷

For the human faith to be similar to the aesthetic. Not simply irrational faith or analytic reason are possible meeting points, but imagination provides a milieu that is both receptive and interpretive. The aesthetic pattern is intuitive; immediate; and born forward in emotional experience. Analogous to the artist, the believer seeks objectivity toward a further reality.

⁵ K.KRAMER, *World Scriptures: An Introduction to Comparative Religion*, 1986, p.9

⁶ J.DEWEY, *Art as Experience*, p.326

⁷ E.VIVAS, “A Definition of the Aesthetic Experience”, in *The Problems of Aesthetic*, p.408

The interplay of subject and mysterious presence happens in the style of encounter. As with the arts, faith is a seeing: a perceiving of likeness and then a perceiving of distance and difference.

The faith experience, like the artistic one, gives not a single but a double access: one into the self, and the other to the holy. When I see Rembrand's painting "Prodigal Son" on the video, my souls around to placed in all my life. Then the experience regroups into a certain vision which leads me to something more, to the holy other.

Therefore aesthetics have some effects on theology. Theology views on art a sustenance of two fronts: subjectivity and objectivity. The aesthetic act is productive. The forms of art are medium of reception and not their object. Likewise, liturgy and religious art play the role of mediation in faith and theology. Theological engagement is neither an emptying of language nor an artificial projection of meanings. Like revelation, art aims at the beyondness but is actualized in history. Like art, if theology remains on the level symbolis/sign, it is empty. Its devoid of prophetic, exsistential, and spontaneously transcendent dimensions, and ready to be handed over immediately. While finite is the medium for both grace and art, the identification of meaning with symbol spell not the birth but the death of art and faith in the world today.

CONCLUSION

I examine Jacques Maritain's definition of art and what it contributes to debates on definitions of art in contemporary aesthetics. Of particular concern are the so-called 'fine arts'. I make three claims; first, that Maritain's definition of art is superior to other traditional and contemporary theories in avoiding their pitfalls and accommodating key data to be met by definitions of art, such as the existence of avant-garde art. Second, I claim that in accommodating avant-garde art, in particular 'conceptual art', Maritain's definition of art refutes the Wittgensteinian argument that art is an 'open concept' which cannot be defined. My final, resulting claim is that Maritain's definition deserves to be the pre-eminent definition of art today. This article consists of four sections. Section one provides some context of definitions of art and the data and conditions that have to be met by a viable definition. Section two provides the foundation and first pillar of Maritain's definition of art, what I identify as a cumulative 'descriptive' definition. Section three provides the second pillar of Maritain's definition of art, applicable specifically to the fine arts. Section four applies Maritain's full descriptive definition to the problem of conceptual art.

Maritain's descriptive definition of art consists of necessary and sufficient conditions—free art as an activity aiming at the production of beautiful physical creations—which is superior to traditional and contemporary definitions of art in avoiding their common pitfalls and accommodating the eight data identified by Adajian and listed earlier. Maritain's descriptive definition of art as a virtue of the practical intellect ordered to the creation of beautiful physical objects seems to be both extensionally and intensionally adequate: there are no current counter-examples to it and given its broadness, it seems that there are no possible counter-examples. Given that it is rooted epistemologically in the artist and his activity first, from which the ontology of artworks and non-art is made intelligible, Maritain's descriptive definition of art also seems to be 'sense' adequate. Moreover, Maritain's definition of art is consistent with artistic practice, artistic traditions and aesthetic experience of art cross-culturally. Its greatest strength is that it explains the recognisability of art by its audience, which is particularly relevant with grotesque and conceptual artefacts and performances. From the above conclusions, I claim that Maritain's definition deserves to be the pre-eminent definition of art today.

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