

## **Art As a Factor in the Soul's Evolution**

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[Page 1] IT is difficult to define Theosophy with a phrase; but were once asked so to define it, perhaps one could hardly do better than say that it is a way of looking at the universe and man from the standpoint of their Creator. To look at everything from the standpoint of God and not of man — this is the gift that the Divine Wisdom bestows on those that cherish her. Hence it is that there is nothing in life that is not interesting to the Theosophist; the speck of dust on the ground, and the glowing nebulas in the heavens that are to form solar systems, the tiny living cell with its untold mysteries, and the Elder Brothers of our race that are the glory of our humanity — all these have their message for him and tell him something of Theosophy. Science, Art, Religion, and Philosophy, every conceivable branch of knowledge, is but a [Page 2] means whereby he gains a glimpse of the Divine Wisdom that is the manifestation of the mind of God.

With this old and yet ever new synthesis of life's activities to guide his vision, man looks on the universe with new eyes; he holds in his hands the key to the riddle of the universe, and even if when veil after veil is lifted there must be veil upon veil behind, yet each raising of a veil will only add glory to his vision.

With the first true glance into the real meaning of life that comes with the study of Theosophy in its modern presentation, three facts will ever stand insistent before the consciousness of man. Of these the first is that everywhere in the universe, at every conceivable point in space, and yet outside it all, there is a Consciousness, the expression of whose Will is the universe visible and invisible. Call it by what name we will, the fact is the same; God, Absolute Spirit, Divine Law — these are merely so many different ways of conceiving this truth. We may regard God, the one Consciousness behind all things, with many a philosopher as Pure Being, or as the Eternally Holy from the standpoint of religion; it will be the aim of this paper to point out the significance of yet another aspect as the Infinitely Beautiful.

It is this aspect that the divine Plato revealed to the world; and the few in Persia and India that follow the mystical philosophy of the Sûfis still attest to this day that it has not been altogether forgotten. [Page 3]

Furthermore, this consciousness or being of God manifests itself in the universe, we are told, in a trinity of threefold activity, symbolized in diverse ways in the world-religions; of these many trinities, which are symbols, one is taken for the purpose of this paper — that of Power, Wisdom and Mind. Usually this trinity is thought of as Power, Wisdom and Love; but Mind is here substituted for Love for the following reasons. As the words are here used a difference exists between Mind and Wisdom; mind it is that gathers facts of consciousness, analyses them, synthesizes them, and thus slowly comes to certain conclusions, and finally to generalization; through the workings of the mind there arises knowledge, as distinct from wisdom. But wisdom does not analyze or synthesize; the thing or law is known by another process, whose faint manifestation among us now is the intuition; it is known from within and not from

without. When wisdom works, for an instant the duality between the knower and the thing known ceases, and the new fact of consciousness is gained from within.

Wisdom, then, is the second aspect of the Trinity. But in reality Wisdom is, to our consciousness, a flashing back and forth between a duality of Beauty and Love. There may be knowledge of a thing or person through the working of the mind, through reason, through judgment; but the wisdom of it arises when through a flash of what to us is love there arises a momentary identification of knower and [Page 4] known, and with that the sensing of the Pattern or Archetype, the Beautiful-in-itself, of which the thing known is a particular manifestation. Beauty, then, cannot be separated from Love, nor Love from Beauty, for they are the inseparable dual manifestations in time and space of Wisdom.

The second great fact that is understood with the true vision of life is that everything in the universe is directed by intelligence. We realize that the scheme of life and activity that we call evolution is the result of a conscious direction; and that this direction is in accordance with a Plan made by a Master Mind. Facts of evolution from this standpoint assume a new significance, for evolution is the realization in our world of consciousness of this divine Plan. Nature is not, then, blindly working to produce forms that will adapt themselves to changing conditions, but it is chaos that is being slowly and laboriously moulded into a cosmos after a Pattern that exists from the beginning of things.

This pattern is Plato's World of Ideas, in which exist the archetypes of things. In one of its aspects it is Kant's world of the things-in-themselves, out of space, time and causality; it is, too, the Divine Mind of Berkeley. What the general concept is to the particular, such is the relation of the archetypal world to our world of time and space.

Before the beginning of evolution, the Divine Mind conceives the archetypes of forms in which the divine [Page 5] life is to manifest; but before man's consciousness which is an expression of that life can exist in full self-consciousness in the archetype, it must first slowly be conscious on a lower realm in the several manifestations of that archetype. Let us consider, for instance, what seems an evident fact, that it is in the scheme of evolution that the human soul is to be clothed in the future in an ideal form, perfectly beautiful and a full expression of the life within. The Divine Mind conceives the archetypal form, and thence it exists as an absolute reality in the World of Ideas. But a long process of evolution has to be gone through before this aim can be realised, and the human soul in full consciousness can take the archetypal form itself as its vehicle. First, the archetype is brought down from the World of Ideas into lower regions; when this happens, the archetype, that is the reality at the back of a general concept, at once manifests itself as many particulars; forms then are to be built up in matter with these particular manifestations as models. Furthermore, as self-consciousness in the human soul is first developed in the lowest realms of matter, these particular types will there appear; they will, perhaps, be hardly recognisable as particulars, for the virgin matter is difficult to mould and the forms will be of the roughest and crudest. But slowly, race after race, the guiding intelligences modify these crude manifestations one after another so as to perfect them; and thus the human [Page 6] consciousness is taught to pass from a vehicle of one particular type to that of another and so slowly onwards to life in the archetype itself.

This, then, is the reason, when we consider the human form, that we can trace its broad outlines in the lowest vertebrata and the planning for it in yet earlier forms; the slow laborious march of evolution through one kingdom of nature after another, and in the human, through one race after another, is all but the work of teaching the divine life, that at our stage is the human soul, to grow in power, till it shall be

able to exist in the archetypal form itself and so stand in the presence of God the Father as His perfect Son.

Similarly, too, just as there exists as the perfect vehicle of man's consciousness the archetypal form to which we are marching, so also are there archetypes behind all particulars, whether they be forms, emotions, or thoughts; and the work of evolution is to train man to live in these archetypal ideas and emotions, and not in their particulars, and so realize his divinity.

Three facts, it was stated, stand clearly before the student of Theosophy; of these, two have been mentioned; first, that there is in the universe behind all force and matter a Consciousness, omnipresent and eternally beneficent, call it by what names we will; and, second, that this Consciousness has at the beginning of things made a plan in accordance with which evolution is [Page 7] being guided. The third follows from these two, and it is that man's duty is to understand what is this Plan and work in harmony with it, for his progress and happiness lie in that alone. It is the understanding of the Plan and the harmonious working with it that is the theme of this paper, showing in what way Art may be a means.

Now man, the child of God, is made in the image of God and just as there is in the Unity of the Divine Consciousness a trinity of manifestation, three similar aspects are found in man also. The divine trinity of Power, Wisdom and Mind, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, finds its reflection in man as Spirit, Intuition and Intelligence. In the growth of the soul the expansion of consciousness proceeds from below and hence the first to manifest in man is Intelligence; and then what is designated by the term Intuition, which embodies in itself not only a sense of unity through love, but also the essence of Intelligence; and finally, when man approaches perfection, Spirit manifests in all its power, containing within itself all that was the life and soul of Intuition and Intelligence.

Man's duty is to work with the divine Plan. But at first man's soul is but feebly conscious, with but little intelligence, and he finds himself united to an animal of much power that has been slowly built for him through the ages through the long process of evolution. The body and its energies are the vehicle of the soul, but they have come from the animal [Page 8] world, bringing with them the animal tendencies of self-assertion and selfishness and the strong instinct for the need of a struggle for existence and self-preservation. Were man left alone to evolve by himself at this stage, progress would be infinitesimal, and indeed there would be far more a reversion to animal brutishness than an evolution to human virtue.

But man is not left alone to evolve; teachers and lawgivers, the perfected men of a past age, with a knowledge of the divine Plan, now appear and direct the growth of the souls of men. At first, very largely, an element of fear comes in the rules of guidance, for the only thing that the savage knows is that pain is to be avoided; he has only intelligence working in him, and only this can be appealed to; and the guiding rules are of such a nature that even his dim intelligence can assent to them, seeing how according to them transgression and pain follow in quick succession. There is, nevertheless, in him intuition, a higher faculty than intelligence; it is feeble, only a spark that has just come from the flame. This is a far more potent factor in the soul than the intelligence, and even at this early savage stage an appeal is made to this nascent Godhead within. Hence there are proclaimed to him dictates of altruism, proved more false than true within the limited experience of the dawning intelligence, such as, *Hatred ceases only by love, Return evil with good, Love thy enemies*; and we shall find that in [Page 9] almost every savage community there exists or has existed this teaching of altruism, generally attributed to some mythical hero or god.

We must not forget this fact, that always in man, even at the lowest, there is within him something that can respond intuitively to the highest code of ethics and give assent thereto, though it may be almost impossible to put it into practice; it is this that shows the possibility that a human soul may evolve through good alone to possess in perfection and strength all those qualities of heart and mind that normally are strengthened, but not originated, in the struggle with temptation and evil. "There is a natural melody, an obscure fount, in every human heart. It may be hidden over and utterly concealed and silenced — but it is there. At the very base of your nature, you will find faith, hope, and love. He that chooses evil refuses to look within himself, shuts his ears to the melody of his heart, as he blinds his eyes to the light of his soul. He does this because he finds it easier to live in desires. But underneath all life is the strong current that cannot be checked; the great waters are there in reality".

Slowly man evolves through experience. At first many experiences are required to teach him one law; he has but the intelligence to work with, and many isolated experiences does he go through before there rises in his mind the generalization that is the law of conduct or the truth of nature. Life after life he [Page 10] lives on earth making slow progress, slowly generalizing, one at a time, the immutable laws of things. At first, carried away by the impetuosity of the desires of his earthly garment, he is unjust to many, and through that reaps much suffering, the result of his injustice to others; but slowly there arises in his mind the idea of justice as a law of his being. Again, too, being the slave of *the will to live*, and with a fierce thirst for sensation, he goes to extremes, recoiling from excess of one kind of sensation or emotion to excess of other kinds, suffering much in the process and learning but little; but still gradually, as the outcome of his experiences of pleasure and pain, there arises within him another law of being, temperance. Similarly, too, through refusal to recognize the just bounds that are imposed upon him by the eternal laws, through impatience to obtain what is not yet his due, he brings suffering on others by these means, and himself suffering in return, he slowly learns patience — patience to plan and to achieve and to suffer without complaining.

Each of the virtues that the man learns throughout his many lives becomes a law of his being; it is a generalization from many particular experiences, but when once generalized is his own for ever, a part of himself; and in so far as he thus generalizes, he gets a glimpse of the divine Plan in which the generalizations exist as archetypal ideas.[Page 11]

We now see the usual method of evolution; man learns the immortal virtues through experience. But experience is a slow teacher, for many particular experiences, requiring perhaps many lives on earth, are needed to instil into the man's soul one truth; is this the only method of building into our inner natures the virtues of Loyalty, Honour, Purity, Sincerity, and the others? Were there no other method, evolution would achieve too little at the expense of much energy dissipated.

There is, however, another way. Man has not only the one aspect of intelligence; there is a higher one of intuition — Buddhi is the name we give to it in our Theosophical studies. Beauty and love are its dual manifestation, but through either it is awakened. When, then, a man lives his lives on earth and loves a few here and there with whom he comes into contact, the Buddhi, the soul of intuition, grows within him. For love, in truth, manifests the immortality within, for it is a desire for the everlasting possession of the good and the beautiful.

Here, then, is a new factor to help his evolution. Intuition transcends reason; wisdom comes from its

exercise, not merely knowledge, as from mind; intuition generalises from within and not from without, not through many particulars, but by sensing the archetype itself. We see thus a new method of realising the virtues, through their archetypes, the divine Ideas themselves, a method [Page 12] by which evolution can be hastened by anticipating experience. Man thenceforward begins to live in the eternal.

Now we can understand the place of Art as a factor in the soul's evolution. Art, in its highest manifestation, always deals with the archetypes. "Its one source is the knowledge of Ideas; its one aim the communication of this knowledge" (Schopenhauer). Music, the Drama, Poetry, Sculpture, Painting, and the other branches of Art, in so far as they show us types of life and form, are true manifestations of Art; in so far as they fall short of this, they are but playing with fleeting shadows.

The divine Ideas are archetypes of natural things, objects and forms that manifest in the orderly process of nature, as a result of the unseen forces that guide evolution; the beauty in them is a reflection of the beauty of the archetypes. We have, however, many things of man's manufacture that may be beautiful — lovely designing and ornamentation, work in silver and gold.

Now it does not follow that because we postulate the Idea, or archetype, for such a natural object as a tree or a flower, that there is of a necessity an archetype for an artificial manufactured article like a chair or a table or a book; nevertheless these latter may be beautiful, if in them the artist tries to embody reflections of several concepts of the archetypal world, such as grace, rhythm, harmony. [Page 13]

When the artist deals with a natural thing, he must try to sense the archetype; if he paints a rose, he must suggest to us through its species the particular conception, a rose, and through that the archetypal idea, flower, an eternal concept; does he merely paint a hand — then the more it suggests to us the archetypal hand the more beautiful it will be. And here we see the true significance of genius. It is the ability of the human soul to come into touch with the World of Ideas. But it is not the artist alone who is a genius; the philosopher with his broad generalisations, the pure-hearted saint in his lofty contemplation, the lover who through human loves rises to one divine, all live in a realm where "eternity affirms the conception of an hour", for genius is the power of giving expression to the unexhausted forms of creation potentially existing in the mind of the Creator".

The true function of Art is to put us in touch with archetypal concepts, and true art in reality does so. Sculpture tells us of grace, that "proper relation of the acting person with the action", and reveals to us the *idea* of the figure. Painting shows us more the character of the mind, and depicting passions and emotions shows the soul in its alternations between willing and knowing; historical painting, again, through particular individuals, that have helped the race by the nobility of their conduct, suggests to us types of men and women; portrait painting, though [Page 14] there may be a faithfulness in portraying a living individual, is yet only great when through the person on the canvas a type can be suggested or hinted at, sometimes merely the particular manifestation of an archetype in humanity. In painting, landscape painting perhaps brings us nearer to the world of ideas through the beauties of nature. It may be the simple picture of a sunset, but the artist will be great if, through the harmony of light and color, he can suggest to our intuition the *archetypal sunset* with its many more dimensions than we can cognize now. With paintings of seas and mountains, lakes and dells, he can teach us to see Nature as she is, as the Mirror of the Divine Mind.

Poetry has much in common with sculpture and painting. It deals with concepts, depicting them with the music of words, with meter and rhythm as a veil to awaken our deeper intuitions to penetrate behind. The true poet reflects the archetypal ideas in the mirror of his own experience, real or imaginary. He looks on the world, and his genius enables him to see the reflections of the archetype around him, and he tells us of joy and sorrow, hope and despair, typical and universal, in the hearts of all men; he gives us the abiding truths which so often vanish in the critical analysis of the lower mind. In epic poetry, the poet shows the heroes of antiquity as types of men, and a Ulysses or a King Arthur, moving about with an atmosphere of his own, makes us dimly feel [Page 15] that there must be and there will be always such men in our midst. In lyric poetry, the poet becoming himself a mirror to reflect typical emotions in others, feeling them as it were, himself, sings of men as he sees them with those *larger, other eyes* than ours.

No branch of Art, perhaps, except Music, can help man to rise to higher levels than the Drama. For the drama shows the inner conflict in man. The true dramatist fastens on fleeting reflections of archetypes in humanity, materializes them, and then on the stage makes them live; and through these types he sounds for us the deep notes in humanity — the pain that is not uttered, the temptations that beset men, their failures and successes, the destiny that makes effect follow inexorably upon cause, and the purification of the human soul through self-sacrifice. For a few hours we are to forget ourselves, and, like the gods, watch mankind in its struggles. We contemplate life, impartially and impersonally, through these types on the stage, and begin to understand life as it is, and not as we think it is. And as before, the nearer the dramatist in his creation comes to types in humanity, the greater he is. The types of men and women in Aeschylus and Sophocles, those that the prolific genius of Shakespeare has created for us, Tannhäuser, Wotan, Brünnhilde, Siegfried, Amfortas, Kundry and Parsifal from the mind of Wagner — all these are ever in humanity; and our knowledge of them gives us a larger view of life. [Page 16] Through watching their experiences, too, we anticipate experiences for ourselves, thus hastening evolution and passing on swifter to the goal. Looking at the world through the eyes of the dramatist, we may ourselves become “serene creators of immortal things”.

With architecture and music we come, as in landscape painting, to the more impersonal manifestations of Art. Architecture and music are closely allied, and the description of architecture as *frozen music*, shows us the relation. For architecture is harmony in space as music is harmony in time. A great work of architecture is like a musical thought-form that descends from on high and becomes materialised in stone. It puts us in touch with the realm of Ideas by telling us the laws of proportion — visible not only in the one building alone but also in the whole universe — by giving us concepts of gravity, rigidity, rhythm, harmony, by making us understand “the bass notes of nature”.

But what shall be said of the greatest of all the arts — Music ? In ways not possible to other branches of Art, music makes us feel our immortality. It tell us of the archetypal world directly, of things of that world without their veils; tells of sorrow, not mine or yours, but Sorrow itself — God's Sorrow, if you will; of love, not mine or yours, not of this individual or that, but love of Love; for music is the soul of Art and talks to us with the language of God.[Page 17]

Sorrow is hard to bear, and doubt is slow to clear,

Each sufferer says his say, his scheme of the weal and woe:

But God has a few of us whom He whispers in the ear;

The rest may reason and welcome: 'tis we musicians know.

True art, then, will always call forth a response in man from the higher intuition, the Buddhi, whose heritage is the archetypal world. It will always suggest something of the world of Ideas. Art, from this standpoint, is always didactic, can never be anything else. It does not necessarily teach us our known ideas of ethics; but it will always show to our intuitions how to look at man and the world from the standpoint of God, that is, in their true relations. It will teach us to *cast out the self*, the true aim of Ethics, Religion and Philosophy. Art, then, is a means for the quickening of the Buddhi, whence come swift generalisations from within of the meaning of life's activities, and the hastening of evolution.

Art can help the evolution of man in another way. Sooner or later in the endless life of the growing soul, there comes a time when an inner change takes place within him; life loses its old attractions for him, and he seeks for something more abiding than the world can offer him. He has come to the end of the *Path of Out-going* and begins to tread the *Path of Return*. There is the *reversal of motives*, and he yearns for things eternal. If he has in his previous lives loved beautiful things, not [Page 18] merely through the senses, but rather through his intuitions, then, slowly, without violent transitions and without deep inner struggles, he passes from his life of worldliness, and enters upon the higher way. For the higher path is not so radically different from that lower where it was pleasant to live and love beautiful things; the higher is but the lower transformed into one of absolute beauty and happiness, without the dross of mortality that made all things lovable transient so that they fell short of our desire. Truly it might be said of the new life of eternal beauty,

I plucked a rose, and lo! it had no thorn.

Further as the man grows to his fuller life through Art, he grows from within, as the flower grows, and there is a harmonious development of all the faculties of the soul, not losing in breadth what he gains in intensity. He grows to be a harmonious and *musical* soul. He treads, swiftly as surely,

the Middle Road, whose Course

Bright Reason traces and soft Quiet smoothes.

No longer a creature vacillating between changing *moods*, his key-note of character now will be Sophrosyne, sound-mindedness, health of heart; and through love of the sciences and fair philosophies, he learns how to blend all human feelings and thoughts "into an immortal feature of perfection".

But more wonderful than all these is the vision he gains of the divine Plan; he becomes a knower of the [Page 19] inner nature of things; he feels and thinks archetypal, the truly *ideal*, emotions and thoughts. Through them he sees in what ways he can become a co-worker with God, how he may be God's messenger on earth to tell of Heaven. A greater happiness than this is not possible to any man, and it is this that comes to him through Art.

Yet Art is not the end. Man has in him a more God-like aspect than intuition; it is Âtmã, Spirit. Through the exercise of intuition Spirit will reveal itself; and what Art is to the dreary view of life of the unevolved man, so will the Spirit-aspect of life be to Art. Of this we know nothing; and yet do we perhaps discern a

reflection of that undreamed of view of life in the lives of a Buddha and a Christ ? Has not every utterance from them an archetypal character, flashing forth into many meanings in our minds ? Do they not seem to live a life that is a symbol, every event of their lives being, as it were, a symbol of some deep living truth in the Eternal Mind of the Most High ? Is it not to this new aspect of life that Art itself is but the threshold ?

Who but the greatest of artists can tell us of that glory that shall be revealed ? Yet, till we come to that day, we have Art to guide us on our way. "Die Kunst, O Mensch, hast du allein" — Art that shall lead a man's feelings and not follow them, that shall make him free-willing, in the image of his Maker. For Art is life at its intensest, and reveals the beauty [Page 20] and worth of all human activities; and yet it shall be the mission of Art, now and for ever, to show men that Life, even in all its fullness, is like "a dome of many-colored glass", reflecting but broken gleams of "the white radiance of Eternity".