Commenting on Hume's commandment, at the end of his enquiry, to burn every work which does not contain any abstract reasoning about quantity or number as so much sophistry and illusion, Huxley observes that we are no longer living in the delicious intoxication induced by the early successes of science, but rather in a grisly morning-after. In this apprehensive sobriety we are able to see that the contents of literature, art, music—even, in some measure, of divinity and metaphysics—are not sophistry and illusion, but simply those elements of experience which scientists choose to leave out of account, for the good reason that they have no intellectual methods for dealing with them. The scientific picture of the world is what it is because men of science combine this incompetence with certain special competences. In the arts, as in philosophy and religion, men are trying to describe and explain the non-measurable, purely qualitative aspects of reality. In recent years many men of science themselves have come to realise that the scientific picture of the world is a partial one.

Art vs. Science

Huxley goes a step further and says that the artist is a better man than the scientist. The ineptitude of scientists and philosophers outside their own business is well-known and is not surprising. Excessive development of the purely mental functions leads to atrophy of all the rest. But in the artist there is less specialization, less one-sided development; consequently, the artist is sounder right through than the lopsided man of science.1

Mechanization prevents creative activity of any kind. Rationalized division of labour takes all the sense out of man's work. Machines relieve him, not merely of drudgery, but of the possibility of performing any creative or spontaneous act whatsoever.2 The reason is not far to seek. Passivity and subservience to machinery blunt the desire and diminish the power to create. The pursuit of mere efficiency at the cost of imagination and instinct affects disastrously one's sense of values, one's taste and judgment.3

1. Philip Quarles's Notebook; Point Counter Point; Avon Publications, V-2031; p.327.
2. 'One and Many': Do What You Will; Chatto & Windus, 1949; p.49.
3. 'Spinoza's Worm': Do What You Will; Chatto & Windus, 1949; p.88.
Art and Materialism:

The materialist attitude to life that goes with insane mechanization has had its share in it too. Our present economic, social and international arrangements, writes Huxley, are based, in large measure, upon organized lovelessness. We begin by lacking charity towards Nature. From lovelessness in relation to Nature we advance to lovelessness in relation to art — a lovelessness so extreme that we have effectively killed all the fundamental or useful arts and set up various kinds of mass-production by machines in their place. And of course this lovelessness in regard to art is at the same time a lovelessness in regard to the human beings who have to perform the tasks imposed by our mechanical art-surrogates.¹

The concomitant utilitarianism works in the same direction. All valuable things in life, all the things that make for civilization and progress — and art is one of them — are the unnecessary ones, says Huxley. According to any proper standard of values, the unnecessary things and the unnecessary people who are concerned with them are much more important than the necessary ones.²

¹ The Perennial Philosophy; Chatto & Windus, 1950; p.109.
² Jeating Pilate; Chatto & Windus, 1948; p.278.
The fine arts (and the arts of life) have flourished most luxuriantly in those societies, in which a very sharp distinction was drawn between mechanic and liberal occupations, that is, in qualitatively hierarchical societies. Our modern civilization is quantitative and democratic. We draw distinctions only between rich and poor. America has twenty-five million motor cars, but almost no original art.¹

Art and Reality:

Art, says Huxley, is not the discovery of Reality — whatever Reality may be, and no human being can possibly know. It is the organization of chaotic appearance into an orderly and human universe.² It is a device for making sense of the chaos of experience, for imposing order, meaning and a measure of permanence on the incomprehensible flux of our perpetual perishing. The nature of the order imposed, of the significance discovered and expressed, depends on the native endowments and the social heredity of the artist.³

Art is also philosophy, is also science. Other things being equal, the work of art which in its own way

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¹. 'Tassel': Do What You Will; Chatto & Windus, 1949; p.230.
². Jesting Pilate; Chatto & Windus, 1948; p.91.
³. 'Liberty, Quality, Machinery': Adonis and the Alphabet; Chatto & Windus, 1956; p.112.
'says' more about the universe will be better than the one that says less. (The 'other things' which have to be equal are the forms of beauty, in terms of which the artist must express his philosophic and scientific truths.) That is why The Rosary by Mrs. Barclay is a less admirable novel than The Brothers Karamazov.¹

Although art is not the discovery of Reality, still the best works of art give us something more than mere pleasure; they furnish us information about the nature of the world. The Sanctus in Beethoven's Mass in D, Seurat's Grand Jatte, Macbeth — works such as these tell us, by strange but certain implication, something significant about the ultimate reality behind appearances. Even from the perfection of minor masterpieces — certain sonnets of Mallarmé, for instance, certain Chinese ceramics — we can derive illuminating hints about 'something far more deeply interfused', about 'the peace that passeth all understanding'.²

¹ Vulgarity in Literature: Collected Essays; Chatto & Windus, 1960; p.115.
² Ends and Means; Chatto & Windus, 1948; pp.285-86.

Compare also Lytliett's remark in Antic Hay: "The artist rushes on the world, conquers it, gives it beauty, imposes a moral significance". (Antic Hay, Penguin Books 1955; p.77.)
The world, like an ore-bearing mountain, is veined with every possible kind of significance. An artist is a man equipped with better tools than those of common men — sometimes, too, with a divining rod by whose aid he discovers, in the dark chaotic mass, new meanings and values. He opens our eyes for us, and we follow in a kind of gold rush. What was empty of significance becomes, after his passage, suddenly full of significance — full of his significance. Nature, as Wilde insists, is always imitating art, is perpetually creating men and things in art's image. How imperfectly, Huxley exclaims, did mountains exist before Wordsworth! How dim, before Constable, was English pastoral landscape! Yes, and how dim, for that matter, before the epoch-making discoveries of Falstaff and the Wife of Bath, were even English men and women!

Nations are to a very large extent invented by their poets and novelists, Huxley goes on in Wilde's vein; thanks to a long succession of admirable dramatists and novelists, Frenchmen and Englishmen know exactly how they ought to behave. Lacking these, the Germans are at a loss. It is good art that makes us natural.¹

To be able to see things in a disinterested way, with the eyes of a child, a god, a noble savage is the mark and privilege of the artist. Huxley refers to the view that all great men have been diseased and lunatic; but adds that that would not prevent a Shakespeare from being the author of *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Macbeth*. It only means that men of talent are different from the Podsnapian canaille and have free access to universes which heredity and habit have closed to the common run of humanity.¹

An artist is the sort of artist he is, because he happens to possess certain gifts. A man who is born with a great share of some special talent is probably less deeply affected by nurture than one whose ability is generalized. His gift is his fate, and he follows a predestined course, from which no ordinary power can deflect him. In spite of Helvétius and Dr. Watson, it seems pretty obvious that no amount of education could have prevented Mozart from becoming a musician.²

**Art and Communication:**

Art is a means to communication. It is a means whereby exceptionally gifted individuals convey to others

their reactions to events, their insights into the nature of man and the universe, their visions of ideal order. Art—communication is pretty pointless unless the things communicated are worth communicating.

But even in cases where they are not worth communicating, art is still valuable as a method of self-discovery and self-expression; a safety valve, a cathartic for purging the system of the products of the ego’s constant auto-intoxication.¹

Art and Mysticism:

In The Doors of Perception, Huxley strongly suspects that most of the mystics (or knowers of Suchness, as he calls them) paid very little attention to art. To a person whose transfigured and transfiguring mind can see the All in every this, the aesthetic quality of even a religious painting must be a matter of indifference. Art, Huxley suggests, is only for beginners.²

Even Jesus of Nazareth, says Huxley elsewhere, was never preoccupied with philosophy, art, music or science, and ignored almost completely the problems of politics, economics and sexual relations. Unfortunately,

1. 'Liberty, Quality, Machinery': Adonis and the Alphabet; Chatto & Windus, 1950; p.112.
2. The Doors of Perception; Chatto & Windus, 1957; pp.21-22.
too scrupulous imitation of Jesus has resulted in a fatal tendency, on the part of earnest Christians, to despise artistic creation and philosophic thought.¹

In an entry in his diary, Sebastian Barnack discusses whether art can be a means of liberation. Daydreaming is fatal to the spiritual life. Much art is but artistically disciplined day-dreaming. Which is why some God-centred saints have condemned art, root and branch. For the artist who happens also to be interested in reality, the way out would seem to lie along a knife-edge. What a man does as an artist will not bring him to the knowledge of the divine Ground, even though his work may be directly concerned with this knowledge.²

And yet, aesthetic experience is in some sort an analogue of the mystical experience, says Huxley. By coming to know perfection in a work of art, we gain a kind of knowledge of the ultimate nature of things. Art is one of the means whereby man seeks to redeem a life which is experienced as chaotic and largely evil; but by itself, art can never be completely redemptive. It can only point in the direction from which redemption comes; it

¹. Ends and Means; Chatto & Windus, 1942; p.236.
². Time Must Have a Stop; Harper & Brothers, 1944; pp.291-92.
can only indicate at one remove the nature of the primsordial and ineffable Fact.¹

Aestheticism, like intellectualism, is, however, not free from evil. An excessive aesthetic or intellectual refinement is liable to be bought rather dearly at the expense of some strange emotional degeneration.² Again, as Sebastian Barnack says in Time Must Have a Stop, pure aestheticism is a process of God-proofing. To indulge in it is a spiritual mackintosh, shielding the little corner of time of which one is the centre, from the least drop of eternal reality.³

Art Only a Means:

Art and science cannot be ends in themselves, says Huxley; they can only be means to an end, means to liberation which is the highest end of all. The comments that Mr. Propter makes in this connection in After Many a Summer are illuminating. Art and Science, he says, can be good, bad or indifferent for the artists and the scientists themselves — good if it facilitates liberation; indifferent if it neither helps nor hinders; bad if it makes

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1. 'Variations on a Philosopher': Themes and Variations; Chatto & Windus, 1954; p.114.
2. Point Counter Point; Avon Publications, V-2031; p.228.
3. Time Must Have a Stop; Harper & Brothers, 1944; p.29o.
liberation more difficult by intensifying the obsession with the personality. The apparent selflessness of the artist or the scientist is not necessarily a genuine freedom from the bondage of personality. The artist's ideal of beauty and the scientist's ideal of truth are only magnified aspects of their own personalities.¹

And yet, says Huxley, an artist or scientist cannot be without a measure of self-transcendence. It is through horizontal self-transcendence that they are able to identify themselves with some cause wider than their own immediate interests. Without self-transcendence no science, no law, no philosophy, there would be no art, as indeed no civilization.²

The Psychoanalyst's View of Art:

The psychoanalysts trace all interest in art back to an infantile love of excrement, and for the varieties of our aesthetic passions they would offer some faecal explanation. For Dr. Ernest Jones's view that religion has always used art in one form or another for the reason that incestuous desires invariably construct their phantasies out of the material provided by the unconscious memory of infantile coprophilic interests, Huxley has only contempt. One should have liked to read, he remarks, Tolstoy's comments in What is Art? on this

² The Devils of London: Chatto & Windus, 1952; p.374.
last and best of the artistic theories. 1

Art More Real Than Life:

"Art", it has been said, quotes Huxley, "is the forgiveness of sins". In the best art we perceive persons, things and situations more clearly than in life and as though they were in some way more real than realities themselves. 2

Also, art moves us more deeply than life itself, as Philip Quarles says in Point Counter Point. That is so because it is chemically pure. When truth is nothing but the truth it is unnatural, it is an abstraction that resembles nothing in the real world. That is why art moves us — precisely because it is unadulterated with all the irrelevancies of real life. Art gives us the sensation, the thought, the feeling quite pure, chemically pure. 3

It is because of their power to move that the arts, including music and certain important kinds of literature, have been, at most periods, the handmaids of religion, providing religion with the visible or audible

1. "Rimini and Alberti": Along the Road; Chatto & Windus, 1948; p.165.
2. "Writers and Readers": The Olive Tree; Chatto & Windus, 1947; p.30.

symbols which create in the mind of the beholder those feelings which for him personally are the god. Divorced from religion, the arts are now cultivated for their own sake. That aesthetic beauty which was once devoted to the service of God has now set up as a god on its own. The cultivation of art for its own sake has become a substitute, Huxley feels, an extremely feeble substitute for religion.\footnote{1}{The Substitutes for Religion: Proper Studies; Chatto & Windus, 1933; p.218.}

Art has been the handmaid not only of religion, but of politics, too. The masterpieces of painting, sculpture and architecture were produced as religious or political propaganda. Genius has always been the servant of tyranny and art has advertised the merits of the local cult. Time, as it passes, separates the good art from bad metaphysics.\footnote{2}{Brave New World Revisited; Chatto & Windus, 1959; pp.78-79.}

**Art and Time:**

Art, like Nature, provides methods for spatializing time. With the regular march of the heavenly bodies and the recurrence of the seasons, night and day, etc., it seems natural to conceive of time as a series of circles. Habit and routine are artificial circular movements superimposed on the natural circles of our
physiological functioning. But habit and routine are in part or wholly subliminal; the arts, on the contrary, are activities of full consciousness. Music, poetry and dance provide methods for spatializing time on the highest plane of awareness. Time here is no mere duration, but is transformed, by means of rhythm and repetition, into a pattern composed of qualitatively different parts and involving circular returns to an identity. For as long as it takes the music to be played, the poem to be read, the dance to be trodden out, the transmutation of time into space is as complete as it is possible for such a transmutation to be. Religion, which makes use of every possible device for rendering duration humanly acceptable, gives the calendar an emotional as well as an intellectual significance, and by exploiting the time-transmuting arts of music, poetry and dance, ultimately inculcates a philosophy, disparaging time in favour of eternity.¹

Art and Theory:

The artist is often told that he should have no theories on the ground that he should be wholly spontaneous. But, says Huxley, a consciously practised theory of art has never spoiled a good artist, has never dammed

¹. Beyond the Mereque Bay; Chatto & Windus, 1949; pp.218-20.
up his inspiration, but rather, and in most cases profitably, canalized it. Even the Romantics had theories and were wild and emotional on principle. Theories are above all necessary when old traditions are breaking up, when all is chaos and in flux. At such moments an artist formulates his theory and clings to it through thick and thin. Thus, when neo-classicism was crumbling, Wordsworth found salvation by the promulgation of a new theory of poetry, which he put into practice systematically and to the verge of absurdity. Similarly in the ship-wreck of the old tradition of painting, we find present-day artists clinging desperately to intellectual formulas. The only time the artist can afford entirely to dispense with theory is when a well-established tradition reigns supreme and unquestioned. And then the absence of theory is more apparent than real; for the tradition in which he is working is a theory, originally formulated by someone else, which he accepts unconsciously and as though it were the law of Nature itself.

Theory, however, is not an unmixed blessing. In one of the essays in Along the Road, Huxley points out how a knowledge of too many theories can be fatal to art. "A little learning", said Pope, "is a dangerous thing."

But the history of these two centuries has proved, is Huxley's comment, that, as far as the artist is concerned, much learning is quite as dangerous as little learning; in fact, a great deal more dangerous. Until quite recently, no European artist knew, or thought it worth while to know, anything about any forms of art except those which had been current in his own continent. The result was that he was able to concentrate on the one convention that seemed to him good — the classical — and work away at it undisturbed, until he had developed all its potential resources.

The case of architecture is still more remarkable. For three hundred years the classical orders reigned supreme in Europe. Gothic was forgotten and despised. Nobody knew anything of any other styles. Generation after generation of architects, working away uninterruptedly in terms of this one convention, got out of it an astonishing variety of achievements. If not men of genius only but the minor artists could achieve this, it was because of the absence of distracting knowledge. There was for them only one possible convention on which they concentrated their whole mind.

The artist of today knows, and has been taught to appreciate, the artistic conventions of every people
that has ever existed. For him, there is no single right convention. Gone is the blessed ignorance. There is no tradition now, or, what comes to the same thing, there are a hundred traditions. The artist's knowledge tends to distract him, to dissipate his energies. He moves restlessly among all the known styles.

In art there are no short cuts. You cannot acquire in a short time the secrets of a style. To understand it you must give yourself up to it; you must live, so to speak, inside it. But this is precisely what excessive knowledge tends to render impossible, especially for the minor men, the rank and file.

The vast increase in our knowledge of art history has affected not only the artists themselves, but all those who take an interest in the arts. We have learned to appreciate and see the best in every style. Knowledge has enabled us to sympathize with unfamiliar points of view, to appreciate artistic conventions devised by people utterly unlike ourselves. All this, no doubt, is a very good thing. But our sympathy is so vast and we are so much afraid of showing ourselves intolerant towards the things we ought to like, that we have begun to love in our all-embracing way not merely the highest, in whatever convention, when we see it, but the lowest
too. Today, there is nothing however bad, from which we cannot derive pleasure.¹

Thus, an artist today knows too much to be willing to follow any single style. Being under no cultural compulsion to adopt any particular line, he selects, combines and blends. The result is either negligible or monstrous. And yet, says Huxley, as a piece of occupational therapy, as a guarantee against boredom and an antidote to TV and the other forms of passive entertainment, art of any kind is welcome.²

Art and Suffering:

Huxley believes that art thrives on suffering. "An artist does not fail under unhappiness", says Mr. Lydiatt in Antic Hay. "He gets new strength from it. The torture makes him sweat new masterpieces."³

Works of art that are the products of happiness and a sense of fulfilment are probably less moving, perhaps less satisfying aesthetically, than those created by victims of frustration and ignorance, of tyranny, war and guilt-fostering and crime-inciting superstitions.⁴

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1. 'The Pierian Spring': Along the Road; Chatto & Windus, 1948; pp.190-201.
3. Antic Hay; Penguin Books, 1955; p.82.
4. 'The Old Raja's Notes on What's What': Islana; Chatto & Windus, 1962; p.172.
To quote Mr. Lypiatt once again: "Can an artist do anything if he is happy? Would he ever want to do anything? What is art, after all, but a protest against the horrible inclemency of life?"  

Some degree of mortification is an indispensable prerequisite for the creation and enjoyment of intellectual and aesthetic goods says Huxley, elsewhere. Those who choose the profession of artist (or philosopher or man of science) choose, in many cases, a life of poverty and unrewarded hard work. And what is true of the creators of aesthetic and intellectual goods is also true of the enjoyers of such goods, when created.

Art and 'Inspiration':

It is by long obedience and hard work that the artist comes to unforced spontaneity and consummate mastery. He submits obediently to the workings of 'inspiration', and makes himself a patient servant of his medium.

Art is not only a matter of hard work, but also of talent. Sincerity in art depends on talent. There

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3. Ibid., p.135.
is a note of sincerity in all that Keats wrote, because he had great literary gifts.¹ A man without talent is incapable of 'honestly' expressing his feelings and thoughts.²

Art and Education:

A good deal of attention has been paid in recent years to the education of emotions through the arts. The finest works of art are precious, because they make it possible for us to know, if only imperfectly and for a little while what it actually feels like to think subtly and feel nobly.³

Life tries to copy art — even when it is bad. Hence the importance of art, says Huxley elsewhere. "The pandar was the book and he who wrote it." Knowing the power of art to mould life in its own image, many Puritans have wished to abolish art altogether. If they had confined their iconoclasm only to bad art, there might have been some sense in them.

An eminent American clergyman once said that the Popular Song can be of a great educative value, as

¹ 'Vulgarities in Literature': Collected Essays, Chatto & Windus, 1960; p.112.
² Grey Eminence: Chatto & Windus, 1942; p.199.
³ Ends and Means: Chatto & Windus, 1948; p.204.
Popular Songs are repositories of wisdom and sound moral doctrine. This only amuses Huxley who foresees in this a fresh cascade of bad music. As the influence of religion declines, he concludes, we must beware of exchanging good religion for bad art. 1

Art and Living:

Artists are higher livers — dead, while they labour, to the world. Sometimes, however, some of them begin to wonder if it is not somehow rather immoral to exist apart, in the heaven of mind. It was this that drove Blake and D.H. Lawrence to preach a personal salvation through the body as well as the soul. Faced by the same moral problem, Keats and Matthew Arnold developed a social conscience. Keats said:

"And can I ever bid these joys farewell?
Yes, I must pass them for a nobler life,
Where I may find the agonies, the strife
Of human hearts."

They felt that it was their duty somehow to take their share in the sufferings and struggles of ordinary men and women. Arnold went so far in this direction as to become an inspector of schools. Both poets tried to

set their consciences at rest by insisting that the artist who realises imaginatively the pains of all the world suffers more than the common man who bears only his own particular pain. The poet's greater capacity for suffering becomes, for such potential ascetics, his moral justification, the reason for his existence.

Some poets have participated less platonically in the activities of the lower life. Milton, for example, began above the medley, conscious of his powers, deliberately planning his poetical career. But when what seemed a higher duty beckoned from the world, Milton went down unhesitatingly into the arena, and unhesitatingly sacrificed his eyes.

"What supports me, dost thou ask?
The conscience, friend, to have lost them,
overplied
In liberty's defence." 1

Artistic creation (as scientific research) may be, and constantly is, used as a device for escaping from the responsibilities of life. Art and science are proclaimed to be ends absolutely good in themselves — ends so admirable that those who pursue them are excused

from bothering about anything else. But they are only a superior kind of dope, which can be indulged in with a good conscience and with the conviction that one is leading the 'higher life'. Upto a certain point, of course, the life of the artist or the scientist is a higher life. Unfortunately, when led in an irresponsible, one-sided way, the higher life is probably more harmful for the individual than the lower life of the average sensual man.¹

Good artists are endowed with a more than ordinary sensibility, energy and curiosity; they also have a more than ordinary reluctance to assume the responsibilities of common life. Talent has its categorical imperatives. An artist cannot help feeling that his first duty is towards his art. Therefore, good artists are, as a rule, indifferent monogamists. Marriage does not seem to them sufficiently important to make sacrifices for. Not only the social and economic, but also, the emotional responsibilities of marriage must almost inevitably interfere with the artist’s performance of his primary artistic duties. In practice, most artists make a more or less (generally less) satisfactory compromise.²

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¹ Ends and Means; Chatto & Windus, 1948; pp.276-77.
² Texts and Pretexts; Chatto & Windus, 1949; pp.131-32.
have a good deal less influence on the lives of people, says Huxley, especially on those of writers and artists, than most educators care to admit.¹

Mark Rampion, in *Point Counter Point*, is of the view that art should not be made an excuse for living a life of abstraction. Flowers do not grow in vacuums, he argues; they need clay and dung. So does art.² People today, however, believe that art and literature are ends in themselves and can flourish in isolation from a reasonable and realistic philosophy of life. Among 'advanced' educationists there are many people who seem to think that all will be well so long as adolescents are permitted to 'express themselves', and small children are encouraged to be 'creative' in the art class. But, alas, Huxley observes, plasticine and self-expression will not solve the problems of education. Nor will technology and vocational guidance; nor the classics and the Hundred Best Books.³

**Folk Art:**

One way of a complete understanding of the nature of art is to compare fine arts with crafts. Other things

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being equal, says Huxley, a work of art which imposes aesthetic unity upon a large number of formal and psychological elements is a greater and more interesting work than one in which unity is imposed upon only a few elements. It is this which constitutes the difference between fine arts and crafts, as also between a greater and a lesser work of art. In the hierarchy of perfections a perfect vase or a perfect carpet occupies a lower rank than that, say, of Giotto's frescoes at Padua, or Rembrandt's 'Polish Rider.'

Huxley is anxious to remove aesthetic confusion by placing folk art in its proper perspective. He finds that most enthusiasts for handicrafts tend to attribute too much aesthetic merit to folk art. While it is good that large numbers of people should be craftsmen, because craftsmanship is something which most men and women find psychologically satisfying, it does not follow that what they produce is all good art. Craftsmanship, so far as the ordinary, untalented man is concerned, is its own reward. Even where the productions of handicraftsmen are excellent, this excellence is essentially inferior to what we find in great art. While popular art in industrialized societies is invariably vulgar, generally

folk art, though often dull or insignificant, is never vulgar. Peasants do not have the money and the technical skill to be vulgar. Vulgarity is the price we must pay for prosperity, education and self-consciousness.¹

In the past, good craftsmanship was the result, on the one hand, of intense and prolonged specialization in a single field, and on the other, of ignorance of every style but that which happened to be locally dominant. Nobody became an acknowledged master of his craft without going through a long apprenticeship. Our new artisans, however, with their power tools and amazingly diversified raw materials, are essentially Jacks of All Trades.

Art and Cynicism:

Can a cynic be a great artist? No, says Burlap in Point Counter Point (and Huxley seems to agree with him). Burlap continues: "A great artist is a man who synthesizes all experience. The cynic sets out by denying half the facts — the fact of the soul, the fact of ideals, the fact of God. And yet we are aware of spiritual facts just as directly and indubitably as we are aware of physical facts ...."²

¹ Beyond the Mixique Bay; Chatto & Windus, 1949; pp.265-70.
² Point Counter Point; Avon Publications, V-2031,p.69.