

PHARISAISM AND VALUES IN ART

Everything that happens that we experience outwardly, or even inwardly, persists in being strictly and unavoidably “what it is”: a chair is a chair; perceptivity is perceptivity. This self-identification with itself of every phenomenon and every object is a major ontological miracle whose persistent recurrence causes it to pass un-noticed.

The fact that what is is, and is as it is, seems to be so excessively obvious that the mere idea of suggesting it as a possible subject for meditation seems quite ludicrous. The lady who was astonished because a cat’s skin has two eye-holes in exactly the place where its eyes were is an example of this. And it would be even more comical if this led to wondering why these eyes, placed so exactly in the centre of these eye-holes, should, in fact, be eyes and, what is more, cat’s eyes.

To pursue this any further would no longer be humorous, but sheer lunacy, although so far we have not even succeeded in penetrating the mystery, not only of the hypothetical “why’s and

Translated by Rollo Myers.

how's," but not even of the fundamental "what" which has the quality of making a thing whatever it is.

Such self-identification appears to us as a condition of what is given and also of what may (or can) be given, since the principle of identity on which it is based, or from which it is derived, constitutes the indispensable basis of all experience this side of schizophrenia.

I do not, of course, propose to embark here on speculations with regard to the question of a "thing being what it is," and if I mention here something that does not in itself pose any problems, owing to the convincing manner in which it manifests itself, this is merely in order to examine those exceptions in which, in a perfectly and unquestionably normal way, the problem of a "thing being what it is" is manifested in those objects which are considered to be of great value in so far as they may possess transcendental potentialities: in other words, depending on their capacity to become something other than what they are in a greater or lesser degree.

Such exceptions can be seen in works of art, since their existence, as an aesthetic fact, is not at an end as soon as they have left the hands of their creator who, in presenting them as "finished objects," is in reality merely delivering them up to the hazards of unforeseeable reactions on the part of future spectators or audiences, each one of whom will judge them from his own particular point of view, which can never be the final judgement: this is inevitable, and something to be feared by an artist bold enough to present his work as being his own creation.

For the truth is that the justification of every work of art resides, not so much in what it actually is, as in the multiplicity of latent possibilities it contains. Every poem contains its own anthology, integrated by the various interpretations to which it is subjected, from those that elevate it above the creative intuition of its creator to those that, through lack of understanding, render it meaningless.

While admitting the fact that this is true of a work of art considered as a work of art, it may also be considered in addition to apply, by extension, to its physical substance, as it were. Take, for example, a picture: here we see it as a simple object, no less identical with itself than, say, this table on which I am

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now writing. It can be measured and weighed; it consists of a rectangular canvas fixed on a stretcher which keeps it taut; it is covered with paint and encased in a frame which defines precisely its boundaries. But this very frame, with its more or less pretentious aureole, already begins to appear suspect. No one has ever attempted to define the boundaries of a table. It is taken for granted that the material of which it is made fulfills that function in every direction, according to its dimensions. There is an old story about a notice placed at the highest point of a column, or pillar, on which visitors, when they have reached the top, can read: "This is the end of the pillar."

It is for this and no other purpose that for centuries it has been the custom to surround a picture with a frame. It would seem that people feel it is necessary to define the limits of a picture in order to indicate unequivocally the boundaries which separate aesthetics from Nature.

The frame appears as an "insulator," in the electrical sense of the term, capable of surrounding a given field so that certain types of existence may be produced within that area. Or it may be compared to a biological membrane that protects and contains, with its warning: "Thus far and no farther," certain expansive impulses. It underlines and emphasises, in a way considered necessary, the fact that the object of the picture-frame is to be what it is already assumed to be, namely a symbolic limit to the problems it raises.

In this day and age we can safely dispense with the picture frame as, indeed, is customary today. Yet its absence continues to function as before, just as a crushed egg-shell is prolonged in the shape of the body of the bird that came out of it.

The hazardous expression, "work of art," applied to a picture in an abstract sense (which is nevertheless just as meaningful as the material nature of the frame) continues to surround it with maternal tenderness and orthopaedic rigidity, thus supporting its intuited ontological invalidity. The picture has to be surrounded with all this external glamour in order to attract the reluctant but indispensable devotion and appetite of the spectator to ensure that somehow it should be seen "to be what it is" and to contain in addition depths undreamt of by its creator.

Today it is a fact that establishing with certitude the identifi-

cation of a picture is no less of a problem than doing the same for a human being, since its physical body in the hands of specialists is subjected to a rigorously objective examination which differs in no way from those carried out on a patient in a hospital, but not for the purpose of investigating possible complaints, but simply in order to establish whether the picture is really what it appears to be. Steps are taken to discover the chemical composition of the paint, the degree of oxidation in the resins contained in the varnish; it is subjected to X-rays, and photographed with a 'tangent light'; a search is made for possible fingerprints as if it were a dangerous criminal; and a thousand technical devices of the utmost refinement are employed—all this to discover what is already in fact self-evident, namely that the picture is what it is.

It might be argued that there is, or at any rate appears to be, something fraudulent about all this, since the purpose of all these lengthy investigations is not the absurd one of establishing that the picture is physically "what it is," but rather to expose the presumed fraud which would consist in making us believe the picture to be another physical entity, which is precisely what it is not. This means that the question at issue is whether this amounts to a deliberate deception or, at any rate, a false, if not actually fraudulent attribution of authorship.

As regards the physical consistency of the picture, it is clear that this is the crux of the problem. It is one of the greatest importance to the owners, or prospective buyers to know whether the canvas conforms to the type manufactured in the workshops of such and such a place at such and such a date, and whether the ageing of the paint or varnish is due to natural causes (the passage of time), or is the result of technical processes employed to accelerate their deterioration by some skilled expert in such matters. Up to now, my line of reasoning may appear as a trap to induce the reader to come to a wrong conclusion in regard to these matters; and I am not ashamed to admit that this is undoubtedly true; but my justification for this is that my object has been to induce him (the reader) to consider this further line of argument, which is not in any sense a trap—namely the question of the extent to which the physical "being" of a picture determines its aesthetic "being."

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Let us suppose that a famous picture gallery, unknown to its original founders, contains a picture of quite remarkable excellence which has wrongly been attributed to a great Master until the moment when I come in to look at it. Its fine qualities arouse in me a genuine delight, due maybe to the harmony or dramatic contrasts of its component parts, to the subtlety of the details revealed in its masterly composition, or to the mysterious atmosphere created by its chiaroscuro, etc. In other words, this picture has attained in my consciousness, as it did before in that of the experts whose opinion carries much more weight than my own, that plenitude of expression due to its maturity whose effect is both instantaneous and convincing, and essential to enable it to "be what it is."

And, in view of the authenticity of the picture already officially confirmed, what value can I—or, for that matter, the above-mentioned experts—attach to the precise and uncompromising opinion of the gallery's technologists—who may not be, for all we know, qualified to pronounce on matters of aesthetics—certifying that this picture is not what it claims to be but, at best, only an excellent copy, or at the worst, a brilliant misrepresentation—so frequent in the history of art—by a contemporary artist possessing the same technical skill, but lacking the creative inspiration of the great masters? What, then, can I do, I ask myself? Conclude that my life-long convictions or experience—which it is too late to change now—are mere illusions?

If my inadequate sensitivity, my inexperience or ignorance, or my superficial attitude towards works of art, or any other of my numerous failings should have led me to be deceived by a flagrant falsification, my shame at being obliged to admit all this would be evidence that the discrepancy between the impression produced on me by the clumsy copy and the precision of the experts' analysis, would not constitute a problem, and its consequences would be entirely my concern, and not affect the picture itself.

But the question does not arise, since at that time nobody would have thought of having recourse to the costly techniques of identification which were only resorted to in cases where the judgment of the experts—who were the only authorities capable of certifying the genuineness of a picture before the modern

laboratory techniques had been developed—was not considered adequate.

We are not, then, confronted with a crude copy, but with a work whose fine qualities necessitate extreme caution, precisely because in order that, being aware of those qualities, those persons of experience and recognised sensibility should have no reason for being ashamed of having valued highly this picture for its aesthetic qualities, despite the incontrovertible but inadequate evidence that for physical reasons it is not as valuable as supposed.

An example of a similar occurrence, this time in the field of music, may be illuminating. Owing to the nature of the case, it would be absurd to insist that the proof of the authenticity of a Bach fugue should depend on its being of the same physical consistency as when it left the hands of its creator. Any analysis of the metal of which organ pipes are made, or of the impression made by the player's fingers on the ivory of the keyboard, or of the organist's identity card, or any measurement of the decibels registered by the volume of sound produced etc., would be equally absurd. All that we can ask for as proof of its musical authenticity is that whoever performs the fugue should confine himself as faithfully as possible to the written indications of the composer, and conduct himself with such complete sincerity that the auditor is not conscious of the player's existence, but is left alone in the presence of Bach. Once the miracle has been achieved, any later expression of opinion on the part of the experts in acoustics would only be ridiculous—and all the more so if expressed in precise terms.

In painting, each picture is at the same time both the score, as it were, and its execution, a fact which has the inestimable advantage of enabling the painter (unlike the musician) to dispense with the always hazardous intervention of an interpreter between himself and his public. When we look at a picture by Delacroix, we already have before us Delacroix's own interpretation of his picture. The copyist of pictures of exceptional qualities—or counterfeiter, if we prefer to use that term—is bound to take the elementary precaution of not attempting any kind of 'interpretative' virtuosity in order to 'improve' what he is reproducing, and must of necessity, to his own regret, confine

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himself in all honesty to merely making a literal copy of the original. Only in this way will 'his' picture deserve the honour of being subjected to the ordeal of spectograph, radiography etc., while he himself will be in the paradoxical situation of one who, while trying to adapt his hand to reproduce the style of the pictorial Bach he is attempting to copy, has to admit that, as things turn out, it is this same hypothetical Bach who is influencing his own style. In this way, in so far as it is a 'version' (of the original) this picture will possess an irreproachable aesthetic authenticity.

How desirable it would be if this kind of 'falsification' were more common in our concert-halls where it would be a matter of life or death for the interpreter to pass un-noticed, subduing his own personality in favour of that of the composer.

The fact that a person of perception, endowed with the necessary degree of culture and sensibility, while experiencing the satisfaction of ascertaining the extent to which the impression he has received is evidence that what he has before his eyes is, in fact, "what it is," should allow himself to be influenced by the cold calculations of the laboratory tests shows how far technology, in its Pharisaical and logical rejection of aesthetic values, is capable of undermining the non-Pharisaical beliefs of the best critics, since I very much doubt whether there exists a critic bold enough to continue to maintain that the admirable but apocryphal picture is no less admirable, even after its inauthenticity has been legally established.

In this sense, as in so many other areas of contemporary life, the well-known saying of La Rochefoucauld that "Hypocrisy is the homage vice pays to virtue" is applicable in an opposite sense to this other form of hypocrisy of which we are all more or less guilty today, pretending that we are more guilty than we are in reality in accepting the evidence of inauthenticity and Pharisaism.

I am thinking of the copy of the *Mona Lisa* in the Prado in Madrid. I suspect that the mere fact of having been accepted in so famous a gallery is already a proof of the high standard of workmanship displayed in the picture. Nevertheless, those of us who have seen Leonardo's original in the Louvre, with varying emotions in each individual case, feel disinclined to repeat the experience in front of the copy in Madrid. For this reason,

instead of a surging crowd of people struggling to approach the "monstre sacré", we find it deserted, and for no other reason than that it is known to be only a copy, even though such a perfect one that the ignorant public who constitute the immense majority of all the visitors to both galleries would be unable to distinguish it from the original. For this reason, defending the dignity of our own limitations, we pass it by, merely giving it a condescending glance, half ironical, half in pity. The same kind of glance that we should, without any doubt, bestow upon the genuine *Mona Lisa* if the Directors of the Louvre in Paris and the Prado in Madrid should, as a most unlikely joke, decide to exchange the picture's respective locations.

In a youthful spirit of anti-Pharisaism I sometimes had the ingenuous idea of publishing poems without any author's signature, so that the reader would be forced to judge them in all sincerity without taking into account either the exaggerated or non-existent reputation of the poet. Pursuing the same idea, I dreamed of concerts being given without programmes, and thought it would be a good thing if art galleries would exhibit, at least for part of the time, their pictures without giving the painters' names, so that nothing would come between the works of art and the public.

Later I realised that such a childishly puritanical attitude, apart from its immediate practical consequences in discouraging the public's interest in art without benefiting anyone, would run counter to the reciprocal requirements of both works of art and the viewing public, since, just as a period of apprenticeship is indispensable for the creative artist, the same applies inevitably to the spectator, since to know the names of the painters is indispensable for reference, since they are in themselves representatives of their epoch, and an indication of the theories and tendencies of their cultural background.

In the improbable event of there being such a thing as "Absolute Beauty," it could only be approached by the traditional way of the recognised "gradus ad Parnassum," and only someone gifted with phenomenal aesthetic sensibility would be able to appreciate it as such before it could have any influence on the essentially social and inter-personal nature of culture in general.

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The aesthetic sense, though as innate in man as any other appetite, calls for some form of external stimulation; and the direction in which it gradually develops may be determined either by systematic instruction in the canons of art, or by the enthusiasm aroused by direct contact with whatever medium in which the person may be working.

And just as an artist begins by copying, whether he admits it or not, the old masters, and his early work is coloured by enthusiastic but involuntary plagiarism, so one interested in art cannot, in order to satisfy his legitimate desires, avoid practising a no less legitimate form of simulation by pretending to feel what he thinks others are feeling, which in its turn is a "plagiarism" of perception, since he is passing off as his own what really is another's.

The Pharisaical outward manifestations of religious observances, which in that field are repugnant as a means of attaining absolute values, are at least less objectionable in intention when they are confined to simulating an eager anticipation of aesthetic delights which they may on occasion be able to enjoy—with the curious attenuating circumstance that in fact this does often occur. A minimum of Pharisaism is unavoidable in the case of an initiate, if he is to avoid getting involved in those deplorable vicious circles where people know nothing about art because it does not interest them, while at the same time it is impossible for them to begin to be interested unless they are prepared to make the effort, even if at first they cannot fully appreciate its value and significance.

It is necessary to accept with humility the Pharisaism of the prestige (which art enjoys) and behave as if one was already enjoying, on credit, as it were, what one might later enjoy in actual fact, even allowing for the possibility that one day this enjoyment might give way to a profound disbelief in such a prestige. In any event, it is always much easier to abuse and ridicule the Pharisaism of others than to recognise the same fault in oneself—which is inevitable, even if such recognition is, in the last resort, a form of defence to prove oneself not guilty of anti-Pharisaism.

Aesthetic satisfaction is a matter of either complete acceptance or rejection, and invariably it ends by the adoption of a sceptical

attitude of rejection. Just as the mystics' final attainment of the ultimate ecstasy of identification with "Being" is only achieved after passing through various stages, beginning with purely earthly experiences, so likewise can the development of any really genuine aesthetic satisfaction only be attained after passing through various preliminary stages, marked at first merely by the observance of external Pharisaical ritual.

The truth will only be discovered, or perhaps revealed, after a succession of errors, and there can be no valid or authentic aesthetic experience other than that which is attained after the final rejection of and triumph over the spurious substitutes which were at first found acceptable.

Even the most severely self-critical person cannot fail to be astonished, in this respect, when he recalls the inadmissible concessions of which he was guilty during the course of his rise to the state of equanimity he now supposedly enjoys, even though in the majority of cases this leads him to be equally distrustful of his present position.

If a certain measure of Pharisaism is always inseparable from art, the reason for this is to be sought in the problematic nature of what precisely constitutes a work of art. No one feels obliged to make us believe that he lives in a perpetual state of ecstasy because he is aware of whatever quality it is that makes a chair a chair. And this applies too to the philosopher who suspects that this awareness may conceal (or contain) the enigma of all enigmas, and also to the artist who believes it is his mission to reveal entities; to accomplish this they will act with the studied humility of those who reckon how much easier it is to attract the attention of others to the dramatic nature of whatever is considered problematic, than to induce them to contemplate what is looked upon as obvious. In this context, there can be no possibility of Pharisaism.

On the other hand, aesthetic Pharisaism owes its existence to the prestige attaching to whatever is problematic, since one is led by one's pride to try to demonstrate that, for him, there is no longer any problem.

Every work of art, including those of a more pronounced anti-naturalistic tendency, aims at the ultimate elimination of the natural object, which is something that exists only in the mind

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of the spectator when, in an equally problematic way, his own vision and that of the creative artist merge together, and become identical, as happens when both sides of a stereoscopic picture come together; and it is this that makes them stand out so vividly in relief, thus producing the impression of an object being identical with "what it is."

The same aesthetic pleasure, which is the ultimate justification of all art, may be derived from the psychic condition caused by the relief of tensions resulting from the transference of the "problematicity" which is the essence of a work of art, not to the merely factual (or material) nature of an object, but to a higher source of pleasure which may fairly be described as "revelation," by means of which that which is (the fact of "being") no longer depends on the auto-identification of its peculiarity (or uniqueness), but projects itself to include the whole of "Being," thus engendering in us that kind of awe which is akin to a mystical experience.

We feel alarm, in that we are witnessing the actual moment of Creation in whose charismatic grace we are partaking. And just as I cited a chair as an example of a natural object boldly "being what it is," I will now evoke, as an example of what I myself have experienced, the emotion aroused in me by van Gogh's picture of a humble cane-bottomed chair which made me experience something like the Platonic Idea of a Chair, but without thereby depriving it of, but on the contrary adding to, the dramatic nature of its—and my own—individuality.

Since the authenticity of this type of experience is inevitably unverifiable, even by the person who experiences it, owing to the varying levels of consciousness which may be involved, and because in such experiences objectivity and subjectivity are mutually confounded, it is only right and proper that aesthetic Pharisaism should enjoy the benefits of any doubts concerning the extent of its *bona fide*, and for this reason any attempt to abolish it would inevitably result in the annihilation of genuine art.

Our imaginary picture-gallery where the artists' names would not be revealed would end by becoming a kind of puzzle in which every visitor, in addition to looking normally at the works displayed, would feel bound, for the sake of his *amour propre*,

to try to solve one riddle after another before arriving at a final solution.

But those who might not feel inclined to make such an effort merely to satisfy their own vanity, would feel helpless in the absence of any such essential information as that provided by the artists' signatures, every one of which, with the implicit information it conveys, causes the spectator's attention to be aroused and directed towards the only thing that counts, namely, in the first place, to enable him to understand why this picture, described as a Goya, is in fact a Goya; and then, when the viewer's general understanding is sufficiently engaged, to discover to what extent this Goya becomes "my Goya."

This can never happen without being prompted by the element of Pharisaism which, thanks to the allurements of the prestige attaching to the artist's signature, is an inducement to accept with enthusiasm as valid something of which we have no experience, and putting our minds at rest with regard to the social respectability of our feigned enthusiasms, and guaranteeing the high quality of the company which both before and after shared them and will continue to do so.

This deception in a good cause usually leads to excellent results, since false promises may become true when the initiate begins to have doubts himself when he discovers the profound truths which had been concealed from him by his own false judgements. For this reason Pharisaism deserves at least to be regarded with the same tolerance with which we recall the distressing pedantry of some old schoolmaster which nevertheless enabled us later on to read the great classics, which he was perhaps unable to understand and may even have secretly hated as one of the tedious impositions inseparable from his profession.

Before considering even the mere possibility of any real aesthetic participation, we must first show respect for the system of assumptions and references without which works of art would be totally inaccessible, and recognise the purpose of a syntax which imposes order on the elements of which such works are composed, thereby preventing them from being dispersed in a state of chaotic confusion.

In the same way as every word in a spoken language, every plastic form, even the most deliberately unusual, maintains its

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validity thanks to the systematic inter-mingling of allusions of all kinds, although it may claim to reveal itself to us either through an anarchic avoidance of any similarity with what we are accustomed to seeing, or else, maybe, by having recourse to the Platonic equanimity of geometrical forms. All these forms end by resolving themselves by conforming to the demands of semantic laws—the deliberately anti-traditional ones especially, though with a change of symbol—and to the syntax which governs the expression of their profoundest manifestations. The necessity of communication between human beings, and especially between an author, though perhaps long dead, with his public, which is perhaps as yet unborn, imposes that kind of fatality whose complicated manifestations conceal an ultimate desire for simplification.

In poetry this becomes so complicated as to border on the impossible, because the conceptual content of its actual material, namely words, influences the statements it has to make—added to which we must take into account the limitations imposed by the different sound-qualities of the various languages.

But even in such ideal “Esperanto” languages such as music and the plastic arts, unaffected by the intrusion of the mechanically significant utility of the spoken word, the message entrusted to the rhythmic forms of sound and colour calls for a continual apprenticeship in order, on the one hand, to grasp the intentions of the authors, who may be in earnest or only joking, and on the other hand, to penetrate the inscrutable mask of sincerity or deception covering the Pharisaism of others, which only one’s own experience can teach him to discern.

There cannot be any form of language without a grammatical foundation, nor any grammar that is not Pharisaical, nor any art that can abandon its lofty ideals without renouncing the exalted goal to which it aspires.

Moreover, although the aesthetic act is, in itself, outside history because of the desire for eternity which inspires it, this does not prevent it from appearing in a space-time context, always invested with ‘*gargas*’ which have in themselves no expressive significance, and must be got rid of; and only the hypocritical authority of prestige can compel us to do this. Furthermore, when we refer to Pharisaism (hypocrisy) as being

the opposite of sincerity, we attribute to the latter a hypothetical autonomy in the matter of making decisions which it by no means possesses.

There is no form of sincerity which is not conditioned, not only by the personal temperament and capacity for intuitive perception, aided or hindered in countless different ways by the organic or psychic disposition of every individual concerned, but also by the influences of the medium due to either previous instruction or overriding antagonisms in matters of taste.

Genuine sincerity cannot be confined to a single fixed conviction in only one direction; in that event, it would cease to be sincere. It must remain capable of accepting or rejecting all kinds of influences, fluctuating in its decisions, and perpetually on guard against both its own persistent convictions and the empty and ephemeral dictates of a 'snobism' which is continually changing its direction. Being or not being presents identical problems. The absolute authenticity of aesthetic satisfaction in its ideally pure form is only conceivable as the ultimate goal towards which it aspires, and which it must attain, but without forgetting the element of Pharisaism on which it is based and—what is more important—on which it must always be based.

To recognise this is not to imply that our scepticism with regard to the value of every work of art must end in denying that it has any value at all, any more than the fact that we doubt the possibility of any water being chemically pure unless subjected to the strictest laboratory tests, the environmental conditions on our planet being what they are, prevents us from being thirsty—and still less from attempting to slake our thirst in fresh spring water.

But it does explain the confusion to which everyone's critical consciousness is subject, and the natural distrust aroused by a work of art of doubtful authenticity which provokes a sudden withdrawal of trust in, not merely a more prudent approach to, the picture in question which, to complicate matters still more, may be suspect owing to an almost infinite series of degrees of deterioration.

An original picture, indubitably the work of a great master, may reappear in a slightly less perfect version in the form of a copy made, for a later commission, by the same master, but yet

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lacking the same glowing inspiration that is so evident in the original creation. Then the differences become more and more apparent and unsatisfactory: the picture bears the hall-mark of the artist's style, and the master signed it after having added some final touches. Or, perhaps, it is the work of one of his most gifted pupils, imprudently taking advantage of his apprenticeship. Or, again, it might be merely a literal copy, entrusted, with no intention of deception, to a painter a contemporary of the artist, for the same innocent reason that we order a copy to be made of a photograph which interests us.

At worst, it could be a case of deliberate deception, executed by someone with a gift for mimicry, lacking any genuine creative impulse, but possessing enough technical mastery to deceive the experts. At each stage of this slippery descent in deception the problematic nature of the problems surrounding every work of art becomes more apparent; and every one of these cases gives us cause for alarm lest, by a process of chain-reaction, the disrespect shown for the laws of aesthetic criteria in the case of this particular picture may signify the end of all standards of judgement, not only in painting, but in all forms of art.

And yet it would seem that in fact this danger only threatens the Pharisaism created by the need to provide reassuring safeguards before venturing to express an opinion without the risk of perhaps being contradicted at a later stage. The same automatic defence reaction is shown in the Pharisaism which, since it is prevalent in the art-trade among dealers, may lead to an excessive depreciation in the value of a work considered suspect, which may also cast doubt upon all the other works by the same artist, although their aesthetic value is the same as before.

This commercial value, which is generally confused with the intrinsic value of a work of art, is fixed according to the standards of this Pharisaism in matters of valuation and bargaining; it also determines the unpredictable fluctuations of inflation and deflation, although nothing is so unpredictable and hazardous as the estimated value of any object on a level which is not only different from, but has no connexion with aesthetic values.

Consequently great caution is needed in buying and selling any object in the category of things which "are not what they are," and in regard to which the mere possibility of "being" depends

on the usual conventional fluctuations in appearances and tastes, now deprived of the unreliable authenticity of the "canons" of art, as a result of having denied to the latter the quality of universality with which until recently they had been credited.

In this respect, the nature of the world of ambiguities in which we find ourselves is such that the first question we have to ask is what value can be attached to the word "value."

Linguists today do not believe in the existence of synonyms in the strict sense of the term, since every word is surrounded by an aura of ambiguous inferences and shades of meaning which make it un-transferable and unique, in the same sense that applies to the human beings who pronounce it. But in every language there exists a phenomenon which argues against synonymity, and that is the fact that both antithesis and synonymity may coexist in a single phonema, giving rise to many doubtful varieties of meaning that may even be completely contradictory—the contradiction being sometimes of a metaphorical nature, or else due to a philological combination of similarities of prosody. The individual's sub-consciousness may further complicate the obscure process of the transference of one shade of meaning to another, masking the content of one by confusing it with another. The word "value," or "valour" for example, is no longer one of the most innocent in this respect. One has only to recall the various shades of meaning, all equally legitimate, it might convey to e.g. a military man, a philosopher, a financier or a painter.

The latter, furthermore, might in his own jargon recognise only its technical meaning, and when speaking of "values" be referring to the variety of contrasting intensities of chiaroscuro or of colours, adding that the principal value of such and such a painting lies in the artist's skill in handling his "values," without thereby being guilty, in the eyes of his fellow-artists, of anything more serious than an inadvertent tautology.

And who has not, at one time or another, heard someone say that the "value" of a certain picture must be judged primarily in term of its "valour" (in the sense of boldness or audacity), which may perhaps be due to the aggressively violent nature of its conception and execution.

It is obvious that Pharisaism is in no way bound to concern

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itself with the clarification of such equivocal ambiguities (which are fortunately favourable to its own approach) as the distinctions between the different kinds of "values" which may well engulf those arising from the anguish of the artist at the moment of creation as well as, at a later stage the perplexities and apprehension of those who contemplate the work of art: in other words, the whole question of its aesthetic value.

Although it is not customary to admit it, the fact that a work of art can become a commercial object—which means that inevitably we must resign ourselves to seeing it deteriorate like any other commodity—is in itself a scandal, a form of simony, an alienation of spiritual values, encouraged no doubt by the multiplicity of meanings attached to the word "value," among which the aesthetic sense of the term is only one among many.

If we confine ourselves now to the idea of "value" in its commercial sense, as subject to the laws of supply and demand being applied to works of art, we are forced to consider the origin of both these terms; for what they imply in the field of bargaining and market-quotations etc. is not the same in both cases, which may range from, on the one hand, the maniacal craving for possession on the part of a collector who hoards with the same frenzy anything from pictures to pipes, and is capable, if he takes up stamp-collecting, of attributing to a ½p stamp from some obscure island in the Pacific a much higher value than to a Rembrandt, to, on the other hand, the type of careful investor who has been told of the incredible profit he might make from some wise investment, especially if its proprietor should opportunely happen to die. This is the type who sees in a work of art a symbol of prestige, both economic and social, the true man of refinement who looks upon such things as enhancing his way of life, and as embodying the noble idea of being at once an educational influence and a means of safeguarding the artistic patrimony of the museums.

And although amidst all this confusion they form only a very small minority, we must not forget those who by making considerable sacrifices wish to acquire a picture for exclusively aesthetic reasons, prompted by a desire to identify themselves with it.

It is understandable that such a heterogeneous collection of

theories and motives cannot fail to create a disturbing impression. And it still remains to be noted that, in addition to existing as an aesthetic fact, a picture is at the same time a cultural object; and when its value depends on its rarity, this quality has nothing to do with whatever other qualities it may possess as a work of art—as, for example, in the case of a picture providing historical evidence in the form of, say, the only portrait of a hero which can be considered authentic on account of its ingenuous style and composition.

All these confusing elements are dwarfed in comparison with the principal complication due to the clever manoeuvres of the dealers, whose cunning procedures, governed by the primary senses of touch and smell, invite the complicity, not necessarily venal, of the critics, constantly afraid of being judged reactionary in their judgements, capable of arousing waves of enthusiasm, sometimes as sporadic as they are exhausting, together with, as an alternative, profit-taking and marketing considerations, and depreciations followed by the liquidation of unsaleable “junk”—all of which makes it impossible to establish, if only temporarily, what the “real value” of a picture may be.

There is no other market or merchandise in existence that is subject to fluctuations of this kind—which is only logical since what is being bought and sold here is something that owing to its very nature, cannot be “what it is.”

Although in the examples already cited the various meanings of the word “value” are, in the last analysis, not interchangeable, it is possible to establish a certain approximate parallel in the methods of fixing prices—taking into account, for example, the energy-producing qualities of wheat as a food, or petroleum as a combustible, both of which satisfy our vital needs. But when we are dealing with a work of art it will not be possible to establish even this kind of hypothetical parallelism, because its ability to arouse aesthetic satisfaction (being the equivalent, in this case, of energy value) is not, and cannot be the same for two different people—nor even for the same person on whom it may make a different impression on two different occasions, not always separated by a long period of time.

Who, for example, on seeing again in later life a work of art which in his youth he had greatly admired, and finding it to

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be a mere caricature of itself, has not been ashamed at this proof of his youthful immaturity of judgement? It is an inevitable condition of the elusive nature of aesthetic values that, although the effect that a work of art may produce on someone who experiences it to the full is one of the most intense and vital sensations that can be imagined, when transferred to another plane the satisfaction it produces appears to be on an appreciably lower level. This is because, once again, we must recognise the essentially dual nature of art, firmly solipsist as regards the processes of creation and perception, and something essentially personal, while at the same time, owing to the fact that it seeks to make contact with the outer world, it must inevitably have an influence on society. The admirable thing about it is that, despite all these heterogeneous obstacles and difficulties, it succeeds in building up—if only for a short, and in fact, in many cases, not always so short a time—an impressive and incalculable amount of enthusiasm and appreciation; and that is one of the merits of that Pharisaism that has been so justly—and so unjustly—blamed.

It is the timid and insecure nature of its judgements, backed by no authority, that causes it to be apprehensive and liable to sudden changes of opinion, with the result that it attacks without pity whatever may have questioned the authority of its earlier dictates. This leads it immediately to declare valueless a work that might still have seemed admirable to those who until then had not been warned of the danger that might arise once its authenticity had been discredited on technical grounds by the experts.

It could be alleged that the same thing happens when any kind of falsification is discovered, and that there is no reason why a work of art should not be discredited for the same reasons. This is the crux of the whole question. Where money is concerned, any falsification introduces an illicit imbalance in the economy as a whole, similar to that which would occur if measurements were taken with an elastic measure, or if a skilled chess-player were to insist that all his pieces should move as if they were Knights. This would be a violation of not only this particular rule, but of the rules of the game as a whole. This is what happens when the agent responsible for the debasement of the currency is the State itself which issued it—as in the case of

inflation, since the depreciation of the currency is not confined to new issues, but affects in an equal degree every single bank-note previously issued as legal tender.

In the same way the slightest alteration, perhaps simply in a date, is enough to invalidate in its entirety an official document; and where objects of cultural or historic interest are concerned, the falsification, or 'faking,' of a picture cannot fail to have the same result.

But when we consider the nature of an aesthetic event as such, then everything is different. A perfect 'fake' (whose detection calls for all the technical resources of the laboratory, and for that reason is considered capable of deceiving not only the general public, but even the most experienced experts) when (owing to the magic influence of the signature) it has stimulated every perceptive faculty in the make-up of a cultivated man, "striking the right chords" and meeting the adequate response of an unquestionably honest sensibility—then produces, and cannot fail to produce an impression identical—not just indistinguishable from, but absolutely identical—with that which the same picture would have produced if the result of the clinical examination had absolved it from the suspected crime of being illegitimate.

When we consider it from a purely aesthetic point of view (and by what other criterion can a work of art be judged?) a really competently executed 'fake' is not perceived as such; one could even say that what puts it into that category is the Pharisee's uncontrollable and unreasonable craving for objectivity arising from his need to know what guarantees the only kind of value which interests him—namely, the monetary value of the picture in question. What, then, in the last resort, is the criterion which determines the final appraisal? To say that a picture is "not what it is" means that it has definitely what is always considered a defect in any work of art: i.e. that of being paradoxically the exact opposite of what it was supposed to be.