

AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

Does art reveal a world unknown to our everydayish common understanding? Or is it only snobbish and fussy posturing about painted pieces of paper, sounds, shapes, lines or equivocal gestures, movements and the like? Some of our cultural preferences deify, others are denounced as cheap; and when eulogies of connoisseurs, and recognised critics, virtuosos all overwhelmingly reinforce these reactions, are we already handed down a venerated tradition? If one makes an affirmative reply to the first question one is in for some sort of metaphysics of art, and if one says 'yes' to the second one approves of anthropological approach to art or 'aesthetic experience'. Obviously nobody who is least acquainted with the issue could reasonably give affirmative response to both these questions. Yet, one may wonder if the above antithetical pair of questions do really exhaust the issue, or are really so exclusive as they appear.

Some philosophers of the phenomenological tradition have insisted on going beyond these familiar grounds, while taking full look on 'aesthetic-experience'. They simply step aside of rather simplistic dichotomy of psychologism, materialism or cultural relativism on one side and metaphysical essentialism, esotericism on the other. Mikel Dufrenne has written an extended philosophical treatise which was published way back in 1953 by University De France Under the French title : *Phenomenologie de l' experience esthetique*¹ that was recognised by the scholars of aesthetics as an eminently readable and coherent presentation of what phenomenology could do to explain the perplexities and paradoxes of aesthetic experience and its critical elaboration. As such it has been a great pleasure to read the present English version so diligently prepared by the team of four for North Western University Studies in Phenomenology and existential philosophy led by Prof. Edward S. Casey of Oxford, who also writes a very useful foreword to the translation. He volunteers

1. The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience—Mikel Dufrenne, English translation Edward Casey and others, North Western University Press, Evanston, U.S., pp. XLVI + 578, U.S., 1973.

the information that since 1960 Mikel Dufrenne has offered to those interested in philosophy of art, around another half a dozen works in which some of the suggested concepts earlier in the phenomenology have been more fully explored and expounded satisfactorily. As it is, this earlier work is the only one which is now made available in English, it is useful to have some debate on few salient issues which are highlighted by Phenomenology. (to be referred as Phe. followed by page Nos., hereafter) regarding Aesthetic Experience.

Within the limits of a short critical essay the present contributor shall of necessity pick and choose only some propositions for detailed comments and exposition cannot but ignore the rest of the bulk of the treatise that covers around six hundred closely set printed pages. Here, a couple of introductory remarks regarding the internal structure of Phe. may lessen somewhat any injustice to it, in our proposed discussion. Phe. opens out to reflect on ' Aesthetic-Object ' that covers almost two hundred and forty pages to be followed by second part on the analysis of Work of Art that make some ninety pages, moving on to Aesthetic-perception in the third section roughly of the same size and finally fourth which takes little over hundred and quarter. A critique of Aesthetic Experience. This is the treatise. As Dufrenne declares (see Phe. introduction, p. LXVI) ' . . . we shall pass from the phenomenological to the transcendental and the transcendental will itself flow into the metaphysical; for, in asking how aesthetic experience is possible we shall be led to ask whether and how it can be true ', the work opens on a very wide horizon and aspires to give a whole aesthetics with universal metaphysics duly based on genuine art—appreciation. A new Aesthetics of art-experience without any facile theories of Beauty so well trodden in the conventional Philosophies of Art. No, Mikel Dufrenne wishes to offer (see Phe. p. XXIII) ' an aesthetic which does not reject evaluation is yet not subservient to it. It is an aesthetics which recognises beauty, without creating a theory of Beauty, because there is no theory to create : there is stating of what aesthetic objects are and to the degree that they truly are, they are beautiful '.

We may have occasion later to examine what Dufrenne thinks 'real' is, particularly in the context of sensuous experiencing of 'Aesthetic-Object' and the various implications of such experiencing; here, all I have to point out is that phenomenological stance appears to me to be unclear about its conceptual-framework and equivocates about modes of being of 'what is possible' on the one hand with 'what is plausible' on the other. Regrettably, Dufrenne often ends up by falling into a faceless reification of past, and its intentions and future and 'not yet'—realizations together with presence of other fellowmen making it one global consciousness of sorts. Further well-known fact of Art-History regarding iconic signs (such as those that fuse the token with their 'signification') Dufrenne naively employs as a valid argument for almost spinning out an ontology of sorts; an ontology of art-meaning. Eventually, he also seems to confuse the two notions of 'real' and 'meaning' as he indulges in slipshot use of the term 'world' that we hope to show, here, by and by.

The Phe. avoids the two familiar extremes in aesthetics,—one overmuch logic-chopping and conceptualization usually uninformed of actual art, working of art-processes or even genuine aesthetic-experience, the other submergence of most significant issues and concepts under unceasing descriptions of so-called 'specifics' of particular artifacts, pieces, details of artworks and haggling over authorship, dates and authenticity (so, ironically undependable) effusive minutiae and jargon of genre, style, techniques or quarrels over classifications of periods and evaluations. Dufrenne deserves a good cheer for having deftly side-stepped all this.

On the contrary, Dufrenne had his long rewarding communion with varied 'sensuous-glories' that devotees of Western Muses have offered and collected in Paris (at least this is my surmise on reading his remarks on classical works strewn throughout Phe.). He, as it is, seems to know his Bach, Mozart, Beethoven or Debussy and their classic symphonies, poetry of Rimbaud, Verlaine Valery, Baudelaire, Goethe or Holderlin, classical drama of Racine, Moliere or Sartre, fiction of great masters like Hugo, Stendhal, Balzac, Zola, Proust, or Malraux. Painters such as Matisse, Van Gogh, Rembrandt, Picasso also seem to people his world. Concerts, theatre, choir, opera, and of course end-

less rounds through Louvres, and other galleries quiet humming of lines remembered echoing and re-echoing down the memory lane over decades, unmistakably punctuate his musings first then their critical exposition, here in Phe. They seem to season and flavour what Dufrenne has to say about 'aesthetic-experience'. He offers in his aesthetic theory as much of this intimate tone and collateral images of a notable and genuine *Rasik* (qualified spectator) as his critical reflections on what he has witnessed of this sensuous-depth. In wonder if Dufrenne could agree to Croce's remark that witness nearly relives as he sees the creation that creator had created through his expression, in the first instance, or seer and creator thus fuse and lose themselves in one, single, sure, expression sans time and place notwithstanding.

Still, one may record that Dufrenne's Phe. is from the standpoint of the spectator only (which we shall see could be defended on his central thesis of aesthetic-experience) and one could even show that he ignores, here at any rate, such other and equally relevant concerns as of the creator or that of the critic. Surely, it is not his intention in writing Phe. to supply guidelines to any aspiring artist or poet or to offer a ready-reckoner to an art-critic of some trend-setting learned weekly eager to judge and deal with magisterial solemnity the creator and his insolent creation, for their saucy indiscretions!

To my mind, all that a observe above about Phe. makes it a significant work, of genuine cultural value, precisely because it so well sidesteps the raucous noise of 'party-whips' and ideological commitments or loud declamations about unconscious urges of the poor-things the artists, or some computerised mathematical programme for art—Happily, none of this trendy clap-trap faults Phe. Sartre, Merleau Ponty, Heidegger, Bergson, Etienne Souriau, Husserl and to much lesser degree Roman Ingarden and Hegel seem to have his forebodings. (See Phe., pp. 199-239). To some for instance Merleau Ponty he nods, Sartre he spars with unceasing vigour regarding latter's theory of Unreality of imagination (Phe., pp. 353-54) and to others say Husserl, Etienne, Souriau, Ingarden, Conrad he handsomely acknowledges his debt more than once.

It is useful to state that the core of Phe. revolves round the notion of 'aesthetic-object' which Dufrenne (Phe., Pt. I) has distinguished from that of 'art-work'; by latter he understands the conventional material artifact a physical-being among will-less things. Subject's perceptions, sensuousness and 'aestheticisation' are pre-supposed by all the aesthetic-objects, holds Phe. Although a bare 'art-work' could last (the cave-paintings, ruins or monument like Taj) as a natural object without satisfying one or more of these intentional conditions, but they are not 'art' just as Mayan shrines were just another gold quarry for Spanish conquistors.

At this stage we take note of what Dufrenne says regarding the distinction between the 'in-itself' of art-object and 'in-itself' of aesthetic-object for us' that explains Dufrenne's crucial non-naturalist ontology of art. This is spelt out in Phe. in extended exposition in Part I (pp. 10-13, 223 and passim) as his pivotal position. It is not only that he insists on autonomy of That is not only that he insists on autonomy of aesthetic-being of such Subject-Object correlation in this sort of inbuilt hyphenated 'Experience of Aesthetic-Objects', but goes on to argue that the Real reveals its consubstantial harmony between subject coming to possess the sensuous, and nature rising for the subject only through such temporary alienation that it fully comes to reveal its presence. World of aesthetic-experience brings out expressed world that we of harried work-a-day world, utilitarians alphas-ees are apt to ignore. Aesthetic-Object, thus concretises 'real' our consubstantial presence (affective-apriori, see Phe., Part IV, p. 455, and ff p.) that works itself into a sensuous project only through our human perception (see Dufrenne's extended comments on Wagner's Tristan and Isolde, Phe, pp. 6-14 and compare his foot-note on pp. 394-395). Dufrenne's demand of Percipient's neutralization of the actual to enable the imaginary to express itself and body forth seems to take on the older notion of Bullough's—the Psychical-Distance as well as poetic prerequisites noted by earlier writers in nineteenth century as they insisted on the part of the reader of poetry 'a willing suspension of disbelief'.

To appreciate Dufrenne's major contribution to theory of Aesthetic-Perception as Phenomenology of Sensuous that consti-

tutes the world of Aesthetic-Objects, we see his conditional parallelism of the subject and the aesthetic-object that supersede both the onlooker as well as the material artifact. He argues and emphasizes on double alienation in the course of Aesthetic-experience of the spectator as well as the derealization of the natural object to enable the project or art to form its 'gestalt', which, howsoever problematic it is in its identity incarnates nevertheless the 'aesthetic-object' with all its various material and non-material tiers—such as body, function, sense, form, depth and expression lives through all of them without being given in any of these isolable or analysable single element. Anatomy of this quasi-subject occupies Phe. extensively, its identity and being are sought to be illuminated in terms of material, formal, psychical and interpersonal emotive elements that constitute these tiers of 'Aesthetic-Object'. I must express my disappointment and fear that irrespective of phenomenological subtleties this whole discussion has not advanced in the direction of clarity as to What exactly one should call the Aesthetic Object? (See, Phe., Part I, Chapter VI, "Being of the Aesthetic-Object", pp. 226-230; Part II, Chapter X, when Dufrenne talks about the structure of the work of Art, pp. 316-17, in Part III, Chapter XIV, Feeling and Depth of the Aesthetic-Object, and the whole of the Part IV especially Chapter XVIII, The Truth of the Aesthetic-Object, pp. 530-537 where Dufrenne claims truth to real compossibilities as concretised in genuine Aesthetic-Objects.)

The discussion and critical reconstructions that Dufrenne makes of the various classifications of Arts and their objects on the basis of their genre, medium, schematism (representational devices pre-supposing arrangements of temporality and organisations of spatiality) are perceptive and instructive. Parts II and III of Phe. are thus most rewarding. These bring to bear on the subject considerably penetrating new material (possibly, well-worked out in last few generations of Continental Art scholarship). Dufrenne seeks to set the paradigm of Harmony, Rhythm and Melody from the structure of musical compositions, first and then to apply the same to mixed arts like theatre, dancing, film and later even try to subsume painting, sculpture and architecture under the musical paradigm. Dufrenne's views on temporalizing of space in painting and spatializing of time in symphony

to pick on the two representatives of the great divide of aesthetic world deserve critical recognition. He writes : ' Such time is not a dimension of the objective world but rather a temporal atmosphere which corresponds to a world atmosphere to the world expressed by the Work. The measured time of the temporal arts, a time which we must follow in order to apprehend the aesthetic object, is like an image of the more secret time in terms of which aesthetic-object is meaning. Similarly, the space of spatial arts is like an image of that more secret space which is unique to the temporal Arts and through which the aesthetic object possesses an invincible presence and proclaim its own world. ' (Phe., p. 299).

Similarly, Dufrenne gives far from extended and some what sporadic analysis of literary-arts, too, poems, plays and novels. He makes a couple of deep searching probes into the complex web that these severally differing literary-works create. Here, Verbal meaning, Uttered pattern of sound, collective myths and traditional legends and symbols, structure and schematism of representation, collateral memories of the author, or his reader running parallel to the fabled character and fictive emotions constituting narrative and its style referring to varieties are all taken note of if not fully explored, and Dufrenne is aware that this multiplicity of ingredients does not remain severally discernible in the expression of the literary works latter are rather blended and fused and transformed through several rounds of interpenetrating reverberations. It is this constant recrystallization of elements that marks literary-arts in a way as most subtle and mixed. Perhaps it is this character of poetic expression that it is claimed ' that out of three sounds I do not make a fourth but a star ' and the claim at least does not seem to be entirely mad. Dufrenne writes (Phe., pp. 328-9) ' . . . the work as a whole bears expression. . . . these traits are not elements on whose basis we could reconstitute the whole, they are not schemata that is, that is the elements of a structure or the generative elements of a totality. Furthermore, when such traits are collected together and systematically exploited they cease to be effective as a result of this very effort. . . . '

Surely, literary creations are in language and could hardly exploit spectacular characteristics of the medium as painting,

sculpture do of colour or texture; or music does of melody and dance of the sinuosities of human person, gesture and movements. (Unless, one insists on plays being staged in theatre, and in poetry recitation of verses as prior condition of knowing a poem.) We have to agree with Dufrenne that literary-arts represent the highest triumph of human subjectivity.

Thinking about our own traditions, I am convinced that much of verve and depth of Ghalib's ghazal or Mira's Bhajan or other vaishnav poetry or its commercial reproductions with the coming of standard recitations preserved by Long-playing records, or the convival atmosphere of a Mushaira or Kavi-sammelan are far from intellectual and literary associations as it seem to owe more plain melliflous tone and melody of voice. Poetry is echo and re-echo of uttered vice.

Role of Language in its primary function of introducing 'significations' has well slipped through Dufrenne's treatment because our author seems too keen to emphasize the multiplicity of modes, manners and varieties in different literary genres, to realize that these all are parasitical to the primary role of words. Further, Dufrenne generally insists that all arts whistfully look and aim at that fusion of their thinghood with sense such as musical expression (Sonata) fully embodies in sound its perfections of sense and thus achieve a complete transfiguration of the world of the creator as that of the listener. But this is too high a demand. We do find gaps in conventional signs such as ordinary language uses or arbitrary symbols in use in several graphic arts, and the vastly different onmotopoeic icons of a few poetic compositions. Dufrenne is just insensitive to problems of complexities of Meaning theory. But don't we have scores for musical compositions? There is the thirst for order and symmetry in empirical sciences as say in astronomy. Cannot one visualize a sort of structural analogue of sound expressed in mathematical language even for a Symphony, true, which will not be performed Music or Aesthetic-Object one lives with in a concert-Hall, it still may bear some isomorphous resemblance to art understandable to those trained in theory of music and acoustics? Then, are all art-works, whether well or ill-performed, equally and uniformly iconic? In other words are there no ways of grading the excellence of performance in intelligible degrees? Must it

be either-or situation? And Pray how are we to know the success or failure of attempted concordance and correspondence of a poem to a theatrical representation an original play into a ballet composition, a Novel into a film, a Song's illustration on Canvas? One faces several difficult issues as to how con-substantial correlation of artistic creations could be visualized. Here, how are we to know in such transfers except externally which is the original and the other adaptation? Of course we are told of colours of tones or Chromatism of musical compositions: of melody and dance of colours Dufrenne hints at some of these facts of art-perception, but despite assurance to stick to 'specifics' of art Phe. cannot offer much on these beyond familiar common places. Dufrenne recognises (Phe., p. 411), '...we may not be able to interperet a particular line of verse such as "Time sparkled and our dreams are knowledge". We may ask just, what does this mean? But the moment we become sensitive to the line's enchantment and are led into the poetic state, which may have to be the result of a long familiarity that is hardly comparable to the understanding's effort to seek stubbornly a solution to a problem. Then the question of meaning is no longer at the stake? 'No, Dear Mr. Dufrenne it was never at stake for you.'

Now, one more point, which is useful to note about Phe., is its analysis of conditions of aesthetic perception. Dufrenne reviews perception, representation, imagination, reflection, feeling, and aesthetic attitude. (part III, pp. 335-441, Chapters XI to XV) This is obviously quite consistent with his treatment of aesthetic object for latter exists as claimed in Phe. only as a disposition of generic human-sensuousness. Dufrenne commits humanity to these dispositions, and even calls them 'affective-apriori'. He offers lot of now familiar gestalt-psychology and its explorations into form-completion, imaginative elaboration of perceived 'presence' and largely maintains organic-totality of all artistic expressions; he writes, '...Expression has said everything in a single stroke. I need not anticipate not just because I am in contact with a free agent but also because there is simply nothing to anticipate. Everything is in expression and what is expressed is given to me immediately' (Phe., pp. 385-6).

Dufrenne has little desire to analyse and seek clarity about constitution of the contemplated art-pieces.; for he deprecates measure and recommends depth which is beyond measurement (*Phe.*, p. 398) and that too should lead to our own transformation. He quotes : to recite the verse : " Oh lake, silent rocks, grottos and dark forests " is hardly to establish a geographical inventory; it is instead to yield to a sort of enchantment. In the end we comprehend such a line just as we comprehend the most difficult of texts, by attaining through the agency of feeling to a world which cannot be defined ' (*Phe.*, p. 411). The mystery of imagined or expressed depth is striven hard to be captured, and it is not to be nailed to an image even, as a shadow being of our subjectivity but as depth or a project which not only negates external world but uses even image to externalise our intentional being into a timeless ' presence '. Dufrenne thinks that it is not only material sounds, colours, shapes that incarnate the total expression but even the subject as own images and memories ought to help to get to this internal world of the aesthetic-object. (*Form* exemplifies this expression).

When all our conceptual reflection and representation have done to assist this contemplation and have not yet quite got to the atmosphere. He writes : ' . . . after I have reflected on a poem by Mallarmé subjected it to grammatical analysis, interpreted its terms, established its subject—in short the work appears to as clearly as possible, I must still say what Mallarmé has communicated and state of only half consciously and to myself the poem's unique atmosphere that rarefied atmosphere between dream and perception where all edges of reality are blunted. . . . ' (*Phe.*, p. 422 cp p. 420). Art-objects, thus either cause total alienation or bring ecstasy and the two are reinforced by each other for aesthetic-object's perfection is ' . . . to be a quasi-subject, but it attains this expressive rigour and security of its objective being a body with an extraordinary developed nervous system, as a man attains the spiritual only by accepting unconditionally his temporal existence ' (*Phe.* p. 425). That is the material structure and the sense and intentions within the aesthetic-object ought to fuse (?) or do as a matter of fact always fuse ? One does not know : here, what really is Dufrenne after, that is if he is setting this up as the ideal that successful aesthetic experience ought to strive

for; or does he suggest like the romantic idealists of Arts that everything of works like Mona-Lisa is unique as well as existentially necessary, an organic whole an instance of affective-a-priori? But what one would do to scores of accedents of modes, manners, slips, mishaps, conventions, styles that are part of its history? Could one not think that even given these conventions and history being what they were, still, the specific work could be wholly other than what it actually is? If not so where stands the autonomy? Is art an unfoldment of a cultural destiny, a sort of Hegel's famous cunning of Reason? How far the sensuous qualities, and affective-apriori, spectacle, themes, techniques and aesthetic intents and their executions could be externalised in a given art-work? Do they harmonise of necessity in all cases? If not, so how do we know when they have failed to converge? We can see for Dufrenne only two options, either to face these questions which he nowhere faces, or reject the ontology and dialectic and end up with relativism, despite his advocacy of affective-apriori and be swallowed up in anthropomorphism (see Phe. p. 538 ff.). Or declare most work of art to be really crafts and that too fairly unsuccessful; real aesthetic object then shall be very rare, indeed, in fact hardly ever to be found in actual art-history. For myself, none of those aesthetic-objects that he has communicated with can be safely regarded as adequate externalization of the 'quasi-subject' of their creator's aesthetic depth. The variety of traits of these works, even if they are what they are cohere as they may, could have also not cohered at all; components and structures in these works could be taken to be no less recalcitrant as in most others that hardly fuse choreography, their temporal order, spectacle, theme, mood, message without residue in their finally transfigured 'presence'. No, all art is far far away from any kind of empty tautology; though even in case of a tautology one could show that the external notation in which it is expressed could be more than one.

Before I end, I would very briefly consider Dufrenne's critique of aesthetic-experience (Part IV, pp. 446-556) which is purely discursive. Here, he states what should be the status of aesthetics, analysis of classification of affective-apriori of the sensuous and throws some suggestions for its satisfactory conceptualization derived from inter-subjectivity or intelligible dialectic of art-

communication—leading eventually to a sort of ontology of Art, Meaning. However, I must hasten to protest, first, against Dufrenne's somewhat incoherent use of terms that provides some gratuitous base for his sort of ontology. If a sense can be given and it does not belong to material-world, it is taken to be 'real'! 'meaning' in 'aesthetic-world' (?) even if quite incompatible with familiar objects. Yet, Dufrenne's claims truth to 'aesthetic-experience'. In fact this may be good Kantian transcendentalism or phenomenology but not quite in agreement, of course with our ordinary beliefs about persons and things. Since, there is no objective reality; as well all are posits of alternatively many human-intentions, so none is any less real either argues Phe. Not art-but nature itself could also be taken to be imitating art. This art is expression, this expression is present to this subject before taken from the real. Expression is the truth which is given before the real. In sum expression is the world as Meaning—a world which is given before the objects in it (Phe. p. 531 ff) and rushes Dufrenne on his idealist charger as he writes with metaphysical abandon '... there are as many worlds as there are aesthetic objects and in any case as many as there are artists. The affective-apriori reveals and constitutes these worlds is a *singular-apriori* (underlining mine) which the affective category subsumes only imperfectly.'

But, if the worlds of arts are thus relativised, pray, how do we expect to be in communion with any work of art at all? With all our differentiated training and taste what we would be as true meaning, as that of another virtuoso, how even the creator's own perception or even his intention could arbitrate or clinch such an issue? Even if it is a necessary condition of creator's own work it is not a sufficient condition for the expression that the work is for me; for-itself is for me and through me. Is not so? Dufrenne's singular apriori unless some profundities are added is a bald contradiction in terms. Howsoever, our subjective response in art is a fact, or can be justified, (and this can be done without metaphysical twaddle about Kant and Hegel see Phe. P. 532 and ff). Dufrenne fails to satisfy how his phenomenology has made a new break-through about '... a meaning of the real that art expresses' for all he says just after this is meaning is true because it is affective dimension through which the real may appear

and not the reality of the real which a physical formula could capture' (Phe. p. 516 and ff p). This shows that despite grave metaphysical stances (this whole section) discursive phenomenology only reiterates some old platitudes of German Dialectrical philosophies. A trifle out of date for modern readers.

By massive equivocation alone Dufrenne feels that apriori categories are consubstantial with singular acts of persons, mathematical concepts are conventions or ' snow is white ' is felt true as absent, so an aspect of the perceived as ' snow is white ' (Phe. pp. 450-73).

No, Mr. Dufrenne if the phenomenology wishes to educate us and desires to rise beyond an exhortatory metaphysics it should not mix its metaphysical categories as it does, here, it takes a step backwards in the direction of philosophies of ' some-how ' we have long learnt to ignore. What logic forbids, even expression cannot revamp. Some clear use of key concepts, here, I have tried with deepest humility, to offer to the author of this massive treatise on Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience, I hope, he reacts.

Deptt. of Philosophy,
Panjab University,
Chandigarh.

Dharmendra Goel