ART AND MEANING IN LIFE

by

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PREFATORY SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION :

The attempt to find meaning in life has taken on a new urgency in an increasingly secular world. The question was dramatically posed by Camus in La Peste : "Yes or no, is life worth the trouble?" and Baier has observed that for modern man, the scientific account of the world takes away life's purpose and with it, its meaning.

If the message of religion has been blunted by science and science itself is neutral does art have anything to offer?

But what is the function of art?

The two questions : "What is the point of life?" and "What is the point of art?" are complex. There is some confusion about what is meant by the first question and what sort of answer or answers we can reasonably expect. There is also considerable disagreement on what is the function of art. The Formalists claim that the work of art is autonomous and the aesthetic experience disinterested. Other writers on art suggest that art enables us to reflect upon the meanings of existence.

Although there are many facets to works of art, is the search for significance, the attempt to find meaning in life one of their functions? My main concern will be with this question.

CHAPTER 1 :

What do we mean by talking about meaning in life? In this Chapter I attempt to clarify what is meant by examining what certain writers and philosophers have said. From this examination it will be observed that we are concerned with themes such as alienation, life and death, self-deception, personal identity, human relationships, and the point is made that these are the themes we will expect to find in works of art when we look for a concern with meaning in life.

CHAPTER 11 :

A definition of the work of art put forward for consideration is that

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works of art are those man-made objects that function aesthetically in human experience. By "functioning aesthetically" is meant that they convey or reflect, besides sensuous and formal values, meanings taken from living experience through the medium of these sensuous and formal values. It is contended :

1) that some paintings convey meaning in life as subject matter and this is a legitimate aesthetic function,

2) that most works of art have the capacity to reflect meaning in life and this has an important bearing on the form taken by the work of art.

Objections, mostly by Formalists, are considered and I argue that they do not (in theory) invalidate these contentions.

CHAPTER lll :

In this Chapter ten works of art (nine paintings and one sculpture) are looked at to illustrate what is meant by saying that a work of art conveys or reflects meaning in life.

CHAPTER lV :

It is concluded that part of the answer to the questions : "What is the point of life?" and "What is the point of art?" is that one place to look for meanings in life is in the work of art and one way of looking at works of art is to look for these meanings.

I wish to acknowledge with thanks the guidance of Dr M R H MacNamara throughout and that of Mrs F van Proosdij (Department of History of Art and Fine Arts) in the sections directly concerned with art.

INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly secular world the perennial question of the meaning and purpose of life is once again central.

The attempt to find meaning for living in a godless world has been stressed by existentialist philosophers and among English-speaking philosophers a start has been made to clarify the problems involved.

The question arises largely from an impression of the purposelessness of the physical universe as a whole. Baier has pointed out that the medieval Christians could believe that life had a meaning. For modern man, however, the scientific account of the world takes away life's purpose and with it, its meaning.

If the message of Christianity has been blunted by science and science itself is negative or at least neutral, does art have anything to offer?

What, then, is the point of art?

According to some modern aestheticians, art, too, is or should be detached from the business of life. Following Kant who claimed that art is disinterested, Osborne and Isenberg have maintained that art is autonomous. But there is no unanimity on this.

According to Tolstoy, the aim of the true artist is to transmit those feelings which constitute the meaning of life for his audience.

Is there a link between the two questions, "What is the point of art?" and, "What is the point of life?".

Two recent judgments on works of art [1]) suggest that there is an important relationship between at least some works of art and questions of meaning in life.

Nel Erasmus, the curator of the Johannesburg Municipal Art Gallery,

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1) By work of art I have in mind paintings or sculpture unless otherwise indicated

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explaining the controversial acquisition in 1973, a Picasso pastel and crayon drawing of a harlequin with contorted features and repulsive expression, said that it imposed a confrontation with fundamental questions concerning life, old age, and death.[1])

And a London art critic, William Packer, said of some contemporary paintings at a private exhibition that "pretty and self-conscious though it may be", much of the work is saved repeatedly, and its scope broadened, by "dark and unspecific hints of something nasty lurking behind the last bush on the left."[2]) The artist has conveyed something of that fear of the unknown which has always been part of human existence.

Both critics suggest, then, that the artist is concerned in some way with meaning in life. The second critic also suggests how the artist conveys what he feels about this meaning - or meanings. According to him, the artist proceeds by hints and intuitions rather than by explicit comment.

What is meant by saying that a work of art is concerned with meaning in life? The complexity of the question is suggested by the two judgements just mentioned. The first maintains that Picasso was confronted with the meaning of life, old age and death - in particular, its meaning for the artist. The second judgement suggests that the artist was concerned with life in general; hinting that in one aspect at least there is something sinister and fearful about it.

Rembrandt's later self-portraits show mounting anxiety, increasing with his age, and indicating a struggle to find an answer to the meaning of his own life.

Michelangelo in his Creation of Adam (in the Sistine Chapel) is concerned, on the other hand, with the meaning of life in general.

These four examples show a concern for meaning in life in two senses, the individual and the cosmic (referred to by Baier in his article

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1) The Star, Johannesburg, March 13 1974

2) The Financial Times, April 3 1975

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on The Meaning of Life as terrestrial and cosmic senses).1) The concept "meaning in life" suggests a complexity which is in need of some clarification and this will be attempted in Chapter 1.

Any connection between a concern for meaning in life and in the work of art will depend on what one takes to be the meaning of a work of art. What is the function of a work of art? Is there more than one function? Can art be thought of as an instrument of communication or is it confined to arousing "aesthetic" sensations? What is the point of art? In Chapter 2, a definition of the work of art will be attempted and objections considered.

As a basis for argument I put forward a modification of John Hospers' definition of works of art : "those man-made objects that function either entirely or primarily aesthetically in human experience." As modified I take the aesthetic function to include sensuous values, formal values and life values (which reflect directly or indirectly a concern for meanings in life.) "Life" values are excluded in the narrow definition of aesthetic experience by Osborne, but I argue that aesthetic values in this sense result from the way the content, subject matter or "life" values are presented in the work of art.

In those works of art where subject matter or content is minimal or absent entirely, aesthetic values consist mainly of sensuous and formal values, but it is suggested (following Panofsky) that an underlying concern for meaning in life is reflected which could govern the form of the work of art.

In the same chapter I discuss what is meant by saying that works of art give meaning to life or are concerned with meaning in life.

Ten well known works of art are examined in chapter 3 in an attempt to illustrate and clarify what is meant by saying that a work of art is concerned with meaning in life.

In Chapter 4 I conclude, firstly, that a definition which covers all works of art and includes a concern for meaning in life is not

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1) K Baier : The Meaning of Life (1957) in 20th Century Philosophy : The Analytic Tradition, edited by M Weitz, Collier-MacMillan, London, 1966, Chapter 20

invalidated by the arguments of Formalists and others.

From the examination of the ten works of art and, in particular, Vermeer's painting, one must concede, however, that it is difficult to find any direct evidence of a concern for meanings in life in all paintings. Nevertheless, it is possible to detect an indirect reflection of such a concern in many works of art.

Secondly, I conclude that one of the functions of art is to communicate meanings in life and that one way of looking at works of art is to look for these meanings. Conversely, one place to look for meanings in life is in the works of art.

MEANING IN LIFE

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTORY SUMMARY. In order to be able to talk about any connection between art and meaning in life, one should be reasonably clear, first of all, about what one means by the concept "Meaning in Life".

An attempt is made in this chapter to clarify the concept. From everyday examples, and from what certain novelists, poets, and philosophers have said, it becomes evident that there are several shades of meaning.

Alienation. One person finds gardening meaningful - for himself. At the office his life seems to be unnatural and he feels alienated.

Self-Identity. The office manager seems to have found an identity for himself. When he eventually retires to the seaside, he feels a loss of identity amongst strangers and he feels alienated.

What have writers and philosophers to say?

Absurdity. A more formidable case for meaninglessness in life is made out by Sartre, and the hero in La Nausée claims that the key to existence is its fundamental absurdity. But Sartre's logic seems to rest on an insecure initial assumption. His notion of bad faith is discussed.

Distinction between Cosmic and Terrestrial senses of meaning in life. Very often when one asks, "what is the point of existence?" one is thinking about the universe. Sometimes one is really thinking, "what is the point of it all for me?" (Baier.)

Believers and Non-believers. Edwards notes that for religious thinkers human life has meaning if it is part of a divinely ordained scheme and if, after death, there is the possibility of eternal bliss.

Some Unbelievers, like Schopenhauer and at one time Tolstoy, agree that life has no meaning if there is no God and if death means

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personal annihilation. Having rejected the claims of religion, for them life is devoid of meaning.

Meaning in Life and Meaning of Life. Some other Unbelievers maintain that life can have meaning in some humanly important sense even if the religious world-view is rejected. Nietzsche, Karl Popper, and Kurt Baier show this view and stress that it is up to us to decide what our values shall be.

In conclusion, the contrast is noted between the definite conclusions of the philosopher Schopenhauer, on the one hand, and on the other, the apparent detachment of the artist Titian concerning the transitoriness of human life. The artist, says Merleau-Ponty,[1]) is entitled to look at everything without being obliged to appraise what he sees.

We can expect from works of art such as paintings and sculpture, a less direct treatment or approach in dealing with such things as alienation, bad-faith, self-identity, life and death, than we find in literature and philosophy. These are some of the themes, nevertheless, we will expect to find when we look for a concern with meaning in life in the work of art.

Alienation and Self-identity. Alienation and self-identity are inextricably bound up with meaning in life. The word alienation has been used in many senses. In general, alienation or estrangement means the process or result of a person becoming alienated from another person, from society, nature or his "true self".

For Marx alienation meant : Man was alienated from the products he produced, from himself because he did not find his fulfilment in his work, and from other men, especially from those men for whom he produced material goods.

Twentieth-century man sometimes feels threatened by the "consumer society" - overwhelmed by an infinity of mass-produced and machine-

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1) M Merlau-Ponty - Eye and Mind, in Aesthetics, edited by H Osborne, Oxford University Press, 1972, page 57.

made articles. "Pop" artists render this world "familiar" and manageable.

Tolstoy's conversion to religious belief changed his position from pessimism to one of belief that meaning in life lies in merging one's life with that of others. In a passage from War and Peace Pierre reflected on the life of the old soldier Karatayev. "His life, as he looked at it, held no meaning as a separate entity. It had meaning only as part of a whole of which he was at all times conscious."[1] It might be inferred from this sentiment that Tolstoy would have favoured a totalitarian political system. However, one is entitled to go no further than that he was thinking of a common humanity, sanctioned by religion.

In Tolstoy's novel, Pierre's ordeal in war left him with a feeling of inner peace. "The search for an object in life was over." He felt that "it was precisely this absence of an aim which gave him the complete and joyful sense of freedom that constituted his present happiness".[2] The awful question - "the question why? - no longer existed for him. To that question why? he now had always ready in his soul the simple answer : Because God is".[3] For Pierre the search for a goal had ended.

What was Pierre's position before? He had felt alienated, estranged, from humanity. This feeling disappeared once he had found his belief in a common humanity and the assurance of a living, ever-manifest God".[4] However, if one did not share Tolstoy's mystical vision and could not identify one's interests and goals with the group to which one belongs, one could quite easily experience a threat to one's personal identity. A feeling of being alienated from this group would inevitably follow.

Absurdity - an existentialist view. In Sartre's novel La Nausée, Roquentin confronts the total meaninglessness of existence.

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1) Leo Tolstoy : War and Peace, (Introduction page 4) Penguin Books, England, 1971.
2) Leo Tolstoy : op cit., page 1308
3) Leo Tolstoy : op cit., page 1309
4) Leo Tolstoy : op cit., page 1308

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Roquentin Sartre expresses his views. The world is a datum, an assumption which goes back to Parmenides (who said quite simply : "What is, is").[1] According to Sartre, "to exist is simply to be there".[2]

From this starting point, Sartre draws certain conclusions, some of which are unwarranted. That there is no reason for existence[3] because it is simply there is logical enough, but his initial premiss is merely an assumption. Existence, he declares, is contingent. It is not a delusion, though, it is an absolute.[4] It is simply there. As there is no reason for it, Sartre concludes that it is absurd, meaningless. The "key to existence", says Roquentin, is its "fundamental absurdity".[5]

But Sartre's logic is faulty. From the assertion that existence is "simply there" he infers that there is no reason for it. As already indicated, his initial assumption is questionable.

It does not follow, even if this assumption is allowed, that existence is absurd or meaningless. At most, it can be inferred that, if existence is "simply there", it is neutral. One cannot conclude from its neutrality that it is absurd or meaningless or that it is not absurd or meaningless. An analogous point is made by the philosopher Karl Popper, who says that "neither nature nor history can tell us what we ought to do". "It is we," he declares, "who introduce purpose and meaning into nature and into history."[6]

Existence, then, may be unintelligible according to Existentialist philosophers and writers. This does not prevent them, or us, from interpreting it.

The notion of absurdity has been exploited by many writers and Samuel Beckett is one who conveys in his novels and plays, the uneasiness

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1) John Burnett : Early Greek Philosophy, A & C Black, London, 1963, page 178

2) Jean-Paul Sartre : Nausea, translated by L Alexander, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1962, page 176

3) Jean-Paul Sartre : op cit., page 181

4) Jean-Paul Sartre : op cit., page 176

5) Jean-Paul Sartre : op cit., page 173

6) K R Popper : The Open Society and its Enemies, Vol II, Routledge & Sons, London, 1945, page 265.

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felt by many people today that the meaning of life has evaded us - that it is absurd. For Beckett, the concept of purpose and meaning in life is beyond comprehension. God's existence is doubtful. "There are places in nature from which God would appear to be absent."[1] In his novel Mercier and Camier two pitiable, grotesque old men set out on a journey, "as towards some unquestioned goal".[2]

"Did what they were looking for exist?" the two old men asked themselves. "What were they looking for?"[3]

Bad Faith. Sartre conceived of man in terms of freedom. Man is inherently free. In fact, he is condemned to be free. Sartre attempts to account for the human condition from the two principles of Being and Non-being.

One can only affirm the reality of Being-in-itself. Things simply are. There is no reason for Being-in-itself. It is contingent, absurd, "de trop". Non-being is identified, on the other hand, with nothingness, consciousness, freedom, the nihilation of Being, and Being-for-itself.

Man is a combination of the in-itself and the for-itself. He is not only a particular individual with given and acquired characteristics which enable others to view him "objectively". As nothingness, he has the possibility of separating himself from these characteristics and viewing them "from a distance". This prevents the individual from merely being himself in any final manner and obliges him to choose himself constantly. Man exists first, then creates his own essence by his acts.

By his awareness and reflection on his past behaviour, which has become his essence, a man can escape from his essence. Man can change his goals and change his character. Even man's factual situation (his physique and the place he lives in, for example) cannot prevent

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1) Samuel Beckett : Mercier and Camier, Calder & Boyars, London, 1974, page 72

2) Samuel Beckett : op cit., page 21

3) Samuel Beckett : op cit., page 23

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consciousness from making a wholly new choice of its way of being. This recognition is the source, however, of the feeling of vertigo or anguish which accompanies our sense of absolute freedom. In anguish I apprehend myself as totally free, and as "not being able to derive the meaning of the world except as coming from myself".[1)]

In apprehending myself as totally free, I derive the meaning of the world as coming from myself. Sartre contrasts this with the mind of the "serious" man who apprehends values in terms of the world rather than as coming from himself.

Unable to bear the thought of his boundless freedom, he adopts the cover of bad faith. It is a flight from anguish, filling up the nothingness of freedom in himself,[2)] and takes the form of pretending that he is not as free as he actually is.

Bad faith, Sartre explains, is a certain art of forming contradictory concepts which join together both an idea and the negation of that idea. A man may try to believe while half-aware that it is a pretence.

Sartre illustrates this ambiguity by the example of a woman who goes out with a man for the first time. She would be humiliated to be merely an object of desire and yet she does not want mere respect. She dissociates herself from the hand that the man is holding in order to avoid making a decision. Poised in the "lofty regions of sentimental speculation" she pretends not to notice that the man has taken her hand in his. The divorce of her body from her mind is accomplished for, while sensing the presence of her own body, she realises herself as not being her own body and contemplates it as though from above.

Sartre gives further illustrations of bad faith. There is the grocer who dreams and is thereby offensive to the customer. It is fairly

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1) Jean-Paul Sartre : Being and Nothingness, trans. Hazel E Barnes, Philosophical Library, New York, 1956, page 40

2) Jean-Paul Sartre : op cit., page 44

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common for people to constitute stereotypes of other people. The grocer is identified with his shop and his mundane occupation. One does not easily accept that he might be writing poetry in his spare time. He is thus deprived in our mind of his humanity.

The waiter who "plays" at being a waiter (another of Sartre's examples) knows from within that he cannot be a waiter in the sense that an inkwell "is" an inkwell. By distancing himself from his role, he can, however, choose not to continue being a waiter.

The antithesis of bad faith, is sincerity (with others and with one-self), on the basis of accepting that human beings are free - responsible and able to choose. Sartre's illustrations of the girl, the waiter and the grocer, are all examples of bad faith. The cases of the girl and the waiter illustrate, in particular, self-deception. Sartre defines the situation of man as one of free choice, "without excuse and without help". Accordingly, "any man who takes refuge behind the excuse of his passions, or by inventing some deterministic doctrine, is a self-deceiver".[1] It is "a self-deception if I choose to declare that certain values are encumbent upon me; I am in contradiction if I will these values and at the same time say they impose themselves upon me".[2]

Other examples of bad faith (deception) come readily to mind :-

1) There are people, all over the world, who profess to believe in racial equality - elsewhere.

2) There are trade unionists who "believe" in the brotherhood of man and the right of all men to a job but support passport control to protect themselves from competition of foreign workers.

3) Alasdair MacIntyre notes that "the creed of the English is that there is no God and that it is wise to pray to him from time to time".[3]

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1) Jean-Paul Sartre : Existentialism and Humanism, translated by P Mairet Methuen, London, 1948, pages 50 - 51.
2) Jean-Paul Sartre : ibid page 51
3) Alasdair MacIntyre : Against the Self-Images of the Age, Duckworth, London, 1971, page 26.

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Bad faith or self deception is, then, a kind of alienation from one's "true" self. One's life is meaningless in the sense that one holds positions which are self-contradictory.

Meaning of Life - a distinction between the Cosmic and Terrestrial senses. Karl Britton notes that when thinking about the meaning of life, sometimes one is thinking about the universe. "What", one asks, "is it all for?" "What is the point of it all?"

Very often, though, one is really thinking, "what is the point of it all for me?"[1])

The cosmic sense is meant when it is said that human life is or is not part of any design. A person may ask whether life has any meaning when he really wants to know whether there is a superhuman intelligence that fashioned human beings along with the rest of the world to serve some end".[2]) Macbeth answers this question in the negative when he dismisses life as "a tale told by an idiot". Milton, on the other hand, believed that God has a plan for the world, requiring "the willing cooperation of all created spirits",[3]) and that God's purposes are fulfilled even by those "who only stand and wait".[4])

In the terrestrial sense of the meaning of life, a particular person's life may or may not have meaning. We are then referring to the question whether certain purposes are to be found in his life. It is observed that the actions of individuals like Churchill or Pasteur appeared to be directed by some dominant over-all goal. Cezanne, it is said "seemed possessed by a sort of cosmic fury",[5]) giving himself up to his work, "body, mind and soul",[6]) and the same could be said of Van Gogh and Michelangelo.

A reminder that the question "what is the meaning of life?" is essentially one which concerns value, is Edwards' remark that to say a person's life has meaning is "not tantamount to saying that the acts

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1) Karl Britton : Philosophy and the Meaning of Life, Cambridge University Press 1969, page 3

2) P Edwards : The Meaning of Life, in The Encyclopedia of Philosophy Vol 1V edited by P Edwards, the MacMillan Co & The Free Press, New York, 1967, page 471

3) Karl Britton - op cit., page 30

4) John Milton : Sonnet XIX in Samson Agonistes and the Shorter Poems New English Library, London 1966

5) P Edwards- op cit., page 472

6) Bernard Dorival - Cezanne, Beric. London 1948 page 70

to which the goal has given direction are of positive value"[1]). A Nazi might claim that for him life has meaning when he belongs to the Nazi party but can this sort of life be shown to be worthwhile?

Can human life be shown to be worthwhile in an objective sense? Perhaps, he suggests, the best that one may hope for is that it be approved by rational and sympathetic human beings.[2])

Can one's life have meaning in the terrestrial sense if one does not find that human life has meaning in the cosmic sense? To believer and unbeliever alike it is clear that if the theory of cosmic design is rejected, it follows that life has no meaning in the cosmic sense. For many people it follows that life has no meaning in the terrestrial sense. But the Christian view guarantees a meaning in the cosmic sense to the believer. In the terrestrial sense, however, he may lead a trivial life. Conversely, your life or mine may or may not have meaning in the terrestrial sense even if life as such has none (in the other).[3])

Milton had believed that each individual was called by God to some task.[4]) He saw his own task as the exercise of his God-given talent for poetry. But when his sight was taken away he became bewildered. His struggle to reconcile his blindness with what he had taken to be God's plan is successfully resolved in his lines :

"God does not need either man's work or his own gifts; who best bear his mild yoke, they serve him best"[5])

At this point certain positions and distinctions can be seen to emerge. Edwards has already distinguished between the meaning of life in the cosmic sense and the meaning of life in the terrestrial sense. He now observes that there are two main positions, that of the believer and that of non-believer and he further

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1) P Edwards : op cit., page 472

2) P Edwards : op cit., page 473

3) P Edwards : op cit., page 472

4) J Milton : op cit., Sonnet Vll

5) J Milton : op cit., Sonnet XlX

distinguishes between optimists and pessimists.1)

He formulates the question "what is the meaning of life?" by asking two related questions "is human life ever worthwhile?" and "does or can human life have any meaning?"2)

Believer's views. For many religious thinkers the answers to Edwards' two questions are "Yes", with "the proviso that these answers would not be justified unless two of the basic propositions of most Western religions were true - that human life is part of a divinely ordained cosmic scheme and that after death at least some human beings will be rewarded with eternal bliss."3)

Unbeliever's views. According to Edwards, some "unbelievers" would agree with the religious thinkers that his two questions must be given negative answers if there is no God and if death means personal annihilation. Having rejected the claims of religion, they therefore conclude that life is not worthwhile and that it is devoid of meaning. Thinkers who hold this view include Schopenhauer and, for a time,Tolstoy. Edwards calls such thinkers pessimists.

Some unbelievers, on the other hand, maintain that life can be worthwhile and have meaning in some humanly important sense even if the religious world-view is rejected. Nietzsche and, among contemporary philosophers Karl Popper and Kurt Baier are two who share this view.

Schopenhauer and Tolstoy. Neither thinker, in Edwards' view, distinguished between the questions, "is human life ever worthwhile?" and, "does or can human life have any meaning?" Having rejected the claims of religion life became devoid of meaning. They concluded that death is better than life because present life is not followed by eternal bliss.

Tolstoy, thinking of the time when he would no longer exist, considered life to be a "stupid fraud". Why make any effort? For Schopenhauer, "the world, and therefore man too, is something which really ought not to exist".4)

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1) P Edwards : op cit., page 471
2) P Edwards : op cit., page 467
3) P Edwards : op cit., page 467
4) Arthur Schopenhauer : Essays and Aphorisms, Penguin Books, England, 1970, page 50

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Life, however, is not without meaning and purpose. He observes bitterly that "it is absurd to suppose that the endless affliction of which the world is everywhere full .... should be purposeless".[1]) But he regrets the "perishability of all things". Present pleasures are over in a moment, and once over, might just as well never have been. It might be argued that present sorrows too are soon over. That is no consolation to Schopenhauer. To him it is all one whether one has been happy or not if life is now at an end. Life is a succession of fleeting moments which, once gone, belong forever to the past.

Tolstoy, too, was deeply preoccupied with the meaning of life and was obsessed by the thought of man's greatest efforts and best hopes being defeated by death.

The reasoning of Schopenhauer and Tolstoy appears to be that death is something terrible because it terminates the possibility of the experiences we value. Therefore, it is inferred, nothing is worth doing and so death is better than life.

Edwards remarks that the conclusion is inconsistent. Firstly, it is argued that death is a horrible evil. Secondly, it is said that death is better than life. But death is adjudged a horrible evil precisely because it brings life to an end, and this implies that life has some positive value.[2])

Schopenhauer says that "the most insignificant present has over the most significant past the advantage of actuality, which means that the former bears to the latter the relationship of something to nothing".[3])

Schopenhauer prefers actuality to nothing and yet infers that because "actuality" perishes the world ought never to have existed.

However, that life can be worthwhile in the terrestrial sense, whether or not any meaning is attached to it in the cosmic sense, surely does

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1) A Schopenhauer : op cit., page 41
2) P Edwards : op cit, page 470
3) A Schopenhauer : op cit., page 51

not depend on whether life comes to an end or not.

"It is true," said Epicurus, "that the Gods are immortal, but the perfection of happiness does not depend on its continuation over infinite time".[1])

Another criticism by Edwards of the imputation that death is better than life is that death is not open to inspection. If two things are to be evaluated relative to each other, both must be accessible for examination or experience. The pessimist, however, asserts that there is no after-life so death is not a possible object of experience. Furthermore, the pessimist grants that life would be meaningful if there were an after-life of eternal bliss. Eternal bliss is then taken as not requiring justification. But, then, does bliss in this life require justification? The answer of the pessimist presumably is that bliss in this life is not eternal.

The answer to religious apologists and pessimists like Schopenhauer and Tolstoy who maintained that "all striving is pointless if it is without final consequence",[2]) is that striving is not pointless if it achieves what it is intended to achieve. It follows that one's goals should be realistic. Tolstoy remarked : "If I were told that I could write a novel in which I could indisputably establish as true my point of view on all social questions, I would not dedicate two hours to such a work; but if I were told that what I wrote would be read twenty years from now ... then I would dedicate all my existence and all my powers to it"[3]) He evidently regarded the "enduring" as more important than the "truth". "To bring into consideration what will or will not happen in the future is irrelevant,"[4]) Edwards observed. We live in the present.

This is no answer, though, to the regret which Tolstoy felt at the thought of the death of those he loved and of his own death, and the regret expressed by Schopenhauer at the "perishability of all things".

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1) Epicurus : Basic Doctrines, 1920, in J M Rust : Epicurus, an Introduction, Cambridge University Press, 1972, page 159

2) P Edwards : op cit., page 471

3) Leo Tolstoy : War and Peace, Vol 1 (Introduction p 4) Penguin Books, England, 1971

P Edwards : op cit., page 471

Many of Titian's paintings reflect a concern with the nature of life and death, the transcience of human life, and the destructive power of time. The idea of transcience and death appears to be the theme of his Young Woman Doing Her Hair (Louvre, Paris). A young woman is shown arranging her hair in front of a mirror held by her lover, with another mirror behind her. The man is "in so deep a shadow that the woman seems to be alone with her thoughts".[1] Panofsky interprets the "apparently unmotivated sadness of her look as betraying a preoccupation with the transcience of her beauty and sees the painting as the evocation of "a vision of love overshadowed by the threat of time".[2]

Titian's painting evokes regret at the idea of transcience and death. Tolstoy and Schopenhauer express regret too but, whereas Titian leaves it at that, the two thinkers go on to draw the conclusion that death is better than life. That their inferences are open to the criticism that they are contradictory is no reason for them to have kept silent. By making their inferences explicit they open them for examination and criticism.

But a difference in approach between writers and philosophers on the one hand and artists on the other hand must be emphasised. That artists are less explicit than writers makes it more difficult to uncover meaning in the work of art. From the writer and the philosopher we want opinions and advice. Merleau-Ponty observes that the artist prefers "to hold the world suspended"[3] before our eyes. The artist does manage to suggest meanings by hints and implication, however, even though his intentions are not always clear and indeed may not be realised quite as he intended.

Meaning of Life and Meaning in Life.

Nietzsche. Among unbelievers who claim that life can have meaning in some humanly important sense is Nietzsche who shows the importance of being actively involved in the struggle to find meaning for oneself.

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1) Erwin Panofsky : Problems in Titian, Mostly Iconographic, New York University Press, New York, 1969, page 92
2) Erwin Panofsky : op cit., page 94
3) M Merleau-Ponty : op cit., page 57

/ 18 ... ...

His distinctive contribution to European thought was to recognise and face the consequences of radical change in the nature of that thought. His philosophy was a response to the nihilism consequent upon the Platonic-Christian metaphysics which he, incidentally, hastened and attempted to replace with his own philosophy of immanence. Anticipating modern attitudes, he wrote, : "I beseech you, my brothers, remain faithful to the earth and do not believe those who speak to you of other-worldly hopes."[1])

From Kant's denial of the validity of God, the conclusion had been drawn by some that there is no God. Schopenhauer decisively rejected God. Nietzsche approved of Schopenhauer's atheism and also noted that in Darwinism there was no appeal to a supernatural agency and no theological reference. If then there was no design or purpose, Nietzsche concluded that the universe is meaningless.

From Darwin's implication that man is part of nature and that nature could be conceived without reference to God, Nietzsche reasoned that, if there was any meaning to man's existence it had to be derived from within nature. Man is not, after all, dependent upon God's grace but must strive to raise himself above the senseless flux. There is no meaning in life other than the meaning man gives his life. In other words, God the Creator is replaced by man the creator.

Accordingly, Nietzsche abandoned the idea of a universal morality. There should be as many moralities as there are individuals. Sincerity and authentic behaviour (to be taken by up twentieth-century existentialists) demand that each person chooses his own way, corresponding to his own true needs. "The way", he said, "does not exist!"[2]) He has discovered himself who says : "This is my good and evil"[3])

Nietzsche criticised Christianity for adjuring man to adhere to a common morality. According to him, this encouraged conformity and the habit in men of looking outside themselves for guidance.

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1) Friedrich Nietzsche : Thus Spoke Zarathustra, Penguin Books, England, 1969, page 42
2) Friedrich Nietzsche : op cit., page 213
3) Friedrich Nietzsche : op cit., page 212

Consequently, they lost the power to create and it was always the uncreative who were "constrained to transfer the value of life to a life after death!"[1])

There is a great deal in Nietzsche's writings that is contradictory, rhapsodic and many people today find his notion of the Overman eccentric. But more enduring influences have been his exhortations to man - living in a nihilistic and secular age - to be self-sufficient, affirm his existence, to give meaning to his life and to create his own values.

Kurt Baier. Baier deals with the problem that is posed by science. He observes that the medieval world-picture provided life with a purpose, hence medieval Christians could believe that life had a meaning. "The scientific account of the world takes away life's purpose"[2]) and for many people it follows that in doing so it takes away life's meaning.

The scientific approach has encouraged us to look for a natural explanation of anything and everything. It has given us an "immensely greater measure of understanding and control over the universe than any other way".[3]) As a result many thinking people have come to feel that "the Christian attitudes towards the world and human existence are inappropriate".[4]) Science has convinced them that "the universe and human existence in it are without a purpose and therefore devoid of meaning".[5])

Baier argues that acceptance of the scientific world picture cannot be one's reason for belief that the universe is unintelligible and therefore meaningless. He points out that there are two quite different senses of "purpose". There is purpose of life and purpose in life. Has science deprived human life of purpose in both senses? And if not, he asks, is it a harmless sense in which human existence has been robbed of purpose? Could human existence still have meaning if it did not have a purpose in that sense?[6])

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1) F Nietzsche : The Will to Power, trans by W Kaufmann and R J Hollingdale, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, London, 1967, Note 666 Page 351
2) Kurt Baier : The Meaning of Life, in 20th Century Philosophy, : The Analytic Tradition, ed by M Weitz, The Free Press, New York p336
3) Kurt Baier : op cit., page 364
4) Kurt Baier : op cit., page 364
5) Kurt Baier : op cit., page 364
6) Kurt Baier : op cit., page 367

/ 20 ... ...

The Christian and the scientific world pictures differ fundamentally on this point, he acknowledges. The scientific picture robs man of purpose of life. It sees him as a being with no purpose allotted to him by anyone but himself. It robs him of any goal, purpose or destiny appointed for him by any outside agency.1)

According to the Christian world picture, on the other hand, man is "a creature, a divine artefact, something halfway between a robot (manufactured) and an animal (alive) ... with a purpose or task assigned to him by his Maker."2)

However, lack of purpose in this sense, Baier thinks, does not in any way detract from the meaningfulness of life. If science has robbed human existence of purpose in this sense no great harm is done.

People are mistaken who conclude that there can be no purpose in life because there is no purpose of life. It is wrong to think that this life or that can have meaning only if life as such has meaning. Your life may have meaning while mine has not. Your life may have meaning for you.

Science, in Baier's opinion has not robbed us of any purpose in life. It has, in fact, furnished us with enormously greater power to achieve these purposes. Incidentally, he remarks, the job of ploughing, the hiring of labourers can be done with purpose or without purpose.

Furthermore we do not think more or less highly of a thing for having or not having a purpose (in the sense of having a function). A row of trees growing near a farm may or may not have a purpose, but can be admired because it is pleasant to look at.

We do not disparage a dog, he says, when we say that it has no purpose. To attribute to a human being a purpose in that sense is positively offensive. "If ... I ask a man ... 'what is your purpose?' I am insulting him".3)

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1) K Baier : op cit., page 367
2) K Baier : op cit., page 367
3) K Baier : op cit., page 367

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According to Baier, then, a man can have a purpose in life whether or not there is a purpose of life. A scientific world picture provides no reason for saying that life is meaningless, but on the contrary, every reason for saying that there are many lives which are meaningful and significant.[1])

Karl Popper. Popper criticises the Christian notion of a divine plan. It leads, he warns, to the temptation of thinking that "God reveals Himself in history; that history has meaning; and that its meaning is the purpose of God"[2])

History has no meaning, he insists. We give it a meaning. There can be no history of the past, "as it actually happened". There "can only be historical interpretations, and none of them final; and every generation has a right to frame its own".[3])

It is justifiable to interpret history from a Christian point of view, he writes, and acknowledges that we owe much of our aims and ends of humanitarianism, freedom, and equality to the influence of Christianity. But, he maintains that one should endeavour to make these ends succeed, "not for the sake of success or of one's justification by history, but for their own sake".[4]) This implies that the ends are worthwhile, or have value, in themselves.

Although history has no ends, we can impose these ends of ours upon it. "Although history has no meaning, we can give it a meaning", and, "ultimately, we may say the same about the 'meaning of life'. It is up to us to decide what shall be our purpose in life, to determine our ends".[5])

Popper's criticism is aimed at all "historicists - religious or Marxist. The latter claim to have discovered a dialectical law of "human nature", according to which history must inevitably bring forth the socialist commonwealth of the world".[6])

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1) K Baier : op cit., page 379
2) K Popper : op cit., page 258
3) K Popper : op cit., page 255
4) K Popper : op cit., page 261
5) K Popper : op cit., page 265
6) K Popper : op cit., page 260

But, says Popper, this implies that even Fascism then must lead to that commonwealth. A further contradiction is that it is deemed necessary, by military force and political subversion, to encourage this "inevitable" dispensation.

The historicist is making the mistake, in Popper's view, of asking an irrational, apparently factual question : "which way are we going? What, in essence, is the part that history has destined us to play?"[1] The rational question, he says, would be : "what are we to choose as our most urgent problems, how did they arise, and along what road may we proceed to solve them?"[2] For it is up to us to decide what shall be our purpose in life, not "the history of mankind" that determines, by its inherent laws, our problems, our future, and even our point of view".[3]

Our purpose in life rests with us, he concludes, with "the clarity of our conception of our ends, and with the realism of their choice"[4] It is up to us, then, to seek for the most rationally definable values which will assist in making our lives meaningful.

Summary. The increasing secularisation of the world has been noted and with it a growing concern for questions about meaning in life. Various senses of meaning in life have been discussed : the sense of meaninglessness arising from alienation, self-deception, bad faith, the distinction between the meaning of life and meaning in life.

The views of Nietzsche, Baier and Popper have been stressed. Nietzsche, it was observed, claimed that meaning could be found in this world - it was not necessary to look for it in another world or another life. Baier pointed out that, although the scientific world picture robs man of the purpose of life it does not deny him a meaningful life. Popper criticises the notion of a divine or a Marxist plan in which man plays his duly appointed role. It is up to us, he says, to decide what shall be our purpose in life, to determine the values which will make our lives meaningful.

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1) K R Popper : op cit., page 255
2) K R Popper : op cit., page 255
3) K R Popper : op cit., page 256
4) K R Popper : op cit ., page 266

One place to look for meaning in life is in the work of art. However, a difference in approach from that of writers and philosophers has been noted. We expect opninions and advice from writers and philosophers. The artist is less direct, though, and suggests rather than comments explicitly. Nevertheless, in a secular age the artist in sympathy with thinkers like Nietzsche, Baier and Popper, attempts to find meaning in life rather than within the framework of religion. This tendency will be noticed from the time of the Renaissance onwards. Instead of religious themes we can expect to find the artist involved with themes such as alienation, self-identity, self-deception, life and death, and personal relationships like love and jealousy.

THE WORK OF ART

CHAPTER II

INTRODUCTORY SUMMARY. Edward Lucie-Smith has claimed that Pop Art enables us to "take a fresh look at things familiar to us, yet uprooted from their ordinary context, and reflect upon the meanings of contemporary existence".[1)]

My aim in this chapter is to draw attention to the role of works of art in the search for significance, the attempt to find meaning in life. I want to consider the view that many, if not all, works of art either express or indirectly reflect a concern for meaning in life.

Any connection, however, between works of art and a concern for meaning in life must depend upon what one takes to be the meaning of the work of art. What is its nature and what is its function?

A) As a basis for argument, I put forward a modification of John Hosper's definition of the aesthetic experience of the work of art. Works of art, he says, are those man-made objects that function either entirely or primarily aesthetically in human experience. They function aesthetically by rendering us sensuous values, formal values, and "life" values. I suggest that under "life" values be subsumed a concern for meaning in life.

Firstly, some works of art, I will argue, convey meanings in life through their subject matter and this is a legitimate, aesthetic function. Secondly, many works of art reflect meanings in life even if this is not consciously intended by the artist.

B) Possible objections are considered. An objection that no definition at all could be found to cover works of art in general is examined. Objections by Formalists that "life" values

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1) Edward Lucie-Smith : Pop Art in Concepts of Modern Art, edited by N Stangos and C Finch, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1974, page 228

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are aesthetically irrelevant is also considered.

C) I conclude this chapter by looking at some of the senses in which art may be said to give meaning to life.

In this chapter I propose to examine some of the problems involved in saying that works of art are, or may be, concerned with meaning in life. It may be objected, for instance, that the function of a work of art is solely to produce an aesthetic response - defined as some sort of pleasurable, disinterested state of mind - and, further, that the work of art is autonomous.

Where does a concern for meaning in life fit in, if one is disinterested in the subject matter and the work of art is autonomous? How does one define a work of art?

A) Definition of a work of art. Of the many attempts to define a work of art, one that takes into account the infinite variety without being too vague is by John Hospers. Works of art, he says, are "those man-made objects that function either entirely or primarily aesthetically in human experience"[1]) He goes on to explain the "aesthetic function" by distinguishing the ways in which we can attend to works of art. There are several different kinds of values which art has to render us. Three principal kinds are "sensuous values", "formal values" and "life values".

Sensuous Values in a work of art (or in nature) are apprehended by the "aesthetic" observer when he takes satisfaction in the purely sensuous characteristics of the phenomenal object. Sensuous values are found when we delight in texture, colour, and tone in the Chinese woodcut, the medieval illustrated manuscript, or the deep blue sky.

Formal Values. We do not long remain satisfied by the quality

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1) John Hospers : Problems of Art, in The Encyclopedia of Philosophy Edited by P Edwards, Vol 1, MacMillan The Free Press, New York, 1967, page 40

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of single tones or colours, he continues, but come to notice the complex formal relationships within the work of art - the total inter-relations of parts, the over-all organization of the work.

An important formal property is unity. However, if monotony is to be avoided, there must be "variety in unity". The unified object "should contain within itself a large number of diverse elements, each of which in some way contributes to the total integration of the unified whole".[1])

Other formal properties or principles include the theme or dominant motif and balance (the arrangement of the parts in an aesthetically pleasing order).

Life Values. Sensuous and formal values are both "concerned with what the work contains in its very medium",[2]) that is, colours and shapes. But there are other values, "imported from the life outside art and these are not contained in the medium but are conveyed through the medium"[3]). Hospers is now referring to works of art that are representative, such as a painting of the Crucifixion, which cannot be fully appreciated unless we have a certain amount of knowledge outside art.

A problem now arises. Are "life values" relevant to the "aesthetic" enjoyment of a work of art? They are, according to Hospers, who has included them in the different kinds of aesthetic values which art has to render us. And yet, by saying that they are "imported from the life outside art", he betrays an uneasy feeling that they are not integral to the work of art.

Other writers on art, such as Isenberg and Osborne are more explicit. These writers take the position which Hospers call Isolationism. They maintain that to appreciate a work of art "we do nothing but look at it".[4]) A work of art should be approached as an exercise in pure form, they say, and "life values" are irrelevant.

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1) John Hospers : op cit., page 43
2) John Hospers : op cit., page 44
3) John Hospers : op cit., page 44
4) John Hospers : ibid, page 44

/ 27 ... ...

Opposing the Isolationist position are supporters of the view known as Contextualism. They maintain that the work of art should be apprehended in its setting. Historical knowledge "feeds into" the work of art. An understanding of the Greek view on "Hubris", the immoderate presumption of the man who seeks to place himself on a level with the gods, adds considerably to one's appreciation of a play by Sophocles.

These two opposing views are dependent, according to Hospers, on a Formalist theory (in the case of Isolationism), and on such theories as Expressionism and Symbolism (in the case of Contextualism).

Hospers' definition does not rule out the possibility that works of art are concerned in some way with meaning in life. I propose for consideration, then, a slight modification of Hospers' definition of a work of art by including a concern for meaning in life.

Works of art are those man-made objects that function either entirely or primarily aesthetically in human experience. They convey sensuous and formal values which are concerned with what the work contains in its very medium. They convey, too, values and meanings imported from the life outside art through the medium of the work of art. (The works of art I will be concerned with are paintings and sculpture unless specifically indicated.) The main objection to this definition will come from Formalists.

The Formalist position, sometimes described as the "aesthetic attitude", includes a belief in the autonomy of art and the exercise of the "sensibility" by means of the disinterested aesthetic experience of "purely formalistic properties of the work of art".[1]) "Life" values are regarded as irrelevant because they imply an instrumentalist view of the function of art and lead to the reduction of art to the level of propaganda.

Before considering the objections arising from the Formalist position however, the objection that no definition at all could be found to cover all works of art must be dealt with.

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1) Harold Osborne : Aesthetics and Art History, Longmans, London 1968, page 10

B) Objections.

ii) Is a definition feasible? Is there a common feature in all works of art?

Strawson, asking if anything clear and general could be said about an aesthetic assessment, draws attention to the diversity of "the items and kinds of items of which we may make an aesthetic assessment".1) Following Wittgenstein's treatment of common names, he is inclined to answer, "No".

Kennick, more definitely, thinks that the assumption that, despite their differences, all works of art must possess some common nature, is mistaken. He regards as fruitless the notion that to think that if we look long enough we shall find the common denominator to a "poem by Donne or Keats, a novel by George Eliot or Joseph Conrad, or a play by Sophocles or Shakespeare ... pictures by Giotto and Cezanne and the Chinese masters".2)

Wittgenstein held that it was mistaken to think that in every case where things are called by the same name there is a quality that is common to them all. He spoke instead of "family resemblances".

Of games he remarked that "if you look at them you will not see something that is common to all, but similarities, relationships ... look for example at board-games, with their multifarious relationships. Now pass to card-games; here you find many correspondences with the first group, but many common features drop out, and others appear. When we pass next to ball-games, much that is common is retained, but much is lost".3)

Bambrough clarified Wittgenstein's remarks with the help of a diagram.4)

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1) P F Strawson : Aesthetic Appraisal and Works of Art, in Freedom and Resentment and other Essays, Methuen,London, 1974, page 179

2) W S Kennick : Does Traditional Aesthetics Rest on a Mistake? edited by Cyril Barrett, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1965, pages 3 and 4

3) Ludwig Wittgenstein : Philosophical Investigations, translated by G E M Anscombe, Oxford University Press, London, 1953, pp 31e - 32e

4) Renford Bambrough : Universals and Family Resemblances, in Wittgenstein, the Philosophical Investigations edited by George Pitcher, MacMillan, London, 1968, pages 189, 190

e	d	c	b	a
ABCD	ABCE	ABDE	ACDE	BCDE

It will be noticed, he says, that each of the five objects e d c b a has four of the five features A B C D E and lacks the fifth. The missing feature is different in each of the five cases. It can easily be seen how natural it might be to apply the same word to a number of objects, he continues, although there is no common feature to all of them.

Bambrough thinks that Wittgenstein has thus correctly provided a solution to the problem of universals. At most, he agrees, we have "family resemblances". There is no common feature in activities such as games, even though we give them a common name. Wittgenstein's "solution" is a salutary warning in view of that "craving for generality" which encourages the search for a simple, single answer to philosophical problems.

But is it really a solution? From Bambrough's diagram, it is clear that there is no common feature to all the objects. A closer look at the nature of these features reveals, however, that it is not clear if they are particulars or universals.

Wittgenstein mentions tennis which has a complicated system of rules, but he draws our attention to other games which consist in just throwing the ball as high as one can. Some games are competitive, he says, others not.[1] Wittgenstein, it seems, is talking of determinate characteristics. The common feature he is looking for is not a universal but a particular.

Khatchadourian, in his article on Wittgenstein's "Family Resemblances", is more patient in his search for a common feature. He accepts Wittgenstein's contention that there are no "determinate or relatively determinate characteristics common to all things called games".[2]

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1) Ludwig Wittgenstein : Philosophische Grammatik, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1969, page 68

2) Haig Khatchadourian : Common Names and 'Family Resemblances', in Wittgenstein, (edited by George Pitcher) : op cit., page 209

/ 30 ... ...

However, he does find a feature common to all kinds of games : namely, "the capacity to serve a specific human need or needs"[1] and he finds that this capacity applies to all man-devised activities and man-made objects".[2]

Khatchadourian takes for his paradigm, "chairs", man-made objects designed to satisfy a need. He argues that the capacity to satisfy a need is implicit in the meaning of the common names we give to man-made things. A common definition of a chair, "separate seat for one", illustrates this clearly, he maintains. Chairs may be made of all sorts of different materials, "may be high or low, soft or hard, round or square or polygonal, straight or curved : and yet will not for that reason, be refused the name "chair" - so long as it can serve as a "separate seat for one".[3]

Maurice Mandelbaum, too, challenges Wittgenstein's reasoning and develops Khatchadourian's line of argument. He claims that games have in common a certain kind of purpose : "the potentiality of ... (an) absorbing non-practical interest to either participants or spectators".[4]

What Khatchadourian has said about chairs and Mandelbaum claimed for games, applies mutatis mutandis, I maintain, to other man-devised activities such as the production and enjoyment of those other man-made objects, namely works of art.

It follows, too, that Hospers' definition of works of art as "those man-made objects that function either entirely or primarily aesthetically in human experience", satisfies Khatchadourian's and Mandelbaum's criterion for a common feature in the exhibited determinate characteristics of works of art, finding it instead in the capacity of works of art to serve a specific human need, namely to function aesthetically in human experience.

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1) H Katchadourian : op cit., page 209
2) H Katchadourian : op cit., page 214
3) H Katchadourian : op cit., page 216
4) Maurice Mandelbaum : Family Resemblances and Generalisation Concerning the Arts, American Philosophical Quarterly, 1965, page 221

/ 31 ... ...

Hospers goes on to state that works of art convey sensuous and formal values which are contained in the work in its very medium - texture, colour, line, spatial and colour relationships. They convey, too, values and meanings (my modification) imported from the life outside art through the medium, that is, aesthetically.

How far, though, can one go in saying that all works of art convey meaning in life?

Not all works of art are painted on canvas. One could not say, either, that the subject matter of all works of art is about meaning in life, for instance, alienation, self-identity, life and death.

These themes are "determinate characteristics" and cannot be applied to all works of art.

However, Wittgenstein's argument does not rule out the possibility that all works of art in some way reflect attitudes to meaning in life. This is, in fact, the belief of iconologists. One of the main objects of iconographical research, says Panofsky, is to apprehend the "symbolical values" in works of art, their intrinsic meaning or content, by ascertaining those underlying principles which reveal the basic attitude of a nation, a period, a class, a religious or philosophical persuasion".1)

The effect on compositional methods of the introduction of new themes is emphasised by Panofsky. In the 14th and 15th centuries, he points out, the traditional type of the Nativity with the Virgin Mary reclining was frequently replaced by a new type which shows the Virgin kneeling before the Child in adoration. From a compositional point of view this change meant the substitution of a triangular scheme for a rectangular one .2)

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1) Erwin Panofsky : Studies in Iconology, Icon Editions, Harper and Row, New York, 1972, page 7

2) Erwin Panofsky : ibid. page 7

The harshness of technique in the works of the German Expressionist group known as "die Brücke" was directly related, it could be said, to their desire "to strip away the superficial mask of appearances" in the society of their time. In this way, it is maintained, many works of art indirectly reflect meaning in life.

Hospers' definition, as modified to include a concern with meaning in life, must then be further qualified.

1) Some works of art convey meaning in life as subject matter. This, I maintain, is a legitimate, aesthetic function. The Formalist view that "life" values are aesthetically irrelevant is incorrect, I argue.

2) Many works of art reflect meaning in life in some degree and this has an important bearing on the form taken by the work of art.

However, objections by Formalists have still to be met.

B) ii) Formalism or the Aesthetic Attitude.

Kant shares some of the responsiblity for the Formalistic theories of art which according to Osborne, express the aesthetic outlook "most characteristic of the last fifty or a hundred years".[1)]

Osborne, one of the chief proponents of Formalism, acknowledges this. It was Kant, he says, who differentiated the aesthetic experience, as a mode of awareness, from all forms of conceptual thinking and also distinguished "the logical laws of aesthetic judgements ... from that of judgements about utility and judgements about goodness."[2)]

It is an easy step from this to Osborne's own theory of

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1) H Osborne : op cit., page 10
2) H Osborne : op cit., page 115

Formalism. According to this theory, the world around us is apprehended by a kind of "direct perceptual or intuitional awareness without consideration of practical implications".[1] This awareness is called "aesthetic experience" or "aesthetic contemplation". Osborne describes this theory as formalistic since "by definition" it is what is called the formal properties of things rather than their practical or scientific significance which make them more or less adapted to aesthetic apprehension".[2]

It is "characteristic of the contemporary outlook in Aesthetics" he continues, "that .. works of art are thought of as things created in their own right .. as objects with their own autonomous values rather than as things intended primarily to be bearers of values extraneous to the furtherance of aesthetic experience".[3]

Art, he insists, cannot be reduced to a vehicle for the propagation of moral ideals.

From this cluster of ideas, gathered together under the name of Formalism, several strands of thought can be distinguished - each of which should be closely examined.

1) The Formalist claims to possess a criterion for aesthetic appraisal - but is a criterion necessary?

2) Is there a special kind of perception - the aesthetic perception?

3) Is aesthetic contemplation disinterested?

4) Formalists assert that works of art are autonomous, created in their own right.

5) Formal values only are valid.

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1) H Osborne : op cit., page 10
2) H Osborne : op cit., page 11
3) H Osborne : op cit., page 10

1) The Formalist's Criterion. The question "Is a common definition possible?" has been discussed. But is a criterion necessary? When we say that one particular work of art is better than another, do we presuppose certain standards or criteria?

Kennick thinks that it is a mistake to say that unless we have a criterion applicable to all works of art we cannot say what is good or bad art. He examines Osborne's belief that a "theory of the nature of artistic excellence is implicit in every critical assertion".[1] Osborne had also argued (Aesthetics and Criticism, page 93) that if correspondence with real or possible actuality is not a necessary condition of artistic excellence, then most certainly it is not and cannot be of itself an artistic virtue, or an aesthetic merit, in those works of literature where it happens to occur.

Kennick disagrees with Osborne. We can agree, he says, that correspondence with actuality is not a necessary condition of artistic excellence. But he thinks that "it does not follow that therefore it does not and cannot appear as a reason for such a judgement".[2] We can and do praise works of art, he points out, as works of art, ... for a variety of reasons.

Kennick is correct in pointing out the "non-sequitur" in Osborne's argument. But he is too hasty in concluding that it is a mistake therefore to think that critical appraisal of works of art presupposes a criterion of what is good or bad art. All that he is entitled to infer is that Osborne's criterion, which excludes non-formalistic or "life" values, is mistaken or that it is too narrow.

A criterion is helpful even if it is provisional. A working definition, widely framed and constantly modified, is nonetheless useful. Finality may not be possible, but a rough

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1) W E Kennick : op cit., page 11

2) W E Kennick : op cit., page 12

guide to indicate what one has in mind when assessing a work of art is essential if clarity is to be attained.

2) Is there a special kind of perception, called "aesthetic" perception? When Osborne claims that there is a kind of "direct perceptual or intentional awareness without practical implications", what exactly is meant? The words, without practical implications are presumably intended to differentiate the aesthetic experience from practical experiences. When one looks at a work of art aesthetically one is not looking at it from the point of view of an economist or judging it by military standards. According to the aesthetic attitude, one does not look at the work of art from a practical point of view; one looks at it with direct perceptual or intentional awareness. One focuses attention on the work itself. How? One perceives the painting. But surely there is something more than bare perception. A dog betrays bare perception (probably) when someone is playing the piano in the same room. He is not attending to the relationship of the forms - essential to the aesthetic attitude - but is merely aware of the sound.

To say that there is a special kind of perception called aesthetic perception is acceptable provided one does not mean that it is a "feeling" like a feeling of anger. It is to say no more than that one is attending to the formal relationships of properties in the work of art.[1])

3) Is the aesthetic attitude really disinterested? According to Formalists, to look at a work of art aesthetically, one is disinterested in the existence of the object represented. Schopenhauer's claim that the aesthetic experience is a will-less, non-practical state of contemplation has encouraged this view. What, then, is the status of subject matter in works of art? Is art concerned with objective reality?

For Kant, a judgement of beauty is a disinterested judgement concerning the pleasure which everyone ought to derive

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1) H Osborne : op cit., page 11

from the experience of form. The judgement, to be disinterested, implies that it is independent of any interest in the real existence of the object depicted. This is not to say that one is indifferent to the existence of the object, George Dickie points out, merely that the judgement is distinguishable from a practical judgement.1) One's interest in looking at the object or its representation is aesthetic rather than military or financial. One can be intensely interested in the outcome of a naval battle and at the same time appraise the visual effects of gunfire lighting up the sky.

From the time of Shaftesbury, however, it has been widely believed that interested or selfish desires are inimical to aesthetic appreciation. This is possibly due to thinking of desire or aesthetic perception as feeling or emotion. But a desire to possess a beautiful painting is not incompatible with an appreciation of the painting as a work of art. The contemplation of the qualities of a painting are simply conceptually distinct from the desire to possess it.

Nevertheless, Kant's view that the disinterested aesthetic judgement is independent of the interest in the real existence of the object has often been conflated with Plato's view that art is twice removed from reality. For Plato, the Form or Archetype alone possessed reality. A bunch of grapes was, accordingly, an imitation of the ideal form of the fruit and a painting of the grapes, therefore, an imitation of the imitation of the reality. As for poets, Plato said quite plainly that they have "no grasp of the reality". (600 e in Book X of the Republic.)2)

That the characters in a work of fiction have no "real" existence appears to bear out what Plato has to say about the real existence of objects (or representations of objects) in a work of art. Pickwick was not a real person.

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1) George Dickie : Aesthetics, An Introduction, Pegasus, New York, page 27
2) R C Cross and A D Woozley : Plato's Republic, a Philosophical Commentary, MacMillan, London, 1964, page 275

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But if the novel is not concerned with real persons and real situations, was it not concerned then with reality in any way? Surely Dickens, in writing about Pickwick or Micawber, was writing, if not about real persons, about human experience.

Beardsmore points out[1]) that Zola in Thérèse Raquin, Ibsen in A Doll's House, have written about men and women struggling with problems and difficulties of married life, that we can learn from the way the characters in these novels responded to the problems and that the situations which gave rise to them are like our own. We can identify with these fictional characters.

This is not to say that Zola and Ibsen have presented us with facts about human experience which could not be presented more accurately in a sociologist's report. It does, however, mean that novelists are concerned with how things are, what they mean, and that by presenting these things in a new light, they can bring a new understanding to human experience.

Isenberg is a writer on art who thinks that "real" life has no place in the work of art. As an example, he cites Alfred Doolittle, the cockney dustman of Shaw's Pygmalion, who returns to England in the last act a wealthy man - having been recommended to an American millionaire as the most original moralist in Great Britain. Isenberg claims that incidents like this are farcical "just because they are so wildly improbable, and without the belief in their improbability no farce".[2])

Another reading of the matter, however, is that Shaw is reminding us that changes of fortune are sometimes fortuitous and telling us something about some wealthy Americans - that their acumen in business is not necessarily accompanied by moral insight.

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1) R W Beardsmore : Art and Morality, MacMillan, London, 1971, page 62

2) A Isenberg : The Problem of Belief in C Barrett (ed): op cit., page 138

It must be concluded then, that the claim that aesthetic experience is disinterested needs to be treated with caution. The wish to distinguish the contemplation of the qualities of a work of art from any practical interest in the work or the objects represented should not be pressed too far. It does not follow that an interest in the objects represented is irrelevant or that an interest in the subject matter should be suppressed. Nor does it follow that the work has nothing important to say about human experience.

The attempt to show that social criticism in a work of literature is not a part of the aesthetic object when other aspects of the work are, makes the enjoyment of the work unnecessarily complicated. How one is to withhold one's interest from some parts in order to devote one's attention to the formal relations of the work is difficult to imagine. The "disinterested-attention theorist" explains that such a segregation is effected by a certain kind of attention, which can take as its objects only certain kinds of objects. However, there is a serious doubt that such a species of attention exists, according to George Dickie.[1] I think that it is possible to distinguish the formal aspects from the other aspects of the work but this is a conceptual activity and is undertaken at the risk of destroying the enjoyment of the work as an artistically unified whole.

4) Is the work of art autonomous? According to Osborne works of art "are thought of as things created in their own right ... as objects with their own autonomous values rather than things intended to be bearers of values extraneous to the furtherance of aesthetic experience".[2]

It is assumed by Formalists that, if the work of art is not autonomous, it therefore serves some other purpose which by definition cannot have anything to do with art. To this it might be objected that countless works of art commissioned

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1) George Dickie : op cit., page 55
2) H Osborne : op cit., page 10

in the service of religion would then be excluded as works of art. Osborne notes that works of art have been used as "religious implements, symbols for the glorification of rulers or ... institutions".[1] But they are regarded as works of art and Osborne's explanation is that somehow the formal properties (which he regards as the essence of the work of art), have managed to assert themselves. He admits that works of art "may embody and effectively promulgate social religious or other values".[2] But he regards this "instrumental" role as irrelevant to their quality as works of art.

It has already been seen that Kant's distinction between the disinterested aesthetic judgement and a practical interest in the real existence of the object represented was conflated by Formalists with Plato's denial that art has any concern with reality.

The notion of the autonomy of works of art is based, too, on a conflation of ideas. This time the claim that the aesthetic experience is disinterested has been conflated with the idea of an activity as a good or end in itself, stemming from Aristotle. The resulting conflated notion of an aesthetic experience as a disinterested end in itself is then contrasted with practical or utilitarian judgements which rest upon the means-end relationship.

Osborne accordingly asserts that works of art are to be thought of as autonomous. Beardsmore, however, says that the "autonomist" is mistakenly assuming that "since aesthetic goods cannot be construed as means to ends, they must therefore be intelligible in isolation from the rest of life".[3] He remarks that the autonomist is quite right in rejecting the extreme instrumentalist's assumption that art should function as a carrier for religious or state propaganda. It does not follow though, he argues, that the significance of art is unrelated to other activities in life.

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1) H Osborne : op cit., page 6
2) H Osborne : op cit., page 10
3) R W Beardsmore : op cit., page 35

He recalls an observation by Wittgenstein on mathematical signs : "It is their use outside mathematics, in other words the meaning of the signs, that makes the sign-game mathematics".[1] He argues that just as the propositions of mathematics are not isolated from activities like measuring, buying or selling, building and counting," so the poet's work, and the problems and discoveries which are a part of it, will not be isolated from other aspects of his life and the life of his society".[2]

Beardsmore correctly points out that the autonomist's inference from the aesthetic experience as a good in itself, that is, worthwhile for its own sake, to the aesthetic experience as isolated from the rest of life, that is, disinterested, is mistaken. He has noticed that the distinction between "disinterested" aesthetic contemplation and practical or utilitarian judgements as a good in itself and utilitarian judgements which are based upon the means-end relationship. He does not see, however, that the two notions (although distinct) are not incompatible with one another.

A football game can be enjoyed as a game - for itself. It can be judged from an aesthetic point of view, as Strawson noticed.[3] Neither of these two ways of watching the game is incompatible, though, with the fact that the game may be a means to an end. Perhaps it is being played for money or for national prestige. It may have been sponsored by a firm of brewers or a cigarette manufacturer.

In the same way, a work of art may be enjoyed for itself, as a work of art, regardless of whether it was commissioned by a Church for an altarpiece or by an affluent Dutch burgher who wanted to impress his neighbours.

In this connection it might not be out of place to comment on art considered for the sake of investment. In contemporary Western society this tendency has reached alarming

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1) Ludwig Wittgenstein : Remarks on Mathematics, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1956, page 133

2) R W Beardsmore : op cit., page 49

3) P F Strawson : op cit., page 179

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proportions. Sotheby's, the London art dealers, have set up profitable branches in New York and other parts of the world. It is to be regretted that this interest in art is spurious and could blind people to the intrinsic values in works of art. An interest in art as investment is not, however, incompatible with an appreciation of such intrinsic values.

5) Are formal values alone admissible in aesthetic appraisal?
Osborne quite explicitly claims that "it is what are called the formal properties of things rather than their practical or scientific significance which make them more or less adapted to aesthetic apprehension".[1] Again, works of art have been used as "religious implements, symbols for the glorification of rulers"[2] and this has blinded the aesthetic observer to their formal properties, the "essential" qualities of works of art.

Kant had already maintained that our "aesthetic" observation is of formal properties alone. In the aesthetic contemplation of a flower or a sunset our pleasure is derived, he said, from the "apprehension of the form of an object (its shape, delineation, arrangement or pattern) without the mediation of a reflective idea as to its function, utility or perfection".[3]

Kant excludes from his definition of aesthetic appreciation portraits, sculpture and architecture - almost everything, Knox remarks,that possesses the least vestige of meaning. He includes those objects, flowers and sunsets, "which mean nothing in themselves and represent nothing".[4]

Again, for Kant a building would please the eye aesthetically if only "it were not to be a church".[5] He failed to

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1) H Osborne : op cit., page 11
2) H Osborne : op cit., page 6
3) Immanuel Kant : The Critique of Judgement translated by J C Meredith, Oxford University Press, 1964, page 55
4) I Knox : The Aesthetic Theories of Kant, Hegel and Schopenhauer, Thames & Hudson, London, 1958, page 39
5) I Kant : op cit., page 73

see that its use and its beauty can blend into an aesthetically pleasing harmony.

Formalists then, distinguish between the formal properties in a work of art and the "extraneous" content which is brought into the work. This is followed by the mistaken assumption that, because one can distinguish conceptually between the formal properties and the content of subject matter, that the one set is essential to the work and the other aesthetically irrelevant. Reid has observed, however, that formal properties and subject matter may be conceptually distinguishable but, he says, they are "aesthetically indivisible in the unity which is the work of art".[1])

Formalists, it seems, have completely misunderstood the relationship between formal properties and content. They have made what Ryle has called a category mistake. Ryle pointed out that team-spirit is not another thing "such that we can say that the bowler first bowls and then exhibits team-spirit".[2]) It is the manner in which he bowls, giving of his best or, perhaps, bowling in accordance with his captain's tactics rather than his own inclination. The foreigner watching his first game of cricket expecting to find something called team-spirit is, in Ryle's view, creating entities where none exist. In the same way, Osborne and other formalists appear to be hypostatizing formal properties.

Formal properties are conceptually distinguishable from the subject matter of the work of art, but it might be more accurate to say that these formal properties are, in fact, the way the subject matter of the work is organised.

Gombrich goes so far as to claim that the form taken by the work of art is dependent on the function that the work is intended to serve. On image "intended to reveal a higher reality of religion or philosophy will assume a different

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1) L A Reid : Meaning in the Arts, Allen & Unwin, London 1969 page 53

2) Gilbert Ryle : The Concept of Mind, Hutchinson, London, 1949, page 17

form from one that aims at the imitation of appearances".[1]) There will be symbolic imagery in the religious work and none at all in the latter.

The main objections to a definition of works of art which claims that some works of art convey meaning in life through their subject matter and that many works of art reflect meaning in life in some degree, have come from the cluster of ideas which make up the Formalist position. That they do not threaten this definition can be seen when they are examined one by one.

The possibility of a common definition has been discussed and Hospers' definition (in modified form) appears to be logically feasible. Osborne's "formalist" criterion for a work of art has been shown to be too narrow, excluding as it does, "life" values or subject matter from the aesthetic experience. A special kind of perception, called aesthetic perception, is rejected if this is meant as a feeling or emotion but found to be acceptable if taken as the apprehension of formal relationships. The formalists' notions of the aesthetic experience as disinterested and the work of art as autonomous have been shown to rest on confusion of thought and the conflation of ideas. Finally, it has been argued that form and matter cannot be separated, except conceptually, in a work of art. It is a mistake to isolate form as the essential element. Form, it is suggested, is simply the way subject matter is organised or shaped and it has been claimed (by Gombrich) that form is dependent on the function the work is intended to serve, for example, to reveal "a higher reality" of religion or philosophy.

Further questions arise concerning the relationship between the work of art and questions about meaning in life.

C) Does art give meaning to life? If so, in what sense or senses does it give meaning?

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1) E H Gombrich : Symbolic Images, Studies in the Art of the Renaissance, Phaidon, London, 1972, page Vlll

1) For the artist and his audience art can give meaning - just as making money can give meaning to some people's lives. In this sense, art provides some people with a purpose in life. It can be added, however, that art has the advantage of being a self-rewarding activity.[1] Making money is usually justified in terms of other ends.

2) Another sense in which art can give meaning to life is that art can make life seem worthwhile. In this sense, art is not seen as a self-rewarding activity but as a means to an end. This end is biological, according to Nietzsche. Nietzsche and Berenson have both drawn attention to the life-enhancing qualities of art. Nietzsche claims that art is "an enhancement of the feeling of life".[2] The beautiful he says, stands "within the general category of the biological values of what is useful, beneficient, life-enhancing".[3] Art is a "celebration" of the rightness of things and this imbues one with a sense of well-being.

The life-enhancing qualities of the art of all times have been noted by Berenson, although he concentrated most of his attention on the Italian painters of the Renaissance. Only works of art can be life-enhancing, he claims, and by life-enhancement he means "the increased sense of power and vitality" due to "the sense of unexpected ease in the exercise of our functions, induced by the arts of visual representation".[4] The highest achievements of sculpture and painting have, according to Berenson, the ability to portray the heroes, the gods, the saints in their ecstasy, in their transfiguration. Berenson believes that in enjoying these works of art we identify ourselves with the people and the ensuing state is one of "intellectual triumph, pride and exaltation".[5]

The work of art must appeal, however, "to the whole of one's

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1) H Osborne : op cit., page 202 - 208
2) Friedrich Nietzsche : op cit., Note 802
3) Friedrich Nietzsche : op cit., Note 804
4) Bernard Berenson : Aesthetics and History, Constable, London, 1950, pages 130, 131
5) Bernard Berenson : op cit., page 131

being, to one's senses, nerves, muscles, viscera, and to one's feeling for direction, for support and weight, for balance, for stresses and counter-stresses".1)

Schopenhauer also saw art as a means to an end. He did not, however, regard it as life-enhancing but as providing relief from the futile struggle for existence. Art affords a means of escape by transforming us into disinterested spectators.2)

For Nietzsche and Berenson, art enables us to enter more fully into living - for Schopenhauer it helps us to endure life even though it does not actually make life seem worthwhile.

3) How do works of art convey or reflect meanings in life?

a) Poems, plays and novels often express a wide variety of attitudes to life, death and other aspects of meaning in life. Sometimes the meaning of life is discussed explicitly. Shakespeare gave us Hamlet who lacked decision because he doubted if it was worthwhile to do anything, and Macbeth who acted quickly and decisively and then found that life had no meaning. Life for him became a tale

"Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing"

Act V Scene 5, Macbeth

Tolstoy, on the question of the meaning of life, which he faced directly, suggested in his novel War and Peace that the individual life has meaning only as part of a whole, in merging one's life with that of others. His belief rested upon the assurance that "God is everywhere" and with this realisation "the awful question - the question why?" quite simply no longer existed for him.3)

For the twentieth-century writer Samuel Beckett, the concept of purpose and the meaning of life is beyond

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1) B Berenson : op cit., page 58

2) A Schopenhauer : The World as Will and Idea, Vol 1 (translated by R B Haldane & J Kemp; Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, London 1907 page 405

3) Leo Tolstoy : Op cit., page 1332

comprehension. God's existence is doubtful, "There are places in nature from which God would appear to be absent" he remarks sardonically.[1]

In his novels and plays, Beckett conveys the uneasiness felt by many people today that the meaning of life has evaded us.

"Did what they were looking for exist?" two old men ask themselves. "What were they looking for?"[2]

b) Paintings and Sculpture. A concern with questions about the meaning in life is more difficult to discover in paintings. It is through the symbolic image, Gombrich claims, that the dominant meaning of many pictures is communicated. He explains that the image has two main functions - that of representation and that of symbolization. There is also the possibility of "another kind of symbolism, not conventional but private, through which an image can become the expression of the artist's conscious or unconscious mind".[3] Accordingly, a painting may represent a woman, and symbolize an idea, and in Delacroix's Liberty Leading the People (Louvre, Paris), perfectly express the struggle for freedom.

Very often the meaning is hidden. The iconological studies undertaken by Gombrich and Panofsky, however, have shown how a knowledge of the symbolism employed in mythological paintings of the Renaissance can lead to an interpretation completely different to that assumed when the images are taken as literal statements. Gombrich and Panofsky have revealed, for instance, how concerned Renaissance painters were with themes such as the transitoriness of life, and Platonic ideas (mingled with Christian aspirations) of love, beauty and the good.

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1) Samuel Beckett : op cit., page 72
2) Samuel Beckett : op cit., page 23
3) E H Gomrich : Symbolic Images, Studies in the Art of the Renaissance, Phaidon, London 1972, pages 124, 125

Non-figurative or "abstract" paintings and most music are not concerned with directly expressing or conveying ideas concerning meaning in life. But many works of art, it is argued, indirectly reflect an attitude to meanings in life. According to Jaffé, even the apparently neutral landscape paintings of Corot reflected a belief in an ordered world in which man has an assured place.[1]) The same writer finds that the Surrealists reflect a view felt by many others that the age which accompanied and followed the First World War was irrational and senseless.[2])

In conclusion, then, it is contended that works of art are those man-made objects that function aesthetically in human experience. They convey sensuous and formal values and values and meanings taken from living experience. Some works of art convey meaning in life through their subject matter. Many works of art reflect meaning in life in some degree and this has a bearing on the form taken by the works of art. Possible objections by Formalists have been examined and do not appear to invalidate these contentions. In the next chapter ten well-known works of art will be examined solely from the point of view of illustrating the claims that :

a) Some works of art convey meanings in life through their subject matter and;

b) Many works of art reflect meanings in life in some degree.

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1) Hans L C Jaffé : Historie Générale de la Peinture XIXe et XXe Siécles, Flammarion, Paris, 1968, page 7

2) Hans L C Jaffé : op cit., page 15

CHAPTER III

INTRODUCTORY SUMMARY

In looking at these ten works (a copy of a Greek bronze and nine paintings), I have a particular aim. I am not looking at them as an art critic might, drawing from each one what strikes him as a salient feature or relating it to some style or movement in art.

My aim is to examine each one to try and find an answer to the question : "What does it mean to say that the work of art conveys or reflects some meaning or meanings in life?"

The opinions of various writers on art will be used in order to support the argument.

The ten works of art under consideration are looked at from the viewpoint of the question, "Is the work of art concerned with meaning in life?" Possible Formalist objections are kept in mind, on the one hand, and on the other, the temptation to read too much into the work is guarded against.

INTRODUCTION

Before examining the pictures, however, some questions arise.

When it is said that one way of looking at a work of art is to look at it from the point of view of what it expresses about meaning in life, what does it mean to look at a picture?

Wittgenstein has pointed out that looking at a picture is something more than a physiological act - it is a conceptual matter too. When one looks at a picture of an animal transfixed by an arrow, one sees the arrow sticking out at the back of the animal's neck. "Let the picture be a silhouette - Do you see the arrow, Wittgenstein asks, or do you merely know that these two bits are supposed to represent part of an arrow?"[1] Our problem, he observes, is a conceptual one.

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1) Ludwig Wittgenstein : Philosophical Investigations, translated by G E M Anscombe, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1968, page 203e

How is one to "see" a concern for meaning in life in a picture? As Wittgenstein suggests, "custom and upbringing have a hand in this".1) The meaning that we see in the picture is determined by its "use" or "application".2)

Assisted by writers on art and what artists have said about their intentions, one gradually learns to look at paintings, progressively discerning layers of meaning. An art critic who has a wide experience of art appreciation and is familiar with a variety of styles, schools and movements, will "see" more than someone whose experience is limited to the art of his own time and locality.

In looking at pictures for meaning in life one is helped by writers on art. But will the work of art mean the same for everybody, given this help? One person may be sensitive to colour relationships - another may enjoy literary allusions. Wittgenstein observes that if you see a leaf as "a sample of 'leaf shape in general' you see it differently from someone who regards it as, say, a sample of this particular shape".3)

Will it always have the same meaning for the same viewer? The viewer depending upon his mood, may respond favourably to the restful, balanced composition of a Mondrian and not react at all to a painting by Nolde at that time. Then, too, a work of art can be regarded as "open". The same viewer may, in time, see progressively more layers of meaning in the work.

Is the meaning "there", waiting to be discovered? Who is to say what the meaning really is? Which interpretation of those advanced is the right one for Vermeer's work Lady and Gentleman at the Virginals? The artist's intention is not always known and, if it is, is the artist always aware of the meaning or meanings discovered by others? Does one have to agree with Mondrian about what his painting represents, in order to be able to enjoy it?

With these questions in mind one can now proceed to an examination of the ten works :-

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1) L Wittgenstein : op cit., page 201e
2) L Wittgenstein : op cit., remark no 139
3) L Wittgenstein : op cit., remark no 74

Polykleitos	:	Doryphoros
Piero della Francesca	:	The Nativity
Botticelli	:	Primavera
Vermeer	:	Lady and Gentleman at the Virginals
Gauguin	:	Whence come We? What are We? Whither Go We?
Munch	:	The Scream
Emil Nolde	:	Candle Dancers
Mondrian	:	Composition in Red, Yellow and Blue
Max Ernst	:	Petrified City
Picasso	:	Woman Weeping

Polykleitos : Doryphoros, Bronze cast of a Roman copy at Naples. Original c 445 B.C.

Among the Greeks art was, according to Hegel, the highest medium under which the community conceived its gods, and became conscious of truth. For this reason we may justly say that the poets and artists of Greece created the gods of the people". In other words they defined for the imagination of the people "the definite content of a religion"[1])

Greek art had its origins in the Minoan-Mycenaean art which developed in Crete during the Bronze age and spread through the Greek mainland, throughout the Aegean and the Western Mediterranean. Tied to religion and myth, it received its inspiration from the heroic legends of the Homeric "epos", taken from the Mycenaean courts and narrating the expedition against Troy.[2])

Osborne describes the primary motivation of Greek art from the 6th to the 4th Century B.C. as "the impulse to produce convincing facsimiles of the visible appearances of things instead of forms and characters which they were known to have.[3])

It has been argued, though, that for the Greeks the work of art was not based on the idea of truth to appearances alone. It was "subject

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1) G W F Hegel : The Philosophy of Fine Art, Vol 1, G Bell & Sons London, 1920, page 140

2) Giovanni Becatti : The Art of Ancient Greece and Rome, Thames & Hudson, London, 1968, page 11

3) H Osborne : op cit., page 31

to the most subtle rules of rational thought"[1]) as well. The human figure, as it appeared in visual perception, formed the basis. This appearance was corrected in accordance with intellectual standards of measurement. The work of art, based on the idea of truth to appearances and subject to a system of relationships and proportions, was intended to appeal to mind and eye. The harmony of sculpture relies heavily on a numerical system of relationships between the parts and the whole.

It is suggested that this concern for measure was a fairly basic Greek attitude, originating with Apollo's priesthood at Delphi - "order and balance was one of the blessings" brought by Apollo to men.[2]) The Pythagoreans, it seems, developed this notion. They were apparently a religious brotherhood in origin and they carried on the influence of the Pythian Apollo; Apollo was the chief Pythagorean God.[3]) The Pythagoreans saw measure and number as a basic feature of the world and applied this idea to mathematics and the theory of music. They believed that an understanding of order in the world, or "cosmos", brought a similar order known as "kosmios" to men's souls.

The possible influence of the Pythagoreans can be seen in a treatise on his sculpture which Polykleitos wrote based on a system of proportions of the human body. Beauty rests "to a nuance" he thought, on the relationship between many numbers.

One of the great masters of the classical heroic style, Polykleitos is famous for his Doryphoros, a statue showing Achilles carrying the lance of Pelion. The statue is over life-size as befits a hero or god. The leg carrying no weight is free and with only the tip of the foot touching the ground, is placed a little behind the other. The free arm hangs loosely, and the head inclines slightly to its right.[4]) Although the form is vital in every part, "the least detail of which is stamped with purpose",[5]) the whole body has an easy rhythm and has seemingly adopted a most natural pose.

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1) R Huyghe : Larousse Encyclopedia of Prehistoric and Ancient Art, Paul Hamlyn, London, 1967, page 240

2) Peter Hoyle : Delphi, Cassell, London, 1967, page 46

3) John Burnett : Early Greek Philosophy, Adam and Charles Black, London, 4th Edition, 1963, page 89

4) K Schefold : Classical Greece, Methuen, London 1965, pages 135 - 137

5) G W F Hegel : op cit., Vol III, page 158

But Schefold observes that none of us has ever adopted this attitude except in the attempt to copy a Polykleitan figure. The slightly bent head indicates the quiet self-awareness of the hero who has preferred an early death to an ordinary life. The sculptor has clearly suggested the "inner agitation; an astringent tense life", and "knowledge of the great supra-personal law of fate and deep familiarity with it".1)

What might this work have meant to Polykleitos and his contemporaries? Although mere conjecture, two claims or suggestions can be put forward. Both claims are advanced as possible answers to the question, "What does it mean to say that this work is concerned with meaning in life?".

The first suggestion is that Polykleitos' Doryphoros reflects in its very form2) a concern for measure and proportion which reflects a basic Greek attitude deriving possibly from the Delphic oracle. This attitude is seen again in the Pythagorean interest in numerical ratio and once more (though much later) in Aristotle's theory of the mean in human conduct.

Secondly, Schefold has suggested that the work conveys through its subject matter (which would have been familiar to Polykleitos' contemporaries), an awareness of the transitory nature of man in the face of the supra-personal law of fate. This awareness is connected with what Burnet calls the melancholy of the Greeks and fundamental to their outlook observing that Simonides' lament that "the generations of men fall like the leaves of the forest, touches a chord that Homer had already struck".3)

These two claims or suggestions are based on conjecture. For the purpose of this essay it is not necessary, however, that they correspond with the actual state of affairs. My aim is to bring out what it means to say that this particular work is concerned with the meaning of life.

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1) K Schefold : op cit., page 137

2) E Panofsky : op cit., pages 7 and 8

A similar claim is made by Panofsky that "a really exhaustive interpretation ... might show that the technical procedures of a certain ... period or artist, for instance Michelangelo's preference for stone instead of .. bronze ... are symptomatic ... of a peculiar religious attitude".

3) J Burnet : op cit., page 8

The suggestion that the emphasis on measure (seen in the form of this work) is related to a basic Greek attitude to the conduct of life may be disputed. Similarly, that the subject matter is related to a certain Greek acceptance of the shortness of human life and the wisdom of living and dying honourably, may not correspond with Polykleitos' intentions. Nevertheless, these two claims provide the sort of answer to the question, "what has this particular work to do with meaning in life?"

Piero della Francesca : The Nativity, c 1470, National Gallery, London.

Although Piero della Francesca was keenly interested in perspective, figures and objects and their relationships in space, this work is, I think, primarily an expression of religious sentiment.

For some people it is probably enough to share in the expression of religious devotion conveyed by the kneeling Madonna and the singing angels. For others it is a delight to observe the subtle and harmonious relationships of colour - a play of colour "not to be comparably manipulated again until Vermeer".1)

In front of a ruined wall, with lean-to roof, forming a rather delapidated shed, Mary kneels in prayer before her child who lies on the ground, his arms stretched out to her. Joseph sits on a saddle behind her, apparently taking no notice of the enraptured group of singing angels and the two shepherds who point upward towards the star. The ox, symbol of the Gentiles, looks quietly towards the child; the ass, representing the Jews, brays in derision. In the distance on the left, is the Tiber Valley and, on the right, the church of Borgo San Sepolcro is seen above the roofs of the town.

In this painting one is able to enjoy the formal qualities in themselves but for some people it is only when the religious content reveals itself that the significance of the work can be fully grasped. The figures are clear-cut in the cold light of dawn. A knowledge of mathematics, perspective and anatomy controls the composition,

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1) Michael Levey : A Concise History of Painting From Giotto to Cezanne Thames & Hudson, London, 1968, page 48

contributing to an appearance of detachment from human emotion. The figures seem to take their places inevitably and the ample spaciousness adds to the profound calm. This "tranquil dimension holds the figures eternally in stillness"[1], says one writer, "the stillness of the moment ... lifts the scene outside time".[2] That the angels appear to be perfectly at their ease and their presence taken for granted by the other figures adds a surrealist and paradoxical note which heightens the extra-temporal character of the scene.

What is the picture's concern with meaning in life? Quite plainly the artist is giving expression to the religious sentiment of the church to which he belonged. The symbolic imagery is easily understood by the Christian. The picture is readily placed in the religious context of fifteenth-century Italy and the meaning conveyed by Piero is unambigiously Christian.

Sandro Botticelli : Allegory of Spring (Primavera) c 1478
Uffizi Gallery, Florence

Italian art and literature was marked by a revival of Greek-inspired humanism during the 14th Century. Petrarch, for instance, insisted that man and his problems should be the main object and concern. He regarded as of central importance "the nature of man, the end for which we are born, whence we come and where we go".[3]

Kristeller has stressed the importance of the philosophical inspiration behind much Renaissance art. Through this knowledge "we have learned to see Botticelli and Michelangelo ... with greater precision because we now understand that some of their images ... are ... specific expressions of ideas then current"[4].)

Philosophers who helped to shape the course of art during the Renaissance are Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola.

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1) Michael Levey : Guide to the National Gallery, Mildner & Sons, London, 2nd Edition, 1966, pages 7 and 8
2) Michael Levey : From Giotto to Cezanne, page 46
3) P O Kristeller, Eight Philosophers of the Italian Renaissance, Chatto and Windus, London, 1965, pages 15 and 16
4) P O Kristeller, op cit., page 142

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In a practical way, Ficino and his circle exercised a considerable influence on a large group of cultured civic leaders, whose interest extended from active participation to sympathetic patronage.

A feature of Renaissance thought is the growing importance of Plato's philosophy which had been somewhat neglected during the Middle Ages. The influence of Plato is apparent in Ficino's view that love for another human being is "merely a preparation, more or less conscious, for the love of God, which constitutes the real good and true content of human desire".1)

An important aspect of Pico della Mirandola's thought is his treatment of classical mythology. Following Ficino, he developed the allegorical interpretation of Greek myths by the Stoic and Neoplatonist philosophers, a tradition which had been continued by the medieval grammarians. While the latter minimized the pagan religious element in these myths, Pico attempted to illustrate their share in the common truth.2)

This interest provided much of the subject matter for the art and literature of the period and there was a vigorous attempt to reconcile pagan myth with the Christian faith.

The Platonic influence is evident in Titian, Michelangelo and Botticelli. It has been suggested, for instance, that Botticelli's Primavera can be traced back to Plato's Symposium. According to this dialogue, man has forgotten his divine origin but can be led by the attraction of physical beauty to the contemplation of the eternal verities of beauty, truth and goodness. Venus is the image of this transcendent beauty and Gombrich has revealed how, as the embodiment of Humanity (Humanitas) in Botticelli's Primavera, Ficino hoped that she would arouse the apposite virtue in his young spiritual ward for whom the painting was commissioned.3)

Gombrich claims that the picture was bought for Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici, the second cousin of Lorenzo il Magnifico. In

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1) P O Kristeller : op cit., page 47

2) P O Kristeller : op cit., pages 64, 65

3) E H Gombrich : Symbolic Images, Studies in the Art of the Renaissance, Phaidon, London, 1972, page 45

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a letter to the young Lorenzo, Marsilio Ficino (the boy's spiritual mentor at the time of the purchase) drew up a moral injunction in the form of a horoscope. Venus, he explained, stands for Humanity, and is a "nymph of excellent comeliness born of heaven"[1], embracing such virtues as Love, Comeliness and Modesty.

Gombrich mentions that seeing is "by virtue of its speed and immediacy, a favoured symbol of higher knowledge" to both Platonist and Christian.[2] He observes that Ficino, in another letter, explained that "virtue herself (if she can be placed before the eye) may serve much better as an exhortation than the words of men".[3] Venus in Botticelli's Primavera, suits this requirement if we accept the belief in the "sublimity of beauty as a symbol of Divine Splendour".[4]

Gombrich's interpretation in the light of Ficino's writings provides a valuable insight into the spirit in which the Primavera was conceived even if, as he himself admits, the precise meaning of some of its figures eludes us. We see the picture, after he has indicated the significance of Venus, as more than a pleasing arrangement of forms.

Some people, however, do not think that the picture should be taken in too much detail. It is enough, they think, to be able to sense the spirit of the work and this accords with the simpler interpretation by Filippo Rossi[5] that it is just an allegory denoting the coming of Spring.

Venus occupies the centre of the woodland scene. Above her, Cupid shoots an arrow. On the left, Mercury points upward possibly, Rossi surmises, dispersing the mists with his wand. Between him and Venus are the Three Graces performing a slow dance. On the right Zephyrus, a winged youth in a cold blue cloak hovers above the nymph Chloris who is attempting to evade his icy touch. From her mouth flowers fall into the lap of Spring who, wearing a dress adorned with flowers, scatters on the ground the flowers she has

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1) E H Gombrich : op cit., page 42
2) E H Gombrich : op cit., page 147
3) E H Gombrich : op cit., page 45
4) E H Gombrich : op cit., page 44
5) Filippo Rossi : The Uffizi and Pitti, Thames & Hudson, London, 1966, translated by R Waterhouse, page 115

already collected.

Rossi's description fits in with the response of those for whom the many literary and philosophical allusions in this painting are either lost or irrelevant. For them it is quite simply a pastoral scene. Pleasant feelings are evoked by the vague awareness of pagan myth, the beautiful figures in graceful movement, embellished rather than hidden by their diaphanous draperies, and the attention to the trees, grasses and flowers which make this a convincing picture of spring.

Wilhelm Bode makes the point that the painting is so rich in ideas that its meaning will never be fully established. This uncertainty does not constitute a fault in his eyes, but rather an additional charm - to everyone it has a special message, everyone thinks he discovers new allusions.1)

What, then, is the painting's concern with meaning in life? From external evidence Gombrich has revealed something of Botticelli's interest in the representation of Neo-platonic ideas.

It is known that Botticelli was also deeply religious and even this apparently profane picture has been seen as an effort to link Christian ideas with the myth of antiquity, with Venus embodying the belief in the "sublimity of beauty as a symbol of Divine Splendour". Indeed the Venus of this painting (in a different context) could quite easily pass for one of Botticelli's wistful Madonnas. Her gentle expression and her right hand raised as if in blessing certainly gives her a spiritual rather than a sensual appearance.

For the artist and his patrons, then, it seems that this painting was a transcription of humanist and religious ideas into visual terms. The viewer can respond to it (depending on how much of this transcription he is aware) either as an evocation of Botticelli's attitude to meaning in life or simply as a beautiful picture. In any event the insight gained by a knowledge of the ideas which Botticelli was trying to express does not appear to have lessened our enjoyment of his work. It does, however, help to provide us with an answer to the question, "what does it mean to say that this particular work is

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1) Wilhelm Bode : Sandro Botticelli, Methuen, London, 1925, page 52

concerned with meaning in life?"

Following Gombrich's research, it can be said with some confidence that the Primavera is at least partly concerned to convey certain Neoplatonic and Christian ideas. These ideas include the notion that one can be led by the attraction of physical beauty to the contemplation of the eternal verities, beauty, truth and goodness. Implicit is the belief, shared by the Neo-platonist and Christian, in the sublimity of beauty as a symbol of Divine Splendour. In this particular case, it was thought that the image of Venus as the embodiment of Humanitas would arouse that virtue in Ficino's spiritual ward, the young Lorenzo.

Johannes Vermeer : Lady and Gentleman at the Virginals, c. 1662, Buckingham Palace, London.

In this painting, a lady stands in front of the virginals at the far end of a room - her back to us. A gentleman, seen in profile, is at her side. They seem to be shut off in a world of their own, but beyond this there does not seem to be much in the way of human interest.

Vermeer's concern seems to be as much for the other objects in the room - chairs, musical instruments, a jug. However, all these items appear to be subordinated to his main interests - spatial relationships, colour and light.1)

Spatial Relationships. The two figures are placed in the centre of a broad, vertical plane at the end of a room. Towards this area, the eye is carried by the diagonals of the carpet draped over the table, the chair, and the diamond pattern of the floor-tiling, coming to a rest at the rectangles of the virginals, the picture frames and the beams of the ceiling. Spatial recession is emphasised by the planes of table and chair seen a little from above. There is a reciprocal play of nearness and distance, an unshakeable logic in the divisions of space and surface.2)

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1) Pierre Descargues : Vermeer, Skira, Geneva, 1966, pages 90, 91
2) Lawrence Gowing : Vermeer, Faber & Faber, London, page 18

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Colour. Colour is imposed by the artist's own scheme of selected colours, mainly blues and yellows. The foreground shape of the carpeted table is kept from becoming too conspicuous by darkening the colour and lowering its pitch. In contrast the yellow blouse of the woman is heightened in pitch.

Light. The figures are precisely revealed in the cold morning light coming from the window. Light, however, is not there just for the sake of realism. As with colour and spatial composition, it is used carefully and discreetly in order to constitute Vermeer's ordered world and this provides a clue to Vermeer's concern with meaning in life.

Vermeer is careful not to concentrate light at any particular point or on any particular object, Descargues observes,1) so as not to upset the balance and clarity of the composition. The light from the window is insufficient, yet he lights up the jug on the table to counter the brightness of the lady's yellow blouse, the white of her collar and the gentleman's collar and cuff.

The main elements of the picture, then, are space, light, and colour. This could lend itself to a formalistic interpretation. These are the elements, however, by which Vermeer constitutes his world.

There is no explicit comment by Vermeer, by way of his subject matter, on meaning in life in this picture. Indeed, it must be conceded that there are many works of art in the fields of still life, genre and landscape, for example, about which one might find it difficult to say that it expressed any concern for meaning in life. However, Levey says of Still Life by the 17th Century Spanish artist Zurbaran, in the Contini-Bonacossi Collection, Florence, that it seems more than a still life : "as if by contemplating it one could penetrate the mystery of existence".2)

Does this painting reflect in any way the painter's view of life?

Descargues points out that Vermeer was the contemporary of Spinoza and Anthony van Leeuwenhoek (who perfected the microscope).

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1) P Descargues : op cit., page 91

2) M Levey : A Concise History of Painting from Giotto to Cezanne, page 192

Seventeenth-century painters, he says, shared with philosophers and scientists an interest in light, perspective and colour.

In this painting perfect order reigns. Could one infer from this that it reflected Vermeer's belief, shared with Spinoza, that the world is part of an ordered system? Nothing is known of his views. One can only attempt by inference to find out what his general attitudes might have been.

From Descargues' suggestion that he shared some of the aims and interests of the scientists and philosophers of the seventeenth century perhaps one can see reflected in his work some sign of their conviction that man could dominate and control events, that chance and the irrational could be eliminated by scientific and mathematical inquiry.

It is possible to see reflected in this painting something of the scientific interests of his contemporaries in light, colour and perspective. Can one see, too, a reflection of the Cartesian optimism of that age in his work?

Certainly the mood in this picture is one of poise and serenity. Lines and colours are balanced and harmonious. This is a representation of a comfortable dwelling - there is no sign of poverty and want. Vermeer, it is evident, has meditated with pleasure on the scene. In the opinion of Herbert Read, Vermeer is an artist who seems to be "completely untouched by the problems of alienation".1)

Another view is that, in common with most Dutch painting of that time, this painting is simply a portrait of prosperous Dutch life. The patrons of Dutch painting in the seventeenth century were "middle-class burghers who were acquiring wealth and position and wanted paintings to hang on the walls of their houses as evidence of their prosperity".2)

Accordingly, Vermeer was supplying just another picture to reflect the comfortable lives of his contemporaries.

One must be careful not to read too much into a painting, as this

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1) Herbert Read : Art and Alienation, Thames & Hudson, London, 1967, page 13

2) Helen Gardner : Art through the Ages, G Bell & Sons, London 1936, pages 480

last viewpoint implies. So far, however, there are three possible interpretations of this painting (viewed from the standpoint of a possible concern with meaning in life.)

It has been suggested that :-

1) the painting reflects Vermeer's interest in the scientific aims of his contemporaries - it is concerned with their interests in light, colour and perspective,

2) it reflects an optimistic belief that the world is part of an ordered system and man is able to control and dominate events. This interpretation relies on the "ordering" of his painting rather than on its "realism". His colouring is schematic, space is contrived and the light is corrected in the interests of balance. Furthermore, the mood is serene - there are no signs of alienation. Certainly, in common with all his works, the ordered quietness of this painting is conducive to meditation,

3) the painting is simply a portrait or mirror of seventeenth-century, middle-class life. In this case, any concern for meaning is on a rather trivial level, entailing a straightforward endorsement of the values of the wealthy burghers of his day, that is to say, meaning in life is seen in terms of wealth and material comfort.

Other interpretations are not ruled out. Nevertheless, the three interpretations are all possible answers to the question "what does it mean to say that this particular work is concerned with meaning in life?"

Paul Gauguin : Whence Come We? What Are We? Whither Go We? 1897, Oil on Burlap, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

The title itself suggests - what is conveyed by the subject matter of the painting - a concern for the meaning of existence.

Gauguin was a sophisticated European who left a stockbroker's office

and tried to immerse himself in nature. He seems to have been motivated by the same feeling of alienation - a feeling that man was becoming divorced from nature - that dominated the members of the Art Nouveau movement.

He must have realised, though, that his attempt to recapture the innocence of a Lost Paradise could never succeed. Towards the end of 1897, Gauguin, without means of support, his body tormented with sickness, gave up struggling and made up his mind to allow himself to die. For three months he stopped painting.

Then in December 1897 he began working on a big composition he had been thinking about for some time.

This was to be "his pictorial testament, the sum of all his ideas, his feelings and his agonies. At the same time it presented a fundamental question that remained eternally unanswered and contained a philosophy of life".1)

His anxiety can be sensed in the brooding melancholy of this work, in the large areas of blue and green - contrasting with the bright orange of the nude figures, and, incidentally, bringing out the contrast between life and death.

The influence of Art Nouveau is seen in the symbolising of the living forms of nature by arabesques and the wavy lines of the background. Gauguin further suggested the fertility of nature by depicting some of the women in the role of motherhood. The Tahitian women - women were an Art Nouveau symbol for nature - are seen as "beings as natural and unreflective as gentle animals".2) The fruit, the flora, birds and animals all help to evoke the magic of the Tahitian scene.

But the theme of the painting is Gauguin's "feeling for life rather than it represented nature".3)

Gauguin in this painting is really posing "philosophical problems

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1) Georges Boudaille : Gauguin, Thames & Hudson, London, 1964, page 230
2) M Levey : A Concise History of Painting from Giotto to Cezanne, Thames & Hudson, London, 1968, p 306
3) Joseph-Emile Muller : Modern Painting, Vol 11, Gauguin to the Fauves, Methuen, London, 1965, page 8

about existence".1) We can reflect on the mystery of life from infancy to old age as the eye moves from the child lying asleep, the girl picking fruit, the women in the unashamed golden beauty of their bodies, to the sombre old woman - her hair painted a cold green and her arms and hands not quite hiding her face nor the bitterness of her expression. A sense of mystery is generated by the aloof air of the women, one strolling on her own, two others in secret conversation, whilst a crouching figure "raises its arms in the air and looks astonished at these two figures who dare to think of their destiny".2)

Boudaille writes : "Gauguin had had the opportunity to meditate on human destiny at the birth of his last child, the little half-caste daughter of Pahura. The theme of childhood forms the first part of his composition - clearly divided into three equal parts". (The second depicts maturity and the third old age.) Gauguin himself describes the painting "A figure in the centre is picking a fruit. Two cats by a child. The idol with both arms mysteriously .. raised seems to be pointing out the beyond."

"The fruit-picking symbolises the pleasures of life, the harvests, and fertility. The fullness of the figures is explicit. It would be happiness unmarred were it not for the idol consituting a reminder of eternal truths, a menace forever threatening humanity."

Gauguin continues : "A squatting figure seems to be listening to the idol; then finally, an old woman close to death seems to accept and be resigned to her own thoughts, bringing the story to a close; at her feet is a strange white bird holding a lizard between its feet representing the uselessness of empty words".3)

Gauguin's painting, then, is concerned with the theme of life and death. As if to show that the totality of human existence from birth to death - for all its mystery - is inextricably confined within the bounds of nature, the idol in the background, "symbolising the primitive traditions of nature's wholeness, looks on".4)

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1) M Levey : op cit, page 306
2) G Boudaille : op cit., page 230
3) G Boudaille : op cit., pages 230 and 231
4) Charles Estienne : Gauguin, translated by J Emmons, Skira, Geneva, 1953, page 91

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Edvard Munch : The Scream, 1893, Oslo National Gallery, Norway

The setting is a road, bounded by a railing, alongside a fjord with some mountains in the background. The main figure is in the foreground, facing the viewer, arms raised to its head and covering the ears, its mouth wide open in a scream.

The sharp diagonal of the road, receding abruptly into depth, ends with the strong vertical of two standing men. This "dizzying generation of space and movement in precise straight lines forms an antithetical movement to the ... curving, absolutely flat expanse of the fjord and mountains". The contrast between the sharp diagonal, the vertical lines and the "gentle curving meander of an art nouveau line" heightens the psychological tensions, according to Heller, and "injects into both these elements that quality of unbalanced dizziness characterizing anxiety in the writings of Kierkegaard and Ibsen".1)

In keeping with the flat, curved fjord landscape, the flat body of the person screaming has lost definite human shape and "twists like a worm" giving an impression of intense agitation".2) The dizzying perspective", Heller concludes, "combines with the mould-coloured landscape and a gangrenous sky to lend the painting its final unnerving impression on the viewer".3)

If that is the impression made on a viewer, then, what was its meaning for the artist?

The Scream was, in Heller's view, a personal confession of fears and was tied to specific events in Munch's life. The picture can, it is suggested, be traced back to his response to his father's death when Munch was a young man, to his alcoholism, and to his attitude towards women.

In his diary, Munch described an event which took place on a walk with two friends. According to him, as the sun set he felt "a twinge of melancholy". He stopped and leaned against a railing. His friends walked on. "I stood there, trembling with fright. And I felt a loud, unending scream piercing nature".4) Looking back, he recalls a great

1) Reinhold Heller : Edvard Munch : The Scream, Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, London, 1973, page 80
2) Reinhold Heller : op cit., page 80
3) Reinhold Heller : op cit., page 80
4) Reinhold Heller : op cit., page 65

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fear of open places and a feeling of dizziness at the slightest height.

According to Heller, "the occasion, the immediate time and place of the sensation, may have been a sunset in Kristiana, but the necessary premise was Munch's insanity, his agoraphobia and alcoholism that produced the psychological phenomenon".1) Munch's need was to give this psychological experience visual expression. The result is The Scream. Its complex development in artistic form has been traced by Heller, originating with drawings Munch made between 1890 and 1893. At a time of intense questioning about the nature of life and death, he did these drawings of a man (his father) on "the endless, barren road" to changeless death .2) The formula of the road leading to nothing could be used as a symbol for the fear of death, the sense of anxiety, "with Munch himself now, rather than his father, appearing on it".3) The drawings were gradually transformed into the final work.

As well as being rooted in his feelings over his father's death, The Scream had its origins, it seems, in Munch's attitude towards women. In this picture, the curving lines of the landscape are equated with woman and the theme of woman is accordingly integrated into the totality of the work.

A further theme is noted by Heller : identity is another strand in the painting. The feeling of dizziness which Munch experienced on his walk with his two friends indicates a threat to the integrity of Munch's ego,3) and Heller observes that the main figure in The Scream, sexless and emasculated", takes on the "art nouveau curvature of the landscape rather than retaining human form".4) In its "intense state of anxiety and despair", it "becomes less real than the vitalized environment surrounding it and the loss of identity becomes death".5)

The significance of the picture lies in Munch's ability to give expression to certain aspects of our emotional life in visual terms. A forerunner of Expressionism, he is a typical product of our ruling spiritual fever,6) the anxiety produced by the uprooting of traditional forms of life in the industrial and technological upsurge of the nineteenth and

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1) R Heller : op cit, page 89
2) R Heller : op cit, page 59
3) R Heller : op cit, page 66
4) R Heller : op cit, page 90
5) R Heller : op cit, page 90
6) R Heller : op cit, page 90

t. ntieth centuries.

As indicated by Heller's analysis, this particular painting exhibits a concern with the theme of anxiety arising from fears of death, attitudes towards women, and fears for loss of self-identity, as well as alienation from industrial society.

Emil C Nolde : Candle Dancers, 1912, Nolde Foundation, Seebüll,

In German Expressionism, if Expressionism is defined as a probing search for an emotional reality behind appearances - a reality that the artist finds by observing his own subjective reactions, and for which he then fashions an adequate and equivalent means to evoke a similar response in the viewer - form was determined by the expression.1)

The way was opened by a group of painters called "die Brücke", formed in 1906. These painters were convinced that it was their duty to transform man's attitudes to living. Art and life had to be brought into harmony.2) People should be revitalized through an art that stripped away the superficial mask of appearances and revealed the simple elements, the fundamental sensations and positive drives in man and nature. Man has become alienated from his "true" nature and art is to be the means to help him to overcome this self-alienation.

Emil Nolde, the oldest of the Expressionists was rooted to the earth, feeling most at home among the peasants of his native soil - North Schleswig on the German-Danish border. He shared "a great many of their fears, superstitions and prejudices", and in his paintings he was able to lend these notions "a mystical and often demonic aspect".3)

Nolde was intensely concerned, it appears, with the human condition. His paintings pose questions about old age and youth, the tragedy of death, human relationships - the union of man and woman (The Lovers,

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1) Peter Selz : Emil Nolde, Doubleday, New York, 1963, page 38

2) Wolf-Dieter Dube : The Expressionists, translated by M Whitall, Thames & Hudson, London, 1972, page 28

3) Peter Selz : op cit., page 9

self-portrait of the artist and his wife, 1932, collection of Mrs A Story, Santa Barbara), and the union between man and godhead in The Last Supper, 1909, Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Copenhagen.

Sexual relationships are probed in works such as the triptych Mary of Egypt, 1912, Kunsthalle, Hamburg - in which the harlot is seen ... flaming like a torch of sensuality among the lustful and vulgar men".1)

In Candle Dancers, colour is the principal vehicle for Nolde's expressionism. Tumultuous reds and yellows dominate, and frenzied brushstrokes give expression to ecstatic, Dionysiac passion. The painting stems from a deep interest in primitive art, primitive life, and ritual, and accorded closely with his blood and soil mystique".2) Although rejected by the Nazis as a "degenerate", Nolde shares their racial prejudices.

The technique of Candle Dancers is economic and the paint is applied in predominantly pure, primary colours direct to the canvas, in keeping with the Expressionists' desire to preserve the freshness and naivety of their sensations, the strength and honesty of their visions".3) In Selz's view, the "entire painting dances". He feels the excitement of the dancers, moving in sensuous patterns. "The tall, flickering candles repeat in staccato rhythm the writhing movements of the dancing women. Even the paint dances : the white of the canvas shimmers at intervals among the vibrating reds and yellows of the background and the twisting green and bluish stripes of the women's skirts. The rich pinks of the half-nude bodies leap out startingly against the shrill Chinese reds and sulphur yellows".4)

Candle Dancers quivers with pulsating life, expressing a primeval energy, an affirmation of life in its most elemental visual forms. Nolde's answer to the question, "Is life worthwhile?", is positive. Life is to be engaged directly and primitive peoples point the way. If man is to overcome his sense of alienation from his "real" nature, life must be made simple, liberated from the white man "who is trying to bring the inhabitants of the world into servitude".5)

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1) Peter Selz : op cit., page 24
2) Peter Selz : op cit., page 33
3) Wolf-Dieter Dube : op cit., page 25
4) Peter Selz : op cit., page 32
5) Emil Nolde :: Letter to Hans Fehr, May,24, 1914, in Hans Fehr : Nolde, Cologne, Du Mont Schauberg, 1957, page 23

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In what way does the painting seem to be concerned with meaning in life?

Firstly, it is suggested that, as a paradigm of German Expressionism, it is an attempt to get behind the appearances of human behaviour and rediscover simple basic notions of living. It is concerned, then, with self-alienation - in this context seen as the divorce between man as he is in practice (or existence) from his "natural" self (or essence). There is a parallel with the Existentialist search for "authentic" existence in this work. The Dionysiac passion of the dance and its primitive abandon is affirmed. Man's elemental "true" nature is extolled in this harshly executed work.

Secondly, in its affirmation of life in its elemental forms, Nolde gives a positive answer to the meaning in life when, to ask if life has any meaning one is asking : "Is life worthwhile?"

If man takes a lead from primitive cultures and returns to a "natural" way of life, he will be revitalised. Life will again become meaningful when once again part of the pattern of Nature.

Piet Mondrian : Composition in Red, Yellow and Blue, 1921
Gemeentemuseum, The Hague.

This painting, from Mondrian's Neo-Plastic period, is firmly two-dimensional and painted in the pure primary colours red, yellow and blue, with black horizontals and verticals.

On the face of it, Mondrian has nothing at all to tell us about meaning in life. The painting is completely devoid of anecdote and there is no reference to the world of appearances. It is apparently just a pattern of lines and colours on a flat surface.

These lines and colours, however, definitely have significance. The lines are strictly verticals and horizontals - there are no curves. Defining the compartments of colour, they give the painting a firm structure. The colours are the pure, primary colours, red, yellow, and blue, together with the three "non-colours", black, white and grey. What significance, then, did these lines and colours have for Mondrian?

Heraclitus of Ephesus (c. 536 - 470 B.C.) maintained that "out of the war of opposites all Becoming originates".1)

Mondrian seemed to be echoing this belief when, in 1926, he wrote that "constant equilibrium is achieved through opposition".2) His works after 1917 especially reveal that it was his aim to express this equilibrium by intuitively drawing together into harmonious relationship, what he regarded (according to his theory of Neo-Plasticism) the basic elements in painting - vertical and horizontal lines and the primary colours.

Dictated by his conception of the world, the aim of his art, it has been said, was to give visible form to the absolute harmony and fundamental logic governing both art and the universe.3)

Progress towards this aim was marked by the influences of Art Nouveau, Fauvism, Divisionism, Cubism, the work of the Dutch painter Van der Leck, Theosophy and the philosophy of Schoenmakers. The Art Nouveau concern for the quintessence of nature rather than its external appearance helped Mondrian to break away from naturalism and these other artistic influences gave him the means to put his ideas into practice. These ideas were assisted towards fruition by Theosophy and the philosophy of his friend Schoenmakers.

Meditative by nature, Mondrian had long been interested in Theosophy, which purported to penetrate by occult means, the reality behind appearances. An elaborate, if arbitrary, theory of colour was to be found in Theosophical writings. For instance, yellow symbolised spiritually and brown stood for earth-bound lust. Schoenmakers appears to have expressed himself with a rational clarity not to be found in the esoteric writings of Madame Blavatsky and other Theosophists.

Mondrian, at any rate, found a "philosophical justification"4) for his paintings in Schoenmaker's writings and conversation.

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1) J Burnet : op cit., page 146
2) Frank Elgar : Mondrian, Thames & Hudson, London, 1968, page 114
3) Hans L C Jaffe : Op cit., page 125
4) Herbert Read : A Concise History of Modern Painting, Thames & Hudson, London, 1968, page 198

According to the latter, nature always functions in "plastic reality". Mondrian echoed this in his own aesthetic theory of Neo-Plasticism with the tenet that "nature can be reduced to the plastic expression of definite relations".1) Painting must accordingly be made to submit to the horizontal-vertical order and colours are to be limited to the three primary colours plus black, white and grey.

Mondrian saw then in this painting a representation of the "fundamental characteristics of the cosmos".2)

Whether this work measures up to the pretensions of the artist is for each viewer to decide for himself. The reduction, in this work, of painting to the basic elements of Neo-Plasticism gives an impression of strength as well as equilibrium. According to one writer on art, Wijsenbeek, a feeling of both strength and repose is conveyed. It can inspire, he remarks, "a mood of introspection and meditation if one opens one's mind to it; and the longer one looks at it the more conscious does one become of undergoing some kind of spritual experience."3)

In contemplating the work, the viewer may well find a hint of the system and order which Mondrian found basic to the universe.

To say that this painting is concerned with meaning in life is to say that it aims to represent "the fundamental characteristics of the cosmos", whether or not it accords with Mondrian's claims.

Max Ernst : Petrified City, 1937, City Art Gallery, Manchester

Born of the First World War, the Surrealist movement was marked by an awareness of the senselesness and irrationality which accompanied it. In attempting to give expression to this new attitude towards life, Surrealist paintings combine incongruous objects in illogical contexts. Fantasy, dream and chance - the main elements in this art - are exploited to the full, opening "unsuspected doors on human uneasiness"

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1) H Read : op cit., page 200
2) H Read : op cit., page 200
3) L J F Wijsenbeek : Piet Mondrian, translated by I R Gibbons Studio Vista, 1969, page 119

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in an unsettled era.[1] Sometimes the sense of uneasiness is heightened by the photographic and hallucinatory precision and exactness with which objects are depicted.

Ernst, although numbered among the Surrealists, was never totally involved in the movement. However, he shared with them a preoccupation with the unfathomable depths of the irrational and the unconscious. There is the same air of disturbed enchantment and fantasy. We find too, according to Giuseppe Gatt, an imagination that is drawn towards a dream world, towards the most deranged states of mind. We also find a critical conscience that sees the need to control and comprehend the meaning of these disturbing experiences. The significance of Ernst's work lies "not in playing on the theme of ... repeated revolt, but rather in the continued search for meaning in man's world and his activities".[2]

The importance of "automatism", one of the keynotes of Surrealism, was recognised by Ernst. Illusions and the association of ideas provoked by them were exploited by him. A fantastic world is evoked by his development of images based on his visual obsessions - inspired in some cases by the strange patterns of floorboard rubbings (frottages.) Images formed in this way are not the products of a disturbed consciousness or of a dream state of mind as in the works of Surrealists like Dali or Magritte. They themselves "provoke hallucinations and mental responses by mysteriously altering the visual meaning of things".[3]

Thus Ernst participates in the creation of reality "even though his reality takes place in a dimension which is outside the normally accepted concept of reality".[4] He uncovers a world which is a projection of man but in which man seems to be a stranger.

In this picture an image of a primordial world, in which man has no place, is evoked. Its threatening shapes make up the symbols of a world which the artist contemplates with fear and repulsion.

The strangeness of the forms in the work and the microscopic attention

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1) Patrick Waldberg : Ernst, Paintings, Methuen, London, 1969, page 4
2) Giuseppe Gatt : Max Ernst, Hamlyn, London, 1970, page 9
3) Giuseppe Gatt : op cit., page 11
4) Giuseppe Gatt : op cit., page 20

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to detail convey a sense of disquiet because what is fantastic and unreal is presented so convincingly that one's notions of what is real and what is unreal are reversed. Ernst makes the discovery that the condition of man is an unhappy one, "for man has held to be real what turns out to be merely a symbol".1)

Dark shapes of deserted "buildings" rising layer upon layer are contrasted with the round, bright disc of the sun above. The city reaches up menacingly into the sky while the sun has a spell-binding, hypnotic effect, giving expression to the artist's apprehensions of foreboding and anxiety.

This picture is one of a series in which Ernst has begun to have premonitions of an impending catastrophe. As in La Ville Entiere, 1936, Ernst is meditating on the theme of Europe and her destiny. He contemplates with a sense of horror "Athenian or Balylonian landscapes that are irremedially petrified".2)

The painting is concerned with meaning in life, it is suggested, in so far as it reflects a deep feeling of alienation, a fear that known and unknown factors threaten to overwhelm man - that man may not be able to control his environment or himself.

Pablo Picasso : Woman Weeping, 1937, Private Collection, London

This painting is not an attempt at the visual representation of the world of appearances. An echo of the agonizing theme of Guernica, it is a work expressing in painterly terms the artist's response to human suffering and the anguish of human disaster. It is indeed a powerful concentration of the emotions engendered by the bombing of the Basque capital in 1937.

According to Anthony Blunt, Picasso's aim was to give expression in visible form to his abhorrence of the evil which he saw in the world around him.3) In December, 1937, Picasso wrote about his attitude

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1) G Gatt : op cit., page 21

2) G Gatt : op cit., page 44

3) Anthony Blunt : Picasso's Guernica, Oxford University Press, London, 1969, page 56.

to the Spanish Civil War : "I have always believed and still believe that artists who live and work with spiritual values cannot and should not remain indifferent to a conflict in which the highest values of humanity and civilization are at stake.[1])

Later, he asked, : "What do you think an artist is? An imbecile who has only his eyes if he's a painter ...? On the contrary, he's ... constantly alive to heart-rending, fiery, or happy events, to which he responds in every way".[2])

In this painting, large tears fall down the woman's cheeks and a handkerchief is stuffed between her teeth. The colours are bright - strongly contrasting reds, blues, green and yellow - an "explosion of strident colour ... used to enhance the despairing misery and terror in the woman's face".[3])

There is no attempt to make the work attractive. Picasso sets out intentionally to make us feel uneasy, disturbed. Our traditional taste for classical beauty, fostered by Greek and Renaissance art, is offended.

The lines of the woman's "monstrously distorted" face are hard, steely and angular, the twisted features communicating with "almost unbearable intensity the torture and grief that possessed so many human beings during those terrible years".[4])

The woman's agony is underlined by the contrast with her frivolous costume, indicating that she was caught unawares. A blue flower adorns her red and blue hat. Cubist devices such as the two eyes on the same profile, the face viewed in profile and frontally at the same time, intensify the emotional effect.

Penrose gives the following description.[5])

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1) Alfred Barr : Picasso, Fifty Years of his Art, New York, 1946, page 264
2) Alfred Barr : op cit., page 56
3) Catalogue to the Arts Council of Great Britain, 1969, Picasso Exhibition at the Tate Gallery, London, Introduction by Roland Penrose, page 47
4) Joseph-Emile Muller : Modern Painting, Vol 4, Methuen, London 1965, page 18
5) Roland Penrose : Picasso : His Life and Work, Gollancz, London, 1958, page 282

"The white handkerchief pressed to her face hides nothing of the grimace on her lips ... fumbling hands knotted with the pain of her emotion join the teardrops that pour from her eyes." Her eyes are rimmed with black lashes and shaped like "small boats that have capsized in the tempest, and he observes that, "as we look into the eyes themselves we recognise the reflection of the man-made vulture which has changed her delight into unbearable pain".

Anthony Blunt remarks that Guernica, the forerunner of this painting, belongs to a great tradition in European art including Dürer, Michelangelo, Bruegel and El Greco, in which artists were "not concerned to show the beauties of nature or the nobility of man, but on the contrary, the evil of the world and the brutality of human beings".1) These artists were constrained in the expression of their horror by the artistic conventions of their time, but Picasso, "who has broken down these conventions, was able to go further, to use more violent distortions, to disrupt the bodies of human beings and animals in a much more drastic manner".2) Weeping Woman, too, expresses the artist's anguish at the human suffering resulting from the brutality of human beings. It is more personal than Guernica, however, and reveals more sympathy with the human condition.

According to Hans Jaffe, this is one of a series of paintings in which Picasso treated the human figures as a symbol of unbridled passion.

How is it concerned with meaning in life? It could be said that the artist has torn the veil of natural appearances from the world, revealing through this demonic and distorted face the tragic disarray of man's existence. This painting is one of his works dating from 1925 which attempt to mirror the disorder of our epoch and reflect the artist's response to the tragedy of human suffering.3)

CONCLUSION.

From these examples, it cannot be claimed that anything direct or

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1) A Blunt : op cit., page 56
2) A Blunt : op cit., page 56
3) Hans Jaffe : op cit., page 96

definite about meaning in life is said. Any such concern appears to be an indirect reflection, rather than explicit comment. A lot that is vague, enigmatic and obscure is said by way of indirect implication. In judging whether these works are concerned with meaning in life, one has to go by supposition and inference based on external evidence (the artist's own stated intentions) and on the knowledge and insight of specialists in art.

Nevertheless, each work has been looked at to see what, if anything, is reflected of the artist's concern with meaning in life.

Of Polykleitos' Doryphoros, it was suggested that, firstly, it reflects in its form a fundamental Greek interest in measure and, secondly, through its subject matter it conveys an awareness of man's transitory nature in the face of the inexorable supra-personal law of fate.

Piero della Francesca's The Nativity is clearly part of the Christian response to the meaning of life.

Botticelli's Primavera, it seems, was at least partly intended to illustrate a blend of Christian and Neo-Platonic ideas of Renaissance humanism. These ideas include the notion that one can be led by the attraction of physical beauty to the contemplation and emulation of virtue.

It is possible that Vermeer's Lady and Gentleman at the Virginals reflects a scientific interest in light, colour amd perspective. Another point that has been made, however, is that one should not read too much into a painting. Certainly Vermeer tells us very little by way of subject matter. A third view is that it reflects an optimistic belief that the world is part of an ordered system and man is able to control and dominate events.

Gauguin's Whence Come We? What Are We? Whither Go We? tells us by its title that the artist was struggling with the meaning of existence. Gauguin seems to be contemplating the successive stages of human life from infancy to old age within the bounds of Nature. What comes next? What is it all about? The artist appears to be raising questions about the mystery of existence. The viewer can only ponder over the mystery with him.

The Scream, by Edvard Munch, is a crystallisation, it has been suggested, of psychological fears and anxieties connected with the themes of love, personal identity, and death.

Candle Dancers, by Nolde, is an affirmation of life in elemental form. In keeping with the ideals of German Expressionists of that time it is clearly an attempt to direct man's attention to basic, natural drives in order to overcome man's sense of alienation from his true nature.

Mondrian, it seems, saw in his Composition in Red, Yellow and Blue a representation of the "fundamental characteristics of the cosmos .... the absolute harmony and fundamental logic governing both art and the universe".

Petrified City by Max Ernst evokes feelings of foreboding and appears to reflect a growing apprehension that man is unable to control his environment.

Picasso's Woman Weeping seems to be a response to the tragedy of human suffering. There are political overtones in this work - the artist's reaction to the bombing of a Basque town in 1937.

To say then, that a work of art is concerned with meaning in life is not to say that it is concerned with one uniform thing called the "meaning of life". It is to say that one work may be concerned with the theme of alienation, another with life and death, yet another with self-identity. Each artist has a different approach. Picasso tries to communicate his anguished response to human suffering. Mondrian offers an intuition of the basic characteristics of the universe. Only very losely can these different themes be subsumed under a concern for meaning in life.

CONCLUSION

CHAPTER 1V

Focussing attention mainly on the work of art, two perennial questions have been considered :-

i) What is the point of life?
ii) What is the point of art?

It has been suggested that the two questions can be brought together into significant relationship when we consider the nature and function of the work of art. As they stand, both questions are vague and too general to be given clear, simple answers. It is hoped that by unravelling some of the strands in these complex questions some insight has been gained into :

a) What is meant, and what sort of answers we can reasonably expect when we ask, "What is the point of life?" and;

b) the nature and function of art.

In chapter 1 an attempt was made to clarify what is meant by asking "What is the point of life?". It was found that we were talking in general, about the meaningfulness (or meaninglessness) of living. From an examination of what certain nineteenth- and twentieth-century writers and philosophers have said, it was observed that we are concerned with themes such as alienation, life and death, self-deception, human relationships.

In Chapter II the nature and function of the work of art was discussed, bearing in mind that one of the functions of works of art may be the communication of meaning. Any connection between a concern for meaning in life and works of art must depend on what one takes to be the meaning of a work of art. What is its nature, and what is its function? A definition put forward for consideration was that works of art are those man-made objects that function aesthetically in human experience. By "functioning aesthetically" was meant roughly, that they convey, besides sensuous and formal values, meanings taken from living experience through the medium of these sensuous and formal values. It was maintained :

1) that some works of art convey meaning in life as subject matter and this is a legitimate, aesthetic function and;

2) that many works of art reflect meaning in life in some degree and this has an important bearing on the form taken by the work of art.

Objections were considered. An objection that a common definition could not be applied to all works of art was conceded if by this was meant the attempt to apply some determinate characteristic or characteristics - as a common feature - to all works of art. Not all works of art are painted on canvas. Not all works of art are about the Crucifixion.

In the light of this objection, the claim that works of art convey a concern with meaning in life through their subject matter was restricted to some works of art only, for the themes making up this subject matter would be determinate characteristics.

It was argued, though, that this did not affect the contention that many works of art reflect meanings in life and that this has a direct bearing on the form. For what is meant in this case is not that a particular theme is common to all works of art but that whatever the particular theme of a work of art happens to be is reflected in that work. The capacity for meanings in life to be reflected in works of art is common to many works of art.

Objections by Formalists that "life" values are external to the work of art and aesthetically irrelevant were also considered. Conceding that there is a distinction between "aesthetic" (formal) and non-aesthetic ("life") values, an attempt was made to find a more satisfactory account of the relationship between aesthetic and life values than that allowed by Formalists.

According to the Formalist, aesthetic values alone are necessary or relevant to the work of art. But this claim rests upon confused thinking. Aesthetic and life-values are conceptually distinct but in the work of art considered as an artistic whole or unity they are indistinguishable.

Beardsmore's argument was mentioned in which it is granted that art

should not function as a means to an end external to art (e.g. religious or state propaganda). It was pointed out, following Beardsmore, that it does not follow that the significance of art is irrelevant to other activities of life - that the aesthetic experience is isolated from the rest of life. Against Beardsmore, however, it was argued that just as a football game can be enjoyed as football and this is not incompatible with the game being a means to the end of making money, so can the work of art be used in the service of religion and at the same time be enjoyed as a work of art.

In Chapter III, I attempted to show what it means to say that a work of art is concerned with meaning in life by examining ten well-known and important works of art. It was found that this concern is :

a) conveyed more or less directly through the subject matter. Of the Doryphoros, for instance, it was held that to say it is concerned with meaning in life is to say that its subject matter is about the transitoriness of human life in the face of the inexorable supra-personal law of fate.

b) The concern with meaning in life is indirectly reflected in the form of the work. In Picasso's Woman Weeping the distorted features, the hard steely and angular lines, communicate the anguish felt by the artist over the Spanish civil war.

It can be concluded, then, that although there are different facets to the work of art and we respond to works of art in different ways, one way of looking at a work of art is to look for the meaning in life conveyed or reflected there - even if not consciously intended by the artist.

No direct answers are given. It was noted in Chapter 1 that various writers and philosophers, Tolstoy, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Sartre, Baier, Edwards and Popper explicitly discuss meaning in life. They draw distinctions between the different shades of meaning, offer opinions and draw conclusions.

The artist, on the other hand, draws no conclusions. The painter, Merleau-Ponty remarks, is not obliged to appraise what he sees. Whereas Tolstoy and Schopenhauer are pessimistic about the transitoriness of human life, Titian is content in Young Woman doing her

Hair to evoke a feeling of sadness at the transcience of her beauty - he gives a "vision of love overshadowed by the threat of time".[1] Again, in Polykleitos' Doryphoros, there is no explicit statement but, instead, overtones of dignity and a measured acceptance of the shortness of human life - rendered more poignant by presenting the hero Achilles in the full glory of his manhood.

Part of the answer, then, to the questions "what is the point of life?" and "what is the point of art?" is that works of art enable us to ponder upon the meanings of existence conveyed or reflected there. One place to look for meanings in life is in the work of art and one way of looking at works of art is to look for these meanings.

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1) E Panofsky : op cit., page 94

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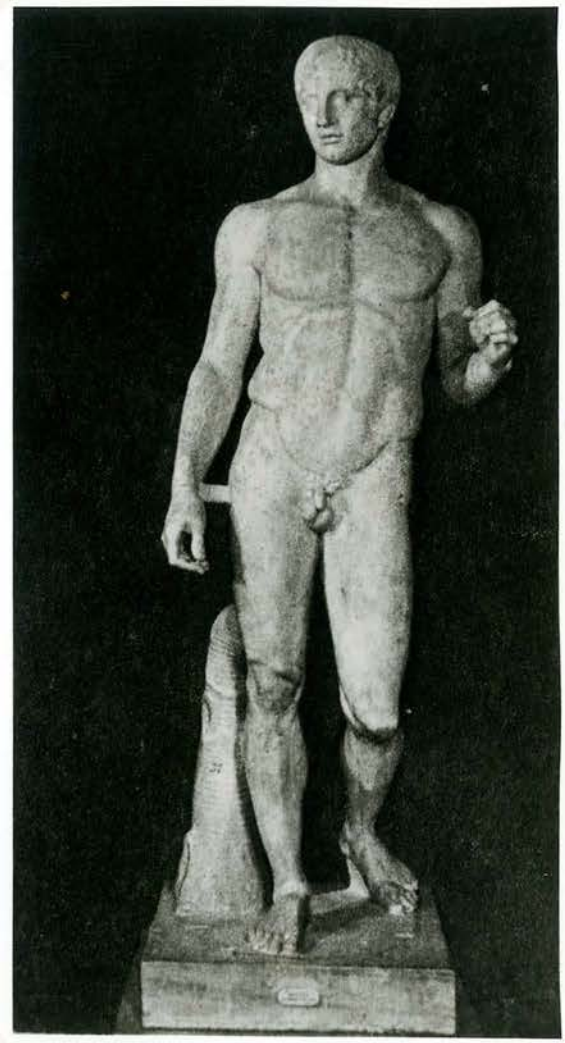

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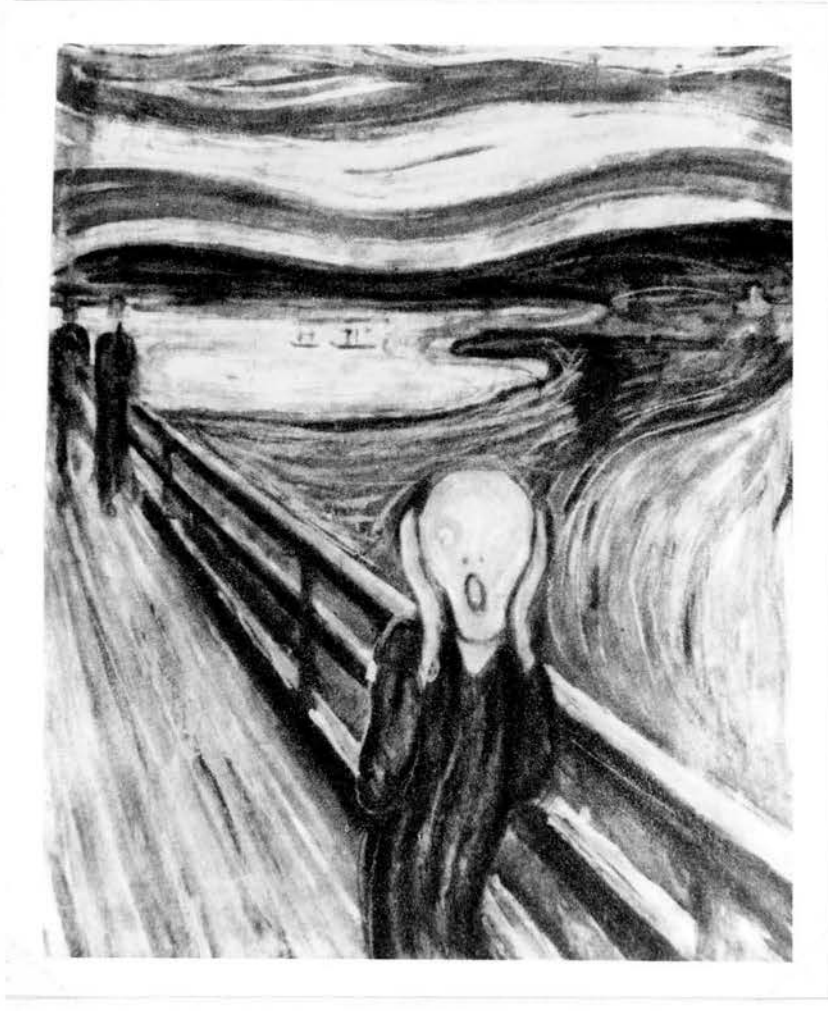

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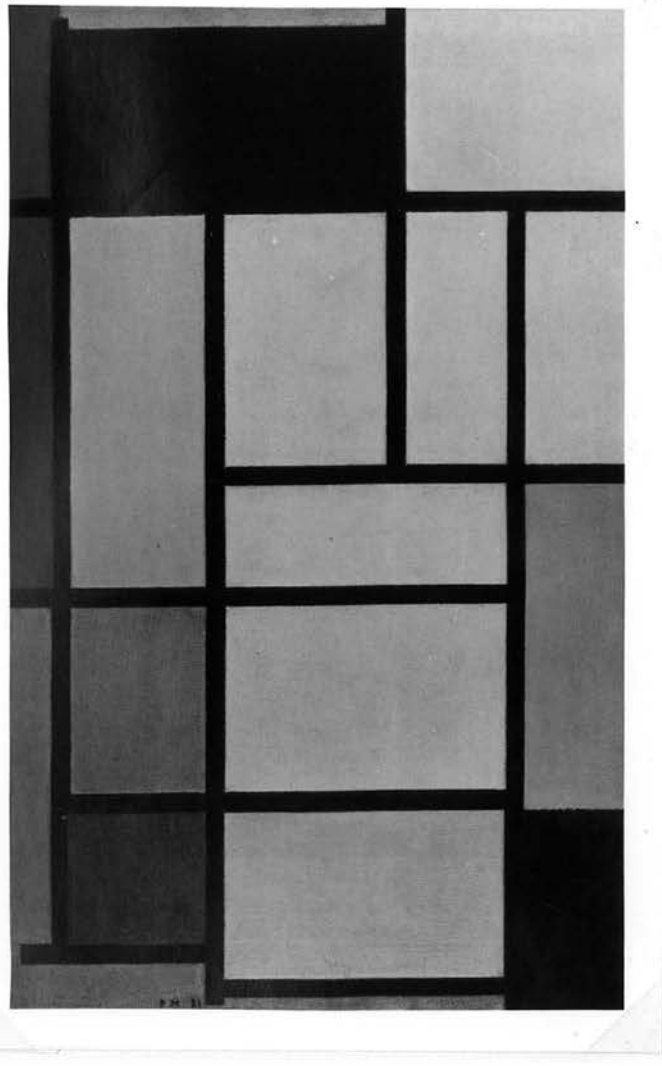

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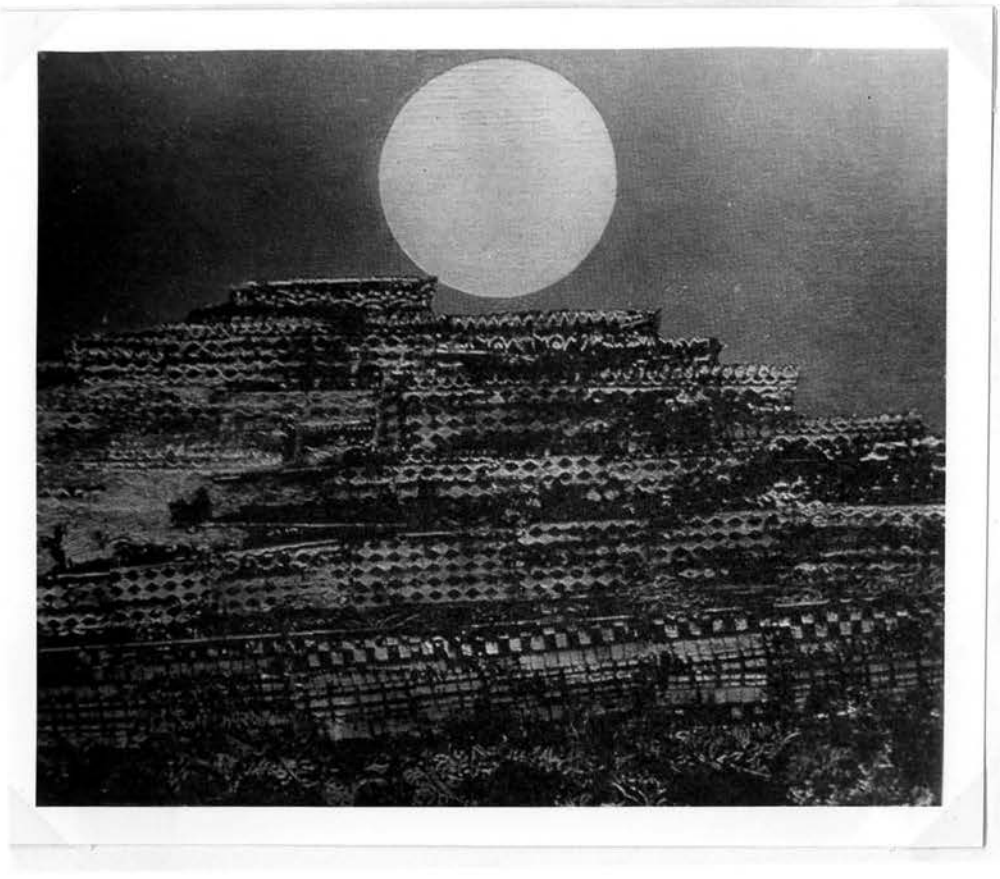
1921, Gemeente-Museum
The Hague



9) MAX ERNST :

PETRIFIED CITY

1937, City Art Gallery, Manchester

10) PABLO PICASSO :

WOMAN WEEPING

1937, Private
Collection,
London