

PHILOSOPHICAL NOTES

MOUNCE AND COLLINGWOOD ON ART AND CRAFT*

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Abstract. Mounce tends to argue that Collingwood's distinction between art and craft is erroneous because a work can be both craft, intended to produce a specific effect in the audience, and also 'art proper', the expression of emotion, the bringing to full consciousness in its full individuality of what is as yet vague and inchoate. Because it is expression, the activity of art cannot be a craft aiming at the production of a definite and reconceived end result, and so it cannot have any techniques or means to preconceived ends. And this is true to artistic experience.

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In his 'Art and Craft'¹ H. O. Mounce has raised certain difficulties regarding Collingwood's account, in *The Principles of Art*,² of the differences between art and craft. Mounce tends to argue that Collingwood's distinction between art and craft is erroneous because a work can be both craft, intended to produce a specific effect in the audience, and also 'art proper', the expression of emotion, the bringing to full consciousness in its full individuality of what is as yet vague and inchoate. Because it is expression, the activity of art cannot be a craft aiming at the production of a definite and reconceived end result, and so it cannot have any techniques or means to preconceived ends (PA p. hi). And this is true to artistic experience. The work does unfold itself to the artist as he creates it. But Mounce seems to misunderstand what Collingwood meant by 'expression' and therefore also his precise reason for distinguishing art proper from craft. Consequently, he appears to assume that, according to Collingwood, art is simply that which is not craft. Mounce then cites features which either (a) appear in instances of the practices, producers and products of art and craft, or (b) are shared by some instances of both and yet are absent from other instances of both. From these examples Mounce concludes that there is no real distinction between art and craft.

1. Mounce's first objection, of type (b), is that both sculptors (artists) and boxers (craftsmen) have no specific plans, sculptors otherwise being just like

* *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (July 1991), p. 173-176.

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¹ 'Art and Craft', *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (July 1991).

² Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1938. References will be given in the text using the abbreviation, PA.

craftsmen, and that performing artists do have specific plans just like most craftsmen. Hence there is no clear distinction between art and craft in this respect. Performing artists may well set a special problem. But the lack of a specific plan is not, in itself, that which distinguishes the artist proper. Rather it is his activity of expression, of which his lack of a specific plan and goal is a consequence. Boxers and other sportsmen may also have no definite goals but they are not engaged in the specifically artistic activity of *expression*.

2. Developing his initial objection, Mounce states that Collingwood, wrongly severing art from the schema of ends and means which belongs to craft, would then have to admit that it would have to be excluded from many crafts or skills, such as selling ice-cream and playing football. Again, whether or not it is absent from these activities, which in some cases I would certainly dispute, this point does not blur the distinction between art and craft. For art is expression of emotion and whatever else those activities are, they are not that.

3. In Collingwood's view sports are 'magic', designed to arouse and sustain emotions needed for practical life by means of life-like situations or practices (*PA* p. 73). (Nowadays, spectator sports are usually 'amusement'.) Hence the footballer does not after all, contrary to what Mounce states, possess all the qualifications required by Collingwood to be an artist. For he is not endeavouring to express his emotions, though today footballers all too often betray, exhibit and feign them (see *PA*, pp. 122-3).

4. Mounce's next objection is to Collingwood's alleged claim that art may fail in its effects and still be good art. To this Mounce counters that it may fail simply because the audience fails to grasp the effect intended, just as a potato-peeler is not shown to be a poor one when the user fails in doing something else with it, for the fault may be his. But for Collingwood any distinct and separable effects of art proper are irrelevant to its value, whereas they are precisely that at which craft is aimed and in the achievement of which its (technical) value resides. Hence his rejection of 'technical' theories of art as 'amusement', 'magic', 'instruction', advertisement, exhortation, and the like. Mounce himself recognizes this when he refers to a machine which produces feelings of pleasure. One would not need to attend to such a machine or be in any way aware of it.³ Collingwood is surely right in maintaining that external effects are aesthetically irrelevant. A crude caricature is likely to be more politically ('magically') effective than a subtle portrait.

³ When we speak of the 'effect' of a part of a work of art, we mean its *contribution* to the whole of which it is an organic part, and likewise when we speak of the 'total effect' of the work, we mean simply the whole work itself as an organic whole. Therefore what look like means to ends in art proper – e.g., lighter tones added 'in order to' balance darker ones, incidents inserted 'in order to' reveal more of the protagonist's character – are organic parts of a whole and not disposable means to something other than and beyond themselves.

5. Mounce next turns to Collingwood's rejection of representation as irrelevant because representation is a craft. Mounce argues that Collingwood's theory of art as the expression of emotion requires representation in art, because emotions have objects and therefore are about the world, situations and what one believes to be happening. Art cannot be expression of emotion without representing some part of the world. But Collingwood did suggest that all art is representational in one of three ways (*PA* pp. 55-5). His point, a correct one, is that it is expression and not representation which makes art into art proper. There are many purely utilitarian representations of many degrees of literalness and distortion, with no pretensions to be art. Conversely, as Mounce rightly states, there are non-representations of the world, such as football, which may or may not be crafts. But it does not follow, contrary to what Mounce suggests, that they are art. They are art only if they are expression. Art and craft do not necessarily exhaust the range of human activities.

6. Again it is no objection to Collingwood, as Mounce goes on to imply, to state that Rembrandt's whole aim was to portray human character by artistic means. His emotions must have an object, a subject-matter, as Collingwood makes clear (*PA*, p. 278), although Collingwood often uses 'emotion' to mean only the emotional charge, the felt positive or negative attitude, towards the object of emotion, rather than the whole experience of an emotion. The question is, what makes Rembrandt's portraits *art*? It cannot be that they are representations, for there are representations which are not art. It is that they are expressions, that in them Rembrandt is exploring in detail and individuality what he feels about humanity and the individuals portrayed. Mounce partly recognizes this when he says that what matters for Collingwood is Rembrandt's ability to express his emotions and not his ability to represent the character of the sitter and to communicate that character. But Mounce therein implies a separation of feeling from its object which, despite some of his language, is not made by Collingwood. Mounce then argues that in art, as in some crafts, we are interested in the means as well as the end (cf. the pleasure machine), so that the work of art is, apparently, a means but not just a means since it is also a focus of interest. Hence again there is no clear distinction of art from craft. But if the work of art is in any way a *means* of communication, then it is not, in Collingwood's terms, a work of art at all. For, in such a case, the artist has already expressed his emotion and so knows what it is. If he then constructs a second work to communicate it, such as a prose paraphrase of his poem, that work is necessarily one of craft and not art.

7. Mounce's example of Vaind Linna's *The Unknown Soldier*, far from supporting his objections, exactly fits Collingwood's differentiation of art from craft, that is, if it is really like what Mounce states it to be. On the one hand, the detail which Mounce mentions is presumptive evidence of full and concrete expression. It is, Mounce states, presented without comment. The artist, according to Collingwood,

does not state his emotion, for that presupposes some explicit knowledge of what it is and thus some degree of previous expression (*PA*, Chap. VI, §7). On the other, Mounce also states that Linna wrote the book in order to show that the point of view of the soldier in the Finno-Soviet wars was not that of those who later glorified those campaigns, and in order to change people's attitudes. The latter would make it also a work of craft. But the former does not necessarily do so. 'In order to' does not entail acting with the schema of ends and means. For if Linna were writing, *inter alia*, in order to *express* his feeling about the war, he would not have had a definite idea of the difference of the two attitudes but an inchoate one which would have become definite in the course of his writing and for the realization of which he could not have adopted any 'means'.

I have not dealt with every one of Mounce's objections, but I think that I have made it clear that they are mostly beside the point because he fails to grasp what Collingwood meant by 'art' and 'craft', and he wrongly takes Collingwood to have made this distinction into an exhaustive dichotomy such that the same work cannot be both and that every activity, if not the one, is therefore the other.