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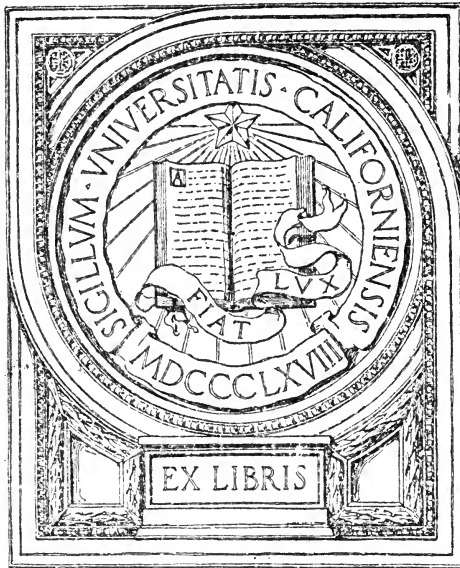
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THE CLASSIFICATION OF THE ARTS

BY PROFESSOR IRA W. HOWERTH



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H6



THE CLASSIFICATION OF THE ARTS

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THE conventional classification of the arts into useful, mechanic or industrial, and liberal, polite or fine is unscientific. It will not stand before even a superficial examination. Fine and useful are by no means mutually exclusive terms. The fine arts are useful, and the useful arts should be fine. The art that paints a picture or chisels a statue satisfies the desire for beauty. It is, therefore, useful for the same reason that cooking or farming or making shoes is useful. All that the word useful implies is satisfaction of desire, and this is the object of all the arts. On the other hand, the word fine, as applied to art, does not signify the absence of utility, but merely that the art has been brought to a certain degree of perfection (polite-polished), and that its practise is associated with gentility. There is no inherent reason why a useful art may not become a fine art. Obviously, then, the division of the arts into fine and useful is not dichotomous. One might as well divide the sciences into practical and interesting.

But are not the fine arts to be distinguished from the useful arts on the ground that the former involve the use of the imagination and the realization of the beautiful? It is true, of course, that the fine arts are *par excellence* the imaginative arts, and that they minister chiefly to the esthetic sense. Still, even this fact does not distinguish them wholly from the useful or industrial arts. Intelligence, imagination and pleasure are elements to be found in all the arts. Art really implies intelligence, and it is clear that imagination and pleasure may enter into invention as well as into the so-called creative arts.

What, then, is the basis of the familiar classification? It is the relative historical circumstances under which the respective arts originated and have been developed. The useful, mechanic or industrial arts are allied to productive labor, and their history is the history of labor; while the liberal, polite or fine arts have always been associated with leisure and culture.

Now productive labor, as everybody knows who is in the least familiar with industrial history, was originally imposed by the conquering upon the conquered. It was a function of the slave. Hence to labor has attached the odium of slavery. A life of productive labor was, in the earlier history of mankind, *prima facie* evidence of subjection and inferiority. This was true not only among barbarians, but

also among the peoples most highly civilized. In Athens, for instance, all work was assigned to slaves. Among the nobility in Lacedæmonia the women were not allowed to spin or weave for fear of degrading their rank. In Rome the trades were called the dirty arts (*sordidæ artes*). Plato and Cicero were alike in regarding the useful occupations as degrading. Even the 'chosen people' imagined that to eat one's bread in the sweat of one's face is one of the severest curses, while people of modern times do not fully realize that under fair conditions it is a blessing, and that under almost any conditions it is better than to eat one's bread in the sweat of another's face. With such ideas of labor it is not surprising that the arts identified with it, or associated with it in thought, should be put in a class by themselves.

On the other hand, leisure being originally, as it is now in some quarters, a badge of respectability, the arts of the leisure class have naturally partaken of this distinction and been regarded as superior to the useful arts. The leisure class could not display its freedom from toil more aptly than by pursuing arts not essential to physical existence. Hence, while all the arts were originally useful, the arts to which members of the leisure class were drawn were those least obviously so. They *selected* those arts which could be pursued only by those who could command their own time. Hence, painting, sculpture, music, poetry and the like were properly called the elegant, that is, the elected, arts, and they soon came to hold the same relation in thought to the useful arts as the leisure class held to the laboring class.

This, then, is the explanation of the long-accepted division of the arts into fine and useful: the monopolization of the fine arts by the leisure class, and the compulsory practise of the useful arts by the slave, the serf and the wage laborer. It is a division based primarily upon a class distinction. The fine arts, speaking generally, involve a greater play of the imagination, a freer expression of individuality, more pleasure than the useful arts, but this is due to the greater leisure and freedom of those who monopolized them as well as to the nature of those arts themselves. If laborers in the industrial arts had more freedom, culture and leisure, and the conditions of their work were made conducive to pleasure, these arts would become fine arts; not so 'fine' as painting and sculpture, perhaps, but fine arts, nevertheless. 'Work without art,' said Ruskin, and by this I suppose he meant work unaccompanied by pleasure, 'is brutality.' But work ought not to be divorced from art. The joy and beauty now associated with the fine arts must become elements of the useful arts as well. "Beauty must come back to the useful arts," said Emerson, "and the distinction between the fine and the useful arts be forgotten. If history were truly told, if life were nobly spent, it would no longer be easy or possible to

distinguish the one from the other. In nature all is useful, all is beautiful."¹

We submit, then, that the commonly accepted classification of the arts is an arbitrary one. Its foundation, the supposedly ignoble character of productive labor, is a false idea. Labor, not leisure, is the real badge of dignity. 'The stone which the builders refused is become the headstone of the corner.' Hence the old classification of the arts, a classification which tends to disparage labor, is an anachronism, and an impertinence. It is, in a way, a gratuitous reflection upon the laboring class.

Before proceeding to reclassify the arts, let us carefully define the scope of art. The word art usually suggests the fine arts. "'Work of art' to most people," says Huxley, "means a picture, a statue, or a piece of bijouterie; by way of compensation 'artist' has included in its wide embrace cooks and ballet girls, no less than painters and sculptors."² The word art properly includes 'all the works of man's hands, from a flint implement to a cathedral or a chronometer.' It embraces all phenomena in which intelligence plays the part of conscious and immediate cause. The supplement of art is nature. Art includes everything not embraced by nature.

The field of the arts being thus defined, we may now construct our classification.

All arts are alike in this—their medium is matter. No art can free itself wholly from material things. Some arts, as music and poetry, may seem to do so, for the ideal elements of these arts predominate to such an extent that we forget the material by which they are made manifest—writing and printing materials, musical instruments and sound waves. No matter how idealistic an art may be, it must still deal with matter.

This being the case, a logical classification of the arts may be based upon a classification of material phenomena. And if this latter is an evolutionary classification, that is, if it proceeds from the simple to the complex, the resulting classification of the arts will be in the order of complexity and potential utility. It will also be a classification in which each art will be a means to those above it, that is, a classification of superiority and subordination.

Now one of the most obvious divisions of the material world is into the inorganic, the organic and the superorganic. From the standpoint of evolution these divisions rank in the order named—the organic is higher than the inorganic, and the superorganic higher than the organic. Each division furnishes the material upon which is exercised

¹ 'Essays,' First Series, Essay XII., Art.

² 'Evolution and Ethics, and Other Essays,' authorized edition, New York, 1899, p. 10, foot-note.

a special class of arts. There are arts which deal with wood, stone and iron (lifeless elements), arts that deal with living things, and arts that deal with organized groups of men, or societies. Hence there are three grand divisions of the arts corresponding to the three grand divisions of the material world. Simplifying our terminology, we may call them the physical arts, the vital arts and the social arts.

The physical arts are relatively the lowest. The material upon which they are employed is passive. It 'stays put.' The principles underlying these arts are extremely simple. The mechanical principles, for instance, are seven in number. They may indeed be reduced to two—the lever and the inclined plane. Historically probably, as well as analytically, the art of making and using tools comes first. The primitive man who chipped his arrow-head from a piece of flint, and fashioned the shaft of his arrow from a stick of wood, employed art. He was an artist. If in the practise of his art he manifested no sense of beauty, it was due to the pressing demands of the more imperative desires rather than to the absence of the esthetic sense. What birds and beasts, and even insects, possess must have been present in the lowest of men. Archeology shows that even the cave-dweller tried his hand occasionally at the purely decorative arts. But the first arts were the hand arts—manufacture, in the strict sense of that word.

As intelligence increased, and inventive genius was applied, hand-making grew into machine-making. The machine is a combination of tools in the operation of which a natural force, like wind, water, steam or electricity, is usually employed. The machine arts are more complex than the hand arts. Their social potentiality is greater. Their object, like that of the hand arts, is not necessarily the production of articles of vulgar utility only. It may be idealistic in the highest degree. The various fine arts must fall under one division or the other. Hand-making (manufacture) and machine-making (machino-facture) completely cover the realm of the physical arts. Under the first are the manual occupations (handicrafts), and under the second the mechanical occupations, imperfectly designated 'the trades.'

Now, the physical arts that minister to the vulgar wants, or needs, of mankind have reached a high degree of perfection. They are to-day the theater for the display of the highest reaches of inventive genius. A watch, a locomotive, a printing-press, are marvels of ingenuity. We do not wonder that untutored men have worshiped a watch as a superior being. A printing-press, working automatically, will print, fold and deliver twelve thousand twenty-four-page papers in an hour. Machines in almost every industry turn out articles which in quantity, regularity and delicacy of form could not possibly be produced by hand. But the object of these arts has been quantity rather than quality, mercantile utility rather than beauty. Salability has been their main

consideration. They have been the instruments of trade and gain, rather than the ministers of joy and life. They have thus been degraded. They are the Cinderella of the household of art. None the less they are noble; and when clothed in beauty, as some day, let us hope, they will be, they will win their full share of admiration and devotion. The repulsion which some profess to feel toward the machine arts is based upon a misconception. It is not these arts which should excite disdain: it is the purpose for which they are employed and the conditions under which they are practised. They could free men from drudgery if properly used; they outrank the genii of fable in serving their master; and they are not in themselves incompatible with pleasure and beauty. But as industrial conditions are to-day, men are not the masters of the machine. They are enslaved by it. Machinery has more slaves than any dominant class ever possessed. Thus it has been, and thus it will be as long as men are 'an appendage to profit-grinding.' Once free men from the machine, give them leisure and culture, and the machine arts will become fine arts. Under normal conditions the element of the beautiful would manifest itself in all work, mechanical or manual, because man is a beauty-loving animal.

It appears, then, that the arts now known as the fine arts must, in our present classification, be distributed among the handicrafts and the mechanical occupations, since they have been selected out because of their idealistic character. They are physical arts, because, like all such arts, they realize the ideal by the exercise of manual or mechanical operations upon brute matter. The artist who paints a picture employs pigment and canvas and brush. To be sure he is supposed to 'mix his paint with brains,' but there is nothing essentially unique in this. Mortar should be so mixed—and dough. The sculptor uses stone and a chisel. The mechanical part of his work is turned over to the machine, from which he himself is free. His art differs in no inherent and absolute respect from that of the industrial artist. Carving a statue to please the eye ought not to differentiate the 'artist' from the laborer who carves a chair to relieve us of 'that tired feeling.' If the one act is accompanied by pleasure, and a manifestation of the beautiful, while the other is not, it is due to factitious circumstances.

It is not to be denied, of course, that the fine arts are the most highly cultivated of all the arts. Their possibilities have, perhaps, been more completely realized than those of the other arts. Certainly this is true with respect to the vital and the social arts. They have drawn to themselves much of the talent freed from the grosser forms of labor. They have touched the highest levels of skill in execution, and of idealistic conception. Zeuxis, it is said, imitated nature so successfully that the birds pecked at his painted grapes, while Parrhasius, his Athenian rival, deceived with his pictured curtain even the practised eye of

Zeuxis himself. Every museum *des beaux arts* evidences lofty flights in the realm of the ideal. Some profess to believe that the climax of art has been reached, that Grecian art will never be surpassed. This is a gratuitous assumption. The soil of art is freedom, leisure and culture; its light and warmth and moisture, appreciation. If men were freed from grinding toil, if the industrial arts had become fine arts, and art appreciation were a common heritage, the growth of even the more imaginative arts would receive an impetus hitherto unfelt, and achieve a development as yet unrealized.

We have now analyzed the physical arts, the arts which deal with non-living matter. They are divided into manufacture, which embraces the handicrafts, and machinofecture, which includes the mechanical occupations. There is no need of a third class to embrace the fine arts, since these are at bottom manual or mechanical, and their fineness is due to the circumstances under which they have been cultivated. Ideally all arts are fine. We now pass to the vital arts.

The world of life is divided into plants and animals. The arts corresponding to these two divisions are the botanical and the zoological. The botanical arts realize the ideal in plant life; the zoological, in animal life. To the former belong agriculture, horticulture, and the like, and to the latter the domestication, breeding and training of animals, and the education of man. It might be more complimentary and gratifying to the human animal if the arts pertaining to his development were given a class by themselves. This may be done, if it is insisted upon. They would be called, of course, the anthropological arts.

Now, the vital arts, dealing as they do with a higher because more complex form of matter, are superior to the physical arts. It will seem strange and illogical at first thought to find farming ranked above music, and gardening above painting. And there is, of course, an element of absurdity in it if we think of the botanical arts as they are usually practised. They are empirical. Their possibilities of use and beauty have only begun to be appreciated. They bear about the same relation to what they might be, as a chant of the Igorrotes does to a Wagnerian opera. There is not a nation on the globe that has given, or is now giving, as much scientific attention to farming as to fighting. Hence the farmer is still a 'hayseed,' and the fighter a tailor's model. But if we think of these arts as they might become—as sustaining a populous world and clothing it with new forms of life and beauty—our estimate will change. If, as we read, Mr. Burbank has developed new species of flowers and fruit, and has produced a spineless cactus which is to be the means of reclaiming the arid regions of the west, he has revealed some of the possibilities of the botanical arts, and done much to remove the stigma that has attached to the cultivation of the

soil. Breeders and fanciers are showing what can be done to mold animal life into preconceived forms. They "habitually speak of an animal's organization," says Darwin, "as something plastic, which they can model almost as they please." "It would seem," said Lord Somerville, "as if they had chalked out upon a wall a form perfect in itself, and then had given it existence."³ Is it less difficult to fashion the ideal in flesh than in clay? The fine arts have been called the 'creative arts.' But the botanical and zoological arts, which are capable of bringing into existence new forms of life, ideal forms, differing in size, shape, color and character from anything that nature has produced, are also creative arts. They continue and supplement the work of the Creator. There seems no absurdity, then, in ranking above the art that paints a flower the art that can produce one; above the art that beguiled the birds, the art that can change the leopard's spots.

At the head of the vital arts is the art which seeks to realize the ideal in the life and character of individual men. Man is an animal, a paragon, if you please, and the 'beauty of the world,' but still an animal. The arts devoted to his physical, mental and moral improvement are, strictly speaking, zoological. They are the highest of the vital arts because they deal with the highest form of life, and outrank all below them in possibilities. The ideal man realized in the flesh, which is the object of these arts, would exceed in beauty and beneficent influence anything that is possible to the painter's brush or the sculptor's chisel. The totality of these arts may be embraced by the word education.

Education employs all lower arts as means. It rests upon them and requires a knowledge of their principles. To educate demands the highest type of mind. It is an art which the world has never properly estimated or appreciated. When ranked as an art at all it has been placed below the fine arts, whereas, when made a fine art itself, it is immeasurably above them. To be sure, there are few who have made it such. The great educational artists may be counted on one's fingers. Each of these men has been as one born out of time. But when the art of education is duly appreciated the world will find a place in its Temple of Fame for such artists as Pestalozzi and Froebel, Herbart and Horace Mann, and the other great teachers who have striven to make the word flesh that it might dwell among men. Education should always be, and should always have been, a fine art.

We now come to the third and last division of the arts, the social arts. The ultimate end of all the arts is a perfected humanity. Hence, in one sense, all the arts are social arts. Here, however, we include only the arts which have for their immediate end the improvement of society, which deal with society as the next lower arts deal with the individ-

* See Darwin, 'Origin of Species,' Chap. I.

ual—man, lower animal or plant. The social arts are in reality one art. They are the art of employing all other arts in the realization of an ideal social conception. This art might also be called education, since we speak of the education of the race as well as the education of the individual. It might be called government, if that word were not vitiated by its associations. Professor Lester F. Ward employs the word sociocracy. "This general social art," he says, "the scientific control of the social forces by the collective mind of society for its advantage, in strict homology with the practical arts of the industrial world, is what I have hitherto given the name Sociocracy."⁴ Call it what we may, this social art is the highest of all the arts. Its end is a perfected humanity. In realizing this end it utilizes all other arts. It is the art of arts. Its application requires the maximum of intelligence and skill. Its potentialities are as yet undreamed of.

The main divisions and subdivisions of the arts having now been passed briefly in review, it will be helpful to bring them together in tabular form. They will stand as follows:

Art	1. Physical	{ Manufacture	{ Handicrafts.
		{ Machinofacture	{ Mechanical occupations.
	2. Vital	{ Botanical	{ Agriculture.
{ Zoological		{ Horticulture, etc.	
3. Social	{ Sociocracy.	{ Domestication, breeding and training.	
		{ Education.	

⁴"Outlines of Sociology," New York, 1898, p. 292.



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