

ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation: ARTISTIC AND ETHICAL VALUES IN
 THE EXPERIENCE OF NARRATIVES

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The *ethical criticism of art* has received increasing attention in contemporary aesthetics, especially with respect to the evaluation of *narratives*. The most prominent philosophical defenses of this art-critical practice concentrate on the notion of *response*, specifically on the emotional responses a narrative requires for it to be correctly apprehended and appreciated. I first investigate the mechanisms of emotional participation in narratives (Chapters 1-2); then, I address the question of the legitimacy of the ethical criticism of narratives and advance an argument in support of such a practice (Chapters 3-7).

Chapter 1 analyzes different modes of emotional participation in narratives, distinguishing between: emotional inference, affective mimicry, empathy, sympathy, and concern. Chapter 2 first critically discusses Noël Carroll's objections to identificationism and to an empathy-based account of character participation, and then analyzes the sorts of imaginative activities involved in narrative engagement, by investigating the distinctions introduced by Richard Wollheim between *central* and *acentral* imagining, and *iconic* and *non-iconic* imagination.

Chapter 3 offers a taxonomy of the possible views on the relationship between the ethical and the artistic values of a narrative, distinguishing between reductionist and non-reductionist views, and sorting the latter ones into *autonomism* and *moralism*, *radical* and *moderate*. Chapter 4 analyzes the ethical assessment of narratives for (i) their *consequences* on their perceivers and (ii) the *means of their production*, and indicates the evaluation in terms of (iii) the *ethical perspective* a narrative embodies as the kind of ethical evaluation on which an argument for the ethical criticism of narratives ought to concentrate. Chapter 5 critically assesses the accounts of "imaginative resistance" to fiction offered by Kendall Walton, Richard Moran, and Tamar Gendler, and concludes that none of them is adequate to ground an argument for the ethical criticism of narratives. Chapter 6 looks at Carroll's argument for moderate moralism and Berys Gaut's "merited-response" argument for "ethicism," and finds both arguments wanting. Chapter 7 proposes a version of moralism grounded in the notion of a narrative's ethical perspective, and defended on the grounds of narratives' commitments to provide a realistic (or "fitting") representation of reality.

ARTISTIC AND ETHICAL VALUES IN THE EXPERIENCE OF NARRATIVES

by

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To my parents, Luigi and Giovanna, and to Gisella, always unconditionally supportive.

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PART I

PARTICIPATING IN NARRATIVES

Chapter 1

MODES OF PARTICIPATION

1. Introduction.

Narratives are pervasive among representations in and outside art. They can be read, heard, watched, or looked at, according to the medium employed. They can be very long and articulate, or be very short. Mainly we find them in literature, cinema, and theater, but instances of narratives can also be found in painting (think of Piero della Francesca's *The Story of the Cross*) and are rather common in certain kinds of sculpture, most notably in bas-relief (e.g., Trajan's Column), and of music, i.e., in opera and many popular songs. Of course, narratives are also pervasive in many non-artistic endeavors, such as documentaries, jokes, and newspaper reports.¹ As readers, viewers, or listeners we are *perceivers* of narratives.

As perceivers we are not left unmoved. Narratives are engaging. They are absorbing, cognitively and emotionally. When reading or watching or listening to a narrative, we follow the development of the fictive events, linking what is represented as

happening to the previously represented events, anticipating what might happen next, and then responding, sometimes with surprise or disappointment, sometimes with a mere sense of confirmation, to what in fact happens.² Narratives are thought-provoking – we are presented with more or less explicit statements of principles we may find easy or difficult to understand. Likewise, we attempt to make sense of the characters' behavior and their responses to the events they undergo. We get to know the characters, especially the protagonists, and relate their actions and responses to the character traits they seem to exhibit. In sum, we *participate* in narratives.

Furthermore, we respond to those events, statements, actions, and character traits with approval, disapproval, or indifference. These responses are largely emotional. We are saddened by the tragic end of the protagonist, joyful and relieved for the final rescue of the heroine; we respond with concern and awe to the depicted powers of nature; and so on.

A large part of our attention and responses directly have the characters, especially the protagonists, as their objects, qua agents in, or subjects affected by, the fictional events. We are angry at Othello and pity Desdemona, are perplexed by Medea and admire Superman. This should not be surprising, since narratives even more than the rest of representational works have humans or human-like beings as their main subject. Let us call emotional engagement with narratives *narrative participation*, and engagement with characters, their destiny and their emotions, *character participation*. These are the topics of this and the next chapter.

Participation in narratives has long been considered problematic because of what in contemporary philosophy of art is known as the “paradox of fiction” – the puzzle of how we can care about, and respond emotionally to, fictional characters and events in spite of knowing that they are merely fictional. Yet, apart from the difficulty of exhibiting a rationale for our emotional engagement with fictional characters and events, there is the question of *explaining* this phenomenon apparently so central to our experience with narratives. What does it mean, as perceivers of a narrative, to participate in its fictional events – what I have called “narrative participation”? And what sorts of relationships hold between our emotions and those of the characters – what I have called “character participation”?

2. Two Views: Participants vs. Onlookers.

In contemporary debate, two alternative general views about narrative and character participation have been defended. Many, in the fields of philosophy, psychology, and literary and film theory, have claimed that our emotional engagement with a narrative is underpinned by a form of “participation” literally conceived – by a *taking part in* the fictional events, and especially by a taking part in the characters’ fortunes and misfortunes, by a *sharing of* their emotions. I will call this general view in all its instantiations the “participant view.”

The master notion for theories belonging to the participant view is that of *identification* with characters. Being engaged with the characters’ fortunes and

misfortunes is identifying with them, having their emotions, or seeing ourselves in their places. The vagueness of the term “identification” as used in the literature and the shortcomings of the theories emerging from some of the interpretations of the identification view have been extensively denounced.³ Although in the following chapter I will maintain that such criticisms ultimately are in no serious way damaging to the participant view, as objections to certain ways of interpreting the notion of identification they are, I submit, (mostly) on target. Hence, I will not investigate identificationism in very much detail in the following. After all, when a narrative perceiver claims – as often the layperson would claim – that, in the process of following and engaging with a narrative she “identified” with one of its characters, most often she will be using that notion in a loose way, meaning in fact that she experienced some form of emotional sharing with the character. (For more discussion on identificationism, see Chapter 2.)

Indeed, the general idea of the participant view, i.e., that we participate in what happens to fictional characters in some sense as if that were happening to ourselves, has been recently expressed by theories that are quite different from an identification theory literally conceived, and that concentrate on a psychological phenomenon different from identification, that of *empathy*. We understand and participate in fictions not by identifying with the characters but by, nonetheless, putting ourselves in their shoes, experiencing in some way what they are experiencing. Recently, the notion of empathy has been revamped by cognitive science influenced theorists by interpreting it as an instance of so-called mental simulation.⁴

Opposed to the participant view is what I will dub the “onlooker view,” whose perhaps most outspoken proponent is Noël Carroll (1990 and 1998a). According to this view, when we read, attend at, or watch a fictional narrative, we emotionally respond to the fictional situations, so to speak, “from without.” We are spectators of those fictional events and respond as such, in no sense making the characters’ emotions our own. Hence, our emotional responses are at least primarily composed of *other-oriented* emotions – emotions we have towards people other than ourselves and which in no way refer to us. Character participation is, on the onlooker view, a response we give to situations we observe, understand – in Carroll’s terms, “assimilate” – and then assess third-personally, albeit through taking into consideration the perspective the characters in the fiction have on the situation.

The debate between the participant and the onlooker view has been, then, primarily on the explanation of character participation and its role in our engagement with narratives. Hence, for the most part my focus below will be only on character participation.

In contemporary debate, the participant and the onlooker view are presented as differing, first of all, on the role to be given to self-oriented responses, such as identification and, more relevantly, empathy, or to other-oriented responses, especially those responses that usually go under the name of *sympathy* (and, for completeness, when the response is of opposite sign, *antipathy*). That is, favoring one or other view on character participation is ultimately equated with claiming the centrality of some *modes*

of participation in characters' emotional states over other modes. I think this approach to the matter is partly misleading, first of all because it reduces the disagreement over character participation to at most a matter of *descriptive* aesthetics and the psychology of fictional engagement. The question the debate turns around risks then becoming, ultimately, just *how often* we respond empathically rather than sympathetically. Such a debate, furthermore, runs the risk of transforming itself into an empirical investigation before an adequate conceptual analysis is conducted on what empathizing, sympathizing, etc. mean, and how the conceptual relationships between these modes of character participation are best construed.⁵ Accordingly, my investigation will first of all provide a taxonomy of the different modes of character participation and an account of the conceptual relationships among such modes.

3. Issues of Method and Scope.

Modes of character participation are general psychological relationships between the perceiver of a narrative and the emotional states that a character in a narrative fictionally has. They explain most of our *responses* to characters. I will investigate three such modes: affective mimicry, empathy, and sympathy.⁶ A different kind of response to characters and their emotions, which most often goes under the term of "sympathy" but which I will dub "concern," will not count as a form of *participation* in the emotions of characters (or, for that matter, real people).

Though my focus is on participation in emotional states, it will soon emerge that my topic connects to issues of epistemic participation, that is, to what a character fictionally perceives, thinks, or values.

In investigating character participation I will also extensively address the issue of our emotional relationships with other real people and their emotions, as well as with our own past or future emotional states. Such discussion will profit both from the studies and analyses in psychology and cognitive science on attributing emotional states to others and understanding them, as well as from the analyses in philosophy of psychology and theory of personal identity of the psychological mechanisms that unify the self and its experiences.

Some intersections between aesthetics and personal identity issues, of course, have already been investigated, most notably by Richard Wollheim (1984, in particular). Recently, Richard Moran has claimed that our emotional involvement with fictional characters should be likened to other instances of emotional involvement with what does not directly and presently affect us: with what we feel towards things that *could* have happened to us or that we *could* have done; with *memories* of our own past; with what is happening to *other people* (1994, 77-79). Examples of this kind show, for Moran, that much of our emotional involvement is with what is not actual, and that imagination plays an important role in all those responses. Quite apart from Moran's specific view of imagination and related issues (for which see Chapter 5), his suggestion of looking at emotional responses to fictions as lying on a continuum with at least some instances of

response to other people or ourselves is, if not entirely original, very much congenial to the spirit of what I will do in the following pages.

I will often refer to experiences of psychological participation we have with respect to experiences of ours that are either remembered from the past or anticipated about the future. *Memories* and *anticipations* represent, in my view, a useful starting point and touchstone for any investigation of our psychological engagement with others, in particular, of our engagement with fictional others. First of all, the engagement of our present selves with our past or future selves can be shown to be problematic in a way that is quite analogous to the way our emotional engagement with other people, on the one hand, and with fictional characters, on the other, is. Without taking sides on the metaphysical issue of the reality of the self, one can easily consider one's *experiential* relationships with one's memories and anticipations as somewhat loose, and in that comparable to the relationships one has with the experiences of others or of characters in fictions.

One need not espouse a Cartesian thesis on the transparency of the mind to acknowledge that typically we have a privileged access to our own mental states, vis-à-vis the mental states of others.⁷ Hence, I propose that, when investigating modes of emotional participation with others, we first look at how we can connect with *our own* emotional states. Often, for instance, our connection with others – whether real or fictional – is described in terms of “identification.” However, if what is ordinarily called “identification” (with others or with fictional characters) stands for phenomena that are at

all material, then occurrences of such phenomena must be found, in the first place, in the participation in one's own mental states.

Indeed, the comparison with the phenomenology of our emotional relationships with past or future experiences of ours can also become a methodological imperative and a useful testing device for definitions and characterizations of the main modes of participation. If, for instance, empathizing or sympathizing with someone is at all possible, it must first of all be possible, I submit, with respect to oneself. Hence, when a definition of these phenomena fails to satisfy this minimal requirement, it should be abandoned as excessively narrow.⁸

Accordingly, the present analysis of character participation will be conducted together with an analysis of the experiences of psychological connectedness with our own selves, on the one hand, and of our participation in other people's emotions, on the other. In all those cases – memories, anticipations, participation in other's experiences, and character participation – the experiential connection between ourselves or our present states and those other emotional states seems to be made possible by the imagination in a sense to be specified.

The workings of the kind of imagination which I claim to be central to all these phenomena will have to be analyzed. Indeed, such analysis will be part of this and of the next chapter. As a first approximation we can say that in cases of participation in other's emotional states the imagination presents us with the mental representation of such states, whether they are someone else's, our own, or those of some imagined fictional character.

Hence, imagination in my sense should not be identified with a creative mental activity, though the representation of someone's emotional state in one's imagination can sometimes be a consequence of such a creative mental activity.⁹

Before addressing the issue of the role of imagination in our participation in other people's emotional states and in those of fictional characters, we need to specify the range of the *objects* of our participating. Character participation is, according to the definition above, the perceiver's participation in the characters' emotional states. Speaking of "emotional states" is meant to include, among the objects of our responses, not only emotions but moods as well.

There is a long literature that emphasizes the intentionality or object-directedness of emotions (in the experiential, occurrent sense) when contrasted to mere feelings and moods.¹⁰ Having an emotion is not only experiencing a certain bodily sensation, i.e., having a certain feeling. It amounts to being in a more complex state, likely one involving cognitive components, and one which is directed to something. Thus, for instance, we do not merely love, but love someone; we are not merely afraid, but afraid of the approaching snake; we are not merely angry, but angry at the aggressive driver; and so on.¹¹

Theories of emotions abound, ranging from the different versions of the cognitivist view, according to which emotions necessarily involve a cognitive component, whether a thought, a judgment, or an evaluation, which is then held responsible for indicating the emotion's object, to the different versions of non-

cognitivism, the view that emotions are internal feelings or sensations. Yet on emotions' capacity, and perhaps even function, of focusing or orienting attention on an object there is quite general agreement (see Levinson 1997, 20).¹² But the object the emotion focuses attention on need not be the emotion's cause (de Sousa 1994, 274).

By contrast, moods lack any intentional object or directedness.¹³ Not that they cannot have causes identifiable by the person who finds herself in a given mood, but such causes are not identified as something the mood orients attention to, and with respect to which it promotes action. This morning, I may have woken up in a bad mood, say, one of vague dissatisfaction, and I may realistically attribute that to the argument I had with my friend the night before. Yet, while I may still be angry at her, or self-critically at myself, I may not be dissatisfied with her or myself or the argument. The argument and its protagonists, though causes of my mood, do not appear to me as objects of it, whether for inadequacy or lack of appropriate connection. Nor does anything else appear to me as an object of the mood, not without replacing the mood with an emotion.

The very absence of an object explains moods' typical indefiniteness, as well as our occasional, doomed-to-fail search for an object of such emotional states. Searching for an object of our mood is contingently made possible by moods' typically long duration. Perhaps also, moods can be kept separate from mere feelings, or experienced bodily states, ones that enter into the composition of moods and emotions and other emotional states.¹⁴

Emotions and moods alike all have some features in common with perceptions. Like perceptions, they have duration in time, are subject to degrees, and have their own phenomenology – something corresponding to what having the emotional state is *like*.¹⁵ Moreover, like perceptions, emotional states, whether emotions or moods, and in spite of the important differences between these two categories, are subject to further psychological operations on them. They can be internally observed, to some extent analyzed, compared, assimilated, or contrasted with each other. When that happens, when an emotional state (or a perception) is thus internally observed, it happens thanks to the imagination, which provides a representation of such a state. It will be important to see how the same kind of imagination plays a central role in the participation in other people's as well as in fictional characters' emotional states.

4. The Role of Imagination in the Representation of Emotional States.

That engagement with fictional narratives involves the imagination should not be surprising. The very activity of apprehending a fictional narrative requires the employment of the imagination. To begin with, fictions in the different media, even when not in the form of a narrative, essentially engage the imagination of the perceiver. Whether we look at a painting, photograph, or sculpture, or read or listen to a novel, drama, or poem, or attend to a performance of a play, ballet, or symphony, if the works in question are representational, understanding them amounts to being engaged in an imaginative activity (see Wollheim 1987 and Walton 1990). While aware, for instance,

of the painted surface we also see the objects depicted in the painting, in some sense as if we were looking at them face to face. The experience of seeing the depicted content is not an illusory one, but it nevertheless goes beyond the mere perception of the depicted surface. Seeing the depicted objects in the picture is an imaginative activity. Likewise for representations in other media. While aware of listening to a drama on the radio, we also imagine ourselves to be hearing the characters talking, as if we were in some way observers of their conversation. Or, in film and theater, though we know we are literally only seeing the actors acting, we also imagine ourselves to be seeing the characters they are impersonating. And so on. Hence, apprehending a fictional narrative involves the imagination first of all because interpreting a fiction is an imaginative activity.

With narratives in particular, imagination is involved in a further sense. While reading or listening or watching, we operate on the data the narrative presents us with. By means of the imagination we construct, categorize, and try to make sense of those data as narrated characters and events (see Smith 1995). On those events the imagination further operates, ordering and linking them in causal chains, making hypotheses and inferences and predictions (see Currie 1990 and Wilson 1995). The Russian formalists maintained that, while, e.g., reading a novel, the reader reorders and fills in the plot (*syuzhet*), thus constructing the story (*fabula*) from that (see, e.g., Tomashevsky 1965). The constructing of the story, if it happens, happens in and thanks to the imagination.

Accordingly, it would seem not surprising that emotionally responding to characters – what I called character participation – is an essentially imaginative activity.¹⁶

To that effect, one may propose the following argument. In order to be engaged with the characters of a fiction, we need to experience it qua fiction, hence with the necessary involvement of the imagination; accordingly, character participation involves the imagination. Yet an argument like this, though correct, is not sufficient to get us to the desired point, at least not without equivocating. That character participation involves the imagination by no means guarantees that the responses themselves are *mediated* by the imagination. Such a more specific claim needs the support of some more specific argument or account.

Nor can the imagination be taken to be what distinguishes character participation from participation in real people's emotions. At first, it may seem easy to claim that since the attribution of emotional states to the fictional characters is itself fictional, the imagination plays with respect to the characters the role belief plays with respect to real people when we respond to their emotional states. One may claim that, on the one hand, when I empathize with the child who is about to be seen by the dentist, I believe she is scared, and when I sympathize with my friend for having flunked the course, I believe he is upset; and that, on the other hand, when I empathize or sympathize with a fictional character, I can only *imagine* what his or her thoughts and desires may be.¹⁷ Yet this suggestion must be rejected, for it considers as distinctive of character participation what is in fact central to most instances of participation in others' emotional states. As will be developed below, central modes of participation in other people's emotional states, such as empathy and sympathy, essentially involve the understanding of what having those

states is *like*. Beliefs alone can provide us only with an understanding of what the other person's emotional states are, not of what having them is like (see section 5 below).

Such an understanding, in cases of participation in the states of real people or those of fictional characters alike, is provided precisely by the imagination.

Obviously, if imagination is required for participation in real people's emotional states, then it cannot be considered the key-factor in distinguishing character participation from everyday emotional sharing responses. Quite the contrary, below, when discussing Noël Carroll's criticism of the participant view, we will have to dismiss an almost paradoxical doubt, i.e., that precisely with narratives our emotional responses may not be mediated by the imagination (see Chapter 2, section 2). Often with fictional narratives the characters' emotional states are explicitly presented to us by the author, through the words expressed by the characters or by the narrator. Hence, in such cases, imagination seems to lose its role. We do not need to imagine that Hamlet is in great anguish, except in the sense in which we must imagine everything that is part of the content of a narrative. Hamlet pretty much *tells* us that he is anguished.

To answer this apparent paradox and to show that imagination indeed remains central to character participation, we first need to further clarify what kind of imagination is relevant here. To do that, we must start from acknowledging that knowing which emotional states someone is in may not exhaust all there is to know about that person's emotional states.

5. Three Types of Understanding.

With characters in fictional narratives as well as with real people in ordinary life, we are presented with emotional states to which we respond. I propose we conceive of what counts as a *response* to the emotional states of others very broadly, as comprising, on the one hand, also some instances of registering, identifying, classifying, and comparing emotional states, and on the other hand, the mirroring for oneself, sympathetically reacting to, and sharing of such emotional states. In fact, minimal, necessary condition for something to be a response to an emotional state in my sense is that some experienced bodily state be integral to the registering, identifying, etc., of the other's state. Experiencing a bodily state, i.e., having a feeling, however, does not itself amount to having an emotional state, though that must be part of it. Accordingly, we can say that a response to an emotional state includes an emotional or else a *quasi-emotional* component.

Thus, in my view, understanding an emotional state can in certain cases already count as a response to it, namely, in all cases in which we understand what someone's emotional state is *like*, because such understanding necessarily contains, I submit, an emotional or quasi-emotional dimension.

“Understanding what another person feels” and similar phrases are subject to several interpretations. There is a *normative* sense of the phrase. It is the sense we apply when we claim the occurrence of an emotional state to be justified given the circumstances. There is a reason or a recognizable cause for the emotional state to be

present. I shall leave this sense aside. The three senses of the expression “understanding” I would like to concentrate on here can be dubbed the *recognitional*, the *experiential*, and the *imaginative* sense. Of these three forms of understanding the second and the third also count as responses in my sense.

To recognize someone’s emotional state can merely be a matter of classification, hence of inference, if not reached at least partly by means of the experience of a bodily state. The following two faces can be classified as respectively being sad and happy, with no emotional or quasi-emotional involvement on our part:



When we classify someone as being sad or happy on grounds of a recognition of the kind occurring when we see the two faces above, we can also be said to be understanding *that* the person is sad, or happy, and thus this form of understanding can also be called *understanding-that*.

The inference to correctly categorize a person’s emotional state can be substantially harder to formulate than with the stylized faces above. By contrast, in other cases the inference can be very easy or even unnecessary, e.g., when we are reliably told what the person’s emotional states are. Yet, in all such cases, this form of understanding will still count as recognitional or understanding-that if no experienced bodily states are involved in the process of reaching such understanding. Of course, it should not be excluded that recognitional understanding-that can be *accompanied* by some emotional

or quasi-emotional involvement, for that may be a consequence of the understanding, one which is neither instrumental to it nor a part of it.

By contrast, when the understanding of an emotional state partly consists in or occurs thanks to an emotional or quasi-emotional involvement, then such understanding will count, in general, as a response in my sense, and in particular as an instance of understanding what being in such a state is like (*understanding-how*).¹⁸ Distinctive of this sort of understanding is that some kind of access to the emotional state is integral to it. That does not exclude that this form of understanding can also lead to or express itself in the awareness or attribution of an emotional state to some person or character. Conversely, in many cases understanding-how may need, or be prompted by, understanding-that. In all such cases, understanding-how and understanding-that work, so to speak, together.

Knowing what a certain emotional state is like can amount either to having the emotional state itself or some appropriate surrogate, or to having represented it to oneself in one's imagination. In the former case, we have an instance of experiential understanding, in the latter, an instance of imaginative understanding. To be more specific, the experiential understanding of an emotional state is the having of an emotional state identical with or sufficiently similar to the one we understand. It corresponds to the common conviction that the best way of understanding what X is like, where X is an emotional state, is by actually having X or something close to it. The best way of understanding what being sad for having lost someone dear is like is to lose

someone; the best way of understanding what being a winner feels like is to win or accomplish something; and so on. Whether or not this view on what is the best way of understanding what an emotional state is like is correct, experiential understanding cannot be claimed to play too central a role in narrative engagement. The claim that a narrative has made us feel what one of its characters is portrayed as feeling should most of the times be considered as hyperbolic and approximate. We do not really feel the same as what the character feels, if nothing else because the fictional events affecting the character do not affect us in the same way.¹⁹

The obvious fact that we do not participate in the characters' emotional states by having the same emotional states has been taken as a reason to discard the participant view about character participation and to embrace the onlooker view. However, such criticisms, which I will discuss in Chapter 2, must take something like experiential emotional understanding as the notion central to the participant view. By contrast, in some of the sections below, I will defend the view that *imaginative* emotional understanding can be the leading notion in an explanation of character participation. What will become most notable, and central to a defense of some version of the participant view, is that imaginative, not experiential, understanding is central also to the participation in the emotional states of other people, by empathy and sympathy, as well of ourselves, in memories and anticipations.

At this point, however, two clarifications are in order. My distinction between understanding-that and understanding-how with regard to others' emotional states seems

to correspond to the distinction between attributing to and participating in others' states. The correspondence can be accepted but with two important qualifications. First, we should leave open the question of whether understanding—that is necessary to understanding-how, and hence not embrace the view that attributing a mental state is necessarily prior to empathizing with it. Second, on the other hand, we should not address the question of whether attributing mental states develops out of or amounts to empathically participating in them. Accordingly, my analyses are neutral with respect to the theory theory vs. simulation theory controversy in the philosophy of mind.²⁰

As for the relationship between responding, or participating, and understanding, given the existence of the three senses of “understanding” outlined above, we can say that not all understanding counts as responding or participating, nor does all participating or responding count as understanding, but some very important instances of the one are also instances of the other, and vice versa.

The above rather abstract considerations will, however, prove helpful in the investigation of the various modes of participating in the emotions of other people, of our own past or future selves, and of characters from fictional narratives. To a taxonomy of the modes of participation we now turn.

6. Mapping Emotional Participation.

It is a well-known fact that humans, children and adults, have a great predisposition to respond in different ways to other humans', and more in general other beings', apparent

emotional states. We seem to be so much open to responding to the expressions of moods and emotions in others that *indifference*, i.e., the *lack of a response* to those emotional states is often worthy of notice and evaluation.²¹

We can participate in other people's emotions and emotional states in various ways. A taxonomy of the ways in which we can participate in another's emotional states is already partly suggested by the above analyses of kinds of understanding and their relationship to response. If we limit our analysis to participation in, or responses to, other people's emotional states (what with respect to narratives is character participation), then we can distinguish between responses which involve a form of understanding of the other's emotional states and responses which do not. The former can be distinguished further according to whether they *amount* to a form of understanding or simply *include* such an understanding. The understanding involved, I suggest, is understanding-how, that of what a certain emotional state is like.

Let us begin with a paradigmatic though not very common situation. At a café, we happen to witness two people arguing with each other, apparently over some important matter. We grasp only portions of the animated conversation, and thus only partially understand the reasons for the argument and the points of disagreement. Yet, even if we know almost nothing about the argument, we may very well find ourselves responding emotionally to some of the emotions and feelings the two people appear to be having. In even so simple a situation, we may be exhibiting a wealth of cognitive and emotional responses which can be distinguished psychologically and epistemically. Let

us list some of those responses, numbering them for convenience. In the following sections, I will provide a somewhat detailed analysis of each of them.

(1) We understand that the people involved in the quarrel are upset, more specifically that perhaps one is angry at the other. These emotions are *visible* on their faces, even if we cannot hear their conversation. (2) When one of the two people starts crying, we feel a lump in our throat. We are not necessarily sad for her – after all, we know nothing of the facts behind the animated conversation – but still are moved in an instinctual and somewhat more basic way. (3) Yet, we understand the other person is embarrassed and, perhaps due to a special sensitivity to this sort of emotion, we easily imagine what that may be like given the circumstances. (4) Despite our ignorance about the whole situation, ultimately we are sorry for the two people, and wish we could somehow help them overcome this negative moment. Such a response, however, is far from necessary, and indeed no more necessary than the opposite response, of annoyance at the two people and their way of discussing private matters in public.

Given the criterion enunciated earlier for what counts as a response, it is quite obvious that (1), the *inferential interpreting* of someone's emotional state, is not a response. And given the distinction between responses that involve a form of understanding and those that do not, we can distinguish (2), the mimicking response often called emotional contagion, but which can also be named *affective mimicry*, from the other two kinds of response. By contrast with the merely mimicking response, unaware of the other person's exact state, (3), i.e., *empathy*, and (4), i.e., *sympathy*,

require an understanding of what the other person's emotional state is like. Indeed, as will be clarified below, empathy *is* a form of understanding, more precisely the imaginative understanding outlined above.

Many would disagree with the claim that sympathy necessarily involves understanding-how, and in fact would rather maintain that one of the features distinguishing sympathy from empathy is that the former is not dependent upon knowing what the other person's emotional states are or are like (see, e.g., Neill 1996, 175, 183).²² Although I will defend my choice below, on grounds of its explanatory power, room can be made for a different sort of sympathy – or *concern* – one independent of what emotionally goes on with the other person, which may be what theorists such as Neill have in mind in denying the knowing-how condition for sympathy (see section 10 below).

All this requires further analysis and expansion, to which we now turn.

7. Emotional Inference.

The attribution of emotional states to the fictional characters is, of course, a fundamental component of the experience of a narrative, and in most cases a condition for following it. Classifying someone under an emotional term is a clear example of recognitional understanding or understanding-that. The inference to the other's emotional state need not be deliberate, or reflexive. Sometimes it happens in a fairly automatic, unreflective way, such as when some reliable character or narrator explicitly tells us what the

character's emotional states are. Woody Allen's *Annie Hall* throughout the movie distinctively makes the inferential task easy, thanks to the protagonist's (Woody Allen) voice-over, the characters' talks with each other and friends, and even conversations with a psychoanalyst. In a remarkable scene, subtitles providing the characters' thoughts discrepant from the conversation occurring aloud make the inference tasks especially straightforward.

Most typically, the ascription of emotional states occurs in virtue of a large number of contextual cues. Indeed, the ascription often occurs solely on the ground of contextual cues together with and according to commonsensical generalizations on human nature and what we know of the characters. In Robert Mulligan's film, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, we do not need to know anything of the character of the parents of the black man who, wrongly accused and condemned to jail, has just committed suicide, in order for us to know that they will be sad and angry. On the other hand, in Stephen Frears's film *Dangerous Liaisons*, it is in virtue of what we know of Madame de Merteuil (Glenn Close) that we can expect her to be happy and satisfied at the news of Mademoiselle Cécile de Volanges's (Uma Thurman) pregnant state.

Yet, understanding-that can occur also thanks to an inference to someone's state from his or her face, as the paradigmatic example from section 5 above shows. We surely have the capacity to interpret other people's facial expressions (and, of course, bodily expressions, tone of voice, and behavior) as indicative of specific emotional states. Paul Ekman (1985) and his colleagues (Ekman 1985) have collected a considerable

amount of evidence of a certain uniformity in the facial expressions of emotional states across cultures, though limited to the so-called “basic” emotions or affects: happiness; sadness; fear; anger; surprise; interest; and disgust/contempt.

Sometimes, the facial expression is so telling that a verbal indication of the emotional state expressed would add nothing to the understanding already achieved by “reading” the face. In psychology, the capacity for “reading” other people’s thoughts and feelings is usually called “empathic inference” (see Ickes 1997). Without questioning the appropriateness of such a phrase, I prefer to speak more simply of inference, for I want to describe as empathy a psychological phenomenon that is not essentially inferential.

Although “telling” faces can also be presented, via verbal description, in novels, they abound in visual narratives. Perhaps an extreme example where emotional states can be individuated easily and in a purely classificatory manner is represented by the convention of having the actors of a play wear masks expressive of an emotion: think, e.g., of Luigi Pirandello’s *Six Characters in Search of an Author* ([1921] 1952), though admittedly those masks also indicate the emotional dispositions and character traits of the characters. By contrast, in Werner Herzog’s *Heart of Glass*, the glazed expressions of the actors (all hypnotized) block any attempt of the spectator to infer specific emotional states from them, thus helping to create an atmosphere of alienation.

Paradigmatic of understanding-that, emotional inference is, however, often a condition for understanding-how, as will be recalled below (section 8). Furthermore, it is at the root of many instantiations of a certain kind of response we have with respect to

characters, when, upon recognizing a character's emotional states, we are *concerned* for the character (see section 11 below). Yet in itself emotional inference does not count as participation. Nor does it enter directly into character participation as defined above, i.e., as an emotional or quasi-emotional response to characters' emotional states. When participation is or includes a form of understanding, I submit, that is a form of understanding-how.²³

8. Affective Mimicry.

The capacity to respond to other people's emotional states is already quite vividly present in children. As Martin Hoffman's (1984 and 1987) observations have shown, newborn children and babies, even prior to the development of a notion of the other people surrounding them as constituting distinct selves, already respond to the manifestation of emotional states from others by paralleling those manifestations (see also Simner 1971). Thus, for instance, when a baby hears or sees another child crying, very often she will start crying as well, although seeking comfort for herself and showing no real concern for the other child.²⁴ Such reactions appear to be caused by the expression of a feeling or emotion by the other, and they often result in the arousal of a corresponding feeling, though of modified intensity. For this reason, this phenomenon has been given the name of "emotional infection" or "contagion."²⁵ Emotional contagion is not exclusive to children, for it is at work even when, say, an adult enters a room filled with laughing

people and as a consequence of that is moved to smile or at least to experience a pleasant feeling. The response is involuntary and automatic.

Emotional contagion is, so to speak, the affective side of a more general mimicking disposition humans have. Thus, *motor mimicry* is the paralleling of someone's muscular activity as when, e.g., we instinctively follow a baseball player's movements in throwing the ball (cf. Smith 1995, 99). Most often, we do not quite reproduce the movements we are observing, but instinctively contract our muscles as if we were to reproduce those movements. Indeed, motor mimicry seems to function very much like a sort of simulation that may occur when anticipating one's own or someone else's behavior. In anticipating, thinking, or planning of, say, jumping over a fence, our muscles may initiate a beginning of the movements (detectable by electromyography) that we would actually make were we in fact to perform the act.

Motor mimicry has affective consequences for the subject who engages in it, and hence is importantly connected with and conducive to emotional contagion. Ekman and his colleagues have shown through their experiments that the external manifestation of an emotion, even when not caused by the occurrence of such an emotion, provokes in the subject some of the physiological effects of bona fide affective states (Ekman 1992, Ekman and Davidson 1993; see also Damasio 1994, 148-149, and Adelman and Zajonc 1989). Subjects that were made to assume a certain facial expression typical of the expression of a happy smile, e.g., by asking them to pronounce the phoneme "eeeeeh," reported feeling happier. Accordingly, although we imitate only the outward

manifestation of an emotion or feeling by another, the mimicking we engage in makes us feel the corresponding feeling of comfort or discomfort.

Despite this “feed-back” effect, given the important difference between emotions and mere feelings, emotional contagion is not contagion of emotions at all, and should rather be named affective mimicry, for it merely amounts to the largely unintentional mimicking of the external manifestation of some emotional state. And so, in the case of one person mimicking the emotional state of another, although the two subjects end up with similar expressions and are affected by similar feelings, only the one who originally was, say, upset about something can be considered as having that emotion. The other, who developed an external response and a feeling as a consequence of the other’s manifested state, cannot truly be said to be upset about anything. The feeling he experiences lacks the feature essential to emotions of focusing attention on an object or state of affairs. This is not to deny that the subject who finds himself “infected” by someone’s expression of an emotion may sometimes be infected with an intense feeling, most often the feeling involved in the emotion the other person is having.

Although typically an instinctual response to external manifestations of emotional states, mimicry can also be prompted by the imagination. In imagination we may represent to ourselves facial or gestural expressions which we then instinctively mimic. If I tell you, “Imagine Oedipus as he punctures his own eyes,” you may respond by closing your own eyes. Shortly, we will see how the possibility that mental images (understood as covering mental representations in any modality) can give rise to

mimicking responses contributes to making mimicry possible even in the realm of the non-representational arts.

There is little doubt that affective mimicry is often at work in the experiences we have with fictional narratives. Given its character of instinctual response to the manifestation of an emotional state, affective mimicry is more likely to occur while experiencing visual narratives, i.e., with cinema, television, and theater. In a famous scene from Quentin Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs*, a gangster cuts off an ear of a policeman who has been tied to a chair. Of course, several of our responses to the scene derive from a more complex perception and assessment of the situation, including, e.g., the fact that the gangster can do this with a lightness strikingly at odds with the pain he is producing. We are disgusted by the act and horrified by the man, knowing among other things the complete futility of his torture (before cutting the ear the gangster had warned the policeman that nothing he may decide to confess or plead for would spare him the torture). And, of course, we pity the tortured policeman. Yet the first response we are likely to have is one merely paralleling the expression of pain of the victim. That response is the most automatic and precedes any judgment on the facts. Nor does it disappear, at least not necessarily, once more structured emotions come into play.

Affective mimicry largely works thanks to facial expressions and so is especially common in the experience of cinema and television, due to the use of the close-up. Yet mimicry cannot be excluded from theater, especially thanks to the affective effects of motor mimicry. In a performance of Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, Willy

Loman's depressed walk may bring us to mimic the character's mood and emotions.

(Note that Miller prescribes in the script that, at the character's first appearance on stage, his exhaustion be "apparent"; [1949] 1996, 2).

Affective mimicry does not need a narrative context, as the examples above, of the baby crying in response to another's cry or a man smiling in response to a laughing company, already show. Hence it is possible to suffer the contagion of Adam and Eve's expression of pain and desperation in Masaccio's fresco in the Brancacci Chapel even before, or anyway independently of, appreciating the depicted narration of the expulsion from Heaven; or, in front of Raphael's *Madonna del Granduca* we may respond by paralleling the trace of melancholy that gleams through Mary's smile. That can happen with positive emotional states, too – think of an encounter with Auguste Renoir's *Luncheon of the Boating Party* as somewhat analogous to entering a room full of smiling faces.

Emotional contagion can be prompted by sounds as well as by images. During the famous shower scene from Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*, we fear for the victim, pity her, and are horrified for what is happening to her. Yet, we may also and first of all be infected by her expression of terror; that effect is clearly facilitated and enhanced by the background sound which at the crucial moment comes in, anticipating and then paralleling the victim's scream, which we may thus be prompted to mimic. What may be happening here is a mimicking of the feelings suggested not only by the victim's facial expression but also by the scream-like background sound.²⁶

Music can prompt mimicking responses even independently of accompanying images, for there can be an internal mimicking of musical gestures, one which can be even prior to and independent of any empathic identification with such gestures (Levinson 1996c, 98).

More complex is the route that mimicry can take, at least in principle, thanks to music's expressive properties. Of course, there are several theories of musical expressiveness, and ones quite different from each other.²⁷ Some of those theories, however, could make room for mimicry as mediated by the imagination. The theories proposed by Stephen Davies (1994) and Peter Kivy (1980) consider a musical passage as expressive of an emotional state when that passage presents a sort of similarity (physiognomic or behavioral) with the human expression of that state. Other theories emphasize the listener's disposition to imagine hearing someone behaviorally expressing the emotional state (see part of the theory suggested by Walton 1988); while others speak of the passage's aptness to be heard as an expression of that emotional state by some agent, the music's persona (Levinson 1996c). In all such cases, I submit, it is possible for affective mimicry to be sometimes at work, paralleling the apprehension of the expressed emotional states, thanks perhaps to the mediation of imagination, where the alleged expressive "appearance" of the music or the perceived expressive behavior of the alleged persona is instinctively mimicked.²⁸

In sum, mimicry pervades our experiences with narratives and even with non-narrative works. The reason for this probably lies in our natural propensity to responding

to movements and sounds, symptoms of emotional states, by mimicking those movements and sounds, often with the subsequent “feed-back” phenomenon of experiencing some corresponding feeling inside.

The very pervasiveness of that psychological phenomenon, however, should warn us against hoping to learn any deep lesson about character participation from it. In narratives, mimicking characters’ emotional states does not even require that those are recognized as characters, playing roles in the narrative. Indeed, as some of the examples above show, mimicry is so basic a form of response that it may occur also with respect to non-narrative or even non-representational works.

Pervasive as it is in everyday life, affective mimicry probably plays an important role in our attributing and understanding other people’s emotional states. If mimicking another’s behavior and expression of emotional states can produce in us the feeling of the corresponding emotional state, then mimicry can be a way to attribute such a state to the other person. Sometimes, it may be owing to the mimicking reaction that we turn our attention to the context the other person is in and from that to understanding what his emotional state is.

Of course, much of the mimicry that we happen to employ may be redundant as an aid to inference. That is, often the emotional state the person is in may be obvious. Yet that should not lead us to conclude that in all such cases mimicry is useless. It must be recalled that knowing what emotional state someone is in does not exhaust all there is to knowing about that person’s being in such a state. Thus, mimicry, when conjoined

with the awareness of the emotional state occurring in the other person, can provide us with clues for understanding not only the kind of emotional state but also the intensity of its occurrence.

Furthermore, mimicry provides us with a clue to a different form of understanding, one that goes beyond the mere registering that a person is in a certain emotional state, and gives us an insight into the special quality of an emotional state's occurrence, or into what such state is like: experiential understanding.

Nor should we think that mimicry disappears once other psychological mechanisms of participation are at work. Indeed, it is important that we emphasize that mimicry is not incompatible with other, more complex psychological mechanisms of participation, and indeed can contribute to the occurrence of them. If we participate in someone's emotional state, say, with empathy, there is no conceptual reason why mimicry cannot be present as well. In fact, mimicry may even contribute to enhancing the empathic response. Where empathy, for instance, provides one with an understanding of the other's emotional state, involuntary mimicry, by producing various feelings, can add an experiential side to that understanding.

Of course, the functions of mimicry in all these respects should not be overemphasized, for mimicry remains a very basic, instinctual, and largely automatic response. An investigation of the mechanisms of mimetic arousal could bring to light a complex and variegated set of causal mechanisms. Nonetheless, analytically, mimicry must be considered as just *one* way of responding to other people's or characters'

emotional states, and one which, not involving a representation of the other person's state, cannot enter into a taxonomy of the different cognitive or evaluative attitudes towards that state. Accordingly, mimicry lies alone on the side of those emotional responses to others' emotional states that involve no understanding, while the more complex taxonomy lies on the side of those responses involving some form of understanding.

It is now time to turn to an analysis of empathy, the most fundamental way of responding to emotional states of those involving a form of understanding.

9. Empathy.

Unfortunately, there is no agreed upon definition of empathy among psychologists and philosophers. Empathy is usually characterized as the capacity of feeling *with* someone, and contrasted to feeling *for* someone; it is further characterized as vicariously experiencing the other's experiences, emotional and cognitive, as putting oneself in the other's shoes (see, e.g., Barnett 1987, Feagin 1996, Neill 1996, Darwall 1998). Each of these characterizations is open to multiple interpretations, and the need for further clarification transfers onto the more specific definitions. Accordingly, I shall begin by proposing my own definition of empathy and then move on to explaining it.

Furthermore, since any definition in this area is bound to be somewhat stipulative, I shall defend my own proposal mainly on grounds of its explanatory power rather than for its correspondence to common usage.

Empathy as I am going to define it will be shown to enter into the constitution of other psychological phenomena of participation in other people's emotional states, whether in reality or fiction: most notably sympathy.²⁹

In my view, when we empathize with someone, we occurrently understand his or her emotional state(s) at a given time from his or her point of view.³⁰

Hence, I propose to consider empathy as a form of understanding which has as its objects instances of occurrent, non-dispositional emotional states. This is not to deny that understanding someone's occurrent states, in conjunction with an understanding of the circumstances in which those states have arisen, can lead one to an understanding of that person's emotional dispositions and character traits (see Ickes 1997, 3 ff.).

Considering empathy as a form of understanding is far from new. In philosophy of history, Wilhelm Dilthey ([1900] 1976) suggested that the notion of *verstehen*, necessary to the engagement with poetry but also to the understanding of past events, is a form of understanding distinguished from the form of inferential knowledge (*erkennen*) that the natural sciences provide (see also Collingwood 1946).

Defining empathy as a form of understanding should not encourage conceiving it as a form of inference, an educated guess as to what the emotional states of the person with whom we empathize are. Empathy in my sense can indeed lead to the ascription of emotional states to a person, but that is surely not what empathy is or is for. Indeed, empathy in some cases can also require the previous recognition of what emotional states the person has.

Whether it follows from or is conducive to a classification of the other person's emotional states, empathy has the distinctive function of allowing access to what the other person's emotional states are *like*. This feature is emphasized in several contemporary definitions and characterizations of empathy. Martin Hoffman, for instance, defines "empathic distress" as "a feeling that is more appropriate to the suffering person's condition than to the observer's own relatively comfortable circumstances" (1991, 132). And Alex Neill states that empathizing with someone "is partly a matter of coming to know *what it is like* to have certain beliefs, desires, hopes, and doubts" (1996, 184).

Too often, however, empathy has also been conceived as requiring the experiencing of an identical, similar, or congruent emotion. That is, in my terms, too often has experiential understanding been assumed to be the only form of understanding-how. Certainly, sometimes, empathizing with a person can lead to actually feeling what the other feels, i.e., an emotional state of the same kind, such as an occurrence of the same emotion, though perhaps of diminished intensity. Those are the instances in which one can properly be said to be experiencing vicariously the other person's emotional state, hence experientially understanding it. Sometimes, the parallelism is complete, as when for instance one empathizes with a fellow party member for the victory of their party at the elections. However, having identical emotions, whether partially or completely, cannot be sufficient for empathizing with someone, for the empathizer's emotions may happen to parallel, more or less, those of all the other party members, not

only of the one she empathizes with. Nor is having identical emotions necessary to empathizing. As Robert Gordon (1987, 152) has pointed out, if I empathize with someone who is joyful for having won the match, his emotion for *his* having so won cannot be identical to the emotion I empathically experience, for I am joyful for *his* victory, not *mine*. Likewise, if the winner is proud, I may feel *his* pride and yet not be proud myself.

That empathy does not require experiencing emotional states which are parallel to or identical with those of the person with whom we empathize, finally, is underlined by the fact that empathy properly understood does not require any full-blown emotional involvement at all. My conviction on this point arises from a simple comparison with the experienced connectedness with our own past or future experiences, according to the methodological proviso suggested in section 1 above. Take, for instance, memory. When I recall a past event in which I was, say, anxious about an approaching bit of news, e.g., because opening a letter about a long-desired fellowship, I might, so to speak, “re-live” that experience; yet, if that does not happen, as most commonly it would not, I would still know what that emotion of fear mixed with expectation was like, from my point of view then.³¹ With a more romantic example, one may sometimes experience the feeling of one’s first kiss again, but one occurrently knows what that experience was like any time one occurrently represents that kiss to oneself. Knowing what an emotion is like from someone’s point of view just corresponds to my definition of empathy. Denying the status of empathic responses, when they are not accompanied by a full-

blown emotion, to experiences such as event-memories would betray not only a narrow conception of empathy but also a failure to see important distinctions among different senses of understanding, most notably the distinctions between recognitional, imaginative, and experiential understanding presented in section 5 above.³² Rather than as feeling an emotional state, understanding another's state from his or her point of view should be related to *imagining* being in that state.

In sum, in my view empathy provides us with a form of understanding-how, and in particular with an occurrent understanding of what a certain emotional state is like from someone's point of view. Such understanding can occasionally lead us to experiencing emotional states that are identical or similar to those of the person with whom we empathize, but it need not do so. Empathy conceived of as a form of understanding essentially is, and most often is composed solely by, imaginative understanding.

Empathy is often characterized as requiring a form of *identification* with the other person. Though that is best considered as a loose way of speaking, two features of empathic engagement that may be behind the assimilation of it to identification are usefully emphasized. The first is related to the proviso that empathic understanding must assume the point of view of the person with whom we empathize; the second concerns the nature of the imaginative act. I shall look at the first feature in the next section, while I will address the second feature in Chapter 2.

10. Perspective-Taking.

When we empathize with someone, real or fictional, we assume that person's or character's point of view. That can be called "perspective-taking."³³ We can, however, individuate at least three senses in which one can take another's perspective.

(a) *Perceptual* perspective-taking is when one imagines to be perceiving (i.e., seeing or hearing or touching, etc.) things from the other's point of view. A chess player, for instance, may take in imagination his opponent's visual perspective on the board and see, e.g., the black Tower as standing on the left of the white Queen and in front of the white King, not vice versa as from his original point of view. (b) *Cognitive* perspective-taking corresponds to when one imagines to be conceiving, interpreting, and evaluating things in the way the other does. The chess player, for instance, when taking the other player's perspective, will more profitably see the black Tower not merely standing to the left of the Queen and in front of the King, but also as *menacing* both of them. And the player may follow in imagination the flow of reasoning his adversary will likely go through, given his perceptions, his goals, and his dispositions. Finally, (c) *affective* perspective-taking is when one imagines feeling the emotions or moods that the other feels or has.

My characterization of empathy might seem to unjustifiably restrict its attention to only one, the last one, of the senses in which we can assume someone else's perspective. Yet the notion of understanding an emotional state from the point of view of the person who has it, while corresponding, I suggest, to affective perspective-taking, involves cognitive perspective-taking and, when relevant, perceptual perspective-taking

as well. If I am to understand another's emotional states from his or her point of view, I am supposed to understand the emotional states as they arise in the circumstances as perceived, interpreted, and evaluated by the person. Thus, the representation of the other's emotional states from his or her point of view must often be accompanied by a representation of the context the emotional states arise and evolve in. In other words, insofar as affective perspective-taking, or empathy, often involves (the employment of) perceptual and cognitive perspective-taking, the former can be distinguished from the other two, and be recognized as having a more complex structure.

One advantage of distinguishing among three sorts of perspective-taking, and of noticing empathy's complex structure with respect to them, is the possibility of individuating different sources of empathic failure or resistance. I may be unable or reluctant to represent an emotional state to myself in imagination either because such response is not perceived by me as appropriate given the circumstances as perceived and evaluated by the other person, or rather because I may be unable, or resist, to looking at things or evaluating them, even in imagination, that way. I will return to the issue of imaginative resistance in Chapter 5.

Narratives often invite us, I claim, to assume a certain perspective, perceptual, cognitive, or emotional, on things. In novels, detailed descriptions of scenes, often reported as what a character is supposed to be perceiving, present us with those scenes from some point of view, which we are often invited to assume in imagination. Of course, there are also descriptions, even quite detailed ones, which do not present us with

any scene perceived from any specific point of view. In such cases, we may be invited to imagine the scene from any point of view, of our choice, or else to consider a state of affairs without representing it to ourselves in imagination. Likewise, for cognitive and emotional perspective-taking – sometimes narratives invite us to assume a character’s perspective; sometimes they merely invite us to realize, be aware of, or think about the fact that a character’s thoughts, judgments, desires, or emotions are this or that.

The above has provided a definition of empathy and some details of the structure of this mode of participation. Obviously, the analysis of empathy remains incomplete until an analysis of the form of imagination it involves is provided. First, however, we should move to an analysis of another mode of participation central to narrative engagement – sympathy – since such mode will prove to involve the same sort of understanding as empathy.

11. Sympathy.

Sympathy is usually contrasted to empathy as requiring that one feels *for* the other rather than *with* him or her (see, e.g., Neill 1996, 175). My niece fears the dentist but I do not fear him, at least do not fear him for myself. Rather, I am worried for my niece. A mother is grieving for the loss of her child but I do not grieve; I pity her. The new graduate is joyful and I am happy, too, but for him, not for myself; and so on. Or so it seems.

Obviously, sympathy and empathy are different psychological phenomena, or different modes of emotional participation. They differ from each other for the sort of emotional responses they prompt and hence for their relationship with action. More relevantly, they differ in conceptual structure, i.e., for what they involve.

Above, empathy was defined as a form of understanding, one involving no real desires to do anything with respect to the situation the other is in.³⁴ Understanding someone's emotional states, in imagination, from her point of view, does not entail any favorable, unfavorable, or indifferent attitude with respect to that person or her states. My understanding the athlete's joy, even when understanding it from her point of view, can make me feel happy for her or, in contrast, make me envious of her victory. Or, of course, I can be indifferent to the matter (cp. Wollheim 1974, Chap. 3, Stocker and Hegeman 1996, 214-215, and Darwall 1998, 261). By contrast, the first thing to be remarked about sympathy is that sympathizing with someone seems to involve a desire, *ceteris paribus*, that the other persist in a positive situation or be freed of a negative one. Indeed, sympathy involves a concern for the other's relevant goals with respect to a situation affecting him or her.³⁵

Yet, I claim, the contrast between the two phenomena has been overemphasized, the conceptual structure of sympathy misconceived, and sympathy's relationship with empathy overlooked. Not only are both empathy and sympathy ways of responding to other people's situations and emotional states, and both give rise to "other-oriented" or "other-focused" emotional responses. More importantly, the two psychological

phenomena are intimately related. I will develop an analysis of sympathy as involving, first, empathic engagement with the other person's emotional states, and, second, perspective-taking – cognitive and, sometimes, affective – with regard to his or her objectives about those states. Hence in the above examples, often, though not always, when we worry for our fearful niece or pity the grieving woman or are happy for the student, we are, by my lights, in a sense fearful, grieving, or happy. In addition, however, when we sympathize with someone we also adopt her goals from her point of view.

In my analysis of the two modes of emotional participation, empathy and sympathy, I start with the taxonomy proposed by Raymond Martin (1998), though at times I depart substantially from his more specific proposals. Martin, after having noted the lack, among philosophers and psychologists, of any agreed way of distinguishing between empathy and sympathy, suggests that “empathy is one thing [and] normally sympathy is empathy plus something else (a kind of super-empathy)” (1998, 96). And he continues: “The something else that when added to empathy makes it sympathy has to do with adopting the objectives of the other with whom one is empathic” (1998, 97). Later, Martin parenthetically specifies that we must adopt the *relevant* objectives of the other person (1998, 98).

That some sort of concern for the other, often mediated by the endorsement of the other's objectives, is essential to sympathy should be quite uncontroversial. Indeed, sympathy is sometimes even reduced to the same as concern for the other (see the next

section). One distinctive feature of Martin's definition is that it does not speak of endorsing the other's objectives but rather of *adopting* them. A second distinctive feature is that it refers to the other's *relevant* goals. Finally, what is perhaps the most distinctive characteristic of Martin's definition is that it considers the concern for the other, in the form of the adoption of his or her objectives, just a component of sympathy – by no means as what sympathy as a whole amounts to.

The above definition, adequately elaborated, has the potential for providing us with quite a detailed and realistic analysis of the phenomenon of sympathy. In the following, I shall present what I consider to be the best way of expanding and elaborating on the suggestion that sympathy amounts to empathy plus the adoption of the other's relevant objectives or, as I shall also say, the other's relevant goals.

If sympathy is defined as empathy associated with the adoption of the other's relevant objectives or goals, then we can dub *antipathy* the empathic representation of the other's emotional states united to the adoption of goals *opposite* to those of the other person. If someone who is in pain wants, as most typically she will, her pain to disappear, the sympathetic spectator will be willing, other things being equal, to do something to have the pain disappear, while the antipathetic spectator, in contrast, will be willing to do something to have that pain continue. Paradigmatic of an antipathetic response can be that of the sadist, in whom the empathic representation of his victim's emotional state is actually conjoined to the desire of having the victim's pain persist. With respect to positive states of mind, the paradigm of the antipathetic spectator in my

sense is the person experiencing envy for someone else's joy – the representation of the other's states of mind is conjoined to the desire of having that joy disappear or diminish. (In general, the appropriate adjustments from the case of sympathy to that of antipathy are obvious, and I shall hereafter leave it to the reader to fill them in.)

Thus put, sympathy can indeed be described as a form of “super-empathy,” though in a very specific sense. If empathy consists in adopting, in imagination, someone's point of view, in particular his or her emotional point of view, it seems that sympathy can now be characterized as consisting in imagining the other person's emotional point of view *and*, in addition to that, adopting that person's evaluative, i.e., cognitive perspective over his or her emotional states. Hence, sympathy in this sense involves both a form of affective and of cognitive perspective-taking. This last claim only apparently conflicts with what stated in the previous section regarding the necessity, in order to assume someone's affective perspective, to often assume also his or her cognitive perspective on things. That is, my present characterization of sympathy only apparently risks conflating sympathy with empathy, in virtue of its claim that both empathy and sympathy involve cognitive and affective perspective-taking. The reason why there is in fact no conflation between the two notions is that the objects of the two instances of cognitive perspective-taking involved are not the same. According to the analysis of empathy proposed above, in order to empathize with someone who, with respect to some situation *S* affecting her, feels the emotional states *E*, we may often need, among other things, to assume that person's cognitive perspective on *S*. The present

definition of sympathy requires that in addition to empathizing with the person feeling *E*, we also assume her cognitive perspective on *E*.

Typically, with sympathy, imagination is involved (at least) twice: to imagine, empathically, the other person's emotional states and to imagine her attitudes, evaluations, and, most importantly, desires with respect to her own emotional states. I say that "typically" imagination is involved twice because there may be cases in which a person's relevant goals are just *endorsed*, without representing them from that person's point of view, and yet that may be done with so much strength to bring about a response which is sympathetic in my sense.³⁶ More often, however, endorsing the other's goals, in addition to empathizing with him or her, is not sufficient for sympathizing with that person.

Indeed, defining sympathy as empathy plus the mere endorsement of the other's relevant goals could be easily shown to have peculiar results. Consider the consequences, for instance, of such a definition applied to personal memories, on the one hand, and anticipations, on the other. When I remember something that affected me, say, negatively, I typically endorse my relevant goals at the time, e.g., that the pain disappear. Yet, not in every such case do I thereby pity myself. Likewise for the anticipation of future experiences. In general, not all instances of empathic engagement with other, past or future, stages of ourselves are thereby instances of sympathy, in spite of us presently endorsing our relevant goals at the time. The instances in which I do sympathize with myself are those in which, in the case of experiences from the past, for example, I not

only endorse my relevant objectives back then, but also represent them to myself as I evaluated them back then, and endorse *that* evaluation.³⁷ Hence, sympathy arises when I actively adopt those objectives at the present time, that is, I desire those goals to be realized. The paradox of adopting objectives regarding a past situation, hence of desiring something about the past, is only apparent, for it is not paradoxical to claim that for someone sympathizing with himself in the past, the counterfactual that he would do something if he could applies.

In sum, the notion of adopting the goals of the other is preferable to that of endorsing those goals in a definition of sympathy. And adopting the other's goals seems to entail taking on the other's cognitive, evaluative perspective on her emotional states.

On the other hand, adopting the other's goals cannot be reduced to merely taking on, empathically, the other's cognitive/evaluative perspective. Nor is the conjunction of such empathic representation with the endorsement of the other's goals sufficient to provide a complete analysis of what adopting the other's goals amounts to. A psychotherapist, for instance, besides empathizing with her patients, may also endorse their relevant goals *and* represent them to herself in the appropriate way; yet the therapist may still remain emotionally detached – something that her profession may indeed impose on her. The element that needs to be added to the analysis of sympathy is the active *desire*, from the other person's point of view, of seeing those goals realized.

Obviously, this is not the place for an analysis of the nature of desires. Nonetheless, two features of desires are usefully emphasized here: their connection to

action and their function of indicators of utility for the person having the desire.³⁸ A desire for x seems to be a reason to get x, and desiring x seems to imply that x is perceived as good or useful to get. Accordingly, if sympathy involves desire, it seems to follow that sympathizing with someone involves, for the sympathizer, having a reason for helping that person realize her relevant goals, and considering the realization of those goals as good or useful to the sympathizer. By contrast, the psychotherapist, or each of us when recalling sad memories or anticipating sad experiences and yet avoiding to sympathize, is not desiring to see the relevant goals realized, but is at most endorsing those goals.

To sum up, sympathy in my view is composed of empathy plus the adoption of the other's relevant goals, where adopting another's goals involves representing them to oneself in imagination from the other's cognitive, evaluative point of view *and* desiring to (help) realize them. Desiring, in turn, involves having a reason for helping the person to realize those goals, and seeing the realization of those goals as good or useful.³⁹

That sympathy entails a representation of the other person's goals from that person's point of view, hence that it may often require trading our own attitudes with respect to a situation of a certain kind for those of the person with whom we sympathize, corresponds well to some recent empirical research. For instance, Daniel Putman (1987), referring to experiments conducted by the social psychologists John Sabin and Maury Silver (1985), emphasizes the fact that when a subject knows that a person has decided not to care about the pain affecting herself, the subject's sympathy for that person is

“lessened considerably” (Putman 1987, 261). If we realize that someone we judge to be in a very bad or, rather, very good situation does not *care*, then our sympathetic response will be substantially attenuated.

Further, that in order to sympathize we must conform ourselves, so to speak, to the other’s objectives makes room for possible degrees of resistance in adopting those objectives. Some goals are just too alien from us to fully sympathize with their owner. Sympathizing with a masochist at the moment that she seeks painful experiences which we would ourselves in all possible ways try to avoid may be difficult mainly because of the difficulty of assuming that person’s perspective on her pain, and hence of adopting that person’s goals with respect to her pain.

In general, our adopting another’s relevant goals is subject to normative constraints, some of which are moral, and it is psychologically so perceived. If an emotional reaction looks excessively strong to us, or excessively weak, given the circumstances, then it may be more appropriate for us that we sympathize at a lower degree than when the reaction looks justified to us. Often that matches ordinary experience. I surely sympathize with my father when he worries about his upcoming surgery, but I can also be somewhat annoyed by his being excessively worried about what is, after all, minor surgery. Sometimes, however, our resistance derives from a sense of lack of appropriateness, so to speak, not of the response to the situation but of the situation itself. Our sympathy may be attenuated by the persuasion that, say, the pain suffered by the other is something he deserves, such as the pain caused by a just

punishment. Or sympathy may fail to be prompted altogether when we disapprove what, say, brought about the other's happiness – say, the happiness of the developer who finally succeeded in getting permission to build a mansion inside a natural reserve. Or, more trivially, when the good fortune touches someone who has already been blessed by good luck, we may have difficulties sympathizing with the happy person. The sense of injustice does not always have noble roots. We may have difficulties sympathizing with someone who wins the lottery on his first try simply because we have been unsuccessful for months. Or we may fail to sympathize simply because it was *he* and not *we* who won.

In sum, all sorts of obstacles to adopting another's goals can intervene and affect the possibility and the intensity of our sympathetic engagement. However, my characterization of sympathy includes an element which can explain why sympathizing with people or, for that matter, with fictional characters, can be relatively easy, in spite of the differences between our own view on things and their view. Such an element is the claim that sympathizing only requires the adoption of the other's *relevant* goals.

It should be easy to accept that the goals adopted, whether in sympathy or antipathy, are only those relevant to the state of mind empathically represented, for sympathizing with someone, or rather responding to him or her antipathetically, by no means involves adopting or rejecting that person's entire set of goals, not even those relevant to the situation. Much more limitedly, when we sympathize with, for instance, someone in pain, we must adopt that person's objectives with respect to *that* occurrent emotional state, and thus typically share his or her desire to have the pain disappear.

Overall, then, sympathizing can be shown to be, in most cases, a relatively easy matter, thanks to the selectivity of the goals we need to adopt. It may be easy for me to be happy for the fans of the popular singer who are thrilled by seeing him, with no need for me to adopt, in imagination, the fans' overall set of goals or objectives, not even limitedly to what is relevant to the situation – the goals which bring them, for instance, to spend time and money to participate in the meetings of the fans' club. It may be sufficient, say, that I adopt their goal of remaining in a state of joyful, shared excitement. Analogously, I can be annoyed by someone's excessive and "cheesy" joy for his son's accomplishments at school, and ultimately, antipathetically, desire that some of that joy disappear, yet without desiring that the entire set of goals that person has with respect to his son's performance at school fall apart.

Thus, it should not be surprising if, especially when dealing with fictions, we happen to be happy for the villain's joy in having escaped from jail, or happen to pity him when he is caught by the police – responses that may be both embarrassing to have. By no means does there seem to be a dependence of sympathy, its being prompted or its intensity, solely on our personal persuasions. When faced with narratives, in particular, we may fail to sympathize with a positive character for the way the character is portrayed, and we may instead sympathize with an evil character portrayed in a charming way. Whatever the mechanisms behind them, these rather common facts suggest an important hypothesis – that perhaps not every time we adopt another's goals do we do it out of endorsement of them. This merits some further developing.

My suggestion is that the selective adoption of another person's goals does not require the full endorsement of them. Although we may sympathize with the villain for having escaped, we may still fail to endorse the villain's overall evaluative system, which includes not only the desire for freedom but also the persuasion that the lives of others are of little worth, and the like. And yet the full endorsement of the villain's goal of keeping in the state of joy that freedom gives him – a goal that we adopt when sympathizing with him – would also require endorsing the evaluative system his joy is located in. To this suggestion I now turn, via a comparison between the view of sympathy defended here, in terms of the adoption of relevant goals, and a view of sympathy as involving *caring* for the person with whom we sympathize.

The analysis of sympathy as requiring adopting the other's goals can also be shown to be preferable to an analysis in terms of caring. Indeed, if, as I claimed, sympathy involves adopting the other's relevant goals in the sense of assuming his or her (cognitive, evaluative) perspective on his or her emotional states, then it seems that sympathy requires *caring with* the other for what he or she cares (as proposed, for instance, by Putman 1987). That seems to be coherent, among other things, with the fact highlighted above that if someone does not care about his or her situation, our sympathetic responses are naturally inhibited. Hence, the question must be addressed, whether the notion of caring for the other can adequately replace the notion of adopting the other's relevant goals or objectives. Obviously, there is an important step from *caring with* the other for what he or she cares about to *caring for* him or her. The latter

notion, but not the former, allows for caring even for someone who does not care about herself, or for caring in ways that are not acknowledged as worthy of care by her.

In spite of a substantial extensional overlap between caring for someone and adopting his or her relevant goals, the two notions need to be kept separate and the latter be considered, in my view, preferable to the former in an analysis of sympathy. The notion of adopting a set of goals includes an element of self-referentiality, which I encapsulated above into the notion of desire, and which caring does not have. Part of my point can be made by reference to two examples already presented above, namely, that of the attitude of a psychotherapist towards her patients and that of one's empathic engagement with oneself in the past or the future.

Ex hypothesis, I attributed the psychotherapist empathic insight into her patients' emotional states as well as the endorsement of her patients' desires, for instance, of being freed from their anxieties. Yet, it seems that the situation can easily be redescribed as that of a psychotherapist who certainly *cares* for her patients, and cares about them with specific reference to their emotional states, but who nonetheless refrains from adopting the patients' relevant goals, while empathizing with them. Of course, often we can sympathize with the same people to whom we are causing pain – it is the role of the *ceteris paribus* clause to make that possible. However, there are surely other contexts where letting ourselves sympathize would interfere with what one ought to be doing. If psychotherapy is at least sometimes one of those contexts, then we must admit that it is possible to empathize *and* care at the same time, yet without sympathizing.

Analogously, in the case of our remembering or anticipating experiences, we can certainly be said to care about ourselves in the past or the future, and yet not sympathize with ourselves each of those times. Accordingly, caring about someone, even when united to the empathic representation of that person's emotional states, does not seem to be sufficient for sympathy.

Caring can also be shown, I submit, not to be necessary to sympathy. I shall defend my claim by recalling an example made famous by Jonathan Bennett (1974), though my interest in the example is different from Bennett's – the example of Heinrich Himmler's apparently sympathetic feelings for the Jews he himself contributed to exterminating. Himmler, in spite of his persuasion in the rightness of the Nazi cause and of the "final solution" regarding the Jewish people, is described by Bennett as having retained the capacity to sympathize with his victims. Himmler is also said to be suffering from physical afflictions deriving precisely from his sympathetic feelings for those who were his victims. Of course, this account of Himmler's divided conscience may in fact fail to be complete and accurate. However, if *someone like* the character described could be said to sympathize with his victims, then my account of sympathy would help explain how that could be the case. First of all, the *ceteris paribus* clause guarantees that not every sympathetic response will actually result into action. However, speaking of adopting the relevant goals, hence desiring them to be realized, remains more appropriate, I submit, than speaking of *caring* for the victims, in light of the fact that ultimately those goals were nonetheless terribly annihilated. It might just be a matter of

not departing too much from ordinary language, and hence of resisting the paradoxical claim that the slaughterer may *care* for his victim. Or it may be that the very notion of caring involves a broader and less distinct embracing of the other's goals. I am claiming that someone like Himmler could adopt his victims' goals, hence sympathize with them, but without caring for them. His adoption of selective goals of his victims (say, the goal of surviving, that of having a family, that of not suffering physical pain) could create the appropriate division in his conscience, due to the clash with his own, other goals, those of the "final solution." However, the adoption of his victims' goals is so selective that it is compatible with desires the owners of such goals likely did not have – say, that if it were possible to realize the final solution by sending all the Jews to Mars, or by magically transforming them into non-Jews, and so on – he would have preferred not to kill them. These are desires that, I suspect, someone *caring* for another person could not have, for they are compatible with an almost complete denial of the system of values the person's goals are part of. In other words, it is the holistic nature of caring, I suggest, that makes it incorrect for someone like Himmler to be described as caring for his victims, even if we accept the assumption that he was sympathizing with them.

12. Concern.

Thus far, I have analyzed the implications, in my view, of defining sympathy in terms of the adoption of the other's relevant goals, and tried to defend the employment of this notion against competitors such as the notion of endorsement of the other's goals or that

of caring about him or her. I now move on to the most controversial part of my definition, i.e., its requiring that sympathy involve the empathic representation of the other's emotional states. The definition may be accused to be too narrow, leaving out a large number of genuinely "sympathetic" responses to other people's emotions of which we may know what they are, will, or could be, but surely do not empathically represent to ourselves. For instance, my definition seems to leave out solidarity responses to people suffering from hunger, pity for someone who we know is going to be affected in some way, and pity for someone that we know would be affected by the situation, had he the right access to the relevant information.

In Federico Fellini's *La Dolce Vita*, the wife of a man who just killed his and her own children before killing himself is intercepted by the police on her way home in order to prepare her for the tragic news. We are not shown the moment the woman will be informed of what happened to her family, and yet we already sympathize with her. Susan Feagin uses a similar example to make her point, that a response to the protagonist of a narrative is sympathetic by virtue of attributing to the protagonist interests and desires which the sympathizer then makes her own (1996, 114-115).⁴⁰ With reference to a short story by Carlos Fuentes, "The Cost of Living," Feagin claims that she sympathizes with the character Ana Rentería even before the woman in the story knows of her husband's violent death, in consideration of "the implications [the event] has for her – sick and unable to work, with no income and even unable to fix food for herself" (1996, 115).⁴¹

Sympathizing with someone by reference to her desires or interests – not, as I do, by reference to the other’s experiences – seems to have the advantage of allowing for sympathy even when the other person’s desires and interests are harmed without the person knowing that. Hence, with reference to a different episode earlier in Fuentes’s story, Feagin claims to feel sympathy, “in the form of consternation and exasperation,” (1996, 115) for Ana, when her husband, Salvador, while Ana is lying sick in bed, goes out initially to seek extra work but then ends up instead spending their last money on some other girl he meets. Even if Ana has no idea of what is happening, we respond sympathetically, in Feagin’s view, because “Salvador’s behavior is contrary to her interests and desires” (1996, 115).

Finally, by referring this time to the person’s interests only, and separating them from his or her desires, Feagin claims that we can respond sympathetically to someone even because *we* “attribute certain interests to the character that the character doesn’t recognize” (1996, 115). For instance, with regard to George Eliot’s *Middlemarch*, Feagin claims: “I worry that Dorothea will give into Casaubon’s demands, and I want her to resist them, even though she herself is simply trying to decide what is morally the most admirable thing to do” (Feagin 1996, 115). Or, to consider a more mundane example, we can be said to sympathize with someone who has put himself in an embarrassing situation even if he thinks he has done nothing embarrassing.

However, none of the above examples makes a better case for conceiving sympathy as a response to a situation affecting a person’s or a character’s desires or

interests, rather than a response to a person's or a character's experience of a situation. In fact, many of these cases can be explained as sympathetic responses even under my characterization; others, I shall claim, are better interpreted as not clear instances of sympathetic engagement.

That we can sympathize for someone before she experiences the relevant emotional states, or even for emotional states she will never experience, can be explained in my characterization simply by supposing an empathic response to the experience of a *future* or a *possible* stage of that person. We sympathize with the woman in Fellini's film because we imagine what it will be like for her to realize that her children have been killed by her own suicidal husband. Likewise for Ana, who will soon suffer from losing Salvador's support.

Sympathy for someone who will never know of some situation affecting his or her interests or desires is explained by reference to a counterfactual experience. Take, for instance, the case of sympathy for a person now deceased, who cannot experience what would have otherwise affected her emotionally. Such a case can surely be explained in terms of the emotional experiences the person would have had, were she still living. We sympathetically pity the deceased father, knowing how disappointing it would have been to him to see his descendants fail to do the little that was necessary to complete his lifetime project. And we are sympathetically happy thinking of the happiness the would-be grandmother would have felt, had she had the chance to see the birth of her long-desired first grandchild. On the other hand, the fact that the sympathy is with respect to a

possible stage of the person that will never in fact be realized explains how the emotional engagement is modified in intensity and quality. We pity the father but also are glad that he, after all, did not live to witness his descendants' behavior; and we are happy for the would-be grandmother, though with a good amount of melancholy. Such effects on the intensity of our sympathetic experiences are perfectly compatible with the account of sympathy I have proposed. It is because we adopt those people's relevant goals before they died that we can feel relieved or melancholic about certain mental or emotional states not having occurred.

Any characterization of sympathy that didn't refer to the other's experiences, but just to the other's situation, interests, or desires, would be less adequate to account for these cases. Of course, it can be maintained that a person's interests can be advanced or harmed even after her death, and in general without her knowing of it. Yet, either those interests are the same as for the person when she was alive, and then the sympathy should be unchanged, contrary to what happens in fact, or those interests are modified by the person's death, and then the (lack of) actual experience on the part of the person with whom we sympathize must be taken into account.

Furthermore, admitting the possibility that some of our sympathetic engagement with people unaware of their own best interests may involve the empathic adoption of the perspective of some self stage other than the one to which the sympathy is directed has the additional advantage of explaining how we can sympathize with an Alzheimer victim or someone affected by *dementia senilis*, and pity him, even when he is presently quite

happy. The person can be pitied not from our point of view but from *his own* (that is, one of his own). The patient, we can assume, may be relatively happy at the present time and yet be deserving of our pity for what his own desires and goals, as he had them when healthy, would have been with respect to his present condition. Those desires and goals will differ from person to person, e.g., between someone who never cared very much about the potentialities of his intellect and, say, someone like Immanuel Kant.⁴²

Certainly, there are instances of so-called sympathy which are not covered by my definition, and Feagin seems to have some of them in mind.⁴³ We may sympathize for the cancer patients or the starving children in the world, but without empathically representing their experiences to us.⁴⁴ Yet, with regard to such cases, I think it is more profitable to see their kinship with, and yet also their difference from, the paradigmatic cases of sympathy. After all, ordinary language lacks precision in these matters. Sometimes, we send “sympathy” cards, yet without literally empathizing with the other person, i.e., without representing to ourselves in imagination her emotional states. Other times, we sympathize with people whose experiences we could hardly be able to represent empathically to ourselves. Perhaps we could speak of a “cognitive sympathy” in these cases, though I think using the term “concern” will actually better avoid confusions. Normally, concern is the nonempathic understanding of another’s emotional states conjoined to an endorsement of his or her relevant goals. Typically, the goals are endorsed, not adopted, for adoption is more akin to the imaginative representation of an experience than to understanding-that it is such and such ways. Concern, by not

involving empathy, is grounded on a form of understanding-that of the other's emotional states, not on understanding-how.

Ultimately, my analysis amounts to a distinction between two sorts of so-called "sympathetic" engagement with other people: sympathy proper, at least in my sense, involving an understanding-how of the other's emotional states and an understanding-how of his or her relevant goals, and concern, or a cognitive form of sympathy, involving an understanding-that of the other's emotional states and of her goals with respect to them.

13. Conclusion.

The above discussion of modes of emotional participation in others' emotional states is far from being complete. Nonetheless, quite a few results have emerged. In particular, I have argued for a central role to be given to empathy, as a mode of emotional participation that enters into other modes, especially sympathy. Moreover, empathy and sympathy have both been shown to involve the imagination, in the sense of taking on the perspective – perceptual, cognitive, and affective as the case may be – of other people. These results will prove helpful in assessing some of the contemporary debate between the participant and the onlooker view of character and narrative participation, to which part of the next chapter is dedicated.

¹ Of course, some of these can *also* be works of art. For a view claiming that jokes always are works of art, see Cohen (1999).

² Noël Carroll (1998a, 354 n.) is skeptical of any pervasive role for predictions in following a narrative. Yet his reservations do not deny that we *anticipate* what may happen next, at least as a set of options (Will the hero fight or flee? Will the protagonist live or die?).

³ See Harding (1937 and 1968), Zillman (1980), and Carroll (1990, Chap. 2, and 1998a, Chap. 5).

⁴ See, most notably, Gregory Currie (1990 and 1995) and Susan Feagin (1996).

⁵ Nor can the conceptual analysis that I am claiming to be necessary be considered as already conducted in the cognitive science debate over our capacity to attribute and interpret other people's mental states, for where the cognitive sciences can be insightful by grouping together mental functions, e.g., empathy and hypothetical thinking, the aesthetic investigation needs an analysis of those functions, one able to indicate what is specific to each of them.

⁶ A fourth mode, *identification*, or *identification proper*, might also be shown to play a role in narrative engagement. Although I will occasionally mention the notion of identification, I will not, however, in this work venture to provide an analysis of it, or of its role in narrative engagement. Suffice it to say that, if something like identification proper exists, it will have to be a mode of character participation only marginally overlapping with the scope of what is ordinarily called "identification" with characters, since the latter term is in fact often used to cover different identificatory experiences, such as empathy and sympathy.

⁷ Consider that my issue here is our capacity to be connected to previous states of ourselves and not that of having a faithful representation of those states.

⁸ The method suggested here will prove especially helpful in the assessment of Noël Carroll's criticism of identificationism, for which see Chapter 2.

⁹ See Scruton (1992) for the distinction between imagination as the "capacity to experience mental 'images'" and as that "to engage in creative thought," and for some remarks similar to mine on the relationship between those two senses of imagination. Similarly, David Novitz has distinguished between "derivative imagining" (such as the imagining by a reader of "a scene described by an author") and a more "creative" or "fanciful" mode of imagination, which "involves the free or unregulated combination of certain entities," such as ideas, images, words, etc. (1987, 10).

¹⁰ Some of the now classical contributions to the literature include: Solomon (1976), Lyons (1980), Gordon (1987), de Sousa (1987), and Greenspan (1988). For useful surveys, see Deigh (1994) and Levinson (1997).

¹¹ When speaking of emotions, I will be referring only to *episodes* of emotional responses, not to long-standing emotional states and even less to dispositions to having an emotion. Hence, my examples do not include being in love with Mary, afraid of snakes, or angry at aggressive drivers, where these are

understood as habitual or enduring.

¹² That is a capacity that may even explain the very existence of emotions in evolutionary terms (see, e.g., Carroll 1998a, 257-259). About moods, Solomon has suggested that they are “‘about’ the world rather than anything in particular” (1984, 306).

¹³ A mood, such as free-floating depression or euphoria, in de Sousa’s words, “seems to have as its object nothing and everything, and often admits of no particular justification” (1994, 274).

¹⁴ While moods typically have long duration, startles, the reflex responses produced by sudden, loud noises, are by definition brief. Startles have a lot in common with emotions (Robinson 1995), and may indeed be considered as a special, limiting case of emotion. Distinctive of startles, apart from duration, is that the orienting or focusing of attention towards an object is accompanied, cognitively, by the mere registering of the object’s presence, without there being any assessment of the appropriateness of such object for an emotional state of a given kind, intensity, and duration.

¹⁵ This comparison between emotional states and perceptions is an adaptation of Scruton’s (1992) comparison between mental images and sensory experiences.

¹⁶ It may be partly for this reason that we find Murray Smith claiming: “Whatever else it is, engaging with fiction is a species of imaginative activity” (1995, 74).

¹⁷ This account is along the lines of the one presented by Feagin (1988). More precisely, in her essay Feagin proposes to consider empathy with a real person as constituted by second-order beliefs about that person’s first-order beliefs. With fictional characters, given they are fictional, there are no first-order beliefs, and hence what we do instead is to *imagine* what those beliefs might be (for criticism, see Neill 1996, 182-184).

¹⁸ I suggest that we conceive of the notion of understanding what it is like to be in a given emotional state, or knowing what such a state is like, similarly to what Thomas Nagel proposes as a requirement for a being to have consciousness, namely, that there is a way for that being to be, something that it is like being that being (1974, 499). See also Jackson (1982).

¹⁹ One obvious distinction between us and the characters is that while our emotions, in reality, are fictional, those of the characters are real, albeit fictionally (see Walton 1990). Or, for those theorists who insist on the reality of our emotions towards fictions, the sort of object those have will still be different (it would be, say, the thought of certain events happening, and not those events happening).

²⁰ See Davies and Stone (1995 and 1996).

²¹ Of course, my requirement that a response involve a bodily state is at odds with ordinary usage when this calls indifference a “response.” According to my usage, indifference is the state in which *no* response is given, and hence is in this sense not a response.

²² See also Feagin (1996, 114): “A sympathetic response [in contrast to an empathic response] does *not* involve simulating the mental activity and processes of a protagonist; it instead requires having feelings or emotions that are in concert with the interests or desires the sympathizer (justifiably) attributes to the

protagonist.”

²³ I do not intend to exclude any of the interactions between understanding-that and understanding-how. Sometimes, for instance, understanding-that can be achieved by inferring from understanding-how, such as when we can attribute an emotional state to another partly thanks to a mimicking response to her state (see the next section).

²⁴ Children start showing concern for the discomfort of other children progressively. At first, the means they seek as remedies for the needs of others fail to recognize the other’s preferences (the child, e.g., will try to comfort another child by bringing her own mother or teddy bear). Only at a later stage of development – at around 20 months – do children start showing an awareness of others’ preferences (and would, e.g., bring to an upset child that child’s security blanket or parent).

²⁵ Both Max Scheler ([1948] 1970) and Edith Stein ([1916] 1964) insisted on the importance of distinguishing “emotional infection” or “contagion” from empathy.

²⁶ It should also be noticed that the sounds (staccato violin) that Herrmann chooses are also inherently of the sort that “sets one’s nerves on edge,” almost like chalk-scraping-on-blackboard sounds. (Thanks to Jerrold Levinson for this observation.)

²⁷ A complete taxonomy and critical discussion of the theories of musical expression proposed up until today is found in Levinson (1996c).

²⁸ Levinson offers the same kind of reasoning for reactive responses to music, such as “a fearful response to a threatening passage imaginatively taken to a threatening individual, or a pitying response to an agonized passage that one imaginatively regards as a person in agony” (1982, 321 n.).

²⁹ It may also enter into the constitution of what I have called “identification proper.”

³⁰ For definitions similar to the one just stated, see Neill (1996, 191) and Martin (1998, 97).

³¹ My point of view *then* is distinct from my point of view *now*, and that fact makes it equivalent to the point of view of *another*.

³² In fact, event-memory involves identification, since the remembered experiences are also recognized as belonging to oneself. Yet, nothing changes for my argument in the text, for identification, in turn, can easily be shown to involve empathy (see, e.g., Martin 1998).

³³ Sometimes, in the psychological literature “empathy” and “perspective-taking” are treated as synonyms (see, e.g., Ickes 1997).

³⁴ For those emotional states that entail a desire, the empathic emotion may entail, I propose, an *imagined* desire. And, of course, one may empathize with someone who desires, and hence imagine having her desires from her point of view.

³⁵ According to Douglas Chismar, sympathy requires, while empathy does not, that one *cares* for the other (1988, 257-258). I briefly discuss the notion of care in relation to sympathy below.

³⁶ Consider, e.g., cases of self-directed sympathy. Perhaps, the “strength” of the endorsement is in fact that one not only endorses one’s objectives in the past, but also presently endorses one’s endorsement back then (for the importance to one’s identity of some sort of second-order endorsement, see, e.g., Wolf 1987 and the literature there discussed, as well as Korsgaard 1996).

³⁷ Counterexamples to the above characterization would seem easy to produce. Consider, for instance, cases in which we sympathize with ourselves in the past (partly) for our having endorsed what look to us now to be the wrong goals. Hence, it seems odd to require that one endorses one’s past evaluations. Nonetheless, I would insist that my analysis cashes out a central mode of emotional participation in others’ emotions, and that other modes, equally called “sympathy” in ordinary English, have indeed a different structure. First of all, each case must be correctly constructed. For instance, when sympathizing with ourselves in part because of our own past mistaken evaluations, we may still in fact be endorsing *other* evaluations we had back then, with respect to the experiential consequences that those mistaken goals had on us, consequences that we are empathically representing to ourselves now. Second, those emotional responses that do not include perspective-taking are, I suggest, more usefully categorized separately.

³⁸ I am partly following Dennis Stampe’s (1994) analysis here.

³⁹ As formulated, this might sound too closely connected to action, i.e., too close to a *desire to do*. Sometimes, however (for instance, when sympathizing with someone joyful), we may just have a *desire that* the present situation continue (see also Feagin 1996, 118).

⁴⁰ Hence it does not depend, for Feagin, on empathy (which she analyzes in terms of simulation): “A sympathetic response [...] does *not* involve simulating the mental activity and processes of a protagonist; it instead requires having feelings or emotions that are in concert with the interests or desires the sympathizer (justifiably) attributes to the protagonist” (1996, 114).

⁴¹ See also Putman (1987, 262).

⁴² It is known that Kant, for a relatively long time before his death, lived in a status of *dementia*.

⁴³ Feagin (1996, Chap. 5). See also Neill (1996).

⁴⁴ The empathic representation of others’ experiences is even less likely when the object of our sympathetic concern is indeterminate or general, since we are sympathizing with any and every cancer patient or starving child.

Chapter 2

IMAGINATION IN CHARACTER AND NARRATIVE PARTICIPATION

1. Introduction.

Chapter 1 has extensively investigated different modes of emotional participation in real life as well as in narratives. One result of such analysis has been to prove that the imagination plays a prominent role in emotional participation and, as far as narratives are concerned, in what I called character participation. The analysis, however, cannot be considered complete until the forms of imagination involved in the participation in narratives and their characters are spelled out in more detail.

Furthermore, empathy emerged as the central mode of emotional participation, since it is constitutive of a variety of phenomena, such as experiential memory, as well as of sympathy, a mode of participation to which it is most often – incorrectly, I have claimed – contrasted.

Such results obviously should affect the way we conceive of the debate between the participant view and the onlooker view. In this chapter, I look at a portion of the

actual debate between the participant and the onlooker view, in particular, at the objections that Noël Carroll has put forward against the participant view. Since the debate between the participant and the onlooker view has also turned around a distinction between two modes of imagination originally indicated by Richard Wollheim, I shall then move to a discussion of such modes. While developing an account of the imagination that is inspired by Wollheim's work, I will depart from some of his specific claims. All of this will allow me to draw some tentative conclusions regarding character participation as well as what above I have called narrative participation. At the end of the chapter, I will offer some applications to literary narratives of what I have developed in these two chapters dedicated to participation in narratives.

2. Noël Carroll on the Participant View.

Paradigmatic of what I have dubbed the participant view about character and narrative participation is perhaps the claim that at least sometimes the reader, viewer, or listener of a narrative *identifies* with some of the narrative's characters. Obviously, there is a difference between pre-theoretical informal claims and the claims of a theory of participation. Hence, many of the statements by narrative perceivers, to the effect that they "identify" with characters, may often be rephrased as claiming, say, that there is a similarity between a character's predicament or character traits and one's own situation or inclinations, in the present or in the past.¹ On the other hand, "identification" is also an important term with respect to a wide set of experiences and claims having to do with

recognizing oneself as the same person over time: memories and anticipations. Those are experiences such as remembering a toothache or fearing an upcoming college test, and corresponding claims of the type, “My face hurt so much!” or “I can already feel how scared I will be when sitting in the exam room...” Let us call these “self-identificatory claims and experiences.”² Accordingly, before dismissing all instances of so-called “identification” with characters as immaterial, we should ask whether and how our experiences with narratives have something in common with those self-identificatory experiences. In that respect, by no means does my analysis in this work aim at being complete. However, the following somewhat detailed investigation of the kinds of imagination involved in narrative engagement as well as in self-identificatory experiences should count as progress in the direction of recognizing elements common to those experiences. Furthermore, progress begins, first of all, with setting aside some misguided criticism of the participant view. In this section, I concentrate on Noël Carroll’s objections to two versions of the participant view: the view that we identify with characters, and the view that we empathize with them.

Carroll has extensively criticized identificationism as requiring either an unlikely process of mind-melding between narrative perceivers and characters, or at least sameness of emotional states between them. I shall not address such criticisms in full detail here, since they target, in my view, more of a straw man than a real competitor to the onlooker view Carroll wants to advocate. Carroll’s characterizations of identificationism assume identification to be some sort of *mental fusion*, i.e., either an

illusory, hallucinatory process (mistaking oneself as one of the characters) or a notion in no way different from the symmetrical notion of identity (requiring sameness of mental states). In either case, the possibility for identificationism to account for narrative and character participation as processes involving the *imagination* is denied to the view from the start.³ Yet, whatever identification ultimately amounts to, it does involve the imagination, and hence involves no illusion or identity, since neither of them is an instance of imagination. Being deluded is not an instance of an imaginative act but rather a *failure* of the imagination; nor is imagination, like identity, a symmetrical notion – my imagining being a carrot, for instance, does not require the carrot to imagine being me.

Carroll's discussion of identificationism, however, is instructive, for it exemplifies a mistake that has vitiated, in my view, a good portion of this debate, and which the methodological choices that have been informing my analysis here aim at avoiding (see Chapter 1, section 3). That is, Carroll's discussion shows the consequences of paying no or little attention, in analyses over narrative and character participation, to the more straightforward instantiations of the notions discussed – in this case, identification and empathy. For, obviously, these are pervasive of self-identificatory experiences, most notably of the emotional engagement with one's own self, past or future, by means of memories and anticipations. Above, I proposed that we look at participation in our own emotional states as a touchstone for analyses of identificatory claims and experiences with fictional characters. The application of that methodological proviso now becomes crucial. No illusion or hallucination is involved, of course, in

typical cases of identificatory claims and experiences, with respect to myself, e.g., in the past – say, as the young teenager who received his first romantic kiss at a high school party, and who felt a certain way on such occasion. Nor are my present emotional states, when I do that, the same in kind as I had back then. And yet referring, by the first pronoun, to that young man from several years ago, and identifying myself as the subject of his emotional experience (or, to use a term from John Locke, “appropriating” his experience) surely is an instance, indeed a pretty paradigmatic one, of identification.⁴

Carroll’s strategy, of characterizing the notions central to the participant view as standing for processes unlikely prompted in the course of narrative and character participation, is employed in a similar manner in his discussion of the role of empathy, or of its more recent formulation in terms of mental simulation (Currie 1995; see also Feagin 1996). Without denying the existence of such a process, Carroll is skeptical about how often mental simulation is really employed in our engagement with narratives. Carroll argues for his point with two claims. First, since most often omniscient narrators or the characters themselves disclose to us the characters’ states of mind, simulation simply does not have a big role to play in our interpretation of the emotional states of characters.⁵ Second, Carroll claims that our emotional responses as perceivers of the narrative differ in object and kind from the emotional responses and states of the character herself. Hence, simulation or empathy, though possible, is rarely activated. Most often, we *sympathize* with a character, not empathize with her:

Most often [...] the emotionally appropriate object of our attention is the situation in which a character finds herself and not the situation as the character experiences it. The character feels grief, but we feel pity for her, in part, because she is feeling grief. The object of her emotion is, say, her child. The object of our emotion is her situation – a situation in which she is feeling sorrow. (Carroll 1998a, 351)

Again, the assumptions behind Carroll's skepticism with respect to the participant view can be exposed and shown to be ill grounded when assessed in light of the most common identificatory processes engaged in in everyday life.

The first of Carroll's questionable assumptions here is that of conceiving of empathy, and specifically of simulation, as merely a process to attribute mental states, in particular emotional states, to others. Hence, Carroll's conclusion that, in most cases at least, empathic engagement or the employment of mental simulation would be redundant in narrative and character participation. We can call this assumption that of *empathy as emotional inference*. However, above, in Chapter 1, I distinguished between emotional inference and empathy, and presented an analysis of empathy as not reducible to an inferential process. Even a quick look at the most common instantiations of empathy shows that empathy is not used just to attribute mental states to others, and hence to understand them in a merely classificatory way.⁶ What Carroll fails to consider is the more, so to speak, "experiential" forms of understanding other people's emotional states (see Chapter 1, section 5 above).⁷ First-person memories and anticipations have an empathic component to them, insofar as a past or future mental state is represented to oneself from one's own past or future point of view. However, memories and

anticipations only occasionally play an inferential role in our lives. Most often, when I recall to myself that first kiss I received as a teenager, I do not do so because I want to know *what* I felt that evening (above, I called this “understanding-that”; Chapter 1, section 5). Admittedly with some approximation, I know what I felt: surprised, excited, and puzzled. By recalling such event to my mind, however, I remember what being surprised, excited, and puzzled on that occasion felt *like* – what that experience for me then felt like (“understanding-how”).⁸ Analogously, I do not need to empathize with myself, or simulate the situation I will be in, for me to know *that* I will be scared, say, the day of my surgery. Yet, empathic engagement may help me anticipate what my fear in the situation may be *like*. Carroll’s assumption, of empathy as a mere inferential tool about emotional states, evaporates in the face of the multitude of instances, in everyday life, of empathic engagement where there is no need for additional inferences.

In fact, Carroll is aware of the participant theorist’s (and specifically Gregory Currie’s) persuasion that a fiction would be for us “dull and lifeless” if we had to go only by what the author of a narrative says and the inferences we can derive from that (Currie 1995, 256). “It is when we are able, in imagination, to feel as the character feels that fictions of character take hold of us” – says Currie (1995, 256).

Carroll, however, believes that the role of this form of imagination in narrative and character participation is overestimated by the adherent of the participant view, for the reason that, as stated in Carroll’s second objection, our emotional responses qua perceivers of a narrative differ in object and kind from those of the narrative’s characters.

This second objection, however, betrays an additional assumption on the nature of empathy, and in particular on its relationship to other modes of emotional participation, most notably sympathy. We can call it the assumption of *empathy and sympathy as mutually exclusive*. As we saw, Carroll emphasizes that, while the character who has lost her child feels grief and sorrow, we feel pity for her. Yet, it is far from clear why this should be a problem for simulation theory, the empathy-based theory, or more generally, the participant view. Even if we were to reject the analysis of sympathy argued for above (to the effect that there is a central form of sympathetic engagement that has empathy as a main constitutive component; see Chapter 1, section 11 above), under any plausible analysis of sympathy, the mere fact that we respond with a sympathetic, other-oriented response to someone does not preclude our responding to her also empathically, in a self-oriented manner (perhaps – as I have suggested – precisely in virtue of our sympathetically responding to her). After all, it should be reminded that so-called self-oriented responses, and empathy in the first place, still have *another* as their target. Of such a person we understand the mental, emotional states in the sense of understanding what having such states is like. Then, as an *additional* response, we may very well sympathize with the person. Yet, by no means does doing that require that empathy cease playing its role.

Of course, we may be concerned for people with whom we do not empathize and such an emotional response is commonly called “sympathy.” Yet, above I have shown how sympathy, conceived of as a process entailing empathy, is usefully distinguished

from the response that I have dubbed “concern” (Chapter 1, sections 11 and 12). And where everyday usage fails to distinguish between two different kinds of sympathetic responses, one entailing empathy and one merely constituted by concern, the two senses – I argued –are helpfully distinguished in technical discourse. I can be concerned for the starving children, and in this sense sympathize with them, without being able, or even attempting, to get to know what a starving experience may be like. However, such concern, I am claiming, is precisely one of the ingredients that, once conjoined to empathy, give rise to that more complex process that I call “sympathy.” Indeed, as I feel that special tenderness *for* myself as a teenager, in no way does my memory of my first kiss disappear; rather, my empathic recalling of that experience is *part of* my feeling such tenderness.

In sum, all of Carroll’s assumptions (1. identification as mental fusion; 2. empathy as emotional inference; and 3. empathy and sympathy as mutually exclusive) evaporate once assessed in light of the more mainstream instances of identificatory claims and experiences with respect to others and, especially, to ourselves.

Moreover, given the results of the above analysis, to the effect that empathy may very well be a process central to many other-oriented responses, such as those of sympathy, there is a heavier burden, I submit, on the onlooker theorist to show the minor role of self-oriented responses, i.e., of empathy, than on the participant theorist to account for other-oriented responses, i.e., for sympathy. The participant theorist need not deny that sympathy plays an important role in character participation, while, at the same time,

emphasizing the central importance of empathy to character engagement. On the other hand, the onlooker theorist seems forced to work with an unlikely notion of sympathy in order to relegate empathy to a secondary role. Accordingly, the view of character participation that emerges from the preceding analysis, while being a version of the participant view, in virtue of emphasizing the centrality of imagining characters' situations and emotional states from their point of view, also espouses a healthy *pluralism*, so to speak, with regard to the variety of modes of emotional participation that constitute, I propose, character participation. Indeed, additional emphasis on the plurality of imaginative activities that are involved in our engagement with narratives will be advocated for below when looking at some applications of the proposed analyses to real narratives (section 5, this chapter). This will further illuminate the nature of character participation, but will also, finally, address the nature of narrative participation.

3. Central vs. Acentral Imagining, Iconic vs. Non-Iconic Mental States.

In spite of the above extensive analysis of empathy and of the form of imaginative understanding that it amounts to, I have still said too little about the nature of this imaginative act. Yet, the debate between the participant and the onlooker view has precisely turned around the question of which kind of imagination is dominant when engaging with narratives and their characters.

Several authors (e.g., Smith 1995, Carroll 1998a, Feagin 1996) in explaining empathy, have recalled a distinction, between kinds or modes of imagination, proposed

by Richard Wollheim in *On Art and the Mind* (1974, 58-59), and then further analyzed by him in *The Thread of Life* (1984, 71-84): the distinction between “central” and “acentral” imagining. Centrally imagining an event, according to Wollheim, is imagining the event from the point of view of one of its characters, or *dramatis personae* (1984, 71-72). For instance, imagining Mahomet II’s 1453 entrance into Constantinople from the point of view of Mahomet or one of his guards or one of the members of the crowd who were present at the event are all instances of centrally imagining that event (Wollheim 1984, 73).

The event is presented in one’s imagination “from the inside” (Wollheim 1984, 73). That is, we imagine seeing the scene as Mahomet or the guard or the crowd member were seeing it. The imagining need not be, or involve, visualizing; rather, it may involve any of the senses, as well as “internal sensations” as they are had from a given point of view.⁹ In the imagined scene mentioned above, one can centrally imagine any the sounds or the smells or the temperatures as they were perceived by Mahomet or the guard or the crowd member.

Whichever character I select, that is the *protagonist* of my imaginative project, the one I imagine from the inside. The *dramatis persona* in the perspective of which the event is imagined need not be, though typically is, a person (Wollheim 1984, 72). It is not entirely clear what we should take this claim of Wollheim’s to stand for. One interpretation would be to take it as considering as instances of central imagining every imagining presenting a scene as that would be perceived from some point of view

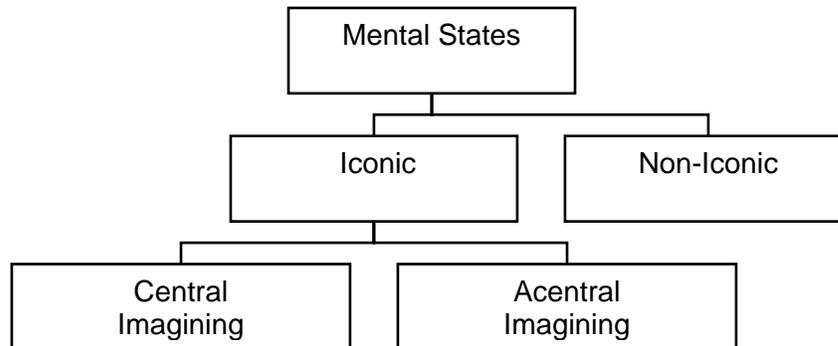
internal to the scene even when such a point of view is occupied just by an object and not a person. If so, then imagining a chess board not from the point of view of the opposite player or of a member of the audience, but, say, of that of the ceiling lamp would still count as an instance of central imagining. Yet, obviously, that cannot be what Wollheim means, for the ceiling lamp, unless differently qualified, e.g., by the narrative's plot, does not count as a *dramatis persona* in the imagined scene, hence cannot be the protagonist of someone's imaginative project. Below, that the *dramatis persona* be if not an actor in the scene, at least a subject of experience in it, will be shown to be essential to a useful definition of central imagining.

Wollheim (1974, 59) uses different linguistic clues for the two sorts of imagining. Acentral imagining is indicated by sentences of the form, "I/you/he/she/etc. imagine/s that X (occurs)," e.g., "I imagine that I fall from the building." In contrast, central imagining is indicated by sentences of the form, "I/you/he/she/etc. imagine/s X (occurring)," e.g., "I imagine falling from the building." In the latter case but not in the former, I am presented in imagination with the visual and bodily and emotional sensations of someone falling from a building (see also Smith 1995, 76). I want to point out, however, that the former case may correspond to at least two rather different imaginative acts, which need to be distinguished.

In fact, the real nature of the central/acentral imagining distinction can be fully appreciated only after realizing that, at least at the eyes of Wollheim in *The Thread of Life*, central and acentral imaginings both are instances of *iconic* mental states, in contrast

to non-iconic ones – a distinction not yet developed by Wollheim in *On Art and the Mind*. We shall see how this fact has not received sufficient attention in the discussion about central and acentral imagining.

Iconic mental states, as they are found not only in acts of iconic imagination but also in event-memories, dreams, and fantasies, have the characteristic, among other things, of *representing* an event to ourselves (Wollheim 1984, 62-63); non-iconic states, such as those of numerical calculation, do not have such a characteristic. Iconic imagination is most commonly known in its instantiations involving the modality of vision, in which cases it takes the name of “visualizing,” but the mental representation of an event can be in terms of sense-modalities other than vision (Wollheim 1984, 72; see also Smith 1995, 107 n.). According to Wollheim, when I report an act of imagination by saying, “I imagined that the horse fell down in the street,” typically I am reporting an instance of non-iconic imagination. In contrast, when I say, “I imagined the horse’s falling down in the street,” likely I am reporting an iconic state. That is, in his later work, Wollheim uses for the iconic/non-iconic distinction similar linguistic clues to those originally introduced to present the central/acentral distinction.¹⁰ The two distinctions, however, are different and, as stated, the central/acentral one is a distinction between different kinds of iconic mental states. Accordingly, imagining one’s fall from a building may correspond to imagining that iconically or noniconically. Furthermore, when imagining the event iconically, one may imagine it centrally or acentrally. The following diagram indicates the relationships between these two distinctions.



This embedding of one distinction – central/acentral – within the other – iconic/non-iconic – has passed unnoticed in contemporary debate. Both Murray Smith (1995) and Noël Carroll (1998a) have interpreted acentral imagining as the entertaining in one’s mind of a thought or idea with no mental picturing of the imagined state of affairs – that is, with no involvement of the imaginer as spectator of the imagined scene. Smith characterizes acentral imagining thus:

[I]n imagining *that* I jump from the building, I do not represent the event to myself with any of the “indexical” marks of the imagined action – for example, transporting myself imaginatively into the appropriate position. I do not place myself “in” the scenario, so much as entertain an idea, but not from the perspective (in any sense of the term) of any character within the scenario. (Smith 1995, 77)

Carroll, regarding engagement with fictions, equates “acentrally imagining the situation of the character” with “entertaining it in thought” (1998a, 355).

Obviously, such characterizations fail to locate the central/acentral imagining distinction within the context of Wollheim’s more recent analysis of iconic mental states.

Both Carroll and Smith have conceived the central/acentral imagining distinction as that between imagining a scene from the perspective of a character involved in the scene and entertaining a proposition or thought or idea in mind. However, in light of the fuller taxonomy of modes of imagination presented above, the notion of a mode of imagination as consisting of the entertaining of an idea, with no accompanying representation or mental “picture,” seems to fit the category of non-iconic mental states rather than that of acentral imagining. Acentral imagining understood as suggested by Wollheim is still iconic and hence cannot be equated to a mental state, such as the entertaining of a thought in mind, involving no representation. An event, when imagined acentrally, that is, *not* from the inside, is still presented to the imaginer in an iconic way.

Furthermore, the linguistic clues, which indeed suggest a distinction between two modes of imagination where one of them amounts to entertaining a thought in mind, best correspond to the distinction between iconic and non-iconic mental states. In imagining that I or someone else fall from the building, there is no need to represent the fall in my mind, either centrally or acentrally. In contrast, if I imagine myself or someone else falling from a building, more likely my imaginative act will include a mental representation of the scene either from the point of view of the falling person or from some other point of observation more or less internal to the scene.¹¹

In sum, by contrasting imagining as the entertaining of an idea in thought to central imagining as the representation of a scene from the inside of some person or character, Carroll and Smith have contrasted members of different distinctions.

Entertaining an idea corresponds to a non-iconic mental state, and should not be contrasted with central imagining, which is instead iconic. Central imagining, that is, the representing of (the experience of) an event from the inside, should be contrasted with acentral imagining conceived as still iconic and hence not merely reducible to the entertainment of an idea in mind.

If the above is true, then it suggests a dilemma the onlooker theorist, such as Carroll, must face, for such a theorist owes us an explanation of the sense in which we, as narrative perceivers, can be “onlookers” of a narrative’s situation if the imagining is non-iconic. If the imagining is non-iconic, then there is no *point of view* from which to be onlookers. If the imagining is iconic, then we are *in* the situation, and hence, pace Carroll, we are participants in the imagined scene even when our imagining is merely acentral.

4. Iconically Imagining Experiences.

It is at this junction that my analysis parts from Wollheim’s, though in a way that is, I think, very much in the spirit of Wollheim’s account.

Consider that Carroll’s and Smith’s mix-match between distinctions may be partly explained by Wollheim’s shifting, across different writings, in his use of linguistic clues. The confusion, however, may find some additional explanation in the fact that Wollheim’s definition of the central/acentral distinction may be at fault, and hence fail to indicate a mode of imagination that can be actually instantiated. Wollheim defines as

“centred” iconic mental states those states “which possess a point of view internal to that which they represent,” more specifically, a point of view identical to that of one of the *dramatis personae* (1984, 72). However, it is not clear how a state could be iconic, i.e., include a representation, and yet *not* be from a point of view internal to the representation itself. Wollheim discusses his example of visualizing the entrance of Mahomet II into Constantinople:

In visualizing the Sultan’s entry into Constantinople, I could visualize it from no point of view – from no point of view, that is, within the historical scene. In that case I would visualize the Sultan and his train of viziers and bashans and guards as they passed through the gates of St. Romanus, paused at the hippodrome, and then rode on to Santa Sofia – and this pageant would be presented to me, or I would represent it to myself, as stretched out, friezelike, the far side of the invisible chasm of history. (Wollheim 1984, 73)

Wollheim seems to have in mind, for acentral imagining and in particular for acentral visualizing, a situation analogous to movie viewing or to looking at the stage from the point of view of a member of the audience. Yet there is no reason to characterize acentral imagining this way. Claiming that acentral imagining is where a scene is represented to us, or we represent it to ourselves, *not* from the inside of any *dramatis persona* is enough, with no need to require that the point of view from which the scene is presented to us be external to the scene.¹²

First of all, distinguishing between points of view internal and external to an imagined scene may not be easy, for a point of view external to the scene is still internal to the imaginative project, and the distinction between scene and project may not be easy

to draw. Indeed, the scene if not coincident with the imaginative project, simply seems to be that part of the imaginative project's content which is most important for us, and if a point of view is internal or external to that, while this may be semantically relevant, is unlikely to make a phenomenological difference. I may look, in imagination, at what interests me from very far in the scene or from outside of the scene – why should two different sorts of imagination be at work in the two cases?

Indeed, distinguishing between points of view as internal or external to an imagined scene risks confusing the distinctive differences between different modes of imagination with a difference in the determinacy of the point of view from which the imagining occurs. Wollheim chooses his example from visualizing but the distinction between central and acentral iconic states is supposed to apply to all sense-modalities. Yet, for other sense-modalities the distinction between imagined scene and imaginative project may be even harder to draw. Surely, the point of view from which I represent an event to myself, whether by visualizing it or by activating some other sense-modality, can be indeterminate in various ways. I may imagine the smell of a ripe apple, even of an apple I am not visualizing, just as approaching or receding, from one side or another, with respect to my point of view; or, I may even imagine the smell of a ripe apple as such, not even as increasing or decreasing in its intensity... In both cases, I submit, my imagining would have a point of view, however minimally specified, one internal to my imaginative project. In other words, iconic imaginings, I claim, always are from some point of view, however indeterminate.

The continuous presence of a point of view is something that iconic states share with perceptions.¹³ Every perception is always from a point of view, though the point of view not always is determinate.¹⁴ Wollheim defines central and acentral imagining in terms of whether the imagining occurs from a point of view internal to the imagined *scene*. Yet he also considers as essential that when the point of view is internal to the scene, it is the point of view of some *dramatis persona*. However, if central imagining amounts to imagining from the inside in the perspective of one of the *dramatis personae*, then there is no need, with *acentral* imagining, to identify it as external even to the *scene*.¹⁵

In disagreement with Wollheim, I am claiming, first, that all iconic mental states (or, less generally, all acts of imagination that are iconic) possess a point of view.¹⁶ Second, I claim that the distinction between points of view which are internal or external to the imagined scene is hard to draw and not useful to discriminate between imaginative acts with importantly different phenomenologies. The important phenomenological difference within iconic states must lie elsewhere. It lies in whether the imaginative act represents, from the inside, some *dramatis persona*'s thinking, valuing, desiring, feeling, in sum, the *persona*'s experience. Accordingly, I propose, when *acentrally* imagining the Sultan's entry into Constantinople, we need not imagine it from the point of view of "the far side of the invisible chasm of history." *Any* point of view not corresponding to that of a *dramatis persona*'s, e.g., imagining the scene from the top of the gates of St. Romanus, will thereby make the imagining count as *acentral*.

The necessity of drawing the central/acentral distinction with reference to an experience arises from the necessity of avoiding an objection that Wollheim himself at a different point seems to have envisaged (1974, 58-59), namely, the objection that there is no difference between central and acentral imagining but a difference in point of view. By contrast, I claim that there is an important difference between the two, and that difference is brought about by the fact that central imagining, imagining some dramatic persona's states of mind from the inside, requires an evaluative/conative/emotive switch. When imagining centrally, we do not merely imagine an event from a given point of view – we imagine an experience. Indeed, the very phrase, “point of view,” should be given, I propose, a different, thicker meaning when used with reference to central imagining. With the terminology introduced above, it should correspond to affective perspective-taking, not perceptual perspective-taking.

When imagining the entry of Mahomet II into Constantinople, centrally, from Mahomet's point of view, or, rather, still centrally, from the point of view of one of the Sultan's guards, or, again, from the point of view of a member of the crowd, the three imaginative projects differ from each other in important ways, and not merely for the different perceptual perspectives on things. When assuming Mahomet's perspective, we may imagine his exaltation; when assuming the perspective of the crowd member, we may imagine his curiosity and submission. And so forth.

Nor are the differences limited to differences in the emotions *accompanying* the imagined perceptions, for the perceptions themselves, besides their being from different

points in the imagined scene, are conditioned and modified by the different cognitive, emotive, and conative perspectives of the two characters. That should be far from uncommon an experience, and indeed one that can be found in other ordinary psychological phenomena. Take, for instance, memory. When I recall to mind my first visit to the university campus where I spent my graduate school years, I do not merely recall approaching the Philosophy Department building from a certain direction but recall that visual experience as qualified by it being the first time I saw that building, by my lack of orientation in the surrounding area, by my curiosity and anxiety as to whom I would meet, and so on – quite a different perception of things from the one I have, in reality or imagination, with reference to the present time. At the very least, those are differences in perception and in the overall experience which can be registered in imagination when the memories are accurate.¹⁷

The account of central imagining proposed here is roughly similar to that advanced by Wollheim. The very notion of imagining from the inside, introduced by Wollheim, is hardly reducible to merely imagining from someone's point of observation. Nor would it be justified to require for central imagining that it occurs from the inside of some *dramatis persona's* point of view, and not merely from a point of view internal to the scene, if all that Wollheim intended were mere perceptual perspective-taking. Furthermore, in discussing the example of imagining Mahomet II's entrance into Constantinople, Wollheim characterizes centrally imagining the scene, from Mahomet's point of view, thus:

I shall successively represent the sights and smells and internal sensations as they would have reached the eyes and ears and nose and the proprioceptive systems of the triumphant Sultan: the noise of the horses, and the clatter of spears and armour behind him, [...] and then twenty, thirty feet away, the Moslem zealot hacking to pieces the ancient marble mosaic is in view, and I the Sultan find myself forbidding him, I the Sultan stop, words of peremptory command issue from my mouth, the mouth of the Sultan. (Wollheim 1984, 73)

It is significant that Wollheim, though he had claimed to be taking his example from visualizing (1984, 72), then shifts to describing “what the Sultan says and does and feels” (1984, 73).

More theoretically, my emphasis on central imagining being a matter of imagining, from the inside, an experience, and not merely a matter of projecting oneself into someone else’s perceptual position, i.e., not merely a matter of how things appear from a given point in a scene, is quite close to one of the essential features, in Wollheim’s view, of central imagining, i.e., what he calls “plenitude.” According to Wollheim, the three essential features of central imagining are point of view, plenitude, and cogency, with the latter two considered as “tendencies” made possible, ultimately, by the first one. Plenitude is defined thus: “As I centrally imagine the protagonist’s doing or saying this or that, so I shall tend to imagine his thinking, his experiencing, his feeling this or that” (1984, 79).¹⁸ One may be tempted to think that it is only Wollheim’s characterization of acentral imagining that is misguided, not his account of central imagining. Yet the two analyses, and the mistakes thereof, are obviously connected, and from the definition of plenitude just quoted it is apparent that Wollheim on central imagining fails to claim that

imagining an experience is essential to it. Rather, he considers imagining the protagonist's thinking, experiencing, feeling, merely as a tendency arising from imagining things from his or her point of view. But merely imagining a scene from someone else's point of view by no means guarantees that we will have the tendency to imagine having, in imagination, an experience similar to that of the person whose perspective we have assumed. Imagining the scene from the other's point of view may be done with detachment, even from merely imagining having any experiences.

Furthermore, even if there be a tendency to engage in further imaginings, those would first of all be of *our own* experiences, were we in the protagonist's place. Robert Gordon (1986, 162; see also 1987, 139) has urged us to distinguish between two different senses of the phrase, "putting oneself in the other's shoes," as on the one hand merely projecting oneself into another's *situation*, his perspective and goals, and on the other hand making, in addition to that, "adjustments for relevant differences," and so projecting oneself into the other's *mind* (1986, 162). For instance, a chess player may imagine seeing the board from his opponent's point of view, and imagine his opponent's pieces being his own; or he may, in addition, imagine himself playing chess following his opponent's idiosyncrasies and level of skill, as well as, of course, playing without knowing what the other player's (in reality, himself) intentions are (Gordon 1986, 162). According to Wollheim's definition of plenitude, imagining oneself in the other's situation should elicit a tendency to imagine oneself having the other's mind. Of course, given the common traits of human nature, it is likely that projecting oneself into

another's situation will in fact elicit, in imagination, responses similar to the other person's, but that does not mean that imagining being in the other's situation has a tendency to make us imagine (having) his or her thinking, experiencing, feeling.

In any event, speaking of a tendency to imagine the other's experience is not sufficient to reply to the objection that central and acentral imaginings are not worth distinguishing from each other, for they merely are imaginings from different points of view, with no important phenomenological differences between them. In any of the cases where the alleged tendency does not actualize we would actually have just an instance of acentral imagining which happens to occur from some dramatis persona's point of view. In sum, only considering the imagining from the inside of an experience as a necessary condition of central imagining individuates a kind of imagining properly distinguished from acentral imagining.

That we imagine the other person's cognitive/conative/emotive responses from the inside is also, I propose, *sufficient* for central imagining. Once a dramatis persona has been chosen as the protagonist of one's imaginative project, that is sufficient to properly describe the scene the protagonist lives as imagined centrally by us. In other words, imagining perceiving the scene from the other person's point of view, far from being sufficient for centrally imagining, is not even necessary to it. Indeed, in the debate about narrative participation, there has been an overemphasis on central imagining as being a matter of perceptions. Yet, as we have seen, conceiving central imagining as a mere matter of perceptual perspective-taking is open to the objection that central imagining is

nothing else but imagining from a point of view that happens to be occupied, in the imagined scene, by some character, or *dramatis persona*. My account, by requiring for central imagining that the cognitive/conative/emotive responses of the protagonist be imagined from the inside, makes of central imagining a notion not so easily disposed of. On the other hand, adding to that condition that the scene be perceived from the protagonist's point of view would run, as will be explained, against the facts, besides making central imagining a rare experience. To explain my latter claim, let us further pursue the analysis of workings of the different kinds of iconic imagination, i.e., of central and acentral imagining.

My emphasis on central imagining being equivalent to centrally imagining someone's experience should not be misunderstood as claiming that when we centrally imagine someone we *identify* with that person. Central imagining may indeed enter into the constitution of identification, a more complex mode of participation the mechanics of which I shall not investigate in this work. Yet, precisely because identification is likely a more complex phenomenon of which central imagining may be a component, the latter cannot be taken as entailing the former.

Nor should my analysis be taken as claiming that, once we centrally imagine someone's experience, we imagine *all* of its experiential dimensions – perceptual, cognitive, conative, and emotional. Let us call this claim, which I reject, as that of central imagining as imagining the *total* experience.¹⁹ I reject this claim for at least two reasons. First, central imagining and more generally iconic imagination can be selective

in what they represent. When I anticipate my next visit to the dentist, the visual sensations of the bright light in my eyes, the odd sensations in my mouth, the taste and smell of the chemicals... may all enter into the “image” of that experience which I form for myself; yet, there may be no room, among the contents of my imaginative act, for the background music that will infallibly be there. Likewise for memories of my previous visits to the dentist. Of course, it is possible that even when I am actually in the dentist’s chair I am not really aware of the music, for I pay no attention to it. In that case, my anticipation or my memory would match the actual experience in that respect. Yet, in general, the actual experience will more likely be denser in terms of the registered stimuli than the imaginary, anticipatory or mnemonic experience.

In one way, the memory or anticipation is unfaithful to the experience it refers to. Yet the difference between the two may be a matter of *salience*, and indeed a virtue of the imaginative vis-à-vis the real experience. The remembered or anticipated experience can focus solely on what is psychologically salient, leaving aside details that are not connected to our beliefs, desires, and emotions.

The second reason why the centrally imagined experience need not be, in my view, *total* is that, with iconic imagination, central and acentral imagining can occur together and even interpenetrate. This is most typically exemplified by memory. It has been noted, and is common personal experience, that when recalling, say, an action of ours, such as entering a swimming pool, we often present ourselves with an image not of what we could see when performing the action but rather of ourselves entering the pool

as a third person might look at us (see also Branigan 1984, 3). The best description of what happens here is, according to my terminology, that in iconically imagining our entering the pool, we centrally imagine, say, the warmth of the water, the smell of the air, the sound of the people swimming, as well as our joy at finally practicing again, but acentrally imagine seeing our entrance into the pool. While taking our affective perspective on things, we are not totally taking our perceptual perspective on them.

Is this at odds with my claim that centrally imagining someone involves imagining from the inside the relevant bits of thinking, feeling, and experiencing of that person? Quite the contrary, my claim helps to explain how the centrally imagined experience need not be *total* in the two ways indicated above. The imagined perceptions are partial and somewhat scattered (e.g., for perceptual perspective-taking switching back and forth from one point of view to another), and yet the overall imagined experience has sufficient unity and continuity thanks to the imagining of thoughts and desires and feelings that guarantees the experience is centrally imagined. My memory of entering the swimming pool is still properly described as an instance of central imagining – the imagining, that is, from the inside of my entering the swimming pool. Requiring for central imagining that there is a succession of continuous imaginings of perceptions from the inside would amount to making the phenomenon almost disappear, relegating it to a few, exceptional and non-instructive cases.

To sum up, the imagining of an experience from the inside is what, in my view, empathy amounts to, once that is not conceived as a mere perceptual (or even cognitive)

perspective switch. I have emphasized that simply transferring ourselves, in imagination, into another's situation is not enough for central imagining, hence for empathy. The most we can do that way is to test how *we* would respond to a hypothetical situation but we do not get to know what the other person's emotional states are like. On the other hand, I have claimed that, once we have that insight into the other person's emotional states, imagining the perceptual experiences of the other is a possibility but not a requirement of empathizing with him or her.

The present account has, in my view, the major virtue of making of empathy a distinctive but realistic mode of participation in others' emotional states. Empathizing with other people is not reduced to merely classifying them under some emotional term. On the other hand, empathy is not defined as an unlikely process of "sharing" other people's emotions and moods, of literally feeling what they feel.

Defined as above, empathic engagement may be shown to be that form of understanding that enters into the constitution of a number of psychological phenomena – not only participation in other people's emotions but event-memories and anticipatory fantasies as well. The same sort of empathic engagement is central, I claim, to our participation in the emotional states of fictional characters in narratives.

That we can enter, in imagination, another person's experiences, her perceptions and thoughts and emotional states according to the case, explains the sense in which it may be thought that empathy requires identifying with the other. I am suggesting that, in

such cases, “identifying” should be taken to mean, “centrally imagining someone’s experience, from the inside.”

As an alternative to identification, one may want to maintain that empathy requires what Robert Gordon, in articulating the mechanisms of simulation, has called an “egocentric shift.” Gordon claims that the person I simulate, say, Mr. Tees barely missing his plane,

becomes in imagination the referent of the first person pronoun “I,” and the time and place of his missing the plane become the referents of “now” and “here.” And I, RMG, *cease* to be the referent of the first person pronoun: what is imagined is not the truth of the counter-identical, “RMG is Mr. Tees.” Such recentering is the prelude to transforming myself in imagination into Mr. Tees much as actors become the characters they play. (Gordon 1996, 55)

The need for cautiousness in adopting Gordon’s notion of an egocentric shift for empathy in my sense follows not only from the necessity of not overlooking that the shift occurs only in one’s imagination, but also that such a shift is selective. That is, in my view, if perspective-taking in any of its forms, and empathy engagement among them, requires an egocentric shift, that occurs only along, so to speak, the dimensions relevant to the specific imaginative project. In order to perceive or conceive or even feel things the way another person does, I need not pretend to *be* the other person or to have *all* of her experiences. Imagination can select what it is to be imagined. For instance, when I take the visual perspective of a friend visiting London, I need not imagine being him; nor do I need to imagine myself being in London and (perhaps) not even being in London. It suffices that I centrally imagine what my friend sees, i.e., to be seeing what he sees.

Likewise, I claim, for affective perspective-taking or empathy. I need not imagine being my niece going to the dentist, and not even myself being at the dentist, but only, from within, my niece's fear of him.

The above analysis provides us with a rich taxonomy of modes of imagination, which find instantiations, I claim, in narrative and character participation as they do in our engagement, in memory and anticipation, with our own selves. The onlooker theorist is claiming that engagement with narratives involves in most cases what I have here described as an instance of non-iconic imagining. The participant theorist can instead claim that a range of imaginative acts – including central imaginings – is part of our engagement with narratives, and that it is the same range of imaginative acts that can be encountered in some everyday psychological phenomena.

In sum, I propose that the participant view be reformulated in terms of *iconic imagining*. As perceivers of a narrative, we are often participants in the imagined scenes, and the core of that participation, which above I dubbed narrative participation, is iconic imagining. We iconically imagine the narrated events from a variety of points of view, at with various degrees of determinacy, for some sense modality or other, from within the imagined scene. At times, and for selected experiential dimensions, the scene is *centrally* imagined, i.e., iconically imagined from the inside of some character. That is the core, I propose, of what above I dubbed character participation.

Having provided a taxonomy of modes of imaginative engagement that quite clearly have an important place in everyday experiences, but having also suggested that

narrative and character participation can be understood in ways that are similar to those other, more mundane instances of participation, let us look at a few examples of perspective-taking and empathy as they can be found in some actual narratives.

5. Perspective-Taking in Narratives.

Sometimes, narratives *require* certain responses, among which empathic ones. More generally, sometimes the assumption of a given perspective is mandated by a narrative, and hence failing to assume that perspective would amount to failing “to get” the narrative. However, in most cases, I suggest, narratives simply *invite* the perceiver to assume a certain perspective, hence they provide our imagination with an opportunity to be activated in a certain way. It is possible to read novels and watch movies with emotional detachment and it is possible to engage with them in different ways. Any account of character-participation, and more generally of our engagement with narratives, must be open to differences and even idiosyncrasies between different spectators.

Some of us have a very active iconic imagination, while others tend to imagine states of affairs without representing them to themselves. I can tell you I could not sleep all night because of food-poisoning and you may react by imagining my staying up with stomach cramps either iconically or not. Of course, if I add a detailed description of my going to the emergency room and of the medical procedures I had to undergo, an iconic response on your part is invited. With a different kind of description, an iconic response would be *strongly* invited or (socially perhaps) even *required* from you. Suppose I start

mimicking with my hands what the doctors did to me and start describing in details the pains I had, then you may be accused of not paying enough attention to my story if your imagining my predicament is not at least in part iconic. Nonetheless, even when, let us suppose, an iconic response on your part is required by my description of the events, I think we should leave some room for responses which are not iconic, if the failure is not a consequence of lack of attention on your part but is instead due to some idiosyncrasy of yours. After all, the capacity of representing an event to ourselves, in imagination, may be affected, we may suppose, by previous experiences with events of that sort.

Of course, such latitude in what counts as an appropriate response may be excessive when applied to very structured narratives. As far as visual perspective-taking is concerned, in theater and much more so in cinema, the assumption of an imagined perspective with respect to the narrated events may be mandatory. The beginning of the swimming pool scene in Mike Nichols's *The Graduate* prescribes our perspective as being that of Benjamin Braddock (Dustin Hoffman). The point-of-view shot presents us with what he sees and hears. Some movies, such as Alain Resnais's *Last Year at Marienbad*, or Federico Fellini's *8 1/2*, can puzzle the spectator and play with ambiguities precisely because they either prescribe points of view that are internally inconsistent or strongly invite a point of view which is then revealed to be deceptive.²⁰

In cinema there is a predominance of constraints on the visual and, more generally, perceptual perspective one is invited or required to assume. For that reason, I prefer here to draw my examples from literature, and specifically from novels. Of

course, novels or passages in them do often prescribe a specific point of view from which the events must be imagined, and that applies not only to the perception of things, but also to how those are conceived, evaluated, and emotionally responded to. However, allowing for the above-mentioned latitude in accepting different sorts of imaginative responses, iconic and non-iconic, to novels and parts thereof will not represent a weakness of my account. First, as already mentioned, it is important to realistically make room for individual differences and idiosyncrasies among the ways that different spectators respond to the same narrative. Second, an account which succeeds in showing that the imagination involved in experiencing narratives is at least as often iconic as the imagination involved in ordinary psychological phenomena such as event-memories and anticipatory fantasies, has thereby shown that iconically imagining is plausibly held as very often being central to the experience of narratives.

Accordingly, the following examples for the most part are not aimed at showing that iconic imagining is required for appropriately experiencing them. When reading a novel, even one full of detailed descriptions appealing to the senses, iconic imagining may be strongly invited but not be a requisite for the correct experience of the work. What I aim at showing with some of the following examples is that *if* the events narrated in the passages I discuss are imagined iconically, then the narrative, for different reasons according to the case, indicates a point of view, perceptual, cognitive, or emotional which the reader is invited to assume in imagination. Since the invited point of view often is the perspective of a character, and since the passages here selected present us with the

characters' experiences, the type of imagining invited by these passages is, I will claim, central imagining and hence, where emotional states are involved, the mode of character-participation invited is empathy.

In Chapter 1, I distinguished between three kinds of perspective-taking, perceptual, cognitive, and emotional, and showed the complexity of the last of them with respect to the other two. When speaking of narratives, one should also mention the pervasiveness of emotional perspective-taking or empathy. Precisely because pervasive, one should not be surprised to find examples of empathic engagement in the routine of reading or watching fictional narratives. Hence, the examples I suggest below could be easily replaced by others. I choose them among the possible others because they exemplify different forms of perspective-taking, how one of those forms can sometimes be invited without inviting any of the others, and how, at other times, the three of them co-operate and even intertwine.

In the following passage from Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, we are invited to take the visual (i.e., perceptual) but also cognitive perspective of the old fisherman. Visual perspective-taking is invited by describing the fish as moving in circles while getting closer to the man:

It was at the third turn that he saw the fish first. [...] at the end of this circle he came to the surface only thirty yards away and the man saw his tail out of water. It was higher than a big scythe blade and a very pale lavender above the dark blue water. It raked back and as the fish swam just below the surface the old man could see his huge bulk and the purple stripes that banded him. His dorsal fin was down and his huge pectorals were spread wide. On this circle the old man could see the fish's eye and

the two grey sucking fish that swam around him. [...] On the next circle the fish's back was out but he was a little too far from the boat. On the next circle he was still too far away... (Hemingway 1952, 50)

The detail with which the fish is described is one of the reasons why iconic imagination surely is meant to be activated by this passage. No doubt, if a reader's iconic imagination *is* activated, and the reader imagines the old fisherman looking at the fish, that cannot be taken as an inappropriate, idiosyncratic, or isolated response. Yet, once iconic imagining is activated here, it is also likely to be central, thanks, e.g., to the repetitive descriptions of the fish moving in circles, while progressively approaching the boat. Given the way the fish is described to be approaching the boat, the fisherman's visual perspective seems to be the best to appreciate what is salient, even in a merely visual respect, in the scene. And what is at stake here is not merely visual.

The tension communicated by the above lines is created by our looking at the fish, in imagination, together *with* the fisherman. In imagination, we see the fish getting closer and closer to the boat, becoming more visible, and at our harpoon's reach. Yet the fish is said to be too far from the boat to be at harpoon's reach. Of course, when we think about it, *we* do not know when a fish is close enough to be reached by a harpoon. We must rely on what the narrator and the fisherman let us know. What is remarkable is that we do so rely on them without any resistance – without asking any questions on whether the fisherman's estimates are correct, and with no reminding ourselves that we ourselves would have no way to tell. We are not merely brought to trust the fisherman's judgment (“the old man was sure that by gaining some more line he could have him alongside”;

Hemingway 1952, 50) – we are also immediately after brought to be doubtful about whether the fisherman will be able to actually get the fish (“Pull hands, he thought. Hold up legs. Last for me, head. Last for me. You never went.” Hemingway 1952, 51). We could maintain we are imaginatively looking at the scene including an old fisherman and a fish, together with what we know of the man’s thoughts and judgments, from some point of view inside the scene, from the perspective of a mere observer, but I think it more plausible to say we centrally imagine looking at the fish from the fisherman’s point of view and judging it to be too far from the harpoon.

The adoption of the fisherman’s perspective becomes wider, in a crescendo, attaining empathic emotional involvement thanks to descriptions of the man’s sensations and emotions as well as access to his (largely internal) monologue showing his thoughts and desires:

The old man was sweating now but from something besides the sun. On each calm placid turn the fish made he was gaining line and he was sure that in two turns more he would have a chance to get the harpoon in.

But I must get him close, close, close, he thought. I mustn’t try for the head. I must get the heart.

“Be calm and stray, old man,” he said. [...]

“I moved him,” the old man said. “I moved him then.”

He felt faint again now but he held on the great fish all the strain that he could. I moved him, he thought. Maybe this time I can get him over. (Hemingway 1952, 50-51)

Sometimes, the elements we have access to through perceptual and cognitive perspective-taking succeed each other, all working towards empathic engagement, i.e., affective perspective-taking, as in the passages recalled above. Other times, the different

elements are more casually put one next to the other, e.g., when presenting a flux of consciousness. See, for instance, this passage from Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*:

She parted the curtains; she looked. Oh, but how surprising! – in the room opposite the old lady stared straight at her! She was going to bed. And the sky. It will be a solemn sky, she had thought, it will be a dusky sky, turning away its cheek in beauty. But there it was – ashen pale, raced over quickly by tapering vast clouds. It was new to her. The wind must have risen. She was going to bed, in the room opposite. It was fascinating, to watch her, moving about, that old lady, crossing the room, coming to the window. Could she see her? It was fascinating, with people still laughing and shouting in the drawing-room, to watch that old woman, quite quietly, going to bed alone. She pulled the blind now.
(Woolf [1925] 1992, 203-204)

Of course, it is possible that the reader while reading this passage merely imagines the situation described, of Mrs. Dalloway being at the window looking at the old woman on the one hand and hearing the voices from the party on the other side. Or we may imagine the scene iconically, from some point of view internal to the scene, perhaps Mrs. Dalloway's own point of view.

Notice that we also have access to the protagonist's thoughts and, in particular, to her finding it "fascinating" to be looking at the old woman going to bed while, opposite to her, the party is still going on. We need to be aware of the noise as well as of Mrs. Dalloway's finding the scene fascinating if we want to be able to appreciate what looking at the old woman could be like for her. From Mrs. Dalloway's perceptual and cognitive perspective, we can imaginatively follow the old woman's movements to her bed, almost pictured in their softness and slowness by Woolf's choice of the adverbs, the musical "quite quietly."

Being led to assume Mrs. Dalloway's perspective is very relevant, for it allows us to perceive reality, in imagination, the way she perceives it, among other things as presenting life and death (represented by the party and the old lady) – opposite poles by both of which the character is attracted. Compare, “she had never been so happy [...] No pleasure could equal, she thought straightening the chairs, pushing in one book on the shelf, this having done with the triumphs of youth, lost herself in the process of living” (Woolf [1925] 1992, 203), on the one hand, with, on the other hand, “There! the old lady had put out her light! [...] She felt somehow very like him [Septimus Smith] – the young man who had killed himself. She felt glad that he had done it; thrown it away while they went on living” (Woolf [1925] 1992, 204). Access to the character's perceptions, thoughts, and emotions, though ordered in a somewhat erratic, Joycean way, present us with a consciousness where the perceptions of the surroundings are influenced by the character's thoughts, and mix with them in complex sensations.

In my analysis, I have maintained that the same sort of imagination, iconic central imagining, is constitutive of some forms of participation in others' states of mind, of event-memories, as well as of anticipatory fantasies. Hence the same imaginative activity can be behind different experiences. Since fiction is also about psychological states, the multiple instantiations of central imagining can all be found in it as well. See, for instance, the following passage taken from Gabriele D'Annunzio's *The Child of Pleasure*. The protagonist, Andrea Sperelli, is waiting for Elena, his former lover now married to someone else, to visit him two years after their relationship ended. What he

sees, what he remembers, and what he hopes and anticipates are all presented to us in a few lines. His memory of the past makes him remember hearing Elena walking through the very square he is now looking at; and his anxiety makes him almost hallucinate, mistaking for Elena a figure who in fact is, in look and attitude, quite different from her.

It wanted but two or three minutes now to the hour. His excitement was so great that he felt half suffocated. He returned to the window and looked out at the steps of the Trinità. She used always to come up those steps, and when she reached the top, would halt for a moment before rapidly crossing the square in front of the Casa Casteldelfina. Through the silence, he often heard the tapping of her light footsteps on the pavement below.

The clock struck four. The rumble of carriage wheels came up from the Piazza di Spagna and the Pincio. A great many people were strolling under the trees in front of the Villa Medici. [...]

Andrea started. A shadow stole up the little flight of steps beside the casa Casteldelfina leading up from the Piazza Mignatelli. It was not Elena; it was some other lady, who slowly turned the corner into the Via Gregoriana.
(D'Annunzio [1889] 1898, 191-192)

Having suggested that narratives most of the times invite, but do not impose, the assumption of one of the characters' perspectives and, more specifically, empathic engagement, one may be led to think that I am allowing for perspective-taking only a minor role in the experience of narratives. But I do not mean to suggest that. First, by leaving room for the possibility of interpreting the above passages with no empathic engagement, I do not wish to deny that much of the *value* of the narrative would be lost that way. In other words, the *interpretation* of a narrative can, in principle, be distinguished from its *appreciation*, and for many narratives the former does not require any emotional responses but simply inferences as to which responses the narrative aims at eliciting. In contrast, emotional responses, not the mere inferring of them, are typically

essential to the appreciation of a narrative. Second, there are narratives and aspects thereof where being able to empathize with a character seems to be essential to understanding an important part of the narrative's content. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, for instance, the protagonist and Septimus Smith, the young man who killed himself, are connected, though they never met each other. Mrs. Dalloway is the only one to be able to understand the man's action (it "was an attempt to communicate," [1925] 1992, 202). How can that be so? Among other things, the narrator tells us of Mrs. Dalloway's capacity to empathize:

He had killed himself – but how? Always her body went through it, when she was told, first, suddenly, of an accident; her dress flamed, her body burnt. He had thrown himself from a window. Up had flashed the ground; through him, blundering, bruising, went the rusty spikes. There he lay with a thud, thud, thud in his brain, and then a suffocation of blackness. So she saw it. (Woolf [1925] 1992, 200-201)

Hence, we can learn of Septimus through Mrs. Dalloway's consciousness; but we have full grasp of her state of mind only if we, in turn, empathize with her. Only by doing that can we fully understand what it may be like for her to imagine the man with a "thud, thud, thud in his brain," or the ground flashing up, and hence understand, as much as those things can be understood, what Septimus's dying might have been, and do so by imagining his death from the inside: "a suffocation of blackness."²¹ Part of the content of the narrative, the connection between the two characters which is, yes, symbolic but also experiential, can be fully grasped only if Mrs. Dalloway's experience of the world, of the party but also of Septimus's death, is imagined from the inside.

¹ See also Carroll (1990, 89) and Neill (1996).

² Corresponding claims and experiences that have others as their targets – notably empathy and sympathy – can instead be called just “identificatory claims and experiences.”

³ For the objection that Carroll conflates *identification* with *identity*, and hence mistakenly conceives of the former notion, like the latter, as symmetrical, see Levinson (1991).

⁴ For the role of the notion of appropriation in the writings of John Locke and some of his contemporaries, see Martin, Barresi, Giovannelli (1998) and Barresi and Martin (1999).

⁵ That is true, for Carroll, not only of written narratives, since, e.g., in a movie like *Casablanca* the character Rick (Humphrey Bogart) makes his feelings for Ilsa (Ingrid Bergman) very clear to us, with no need for us to simulate his situation (see Carroll 1998a, 350).

⁶ That would indeed be redundant if, as emphasized by Carroll, Paul Ekman (1992) is right in claiming that we have the capacity to detect which emotions other people are having simply by looking at their faces.

⁷ Ekman himself is well-known for having investigated the effects that certain facial expressions, which may be produced by mimicking the expressions we see in other people’s faces, have on our own moods (see Chap. 1, sect. 8 above).

⁸ Barry Levinson, in his *Rain Man*, has the autistic character Raymond (Dustin Hoffman) describe his first romantic kiss as feeling “wet.” Perhaps, even to the autistic memory, at least in the fiction, remembering his kiss that way was not the same as just giving it an attribute.

⁹ See the quote from Wollheim (1984) in section 4 below.

¹⁰ A circumstance that Smith (1995, 107 n.) notes.

¹¹ The need for the cautious clause in this sentence will become apparent shortly.

¹² James Harold has suggested that, rather than calling this form of imagining “acentral,” I should use another term introduced by Wollheim: “peripheral imagining.” (See Harold 2002 and Giovannelli 2002). I disagree, however, since in Wollheim’s text, peripheral imagining is defined as the imagining of all the *other* characters of a scene that I am centrally imagining *from the perspective of one of its characters* (1984, 74). By contrast, I am arguing that acentral, iconic imagining need not be from the perspective of *any* character. Hence, it is much preferable to keep the terminology as it is, and concentrate on the locus of my disagreement with Wollheim: that iconic, acentral imagining is still internal to an imagined scene even if it is the imagining from an unoccupied (by a *dramatis persona*, that is) point of view.

¹³ In fact, this may be only one, quite general property that iconic imaginings share with perceptions. By reference to a number of psychological experiments, Currie and Ravenscroft (2002, Chap. 4), for instance,

list several points of resemblance between vision and visual imagery as well as between real and imagined movement.

¹⁴ Some of James Turrell's installations are good examples of the indeterminacy of point of view in vision. Often, they consist of rooms containing a light so dim that it is impossible, as the viewer, to estimate one's distance from the light source.

¹⁵ Quite obviously, if central imaginings are those "which possess a point of view internal to that which they represent," with the point of view being that "of one of the dramatis personae" (Wollheim 1984, 72), acentral imaginings can be those with a point of view not coincident with that of one of the dramatis personae or not internal to the imagined scene or, rather, those which essentially lack a point of view (cf. Wollheim 1984, 80). In sum, Wollheim seems to be opting for either the second or the third characterization of central imagining – I claim we should opt for the first one.

¹⁶ Wollheim, too, does not want to consider only perceptual states as having a point of view. Yet, instead of acknowledging that all iconic imaginings have a point of view, he restricts that claim to central imagining only: "on my use of the term, in addition to perceptual states, imaginings – and specifically cases where I centrally imagine someone or other thinking, feeling, experiencing this or that – have a point of view" (1984, 80).

¹⁷ I suspect that often, when we say of a memory or other imaginative act that it is *vivid*, part of what we mean is that, besides being perceptually sharp, it includes the relevant emotive connotations and nuances. Accordingly, the imaginative representation of the experience, rather than being more vivid than others, should rather be described as being more accurate.

¹⁸ Already in *On Art and the Mind*, Wollheim had suggested that "it is a mark of the character whom I centrally imagine that in imagining what he does I also imagine what he feels and thinks" (1974, 59). At least at the level of statements, Wollheim's original position (1974) on the issue was, in my view, closer to the truth than his more recent one (1984).

¹⁹ Notice that such a view is remarkably similar to Carroll's characterization of identification as mental fusion (see section 2 above).

²⁰ See Branigan's analysis of the bedroom scene in *8 1/2* (1984, 146-147).

²¹ Another example I know of, where a person's dying is represented from the inside of his consciousness, occurs in Tomasi di Lampedusa's *The Leopard* (1957, part VII).

PART II

EVALUATING NARRATIVES

Chapter 3

INTERSECTING VALUES

1. Introduction.

Art objects can have values of different sorts depending on the point of view from which they are evaluated. They can have artistic, aesthetic, economic, historical, sentimental value, just to mention a few. Some artworks have functional value: portals and pots and pitchers for example. Some have social or political value, having been made as a tribute to people (think of the *Vietnam Memorial*) or to ideals, such as people's solidarity or freedom from oppression (to take examples from songs, think of *We Are the World* or of the U2's *Bloody Sunday*).

Values of one sort can sometimes bear on values of other sorts. A painting in a museum, for instance, may have great sentimental value to the museum's curator partly because of the painting's historical importance. That the painting is historically important can be a reason for the curator to value it as a source of personal satisfaction, *qua* piece of the collection she is responsible for. Likewise, the aesthetic and the artistic

values of a work – e.g., how beautiful or expressive, skillfully painted or original it is – can contribute to the economic value of the work. That is, sometimes some paintings are more expensive than others – e.g., more expensive than other paintings painted by the same artist – partly because they are more beautiful, expressive, skillfully painted, or original than others.

Such instances of bearings of one sort of value on another, however, have the distinctive characteristic of being totally unsystematic: one painting may be more expensive than another because of its being more beautiful, but surely it is not always the case that the more beautiful a painting is, the more expensive it is. Aesthetic value, that is, and financial value are not mapped one onto the other in simple fashion.

The intersection between two of the possible values a work of art can have, the aesthetic or artistic on the one hand, and the ethical on the other, has created a lively philosophical debate, one especially lively in our time. In art criticism, and in particular in the criticism of fictional narratives, such as novels, films, and plays, it has been relatively common practice to let ethical considerations bear on the assessment of those works as works of art. When an artwork is, in some sense, morally good or bad, that is taken to affect, positively or negatively, the work's value as a work of art. Such a practice, the *ethical criticism of art*, is precisely what most current philosophical debate has concentrated on. One important motivator of this debate is the existence, historically, of a long and influential philosophical tradition, finding its inspiration, whether or not legitimately, in the work of Immanuel Kant, that considers the realm of art to be an

autonomous realm of value, one to which only artistic or aesthetic standards apply, and not financial or practical or political or... ethical ones. On the other hand, despite the emphasis on the autonomy of art, found not only among philosophers and art theorists but among artists as well, the ethical criticism of art has kept, if fluctuatingly, its popularity.¹ So, the question arises: Is the ethical criticism of art theoretically justified – a legitimate way of evaluating works of art? Or doesn't it rather confuse things, judging one kind of thing in terms of something of a different sort – a work of art, that is, in terms of something as a moral lesson?

In this chapter, I first address the general issues regarding the artistic evaluation of narratives. Then, I move on to mapping the possible positions on the bearing of ethical value on the value of narratives when judged as art. I will briefly acknowledge, and then set aside, reductionist approaches to these two values, in particular an approach that considers artistic value as part of, or entirely reducible to ethical value, or both values as reducible to some third kind of value. Hence, I will provide a taxonomy of the possible non-reductionist positions on the issue, which I will name *radical autonomism*, *moderate autonomism*, *radical moralism*, and *moderate moralism*. Although my taxonomy will use the terminology that is becoming customary in today's philosophical debate, it makes the distinction between these four views in a different way from what appears to have become accepted, though hopefully for good reasons. This part of the chapter will serve to introduce the discussion of arguments for moderate moralism in the following chapters.

2. Artistic Value.

The ethical criticism of narratives is an art-critical practice aimed at individuating the value of a narrative when judged as art, i.e., at individuating the narrative's artistic value. In this context, the definition of artistic value, as the value of a work of art as a work of art, must be understood broadly, as including more than the value a work has in virtue of its so-called aesthetic properties. Surely all sorts of aesthetic properties (including, e.g., a work's beauty, formal balance, unity, harmony, and so on) are relevant to the value of a work of art as a work of art. Roughly, those are properties that one can perceive in the work, properties that essentially depend on their (visual, aural, or other) "appearance." Yet the evaluation of a work of art as a work of art also includes an assessment of the work's success in being, for instance, original, i.e. innovative with respect to artistic traditions, or in being skillful, or perhaps even in being provocative or cognitively stimulating. That is, artistic value is allowed to derive partly from non-aesthetic properties, notably from relational properties having to do with the history of art, and from intellectual, cognitive benefits of engaging with the work. In fact, this is fairly approximate, and fails to do justice to the debate on how to distinguish artistic from aesthetic properties, and artistic from aesthetic value.² Fortunately, such debate is something I need not venture into, since my conception of artistic value in this context aims at being inclusive, even liberal. Artistic value in my sense includes a work's

aesthetic value narrowly conceived, i.e. as necessarily involving some sort of sensory (maybe of a higher order) response, but has a much broader scope than that.

Such an inclusive conception of the value of art as art is fairly common in the literature about the ethical criticism of art. In fact, in the literature, what I call “artistic value” is often named “aesthetic value” (see, e.g., Gaut 1998b). Yet, the latter term is not only literally a less precise label for the value of a work of art as a work of art, it is also more suitable to those theories that, emphasizing the autonomy of the aesthetic realm, deny legitimacy to any art-critical practice that considers as relevant to the artistic assessment of artworks aspects of them that are not, properly speaking, dependent only on so-called aesthetic properties.³

Indeed, the most interesting debate on the legitimacy of the ethical criticism of art, and the one I will be concentrating on, takes place within such broadly defined boundaries of the value of art. It should be underlined, however, that my adopting a broad conception of artistic value is not open to the accusation of begging the question in favor of the ethical criticism of art. For it is left open for discussion whether ethical features of a work should be included among the determinants of artistic value. Furthermore, the argument I will provide below (in Chapter 7), and indeed the various arguments defending the ethical criticism of art that I consider in the following, do not depend on having defined artistic value broadly. That is, none of those arguments are

grounded on premises including references to *other*, in the sense of *other-than-aesthetic*, values of artworks.

In contrast, a narrow conception of artistic value, one identifying it with aesthetic value as a function of the *aesthetic experience* provided by artworks, or by the *aesthetic pleasure* integral to such experience, leaves little room for a discussion on the legitimacy of the ethical criticism of art. With the exception of views that consider immorality as non-aesthetic and morality as aesthetic, or of views simply identifying aesthetic and ethical value, or reducing one to the other, an understanding of the value of art as aesthetic in a narrow sense appears to leave little room for an investigation of possible bearings of other sorts of value on the value of art.

In sum, I propose that we work under the assumption that artistic value – the value of a work of art as a work of art – can depend on non-aesthetic properties. Our question, of course, is whether among the non-aesthetic properties, which nonetheless have relevance to artistic value, moral properties can legitimately figure – whether, that is, such properties contribute to the artistic assessment of a work as legitimately as, say, an art-historical property like the work’s originality.

In the following, my way of addressing these issues will often sound metaphysically realist – in terms of the existence of aesthetic, artistic, and ethical properties, and of values that are in some way dependent on them. Yet, none of my discussion really depends on realist conceptions of the nature of artistic or ethical value.

It suffices that one assumes that the activities of assessing artworks artistically, on the one hand, and ethically, on the other, have intersubjective validity, in the sense that it is possible to have intelligible disagreement on the results of such activities. In fact, in principle, the question of the legitimacy of the ethical criticism of art could be raised even under somewhat narrow subjectivist assumptions, as a question about whether one could legitimately consider the ethical evaluation one gives of an artwork as a reason to assess the work from the artistic point of view.⁴ However, I will not be interested in such a discussion, since the ethical criticism of art is a *public* critical practice, hence one presumably aiming at some sort of inter-subjective agreement.

3. Reductionism.

Before discussing the various arguments proposed in favor of the ethical criticism of art, a taxonomy of the possible positions on the bearings of ethical value on artistic value should be provided. And yet, before doing that, some remarks on approaches that do not look at, properly speaking, *intersections* of one sort of value with another are helpful.

Granted that an artwork can, in principle, be attributed a variety of values – artistic, ethical, economic, etc. – one theoretical possibility is that the artistic value of a work is *the same as* one of those other values mentioned. Some theorists, for example, have maintained that the value of artworks consists, in its entirety, in the cognitive insights that those works provide on the world (see, e.g., Goodman 1976, especially 255

ff.; see also Goodman 1978.) Other theorists have claimed that the value of artworks is the same as their ethical value, or at least that the former entirely derives from the latter. Both approaches are *reductionist* of artistic value to some other sort of value, whether cognitive or ethical. Hence, we can call the first family of views – those reducing artistic value to cognitive value – *cognitive reductionism*, and the second family of views – identifying the value of art with some form of moral value – *moral reductionism*.

Perhaps the paradigmatic example of cognitive reductionism is found in Nelson Goodman, who conceived of art as essentially symbolic activity, and of symbolization as such that “its drive is curiosity and [its] aim enlightenment” (1976, 258). To Goodman, the aesthetic experience, i.e., the experience of works of art is “a form of understanding” (1976, 262) and “aesthetic excellence” is to be subsumed “under cognitive excellence” (1976, 259).

On the other hand, and admittedly only with respect to the value of poetry, Sir Philip Sidney is paradigmatic of moral reductionism. For to him the point of poetry was to teach its readers, and motivate them towards, virtue (Sidney [1559] 2002).⁵

Even Plato’s view, as expressed in *The Republic* and as it is commonly interpreted, could be considered a form of reductionism, but of the cognitivist and of the ethical kind together, insofar as it claims that art has no value because it brings about no real knowledge, either about the true nature of things or about the good and the just.

Other theories come at least close to being reductionists in the specified sense, though they are perhaps best understood as theories considering the value of artworks as

conditional on their ethical status. Most notably, the author who naturally comes to mind as a representative of moral reductionism is Leo Tolstoy, who in his essay *What Is Art?* defended the view that the purpose of art is ultimately moral.⁶ In fact, Tolstoy's theory is complex, involving multiple criteria for artistic merit, by no means all of them immediately ethical.

Recall that, for Tolstoy ([1898] 1995), art is communication, specifically communication (indeed, “contagion,” “infection”) of the feelings of the creator of the artwork to his or her audience. Indeed, the successful communication of feelings, the infection of the audience members with the same feelings or emotions experienced by the artist, is sufficient to make the object an instance of art. That, in itself, already appears to be, in Tolstoy's system, a source of *some* artistic merit. Furthermore, the value of an artwork is partly a function of *quantitative* matters: the number of people infected and the strength of the infection. The latter of these criteria is especially interesting for being itself, in a sense, compound. The strength of the infection depends on the degree of occurrence of three conditions: the individuality of the feeling; the clarity (“clearness”) of the transmission; and the sincerity of the artist. Hence, there appears to be a dimension of artistic value that is not directly moral, insofar as it is independent of the subject matter, i.e., decided “apart from whether the feelings it transmits are good or bad.” (Tolstoy [1898] 1995, 515)

Yet, as is well known, according to Tolstoy, the value of art is also primarily determined by a qualitative criterion, i.e., by the value of the feelings transmitted, and

hence by a criterion that is clearly ethical: for good feelings are either those “flowing from love of God and man [‘religious art’], or merely the simple feelings of uniting all men [‘universal art’]” ([1898] 1995, 521).

It is not clear whether the first set of criteria – having to do with the transmission of the artist’s emotion being successful and widespread and powerful – should be considered ethical, although Tolstoy might have considered moving people emotionally in itself to be morally uplifting. Hence, it is not entirely clear whether Tolstoy’s theory should be considered a form of reductionism. Perhaps, the theory is best interpreted as considering the artistic worth of substantially valuable art as *conditional* upon its achieving a moral goal, albeit by satisfying criteria that are only partly ethical.

In any event, there are various reasons to leave these questions aside and to not discuss, in the following, moral reductionism per se among the accounts considering the ethical value of works as bearing on their artistic value.

First of all, reductionist views in general seem to be wrong as accounts of artistic value. Take cognitivism, for instance. Not all art seems to have cognitive value, and even when such value is present, it does not necessarily seem to be the central value of works of art.⁷ Similarly, and most importantly for present purposes, a reduction of artistic value to ethical value would be even more implausible. Artworks seem to be valuable not just for moral reasons but for their formal features as well, and more generally, for their aesthetic properties; and narratives seem to be no exception to this rule. Whatever the definition of a narrative, it would be hard to deny that some narratives

are simply morally neutral. Yet even if one were to accept that all narratives have a moral dimension, it would not follow that the sole artistic value they have is of the moral sort. For narratives, too, are praised for aesthetic properties having nothing to do with morality, such as elegance of language, vividness of description, realism of characterization, unity of narration, and so on and so forth.

Second, the possible attractiveness of reductionist accounts may in fact be derived from features which are only contingently associated with reductionism but by no means necessary to it. One such feature is the apparent simplicity (epistemic and ontological) of a *monist* view, a view, that is, claiming that there is only *one*, hence necessarily unified, artistic value. For, if the value of art is reduced to ethical or to cognitive value, then there is only one criterion for the evaluation of art, or so it would seem. However, this sort of simplicity, assuming that it is desirable in this area, might in fact be largely immaterial, since reductionist views may lead to a form of monism with no monistic consequences for art-critical practice.

Take cognitive reductionism, for instance. Although all the values art *qua* art can have are reduced to cognitive value, such form of reductionism can (and likely will) recognize the existence of a variety of values artworks can have: e.g., the value deriving from presenting us with ways of seeing, ways of hearing, or psychological insights. Of course, all of those values are then recognized to be of a cognitive sort, e.g., as ways of knowing the world – the visual world, the world of sounds, and the world of feelings. Yet, there is ample room for art criticism to investigate the different ways for art to bring

about these results. And there is room, moreover, to hypothesize that art, in its different forms, is capable of achieving those cognitive goals in ways that are *distinctive* of art. That all of this can be done even within a reductionist (and monistic) conception of artistic value is no special advantage of such approaches – rather it shows that such possibilities exist independently of the reductionism/non-reductionism divide.

At least some of the above might be contested, claiming that monism in fact points to a distinctively artistic way of bringing about the single form of value that is realized by a variety of human activities – something that allegedly would be lost in a pluralistic approach. *Pluralism* is the view that a multiplicity of the values that artworks can have are legitimately considered as bearing on the *value* of those works *as works of art*, or, equivalently, the view that the artistic value of a work comprises a variety of values: not only artistic narrowly conceived (e.g., the work's being skillfully produced, or its being an exemplar of a given artistic style) or aesthetic, but ethical and cognitive as well. Yet, a pluralist view need not give up the possibility of claiming that all or some of the values that art realizes are distinctive to art. Suppose, for instance, that some artworks have a morally educational value, and that this value is claimed, in a pluralist fashion, to contribute to those works' artistic value. Such a claim is surely compatible with maintaining that the moral education that artworks can provide can be provided only by artworks. One could claim, e.g., that only fictional dramas of human affairs can educate us on certain aspects of the moral life. Or the claim could be made with respect to the *degree* of value that can be so achieved.

In sum, reductionist views, while questionable accounts, do not seem to bring anything new to the debate on the ethical criticism of art. Surely, and this constitutes the final and most important reason to leave moral reductionism aside in the following discussion, that ethical and artistic value are systematically related is a claim that can be made by non-reductionist theories as well.

4. Autonomism and Moralism, Radical and Moderate.

As mentioned above, the ethical criticism of art is at odds with a fairly long-standing philosophical tradition claiming the autonomy of art. At least since the Romantic movement and the doctrine, known as *aestheticism*, that art should be produced and valued for its own sake, many have conceived of the realm of art as isolated from other realms of value.

Aestheticism and the doctrine of “art for art’s sake” historically also included a normative claim on what it takes to make good art. In particular, any instrumental value attached to an artwork, whether as a vehicle of knowledge or of morality or of religion, for instance, could not but ruin – the aestheticists claimed – the artistic value of the work, which should be art’s only aim.⁸ And, though the main focus was on censuring any purpose or function for art, an equally frosty reception was accorded, more generally, to any conditioning of the value of art on any other value. Nonetheless, the theoretical claim that the assessment of artworks must be independent of any evaluation of them from other, non-artistic points of view, can be kept separate from any normative claims

on whether having “ulterior,”⁹ non-artistic values necessarily diminishes the value of a work when judged as art.¹⁰

Historically, the view that the value of art is autonomous has been expressed by formalists about the nature and value of art, such as Clive Bell ([1914] 1987), who with regards to works of visual art maintained that their value solely depends on their having “significant form,” or such as Eduard Hanslick, who claimed that the value of music *as music* derives solely from the beautiful audible forms that compose musical works, or, finally, such as Cleanth Brooks and the other proponents of the “New Criticism” of literature, according to whom, in Michael Weston’s account, a poem valued *as a poem* must be evaluated as a “dramatic unity of patterns of figuration,” i.e., of imagery, rhythm, and sound.¹¹

However, again, there is no necessary connection between the thesis that the value of art is unaffected by ulterior values and formalism. One can claim, for instance, that ethical judgments about a work can be relevant to that work’s artistic value insofar as they are about features of the work that affect or constitute such a work’s form.¹² Conversely, one need not claim that the value of artworks derives only from their form in order to claim that the value of art is not affected by any ulterior values artworks can have. Artistic value could be claimed to depend on nothing external to it, hence granting artistic value’s autonomy, and yet to depend on non-formal properties, such as brilliance of color, sweetness of sound, or felicity of language. That is, an autonomist view of artistic value can be quite inclusive in its considering which properties are legitimately

relevant to artistic value. It can even include, I submit, affective responses that a work aims at eliciting, for, first, such responses need not be construed in terms of the responses the work actually elicits (Whewell 1992, 7-8), or, second, they can be admitted in all such cases in which they have no moral component or implication.

These preliminary remarks were necessary to distance our debate from some normative discussions (notably on the importance of keeping art “pure” and unaffected by ulterior values) as well as to show how a classification of the various approaches to the bearing of ethical value on artistic value can be presented in a fairly general way, without having to endorse or reject specific views on the nature or value of art, such as formalism.

The taxonomy I am about to provide has several advantages, as I hope to show. However, a cautionary note is now in order. Insofar as any such taxonomy must inevitably be somewhat stipulative, what I propose, while well suited, I claim, to discuss the theories I will here consider, might nonetheless prove inadequate to the discussion of approaches I do not consider in this work.

In principle, I suggest, we can distinguish between four different general approaches to the issue of whether ethical value ever bears on artistic value, or to the issue of the legitimacy of the ethical criticism of art. First, there is *autonomism*, the view that the value of a work of art as a work of art is independent of any other sort of value the work may have. This can be interpreted in a *radical* or in a *moderate* way. A radical autonomist claims that judging a work of art in ethical terms is something like making a

category mistake – something like judging, say, a romantic dinner on consideration of the number of triangular objects present in the restaurant, or like judging how good a philosophy student is, as a philosophy student, in terms of her tendency to wear sneakers. Judging artworks as works of art in terms of their ethical features always amounts, for the radical autonomist, to bringing the wrong (set of) reasons in the assessment of it.

An autonomist of the moderate sort accepts that the ethical value of a work of art can, on occasion, bear on its value as a work of art, but claims that the relationship between those two values is completely unsystematic. The above-presented comparison with financial value is helpful here: though some paintings are more expensive than others partly because they are more beautiful, the beauty of a painting is not always relevant, or relevant in the same way, to its price – sometimes beauty is irrelevant to the painting's financial value, other times it may even diminish it.

The opposite approach to the relationship between these two values, and hence to its place in the practice of art criticism, can be called *moralism*, the view that the ethical value of a work does bear on its value as a work of art. Of this view, two different breeds can also be distinguished. A *radical* moralist claims that there is a systematic relationship between the ethical standing of a work and its value as art; in particular, that a work's being ethically defective makes it also, other things being equal, defective as art; and that, vice versa, its being ethically sound or praiseworthy makes of it a better work of art than it would otherwise be.

A *moderate* moralist, instead, would claim that, though the ethical status of some kinds of artworks systematically bears on their value as art, that is not true for artworks of all sorts. There are instances in which the one sort of value is not related to the other in the specified sense. This needs clarification. The moderate moralist is willing to admit – what the radical moralist denies – that there can be artworks, say, the immorality of which does not affect their value as art, or can even affect it in the sense that they are *better* works of art *because* they are immoral.

Naturally, the gray area is where the two moderate approaches, the autonomist and the moralist, seem to meet each other. For where does the difference between the two really lie, if both allow for exceptions? There is still a very important difference, I claim, between the two approaches, for the moralist believes – what the autonomist denies – that artistic and ethical values are connected to each other in a systematic way, so that an increase in ethical value counts in favor of a work from the artistic point of view, a decrease in ethical value counts against the work. What makes the position *moderate* is its allowing for *kinds* of works where the relationship does not apply. However, such artworks' being different, in that respect, from others can itself be explained in a generalized manner – as being the *sorts* of artworks the ethical value of which has no bearing, or has a negative bearing, on the artistic value.¹³ In contrast, the moderate autonomist simply allows for, so to speak, one sort of value to encounter the other, but with no generalization possible.

The above taxonomy has some clear advantages. To better see them, let's bring to the surface the fundamental tenets from which the taxonomy results. First, approaches to the matter differ in the answer they give to the question, Does the ethical value of an artwork ever bear on its value as a work of art? If the answer is an unconditional, No, then the resulting view is what I have called radical autonomism. However, a positive answer to the same question does not give rise to any unified approach to the matter, until another question is asked: Does the ethical value of an artwork systematically bear on its value as a work of art? If the answer is that, No, ethical value bears on artistic value only in a wholly unsystematic way, then the resulting view is what I have called moderate autonomism. A positive answer, again, does not give rise to a unified approach, until a third question is asked, whether, that is, the ethical value of an artwork systematically bears on the artwork's value as a work of art *for all kinds of artworks*. That is, a radical moralist must answer that for all kinds of artworks, their ethical value systematically bears on their value as art; a moderate moralist that the systematic bearing of one sort of value on the other only occurs for certain kinds of works.¹⁴

Of course, what is meant by "kind" of work in this context needs clarification. It does not mean "medium," i.e., it does not mean that the moderate moralist makes her claims only with respect to certain media and not others. *Any* of the four approaches above can be medium-relative. One can be a radical autonomist, for instance, just about music, with nothing to say about other media. Nor can that term mean something too vague such as, "the kind of artwork for which ethical value and artistic value work this

way,” for that would fail to distinguish the moderate moralist position from the moderate autonomist one. A moderate autonomist, e.g., could claim that “for *this particular* work of art its ethical value is relevant, in the way it happens to be, to its value as art,” and conceive of “this particular work of art” as being equivalent to “a work of art of this kind.”

The moderate moralist’s claim, for it to make sense, is best understood as relative to artworks of given *genres*, broadly conceived, where the genres an artwork belongs to make of it the kind of artwork it is.¹⁵ Reference to the genres is what allows the view to claim that the relationship between ethical and artistic value is a systematic one, but also that exceptions, so to speak, for which the relationship does not obtain or obtains otherwise, occur for certain kinds of artworks, i.e., for artworks belonging to certain genres.

When I say that the notion of genre should be conceived of broadly, one of the possibilities I have in mind is in fact that of fairly narrow, if you like, genres. Narrative, for instance, is a broad genre and, typically, a moderate moralist will want to draw distinctions, or allow for exceptions, *within* that realm, so that *some* but not all narratives can be considered to be, say, positively affected by their immorality. Referring to even fairly specific genres is compatible with the notion of genre as it is usually understood. For a genre may be individuated by properties of different kind, most notably by formal and by content properties. The short story, for instance, is partly determined by its length, the sonnet by its verse and rhyme structure. Western movies, in contrast, are

mainly individuated by their subject matter, as are romance novels. Film Noir is individuated by both formal elements (use of light and framing) and content elements (mystery, ambiguities, criss-crossings, *femmes fatales*...). And so on and so forth.

In sum, I propose that we reformulate the characterization of the moderate moralist approach by saying that moderate moralism is relative to the kind of artwork or, if combinations of genres can themselves be called genres, that it is genre-dependent.

Notice that radical moralism, too, has a certain amount of relativity built into it, at least if we want to attempt to construct, for each of the four possible approaches, the most plausible, though still general formulation of each. The radical moralist claims that an artwork's ethical value is always systematically related to the artwork's value as art for all kinds of works, or genres. Yet, of course, there is a variety of ethical points of view from which artworks can be evaluated: their consequences, for example, or the circumstances of their production, or the intentions of their producers, or the message they convey, etc. Hence, I suggest, an approach to this issue should be considered an instance of radical moralism even if it concentrates, as it would most often be the case, on only one ethical dimension as the one it claims to be, always, artistically relevant.

Generalizing from the above claim, we can, then, state that all four sorts of approaches are instantiated by theories relative to the ethical dimension which is considered to be relevant. Accordingly, one can hold a certain view with respect to the bearing of one sort of ethical value on artistic value, while holding a different view on the bearing of a different sort of ethical value on artistic value.

A corollary of the above principle is that every theorist who claims that a given ethical dimension is relevant to artistic value, hence espouses a form of moralism, while at the same time admitting that other ethical evaluations of works of art are possible, although irrelevant to their value as art, is therefore committed to an autonomist claim with respect to each of the ethical dimensions she considers irrelevant.

5. A Note on Immoralism.

My taxonomy leaves out at least one logically possible position: *immoralism*, the view that works of art are artistically better because of their immorality. Formulated as a general view, immoralism would be perfectly symmetrical to moralism, claiming that ethical and artistic value are systematically related, though in the opposite way to what the moralist claims. Immoralism says that the immorality of works contributes to their artistic value; their morality detracts from it. Of immoralism, too, we could distinguish two different versions, a radical one and a moderate one, depending on whether the alleged relationship is held to obtain for works of all genres or only for some of them.

I will not consider immoralism as a general view, for two reasons. First, there are very few actual kinds of narratives for which it could be claimed that moral merit counts against artistic value, and immorality in favor of artistic quality. I am not just referring to the fact that there may be narratives with no ethical dimension, for, like moralism, immoralism need not be confused with some form of reductionism and hence can be formulated just with respect to the relationship between the ethical value of works, when

present, and their artistic value. Rather, I am referring to the fact that the only immoralist view with any plausibility is one that concentrates on some genres within which immorality seems in fact to play a role in making artworks successful. And while the existence of such role may be argued for some genres or for some particular works, it is simply implausible to claim that every time an artwork can be judged ethically, the result of that judgment must count, in an inverse manner, against the value of the work as art. Hence, radical immoralism can be set aside from the start.

As regards moderate immoralism, its possible truth can be brought to bear onto the moderate version of moralism as I have characterized it. For the moderate moralist does not deny that there may be kinds of works for which artistic and ethical value fail to be systematically related in the way claimed by the moderate moralist for other kinds of works. One way for the relationship between ethical and artistic value not to hold in the way specified by moderate moralism is precisely what the moderate immoralist claims.

The above might appear to be an odd feature of the taxonomy I am proposing, for it considers moderate immoralism compatible with moderate moralism, but not compatible with autonomism, not even autonomism of the moderate sort. Isn't the fact that some works of art may be better as works of art precisely because of their immorality the sort of fact an autonomist would want to recall as an objection, by means of counter-example, to the moralist positions? In contrast, I claim that the apparent oddity here simply has to do with an ambiguity about what counts as an immoralist claim. This is precisely the sort of confusion that my taxonomy allows us to bring to light. The issue is

relevant precisely because it clarifies what would count as a counter-example to the theories of the different sorts.

Accordingly, I submit, as a general view immoralism is incompatible with autonomism, both radical and moderate, as well as incompatible with radical moralism. It is not incompatible, however, with moderate moralism.

Notice that the claim that a work of art can be a better work of art precisely in virtue of its immorality can be made for particular works or for works of a certain kind. That is, the claim can be that there happen to be particular works of art that, in virtue of their particular make-up, turn out to be artistically better precisely because of their immorality. Or the claim may be that there are kinds of works, genres if you like, for which immorality plays this role. Of course, of the two positions, the former is going to be easier to defend. It is easy to find examples of individual works— perhaps, more naturally from narratives dealing with humor – where the immorality seems to contribute to the artistic goals of the work. Think, for instance, of the somewhat racist tones in Tom Wolfe’s *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, where the novel’s way of framing the ethnic tensions appears to contribute to making it hilarious.

Either sort of case in which the artistic value of a work is enhanced by its immorality – whether in virtue of the particular nature of the individual work or in virtue of its belonging to a given genre – seems to constitute a counter-example to both radical autonomism and radical moralism. That they would constitute a counter-example to radical autonomism should be obvious, for radical autonomism claims that the ethical

value of a work never has anything to do with its value as art. That they both would count as counter-examples to radical moralism should also be obvious, at least if the fact that a work is a better work of art in virtue of its immorality is conceived of as incompatible with the work also being a worse work of art because of its immorality – an issue we will return to later (Chapter 7).

Notice, however, how the two cases interact differently with moderate autonomism. Since moderate autonomism holds that ethical and artistic value may happen to interact with each other but always in an unsystematic way, the example of a work the artistic value of which is enhanced by its immorality is no objection to, but rather confirms, moderate autonomism, *if* it is claimed to happen just in virtue of the *particular* work's nature. By contrast, the existence of *genres* (kinds of artworks) for which immorality counts in favor of artistic value (and perhaps morality counts against artistic value) is incompatible with the autonomist claim of the moderate autonomist.

In contrast, notice that moderate moralism, in principle, is compatible with either sort of case. All the moderate moralist claims is that there are kinds of works, genres, for which ethical and artistic value are systematically related in the sense that a morally better artwork of that sort is also better, other things being equal, as art, and that a morally worse work of that sort is also worse, other things being equal as art. As already mentioned above, such a claim is obviously compatible with accepting the existence of genres for which the systematic relationship between ethical and artistic value is reversed. Yet, the moderate moralist's claim is also compatible with accepting the

existence of works that, in virtue of their particular make-up only, are artistically better because of their immorality, or artistically worse because of their morality, without that being necessarily true for other works belonging to the same genre.

The only instance that would count as a counter-example to moderate moralism, then, is that of a work belonging to one of the genres for which the theory claims that there exists a systematic and positive relationship between ethical and artistic value, a work which however is such that its immorality counts towards its value as art, or its morality against its value as art.

In sum, immoralism, whether radical or moderate, need not be addressed in the following. What, in contrast, *will* deserve careful attention is the possibility of immoralist claims about particular works of art, artworks that appear to succeed artistically partly because of their immorality, or to fail artistically partly because of their morality. I have claimed that such works would appear to confirm moderate autonomism but that they would constitute counter-examples to moderate moralism only if the work in question belongs to one of the genres for which the moralist claim is being defended.

The latter claim may raise the suspicion that my way of framing the discussion begs the question in favor of moderate moralism, or even renders it unfalsifiable, by making it virtually always revisable. That is, the claim that something counts as a counter-example only if it is an artwork belonging to certain genres could be taken to imply that the counter-example could be neutralized by redefining the relevant genre so that the artwork in question no longer belongs to it.

However, the current suspicion can be rejected on two grounds. First, I have already stipulated above that genres for which the ethical criticism of art is legitimate are not to be defined, say, as the genres of those and only those works for which their ethical value bears on artistic value in the way indicated by ethical criticism. Second, an argument in support of the ethical criticism of art, and in particular an argument in favor of a moderate moralist view, can be such that the reference to genres of a certain kind is essential to it. For arguments taking such form, question-begging reformulations are not going to be that easy. Defending the present taxonomy from the accusation of not being neutral with respect to the correctness of the theory it aims at framing is obviously important in itself. However, it becomes especially important because, below, I will provide an argument in favor of a form of moralism that will be genre-based precisely in the sense of essentially referring to narratives belonging to a genre. I should, however, mention that there may be a sense in which the existence of individual works, belonging to the genre for which ethical value positively bears on artistic value, and yet such that their ethical status *also* bears in a reverse manner, are not incompatible with moderate moralism. A specification of this claim, however, will have to wait for Chapter 7, where I present my view.

6. Noël Carroll's Characterization of Radical Autonomism.

The taxonomy just suggested does justice, I think, to all four approaches, as well as to the differences among them. The terminology I am adopting – distinguishing between

“autonomism” and “moralism,” “radical” and “moderate” – has become relatively standard in contemporary debate. Noël Carroll, in particular, has introduced this cluster of terms and called his own approach “moderate moralism.”¹⁶ It must be emphasized, then, how my articulation of the four approaches differs from Carroll’s.

First of all, Carroll’s characterization of what he calls radical autonomism is very extreme. Indeed, I am going to claim, his characterization is excessively extreme and somewhat beside the point. For instance, he states that according to radical autonomism “the ethical evaluation of artworks is always conceptually confused” (Carroll 2000, 360); that from “the perspective of an autonomist, the fact, if it is a fact, that we spend so much time talking about morality with regards to so many artworks appears to be virtually unintelligible – perhaps it can be explained only by attributing deep and vast confusions to those who indulge in such talk” (Carroll 1998b, 127).

However, once characterized that way, radical autonomism becomes an approach adopted hardly by anyone. Carroll mentions Oscar Wilde and his famous “Preface” to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. It would take us too far off track, into an area not immediately relevant to the present analysis, to determine to what extent the brief and aphoristic remarks in the “Preface” really represent Wilde’s thoughts on the matter. However, even taking the “Preface” at face value, I don’t think we can attribute to Wilde a theory to the effect that artworks can never be intelligibly *talked about* in ethical terms. Carroll’s characterization is excessively radical because it fails to consider the essential proviso that the radical autonomist’s claim is a claim on what can be said about works of

art *when assessing them as art*. Notice that even Wilde, in his “Preface,” talks about artworks ethically, though in the very indirect sense of attributing ethical status to the content of art, which an artist can use to produce artworks: “The moral and immoral life of man forms part of the subject matter of the artist [...]. Vice and virtue are to the artist materials for an art” (Wilde [1891] 1974, 107).¹⁷ In any event, there is no need to attribute to a radical autonomist the claim that artworks can never even be talked about in ethical terms – it is enough to claim that, for the radical autonomist, such talk is never relevant to the assessment of the artwork as a work of art.

A perhaps more radical theory than the one expressed by Wilde in his “Preface” is expressed by William Gass (1993). In contrast to any view that aims at either eliminating spheres of value, or reducing one sphere to another, or subordinating one to another, Gass argues that the various value areas are “different, independent, and equal.”¹⁸ More specifically, about artistic value, he claims that “the artistic value of a book is different from its economic value, and is differently determined, as is its weight in pounds, its utility as a doorstop, its elevating or edifying or life-enhancing properties, its gallery of truths” (Gass 1993, 113). Admittedly, in his rhetoric Gass treats considerations of the ethical and epistemic status of a book such as a novel, as on a par with considerations of the item not even treated as a novel, such as its weight or utility as a doorstop. However, a charitable interpretation would appear to grant that some of the values Gass mentions, though not aesthetic or artistic, are nonetheless values that can be attached, from the ethical or the epistemic point of view, to a novel apprehended as a novel, e.g., by virtue

of the emotional responses its readers would experience or simply by virtue of the novel's content. Gass's point, of course, would still remain that none of these values has anything to do with the novel's value as art. Espousing a formalist approach, he proposes that

[a]rtistic quality depends upon a work's internal, formal, organic character, upon its inner system of relations, upon its structure and its style, and not upon the morality it is presumed to recommend, or upon the benevolence of its author, or its emblematic character, when it is seen as especially representative of some situation or society. (Gass 1993, 113)

My point is simply that, though clearly a pretty radical autonomist position, what's expressed here is not a view denying that intelligent talk of artworks in ethical terms is even possible.

Even Clive Bell, a paradigmatic proponent of autonomism, does not literally say that someone cannot judge a work of art from a non-aesthetic point of view, or that works of art cannot have those additional values. He simply claims, in high autonomist fashion, that when artworks are judged *as works of art*, those other values, perceived from non-aesthetic points of view and concerned with properties having nothing to do with significant form (in Bell's view the only source of aesthetic value), have nothing to do with the value of art (e.g., Bell [1914] 1987, 25). Rather, most of the times, they are merely distractions. Of the moralist, e.g., Bell says that he would "remind him that his moral judgments about the value of particular works of art have nothing to do with their artistic value" ([1914] 1987, 116). Indeed, works of art can be talked about and assessed ethically, but not when judging them as art: "You may, of course, make ethical judgments

about particular works, not as works of art, but as members of some other class, or as independent and unclassified parts of the universe” (Bell [1914] 1987, 116). In a case like that, “you will be making a moral and not an aesthetic judgment” (Bell [1914] 1987, 116).¹⁹

Clive Bell himself engages in moral talk about works of art, in a sarcastic way to be sure, but to show the artistic irrelevance of such comments, not their impossibility. Nor does Bell ever commit himself to claiming that the morality or immorality of a work (or, for that matter, any other value the work may have) is incompatible with the work’s having artistic status and artistic value. Morality and immorality seem to have to do, for Bell, primarily with the artwork’s representational content. Yet, such content and its attributes are not incompatible, for Bell, with artistic status or value; they are only irrelevant: “The representative element in a work of art may or may not be harmful; always it is irrelevant” ([1914] 1987, 25).

Nor does Bell deny that the content can be assessed from a variety of non-artistic points of view. In fact, it is somewhat unfortunate for our purposes that Bell declares William Powell Firth’s *Paddington Station* not art, but rather just “an interesting and amusing document,” one definitely “well worth preserving” but only in virtue of its amusement and information value about the “manners and customs of an age” ([1914] 1987, 18). It would have served our purposes better had Bell condemned *Paddington Station* just as *bad art* – art with little artistic value, though not completely devoid of it. Nonetheless, on the grounds of the above quote on the role of representational content,

we can certainly imagine Bell's judgment on a work with many of the attributes of *Paddington Station* and yet some significant form, hence some artistic value. We would then have a work with little artistic value but, nonetheless, in Bell's eyes, considerable amusement and information value, with of course the latter values having, according to autonomism, nothing to do with the former.

In sum, I think there is ample reason to hold that Carroll's characterization of what he names "radical autonomism" is indeed too radical. If taken literally, it would even fail to classify theorists such as Wilde, Gass, or Bell as radical autonomists.

The inaptness of Carroll's characterization of radical autonomism may owe in part to its having been presented within a discussion of both the ethical criticism of art and the educational or corruptive function of art. Yet, in addition to recalling that the ethical criticism of art can be concerned with dimensions of ethical value other than the education or corruption that artworks can bring about, it should be emphasized that, if some autonomists were trying to secure a sort of "immunity" for works of art in virtue of their artistic status, that would be either an ethical claim about artworks, to the effect that they are never immoral, or else a claim about artistic value trumping all other values. But such claims are not necessary to an autonomist position.

There is, however, another possible source of Carroll's overly radical characterization of the radical autonomist position. Carroll seems to equate the fact of a judgment's involving a category mistake with the judgment's being virtually unintelligible. Yet, category mistakes are not necessarily unintelligible – some of them

are, some aren't, to varying degrees. At the very least, the sense of intelligibility in question here should be clarified. Most likely, judging a romantic dinner in terms of the number of triangular objects present in the restaurant sounds pretty unintelligible, and would need some significant contextual specification to be restored to rationality.²⁰ However, we can have a serious discussion with someone who, about a romantic dinner, says that it was good because the food was good, while the company was lame. We could tell such a person that she is judging the *dinner* while she thinks, as she may, that she is judging the *date* (or, if you prefer, the *romance*). That is, we can accuse someone of a category mistake while we understand perfectly well where her mistake comes from. We may know, as is often the case, which category is being confused with which and why. Judging a philosophy student for the shoes she wears may not be understandable (at least in the absence of appropriate contextual specification), but judging her for her looks is all too understandable, and for that reason worrisome. Of course, the former instance is worrisome, too, but only with regard to the speaker's rationality; the latter is worrisome with respect to the speaker's conflating one value (that of a student's philosophical abilities) with another (that of the student's attractiveness). It is perhaps worth adding that some of the worries autonomists have with respect to the ethical criticism of art might have to do with some form of integrity, in the sense that the value of art deserves a respect that confusing such value with others risks undermining.

At any rate, I think it is easy to accept the conclusion that Carroll's characterization of radical autonomism is overstated. Once the actual autonomists' core

claims (those of Wilde, Gass, or Bell for example) have been put in context, purified of their emphatic and rhetorical elements, and shorn of their normative corollaries, I think it becomes more acceptable to characterize radical autonomism simply as the view that, when judging art as art, ethical, political, ideological, and cognitive judgments do not matter.

7. James Anderson's and Jeffrey Dean's "Moderate Autonomism."

Defining radical autonomism in the most precise way affects our understanding of the other views as well, such as moderate autonomism. James Anderson and Jeffrey Dean, who call their theory an instance of moderate autonomism, claim that "[a]ccording to this view, moral criticism of works of art is legitimate as is, of course, aesthetic criticism" (1998, 152). It is not surprising that Anderson and Dean would call their own view moderate autonomism, since they are working within the conceptual framework established by Carroll, albeit objecting to his view. Indeed, Carroll had presented moderate autonomism as "a logically possible position" (1996, 237 n.), a position claiming something along the following lines:

A given artwork may legitimately traffic in aesthetic, moral, cognitive and political value. But these various levels are independent or autonomous. An artwork may be aesthetically valuable and morally defective, or vice versa. But these different levels of value do not mix, so to speak." (Carroll 1996, 231)

Interpreted, as I think it is meant by Carroll and most likely by Anderson and Dean, in the sense that the "different levels of value" *never* mix, the view expressed by

the above characterization is, I would suggest, a form of radical, not moderate, autonomism (compare William Gass's claim that the different values of a work of art are "independent").

It is not entirely clear whether Anderson and Dean want to claim anything different from what has just been stated, hence not entirely clear whether their view should be interpreted as a form of radical or of moderate autonomism, according to my understanding of those categories. Accordingly, I first provide an interpretation of their view as a form of radical autonomism. I then call attention to a claim by Anderson and Dean that might make their view count as a moderate version of autonomism after all.

I already claimed that admitting the possibility of ethical criticism, that is, of criticizing artworks from the ethical point of view, is not in itself a denial of radical autonomism. If the views we are here attempting to classify are about the bearing of one sort of value on another, then they must be classified as radical or moderate with respect to that issue, and not with respect to the separate issue of whether moral talk or evaluation, i.e., moral criticism, is ever appropriate to works of art. I have claimed that not even Bell denies that artworks can be subject to ethical evaluation, but simply holds that such evaluation has nothing to do with the artistic value of the work. Hence, by merely considering the "moral criticism" of artworks legitimate, Anderson and Dean are not espousing an especially moderate version of autonomism.

One may want to insist that Anderson and Dean's position still differs in an important way from a view like Bell's, for they admit that artworks *as artworks* can be

judged ethically, while according to Bell, as seen in the above quote, when you judge a work of art from the ethical (or from some other non-aesthetic) point of view, you are judging it as a different sort of object, perhaps even just as an unclassified part of the universe (to use Arthur Danto's 1981 phrase, as a "mere object"). And Bell even adds claims such as the following:

it will be right to take into account the area of the canvases, the thickness of the frames, and the potential value of each as fuel or shelter against the rigours of our climate. [...] You will be making a moral and not an aesthetics judgment." (Bell [1914] 1987, 116-117)

Indeed, Bell appears to allow for non-aesthetic judgments of artworks only when those works are not being considered *as art*.

However, there are indeed important differences between Bell's view, on the one hand, and the view advanced by Anderson and Dean, on the other hand. Not all of them, however, may be as immediately relevant to the issue at stake here as it might first have appeared.

In fact, what Bell says about *Paddington Station* shows that he was willing to recognize that the ethical judgment of artworks, specifically paintings, could be concerned with their being representational symbols, hence not just with their mere physicality. *Paddington Station* can surely be judged from a comic or practical or epistemic point of view *as a picture*, though not, of course, as an *artistic picture*.

Nonetheless, there is indeed an important difference between Bell's view and the view advocated by Anderson and Dean. Bell was willing to admit, in principle, non-artistic

evaluations of artworks, but that entailed, in his view, not considering the art *status* of those works. In contrast, Anderson and Dean are willing to admit, as the rest of the above-quoted passage recites, that “[i]n some instances the legitimate aesthetic criticism of a work can surround aspects of the moral subject matter of a work, i.e., the moral content of a work can contribute to or detract from the aesthetic aspects of a work” (1998, 152). Of course, this is a claim Bell would never subscribe to, and hence Anderson’s and Dean’s view is indeed different from Bell’s. The question becomes, then, whether this claim – that the ethical status of the content of a work can bear on aesthetic aspects of such work – makes of Anderson’s and Dean’s view a moderate form of autonomism. I suspect that it may not, simply because such a claim has to do more with rejecting formalism than with deradicalizing autonomism.

Of course, Bell is a formalist, while Anderson and Dean are not committed to any simple version of formalism. Bell believes that the same feature, significant form, that confers *artistic status* also confers *artistic value*; Anderson and Dean are much more open to accepting a plurality of determinants of artistic value. The fact is that radical autonomism is a family of views and hence embraces theories that can differ from each other on a variety of issues (including what makes art art and what makes art valuable). It is not even clear to what extent such distinctions are internal to radical autonomism in the sense of being distinctive of it. Above, for instance, I remarked on the possibility of being a formalist while endorsing the ethical criticism of art (section 4). In fact, Anderson and Dean, by admitting the legitimacy of moral criticism of artworks when

considered, in their *status*, as works of art, do separate themselves from Bell, but only in the sense of separating themselves from some version of *formalism*, and not from *radical autonomism* as they instead appear to believe. For a formalist *à la* Bell only significant form, not content, matters to artistic status. Hence, an ethical judgment, like any other judgment that concentrates on other properties of the object, such as its mere physicality or, more typically, the work's content, automatically treats the work *not* as a work of art – perhaps, treating it as a mere object, perhaps just as a picture but not an artistic picture. Anderson and Dean, in contrast, by claiming that the ethical content of the work can affect its artistic value when the object is perceived as an art object, are just claiming, in antiformalist fashion, that content, with its attributes, does matter, for some works of art, to their being the sorts of works they are.

Nonetheless, it must be recognized that Anderson and Dean, in the above quote, do not just admit that artworks, *qua* artworks, can be evaluated ethically, hence evaluated ethically for their content. They also accept that, for some artworks, aspects of the artwork's content that are moral in nature can be *aesthetically* relevant, i.e., relevant to the artistic assessment of the artwork. Is this, finally, *moderate* autonomism? I remain somewhat skeptical.

What is needed for a theory to be a form of moderate autonomism is the admission that ethical value can sometimes bear on artistic value, though in an unsystematic way. That is, a moderate autonomist must be willing to make a claim about the bearing of ethical value on artistic value analogous to the claim that some paintings

are more expensive than others because more beautiful, and that yet that fact teaches us nothing about the relationship between aesthetic and financial value beyond the fact that the former may at times bear on the latter. It is not clear whether that is indeed the form of autonomism Anderson and Dean are willing to endorse. For these two defenders of what they call “moderate autonomism” sum up their view by saying that “it is never the moral component of the [aesthetic] criticism *as such* that diminishes or strengthens the value of the work *qua* artwork” (Anderson and Dean 1998, 152). This can be, again, a claim of radical autonomism, if less emphatic and sweeping than, say, Bell’s. Or it may be compatible with moderate autonomism after all, but only if a certain assumption Anderson and Dean seem to be endorsing is instead rejected by them.

By claiming that it is never the moral component, *as such*, of the criticism that affects the artistic value of a work, Anderson and Dean might mean one of two things. They might mean that when some value, such as ethical value, happens to contribute, positively or negatively, to a value of another sort, such as artistic value, it cannot be doing that *as* the sort of value it is. If this is their claim, then their view is indeed a form of radical autonomism: the ethical value of the work has no bearing whatsoever on the work’s artistic value. However, it should be noticed that the assumption that radical autonomism depends on in the preceding reasoning is quite questionable. When the beauty of a painting contributes to making the painting financially more valuable, it may very well so contribute *qua* beauty, indeed as aesthetic value. That is, the mere fact that a value of one sort contributes, instrumentally or in some other way, to a value of another

sort does not mean that it does not so contribute as the sort of value it is. An additional example may help secure this rather general claim. Some companies choose their employees partly on consideration of the prospective employees' ethical qualities, such as their being honest. In such companies, it is then the case that one can be considered a good employee partly in virtue of one's honesty. The relationship between being valued as an honest person and being valued as a good employee can, then, be considered as obtaining, though not necessarily as obtaining systematically (for whatever reason).

Now Anderson and Dean may be willing to abandon the assumption in question, and to advance their claim in the different sense that, when a value of one sort happens to contribute to a value of a different sort, though it does so contribute for the sort of value it is, in no way transfers, so to speak, the structure of its value onto the value it happens to bear upon. That is, Anderson and Dean, by saying that it is not "the moral component of the criticism *as such* that diminishes or strengthens" the artistic value of the work, may be emphasizing that ethical value, though on occasion bearing on artistic value, does not bear on it systematically. An artwork succeeding artistically partly in virtue of its ethically praiseworthy content might lose some or all of its artistic value if the content happens to be made even more ethically praiseworthy. Hence, for instance, even if we assume that Harper Lee's novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, or Robert Mulligan's movie version of it, are artistically good partly thanks to their morality, an increase in such ethical component, the moderate autonomist might want to argue, could quite possibly make those works artistically defective.²¹ If this is the sort of claim that Anderson and

Dean want to make, then their view can be classified as an instance of moderate autonomism.

8. Noël Carroll’s “Moderate Moralism.”

The above discussion has already shown that the present issue, regarding how to classify the various theories proposed, is by no means merely terminological. For the attempt to best categorize the various approaches allows us to better see the nature of the theories entering the debate. This becomes fairly important in correctly classifying the theory proposed by Carroll, which he names “moderate moralism.”

Carroll has repeatedly formulated his claim by introducing a cautionary clause to the effect that moderate moralism is the view that “moral evaluation may figure in our evaluation of *some* artworks” (1996, 229, my emphasis). Originally, the cautionary clause was just aimed, it seems, at distinguishing Carroll’s “moderate moralism” from what Carroll dubbed the “radical moralist or Puritan.” The latter would be “someone, perhaps, like Plato – who maintains that art should *only* be discussed from a moral point of view” (Carroll 1996, 229). Hence, originally, the cautionary clause, to the effect that the ethical value bears on artistic value only in some, not all, cases, simply amounted to differentiating Carroll’s view from “radical moralism,” or even from what I called moral reductionism. Carroll wanted to “freely admit that some works of art may have no moral dimension due to the kind of works they are, and [...] do not claim that moral considerations trump all other considerations, such as formal ones” (1996, 229).

I have claimed above that a view like Plato's is best construed as a form of reductionism, and hence as one that does not belong to the four-part categorization, of moralism and autonomism, radical and moderate, that we should be working with. Accordingly, Carroll's view cannot count as a form of moderate moralism simply because it is contrasted to moral reductionism. Indeed, the conflation operated by Carroll between moral reductionism and radical moralism – a conflation that in a way mirrors the implausibly radical characterization of radical autonomism which has been discussed above – further shows the advantages of adopting the categorization I have proposed. My categorization clearly has more explanatory power, among other things, by allowing us to locate Carroll's view vis-à-vis moderate autonomism, on the one hand, and the view that Berys Gaut (1998b) has defended, and named "ethicism," on the other. It is precisely to differentiate his view from Gaut's ethicism that Carroll has clarified, if in passing, his "moderate moralism." It is worth following the development of these explanations in Carroll's writings, for they amount, I shall claim, to changes in the theory advanced by the author, hence affecting the question of the theory's correct categorization as well as that of its plausibility.

In his reply to Anderson and Dean (1998), Carroll complains about the "tendency to regard [his] moderate moralism and Berys Gaut's ethicism as pretty much the same" (Carroll 1998c, 419). Carroll clarifies:

Gaut's arguments on behalf of ethicism are much more ambitious than my arguments for moderate moralism. I say this not because I am unsympathetic to Gaut's view, but only to acknowledge that my case is more limited in scope than

Gaut's. Gaut seems willing to consider *virtually every moral defect* in a work of art an aesthetic defect, whereas I defend a far weaker claim – namely that *sometimes* a moral defect in an artwork can count as an aesthetic defect.” (Carroll 1998c, 419, my emphasis)

Although all of these theories, Carroll's as well as Gaut's, will have to be discussed in detail below (Chapter 6), the importance of categorizing them in the correct way forces me to anticipate the formulation of them. As we have seen in one of the above quotes, in his 1996 essay Carroll formulated his view with reference to “kinds of works.” In the same article, he also seemed to consider that specification to be equivalent to one referring to works belonging to “certain genres”: “My position, moderate moralism, only contends that for certain genres, moral comment, along with formal comment, is natural and appropriate” (Carroll 1996, 229). These are works that, by their nature, engage our “moral powers,” deepening or perverting our moral understanding (see also Carroll 1998b). Accordingly, we can conclude that when Carroll qualifies his theory as moderate because it claims that only “sometimes” ethical evaluation bears on artistic evaluation, he is surely referring to the fact that, for certain kinds of works, or genres, one value so bears on the other. In fact, the alternative would be to admit that what is true of some works may not be true of other works, though belonging to the same kind. In other words, the alternative would amount to considering the bearing of ethical on artistic value as unsystematic – the claim of a moderate autonomist. Yet, Carroll is at this stage committed to generalizations over kinds of works, or genres. This is further confirmed by the fact that Carroll (1998c) makes use of

a hypothetical example, one in which a character like Himmler is awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Of it Carroll claims that it would fail to earn the responses (of admiration for the Himmler character) it aims at, and hence would fail on its own terms (1998c, 421; see Chapter 6 below). Yet, likely a hypothetical example such as the one above can be used by Carroll to illustrate his theory precisely because the theory allows for generalizations over *kinds* of works: other things being equal, a narrative of this kind would *always* fail to earn the aimed at responses and hence fail artistically. Hence, I conclude, Carroll's "moderate moralism" claims that ethical evaluation legitimately can be considered to bear on artistic evaluation for works of a certain kind, i.e., works belonging to certain genres. Hence, the cautionary clause, for which only *sometimes* ethical defects can be considered artistic defects, seems to refer, at least as it was originally proposed, to the fact that the theory is genre-relative.

The above sheds light on the contrast with Gaut's ethicism, as well as on where to look for the components of Carroll's theory that would make it moderate.

Consider Gaut's precise definition of his ethicism as the view that regards works of art manifesting ethically blameworthy attitudes as worse works of art because of that, and works of art manifesting ethically praiseworthy attitudes as better works of art because of that (1998b, 182; see Chapter 6 below). When differentiating his view from ethicism, Carroll somewhat mischaracterizes Gaut's view by attributing to it the claim that "virtually every moral defect in a work" counts as an aesthetic defect. Gaut has clearly chosen just *one* ethical dimension of judgment as the larch pin of his view – that

having as its object the attitude manifested by the work. Carroll, in contrast, concentrates on a different dimension – related to the work’s engagement of our “moral powers” (and then the consequent deepening or perverting of our moral understanding, 1996, 229; see also Carroll 1998b). The mere fact that Carroll’s view concentrates on only one dimension of a work’s ethical value, as indeed is appropriate, does not make the theory *moderate* with regard to the relationship between such ethical value and artistic value, or more moderate than Gaut’s. In fact, in principle it would even be possible for the class of artworks that “engage our moral understanding” to be broader than the class of artworks that manifest a praise- or blame-worthy attitude, hence for Carroll’s version of moralism to be more inclusive than Gaut’s.

As a matter of fact, Carroll’s moralism is narrower in scope than Gaut’s, primarily because the former, and not the latter, mainly concentrates on narratives. With respect to narratives, however, the theory originally presented by Carroll may not be significantly more moderate or significantly less ambitious than the ethicism proposed by Gaut. At the very least, Carroll should clarify how the ethical dimension he considers relevant to artistic assessment – the engagement of our “moral powers” – is less comprehensive than the dimension considered relevant by Gaut – the manifestation of ethically relevant attitudes.

In any event, whether a theory instantiates a moderate form of moralism does not depend, I have suggested, on the ethical dimension the theory concentrates on, but on what it claims about the relationship between the resulting ethical judgment and the

artistic judgment. Accordingly, I submit, if not further qualified, Carroll's view as originally proposed is a form of radical moralism as much as Gaut's ethicism, notwithstanding the fact that the former is formulated with regard to narratives only and the latter with regard to all works of art. Both theories are radically moralist, of course, with respect to the different (though largely overlapping) ethical dimensions each of them concentrates upon.

Carroll's view can be considered a form of moderate moralism only if it admits of the existence of genres or kinds of works for which the systematic relationship between ethical and artistic value obtains differently than in the paradigmatic example offered above, or fails to obtain altogether. One could claim that that is precisely what Carroll, at least in his more recent defenses of his view, wants to claim. He states, for instance, that "[m]oderate moralism maintains that in some instances a moral defect in an artwork can be an aesthetic defect, and that sometimes a moral virtue can count as an aesthetic virtue" (Carroll 1998c, 419). However, *this* claim, again, should be specified to clearly indicate whether Carroll is thinking of kinds of works, or genres, which, though such that they do have ethical defects or virtues, escape the moralist charge that such defects or virtues must count artistically.

In fact, I believe that Carroll would probably opt for such a claim and in that way clearly differentiate his view from the more extreme view proposed by Gaut. But this belief is partly grounded on a recent specification of his theory made by Carroll, one which amounts to introducing an autonomist element in the theory.

In his perhaps most comprehensive account of these issues, and one more properly centered around the question of the ethical criticism of art rather than the issue of the improvement of our moral understanding through art, Carroll finally gives a clarification of how his version of moralism is moderate in the sense that only for *some* artworks do ethical defects count aesthetically. As an explanation of the fact that “[m]oderate moralism does not claim that every defect in an artwork is an aesthetic defect,” (2000, 378) Carroll adds:

Artworks can be immensely subtle in terms of their moral commitments. Morally defective portrayals may elude even morally sensitive audiences and may require careful interpretation to be unearthed. But the moderate moralist will not, in addition, criticize them aesthetically, if they are so subtle as to escape a morally sensitive audience. Moderate moralism is not, then, committed to the proposition that every moral defect in an artwork is an aesthetic defect. (Carroll 2000, 378)

Below, when assessing Carroll’s argument for his version of moralism (Chapter 6), I will question whether this claim about moral defects so subtle that not even morally sensitive audiences (conceived of by Carroll as “ideally morally sensitive,” 2000, 378) is a tenable notion, if a coherent one. For now, however, I shall limit myself to spelling out what this claim says about Carroll’s view, with regard to the sort of view it is.

Allowing for works of art that embody moral defects in such subtle ways that morally sensitive audiences will not be able to detect them might amount to introducing an element of autonomism into Carroll’s moderate moralism. For those works whose immorality passes undetected do not even seem to belong to any identifiable *kind* of work, or genre, but rather appear to be individual exceptions to the moralist’s statement

about the bearing of a certain kind of value on the artistic value of works of a certain kind. At the very least, the moderate moralist should address the question of how such a view can still be a form of moralism, rather than autonomism. Moralism is *moderate* if it allows for the existence of kinds of works, or genres, for which their ethical value fails to bear systematically on their artistic value. However, a moderate view is a form of *moralism* only if it states that there are kinds of works, or genres, for which the relationship between ethical and artistic value does operate systematically. Hence, when a moralist begins allowing for exceptions, as on the view that Carroll (2000) seems to be defending, he should clarify whether exceptions are allowed for any of the possible kinds of works, or genres. For if that is the claim, then the theory is giving into the autonomist claim that the two forms of value are not systematically related. If the relationship between ethical and artistic value is no longer considered systematic, then we are left with a theory analogous to the claim that, typically, the more beautiful a painting, the more expensive it is, and yet *some* paintings are, say, financially *less* valuable precisely because of their beauty. In fact, how to interpret Carroll's view in light of the above remarks is a question worth pursuing a little further.

As it will be discussed below, Carroll's theory is one based on the notion of response. In a nutshell, Carroll's moderate moralism amounts to the claim that some works of art fail because, as a consequence of the immoral outlook they embody, they fail to receive from morally sensitive audiences the responses works of that kind aim at eliciting. Accordingly, Carroll's remarks on those works that embody moral defects but

in so subtle a way as to pass undetected can be interpreted as claiming that such works do not fail to receive the response they aim to elicit – the audiences are not blocked from responding in the prescribed manner. Accordingly, I submit, there are two possible interpretations of Carroll’s remarks above. According to one of them, the view is indeed a form of moralism but the above remarks have nothing to do with the theory being moderate. According to the other possible interpretation, which I shall claim to be closer to Carroll’s intentions, the qualification does amend his moralism but by allowing an autonomist component into it.

The first possible interpretation is that the moral defects of such works do not have anything to do with the prescribed responses. If so, then, once again, Carroll, by allowing for these exceptions is not defining a moderate version of moralism but rather just concentrating, as appropriate, on one dimension of ethical assessment and not others. If, instead, those moral defects are claimed to be related to the prescribed responses, and such works simply to be such that they do not succeed in receiving such responses from morally sensitive audiences, then Carroll is indeed allowing for individual exceptions, hence allowing an autonomist commitment precisely for the sort of ethical value and the kinds of works he has claimed his moralism to be applying to. I would suggest that the latter of these two interpretations is probably what Carroll would opt for, partly because it does indeed match better what the author says, partly because it is indeed a version of the theory that would differ significantly from Gaut’s ethicism.

Whatever the truth about these specific matters, there should be sufficient evidence, by now, that the taxonomy I here propose, with its characterization of radical and moderate autonomism, and of radical and moderate moralism – distinguished from reductionist approaches, relative to the ethical dimension that a theory deems relevant, and arising from different answers given to crucial questions on the relationship between such value and the value of art – is largely preferable to the taxonomy presented by Carroll. Carroll and those following his categorization merge into radical autonomism elements of normative theories and formalistic tenets that need not be considered in this debate. Carroll also conflates radical moralism and reductionism.²² Finally, he characterizes the distinction between moderate autonomism and moderate moralism in terms of ethical defects counting as artistic defects none of the time, or some of the time, respectively. Such taxonomy, however, obscures important distinctions and similarities between theories, distinctions and similarities, which, by contrast, can be easily accounted for within the framework I propose. Furthermore, probing the theories proposed, in light of the taxonomy I recommend has brought to the surface the necessity of disambiguating some crucial claims made by these theorists, as shown by my discussion of Anderson's and Dean's view as well as my discussion of Carroll's view.

¹ How unpopular in the United States the ethical criticism of art had become, especially due to the dominance of the New Criticism movement, is vividly recounted by Wayne Booth (1988, especially 3-8).

² See, e.g., Kivy (1980), Kulka (1981), Hermerén (1983, 53-75); Stecker (1997), Levinson (1987a), and Levinson (1996a). See also, on aesthetic properties, Levinson (2001).

³ I leave aside the interesting question of whether the artistic value of a work, considered as partly dependent on artistic properties having to do with the history of art, can be legitimately considered to change over time. The most interesting property that might appear to depend on what happens after the creation of a work is that of the work's influence on the future development of art (and, perhaps, culture). For an interesting discussion of this and related issues, see Levinson (1987a and 1996) and Stecker (2002). Influence as an artistic property is investigated by Hermerén (1975) and Goldman (1993).

⁴ To the extent that one takes one sort of evaluation as legitimately bearing on an evaluation of another sort, even within a subjectivist framework, some constraints in terms of internal coherence of one's judgments might very well apply. The issue of internal coherence in one's aesthetic judgments, though not specifically with regard to the bearing of ethical considerations on artistic judgments, is nicely investigated in Cohen (1998).

⁵ See also the account of Sidney's view in Beardsmore (1971).

⁶ Beardsmore (1971, Chap. 2) treats Tolstoy's theory as one that reduces the value of art to moral value, and art criticism to moral criticism. Beardsmore's understanding of "reductionism," however, is different from mine, since it conflates reductionism and what I call, below, radical moralism.

⁷ Cf. Stecker (2003).

⁸ Théophile Gautier, in his *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1835), stated that "nothing is truly beautiful except that which can serve for nothing; whatever is useful is ugly" (quoted in Whewell 1992, 6). And, of course, see also Oscar Wilde's claim that "all art is quite useless," in his "Preface" to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* ([1891] 1974). For a criticism, from an autonomist perspective, of the confusion between, on the one hand, the issue of whether art can have ulterior, and in particular ethical, functions, and artworks with such functions be valuable (and presumably be such that their artistic value be unaffected by their having ulterior values) with, on the other hand, the issue of the legitimacy of ethical criticism, see Isenberg ([1953] 1973, 274).

⁹ The term "ulterior" need not suggest that whatever those other values have to contribute to the assessment of a work of art as art is peripheral. The term occurs, for instance, in George Santayana, when he claims: "Ulterior judgment, practical and moral, will inevitably color every perception given to a rational creature. To say that simultaneous reactions do not affect aesthetic feeling is to walk the tight rope of artificial distinctions" (quoted in Isenberg [1953] 1973, 265).

¹⁰ Strictly speaking, a "purist" claim about art is not incompatible with the legitimacy of the ethical criticism of art. One could maintain that, though the morality or immorality of a work positively or negatively bears on its value as a work of art, the very fact that the work performs some non-artistic

function (e.g., that of being morally educational) subtracts, by its very existence, some value from the work, possibly more value than the value that that function, when positive, adds to it. Personally, I do not see the motivation for holding a theory like this one but, at any rate, it would not be incompatible with the ethical criticism of art.

¹¹ On Hanslick, see Budd (1992). On the New Criticism movement, see Weston (1992, especially 93).

¹² Pole (1983) holds a view along these lines, according to what claimed by Gaut (1998b, 190).

¹³ In fact, the moderate moralist position should itself be seen as a family of positions, depending on whether the claim is that, for the specified kinds of works, ethical value *always* counts artistically or only *usually* or *generally*. Such positions, however, still are different from autonomism for their maintaining that a systematic relationship holds for kinds of works.

¹⁴ Notice that the radical moralist does not claim that artworks of all kinds have an ethical dimension but only that, for artworks of all kinds, when they can be judged ethically, their ethical value bears on their artistic value in a certain way. Accordingly, moralism, even of the radical sort, is not subject to the objection I raised above to moral reductionism, namely, that there are artworks, even narratives, that have no ethical dimension.

¹⁵ Indeed, the notion of genre is going to play an important role in my own account below (Chapter 7).

¹⁶ Of course, the terms “moralism” and “autonomism” had been used before Carroll’s contributions to this debate, e.g., by Isenberg (1953), Beardsmore (1971), and Beardsley (1981).

¹⁷ More interesting, though not relevant to the present discussion, is Wilde’s identifying, after all, an ethical function of aesthetically good art. David Cooper has emphasized the importance of taking Wilde’s aphorisms in context as well as of considering the “Wildean irony and a desire to *épater les bourgeois*” (Cooper 1992a, 442). Furthermore, Cooper claims that “despite the ‘immoralist ring’ to some of his remarks, it is clear that the mature Wilde had a deep concern for the moral condition of man and believed that art had a vital role to play in improving it” (Cooper 1992a, 443).

¹⁸ In Gass’s view, these values are: knowledge, “the values of duty and obligation,” “appreciative values of all kinds, including the beauties of women, art, and nature, the various sublimes, and that pleasure that comes from the pure exercise of human faculties and skills,” the “values of self-realization and its attendant pleasures [...] frequently called happiness,” and the values “which have to do with real or imagined redemption, with ultimate justice and immortality” (1987, 109). In fact, one of the main concerns of Gass (1993) is that of declaring that no value is subordinate to any other. Such issue, however, is independent of the issue of whether ethical value has bearings on artistic value.

¹⁹ It is perhaps worth recalling that Bell does, after all, see a moral function for art but simply because art is “the most direct and potent [means to good states of mind] that we possess.” ([1914] 1987, 114)

²⁰ One such specification could be that one’s dinner companion is an artist who just published a book on triangular objects.

²¹ Of course, the autonomist’s claim cannot simply be that such narratives would then become excessively sentimental, or their characters become unrealistically too good, and hence that the narratives would be

artistically defective because of *that*, for even the moralist could, in my view, acknowledge such a fact (see Chapter 7 below).

²² Notice that radical moralism as characterized by Carroll does not just claim that ethical defects always count as aesthetic defects (and ethical virtues as aesthetic virtues) but also that all aesthetic defects and virtues are ethical in nature.

Chapter 4

ETHICAL EVALUATIONS

1. Introduction.

Artworks can be assessed morally in many ways. In general, three such ways derive from the fact that an artwork typically is an object, which is the product of human action (indeed, of a set of actions), and which is to be used in certain ways.¹ Since my focus here is on narratives and not on any sort of artwork, I shall concentrate only on the different ways in which the former, not the latter, can be ethically assessed. Hence, in this work, I discuss only the three main respects in which narratives usually are ethically criticized, that is, a) for their *consequences* on readers or spectators, b) for the *means* of their *production*, and c) for the *ethical perspective* they appear to endorse. I discuss the first two of these dimensions of ethical judgment in the present chapter, and the last one in Chapter 7.

In fact, the language and practice of criticism is often not explicit about its ethical assumptions, and hence it is to be expected that, when a narrative is evaluated from the

ethical point of view, it would not always be spelled out on what grounds the work is being criticized. Furthermore, the abovementioned ways of evaluating narratives ethically do not exclude each other: a narrative can be praise- or blame-worthy at once for its consequences on its perceivers, for its means of production, or for the ethical perspective it endorses. Yet these three different ways of being moral or immoral are analytically distinguishable one from the other and possibly underwrite different relationships with the artistic value of a work. And, of course, a narrative can be praised for, say, the message it conveys, and yet be criticized for the way the narrative was produced. Accordingly, it is helpful that these three ways of succeeding or failing from the ethical point of view be treated separately.

An additional qualification is needed. That the different ways of ethically judging a narrative can be distinguished one from the other does not imply that the facts relevant to one sort of judgment cannot be relevant to judgments of other sorts as well. For instance, that a narrative has certain consequences may be relevant, perhaps in conjunction with other facts (e.g., that the author could foresee such consequences), to the identification of the narrative's ethical perspective.

In fact, distinguishing between the above three ways of ethically assessing narratives has the special advantage of forcing us to clarify also some of the claims that philosophers have made with respect to the ethical criticism of art, most notably with respect to what has been a central way to praise or blame narratives ethically, namely, for their improving or worsening, morally, their perceivers. When encountering

philosophical views emphasizing this aspect of art narratives, it will be advisable to clarify whether the claim concerns the consequences of some narratives – that they improve or worsen people’s ethical behavior – or rather the status of the ethical perspective they express – one that might be enlightening (because enlightened) or confusing (because confused).²

In principle, an investigation of the legitimacy of the ethical criticism of art narratives should consider arguments for the bearing of ethical value on artistic value for each of the abovementioned ways of ethically assessing narratives. However, contemporary debate has ultimately concentrated, for the most part, on the bearing of the status of what I have called the narrative’s ethical perspective on the narrative’s artistic value. Indeed, this chapter aims at discussing the ethical judgment of narratives on the basis of consequences and on the basis of their means of production so that these two dimensions of ethical assessment can eventually be set aside, and the judgment of a narrative’s ethical perspective be identified as central to an argument for the ethical criticism of art. For such argument need not only be successful but also relevant, i.e., it must support a theory that is both sufficiently comprehensive and focused on central aspects of the evaluation of narratives. My conclusion will be that concentrating on the ethical evaluation of a narrative’s perspective is indeed the most appropriate thing to do, for the ethical perspective of a narrative is the object of an ethical evaluation that most directly addresses the nature of the work, and an evaluation that has the best chances of

being artistically relevant in a systematic way, for narratives in any media. But the other forms of ethical evaluation of narratives should nonetheless be acknowledged.

2. Judging Consequences.

As items subject to public consumption, narratives can be ethically assessed for the consequences they have over their audiences or even over communities wider than those audiences. Consequences can be, so to say, small-scale or large-scale. Ignazio Silone's novel *Fontamara* is said to have had a role in the uprising against Fascism in Italy, Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in the start of the American Civil War. Those are the kind of consequences that can be called large-scale. Sometimes artworks have large-scale consequences over groups of people not entirely overlapping with the actual audiences of the work. Sadly, Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* surely made many people upset though they never actually read the book (indeed they were forbidden from reading it).³

Consequences can, of course, be small-scale. Someone may be hurt or pleased, for instance, by recognizing herself in the main character of a novel. As described in E. M. Forster's *Room with a View*, Miss Lucy Honeychurch is made very upset by her finding out that her confidant and writer, Mrs. Eleanor Lavish, has included a description of the heroine's first kiss with Mr. George Emerson in her latest book, *Under a Loggia*. Likewise, the main character in Woody Allen's *Manhattan* confesses that, after his

former wife has published an autobiography revealing details of their marital relationship, he is living in the past.

By no means should the above-mentioned examples of small-scale consequences strike one as isolated cases, or as instances that are found in fiction only, for every one of us probably has some narrative to cite as having had effects on oneself, some trivial some important. Wayne Booth, for instance, recalls, among other things: having read more about medieval monasteries after reading Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*; having found himself wondering, about an African-American couple, whether the bruise on the wife's cheek was a sign of abuse by her husband, after viewing Stephen Spielberg's *The Color Purple*; and having sent a contribution to Amnesty International after attending a performance of Athol Fugard's *A Lesson from Aloes* (Booth 1988, 229 and 278-279).

Ethically relevant consequences can be of different kinds. Indeed, art criticism, when concerned with the consequences of a narrative on its perceivers, appears to concentrate mostly on the narrative's *behavioral* consequences. Especially in the criticism of works of mass art, when the consequences of a narrative are the object of ethical evaluation, for the most part that is to the effect of claiming that the narrative in question is ethically *ameliorative* or, in contrast, ethically *corruptive*, in the sense that the narrative allegedly leads people to act in a better or worse way, whether through the effects of the moment or because of changes the narrative allegedly produces in the character of readers, listeners, and spectators.

Indeed, it should not be surprising that in many cases the consequences a work has on an individual perceiver are consequences on his or her behavior. Reading, viewing, or listening to a narrative can be fairly an engaging experience, cognitively and emotionally, and such an experience surely can have important effects on a person's outlook on things, dispositions, and character – all dimensions that are intimately connected to a person's behavior.⁴ And, as far as large-scale consequences are concerned, some of the examples mentioned above should suffice to show how narratives might sometimes have behavioral consequences even over a very large number of people.

However, as shown by the examples above, a narrative can also just hurt someone's feelings. Or it can change one's outlook on things, for the better or the worse, though with no effects on one's behavior, as when one realizes what the real nature of a war conflict in some remote part of the world is, but without taking any steps, if possible, to influence the events or even to show one's own new persuasion. Hence, some consequences appear to be ethically relevant just on the grounds of the harm they cause – or, for that matter, the harm they prevent – or for some other good or evil they bring about, independently of any effect on people's behavior.

Accordingly, in order to offer a unified analysis, I will concentrate on the notion of *response*, broadly construed and not limited to those responses that bring about changes in behavior. Below, the ethical judgment of a narrative in terms of its consequences will amount, then, to the judgment of the cognitive, emotional, and conative responses the narrative causes in its perceivers. Of course, this is not to deny

that the change in outlook on things, the arousal of certain emotions, or the developing of certain desires may also bring about behavioral changes in some perceivers, and can be ethically judged for them. Yet, concentrating on the notion of response makes it possible to include a wider range of ethically relevant consequences as objects of judgment. Indeed, some of such consequences are precisely of the kind that seem of interest to several contemporary philosophers and critics, for surely a narrative can be said to be ameliorative or corruptive not only when it actually affects its perceivers' behavior, but also when it just leads people to having an appropriate or inappropriate outlook, emotion, or desire with respect to some event or state of affairs.⁵

It is worth mentioning that, on this approach, only apparently is attention withdrawn from the narrative's large-scale consequences. In fact, when films, novels, TV shows, video-musical clips, and so on, are attributed ameliorative or corruptive powers over society as a whole, it is for the most part as a result of whatever ameliorative or corruptive power the narrative allegedly has on the individual reader or viewer or listener of it.⁶ If *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had the consequence of contributing to the Northern states of the Union siding in favor of the emancipation of the American slaves, it was thanks to a new awareness the novel brought about in its individual readers. This is also going to be my own approach to the matter – looking at what I called small-scale consequences of narratives, assuming that the most significant large-scale consequences arise from them.⁷

It should also be considered that different ethical theories have different ways of assessing consequences – by looking, e.g., at the amounts of pleasure and pain produced, or at the satisfaction of legitimate preferences. A philosophical investigation of the bearings of ethical value on the artistic value of narratives will be stronger provided that it remains neutral with respect to the competing ethical theories – hence is general in that respect – and yet, at the same time, remains relevant to the actual practice of narrative criticism – hence it is not overly general. Accordingly, I will consider responses to be ethically relevant in the sense that it is, ethically speaking, a good or a bad thing that they occur. Such an approach should be broad enough, and hence neutral with respect to competing ethical theories. Not being necessarily linked to a hedonistic approach, it allows us to consider, say, with respect to a racist narrative, as evil consequences both the harm caused to the victims of the work’s racism and the entertainment provided to the racist perceiver.

Grounding an ethical evaluation of a narrative on the responses the narrative causes in the narrative’s *perceivers* has several advantages. First of all, it allows us to exclude, as irrelevant to the ethical evaluation of a narrative, consequences among wider “audiences,” such as those that reacted to Rushdie’s *Satanic Verses* without having directly experienced the narrative. A narrative is accessed by reading it, viewing it, listening to it, according to the medium employed. Therefore, it is plausible to exclude as *not* being consequences *of the narrative* those consequences that have nothing to do with accessing it in the appropriate way.⁸ Secondly, it allows us to concentrate only on

consequences affecting the audience appropriate to a given narrative, so that if, say, a novel that is meant for a grown-up public has negative consequences on a young reader who should not have read it in the first place, this can be considered of no fault for the novel.

Admittedly, in some cases the mere introduction of a narrative in a context might imply an ethical evaluation of the narrative itself, even as regards consequences on those who are not perceivers of it. Cheap thrillers exploiting real-life tragic events from the news may be criticized partly because of the outrage they create among the communities of the victims, including those people who refuse to even experience the work in question.⁹ In such cases, it may not be implausible to consider the narrative itself as an appropriate object of ethical blame. A possible argument in this sense could perhaps start from categorizing the production of the plot included in the script, screenplay, or novel as an act of exploitation of the tragedy that actually happened, hence from conceiving the real-life tragedy as part of the very means of production of the work.¹⁰ Or the argument may emphasize how a narrative exploiting such facts ultimately fails to show, by its very existence in the given context, say, the appropriate sense of condemnation towards those who brought about the tragedy, or the appropriate sense of respect for those who suffered it – hence could be condemned for its outlook on things. Even when, as in most cases, the narrative seems to condemn the criminals and show sympathy for the victims, one may legitimately suspect the sincerity of such attitudes of condemnation and sympathy, on the grounds that the very narrative uses, to its own success, what the criminal acts had

helped build in the audience's imagination. Moreover, as suggested, often such narratives are cheap, and one way of being cheap is to present a story, exploiting the popularity of the real events, without attempting any complex elaboration of or meditation on the suffering of those involved.¹¹

Whatever happens to be the case, the ethical assessment of such works depends on dimensions other than the sole consequences of the work, namely, on the means of production or on the work's perspective. Hence, the artistic relevance of that judgment, too, depends on what can be said about those other dimensions of ethical assessment. Indeed, in such cases even the evil consequences on audiences broadly conceived appear to be brought about by their being immoral products of exploitation or by their embodying inadequate approaches to what they narrate. Hence, these interesting but special cases can be left to the side. Moreover, even if in special cases the ethical evaluation of a work might be grounded in the responses given by *non-perceivers* of the work, it is unlikely that such an ethical assessment could have a legitimate claim to artistic relevance. As was suggested at the opening of Chapter 3, when judging a work from one sort of point of view it may be relevant to take into account the evaluative results reached from a point of view of a different kind. However, the possibility of intersections between values of different sorts by no means denies, but rather assumes, the existence of a point of view from which artworks are evaluated as works of art, in contrast to evaluating them as investments, objects of personal satisfaction, and so on. Even less controversial should it be to assume, as I am going to do, that typically

experiencing a narrative as such, that is, for instance, reading a novel, viewing a film, attending at a play, is a necessary condition for evaluating the narrative from the artistic point of view. The value of a work of art as a work of art, even once it is broadly conceived as including things like the work's influence on the history of art (see Chapter 3 above), must be limited to the value as it is determined with respect to those – artists, critics, and art lovers in general – who have actually experienced the work.

Concentrating on the notion of response has the additional advantage of indicating a way to dismiss as irrelevant to the ethical evaluation of a narrative some of its behavioral consequences. There is a well-known sort of response, known to media researchers as the “copycat phenomenon,” which has had many instances, among which some striking examples. When Rod Serling's TV movie, *The Doomsday Flight*, was first aired in 1966, a series of bomb threats, some of which were of the very same sort as the one depicted in the movie, were reported. The film's director himself publicly apologized and asked for the movie not to be broadcasted ever again.¹² The alleged influence need not follow the copycat phenomenon so closely. Apparently, Jeffrey Dahmer confessed to have been influenced in his killings and cannibalistic rituals by the movie *The Exorcist III* even though that movie does not include any references to cannibalism.

Immediately, such reported facts appear to be extraneous to the actual nature of those movies, and only very implausibly appealed to in evaluating them from the ethical point of view. Noël Carroll, who mentions the Dahmer case in the context of discussing

the consequences of works of mass art on audiences, emphasizes the fact that such consequences were not predictable and that no generalization, to the effect that similar behavioral consequences could be expected on other, normal people, would be possible: “How could anyone predict on the basis of looking at *The Exorcist III* that anyone would behave as Dahmer did? How can one extrapolate from the case of Dahmer to that of normal people?” (1998a, 302). Carroll’s protest is justified, if perhaps not expressed in the best way. In fact, in principle a narrative may be blamed or praised even for consequences that were not exactly predictable at the time of its production, if some sort of *moral luck* may apply to narratives as well as to actions and people.¹³ Furthermore, that the only consequences that matter are those on *normal* people remains an empty requisite until the relevant sense of normality has been specified. Granted, a serial cannibalistic killer such as Dahmer was not normal. Yet “normal” cannot just be equated with “average,” for the obvious problems arising with works appealing to, or vice versa offending, only small groups in society – say, the racists or the members of a minority. Surely there is something ethically worrisome in a narrative that appeals to the sentiments of radical racists in society, or in one that offends the members of an ethnic minority, even if radical racists or ethnic minorities are not quite representative of the *average* member of society.

Perhaps, given the fact that narratives most of the time are offered to potentially large audiences, we should look at their behavioral consequences first and foremost on somewhat representative perceivers, such as those who share an ideology or an ethnicity

or a social condition in society. One obvious problem with the above proposal has to do with how the notion of a representative perceiver is to be defined. The problem can be exemplified by recalling what followed the broadcasting, in 1984, of another film for television, *The Burning Bed*, starring Farrah Fawcett Majors as a heavily abused wife who eventually sees no other escape but that of killing her husband by setting his bed on fire. After the movie, which incidentally claims to recount a true story, was broadcasted, some real-life battered wives apparently decided to murder their husbands, in some cases in precisely the same manner as described in the movie.¹⁴ If those women are to be considered representative perceivers, then the movie should be partly blamed for the deaths that occurred, according to the suggested criterion.

The truth of the matter is that we know very little about the behavioral consequences of works of art on their perceivers, as Carroll emphasizes (1998a, Chapter 5).¹⁵ After all, a person's behavior is the result of so many factors that an ethical assessment of narratives based on their behavioral consequences would end up being either too narrow – including only those narratives that successfully aim at affecting their perceivers' behavior, such as propaganda pieces – or too broad – including as relevant consequences that seem attributable more to the nature of the perceiver than to that of the artwork itself. Hence, we are well-advised to look at the notion of response instead.

Abandoning the attention to behavioral consequences in favor of the notion of response does not, however, solve all the problems, for there are idiosyncratic responses as well as idiosyncratic forms of behavior following from narratives. Shortly, I will

propose that these problems be solved by reference to the correct interpretation of a work. The result of such proposal will be, however, equivalent to abandoning the criterion of ethical evaluation in terms of a narrative's consequences in favor of an evaluation of the point of view or perspective endorsed by the narrative.

As an instance of what can be named the *idiosyncratic response problem*, let us consider that of a perfectly normal person responding with anger against homosexuality or even becoming firmer in his homophobic feelings after seeing, say, Frank Oz's film comedy, *In & Out*. Such a perceiver could not be discounted as merely abnormal or non-representative of a group, for surely there are many people in our society who share the same prejudices against gay people.

Accordingly, I suggest that we look for solutions to the idiosyncratic response problem not in the nature of the *perceiver* but rather in the nature of the perceiver's *experience* of the work. It will soon be clear that this is an area where more analytic progress can be made, and without having to rely on problematic psychological and normative categories such that of the "normal."

Thus, suppose someone is made angry or even firmer in his homophobic feelings, precisely as a consequence of seeing *In & Out*, in which the main character, played by Kevin Kline, realizes and confesses to be a homosexual on the very eve of his long-awaited wedding. The most natural proviso to address the idiosyncratic response problem vis-à-vis a case like this is to require that the work be experienced *correctly*. If the work is successful in calling for the responses it prescribes and, nonetheless, some

perceivers respond with anger where they are supposed to respond with sympathetic irony, then they can be accused of experiencing the work incorrectly. Watching *In & Out* might very well have such consequences on some people, but only because they experience the movie in a way that is different from how it is in fact supposed to be experienced, failing to respond sympathetically for the right characters, failing to perceive situations as connoted by the film, etc.

Failure in experiencing a work in the correct way may be easily betrayed by failure in supporting one's responses by the correct set of reasons. Suppose that our hypothetical viewer justifies his anger by claiming that *In & Out* shows how disruptive homosexual behavior can be for the surrounding community – in the movie, that of the main character's family members and of his work place among others. Surely those are facts that one can indeed see portrayed in the movie. However, recalling those facts alone, with no mention of their being instrumental to showing how those communities are, thanks to the protagonist's coming out, led to come to terms with their own prejudices, clearly betrays a misinterpretation of the work. The movie has not simply been misunderstood but actually misapprehended – that is, experienced in a way that is different from the correct one.

Likewise, it could be claimed that *The Burning Bed* did not aim at eliciting in victims of abuse a sense of despair towards the prospects of receiving help from the appropriate authorities. Rather, the movie seems to recommend that women seek the help of social workers and organizations available.¹⁶ Those wives who responded to the

viewing of the movie by killing their abusive husbands, it could be claimed, failed to experience the work in the appropriate way – they failed to see an important point the movie was making.¹⁷

In fact, the requirement that only the consequences on perceivers who have correctly experienced the narrative should count is not without problems, for it does not rule out the possibility that a narrative, even when experienced correctly, may turn out to have consequences that should not be taken into account in an ethical evaluation of the work. Imagine a woman who correctly saw *The Burning Bed*, correctly apprehended the movie, including the exhortation to appeal to the appropriate authorities and professionals and then simply responded otherwise – “brought by” by the movie to thinking that there is really no hope for battered wives in our society. Or, perhaps more strikingly, imagine a viewer who correctly experiences Leni Riefendstahl’s *The Triumph of the Will* – correctly interprets the work, correctly participates in the film, responding in the ways it calls for, and so on – and yet, as a result, is moved away from the Nazi ideology, perhaps because she is now even more aware of its power, insidiously pervading the arts. That is, one could correctly experience Riefendstahl’s piece, correctly perceive the power of it as propaganda, and precisely because of that be moved away from the ideology it advertises. How can such a consequence, one that in the given case is ultimately *ameliorative*, be excluded from an ethical assessment of the work? That is, how can an effect such as the one described be kept from counting in favor of *The Triumph of the Will* as a morally educational, rather than corruptive, work?

One may suggest that the viewer of *The Triumph of the Will* admires Hitler as a consequence of seeing the film, but eventually hates Nazism even more solely as a consequence of having been brought to admire Hitler by the film. While admiring Hitler is a direct consequence of experiencing the film, one would claim, hating Nazism is an indirect consequence only. It is the direct consequences only, one may want to conclude, that matter to the ethical evaluation of a narrative.

Of course, one problem with such a proposal is the difficulty of separating direct from indirect consequences of experiencing a narrative. When Hitler watched *The Triumph of the Will* and felt, let us suppose, self-pride, was that a direct consequence of experiencing the narrative or an indirect one – perhaps a consequence of experiencing, thanks to the narrative, admiration towards himself? More worrisome problems derive from linking the ethical assessment of a narrative to the direct consequences of experiencing it. Some consequences that clearly are indirect may seem to be morally relevant. The success of a piece that advocates a certain point of view, for instance, is partly signaled by how many people end up sharing such a point of view. Hence, that becomes an issue of large-scale consequences the narrative is capable of bringing about. Yet, large-scale consequences often include effects that only indirectly are brought about by experiencing a narrative – they are often brought about by more direct responses to experiencing the work. If Silone's *Fontamara* truly contributed to mobilizing people against Fascism in Italy, that could safely be described as a partly indirect consequence of the emotional experience of reading the novel. More particularly, and most

importantly, it is the very notion often recalled in the ethical criticism of art – the educational or corruptive effects of narratives – that is endangered by excluding any consequence that is not a direct effect of experiencing a narrative. For when narratives are praised or blamed for leading their perceivers to ethical improvement or corruption, it is not very plausible to suppose that the alleged effects directly follow from experiencing the narrative, and not, for a large part, from reflecting upon one's engagement with that. Yet, if indirect consequences are admitted as potentially relevant to the ethical evaluation of a work, we are brought back to the idiosyncratic response problem.

The only promising solution to the idiosyncratic response problem is that of excluding, in the ethical evaluation of a narrative, any response that fails to correspond to the point of view embodied in the narrative. This way, *In & Out* cannot be judged for any condemning response to homosexuality – the work's perspective is obviously not that of condemnation. Nor can *The Triumph of the Will* be praised in virtue of anti-Nazi responses deriving from it, for the work's perspective is clearly sympathetic to Nazism.

In sum, the ethical judgment of the consequences of narratives on their perceivers, even when looked at in terms of responses rather than behavioral changes, fails to systematically correspond to a judgment of the narrative itself. Some of the responses that in fact follow from a narrative may be idiosyncratic, and hence their ethical nature fail to reflect the character of the work itself. For the responses to count towards an ethical evaluation of the narrative, it is not sufficient that they happen to be brought about by the work. They must also correspond to the nature of the work when correctly

apprehended – and that nature seems to include, constitutively, the narrative’s ethical perspective. Hence, the above discussion shows that the attention, when evaluating a narrative ethically for the responses it produces in its perceivers, should still primarily go to the perspective the work embodies, rather than to the responses themselves.

Moreover, the ethical perspective of a work can be judged ethically *independently* of the responses it in fact elicits. A narrative that espouses a racist point of view is ethically blameworthy because of that, whether its perceivers respond by endorsing, rejecting, or simply recognizing such a perspective.

Finally, it is the point of view or perspective embodied in a work that represents the best candidate for a dimension of ethical judgment that can also be claimed to have artistic relevance. For, as I will argue below in Chapter 7, the ethical perspective of a narrative is an integral part of a work. By contrast, responses, even when they correspond to the perspective of a work, largely depend on the nature of the perceivers as well; hence, they bring into the evaluation of a work elements that are contingent on the sort of people that happen to be perceiving the work.

All of this strongly suggests that the ethical perspective of a narrative is indeed the dimension of ethical judgment that an argument for the ethical criticism of art narratives should concentrate on. But, before drawing that conclusion, we must discuss another important dimension for the ethical evaluation of narratives – that in terms of the means of their production.

3. Means of Production.

The preceding discussion has established that narratives can be judged from the ethical point of view for the consequences they have on their perceivers but that for a judgment of this sort to be subject to a plausible standard of correctness, however, the consequences of the work must be assessed in light of the ethical perspective the work appears to possess. An alternative way of summing this up is by suggesting that the judgment of the work's consequences ultimately translates into a judgment of the work itself only to the extent that the consequences are such as would be welcomed by someone holding the perspective the work has. The conclusion that I will reach with regards to the ethical judgment of a narrative for the means of its production will, in part, be similar. Since our interest remains that of identifying the dimensions of ethical judgment of a narrative that can have a claim to enter into its artistic evaluation, it will turn out that often the judgment of the means of production is related to the judgment of the work's ethical perspective. The adoption of certain means for the production of a work quite often says something important about the perspective and the nature of the work itself, and indeed can enter in interesting relations – of consistency or rather of tension and contradiction – with the ethical perspective of a narrative. Perhaps, it is normally to be expected that a narrative produced by certain means has a perspective compatible with the perspective that someone adopting such means would adopt. Perhaps, when that does not happen, that may count against the hypothesis that the perspective is endorsed genuinely.

Yet, the main reason to abandon, eventually, the ethical assessment of the means of production as a dimension for artistic assessment will be a clear asymmetry between the claim of artistic relevance that the ethical status of the means of production can have within some art forms vis-à-vis others. Specifically, it is much easier to hold that those art forms that put us in contact with the means of production, as part of their content, may be affected by the means' ethical status in their artistic value; while those art forms for which the means of production are not similarly accessible through the work itself present much a harder case for any moralist claim.¹⁸ Since we are after a unified analysis of the bearing of ethical value on narratives, it is recommendable that we concentrate on an ethical dimension that pervades narratives produced in the different media. And that will be, I submit, the evaluation of the narrative's ethical perspective. Nonetheless, some features of the ethical assessment of narratives' means of production are worth exploring.

Insofar as artworks are entities brought about by human intervention, the question of the morality of the means utilized in such interventions may always naturally arise. Indeed, artworks are subject to ethical evaluation for the way they were produced simply because they are artifacts. Of course, when doing that, one judges *the product* while really, strictly speaking, what is worthy of blame or praise is the *way* it was produced. Yet, in a variety of other cases, that represents a broad application of evaluative language signaling something important about the object itself. We can speak of foie gras as immoral food even if what is really immoral – or so I am assuming for the sake of illustration – is the way it is produced. Hence, in itself, calling a narrative, say, immoral

because of the way it was produced corresponds to what we do with many other products of human action. Furthermore, attaching the ethical attribute to the object itself corresponds well to the related normative claim one may want to make with respect to the place certain objects should have in one's life, for certain items seem to contribute positively, others negatively, to the value of a life partly in virtue of how they were brought into existence.

The comparison with non-artistic products of human action is further enlightening for the preliminary investigation of the ethical judgment of narratives for their means of production and of its bearing on the work's artistic value. Consider that not everything that is brought about by questionable means is then automatically subject to a negative ethical judgment: the child that results from rape or the monstrous result of misguided genetic engineering, for instance, are not to be blamed. Of course, the reason may be that these sorts of objects, independently of how they were produced, have value in themselves. Yet, this is precisely the sort of claim that many may want to make of a work of art – that its value is intrinsic to it or at any rate independent of its means of production.

Moreover, even when the object can, according to ordinary usage, be given the ethical attribute, as in the case of foie gras, it is not clear whether that has anything to do with the value of the work from other points of view. Foie gras, for instance, does not seem to lose any of its culinary value because of its being produced by torturing geese.

In sum, for several reasons the question on whether the ethical judgment of a narrative with respect to the way it was produced has anything to do with its value as a narrative appears to have no straightforward answer. I will first present some general considerations regarding what should count as means of production of a work of art, and what seems to contribute to the question of artistic relevance. Then I will point out an important difference between media, namely, that with some media much more than with others we seem to be put in contact with the means of production; or, more generally, that with some media more than others, experiencing the work seems to include also experiencing the means of production. Further, I will point out the strange relation that there appears to be between a narrative's means of production and the narrative's ethical perspective – a relationship such that the ethical status of the perspective and of the means seem to be typically, but only contingently, aligned. And, finally, I will point out how the relationship between ethical and artistic value, when the ethical value is that derived from the means of production, is unsystematic, due to a paradox intrinsic to that relationship.

The means of production I will be concentrating on here are the materials used, including sitters for works of painting, sculpture, and photography, as well as actors and performers in theater, cinema, dance, and music, and the actions over those materials, directly related to the artwork's existence. The means of production are thus distinguished from the conditions of production, and the latter are not considered as possibly artistically relevant, not even when they can be argued to have been

irreplaceably necessary to the existence of some artworks. Hence, for instance, if abandoning his family was necessary to Paul Gauguin to be able to dedicate himself entirely to painting,¹⁹ his doing so should nonetheless not be considered among the means of production of any particular painting, and I will not discuss the hypothesis that it might be relevant artistically.²⁰

So circumscribed, the focus of attention leaves narratives in the literary medium almost completely out, yet, I am going to claim, rightly so. Of course, novels and other narrative literary pieces may be produced, in farfetched cases, by questionable means, saying by using someone's blood as ink (as reportedly Jack the Ripper tried to do for one of his letters, albeit not for artistic purposes). Yet, for the most part, examples of means of production that are subject to ethical evaluation are found mostly in the visual arts. In particular, feminist critics of pornography have emphasized how often pornographic films are produced by abusing the women that they portray.²¹ Perhaps the most famous example is that of Linda Boreman (later Linda Marchiano), who acted in *Deep Throat* under the pseudonym of Linda Lovelace, and who later denounced the physical and psychological abuses she had to suffer in the production of the movie. Andrea Dworkin quotes Marchiano: "every time someone watches that film, they [sic] are watching me being raped" (Dworkin 1989, XVI). Yet, examples of narratives produced by ethically questionable means exist outside the realm of pornography, though the evidence is often anecdotal. It seems, for instance, that in the making of Werner Herzog's *Fitzcarraldo*,

many Peruvian Indians were actually mistreated, especially in the shooting of the famous sequence in which a full size steamboat is pulled up a mountain.

The examples need not be so striking and rare. Consider, for instance, that “Westerns” – one of the staples of the Hollywood film industry – are characterized by battle scenes that, in the absence of the potentials of the new digital technology, would have not been possible without the use of invisible wires that had the result of injuring many of the horses involved.²²

I do not mean to exclude examples from other art forms. In architecture, for instance, insofar as the production of China’s Great Wall or of the Egyptian pyramids or of the Gothic cathedrals cost the lives of many, such works may be subject to an ethical judgment (even more so if it were to turn out that the building was produced by slave labor).²³ However, as far as *narratives* are concerned, I am skeptical that much will be found outside of the realm of the visual arts.

Furthermore, as far as the bearings of ethical value on artistic value are concerned, it is naturally easier to find examples of means of production that affect the work’s appearance or content, hence means of production the ethical status of which may have an easier claim to artistic relevance. In that respect, consider that, even if a novel were to be written with the blood of an innocent victim, that would not affect the “appearance” of the work or what the work is *about*. Likewise, in the architectural examples mentioned above, the appearance of the buildings is unaffected by the way they were produced. Curtis Brown (1995) has proposed what he calls an “autonomist

principle” in this regard, namely, that the history of production of a work is aesthetically relevant only if it affects its appearance or its content.²⁴ By applying this principle to Benvenuto Cellini’s *Nymph of Fontainebleau*, he claims that the value of the sculpture is not affected by the fact that, at the time Cellini was producing this work, he was physically abusing the model, Caterina, who most likely was the sitter for it. Brown does not provide a complete argument for his autonomist principle. Nor will I, although I happen to agree with his conclusion on the *Nymph of Fontainebleau*.

The principle seems to have some advantages, especially in excluding some means of production from any claim to artistic relevance. Consider, for instance, the chances that movies, being the products of a large industry, are partly produced by exploiting *some* people. *That* fact, no matter if blameworthy, seems to have nothing to do with the value of a film as art, however. The suggested principle provides a way to explain how this is so.

However, I am quite skeptical of a principle like the one suggested by Brown having the generality it aims at. Indeed, I suspect that any regulatory principle of the bearings of the ethical status of the means of production of a work of art on its value as art will turn out to be much more complex than what Brown proposes.²⁵ For such principle seems to work better with some art forms than with others. Consider, for instance, the Gothic cathedrals. Perhaps, to the extent that the *difficulty* of building them may have a legitimate, even an obvious – in my view – claim to artistic relevance, the lives that were lost in the production of them might have to be considered in the overall

artistic assessment of the work, albeit it is far from clear how that would affect the judgment. In any event, it seems that in different art forms, the artistic relevance of the ethical status of the means of production is different. Moreover, it seems that to the extent that a general principle can be found, it separates some arts from others in terms of the relevance of the means of production. To illustrate, let us briefly consider the principle that the moral status of the means of production counts artistically to the extent that experiencing the work of art puts us, as perceivers of the work, in contact with such means.

If an argument for the artistic relevance of the ethical status of the means of production of a work can be found, it is more likely to be found with respect to art forms that put us in direct contact with such means. Those do not just include instances of performance art, theater, and the like, where the spectator has direct contact with the performers, but also all art forms where there is an indirect contact, such as photography, film, and audio recordings. Brown (1995) has suggested, with respect to pornographic films portraying real abuses, that they do not just represent abuse, they are also recordings of a performance. His reasoning then continues by saying that “certain ideas are not just immoral, they are ugly” (Brown 1995). I actually believe that a more general claim is possible: some works of art put us in contact with the very instance of abuse, whether directly as with performance art and theater, or indirectly, through a photograph, a film, or an audio recording.²⁶ We may have legitimate ethical qualms about being put in contact with a real instance of abuse that is being brought about in order to produce a

work of art.²⁷ And these qualms can have artistic relevance if – I am just sketching an argument – one of the goals of the work is to make us enjoy entering in contact with what it portrays without qualms. This might damage, I submit, a movie like *Fitzcarraldo*, for if the above-mentioned scene really records real abuse, that fact may take away from the enjoyment that derives from entering in contact with it.

However, such a criterion for the artistic relevance of the means of production is obviously limited to those media that allow for contact between the work's perceiver and the work's means of production. Hence, it lacks the generality necessary to an argument for the legitimacy of the ethical criticism of narratives. Furthermore, even within the limited scope of such a criterion, the means of production alone may fail to be a reliable guide to the work's ethical status. To explain, consider that, at least in normal circumstances – that is, barring cases of coercion, akrasia, self-deception, and insanity – performing an action is a way to endorse it. Hence, when certain means of production are used, and the awareness of the means is part of the proper experience of the work (typically, because the work puts its perceiver in contact with those means), that suggests a corresponding ethical perspective. Narratives that are produced by performing x, y, z, and that put their perceivers in contact with x, y, z, must accept x, y, and z. However, I submit, the connection between the two dimensions is only contingent, for at least in principle one could produce a film that is, say, sympathetic towards abused women and yet do so by means of abusing women. In such a case, the ethical judgment of the means of production alone seems to miss something very important about the work, having to do

with the work's perspective. That would remain true even if, in such circumstances, one could easily claim that the work's ethical perspective would not seem to be genuinely held, and indeed that the inconsistency between the work's perspective and its means of production becomes itself subject of ethical concern and of artistic relevance. In any event, the ethical assessment of a narrative that concentrates on the means of production seems to be conducive or linked to an assessment of the work's perspective – of whether the narrative's point of view is one of approval of actions of that sort, yet only contingently so. Hence, it is not quite clear how systematic a possible dependency of the artistic value on the ethical status of its means of production could be. There is going to be no easy answer, for instance, to whether it is worse, artistically, to be the product of immoral means within an ethically blameworthy perspective or to be the product of the same means within a praiseworthy perspective.

Finally, there is perhaps a paradox embedded in the production of art that might make this dimension of ethical judgment even less of a systematic guide to artistic assessment. For, on the one hand, the artistically valuable result seems to be redeeming of any immorality, and invites us to forget the immorality itself, perhaps even making us appreciate the difficulty of execution that *includes* the immoral means in question; and yet, on the other hand, art seems to be all too trivial when compared to some of the harm that the production of it has caused.

The above discussion indicates quite clearly that, while the means of production of a narrative can be subject to ethical judgment, the claim for possible artistic relevance

of such judgments has different plausibility for different art forms, and in any event likely exhibits an unsystematic relationship with the work's ethical perspective.

4. Conclusion.

Given the results of the discussion of consequences of narratives and of narratives' means of production, it is clear that an argument for the ethical criticism of narratives be better grounded on some other ethical dimension – a dimension appropriately referring to the nature of the work, as well as one relevant to narratives in any medium. Hence, following much of contemporary philosophical debate, I will concentrate, in Chapter 7, on the ethical status of narratives' ethical perspectives, conceived of as expressive of the nature of the work. Yet, contrary to a good part of such debate, and consequent on the analyses developed in the present chapter, I will consider the judgment of a narrative's perspective as having no necessary dependence or bearing on the judgment of the narrative for its consequences or for its means of production.

¹ Of course, regarding the claim that typically artworks are the product of human action, the art of the *objet trouvé* is nothing but a special case, in which a preexisting object is turned into an art object by human actions, such as isolating it, putting it into a different context, calling attention to some of its properties, etc. See Walton (1970), Levinson (1979), Danto (1981), and Dickie (1984).

² This distinction will be important, for instance, when categorizing Noël Carroll's view (see Chap. 6, sect. 2).

³ For an interesting discussion of some ethical consequences of Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Silone's *Fontamara*, and Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*, see Hanne (1995, Chaps. 3, 4, and 6). Naturally, this sort of examples relates to an issue different from that of the ethical criticism of art, namely, the relationship between art and ideology. For a discussion of the latter issue, limited to mass art but of more general relevance, see Carroll (1998a, Chap. 6).

⁴ Of course, some of the mechanisms behind such behavioral effects may have to do with the psychological mechanisms of narrative participation investigated in Chaps. 1 and 2 above.

⁵ Of course, a narrative refers to or is about not just the events and states of affairs that it narrates: *Uncle Tom's Cabin* narrates Tom's life events but more generally is about slavery in the pre-Civil War States.

⁶ Of course, sometimes mass art is accused precisely of homogenizing the contents of a society, with a consequent loss of individuality (see, e.g., MacDonald 1953). Yet, even a claim of that kind can be rephrased in terms of small-scale consequences, as that of mass artworks allegedly de-individualizing the individual.

⁷ Such a focus on the individual well accords with a change of approach among social scientists interested in the mass effects of the media (cf. Sparks 2002).

⁸ Those are better described as consequences of *the fact that* the narrative exists, in conjunction, of course, with other factors.

⁹ It was wise, then, of Ridley Scott to cut from his *Hannibal* the subplot that was going to be dedicated to a real-life serial killer in Florence.

¹⁰ Incidentally, *The Satanic Verses* are very different in this respect, for, rather than being exploitative, they themselves were used by a political regime.

¹¹ If Novitz's (1995) distinction between messages conveyed *in* works of art and messages conveyed *through* them is viable, then these may be cases in which the message in the work (of sympathy for the victims) is at odds with the message conveyed through the work (of merely exploiting the victims' misfortune). In any event, the ethical assessment does not have the narrative's consequences as its object.

¹² See Liebert (1973). See also Sparks (2002).

¹³ For the notion of moral luck, applied to people's actions and lives, see Nagel (1976).

¹⁴ See Sparks (2002, 73).

¹⁵ See also Hamilton (2003).

¹⁶ I am assuming that this analysis of the movie is correct, for the sake of explanation. Does *The Burning Bed* really do that? At the end of the movie, the protagonist is acquitted of the charge of murder on the grounds of having acted in self-defense. By my lights, the film does not make an effort to investigate whether that was an instance of excessive self-defense. Moreover, the movie portrays the protagonist's failures in getting appropriate help from the authorities (the police force in the first instance). If self-defense applies, in consideration of the circumstances, why should not that apply in the eyes of anyone else who may see herself in very similar sets of circumstances? Surely the filmmakers were not foreseeing such dramatic consequences for their work; yet, as regards the sort of message the movie conveys it is, in my view, much more ambiguous and multifaceted than in the analysis I am here assuming.

¹⁷ I am committing myself to a fairly strong objectivism here, by assuming that there is such a thing as a distinction between correct and incorrect ways of experiencing a work. I am not assuming, however, that there is only *one* correct way to experience a work. Objectivism is compatible with pluralism. Not only are there some works that call for different sorts of experience, all of which are correct, but it cannot be excluded that many more if not all narratives, may allow for a plurality of correct experiences – most notably the first-timer's, on the one hand, and the expert's, on the other. A somewhat analogous claim has been made, for instance, with regards to music, where the set of correct experiences has been maintained to comprise the listener's, the performer's, as well as the first-timer's (see Levinson 1987b).

¹⁸ Of course, by this I do not mean to imply that the means of production, and the perceiver's awareness of them, are relevant to the understanding and correct appreciation of an artwork only when the perceiver can be in contact with them. Awareness of what went into the making of an artwork is typically constitutive of that contextual knowledge that is necessary to understand and properly appreciate a work, whether or not as perceivers we are in direct contact with the means of production. My claim is only limited to pointing out an asymmetry, regarding a defense of the ethical criticism of art based on the means or production, between those media that allow for (and require) a direct contact with such means and those media that do not.

¹⁹ The example was first discussed by Williams (1976), for its implications to moral theory.

²⁰ On the other hand, I am not suggesting that such conditions of production should be treated as on the same level as metaphysically trivial ones, such as that Gaugin had to be born, or be genetically made the way he was.

²¹ See, e.g., MacKinnon (1989 and 1993). Of course, this is only one of the complaints that feminist thinkers, including MacKinnon, have with respect to pornography. Other main ones, however, can for the most part be reduced to the other two dimensions of value I am spelling out here: that pornography portrays women as objects for the male pleasure, or even as such that sexually abusing them is justified (hence these are criticisms of the work's ethical perspective); or that pornography reinforces harmful stereotypes, or even that it increases the number of rapes (i.e., criticisms in terms of the work's consequences). It is important to see that these criticisms are distinct from each other, if at times relatable.

²² Digital technology indeed represents an important change in this respect. In Ethan Coen's *O' Brother Where Art Thou*, for instance, the scene in which a cow is hit by a car was possible without harming any animals, as it can be learned from the website of the American Humane Association, which tries to monitor the production of movies in the USA and checks for harms produced to animals (see <http://www.americanhumane.org>).

²³ Of course, such examples are relevant only if they do have artistic status, which in the case of the Great Wall, for instance, might be questioned.

²⁴ In fact, Brown's claim could be read as referring to any aspect of a work's history of production – in which case it would need quite a broad construction of an artwork's "content" to be plausible – or as referring to the ethical assessment of the work's history of production. For the purpose of the present discussion, I am interested only in the latter claim.

²⁵ For brevity's sake, I don't develop the possible objections to Brown's principle. At the very least the principle needs to be specified better in terms of scope. For instance, would Brown consider it as a means affecting a work's appearance or content that a scene had been brought about by immoral means so that that scene could then be portrayed?

²⁶ Walton (1984), for instance, has claimed that photographs allow viewers to be in (visual) contact with what they are photographs of.

²⁷ Notice that for the abuse to count amongst the means of production it is not sufficient that it is real abused recorded, for otherwise any documentary made using real footage (even of abuse one could do nothing to prevent) would be judged immoral.

Chapter 5

RESISTING IMAGINING

1. Introduction.

The ethical criticism of narratives is an art-critical practice. The question of the legitimacy of such critical practice, then, is the question of whether what some art critics do has any value in helping determine the artistic worth of some narratives when judged as art. In this chapter, I begin looking at some arguments in favor of the ethical criticism of narratives as a legitimate art-critical practice.

I will not be looking at arguments for views of an autonomist persuasion. Arguments for autonomist positions have already been rejected, extensively and, for the most part, convincingly, most notably by Roger Beardsmore (1971) and Noël Carroll (1996, 1998b, and 2000).¹ My approach below, however, will be that of considering the autonomist intuition as still putting the burden of proof on the moralist. First of all, my own understanding of the possible positions on the matter, presented in Chapter 3, conceives of autonomism, especially moderate autonomism, as a view that cannot be

rejected as easily as more radical constructions of it. Radical autonomism as conceived here cannot be dismissed just by mentioning as counterexamples works for which ethical assessment is appropriate, for radical autonomism need not deny the existence of such works. Nor can moderate autonomism be rejected by showing that, with some works, ethical value can contribute to their success as art, for moderate autonomism as construed here does not deny that – it claims, more limitedly, that whatever relationship might obtain between ethical and artistic value, it is not a systematic relationship.

Furthermore, it is open to debate whether the burden of proof falls on the autonomist or on the moralist. On the one hand, there are powerful, *prima facie* reasons for preferring the autonomist approach. Consider, for instance, that works of art can be judged from a variety of points of view, and hence can have a variety of values of different sorts. No one would ever claim that all of the values an artwork can have, deriving from its being evaluated from the financial or the therapeutic or the merely practical or whatever else point of view, have a bearing on its value as a work of art. Hence, it appears that the burden inevitably is on those who want to select one such non-aesthetic value – ethical value – and claim that it is relevant to artistic assessment.²

On the other hand, especially for what narratives are concerned, it would appear quite strange if their ethical standing had *nothing* to do with their artistic standing. Perhaps it is not as easy as the autonomist would want to separate the judgment that can be given of narratives ethically, e.g., in virtue of their content, from the judgment that can be given of them artistically, partly in virtue of having such content. Narratives are

representational works, and hence their representational contents have a good prima facie claim to being relevant, with their characteristics, including ethical ones, to the value of the narratives as such. Moreover, narratives most typically have human actions and characters as part of their content, hence precisely the sorts of things and events that are subject to moral evaluation. Accordingly, if the moral evaluation of the content of a narrative is, typically, a natural activity, and if a narrative's content is integral to the very nature of the narrative, it appears unavoidable that ethical evaluation should have some role to play in determining how good, as an artistic narrative, a narrative is.³

In any event, precisely because the theory I want to defend is a form of moralism, I shall take the burden of proof as falling on the moralist. Specifically, in the following, I shall consider the general, autonomist intuition, that artworks can be evaluated from different and independent points of view, as primary. Hence, when discussing each of the arguments below, I will ask whether it is sufficient to respond to the intuition that, though a narrative may very well be judged as ethically sound or defective, that has nothing to do with whether the narrative is good or bad, as art. Such intuition, for the arguments under discussion in the present chapter, will take a specific form, namely, that of asking, provocatively, whether the ethical sympathies one has are not a defect in the art critic's toolbox – whether, that is, it would not be better, in order to appreciate artistic narratives, if one were, perhaps, less morally sensitive, or at least more capable of bracketing assessments coming from one's own moral perspective.

Though I will find each argument under examination in some way wanting, discussing them will help us approach the argument that I intend to propose.

2. Hume's Moralism(s).

Contemporary moderate moralists have found their historical inspiration in some of David Hume's remarks in his essay, *Of the Standard of Taste*. As will be shown below, the problem with those remarks is part and parcel of their theoretical richness, for they seem to entail not just one possible view, but several, on the bearing of the ethical status of artworks on the experience and value of them as works of art.⁴

First, recall that Hume, by the end of his essay, has established the notion of delicacy of taste as the basis for the only possible standard of taste. The standard of taste corresponds to the joint verdict of those true judges who do have delicacy of taste, but there remain two important "sources of variation" that affect the *degree* in which a given work of art is appreciated. In particular, Hume refers to *individual predispositions and preferences* between art appreciators, and to *cultural differences* between a contemporary audience and the one for which the artwork was originally produced, or in his words, "the different humours of particular men" and "the particular manners and opinions of our age and country" ([1757] 1995, 265).

The differences between individuals are often to be ascribed to differences in age, and hence in temperament. For example, the younger reader will more likely be moved

by the romanticism of Ovid, the older reader by the philosophical reflections of Tacitus ([1757] 1995, 266).

Admitting that there are some ineliminable variations in individual preferences (or sensibilities), however, does not mean that Hume is giving up his requirement, which he had presented earlier in the essay, that the true judge be “free from all prejudice” ([1757] 1995, 262). In particular, Hume was thinking of the difficulties of appropriately appreciating a work of art that comes to us from a different time or culture. Being free from prejudice in some sense means forgetting oneself: “considering myself as a man in general, [I must] forget, if possible, my individual being and my peculiar circumstances” (Hume [1757] 1995, 263), he had remarked earlier in the essay. In some sense, one must put oneself in the shoes of the intended audience member of a different age or culture. For instance, when attempting to appreciate a piece of rhetoric produced for an audience belonging to a different time or society, one “must place himself in the same situation as the audience,” or otherwise he will not be able to “form a true judgment of the oration” (Hume [1757] 1995, 263). Each artwork has, in other words, “a point of view, which the performance supposes,” (Hume [1757] 1995, 263) and a critic who is free from prejudice will be able to place himself in such a point of view. This amounts to making “allowance” for the “peculiar views and prejudices” of the people, from a different age or culture, for which the work was created (Hume [1757] 1995, 263). Hence, being free from prejudice, so as to be able to appreciate art that comes to one from alien cultures, requires that the critic has “imposed a proper violence on his imagination, and [has]

forgotten himself for a moment” (Hume [1757] 1995, 263). This may not be easy to do and so, naturally, a French or an English audience, say, will not be touched as much as an Italian audience by what was produced for the latter and not the former (Hume [1757] 1995, 266). Hence, the difficulties we may have in appreciating artworks belonging to other cultures, though they cannot be entirely overcome, do not reflect on the value of the artworks themselves.

It is at this point that Hume introduces the issue of which differences between cultures should really be allowed as innocuous and not detrimental to the actual value of a work of art – just unavoidable differences in the degree of appreciation of what is foreign to our own culture – and which differences should instead be considered as negatively affecting the work of art:

Where any innocent peculiarity of manners are represented [...], they ought certainly to be admitted; and a man, who is shocked with them, gives an evident proof of false delicacy and refinement. [...] But where the ideas of morality and decency alter from one age to another, and where vicious manners are described, without being marked with the proper characters of blame and disapprobation; this must be allowed to disfigure the poem, and to be a real deformity. I cannot, nor is it proper I should, enter into such sentiments; and however I may excuse the poet, on account of the manners of his age, I can never relish the composition. (Hume [1757] 1995, 267)

It should be emphasized that an artwork that is disfigured by its immorality is not thereby, for Hume, one with no artistic value – its value is just considerably diminished:

The want of humanity and decency, so conspicuous in the characters drawn by several of the ancient poets, even sometimes by Homer and the Greek tragedians,

diminishes considerably the merit of their noble performances, and gives modern authors an advantage over them.” (Hume [1757] 1995, 267, emphasis added)

Likewise, while Hume considers Corneille’s *Polyeucte* and Racine’s *Athalie* to be disfigured by their religious bigotry, he still refers to them as to “two very fine tragedies” (Hume [1757] 1995, 268). Hence, Hume is not a reductionist, nor a thinker who believes artistic value to be wholly conditional on ethical value (see Chapter 3, section 3). Rather, we find in Hume’s remarks a form of moralism, likely radical moralism.

The crucial difference, for Hume, between mistakes in a work that do not make a difference to its artistic value and those that do, is that between “speculative opinions of any kind” and “moral principles” ([1757] 1995, 267) – in more contemporary terms, between epistemic and ethical mistakes. When presented with the former, we are required to adopt simply “a certain turn of thought or imagination.” When presented with the latter, “a very violent effort is requisite to change our judgment of manners, and excite sentiments of approbation or blame, love or hatred, different from” one’s own (Hume [1757] 1995, 267). Moreover, “where a man is confident of the rectitude of that moral standard, by which he judges, he is justly jealous of it, and will not pervert the sentiments of his heart for a moment, in complaisance to any writer whatsoever” (Hume [1757] 1995, 267).

As suggested, we find in Hume not just one claim but a tangle of suggestions, which are worth considering separately. The first issue is that of the difficulties our imagination may encounter when put to task with works we consider to be immoral. It is

the issue, in other words, of the resistance in imagining that can be experienced during encounters with fictions.

3. Imaginative Resistance(s).

Chapters 1 and 2 have confirmed and extensively interrogated the widely recognized fact that perceiving a narrative with understanding and appreciation requires an employment of the imagination. It does not only require the imagination because most narratives present us with fictional events, hence with events we must in some way pretend to be real, for the sake of understanding, following, and appreciating the narrative. Nor does perceiving a narrative require imaginative engagement only in the sense that we must relate in the appropriate manner to the medium the narrative is in, for example, taking projected images as people we are looking at, or projected sounds as voices we are listening to. Nor, finally, does it require the imagination only in the sense that we must imagine, say, when watching a movie, that Humphrey Bogart is Sam Spade, or that Charlie Chaplin is Hitler. All of these instances of imaginative engagement are pretty uncontroversial.⁵

Yet narratives engage the imagination also in the sense that they present us with characters and situations in which we participate or with which we engage, imaginatively – characters and situations to which we are supposed to respond, empathetically or sympathetically, approvingly or disapprovingly. We empathize with characters, in some sense putting ourselves in their shoes; we sympathize with them, somewhat endorsing

their values and interests; and, of course, we respond to the overall turn of the events, with approval, disapproval, or indifference. Moreover, partly from such responses and partly from other elements of the narrative, an overall perspective on narrated and related events emerges, one to which one is supposed to subscribe, for the sake of understanding and appreciating the work (see Chapter 7 below). Narratives invite all such responses, more or less strongly; sometimes, they even mandate such responses, as requisite to appreciating or even understanding the work.

Empathy and sympathy both mobilize, in a broad sense, our own value system, whether to allow the cognitive/conative/emotive switch necessary to imagine an experience from the other's point of view, or to sympathetically endorse or antipathetically reject the other's relevant goals. Subscribing to the narrative's overall perspective is an imaginative activity in which our own belief and value system becomes implicated. The narrative's perspective is in itself a construal of sorts – a system of connections among beliefs, conceptual categories, principles, and construals that, arising from the narrated events but also informing the perception of them, must be adopted, made one's own as one perceives the narrative.

Pretty much as it happens with respect to situations in real life or, for that matter, with non-artistic reports of such situations, say, by a newspaper article, making the cognitive/conative/emotional switch necessary to assume another's point of view may be more or less difficult depending on how radical the switch to be made is – how alien from one's own the point of view to assume. If a narrative invites us to emotionally participate

in the feelings of characters we find morally repugnant, or more generally to adopt an ethical perspective we reject, we may have an understandable resistance to do so, and that will likely affect our capacity to follow the narrative with understanding and appreciation.

Sometimes we may experience a high degree of resistance to endorsing the perspective that is being presented to us. For instance, many viewers totally resist embracing the perspective of Leni Riefenstahl's *The Triumph of the Will*, which regards Hitler as a hero and good father of a new, unified Germanic nation. We may be simply unable or unwilling to respond to Hitler with attitudes of admiration and gratitude. To the extent that going along with the work's perspective and responding to the characters as the work aims that we do is necessary to understanding and appreciating the narrative, our resistance may affect our understanding and appreciation of the work.

To sum up, our being engaged with a narrative, emotionally participating in the narrated events and characters, and responding in various ways to the portrayed situations, as well as responding to the overall perspective manifested by the work, calls for an engagement of our own value system. And there may be understandable resistances coming from our own value system towards being engaged in the requested way. Engagement with a narrative is largely a matter of engaging in the appropriate imaginings – imagining someone else's experiences, imagining a character or a set of events as deserving a certain response, imagining that the narrated events have the significance that the narrative presents them as having. Hence, the resistances

encountered in engaging with a narrative are largely resistances to imagining certain things, or to imagining them in a certain way.

How *understandable*, however, are these resistances? There is a puzzle, after all, which is brought about precisely by Hume's above-mentioned remarks. For Hume points to an asymmetry between what we seem to be willing to imagine when factual mistakes are involved and what we are willing to imagine when moral mistakes are involved. Formulated in the contemporary terminology of make-believe, we appear to resist make-believing moral propositions that deviate from what we believe to be true, while appear not to resist make-believing factual propositions we believe not to be true.⁶ Or, in other words, we seem to be more "jealous" (to use Hume's term) of our value system than of our belief system, even when all we are asked to do, so it seems, is to bracket, not abandon, such system for the sake of understanding and appreciating a narrative. In fact, at least according to Hume, precisely when we are more certain of our moral views, we are more resistant to put them out of gear when faced with a morally deviant artwork.

That there is such an asymmetry between making epistemic adjustments to the fiction, on the one hand, and making moral adjustments, on the other, appears to be an empirical fact. It finds anecdotal confirmation in at least some of our own experiences with narratives, but it can also be brought about, on purpose, by trying to imagine as correct, hence in some way trying to get along with, a statement like, "In killing her baby, Giselda did the right thing; after all it was a girl."⁷

Consider that what we are supposed to imagine, we are assuming, is that the above statement be true, though just in the fiction, which is different from just imagining that someone in the fiction, such as a character, or someone in some way implied by the fiction, such as an implied narrator, or even someone real, outside of the fiction, such as the narrative's author, believes the statement to be true. Imagining any of the latter will likely be pretty unproblematic. In contrast, imagining the statement *tout court* to be true is what encounters our resistance.

In contemporary philosophical debate, this issue is discussed as that of the phenomenon of “imaginative resistance,” resistance, that is, to imagining certain things – notably, moral deviances – and not others – typically, factual deviances.⁸ Yet, one could in principle distinguish between two such “resistances,” depending on their respective most immediate source, as well as on their relationship to our will. It might be the case that I have difficulty in bringing myself to imagine what I find to be morally repugnant – a form of *psychological resistance*; or it might be rather that I just do not want to imagine what I consider morally repugnant – an *ethical resistance*.⁹

More importantly, contemporary debate on the issue has tended to run together two senses of what I have just named “psychological resistance,” namely, *difficulty* in imagining, and, much more strongly, *impossibility* of imagining what is required or recommended by a narrative. Perhaps, such blending of the two senses derives from combining the common experience of a *difficulty* in imagining the rightness of views we consider to be morally repugnant, and hence not possibly true, with the philosophical

suspicion that what is impossible is thereby *unimaginable*. Or it might partly be an inheritance from Hume's text above. For Hume himself claims that, when presented with "sentiments" I disagree with, "I cannot, nor is it proper I should" enter them, stating, first, an impossibility, and, then, something that instead seems compatible with the possibility of imagining what is requested from us by a narrative (although, Hume remarks, "a very violent effort is requisite to change our judgments of manners" [1757] 1995, 267). A clarification in this respect and a specification of whether the resistance reaches impossibility or not, would have perhaps contributed to making the debate on the nature of such resistance clearer.

In fact, the question we are interested in is whether such resistances – psychological or ethical as they may be – are justifiably considered to be relevant from the artistic point of view. That is, we need to determine whether a narrative that, because of its immorality, encounters resistances in its perceivers in engaging in the imaginings the narrative requires or invites, is therefore defective from the artistic point of view – a worse narrative than it would otherwise be. Hence, in the following, though I will dedicate quite a bit of space to discussing the first issue – the nature of these resistances, and the source of the asymmetry between imagining factual and moral deviances – it will be ultimately to go back to the second issue – whether resistances of this sort are able to ground the ethical criticism of art narratives. Accordingly, I will look at the three accounts of imaginative resistance offered so far – Kendall Walton's, Richard Moran's, and Tamar Gendler's – but also at the possible arguments for the legitimacy of the ethical

criticism of narratives that one may think of constructing from them. Quite conveniently, these three accounts approximately correspond to views emphasizing, respectively, psychological resistance as impossibility to imagine, psychological resistance as difficulty to imagine, and ethical resistance as voluntary opposition to imagine.

The background against which the possible arguments for the ethical criticism of narratives based on imaginative resistance are to be assessed must include the autonomist charge to the effect that, when perceivers fail to engage or have difficulties in engaging in the imaginings appropriate to an immoral narrative, that fact indicates no artistic defect in the work but rather a defect in the perceivers' artistic sensibility. Most likely, the radical autonomist would point out that the ethical status of propositions that are just imagined, not asserted, is morally neutral because of that.¹⁰ Yet, even if imagination were to be subject to ethical evaluation, that should have nothing to do with the issue of how successful a narrative is on its own terms, as art. The moderate autonomist, in turn, would claim that whether a work of art is successful on its own terms depends on what, so to speak, those terms are – the immorality of certain imaginative responses may very well be instrumental to the overall artistic value. At any rate, it can be pointed out, in autonomist fashion, that there exist, after all, perceivers who appear to be better positioned than others to appreciate such works of art fully. Those are the perceivers with a value system compatible with what the narrative, ethically, aims at. Take a work like Riefenstahl's *The Triumph of the Will*. It was intended for a Nazi audience, or at least for an audience willing to look at the celebration of the Nazi power and objectives

with no ethical qualms. Hence, the doubt legitimately arises, of considering it – as provocatively suggested by Kendall Walton –

unfortunate that we are psychologically unable to bracket our moral concerns in order to appreciate the work aesthetically. Given that the work exists and has the moral deformities and aesthetic merits that it has, it is too bad that awareness of the former interferes with enjoyment of the latter. (Walton 1994, 29)

Notice that the issue is not only, as at times Walton and others seem to believe,

that of appreciating, in a work like *The Triumph of the Will*, its cinematic, formal qualities *in spite of* its immoral content.¹¹ The fact is – or at least so we should be willing to consider, if we want to take the autonomist’s challenge seriously – that *The Triumph of the Will* also succeeds largely with respect to content, in putting Hitler and the Nazi movement in a better light than they really deserved (see Chapter 6, section 10, and Chapter 7 below).¹²

Thus, let us seriously entertain the possibility that the moral defects of a work may not be artistic defects, and that it would be desirable, a mark of “delicacy of taste,” for us to be able to take the place of the Nazi audience member, bracketing our moral prejudices, forgetting ourselves for a moment, and from that perspective be able to fully appreciate the work of art.

4. Kendall Walton’s Supervenience Argument.

Hume, of course, would object. An artwork like Riefenstahl’s *The Triumph of the Will* demands from me responses I cannot give, since “I cannot [...] enter into such sentiments” as sentiments of admiration for Hitler, being it impossible for me to enter

into sentiments I find morally disagreeable. This looks somewhat like an overstatement on Hume's part. Is it really *impossible* to hold, in imagination, a value system we do not agree with? Kendall Walton has proposed an account of imaginative resistance that seems willing to declare the impossibility, for us, to engage in such imaginings.

Surely, imagining that we hold a value system, i.e., imagining that we believe it to be right, is possible, for Walton, even when such a system is at odds with what we believe to be right. We often imagine ourselves, for instance, believing in moral principles we do not (currently) believe in, when recalling, in memory, those times when we used to hold moral principles we no longer endorse (Walton 1994, 48). Likewise, we can, so it seems, imagine ourselves believing in the Nazi value system, and view *The Triumph of the Will* under that light. Yet, Walton insists, that is not all we are supposed to do with respect to such works – we must also imagine the immoral value system to *be* right. And *that* may be something for us impossible to do.

We can name Walton's argument to this effect the "supervenience argument." Walton suggests that perhaps our resistance in imagining morally deviant propositions (i.e., in imagining propositions like the one, above, on Giselda and her baby, as ethically correct in the fiction) has to do with how such propositions subvert dependence relations between moral and non-moral, or "natural," properties. Evil, for instance, Walton claims, depends on, in the sense that it *supervenes on*, things like slavery, genocide, etc.; immoral propositions ask us to imagine such dependence relations not to obtain as we think they do (1994, 45). The resistance in imagining such dependence relations

subverted, Walton continues, may have to do with a difficulty in even understanding what it would be like for such relations to be different from what we think they are. To quote Walton in full:

We [...] need an explanation of why we should resist allowing fictional worlds to differ from the real world with respect to the relevant kind of dependence relations. My best suspicion [...] is that it has something to do with an inability to imagine these relations being different from how we think they are, perhaps an inability to understand fully what it would be like for them to be different. (Walton 1994, 46)

Walton even goes as far as formulating an argument, however tentative, for the ethical criticism of narratives. An immoral work fails artistically, Walton argues, if its author *meant* the proposition – say, that slavery is morally acceptable – to be fictional, i.e., for the narrative’s perceivers to imagine the proposition to be true, while we find it impossible to even imagine how moral rightness could supervene on something like slavery (1994, 45).¹³

Hence Walton suggests an explanation of imaginative resistance in terms of a conceptual impossibility. Accordingly, though he sometimes seems to run together a discussion of resistance as psychological difficulty and one as psychological impossibility, we can take him as expressing a view that leans towards considering certain imaginings impossible to engage with:

Is it difficult or impossible, for those of us who abhor slavery and genocide, to imagine engaging in these activities to be morally proper? [...] there are limits to our imaginative abilities. It is not clear that I *can*, in a full blooded manner, imagine accepting just every moral principle I am capable of articulating. (Walton 1994, 47-48, emphasis added)

This is true, according to Walton, of other dependence relations as well, such as those involving humor or those involving aesthetic properties. Thus, with respect to humor and a “nonjoke” like “A maple leaf fell from a tree,” Walton concedes that, maybe, “with effort and ingenuity I could dream up a way of thinking about it in which it would strike one as funny. But there is a sense in which I *can't* [... now] imagine finding it funny” (1994, 48-49, emphasis added). And, about aesthetic properties like being jagged or angular or awkward, Walton asks: “Can what counts in the real world as a jagged or angular or awkward line be flowing or graceful in a fictional world (when relevant aspects of background context are the same)?” (1994, 44-45).

Both Moran (1994) and Gendler (2000) oppose the supervenience argument. I shall look at their objections in turn.

Although Moran is not specifically addressing Walton’s account, his criticism is quite applicable to the supervenience argument.¹⁴ The gist of Moran’s concerns with respect to something like the supervenience argument is that, if a given set of non-moral properties is considered to be necessarily linked to a given set of moral properties, in the sense that the latter supervene on the former, we are forced to conceive of wrong moral judgments as involving some violation of analytic or conceptual necessity. Accordingly, an instance of moral disagreement would boil down to disagreement on how to use moral concepts. One of the contenders must be conceived of as confused in her application of moral concepts, and hence incomprehensible in what she says (Moran 1994, 101-102). Indeed, this seems to be the characterization of moral disagreement that Walton is

pointing to when he refers to “an inability to understand fully what it would be like for [the relevant kind of dependence relations between moral and “natural” properties] to be different [from how one thinks they are]” (1994, 46). However, Moran objects, that is not the way we normally treat moral disagreement. Normally, from the fact that others express different moral judgments from our own, we do not conclude that they are morally incompetent. Furthermore, he claims, the condition of comprehensibility is especially important to make sense of instances of change of mind on moral issues – make sense of the views we used to hold as well as of the process of moving from one view to another (Moran 1994, 101-102).

In fact, most likely, there is less disagreement between Moran and Walton than my previous remarks seem to suggest. Moran, about the supervenience account, admits that there “may be something to this” (1994, 101). Most importantly, Walton might be making his claims only about *some* moral deviances, not all of them. Consider that Walton himself refers to instances of remembering holding moral views we have then abandoned, and surely does not want to deem it impossible to imagine subscribing to such views (1994, 48). He also concedes that sometimes

we are able to understand and empathize with people who hold moral views we have never held or even been seriously tempted by, and this empathy is likely to involve imagining subscribing to these moral views ourselves. (Walton 1994, 48)

Yet, again, these instances are different from imagining those moral views that are alien from ours to be *true*:

A work in which it is fictional that genocide is morally permissible would be one that calls for imagining that genocide *is* morally permissible, not just imagining accepting this to be so. I find myself strangely tempted by the thought that although I might imagine the latter, I cannot imagine the former. (Walton 1994, 49)

The very fact that Walton mentions instances of memory as well as of empathy with people whose ethical views are alien to us, i.e., mentions precisely those cases that Moran considers as problematic for the supervenience argument, makes one wonder whether Moran's objection is really addressing something the advocate of the supervenience argument wants to claim.

The objection, recall, is that, if imaginative resistance were to be attributed to the impossibility of imagining dependence relations between given non-ethical properties and ethical properties as being different from what one believes they are, moral disagreement would have to be conceived of as attributing conceptual confusion to one's opponents; and, yet, that is not how ethical disagreement is normally conceived of. However, consider that, first, the advocate of the supervenience argument need not conceive of all, ordinary ethical disagreements as involving conceptual confusion, for he, like everyone else, could claim that many instances of ordinary ethical disagreement are grounded in disagreement of fact.¹⁵ Second, even if ethical disagreement is conceived of as turning on the correct understanding of the relevant ethical concepts, that does not involve attributing moral incompetence to one's opponents. The disagreement over what exactly falls under a concept like justice can occur between people who, for the most part, agree on the extension of the concept – just disagree on whether what they are

debating falls under the concept. This is even more likely once it is considered that even important disagreement would often involve several ethical concepts and principles at once, of which the precise scope and application to the specific case would be at stake, not what those concepts and principles mean or how they apply in the paradigmatic instances. Finally, it is precisely at the level of the ethical disagreement where all factual disputes have been resolved, and all vagueness on the scope of ethical categories and principles has been dispelled, that ethical disagreement could perhaps be conceived of as implying conceptual confusion on one side of the dispute, for what could it mean that, say, beating a slave was the right thing to do, after one has recognized that he, too, is a person, that he was being deprived of his personal freedom, etc.?

All of the above shows how there might be a sort of imaginative resistance that can be traced to the impossibility (or, for that matter, to the difficulty) of imagining certain dependence relations as being different from what one believes to be the case. It also shows, however, how the supervenience argument fails to have the scope necessary to cover the common cases of imaginative resistance. At most, the argument seems to be able to show that those principles that manifestly subvert the fundamental relation one may think exists between certain states of affairs and their moral status do in fact change the subject – they present one with an alien concept that may be impossible to understand. Moran is right in claiming that most often moral disagreement does not take this form. Even ethical judgments that radically differ from our own often do not appear incomprehensible to us.

Walton's suggestions are just tentative. In fact, in the same way as he distinguishes between the response to a dumb joke and that to a nonjoke like the maple leaf story recalled above, so he distinguishes between recalling holding an ethical position one no longer holds and being presented with an ethical position after having undergone a "conversion" into a completely different moral perspective. As one may imagine finding the first joke funny, but not the second, so one may imagine believing in a currently considered immoral principle, but not imagine embracing a radically different ethical perspective. In the respective latter cases, we may be confronted with the fact that "there are limits to our imaginative abilities" (Walton 1994, 47). Perhaps Walton's argument fits best precisely those cases that philosophers appear to have mostly concentrated on: extreme cases of clear immorality, such as de Sade's *Justine* or Riefenstahl's *The Triumph of the Will*. Yet, often narratives present their audiences with less clear-cut cases of moral deviance. They also often present us with cases with respect to which we are uncertain. Hence, we need an argument capable of addressing the different possible instances in the spectrum, from the clearly immoral to the clearly moral, through all the nuances of the morally dubious.

As mentioned above, Walton is willing to accept that we can imagine someone, or even ourselves, holding a perspective we disagree with. He also seems to distinguish between deviances, even moral ones, that can be imagined, perhaps even easily, and deviances we are unable to imagine. Hence, the doubt arises whether the supervenience argument really addresses the phenomenon of imaginative resistance as it is brought

about by the experience of narratives. For, most of the time, imagining what is requested by a narrative is not *either* impossible *or* easy, but rather just difficult. Yet, before moving to this other issue, let us look at another discussion of Walton's tentative account of imaginative resistance: that by Tamar Gendler.

Gendler sets herself with the task of showing that we can indeed imagine conceptual impossibilities, and takes that to be a refutation of Walton's proposal. Before looking at what Gendler has to say in that respect, however, it must be mentioned that Walton himself does not exclude that we can imagine *some* conceptual impossibilities. For instance, it seems that we can imagine contradictions, such as those included in M. C. Escher's etchings or in narratives of time-travel. The way contradictions can be imagined, Walton suggests, is by imagining a proposition, *p*, and also imagining its negation, *not-p*. If a work succeeds in prescribing these two imaginings, then the conjunction of them, *p* and *not-p*, seems to be fictional as well. Yet, Walton is skeptical on whether an analogous strategy would work with respect to immoral propositions, such that slavery is just. One could imagine, he concedes, that

a person's behavior on a given occasion was morally acceptable, and also that her behavior on that occasion consisted in beating a slave [...]. But this doesn't make it fictional [hence possible to imagine] that she was behaving morally *by virtue of* the fact her behavior consisted in beating a slave. (Walton 1994, 47)

Borrowing from a different part of Walton's text, in order to imagine the two things together in the relevant manner, one needs to be able to imagine *a way* in which beating a slave could count as an instance of moral behavior (1994, 49). We are back to the

impossibility of imagining the relevant dependence relations as being different from what one thinks they are.

Gendler, however, provides us with a long story, “The Tower of Goldbach,” in which, in brief, God allows for the number twelve to both be and not be the sum of five and seven. It appears that the story is successful in asking us to imagine, at the same time, that twelve is and is not the sum of five and seven. The conceptual impossibility, the contradiction, Gendler claims, has been successfully “disguised,” thanks to the story exploiting our “capacity for selective attention” (2000, 69).

What happens as we read through “The Tower of Goldbach” is that we focus now on this aspect of what it is to be twelve, now on that aspect, in a way typical of fictional understanding in general – indeed, in a way typical of nonfictional understanding as well. (Gendler 2000, 68 n.)

So, Gendler concludes, “conceptual impossibility does not preclude imaginability” (2000, 69).

I am skeptical, however, of Gendler’s objection really being a problem for Walton’s supervenience argument correctly construed. Indeed, I am going to claim that “The Tower of Goldbach” is not a counterexample to Walton’s suggestion. Nonetheless, several interesting points arise from discussing Walton’s supervenience argument in light of Gendler’s analysis. But let us proceed in order, pointing out first why the story is not a counterexample to the supervenience argument.

Recall that Walton’s suggestion is that the resistance to imagining morally deviant propositions derives from something like an incapacity to imagine certain

dependence relations, “dependence relations of a certain kind” (1994, 46), to be different from what we think they are. As seen above, this comprises not only (some) moral deviances but also deviances from what we consider as humorous or, aesthetically, as being a jagged or angular or awkward line. Hence, Walton’s claim is somewhat general. It is not, however, as general as what Gendler addresses by her fictional story, namely, what she calls “the impossibility hypothesis” – the view that imaginative resistance is explained by reference to the conceptual impossibility of the scenarios to be imagined (2000, 66).

Walton does not hold that conceptual impossibilities, in general, cannot be imagined – only those conceptual impossibilities that amount to misconstruing dependence relations of a certain kind. Indeed, it is peculiar that “The Tower of Goldbach” is a story about a mathematical contradiction, for Walton, as recalled above, does not exclude that contradictions can be fictional (1994, 46). “The Tower of Goldbach” and Gendler’s analysis thereof do not appear to differ in a relevant way from Walton’s accounting for the possibility of imagining contradictions of the type p and *not- p* . The only difference is that Gendler, correctly, points out that in a story like the one she has provided, it “is a result of lots of local bits of conceptual coherence that the global incoherence [of twelve both being and not being the sum of five and seven] is able to get a foothold” (2000, 69). Yet, there is no reason why Walton should disagree with this. Accordingly, on these grounds only, I can already conclude that Gendler has failed

to present a counterexample to Walton's supervenience argument for imaginative resistance of propositions that subvert dependence relations of the relevant kind.

There is, however, much more that can be said with respect to Walton's claim that what may help one imagine a logical or mathematical contradiction will not work with respect to imagining immoral principles as correct. Specifically, Walton claims that contradictions can be fictional, "although it takes some doing to make them so" (1994, 46); in the case of immorality, however, Walton is skeptical that "a similar strategy would work" (1994, 47). The reason he gives for his skepticism is that, with a proposition like "the institution of slavery is just and proper," the proposition cannot "be separated into distinct components, each of which can unproblematically be made fictional" (Walton 1994, 47). Moreover, as seen in the above quote, Walton admits that a person's behavior may be imagined as morally acceptable, and that such behavior may be imagined as consisting in beating a slave. Yet, that would still fall short, Walton has claimed, of imagining the behavior as morally right "by virtue of" its consisting in beating a slave.

At this point, Gendler's remark, that a global incoherence can be imagined because disguised in the midst of many bits of local imaginings, becomes very relevant. For I am going to claim, first, that Walton's skepticism with regards to making the strategy used to imagine a contradiction, the contradiction p and $not-p$, work in the ethical case too is an ill-grounded skepticism. Second, I am going to claim, however,

that such strategy, in both cases, does not bring one to imagining the deviance, logical or ethical as it may be, in its full strength.

The fact is that we must distinguish, I propose, between imagining a fictional world in which it is true that *p* and *not-p*, and imagining *p* and *not-p* to be true. Or, we must distinguish between imagining a contradiction *globally*, as part of a fictional world, and imagining it *locally*. Or, finally, we should distinguish between devising *a way to imagine that p* and *not-p* and *imagining a way for p* to be *not-p*. Once these distinctions are drawn, I submit, both of my claims above can be shown correct.

Walton's suggestion for imagining contradictions (such as those involved in time travel or in M. C. Escher's etchings) is a strategy indicating a way to imagine that *p* and *not-p*. However, similar, albeit not entirely analogous, strategies could be devised to find a way to imagine that beating a slave was the right thing to do. Such way would be whatever may bring one to approach, in imagination, the frame of mind of a (non-hypocritical) slave owner: a set of beliefs, factual and normative, more or less coherently held together – that slaves were not really people, that slavery had existed for such a long time, that this is how her parents had always behaved, that the slave had deserved the beating, etc. Since such a slave owner would certainly be able to justify, to herself, that beating the slave was morally right, we can, in turn, imagine such justification as our way of imagining that the beating was right. Indeed, what the slave owner could believe she could also imagine. Hence, since a way of imagining that beating a slave is the right thing to do is, after all, available at least to someone, the burden of proof is indeed on

Walton to show that it cannot be imagined by someone who, though not believing in the slave owner's value and belief system, is able to take, in imagination, her place.

Indeed, when the sense of "imagining" at stake is the global one, it might very well be the case that imagining the truth of an immoral proposition turns out to be *easier* than imagining something like a mathematical contradiction. Separating the components of a proposition is only one possible way of aiding one in imagining, globally, the proposition, a way that works well with contradictions. However, with other sorts of propositions, that are not contradictory but, for instance, morally deviant, other strategies, like the one just described, may be possible. Hence, though there is no easy way to separate the "components" of the statement "slavery is good," it might in fact be relatively easier to find one's path to *a way* in which one may imagine that someone's beating a slave is just. Likely, the number of things to imagine would be larger than imagining *p* and *not-p*, but it is possible that, once the imaginative work is done, *less* resistance be experienced in imagining the truth of something like, "In beating her slave, Jane did the right thing," than the truth of something like, "Twelve is and is not the sum of five and seven," or "Jane did and did not beat her slave," or "In beating her slave, Jane did and did not do the right thing" (in a context where ambiguities and vagueness are eliminated).

On the other hand, when the sense of "imagining" is the local one, then the difficulties with imagining that Jane did the right thing *by means* of beating her slave, or that she did the right thing *because* she beat her slave, or that she did the right thing *by*

virtue of beating her slave, those difficulties that Walton pointed out, may all still be there. They are the difficulties, in other words, of imagining a way for Jane's beating her slave to be right. However, contrary to Walton's suggestion, these difficulties seem to be present in the non-moral cases as well, including cases of logical or mathematical contradictions. For, even with stories like Gendler's "The Tower of Goldbach" or with strategies like those devised by Walton to imagine the truth of p and $not-p$, what is being imagined is a world in which it is the case that p and $not-p$; yet that is different, I submit, from imagining, *locally* if you like, p and $not-p$, which entails imagining a way for p to be $not-p$, i.e., a way for p to be $not-p$ by *virtue of* being p . Let us apply this to M. C. Escher's *Waterfall*. While I can imagine a world in which a waterfall's water both ascends and descends, that seems to be different from imagining that the waterfall's water ascends in virtue of its descending, or that it falls because it goes up.¹⁶

Accordingly, if there is an asymmetry between the relative resistance that we experience in imagining moral deviances, on the one hand, and imagining epistemic deviances, on the other, that difference does seem to derive, or be connected to, the different strategies available for imagining the deviances in question.

To conclude, Walton's supervenience argument would be persuasive only if there were indeed something *special* about dependence relations *of a certain kind* – such as those between moral and nonmoral properties. Yet, Walton has not provided enough grounds to claim that there is indeed such a difference. In fact, I have argued, it is precisely from Walton's own considerations and examples that we can reasonably

suspect that between imagining a contradiction and imagining a morally deviant proposition, the former may be a harder task than the latter to accomplish.

At any rate, even if imaginative resistance were to be conceived as an impossibility to imagine explained by the supervenience account, that would not be sufficient to ground an argument for the legitimacy of ethical criticism of narratives. Better to say, that the argument would support only a form of ethical criticism targeting those narratives that, while intended to prescribe certain responses, fail to do that because of their immorality. While there are indeed works of this kind, such ethical criticism of narratives would not be able to attack works like *The Triumph of the Will*, since such works, one can easily maintain, do indeed succeed in prescribing the responses they intended, once the perceivers of the narrative are the Nazi would-be sympathizers for which the propaganda documentary was created. For, no matter how trivial a fact that might seem, it needs to be remembered that *The Triumph of the Will* was not produced for post-World War II audiences, but precisely for those Nazi sympathizers or would-be sympathizers that Hitler wanted to reach. Isn't it possible, the autonomist might claim, that the "true judges," or at least the "true judges" for the work in question, need to be, while aesthetically delicate, morally deficient as well? Furthermore, resistance is an empirical fact and hence any explanation of it must take relevant empirical facts into account. Of these, consider, first, the existence of Nazi would-be sympathizers, who would respond as prescribed. Second, consider another empirical fact – that some of us are *tempted* to respond in the way the narrative requests.¹⁷ That is, after all, what makes

some narratives potentially corruptive. And hence the question arises again, whether it isn't that we, the perceivers, are defective, not the work, with respect to narratives of this kind.

The fact is that the claim that it is *impossible* to imagine certain things, so difficult to prove, and surely not proved by Walton's argument, is still insufficient to ground an argument for the ethical criticism of narratives. Proving that certain things are not impossible to imagine but *hard* to imagine is easier, and yet, I am going to claim, even less capable of supporting an argument for the artistic relevance of such imaginative resistance. Nonetheless, to such an argument we will now turn.

5. Richard Moran on Dramatic Imagining.

Richard Moran (1994) has spelled out a form of imaginative resistance that more closely corresponds to what I have classified as a difficulty, psychologically, in imagining morally deviant propositions.

Moran, emphasizing the *mode* of imagination involved, more than the *content* of the imaginative act, has proposed that imaginative resistance be explained by the fact that narratives call for the activation of a form of *dramatic* imagining, different from what Moran calls *hypothetical* imagining. In hypothetically imagining we just entertain a proposition; yet this is not what narratives call for; what they call for is the expression of attitudes, whose content is not entirely propositional. When perceiving a narrative, we

are asked to engage in imaginative, dramatic rehearsal of attitudes, to occupy a point of view, a perspective on things. And “imagining along these lines involves something more like genuine rehearsal, ‘trying on’ the point of view, trying to determine what it is like to inhabit it” (Moran 1994, 105).

That dramatic, not hypothetical, imagining is at work in these cases explains where the difficulty in imagining – imaginative resistance – comes from: the request to occupy “a point of view,” to try on a “total perspective,” being close to “genuine rehearsal,” can encounter our resistance when we reject that point of view, when “our heart is not in it” (Moran 1994, 105).¹⁸ Moran’s emphasis on the role of a form of imagination different from hypothetical imagining is surely welcome (I myself, in Chapter 1, emphasized the importance to narrative engagement of forms of imagining, such as iconic and central imagining, vis-à-vis a form of imagination that is less participatory in nature, not involving a point of view). However, there are reasons to be skeptical of Moran’s rather general considerations being able to explain why imaginative resistance would occur more with respect to moral deviances than with respect to epistemic deviances.

In general, it is not quite clear how much progress is being made, in an attempt to explain imaginative resistance, by linking such experience to “genuine rehearsal” – for wouldn’t what is encountered in genuine rehearsal be, if not imaginative resistance, something very close to it? Moran’s suggestion that imagination has different modes, which may be differently at work in different cases, is interesting and might be helpful in

identifying the source or sources of imaginative resistance. However, as it is, the account is insufficient to explain imaginative resistance and the asymmetry pointed out by Hume. Moran, wants to find the origin of the resistance not in *what* one is supposed to imagine (the imagining's content) but rather in *how* one is supposed to imagine it (the kind of imaginative activity). However, it seems that the mere fact that one mode of imagination rather than another, dramatic and not hypothetical imagining, is involved (conjoined, of course, with a difference in what we believe to be the case) is insufficient to explain imaginative resistance. In spite of my believing, for instance, that there is no money in the safe, I can certainly imagine, not just that there is money in it, but seeing the money, counting it, desiring it, and being tempted to steal it. Or, in spite of my beliefs on the nature of the planet Jupiter, I can certainly imagine not only that an elephant is walking on the planet's surface, but also imagine myself as an elephant, joyfully walking on it. Hence, it seems that we can engage in dramatic imagining with respect to what we don't believe to be the case, and experience no imaginative resistance. Moran, of course, would protest that in the cases I used as examples there is no resistance in imagining a deviant reality because we have no problem with that. Yet, that is precisely the point: Moran's explanation of imaginative resistance with respect to morality must refer to a difficulty in occupying, inhabiting, a point of view we have difficulties occupying because of its being immoral – what is that if not the imaginative resistance the account aims at explaining? And isn't precisely *what* a point of view requires us to imagine –

that is, the *content* of the imaginative act – that makes it difficult for us to occupy such point of view?

Furthermore, it seems that imaginative resistance can arise even in cases in which no enactment or rehearsal is necessary, hence no dramatic imagination involved. How easily can we imagine, for instance, that a world of pigs is better than a world in which there is knowledge and artistic activity, if we are strongly persuaded of the opposite? In Chapter 1, I have myself emphasized the importance of forms of imagining, iconic and central imagining, that may be *dramatic* in the specified sense. Yet, by no means does that exclude that, at times, even merely entertaining a thought – not the thought of a world of pigs but the thought of such a world being better – may be difficult, giving rise to imaginative resistance. Such occurrences of imaginative resistance may need an account in terms of failure to recognize supervenience relations as being different from what we believe they are, as suggested by Walton. In any event, they cannot be explained in Moran's terms, for they involve no dramatic imagining.

In sum, Moran's suggestions that link imaginative resistance to the notion of dramatic imagining are shown, first, to have much less explanatory power than one would have hoped for, and, second, to be at best complementary to an account of resistance explained on the grounds of supervenience relations between the ethical and the nonethical. As for a possible argument for the ethical criticism of narratives, whatever the merits of an account of imaginative resistance in terms of dramatic imagination, an account of the experienced difficulty in engaging in some imaginings

would hardly be crucial to demonstrating that the immorality of some narratives makes them worse works of art. Even if the twist of imagination required to respond to an immoral narrative is naturally hard to accomplish (Hume talked of the need for a “very violent effort” [1757] 1995, 267), that in itself points to no artistic defect. Consider, once again, that the required twist of imagination quite clearly is not equally hard for everyone. It is easier for those who share the narrative’s ethical perspective. Yet, it is easier also for those who have more powerful imaginative abilities, or at least that cannot be excluded. The latter may be found among those perceivers who are firm enough in their ethical persuasions, or so they think, as to allow themselves more freely than others an “expedition abroad,” into the realm of the immoral. Or they might be found among those who are in fact easier to influence in their moral views, whether permanently or temporarily. Thus, one could wonder, in autonomist fashion, which qualities make up a “true judge” of narratives, or at least a true judge of a given narrative: a stronger imagination, or maybe a stronger confidence in one’s sense of morality, or maybe a weaker or even a worse morality? The artistic point of view, we are assuming, is distinguishable for the moral point of view, and hence, prior to a successful argument for the legitimacy of the ethical criticism of art, more specifically, of narratives, it cannot be assumed that artistic sensibility needs to go together with ethical sensibility.

Moreover, any argument emphasizing imaginative resistance as a matter of *difficulty* to imagine must face a fundamental problem, having to do with the relation between degree of ease in imagining and degree of artistic value of a work. Consider that

we may have very understandable difficulties imagining Oedipus's experienced sense of guilt and despair when he realizes in full the real nature of his deeds. Nor is imagining, when watching *Star Trek*, Spock's responding to events with the fully rational attitude of someone who, by his very nature, feels no emotions, easy to imagine. However, in ethically unproblematic cases, difficulty in imagining something, when attributed not to a lack of sensitivity in the perceivers but rather to the very nature of the narrative, may point to the work being challenging, perhaps accessible only to the most daring minds, and yet all the more valuable for that. And, thus, one wonders whether that could happen with some works' immorality as well.

Sometimes, narratives themselves insist that what they narrate is very hard, even impossible to imagine. Patrick Süskind's *Perfume* is a story having for protagonist Jean-Baptiste Grenouille, a man with an exceptional sense of smell, one unmatched by any other human, capable of smelling and memorizing odors that normal people cannot perceive (some examples include: the smell of glass, that of stone, that of a brass doorknob). This man's experiences are in some way unimaginable and, indeed, as the narrator parenthetically remarks, almost impossible to describe:

He stretched out – to the extent his body fit within the narrow stony quarters [the cave where he had found refuge, away from the smell of humans]. Deep inside, however, on the cleanly swept mats of his soul, he stretched out comfortably to the fullest and dozed away, letting delicate scents play about his nose: a spicy gust, for instance, as if borne here from springtime meadows; a mild May wind wafting through the first green leaves of beech; a sea breeze, with the bitterness of salted almonds. It was late afternoon when he arose – something like late afternoon, for naturally there was no afternoon or forenoon or evening or morning, there was

neither light nor darkness, nor were there spring meadows nor green beech leaves. . . there were no real things at all in Grenouille's innermost universe, only the odors of things. (Which is why the *façon de parler* speaks of that universe as a landscape; an adequate expression, to be sure, but the only possible one, since our language is of no use when it comes to describing the smellable world.) (Süskind 1986, 125)

Surely, the author tries to do as much as possible to help us imagine what seems to be unimaginable. Yet he also remarks on the difficulty one would likely encounter in doing that. Eliciting imaginative resistance in a case like this does not seem to be an artistic defect.

Of course, one might like to claim that when the resistance is what the narrative aims at, *that* difficulty is what we are supposed to imagine, hence there is no resistance, in fact, towards imagining what requested, when we experience resistance. However, even if this were true, it would not help in providing a better argument for the ethical criticism of narratives, for an immoral work, too, could invite resistance in the same way with respect to its perspective, so as to then make it even more “honorable” having embraced such perspective. Perhaps this is part of what Heinrich Himmler, as famously presented to us by Jonathan Bennett (1974), was trying to do in some of his speeches: show how difficult it may be to embrace a certain ethical perspective (tragically, the perspective of aiming at the “final solution of the Jewish problem”) against the pressures of imagination (naturally prompting feelings of sympathy for the victims). Or, at least, we could certainly imagine a narrative that embodies Himmler's perspective, mandates

an endorsement of that, and yet does so while also purposefully prompting sympathetic feelings for the victims, so as to show the Nazis as being all the more honorable for that.

An argument in favor of the ethical criticism of narratives has better chances of succeeding if grounded in what I called *ethical resistance* – a voluntary resistance to imagining what we find to be immoral or at any rate disagreeable from a moral point of view. That leads us to discuss Gendler’s account.

6. Tamar Gendler’s Account: Resistance as Unwillingness.

Gendler emphasizes this element in her account of imaginative resistance. She claims that, in the most central cases at least, imaginative resistance arises, not from our inability to imagine a fictional scenario but from our unwillingness to do so.¹⁹ Such unwillingness “is a function of my not wanting to take a particular perspective on the world – this world – which I do not endorse” (2000, 74).

Gendler’s account is partly based on the fact that, with respect to narratives, there are truths – or what the narratives’ authors take to be truths – that are *imported* from the real world into the world of the fiction, as well as *exported* – by the narratives’ perceivers – back from the fictional world onto the real world. Narratives import truths from the actual world in the sense that, among the fictional truths that they generate, explicitly or implicitly, there are also truths about the real world. For a narrative to be understandable, its author must be able to assume, and its perceiver assume the author assumes (and so on and so forth) a certain shared background knowledge about the real

world – say, that France is in Europe or that that when someone is said to have gotten married it means she entered a monogamous marriage (my examples), or that the quadrille is danced a certain way or that unrequited love is painful (Gendler’s examples).²⁰ Accordingly, Gendler contends, when reading or watching or listening to a narrative, a narrative’s perceiver will also feel free to *export*, from the fiction onto the real world, any fictional truths the perceiver considers to be “not merely truths in the story,” (2000, 760) but (purported) truths in the real world as well.

Gendler emphasizes how, depending on the genre the narrative belongs to, the rules of import and export will be different. With works of *realistic fiction* such as *Pride and Prejudice* or *Anna Karenina*, and which Gendler also describes as *nondistorting* fiction, not only are the rules of import relatively lenient – “in general (though there will be numerous exceptions), if something is true in the actual world, it will be true in the fictional world” (Gendler 2000, 76) – but so are the rules of export, i.e., exceptions aside, “if something is true in the fictional world, it will be true in the actual world” (Gendler 2000, 76). In contrast, some fictions are, by their very nature, *distorting*. In the TV show *The Addams Family*, for instance, truths are exported in an altered form, specifically, in a reversed form, presenting what is really good as bad, and vice versa (see also Chapter 7 below). Hence, resistance arises, claims Gendler, when a perceiver “feels that she is being asked to export a way of looking at the actual world which she does not wish to add to her conceptual repertoire” (2000, 77).

The asymmetry Hume pointed out, between imagining epistemic deviances and imagining moral deviances, seems to be explained, in Gendler, by two further considerations. First, moral claims more often than nonmoral claims, “clamor for exportation,” given their supposed categorical nature, hence truth across all possible worlds (Gendler 2000, 78). Second, with nonmoral deviant claims made within a fiction, their very deviance is usually an indication that such claims should remain within the fiction. In contrast, with morally deviant claims, normally, we cannot take their deviance as an indication that the author of the fiction does not want them to be exported, nor that she wants them to be exported in altered form (Gendler 2000, 78). And the reason why this is so is “because we recognize that there are instances of *actual* moral disagreement” (Gendler 2000, 78). Hence, with a work such as *The Triumph of the Will*, which I gather Gendler would consider an instance of nondistorting fiction in her sense, the exportation is meant to occur, and occur in unaltered form, and hence it encounters our resistance.

To better discuss Gendler’s reasoning, let us sum up her main claims:

1. Our resistance to imagining certain fictional scenarios derives, not from our inability to imagine them, but from our unwillingness to do so.
2. Our unwillingness to imagine certain morally deviant scenarios “is a function of” our unwillingness to add to our conceptual repertoire “a way of looking at the actual world” (Gendler 2000, 77).
3. Typically, we recognize that fictions ask for unaltered exportation of their moral claims, including deviant moral claims, and not of their deviant nonmoral claims,

and recognize that for two reasons: (a) moral claims are taken to be categorical in nature, hence such that they purport to be true in all possible worlds, and (b) because there are real moral disagreements, we typically cannot take moral deviance as evidence that the author does not mean those claims to be exported.

Let us begin with this last, two-fold claim, which is the one that is supposed to help explain the asymmetry Hume had pointed out. (a) and (b), I take it, work in the account independently of each other, as independent sources of evidence that a fiction typically aims at exporting its moral claims, even when deviant, and not its nonmoral deviant claims. It is unfortunate that central as these two claims are to Gendler's account, they are not developed by the author in more detail. Claim (a), for instance, does not really seem to point to a difference between moral and nonmoral deviant claims, for many nonmoral claims, of course, are taken to be true in all possible worlds: most notably, those of logic and mathematics. As in the very example discussed by Gendler, on the number twelve both being and not being the sum of five and seven, fictions surely can make logically or mathematically deviant claims, without that becoming a source of suspicion, for us perceivers of the fiction, that those claims are aimed to be exported onto our world. The mere fact, that is, that a claim is of a kind – logical, mathematical, or moral – whose claims generally purport to be true in all possible worlds, *in itself*, is no source of evidence that the fiction including that claim aims at its exportation.

Claim (b) might be a more central part of the explanation of why moral claims are especially problematic. However, without further explanation, it is not clear how the

mere fact that there are *actual* moral disagreements should be evidence for the fact that fictions aim at the exportation of their moral claims, even when those are deviant, more often than at the exportation of their deviant nonmoral claims. Consider that there are plenty of actual nonmoral disagreements regarding physical and metaphysical issues, and yet that does not seem to be, in itself, a source of suspicion that, for us as perceivers of a fiction, a fiction embodying claims in those areas aims at the exportation of such claims. The mere fact that scientists debate on the nature of black holes does not lead us to assume that science fiction treating black holes aims at saying anything about actual black holes. And this would still be true, I submit, in the eyes of a scientist firmly convinced of the truth of a given black hole theory, when at odds, say, with what is claimed in the fiction. There are philosophical debates on the nature of time, and real disagreements, and yet that does not give rise to any suspicion that fiction involving time travel or similar incoherence aims at taking sides on this issue. And, of course, there are differing opinions on the existence of God, Satan, and the like, and yet we do not take a movie like *The Exorcist* as aiming at exportation of its religious perspective.

Perhaps, Gendler would insist that (a) and (b) *together* are evidence of exportation, and in the immoral cases, of problematic exportation. Now we have a thesis that fictions including moral claims aim at their exportation, and that such exportation is problematic. Yet, why should it be problematic? That's what (2) aims at explaining.

Claim 2 above also raises suspicions, however, for Gendler, first of all, does not explain the nature of the relation between imagining a fictional scenario and adding the

implied world view to our “conceptual repertoire” in a way that would make such an addition importantly problematic. Fictions that aim at the exportation of immoral fictional truths to the actual world surely are problematic to the extent that, understandably, we do not want to assent to such truths about our world. However, Gendler, in making sense of why, in her view, we refuse to imagine morally deviant fictional scenarios, will have to take either the line that so imagining commits us to *asserting* the fictional truths as nonfictional truths as well, or the line that imagining such scenarios adds those truths to our conceptual repertoire *but as unasserted*. In the first case, she needs an additional argument to exclude the possibility of imagining a fictional scenario and exporting the fictional truths as *unasserted*, or in other words, *imagining*, not asserting, *of the actual world* that such truths apply to it.²¹ In the second case, Gendler needs an additional argument to make it reasonable that one may want to refuse adding a world view to one’s conceptual repertoire. With the exception of some special cases, it seems in fact *unreasonable* for one to refuse to add a conceptual schema to one’s repertoire.²² Take the world view that classifies African-American people as less worthy of respect than Caucasians. Adding such a view to my conceptual schemata, provided that I need not endorse it, can allow me to further operate on its incoherencies, investigating its consequences, explicating its premises, and so on and so forth. Incidentally, but most relevantly, those operations are among the necessary ones for a perceiver to follow a narrative with understanding. For instance, we must imagine

Huckleberry Finn's world view so as to understand his choices and inner feelings, as well as to formulate our own responses to them.

Finally, Gendler's main claim, claim 1 above, that imaginative resistance finds its source in our unwillingness, not inability or difficulty, to imagine certain fictional scenarios may carve out a sense of imaginative resistance that is narrower than the actual phenomenon. Perhaps, as I have suggested above, we naturally experience difficulties in imagining logical contradictions, e.g., those offered to us by Quantum Theory, in spite of our being more than willing to imagine them. On the other hand, we may at times want to resist imagining something and be quite unable to so resist. Consider, e.g., our unwillingness to imagine descriptions of disgusting scenes – the mere utterance of a description (“a vomit sandwich”) may just force the imagination upon us, despite our unwillingness to so imagine.²³ Some examples may also have ethical relevance: We may want to resist imagining that human relationships ever look like what is presented on *The Jerry Springer Show*, and yet it might be inevitable as we watch the show.

In any event, what interests us here is whether explanations of imaginative resistance can ground an argument in favor of the legitimacy of the ethical criticism of narratives. In that respect, a conception of imaginative resistance as unwillingness to imagine what is requested by a narrative introduces an important element, however trivial it might, at this stage, appear: narrative perceivers can have *moral* reasons to resist responding to a narrative as understanding and fully appreciating it would require. Walton has remarked, in this respect, that a narrative like *The Triumph of the Will* is such

that, if “the work’s obnoxious message does not destroy its aesthetic value, it nevertheless renders it morally inaccessible” (1994, 30). As we saw, Walton attempts to explain such inaccessibility (mainly) by means of his supervenience argument, hence in terms of our inability to imagine. However, a different argument can be developed based on a conception of imaginative resistance that we choose to exercise on moral grounds.

For some narratives, an argument like the following would work: if a narrative aims at having its perceivers imagine certain propositions (or scenarios) and such perceivers resist imagining them because they recognize moral reasons not to do so, then the narrative fails in that respect on its own terms, and hence is, in that respect, artistically defective.²⁴

The problem with an argument like this, however, is either its narrowness or its incompleteness. Such an argument would apply only to those narratives that aim at eliciting certain imaginings from certain perceivers, perceivers whose ethical sensibilities turn out to be at odds precisely with such imaginings. To explain, certainly a narrative that submits itself to the moral assessment of a, so to speak, “unselected” set of perceivers, fails on its own terms to the extent that it receives condemnation, not approval, from such perceivers. To take an example from the non-artistic field, a political speech that fails to persuade one’s own party members fails as a political speech of that kind. Likewise, a narrative like H. B. Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* would have failed on its own terms, had it failed to elicit the imaginings consistent with its ethical perspective in favor of the emancipation of the African-American people. An argument

like this, however, would be too narrow, because applicable only with respect to imaginative failures amongst the audiences that the narrative aimed at addressing.

Accordingly, in the same way as a certain kind of political speech would not be a failure because it does not persuade the leaders of the opposition party, so *The Triumph of the Will* cannot be considered a failure because post-World War II audiences, for the most part, do not embrace its ethical perspective, according to an argument like this.

Alternatively, the argument should be formulated not in terms of the imaginings that given audiences are willing to engage in, but rather in terms of those that they ought to be engaging in. Furthermore, the reasons not to imagine unethical perspectives must be shown to be artistic reasons as well, or at least, to be artistically relevant. Yet none of the arguments that we examined so far has shown itself to have those characteristics.

¹ Given my claims in Chapter 3, it will be no surprise that I find some of Noël Carroll's objections to autonomism unconvincing just because they address, in my view, straw man theories rather than what moralist views should be seen as opposing.

² Naturally, an analogous reasoning applies to any form of pluralism about the value of art, e.g., a theory emphasizing the importance of artworks' cognitive value.

³ Finally, perhaps one could even point to narratives being distinctive, among representational works, in their presenting a content that develops over time – a characteristic that makes them resemble human action, or the agency behind it. Hence, narratives quite naturally are candidates for ethical evaluation. Yet, again, if the ethical evaluation turns on something so essential to the very identity of the narrative, then it would seem that the burden falls on the shoulders of those theorists that deny such ethical evaluations to have anything to do with the value of the narratives as narratives. (For an investigation of narratives and agency, in particular the agency of an implied narrator, see Chatman 1990 and Levinson 1996b).

⁴ The contemporary philosopher who has perhaps most carefully attempted to disentangle some of the theoretical richness in these parts of Hume's essay is Kendall Walton (1994). But see also Moran (1994).

⁵ Of course, there is plenty of controversy on exactly how to *analyze* the relevant kinds of imagination at work.

⁶ Of course, there can be similar resistances affecting one's appreciation of a work that have not to do with the artwork's content – resistances, e.g., prompted by an awareness of the means of production used to create the work. Given the conclusions of Chapter 4, it is only natural to concentrate here solely on those imaginative resistances having to do with the content of what is to be imagined.

⁷ The example is Walton's (1994, 37). It is also recalled by Gendler (2000, 62).

⁸ The cautionary clauses, "notably" and "typically," in this sentence are necessary because imaginative resistance might be encountered in cases of what are strictly speaking factual beliefs with moral relevance, e.g., the belief that members of a given ethnicity are less intelligent than others, and even in non-moral cases, such as the belief that an unfunny joke is truly hilarious.

⁹ The phrase "psychological resistance" and the remark that often we do not want, on ethical grounds, to overcome it can both be found in Walton (1994), though not to the use I make of them here.

¹⁰ Berys Gaut, however, discusses and refutes this claim in defense of what he calls "amoralism" with respect to humor (1998a).

¹¹ See, e.g., Walton (1994, 30), Kieran (1996, 347), and Carroll (2000, 380).

¹² This makes *The Triumph of the Will* successful, in that respect, for the sort of work it is, i.e., political propaganda. I am not claiming that a similar result would make *any* narrative successful. On the contrary, I will claim below that most likely such element of incorrectness in the work makes it unsuccessful in that respect (in which case, *The Triumph of the Will* is, in a sense, both successful and unsuccessful in its

portraying Hitler and the Nazis as better than they really were). This will be shown by my argument in Chapter 7. For the claim that this film's achievements are not just formal, see Jacobson (1997) and Deveraux (1998). See also Sontag (1982).

¹³ In fact, earlier in the text, Walton also suggests what would amount to a different sort of defense of the ethical criticism of art: "If the work's obnoxious message does not destroy its aesthetic value, it nevertheless renders it morally inaccessible. That must count as an aesthetic defect as well as a moral defect" (1994, 30). Subsequently, however, Walton has explained that by the above claim he only means that it is *unfortunate* from the aesthetic point of view that the work's value is morally inaccessible, and not that that counts as an aesthetic defect literally speaking (see Jacobson 1997, 190 and 199 n.).

¹⁴ In fact, the connection between Moran (1994) and Walton (1994) is closer than my remarks in the text indicate, for Moran (1994) partly derives from a conference presentation for which Walton was the commentator.

¹⁵ See, e.g., Stevenson (1944).

¹⁶ In fact, I suspect, part of the artwork's attraction derives precisely by its probing and in part defying our imaginative capacities, something I will discuss again below.

¹⁷ If anecdotal evidence in these matters counts, I can perhaps mention that provided to me by a friend of mine, who happens to be Jewish. After visiting a class where I showed a clip from *The Triumph of the Will*, he reported finding it hard *not* to be engaged by the scenes.

¹⁸ I am classifying Moran as a theorist who emphasizes the *difficulty* of imagining rather than its impossibility, despite claims like "I may *not be able* to [do the necessary rehearsal] if my heart is not in it" (1994, 105, my emphasis). If not an overstatement, the sense of impossibility applied here is weaker than what I mean by the term in this context: depending on the mood of the moment one may be unable to do the imagining but this only shows that, in general, even for that person, doing the imagining is just difficult.

¹⁹ Above, I have distinguished "impossibility" and "difficulty" to imagine. I take Gendler's notion of "inability" to imagine to be aimed at embracing both.

²⁰ Of course, what Gendler is pointing out – that fictions import truth from the actual world – has been investigated by several authors, notably David Lewis (1973 and 1978), Nicholas Wolterstorff (1980), and Kendall Walton (1990).

²¹ I am not claiming that a fiction aiming at exporting asserted truths, and succeeding only in exporting them as unasserted, is not, perhaps in some important sense, failing. I am just questioning the connection between imagining *p* of some fictional world and asserting *p* of our actual world.

²² It can be reasonable for the parents of the victim of a racist killing not to be willing to add the racist world view to their conceptual schemata. Likewise, one understandably may not want to learn the medical information regarding the disease that killed one's own son.

²³ Walton (1990) investigates some forms of imagination involuntarily prompted, though not all of them would support my case here. I am borrowing the example of "a vomit sandwich" from a talk presented by

Susan Feagin at the 2000 Annual Meeting of the American Society for Aesthetics in Reno.

²⁴ Both Walton (1994) and Carroll (1996) suggest arguments along these lines (see section 4, this chapter, and Chapter 6, below).

Chapter 6

RESPONSES TO ETHICAL PERSPECTIVES

1. Introduction.

When Hume declared that, with a poem embracing an immoral perspective, “I cannot, nor is it proper I should, enter into such sentiments” ([1757] 1995, 267), he had laid down the ground for some of the most influential, in contemporary times, defenses of the ethical criticism of art. Such defenses are based on the notion of response.

Chapter 5 has extensively investigated the notion of imaginative resistance, which, more narrowly perhaps, amounts to a resistance towards responding in the way a narrative invites or prescribes. The conclusion of that chapter, however, was the very natural claim that, unless the resistance is justified on independent artistic grounds, it cannot be considered as pointing to a defect in the work. The defect, the autonomist could protest, might very well be in the narrative’s perceiver, who is guilty of letting his ethical “prejudices” interfere with what could otherwise be the appropriate, full experience of the narrative.

Moreover, theories that concentrate on the notion of resistance quite naturally tend to focus on immoral narratives only. Yet, in Chapter 3, moralist views have been characterized as such that the morality of the work contributes, or at least can contribute, to its artistic value *in general*, for both immoral and moral works. Hence, there is an explanatory advantage in arguments that are capable of accounting for the contribution of ethical value to artistic value, not only when dealing with an immoral narrative but also when assessing a morally praiseworthy one. Arguments concentrating on the notion of response can do that by, in a sense, further investigating the nature of the resistance to respond, making room for a notion opposite to that, one indicating how the morality of some narratives may lead perceivers to *resist less* to the prescribed imaginings, and hence perhaps to be *more absorbed* by the narrative. Or they may abandon the notion of resistance altogether, while still remaining response-based arguments. In this chapter, I will begin by analyzing a defense of the ethical criticism of narratives that refers precisely to the notion of being more or less absorbed by a narrative, depending on its ethical status, in the sense of responding more or less easily to a narrative in the ways it requires. Then, I will move on to an argument that, while appealing to the notion of response, does not depend on the fact of resistance or absorption. The two arguments have been proposed, respectively, by Noël Carroll and Berys Gaut.

2. Noël Carroll's Enthymeme Argument.

In Chapter 3, which was dedicated to classifying the range of possible theoretical positions with regard to the ethical criticism of narratives, Carroll's theory was already presented somewhat extensively, due to a difficulty with classifying it precisely. My conclusion in that chapter was that Carroll's theory is indeed a form of moderate moralism, insofar as it claims that for given art genres ethical evaluation legitimately bears on artistic evaluation. I have, however, also pointed out that in his latest contribution to the debate Carroll (2000) has made, or has made explicit, what I considered an autonomist concession, namely, that there can be artworks, and specifically narratives, where the immoral element, though present, is so subtly disguised as to pass undetected, and hence not count artistically. The reason I considered this to be an autonomist concession, recall, is that such works appear to be described by Carroll as being such that their immorality does not bear on their value as art simply because they happen to be subtle enough in concealing their immoral perspective, and not in virtue of their belonging to genres different from those for which ethical criticism more typically is appropriate. Obviously, that is not an irrelevant concession. Yet, for the time being, I propose we concentrate on the theory as a consistently moralist position, though of the moderate sort. In Carroll's words, such a theory "maintains that in some instances a moral defect in an artwork can be an aesthetic defect, and that sometimes a moral virtue can count as an aesthetic virtue" (1998c, 419). (For future reference, let us emphasize that Carroll's use of the term "aesthetic" is equivalent to, or at least compatible with, my

use of the term “artistic” for the value, and whatever is relevant to it, of an artwork qua work of art; see Chapter 3 above.)

It should now be mentioned, however, that the “moral defects” and “moral virtues,” or the kind of moral evaluation of narratives Carroll concentrates upon, seem to include what can be said, morally, of a narrative artwork in two different senses. First, there is the moral judgment that can be given of the narrative with regard to its embracing a certain ethical perspective, which may be good or evil. Second, there is the judgment of the narrative as morally ameliorative or corruptive. In his writings, Carroll often refers to the latter of these ethical dimensions, since he considers moral amelioration to be an integral part of understanding and following morally praiseworthy narratives:

“Understanding the work, enlarging one’s moral understanding and learning from the narrative are all part and parcel of the same process, which might be called comprehending and following the narrative” (1996, 230). Hence, to Carroll, moral learning is not accidental to engaging with certain narratives but is rather something of a regular “side reaction” (1996, 235) to such engagement. And the same can be said, *mutatis mutandis*, for those morally blameworthy narratives that confuse the understanding. Carroll (1998b) gives the name of “clarificationism” to this view on how morally sound narratives can contribute to clarifying and deepening their perceivers’ moral understanding, while morally defective ones can confuse the understanding.

Although clarificationism is an interesting theory, addressing an interesting issue, there is no need, for present purposes, to consider its claims. We need not worry about

that particular view because, I submit, it is not really instrumental to Carroll's argument with regards to the ethical criticism of narratives as an art-critical practice. For Carroll, narratives are ameliorative or corruptive, i.e., they confuse or clarify moral understanding, ultimately in virtue of their having a moral or immoral perspective or, if you prefer, in virtue of their presenting and advocating a confused or enlightened moral understanding. Hence, looking at Carroll's argument for the legitimacy of the ethical criticism of narratives with that additional claim on the ameliorative or corruptive powers of narratives would not strengthen the argument. Rather, I suspect it might even weaken it. First, it would open it to objections from those who claim narratives cannot give any substantial contributions to knowledge.¹ Second, it might even introduce an element of tension within the theory itself.² Since I am going to be critical of Carroll's argument below, it is only appropriate to try to discuss the strongest version of it.

It is now time to look at Carroll's argument for his theory, which will shed further light on the nature of the theory itself. Carroll's argument can be called the *enthymeme argument*, for it emphasizes a feature that narratives, he contends, have in common with the rhetorical figure that Aristotle had declared to be the most effective for the purpose of persuasion: with both, success depends on the perceiver's contributing to the story, or to the rhetorical reasoning, by filling in the missing details or premise.³

More specifically, Carroll bases his argument on the structural incompleteness of narratives. Every narrative, he claims, is incomplete, in the sense that it makes assumptions that require the narrative's perceiver to "fill in" the details. We are not told,

in the narrative, that Sherlock Holmes is a man, not an android, or that a message in ancient Rome was delivered by hand and not by fax (Carroll 1996, 227).⁴ Of course, this is an idea that we have already encountered in Chapter 5, in connection with Tamar Gendler (2000) and her claim that fictions allow for, indeed they require, the importation of truths from the real world. To Carroll, this process of filling in is “a substantial and ineliminable part of what it is to understand a narrative” (1996, 227).

The argument continues by emphasizing how the process of filling in necessary to understand and follow a narrative is partly a matter of providing the right emotional responses to narrated events and characters. Narrative perceivers are supposed to respond emotionally to the narrated events and characters, with, say, sympathy, resentment, or joyful surprise. Hence, Carroll can continue by stating that narrative understanding requires the mobilization of our emotions, “the emotions that are appropriate to the story and its characters” (1996, 228).

However, consider that many emotions have an ethical component, insofar as emotions in general are governed by criteria of applicability and some such criteria are ethically normative. The criterion for anger, for instance, is that of one or one’s own having been wronged (Carroll 1996, 228). Moreover, some emotions are themselves moral emotions: guilt, compassion, and indignation, to cite just a few examples.⁵

In sum, following a narrative with understanding requires the “mobilization of our moral powers,” i.e., the application of ethical principles and categories necessary to the activation of emotional responses that are appropriate to the narrated events and

characters. The mobilization of the moral powers is, according to Carroll, very pervasive, so pervasive by his lights that he deems it as “vastly improbable” that a narrative of human affairs would not rely on it (1996, 228).

Not all narratives, of course, are morally sound. Some are flawed, morally, because they embrace a defective ethical perspective and address their perceivers with it. Those narratives accordingly require from their perceivers immoral responses. Yet, those are responses that “morally sensitive audiences” would not be keen to give, since they run against those audiences’ ethical principles and categories. Hence, immoral narratives fail to elicit the responses they aim at. Yet, failing to elicit the responses a narrative aims at “is a failure in the design of the work, and, therefore, is an aesthetic failure” (Carroll 1996, 233), a failure of the narrative from the artistic point of view. Such works fail “on their own terms” because they fail to receive precisely the audience uptake they aim at. Vice versa, a narrative that, thanks to its requiring that it be filled in with the right moral responses by its perceivers, secures such responses, is in that respect successful, and, therefore, artistically better. Moral narratives are indeed more absorbing; and being absorbing for their perceivers is what narratives primarily aim at.

Carroll offers some helpful examples to illustrate his view, e.g., that of Brett Easton Ellis’s novel *American Psycho*, which fails artistically, Carroll contends, to the extent that it is intended as a political satire of the eighties in the USA, but which has detailed descriptions of murders that made readers respond with horror rather than with the intended amusement (Carroll 1996, 232-233). The activation of the American

readers' moral powers did not go in the direction aimed at by the novel; hence the novel failed on its own terms. By contrast, Jane Austen's *Emma* absorbs our attention and hence is artistically successful partly because of the way it engages the reader's moral understanding, by, e.g., asking the reader to assess the morality of Emma's actions with respect to Harriet (Carroll 1996, 236).

Carroll's argument is somewhat attractive. First of all, it relies on a now widespread persuasion, amongst philosophers, that engagement with a narrative is not merely a passive experience, but rather one requiring the active mobilization of one's own background of beliefs and emotional attitudes. Chapter 1 has investigated some of the dynamics of such active participation. Moreover, Carroll seems to link the fact that narratives require a process of filling in from one's own background, which is true of non-artistic acts of communication as well,⁶ to the degree of success of a narrative, which partly depends – he claims – on how much a narrative succeeds in being absorbing. Hence, the resulting account might be able to establish a systematic relationship, for some narratives, between ethical and artistic value, and account for degrees of artistic value in relation to degrees of ethical value, other things being equal, of course. Furthermore, Carroll's argument and the theory it supports make explicit reference to narratives' belonging to genres, or more loosely, to their being works of certain kinds, and links that to the issue of a narrative's succeeding or failing *on its own terms*.⁷

Nonetheless, I will claim below that the enthymeme argument does not succeed in proving that the ethical criticism of narratives is a legitimate art-critical practice. In

particular, a) I will emphasize how the argument relies on the responses that selected perceivers, those making up “morally sensitive audiences,” will give or fail to give to narratives without having shown that it is indeed those perceivers that can be allowed to set up the standard for the artistic evaluation of the narratives in question. b) I will also emphasize how Carroll’s understanding of these morally sensitive audiences makes the theory depend on how such audiences will in fact respond, hence makes the theory fail to appropriately track ethical and artistic value of narratives independently of whether the person judging them is right or wrong. c) Furthermore, I will raise doubts concerning Carroll’s general prediction that morally sensitive audiences will in fact fail to respond to immoral narratives in the required manner. d) Finally, I will question the relationship established by Carroll between a narrative’s being absorbing and its artistic success.

First, however, I want to discuss an objection to the enthymeme argument that Carroll himself originally envisaged, but then dismissed. Discussion of such an objection, which I ultimately do not consider fatal for the argument, is needed to dissipate confusions on the actual nature of the argument. It will also help to clear the path for the criticisms to follow.

3. The Argument from Common Reasons.

When he originally proposed his moderate moralism, Carroll envisaged, in a nutshell, the following objection. If an argument – Carroll’s argument – shows how some narratives fail to receive the audience responses they aim at because they endorse an ethically

defective perspective, that still does not show that, for the narratives in question, a moral defect is also an artistic defect. All the argument shows is that those narratives, by proposing an immoral perspective, made “an error concerning the audience’s psychology,” something that could be called “a tactical error” (Carroll 1996, 234). There is something worth considering in this objection, since it can be interpreted so as to probe the argument on the most important issue: its ability to show that ethical evaluation of some narratives is an integral part, and legitimately so, of their artistic evaluation. Now Carroll has his own brief reply to the objection but it is one that confuses the issue, I suspect, more than clarifies it. He insists that the judgment of the narrative on the grounds that it fails to receive audience uptake is not independent of the ethical judgment of the work’s evil perspective, for the “reason the work is aesthetically [or artistically] defective – in the sense of failing to secure psychological uptake – and the reason it is morally defective may be the same” (Carroll 1996, 235): it is the fact that the narrative endorses an immoral perspective. Yet, obviously, such reasoning, at least if interpreted literally, will not do, as it is easy to show.

Of course, that the same reason has a role in two different evaluations does not establish any relationship between them, above and beyond the mere fact that two evaluations of different sorts happen to include the same reason. Compare Carroll’s reasoning regarding narratives, their moral and their artistic value, to a parallel reasoning regarding other types of evaluation. Take the following two statements:

(1) The house is inexpensive because of its defective heating system.

(2) The house is unsafe because of its defective heating system.

Clearly, from (1) and (2) both being true at the same time no connection between evaluations of houses' safety level and their financial value is being established. For we would not know, say, which (if either) of the following two statements we should derive from the sole fact that both (1) and (2) are true:

(3) The house is unsafe because it is inexpensive.

(4) The house is inexpensive because it is unsafe.

Likewise, the truth of the following two statements is not sufficient to establish any generalizable connection between ethical and artistic value:

(5) The narrative is morally defective because of its defective ethical perspective.

(6) The narrative is artistically defective because of its defective ethical perspective.

The truth of (5) and (6) together is insufficient to allow us to decide between the following two statements:

(7) The narrative is artistically defective because it is morally defective.

(8) The narrative is morally defective because it is artistically defective.

Hence, pace what Carroll appears to hold when replying to the above-mentioned objection, the mere fact that the same reason grounds an ethical and an artistic reasoning with regard to an artwork is not sufficient to establish the required relationship between

ethical and artistic value – the relationship summarized by saying that ethical defects can sometimes be artistic defects, and ethical virtues can sometimes be artistic virtues.

Furthermore, Carroll's way of dealing with the objection might have had the effect of deflecting attention from the enthymeme argument itself, which is really what grounds Carroll's moderate moralism, to an argument apparently appealing to the commonality of reasons between ethical and artistic evaluation. Indeed, Anderson and Dean have revived the objection precisely in those terms, concentrating on what they have dubbed Carroll's "argument from common reasons" (Anderson and Dean 1998, 153-157). To refute it, they claim that, in Carroll's reasoning, the immorality of the narrative's perspective is part of two different arguments: what they call the "moral defect argument" and the "aesthetic defect argument." Since the two arguments are different, in spite of their sharing a common premise, they fail to show that the artwork's having a defective ethical perspective is, as Carroll stated, the *same reason* that makes it ethically and artistically defective. And since, for Anderson and Dean, the argument from common reasons is central to Carroll's case for moderate moralism against autonomism (specifically, Anderson's and Dean's "moderate autonomism"), Carroll's theory, they claim, fails.

In the attempt to reply to this reformulation of the objection, Carroll has clarified that his argument was only aimed at showing the *centrality* of the same reason to the two evaluations, the ethical and the artistic, not the *sufficiency* of such reason to either of those evaluations:

The moderate moralist need only contend that among the complex of factors that account for the moral defectiveness of the artwork in question, on the one hand, and the complex of factors that explain the aesthetic defectiveness of the work, on the other hand, the evil perspective of the artwork will play a central, though perhaps not sufficient, explanatory role in both. (Carroll 1998c, 423)

Such a reply, however, in itself, is quite beside the point. Surely, one could, for example, tell a long story on why a house is inexpensive – one in which the defectiveness of the heating system is a central factor amongst a variety of factors, such as the house being located in a cold climate, and the like. And one could tell a long story on why the house is unsafe – one in which the defectiveness of the heating system is a central factor amongst a variety of factors, such as the house being made of flammable materials. Yet, by no means would that be what establishes the relationship between the house being unsafe and its price (again, it would not help in choosing between claiming that the house is inexpensive because unsafe and claiming that it is unsafe because inexpensive). Or, again, one could tell a long story to show how important sincerity is to a good friendship. And one could tell a long story on how important sincerity is to being a good physician. Yet, that does not show that good physicians are good partly because they are capable of being good friends, or that good friends are good partly because they are capable of being good physicians.

Indeed, to better appreciate how the debate on the centrality of the same reason to the two arguments, the ethical and the artistic one, is not very instructive, consider that one can hardly construct a parallel between the centrality of the narrative's evil

perspective to the narrative's ethical status and the centrality of that perspective to the narrative's artistic status. For that a narrative endorses an evil perspective counts, or is very close to counting, as the narrative being ethically blameworthy. In contrast, that an evil perspective makes a work artistically blameworthy is something that obviously needs some argumentation.

Hence, Carroll's defense against the objection is beside the point. It is also, however, unneeded, or so I shall claim. Indeed, I am going to argue that the debate around this objection risks misconstruing the enthymeme argument while, at the same time, failing to do complete justice to the objection.

The fact of the matter is that the moralist does not need to make *any* claims on a defective ethical perspective being present in both the ethical and the artistic evaluation of a narrative. Whether ethical virtues or vices of narratives can legitimately be considered artistic virtues or vices will depend on the argument proposed – in this case the enthymeme argument – not on whether the same reason centrally figures in both an argument about ethical worth and an argument about artistic worth.

Carroll's remarks regarding the same reason being behind two different evaluations, the ethical and the artistic one, while failing to reply to the objection we have been discussing, risk misrepresenting the enthymeme argument, suggesting that something like the argument from common reasons is an elucidation of it or some sort of necessary supplementation.⁸ In contrast, I have claimed that such remarks do not appear to help the argument in any way. Hence, let us examine what the proponent of the

enthymeme argument can and needs to say in order to reply to the autonomist objection envisaged by Carroll and embraced by Anderson and Dean.

Consider that, on Carroll's original formulation of his theory, all the moralist claims is that with some narratives an ethical defect can be an artistic defect, and an ethical virtue an artistic virtue. It may be helpful if we don't defer from speaking of virtues and defects, or vices, here. The moralist's claim could just be analogous to someone claiming that the ethical virtue of being compassionate is also a virtue of the good physician, and that the ethical vice of being unfair is also a vice in the teacher.⁹ To make my point clearer, consider the moralist's claim, about ethical and artistic value, by analogy to claims someone believing that artistic value is not merely restricted to aesthetic value would make (which, incidentally, is precisely the assumption we have been working under; see Chapter 3). If someone claims that a work is aesthetically good because it is harmonious and claims that the work is artistically good because it is harmonious, one is not therefore claiming that being harmonious is sufficient for the work to be aesthetically good, or sufficient for it to be artistically good. Nor is one necessarily saying that the work's being harmonious is a central reason for why the work is aesthetically good or for why it is artistically good. Much more simply, all one is claiming is that being harmonious is an aesthetic virtue of that work of art and is also an artistic virtue of it. Such a claim follows from a certain conception of artistic value – namely that aesthetic value is part of it. Yet, such a conception need not derive from anything like a common reasons argument.

The truth of the matter is that the objection as originally conceived by Carroll, and even as restated by Anderson and Dean, included an intuition that neither of the two discussions really spells out. It is the intuition that, if a work is considered as artistically defective because it fails to receive audience uptake, *that* is the reason why it fails, and not whatever may be behind it, e.g., the fact that the narrative embraces an evil perspective. The intuition of the objection, then, was well captured by Carroll in his reference to a “tactical error” – artistically, in some cases, immorality may not pay off. Yet, the reason the work fails is that it does not receive uptake, not that it is immoral. That is, the objection is really a version of an autonomist claim that we have already encountered above (Chapter 3, section 7). Accordingly, I shall discuss this intuition briefly.

When presenting the various possible positions on the issue of the ethical criticism of narratives, and in particular when discussing the version of moderate autonomism defended by Anderson and Dean, we encountered the claim that, even if narratives can be criticized ethically, it is never the ethical evaluation as such that matters to the artistic value. As a general claim, I dismissed it, offering examples of evaluations of one kind that contribute to evaluations of other sorts though without losing their nature as evaluations of their kind. The claim that an evaluative quality of a given kind (or the result of an evaluation of a given kind) does not contribute as such to evaluations of other kinds, once generalized, is obviously false. A vase can be praised, aesthetically, for having a beautiful shape; and it can be praised, artistically, for having been produced by

an innovative technique. The overall artistic value of the vase, I submit, is determined partly by an aesthetic quality – the vase’s beautiful shape – partly by a more narrowly artistic quality – its having been produced by an innovative technique. Claiming that, once entered into the evaluation of the vase’s artistic quality, the aesthetic quality does not contribute *qua* aesthetic quality, would be clearly implausible. The vase is a better vase *qua* art partly because, aesthetically, it has a beautiful shape.

Of course, the autonomist would point out that the issue with regard to Carroll’s argument is different, for the immorality of a narrative’s perspective has not been shown to be as integral to the artistic value of the work as a vase’s beautiful shape is to the vase’s artistic value. Moreover, it is undeniable that there can be cases in which an evaluative property of one kind is mentioned within an evaluation of a different kind, and that that property simply is not considered for the sort of property it is, or the underlying evaluation is not considered *qua* evaluation of its kind. Take, for instance, the criticism of a politician on the grounds that his racist perspective has made him unpopular. In such a criticism the politician is not being considered unsuited as a politician even partly because of his immorality, but more simply, because of his unpopularity, which happens to derive from his own immoral racism. Accordingly, although the autonomist’s implausible general claim, that once an evaluation of one kind is considered within an evaluation of a different kind the former cannot contribute to the latter as the sort of evaluation it is, should be rejected, there is a more specific concern with respect to the moralist’s argument, which the objection in fact points to. Carroll’s argument must show

that ethical evaluation is indeed *integral* to the failure of some narratives to succeed *on their own terms*. It must show that an ethical consideration is central to the artistic evaluation of some narratives in a way comparable to how an aesthetic quality can be central to assessing the artistic value of a vase. For the doubt must be considered that all the argument has established is that some narratives are artistically unsuccessful partly because they fail to receive audience uptake, as a consequence of the immoral perspective they happen to endorse, in the same way in which a politician may fail to be good as a politician partly because of his lack of popularity, due to his embracing an immoral perspective.

Whether Carroll succeeds in showing that ethical evaluation is integral to artistic evaluation depends on the soundness of his enthymeme argument. Surely, the argument has arguably gone a long way in showing that ethical features of narratives affect the experience of them as works of art. We could rephrase this by saying that the enthymeme argument appears to show that an experience of narratives' ethical features (i.e., an identification of and a response to some of their ethical features) is integral to apprehending them artistically. Moreover, given the structure of many narratives, engaging with them partly by means of one's "moral powers" seems to be legitimate on artistic grounds. Hence, the argument seems to come close to showing that ethical evaluation is integral to artistic evaluation. It would show that, however, only if it proves that an ethically *sound* evaluation is integral to artistic evaluation. And *that*, I am going to claim, is something the enthymeme argument fails to prove.

The element of ethical soundness, in the argument, has to do with reference to the experience of narratives that ethically sensitive audiences will have. Hence, let us move on to an investigation of this notion.

4. “Morally Sensitive Audiences.”

Obviously, the first and most important concern with an argument like the enthymeme argument is whether, by appealing to the responses or lack thereof of morally sensitive audiences, it is not just begging the question in favor of the ethical criticism of art. That the artistic assessment of a narrative partly depends on the judgment or experience of morally sensitive perceivers is one possible formulation of the moralist thesis. Hence, the premise, that a narrative that fails or succeeds in moving, absorbing the attention of, morally sensitive audiences fails or succeeds on its own terms, must be defended.

Since the notion of “morally sensitive audiences” is so central to the argument, and indeed in order to better discuss the above concern, it is important to understand, first of all, what exactly is built into that notion. Surely, Carroll does not want to characterize morally sensitive audiences simply as ones capable of detecting the ethical status of a narrative’s ethical perspective but also as ones that are such that, once they detect a work’s ethical status, they respond in ways that are ethically appropriate. Moreover, Carroll probably thinks of them as audiences that are *especially* capable of detecting the ethical status of works, and *especially* reliable in responding accordingly. And yet, as we

shall see, he does not conceive of them as ethically *ideal* audiences – audiences, that is, that *always* get it right in matters of moral evaluation.

So, why should morally sensitive audiences conceived of as above be those that set the artistic standard in the evaluation of narratives? Of course, if the artistic success of narratives is shown to depend, in part, on ethical assessment by morally sensitive audiences, we would have gotten pretty close to justifying the ethical criticism of narratives as an art-critical practice. However, the enthymeme argument does not provide very much of a defense of why the judgment of morally sensitive audiences should be the one that sets the standard. After all, if, as Carroll rightly claims, a narrative fails artistically when it fails *on its own terms*, then shouldn't the audiences that set the standard be those for whom the work was created? Shouldn't, that is, racist and sexist and homophobic works be evaluated in terms of their receiving uptake amongst the audiences they ostensibly aim to appeal to? However, once judged with respect to the intended audiences, works that that are undeniably immoral because of the ethical perspectives they endorse could no longer be considered artistically defective because of that. Works of propaganda advocating evil perspectives could no longer be considered artistically defective because of their immorality, provided that their success is judged only with reference to the success they obtain amongst the audiences for whom they were created. Notice that those are not even works that subtly disguise their ethical outlook – rather, as propaganda pieces, they can be pretty blatant in their ethical slants. Yet once

the audiences for whom those works were created are selected, such works can no longer be deemed artistically defective because of their immorality.

As simple as this autonomist objection is, it is nonetheless a powerful one, and one that the enthymeme argument does not seem suited to address. The argument determines failure and success of a narrative on its own terms on the grounds of the responses the work aims at. Yet, often narratives aim at responses from selected audiences, and sometimes those audiences are not morally sensitive ones in Carroll's sense. Hence, the theory either begs the question, by considering only the responses of morally sensitive audiences as a touchstone against which to determine a narrative's success or failure on its own terms, or peculiarly fails to condemn artistically some of the most immoral works.

In order to cope with the above problems, a supporter of the enthymeme argument might propose to restrict the moralist claim only to those works aiming at eliciting responses from morally sensitive audiences. I am skeptical that that is something Carroll himself would want to claim, first of all, because he himself discusses examples of unequivocal propaganda. Moreover, despite his insisting that his moralism is *moderate*, one that maintains that *sometimes* moral defects count as artistic defects and moral virtues as artistic virtues, he still appears to conceive of his theory as fairly general (consider, e.g., his emphasis on the fact that virtually *all* narratives of human affairs mobilize our moral powers). By contrast, the resulting theory here would be substantially reduced in scope, and indeed would be peculiar in an important way. It

would claim that if a narrative aims at eliciting responses from morally sensitive audiences but fails to do that, it is then artistically defective; if it succeeds in eliciting those responses, it is then artistically sound. Yet, the theory would apply radically *different* standards to a subset of narratives, those not aimed at morally sensitive audiences, but for no good reason. We can imagine two narratives advocating the same immoral perspective; presumably, they would be equally blameworthy, ethically, because of that. And yet, under the hypothesis we are now considering, one could be a worse work of art because of that, the other not, depending on whom the two works aim to appeal to. The relationship between artistic and ethical value would be systematic but according to a structure that appears to be arbitrary.

In fact, the ethical criticism of narratives that would be legitimized on these grounds would risk being a pretty ineffectual critical practice. Take, for example, an immoral narrative. If the narrative can be considered accountable, artistically, for its immorality only in the event that it is aimed at morally sensitive audiences, then only those works that, in some pretty explicit ways, aim at failure could be criticized. In contrast, most often, I submit, immoral works do not aim at the responses of morally sensitive audiences in Carroll's sense, but rather at more mundane audiences, those that may possibly embrace, at least in a degree, the work's immoral perspective.

Notice that my reasoning need not require attributing to authors the intention of trying to conceal a perspective they themselves deem immoral. Authors can be sincerely persuaded of the soundness of immoral perspectives. My point is simply that such

authors would not intentionally be addressing audiences – Carroll’s “morally sensitive audiences” – that would reject the work’s ethical perspective. Furthermore, sometimes it is not fully determined which audiences, in terms of their ethical sensibilities, immoral works address. de Sade’s novels, for instance, arguably were not meant to be read by depraved readers, ones in full agreement with the works’ perspectives. In fact, the author at great length mimics and ironically addresses the attitude of a moral reader. Part of the shock value of de Sade’s novels – something the author seemed to aim at – derives precisely from their addressing readers who are not morally depraved. On the other hand, it would be a mistake to think of de Sade as addressing morally sensitive audiences in Carroll’s sense, for, if so, there would be no hope for the lengthy arguments in defense of the libertine lifestyle to impress the novels’ readers.

In sum, if narratives are supposed to be judged according to the standards of the audiences they were created for, then most immoral narratives would not be condemned, artistically, because of their immorality. If, instead, they are supposed to be judged in terms of the standards of morally sensitive audiences as conceived of by Carroll, then either the argument must be supplemented with a demonstration that morally sensitive audiences should indeed set the standard for artistic evaluation or the view can be accused of begging the question. Finally, restricting the theory to only those narratives that, on their own terms, appeal to morally sensitive audiences yields a view that is very narrow and indeed not very interesting, since presumably the number of narratives that explicitly aim at artistic suicide is not very large.

Carroll's enthymeme argument appears to conflate the point of view of an art critic – under the assumption that the ethical criticism of narratives is a legitimate ethical practice – with the point of view of the audience the work was created for; or, alternatively, the argument appears to shift illicitly from the latter point of view to the former. Besides being question-begging or equivocal, such a move is unjustified on the grounds of artistic practice, for not that often, presumably, do narratives aim at addressing exclusively morally sensitive audiences.¹⁰

The above worries could be rejected by Carroll as deriving from an excessively strong understanding of what makes for morally sensitive audiences. Carroll could protest that the enthymeme argument makes reference precisely to those ordinary, actual audiences who commonly experience narratives, and that those are precisely what he calls “morally sensitive audiences.” That is, Carroll could protest that the above worries derive from conceiving of the “morally sensitive audiences” as *ideal* audiences, which are not what the enthymeme argument refers to. Undoubtedly, Carroll's characterizations of the morally sensitive audiences, especially from his examples, are surely not those of ethically ideal audiences. However, if what makes for a morally sensitive audience is conceived of too weakly, then the enthymeme argument falls prey to another set of objections, having to do with instances in which immoral narratives receive, in spite of their immorality, the aimed uptake. Carroll has in fact addressed two hypothetical instances of these cases.¹¹ They both show that he does not conceive of the morally sensitive audiences in ideal terms. From the discussion of the two hypothetical examples

he considers will also emerge a distinction between the morally sensitive audiences and the actual audiences a work may encounter, as well as Carroll's use of morally sensitive audiences' responses as setting the standard for artistic judgment.

5. Undetected Moral Status.

Of the two hypothetical examples discussed by Carroll one was already mentioned above: a narrative may disguise its immoral perspective so subtly that even morally sensitive audiences will fail to detect its immorality (Chapter 3, section 8). In such circumstances, Carroll contends, the narrative's immorality would not affect its artistic value.¹² Such a claim confirms that Carroll is not thinking of morally sensitive audiences as made of ideal perceivers – if they were, no work's immorality would pass undetected; rather, by definition, either the immorality would be detected or the work could not be considered immoral. Yet, it also confirms that morally sensitive audiences for Carroll set the artistic standard: if they do not detect the immorality, then such immorality as there is does not impact the narrative's value as art.

I have already remarked (Chapter 3, section 8) how this appears to be an autonomist concession, which, *in itself*, is no objection to the argument, though it raises some doubts on the overall attractiveness of the theory. For this appears to be a theory that lets some works' moral status have nothing to do with those works' artistic value, in spite of the fact that such moral status is measured along the same dimension – the work's ethical perspective – as that of other works of art that are instead criticized

ethically. In any event, an example of this sort is presented by Carroll as a fairly exceptional case, and hence it is helpful in an assessment of the theory only to a limited extent. Fortunately, Carroll has discussed another hypothetical example – one in which the immorality of a narrative passes undetected not because of a particular subtlety in the work’s concealing its ethical perspective, rather just because of a failure on the part of the audience.

The example is that of a propaganda film that “treats enemy soldiers as sub-human, worthy of any amount of indignity” (Carroll 1996, 223). During war time, audiences may fail to see the immorality of characterizing other human beings this way, and would then respond to the work in the intended way. About instances of this kind, Carroll claims that the narrative’s defective ethical perspective still is (or may be) an artistic defect, since “as long as the moral understanding promoted by the [narrative] is defective, it remains a potential obstacle to the [narrative’s] securing the response it seeks as a condition of its aesthetic success” (1996, 233).

There are, in principle, two ways in which to interpret these remarks. They could be taken as claiming that, insofar as a work is flawed (i.e., artistically flawed because of its ethical defect), the flaw is there even if it has passed undetected. Anderson and Dean, for example, have interpreted Carroll’s claim in this way, giving a comparison with the artistic deficiencies in Van Megeeren’s forgeries of Vermeer, which were there even before detection (Anderson and Dean 1998, 154 n.). Alternatively, the claim may be that,

though presently undetected, the *moral* flaw of the work may be detected in the future, and the uptake necessary to the work's artistic success thus denied to it.

The supporter of the ethical criticism of narratives should endorse the former, not the latter, of these two claims, if the activity of criticizing narratives artistically is to be conceived of as an activity aimed at discovering the value of artworks independently of the responses they have in fact received. Yet I am very skeptical of whether Carroll is in a position to make this claim, given how the enthymeme argument has been presented. For the argument relies on how morally sensitive audiences, however these should be construed, would *in fact* respond to a narrative. In particular, Carroll has made the success of a narrative depend on the responses perceivers in fact give or will give. In the first example we discussed above, he also added that, if a narrative were to succeed in eliciting the responses it aims at – and in principle it may succeed in doing so for ever – the narrative's immorality, on the grounds of its evil ethical perspective, would be artistically neutral. Hence, it is not surprising that, of works like the propaganda film in the second example here discussed, Carroll would only be able to say that it “may” make sense to call them aesthetically defective because of their immorality, on the grounds that they “remain likely to fail to engender the planned response in morally sensitive viewers” (1996, 233). Such works “may still be aesthetically flawed, since in those cases the moral flaws sit like time-bombs, ready to explode aesthetically once morally sensitive viewers, listeners and readers encounter them” (Carroll 1996, 234). However, since, in principle, the narrative's ethical defect might *never* be detected, it may count as an

artistic defect only from the moment it *is* detected. Accordingly, the relationship that the enthymeme argument establishes between a narrative's ethical status and its artistic value is, at best, a contingent one. The narrative's value as art is claimed to depend on the narrative's ethical status as contingently perceived by selected audiences – morally sensitive audiences – ones that may on occasion fail to detect the real ethical value, for some time or for ever.

Hence, the account has two major defects. First, it seems to apply to, say, immoral narratives not because they *are* immoral but because they are *perceived* to be immoral. That is, the moral status of a work has artistic relevance only to the extent that that is actually detected. In this way, the ethical criticism of narratives, vis-à-vis other components of artistic criticism, such as criticism in terms of aesthetic or formal properties, is not a process of discovery of the characteristics of the work, but at best of how certain perceivers would respond to the work. Second, the theory fails to show, as instead any response-based account must be able to do, that the responses it chooses as artistically relevant – in this case the responses of morally sensitive audiences – do indeed legitimately set the artistic standard.

Fortunately, a response-based argument can take care of both of these worries at once, if it succeeds in showing that ethical sensibility legitimately is part of artistic sensibility, i.e., that perceiving and responding to narratives in ethically sound ways is an integral part of appreciating them artistically. Carroll fails to give any convincing argument in this sense, though presumably he would claim to have shown that in showing

that the mobilization of the perceivers' moral powers is essential to understanding and following the vast majority of narratives. Let us briefly address a claim of this kind.

If the activation of one's moral powers can be shown to be necessary to understanding possibly any narrative of human affairs, then the supporter of an argument for moralism might want to claim that the necessity for the activation of perceivers' moral powers points to the responses of morally sensitive audiences as setting the normative standards against which to assess narratives artistically.

Since I agree with Carroll that narratives very often, if not always, activate our moral powers, I must say why I don't think that is sufficient to make the case for moral sensibility to be part of artistic sensibility. The fact is that, when speaking of "morally sensitive audiences," Carroll, as shown above, is introducing a notion that is rather thicker than that of audiences merely *capable* of activating their moral powers. For a morally sensitive audience is not just capable of identifying the responses the narrative requires or invites, but also of assessing whether such responses (and hence the narrative itself) are morally sound, and give or fail to give the responses accordingly. Carroll's enthymeme argument, while making a convincing case for the necessity of an activation of the narrative perceivers' moral powers to the full understanding and appreciation of a narrative, shifts to whether morally sensitive audiences *will* activate their moral powers as a standard of artistic success. However, in the absence of an argument for it, the latter claim amounts to, again, the same question-begging assumption in favor of the ethical criticism of narratives pointed out above. Consider that, with the example of the

propaganda film, perceivers who buy into the film's understanding of reality, perhaps due to the heat of war, can safely be said to lack *moral sensibility*, at least of the kind necessary to see the enemies as fully human. However, one could not equally safely say that such perceivers have failed to have their *moral powers* activated by the film, and have hence failed to fill it out with appropriate responses. Quite the opposite, they have responded precisely the way the narrative invited them to. The claim that following a narrative with understanding requires the activation of one's moral powers is not the same as the claim that following a narrative with understanding requires the activation of *sound* moral powers, or those of a morally *sensitive* person. After all, those audiences that fail to see the immorality of that hypothetical propaganda film must nonetheless have activated their moral powers, in order for them to fill in the narrative with the appropriate responses (i.e., appropriate to the narrative): e.g., that enemy soldiers, not being people, can be the object of mistreatment.

I will argue below (Chapter 7) that perceivers who fail to see the immorality of a narrative do indeed fail to see a defect in a work that is artistic, or at least, artistically relevant. Hence, artistic sensibility must indeed include ethical sensibility. But Carroll's enthymeme argument provides no warrant to this conclusion, insofar as it considers as essential to narrative understanding the mere activation of one's moral powers, and not the activation of sound moral powers.

To this Carroll could protest that, in fact, the enthymeme argument does include the appropriate link between the activation of moral powers and the activation of sound

moral powers, insofar as the argument points out that emotional responses are subject to criteria of correctness. Hence, responding as the propaganda film asks its perceivers to do, with no sympathy for the enemy soldiers, insofar as they are depicted as sub-human, is a failure in activating one's moral powers. Such a response may indeed go in the right direction, one leading to a theory that judges artworks artistically partly in virtue of their moral status, and not for how perceivers happen to morally respond to them. Shortly, we will be examining precisely a theory of this kind, namely, that of Berys Gaut. However, as far as the enthymeme argument is concerned, a work fails or succeeds on its own terms insofar as it fails or succeeds in receiving the aimed uptake. Since the moral inappropriateness of certain emotional responses, and the appropriateness of others, is relevant to the artistic value of the work only because, and to the extent that, morally sensitive audiences would recognize such appropriateness or lack thereof, a work would fail on its own terms only if, by its very design, it aims at being subject to the judgment of morally sensitive audiences. In the absence of an argument to the contrary, a propaganda film depicting the enemies as sub-human arguably does not aim, by its very design, at receiving responses from such morally sensitive audiences.

In sum, I have argued that Carroll, while apparently building an argument for the ethical criticism of narratives on what he claims to be essential to the understanding of them, in fact simply describes how morally sensitive audiences would respond or fail to respond to moral or immoral narratives, and hence determine their success or doom them to failure. In the absence of an argument establishing that morally sensitive audiences set

the standard for the artistic assessment of narratives, Carroll's argument simply reduces itself to a description of how a moral narrative will succeed, while an immoral one will fail, with morally sensitive audiences.

6. Further Worries.

Carroll concentrates on the immorality accruing to narratives because of their embracing of immoral perspectives. That is indeed the sense of morality and immorality the ethical critic of art is most likely to concentrate upon. Narratives should be primarily judged not for *what* they portray but for *how* they portray it, i.e., for the perspective they have on what they portray. On the other hand, Carroll concentrates on the process of *following* a narrative with understanding, and claims that immoral narratives will fail to draw in morally sensitive audience members and to hold their attention. However, though the ethical perspective embraced by a narrative pervades the whole narrative and is likely to affect the experience of its parts, the mechanisms of engagement with a narrative are improperly reduced, by Carroll, to the responses given or denied to the narrative's ethical perspective. For, on the one hand, the ethical perspective of a narrative may emerge, at the end of it, when all the relevant episodes have been presented. In such a case, the narrative is surely liable to an ethical judgment based on the perspective the narrative embraces, but such judgment does not appear to be immediately linked to the process of following the narrative. On the other hand, some narratives may fail artistically because morally sensitive audiences will resist what *appears* to be the ethical perspective of the

narrative without that really *being* the narrative's perspective. After all, even in regard to Ellis's *American Psycho*, one may suspect that the narrative's mistake is at least predominantly an artistic one – that of failing to make its ethical perspective (of social criticism of the America in the eighties) manifest enough – and less an ethical one – that of actually embracing a perspective disrespectful of human life.

Moreover, the gist of Carroll's account is that immoral narratives will fail to absorb us, provided we are morally sensitive enough to perceive the gap between our own moral system and the narrative's ethical perspective. By contrast, narratives whose perspective matches our own will absorb us more. Yet there is reason to be suspicious of the link Carroll proposes between absorption and correspondence to the audience's moral system. After all, narratives that present us with *belief* systems that are at odds with our own system of held beliefs may win our engagement and absorb our attention precisely because of *that*. A film like Milcho Manchevski's *Before the Rain* can absorb us because of the temporal contradictions it embodies. A novel like Patrick Süskind's *Perfume* is absorbing thanks to the presentation of olfactory experiences at odds with our own. And so on.

Carroll claims, more specifically, that immoral narratives fail to absorb us because they confuse the understanding. Yet, in cases not having to do with morality, at least, we do not always find unabsorbing that which we find confusing. A movie like Stanley Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut* is absorbing precisely because it confuses us by blurring the distinction between reality and dream or hallucination.

Of course, that which is confusing or just contrary to what we believe, in the moral sphere may give rise to that special resistance, discussed above as *imaginative resistance*.¹³ However, one can be skeptical of whether that is appropriately described in terms of lack of absorption. Immoral characters, such as those that populate the movies of Quentin Tarantino or those of Ethan and Joel Coen, can surely be interesting and absorb our attention. And a large part of our absorption may have precisely those characters' implied ethical perspectives as objects. In other words, I submit, absorption is not correlated in any simple way with being in agreement with. We can be absorbed by what we abhor, and fail to be absorbed by what we approve.

7. Berys Gaut's "Ethicism."

The main problem with Noël Carroll's enthymeme argument was shown to be its making the artistic success of a narrative depend on the actual responses the narrative elicits or will elicit in morally sensitive perceivers. Such perceivers, according to Carroll, will be more absorbed, other things being equal, by morally sound narratives than by morally defective ones. Yet, one of the problems with such proposal is that even morally sensitive audiences may be moved by an immoral narrative or fail to be moved by a moral one (immoral or moral, of course, in the relevant sense). In such instances, the argument provides no way to conclude that the narrative's artistic value is affected by its moral status, besides perhaps an optimistic expectation that the narrative's real ethical standing will eventually become transparent to the morally sensitive perceiver and will

then affect his or her response. The alternative of idealizing the morally sensitive perceivers, and making of them the standard for artistic judgment, needs a separate argument, I claimed, one that Carroll does not provide.

Such an argument has in a sense been offered by Berys Gaut, who has put forward perhaps the most refined defense of a moralist position, one that does not depend on any claim on what responses narrative perceivers are in fact willing to give, but rather on the responses they *ought to* give, hence on which responses the narrative *deserves*, independently of whether it in fact receives them.

Gaut names his version of moralism *ethicism*, and defines it as the thesis that “the ethical assessment of attitudes manifested by works of art is a legitimate aspect of the aesthetic evaluation of those works” (1998b, 182). The claim is a *pro tanto* one, “such that if a work manifests ethically reprehensible attitudes, it is to that extent aesthetically defective, and if a work manifests ethically commendable attitudes, it is to that extent aesthetically meritorious” (Gaut 1998b, 182).

As stated, the theory appears to be very broad. It covers as relevant to the artistic value of a work every attitude manifested by it towards some object or state of affairs.¹⁴ Furthermore, the pro and con attitudes an artwork manifests towards some state of affairs or thing should be conceived of as lying on a continuum between unmixed approval and unmixed disapproval, allowing for all the nuances of intermediate positions, including neutral and mixed attitudes.

Indeed, ethicism is not just a theory about the criticism of narratives or even, so it seems, only of artworks with a representational content. Rather, it is meant to cover the artistic criticism of non-representational works as well, such as music with no text, provided that such works manifest attitudes with respect to some object or state of affairs.¹⁵ In sum, ethicism justifies the ethical criticism of art across media and genres, and even into the realm of some non-representational works.

Moreover, ethicism does not link the ethical criticism of art to any function that artworks must have for them to be criticized this way: most notably, an educational function. Thanks to its making use of the broadly conceived notion of the attitude manifested by an artwork with respect to some state of affairs, ethicism can justify the ethical criticism of artworks of very different nature and produced for very different purposes.

Hence, according to the categorization proposed in Chapter 3, ethicism is a form of *radical moralism*, one claiming that, for the selected ethical dimension – in this case, the attitudes manifested by an artwork – the ethical value of a work systematically bears on its artistic value for works of all kinds or genres. Moreover, the ethical dimension that is indicated as relevant to the value of works of art is ultimately analogous to that of a work's ethical perspective, which I suggested in Chapter 4 to be the most promising for grounding the ethical criticism of narratives.

Of course, the attitudes that we should be interested in, when criticizing an artwork, are those actually possessed by the work, not those the author, narrator, or artist

claims the work to possess, as Gaut rightly points out (1998b, 184). de Sade, for instance, in the dedication pages of his *Justine*, claims that he intends to show how the path of virtue ought never to be abandoned, not even when vice, not virtue, seems to be constantly rewarded by fortune (de Sade [1791] 1990, 455-456). Yet, the detailed descriptions of the rapes and tortures to which the protagonist, Thérèse/Justine, is subject, the articulate philosophical arguments put forward by the evil characters in the novel in support of a lifestyle dedicated to vice, and, in contrast, the inadequacy and lameness of Thérèse/Justine's moralistic defenses of virtue, clearly indicate that the narrative has an attitude towards the narrated events that is quite different from the author's stated intentions. And, more generally, Gaut's theory is neutral with respect to the question of interpretation, that is, on what determines which attitudes an artwork manifests.

In sum, for those artworks that manifest attitudes with respect to states of affairs or things, their attitudes can be judged ethically, as defective or meritorious. And in that respect, ethicists claim, such artworks are also defective or meritorious artistically – worse or better works of art than they would otherwise be, in virtue of the moral status of the attitudes they manifest.

Gaut's ethicist is in many respects similar to the view that I will defend below (Chapter 7). Especially the notion of manifested attitude – conceived of as the attitude manifested by the work itself and not necessarily by some character in a narrative or by the work's author, real or implied – seems very close to the notion of a narrative's ethical perspective. Yet, there remain some important differences between Gaut's account and

my own, first of all because Gaut's approach, like Carroll's, is a response-based one. Indeed, my critical discussion below will concentrate precisely on the notion of response.

8. The Merited-Response Argument.

In support of ethicism, Gaut presents the *merited-response argument*. The argument can be summarized as follows. If an artwork prescribes a response that is unmerited, then the artwork is in that respect defective; conversely, if it prescribes a response that is merited, it is in that respect meritorious. Since ethically reprehensible responses are unmerited, and ethically commendable responses are merited, artworks are defective or meritorious partly according to the ethical status of the responses they prescribe. In particular, ethicism as stated above is true, since the attitudes manifested by an artwork are a matter of the responses the artwork prescribes.

For a better assessment of the argument, let us spell out the premises that, in Gaut's view, lead to the conclusion that ethicism is true. I will quote or paraphrase Gaut's text as appropriate.

(1) "A work's manifestation of an attitude is a matter of the work's prescribing certain responses towards the events described" (Gaut 1998b, 195).

(2) "If these responses are unmerited [...], we have reason not to respond in the way prescribed" (Gaut 1998b, 195). If these responses are merited, we have reason to respond in the way prescribed.

(3) “What responses the work prescribes is of aesthetic relevance” (Gaut 1998b, 195).

(4) [from (2) and (3)] “Our having reason not to respond in the way prescribed is a failure of the work” (Gaut 1998b, 195). Our having reason to respond in the way prescribed is a success of the work.

(5) Ethically reprehensible responses are unmerited. Ethically commendable responses are merited.

(6) [from (2) and (5)] We have reason not to respond in the way prescribed when the prescribed response is ethically reprehensible. We have reason to respond in the way prescribed when the prescribed response is ethically commendable.

(7) [from (1), (4), and (6)] A work that manifests an ethically reprehensible attitude fails, in that respect, as a work of art. A work that manifests an ethically commendable attitude succeeds, in that respect, as a work of art.

(8) Hence, ethicism is true.

My critical discussion of the merited-response argument will mainly concentrate on the transition from premises (4) and (6) – on having reasons to respond or not to respond in relation to the morality of the work, and on that bearing on the work’s artistic success – to the conclusion stated in (7). However, since (7) is stated in terms of a work’s *manifested attitude*, that transition requires premise (1) as well, linking the manifestation of an attitude to the responses a work prescribes. Hence, I shall first dedicate some space to a discussion of that premise.

9. Manifested Attitude and Prescribed Responses.

An important aspect of the merited-response argument that must be clarified is the connection its first premise establishes between an artwork's manifested attitude and the responses the artwork prescribes to its perceivers. Notice that the link between the two notions is fundamental to the merited-response argument, for it to be based on the notion of response and yet be able, at the same time, to consider an artwork as ethically defective or meritorious in the central sense of that judgment: for the point of view, ethical perspective, or attitude the work has on things.

Of course, it is Hume himself who in *Of the Standard of Taste* establishes a relation between an artwork's point of view and the responses the artwork requires of us. For, in the long passage quoted in Chapter 5, he both locates the ethical defect of a work in its failing to mark immoral manners "with the proper characters of blame and disapprobation" ([1757] 1995, 267), and refers to the artwork's perceivers' justified qualms to "enter into such sentiments" ([1757] 1995, 267).

Indeed, sympathizers and critics of the Humean approach seem to be equally happy, in general, with framing the discussion on the ethical criticism of narratives around the notion of response. In particular, the debate has concentrated on narratives' *advocating* or *promoting* a perspective, attitude, or point of view, and the notion of advocating or promoting, in turn, has been interpreted in terms of prescribing responses. Matthew Kieran, for example, defends his moralist position in terms of narratives' (more generally artworks') promoting imaginative understandings of reality, understandings

that are prescribed to the narratives' perceivers.¹⁶ Carroll, for his part, seems in fact to separate between the perspective of a work and the work's promoting it. Yet, his argument is all centered on the notion of response, and although the ethical dimension it concentrates upon is the "moral understanding" of a narrative, a novel like *American Psycho* is said by him to be condemned by the audience for "promoting" its flawed moral understanding of murder and torture (Carroll 1996, 232). On the other hand, Daniel Jacobson – a critic of the Humean approach – emphasizes how narratives often do not just present ethical perspectives, they advocate them (1996, 335, and 1997, 167); and they advocate them (primarily) by requiring responses from the narratives' perceivers: "a poem advocates an ethical perspective only if we are called upon, in engaging the work, to respond in sympathy (or perhaps in complicity) with that perspective (1996, 335; see also 1997, 167). The result of this approach has been that of discussing the moralist arguments just in terms of responses. Jacobson, for instance, when critically discussing Gaut's argument as well as other Humean arguments (Carroll's, Moran's, and, more limitedly, Walton's), just refers to the prescribed responses as the criterion for the ethical judgment of art: the criterion such "that a work of art is immoral when it calls for an emotional response it would be wrong to provide" (Jacobson 1997, 171).

In light of this widespread agreement on what it takes for a narrative to advocate its ethical perspective, there might seem to be little necessity to explain the tie between manifested attitude and prescribed responses in any detail, as Gaut himself does not do. By contrast, I will suggest reasons for not taking the relationship between the two notions

that are so brought together – manifested attitude and prescribed responses – for granted. Given the relevance of this issues to any response-based defense of the ethical criticism of narratives, and not just to Gaut’s merited-response argument, I will address it at some length, though still in direct reference to Gaut’s claims.

The need for clarification on this issue derives in the first place from the rather vague terminology by which the claim, in Gaut’s text, is formulated: the manifestation of an attitude being “a matter of” (1998b, 195) the responses it prescribes; elsewhere in the text, the attitude being “manifested in” (1998b, 192) the responses it prescribes.

Most likely, Gaut establishes that the manifested attitude of a work “is a matter of” the responses it prescribes, in the sense that artworks manifest their attitudes “in” the responses they prescribe, partly on the grounds of an analogy between an artwork’s manifesting ethically relevant attitudes and the utterance of a value judgment, specifically an ethical judgment. There is a long metaethical tradition, of course, that interprets the utterance of ethical judgments in terms of the expression of sentiments conjoined with a prescription.¹⁷ Such tradition has been continued by a number of theorists who, in spite of their differences, all pursue what can be called a “neo-sentimentalist” project – explaining value attribution in terms of emotions or attitudes, as was already suggested by Hume.¹⁸ It is quite likely that Gaut’s approach to the relationship between a work’s manifested attitude and the prescriptions the work prescribes on its perceivers is influenced by these more contemporary representatives of this approach. The very notion of “merited” response is used by some of the neo-sentimentalists in metaethics, including

Elizabeth Anderson, whose remarks on humor and ethics suggest an argument very similar to the one defended by Gaut on the ethics of jokes, as well as to the merited-response argument for the ethical criticism of art itself (Anderson 1993, 2, Gaut 1998a).

Of course, if the relationship between manifested attitude and prescribed responses really requires the endorsement of the neo-sentimentalist approach to value language, then the merited-response argument may be weaker than one might have initially thought. For its success would depend on the success of that project concerning evaluative language, a project that not everyone agrees upon.

Whatever the origin of Gaut's reasons for connecting the manifested attitude of a work to the work's prescriptions for its perceivers, that connection, I claim, should not be seen in too strict analogy to what might be true of ethical judgments. Much more instructive, I am going to suggest, is a comparison between an artwork manifesting an attitude and a *person* manifesting her attitude, perspective, or point of view on things – something that is usually brought about by means of several judgments but also by bodily postures, actions (including acts of omission), value-laden and in general ethically relevant descriptions, emotional responses, and so on.

One reason I see to draw a distinction between the expression of an attitude by means of an ethical judgment and by means of a work of art is that ethical judgments are supposed to receive the same responses from everyone; yet that is not true of works of art. If a claim like “x is right” really includes a prescription such as “approve of x!”, that prescription applies equally to any morally competent person. By contrast, artworks'

prescriptions may be, and often are, much more multifarious than that, involving a variety of possible perceivers. A work of art offers itself to the experience of the first-timer, first-timer with respect to that art object and sometimes first-timer with respect to a whole genre of art; but it also offers itself to the experience of the expert. It offers itself to the one-time perceiver as well as to the multiple-time perceiver. Some artworks may offer themselves to women in one way and to men in a somewhat different way (*The Vagina Monologues* comes to mind). And children's literature can appeal to the adult reader not entirely through the adult's occupying, in imagination, the child's place with respect to the narrative, but rather through a point of view specifically designed for the adult perceiver. And so on.¹⁹ In sum, as human beings can have, and manifest, the same attitude but with different implied prescriptions for different listeners, so can, in principle, narratives.

The analogy between the manifestation of attitudes by an artwork and that by a person perhaps gives voice to one of the intuitions of Wayne Booth, who, developing one of Hume's suggestions, describes literary criticism (and, of course, by extension, the artistic criticism of narratives in any media) as similar to the choice of a suitable friend, in terms, that is, of the sort of "implied author" emerging from the narrative (Booth 1988, Chaps. 7 and 8).²⁰ Without espousing Booth's theory of the implied author, we can accept the idea that narratives present themselves to us, so to speak, with their look on to the world, a perspective on things, a point of view or, if you like, an attitude. Indeed, the

very activity of interpreting a work involves identifying the work's perspective, and such individuation may involve hypothesizing on the artist's outlook on things.

Of course, there is a sense in which people and narratives are *not* similar with respect to the attitudes they have or manifest, for a person but not a narrative can *have* an attitude, in the sense of possessing it, and *not manifest* it, in the sense of making it in any way noticeable. Since narratives do not literally have mental states, I am going to assume, they have or possess an attitude with respect to a state of affairs (typically a state of affairs connected to the narrated events) only to the extent that they manifest it. In fact, Gaut seems to assume the identity between an artwork's attitude and the attitude the artwork manifests (incidentally, making his very use of the phrase "*manifested* attitude" somewhat redundant). Of course, in no way does that mean that the narrative's attitude needs to be manifested overtly, or in ways that make it obvious. Simply, the narrative's attitude must be detectable and in that sense be manifested *in* the work, for it to be considered as the *narrative's* attitude (versus attitudes that may be detected *through* the narrative but attributed to, say, its author rather than to the work itself).

We should then perhaps distinguish between a thin and a thick sense of "manifesting an attitude," when talking about narratives. By its very nature, a narrative cannot have an attitude unless it does, in a thin sense, manifest it, i.e., unless the attitude is detectable in the narrative. In this, narratives are *different* from people. On the other hand, *like people*, different narratives can possess the same attitude and yet manifest it, in a thick sense, in significantly different ways. A narrative may betray an attitude of anti-

Semitism or be explicit about it; it may preach or just show; it may recommend or present for consideration; and it can make any of these things more or less whole-heartedly. In all such cases, the artwork's attitude could be the same, although differently manifested. In general, unless one is willing to claim that the same ethical perspective, or ethically relevant attitude, cannot be embodied by different artworks, the possibility of distinguishing between possessing and manifesting an attitude must indeed be admitted.

Once the alternative analogy, between narratives and people rather than between narratives and the expression of a value judgment, is considered, a possible gap between having an attitude, on the one hand, and prescribing responses towards what the attitude is about, on the other, may emerge. Alternatively, the manifested attitude could be *defined* in terms of prescribed responses. This latter suggestion is indeed Gaut's own. He *defines* a work's attitude in terms of the responses the work prescribes. Furthermore, although Gaut refers to the necessity of looking at all the prescriptions of a work to "*discover* the attitudes it manifests," he also refers to the "point of view" or "perspective" that a narrative has on the narrated events as "*constituted* in part by actual feelings, emotions, and desires that the reader is prescribed to have toward the [...] imagined events" (1998b, 193, emphasis added). I will find this suggestion problematic, in particular for its possibly shifting attention away from what should be the real object of the ethical evaluation: the attitude, point of view, or perspective of the work itself. I shall, then, discuss *both* of these options.

Certainly when people prescribe, say, immoral attitudes towards an object or state of affairs, they can be blamed for that. However, with people, the typical object of praise or condemnation is the perspective they endorse on things, not what they prescribe to others. That is, naturally most often we look at what a person prescribes to others as a sign of the perspective she herself holds on things. Indeed, someone seeking supporters for, say, a praiseworthy perspective that nonetheless she seems to be uncommitted to would sound insincere; someone seeking support for an immoral perspective without himself endorsing it would raise understandable suspicion. We look at what the person prescribes primarily as an *indication* of her attitude, but it is the person's attitude itself we want to judge in order to judge the person.

In general, when someone appears to prescribe to others an attitude she herself seems not to endorse, it is natural to look for contextual clues that would explain away the divergence between what's prescribed to others and what's endorsed by oneself. The prescription may be insincere or part of hypothetical reasoning, and hence not really, or only conditionally, prescribed. Or the prescription may be addressing someone holding a value system significantly different from one's own. In an exchange between an adult and a young child, for instance, the former may prescribe fear of monsters she does not fear, or great excitement at food she would never eat.

In sum, prescribed responses offer guidance in determining what the prescriber's attitude with respect to a given state of affairs is. Yet there is no simple correspondence between manifested attitude and prescribed response. In other words, the relationship

between prescribed responses and manifested attitudes is an evidential one. When the guidance offered by the prescriptions appears misleading, because the prescriptions are at odds with the attitude held, typically contextual clues are looked for in order to reestablish the connection between the person's perspective and the prescribed responses.

All of the above, I submit, can be true of narratives as well. With narratives, too, prescriptions to their perceivers can be an indication of the narrative's perspective. Of course, if all that was meant by declaring the attitude manifested by a work "a matter of" the responses it prescribes were an evidential relationship between the attitude actually possessed and the responses prescribed, where the latter may offer guidance to infer the former, then the merited-response argument would fail to establish, in premise (1), the needed relationship between prescribed responses and manifested attitude. If the relationship is only an evidential one, then the occurrence of a prescription may be an unreliable guide to identifying the attitude possessed by the narrative. And even if a prescription may be univocally connected to an attitude (something Gaut provides no argument for), in the sense that a person or an artwork cannot prescribe it without thereby manifesting the corresponding attitude, the relationship between the two is not biunivocal, since the same attitude is compatible with different response prescriptions.

Above, we have established that the same attitude can be expressed by different narratives in different ways – that is a feature narratives seem to have in common with people. Hence, presumably the same attitude may be accompanied by different response prescriptions. Moreover, with people as well as with narratives, the prescriptions on

those who are at the recipient's end of the manifestation of an attitude can be different, too, depending on the sort of recipient. One may express a favorable attitude towards the practice of female genital mutilation, and prescribe agreement from those belonging to one's own cultural group, but only acknowledgement and respect from everyone else. In any of these cases, the attitude expressed or manifested, we could assume, would be the same – a favorable attitude towards a certain practice – in spite of the prescriptions to listeners being fairly different. Hence, the same may happen, in principle, with narratives as well.

Indeed, above I have suggested that some narratives may prescribe different responses to women vs. men, or to children vs. adults. If that is compatible with the existence of *one* perspective that is the narrative's (see Chapter 7), then the work's response prescriptions do not point to the work's perspective in any simple fashion.

Finally, a further element of diversification among legitimate responses by narrative perceivers derives from the distinction, emphasized in Chapter 2 (section 5), between responses that are *required*, or *prescribed*, and responses that are *invited* by a narrative, for the same work may prescribe a given response to certain perceivers but only invite it from certain others.²¹

In all these possible instances the different prescriptions accompanying a given attitude can as such also be subject to different evaluations of their merit – an attitude, for instance, may be not agreeable but surely worthy of consideration. It follows that a narrative prescribing different responses to different perceivers would also be ethically

judged, as regards those prescriptions, in different ways. Hence, the merited-response argument, by being grounded on the notion of prescribed response, may be relying on something that fails to track the ethical status of the attitude or perspective of the work itself.

Gaut, in fact, introduces the appropriate proviso that in order to determine the attitude of a work, the whole set of responses it prescribes must be examined. He points out that the responses an artwork prescribes come in a hierarchy. The object of assessment for someone criticizing an artwork ethically is the overall attitude a work has with respect to a given object or state of affairs. Accordingly, the set of responses manifesting the work's overall attitude, and that are relevant to the ethical assessment of the work, may be quite different from the particular responses that are prescribed, as the narrative develops, with respect to the individual characters and events.²² For instance, a narrative can prescribe a sympathetic response to some evil character only to make us realize how seductive evil can at times be. It is in the latter response, a response of self-critical surprise at our own fascination with evil, that, we are assuming, the overall attitude of the work must be located. Hence, Gaut warns us, "the complete set of prescriptions that a work makes must be examined in order to discover what attitudes it manifests" (1998b, 193).

Gaut's point is well taken. Indeed, it makes his view stronger, for instance, than the one defended by Carroll. For one of the possible concerns above in this chapter, with a theory based on resistances to respond to certain prescriptions, as well as tendencies to

respond to others, was that in the process of following a narrative one may be required, say, to go along with an immoral attitude, so as to allow the narrative to eventually condemn such attitude (section 6). Yet, following Carroll's own reasoning, a morally sensitive perceiver will likely resist doing that, so making the narrative somewhat unsuccessful. However, I submit, such a narrative, if unsuccessful, would not be unsuccessful because of its immorality, since its overall perspective, we are assuming, would not be an immoral one. By contrast, thanks to Gaut's proviso, one can claim that in this case, if the narrative is well designed, it is rather the perceiver who refuses to go along with the immoral attitude manifested in the course of the narration who should be blamed for that on artistic grounds.

Nevertheless, Gaut's proviso does not eliminate the problem that if the relationship between prescribed responses and manifested attitude is only evidential, even the complete set of the former may, in principle, be an unreliable guide to the real nature of the latter. Indeed, the existence of a possible gap between prescribed responses and manifested attitude is a general problem for any view connecting the perspective of a work to the responses the work prescribes, and then assessing the work's ethical status by judging those responses.

It is only the claim that a work's perspective is *constituted* by the prescribed responses that could assure that whether a prescription is merited or unmerited is appropriately linked to the ethical status of the attitude manifested. Yet, to be sure that the link between the two judgments, one on the meritedness of the prescribed responses

and the other on the ethical status of the attitude manifested, does indeed appropriately obtain, the sort of constitutive relation involved must be clarified.

Let us, then, investigate the hypothesis that a work's complete set of prescriptions in some sense constitutes the work's attitude. Of course, the manifested attitude should not be *identified* with the set of prescribed responses. When I manifest my attitude to you with respect to something, that attitude surely cannot be made of the same responses I prescribe to you, for I may want from you responses to the object of my concern that are different from the responses *I* give.²³ Admittedly, in some cases there will be great similarity between an attitude manifested to someone and the responses prescribed for her, but surely not always so. When I manifest to you my resentment for the way women are treated in certain societies, I probably do call for your approbatory response of my resentment in the sense that I expect you to feel the same resentment toward the object of our conversation. (And your response is already different from my response to the extent that yours, not mine, has my own attitude as one of its objects.) Yet, if I manifest to you my love for mountain biking, I probably just ask for your acknowledgment of my passion, maybe for a response of interest on your part, but surely not for the same kind of response as my love for the activity calls forth from me. In some cases, responding to my manifestation of an attitude with anything more than mere acknowledgment may even be deemed inappropriate, as when I manifest to you my anger at my spouse, and yet do not expect you to become angry at her, not even as a sympathetic response.

I am not suggesting that Gaut wants us to identify the manifested attitude with the set of prescribed responses. I want solely to address the question of how much correspondence the merited-response argument should aim at establishing between the two. If the relationship is considered such that the prescribed responses constitute the manifested attitude, the available options are, first, that the manifested attitude is only in part constituted by the prescribed responses or, second, that the prescribed responses, though not identical with the manifested attitude, give us all there is to know about it. I will discuss these two options in turn.

Interestingly enough, in the above-mentioned quote, Gaut declares the point of view or perspective of a narrative as “constituted *in part* by actual feelings, emotions, and desires” (1998b, 193, emphasis added). Admittedly, Gaut’s reasoning in this context is aimed at defending his view that at least some of the emotional responses we are supposed to give when perceiving a narrative are *real* (versus imagined or make-believe) responses. Yet, the suspicion still arises that Gaut is committed to a view such that those responses that are deemed merited or unmerited for ethical reasons only *in part* constitute a narrative’s attitude, perspective, or point of view.

Yet, if the prescribed responses are considered as partly constitutive of the work’s attitude, then the judgment of the former may not be appropriately taken as being fully equivalent to a judgment of the latter, precisely because there is more to an artwork’s attitude than the responses the artwork prescribes.

Accordingly, let us examine the second option suggested above – that the set of prescribed responses gives us everything we need to know on the work’s attitude with respect to the narrated events. A suggestion of this kind may rely on the above-mentioned analogy between a narrative having or manifesting an attitude and the manifestation of an attitude by means of a judgment – most typically, an ethical judgment. I already pointed out some reasons to privilege a different analogy, that between narratives and people. Moreover, that suggestion may rely on a fundamentally Humean idea – that evaluative language ultimately has to do with the sentiments, with approbatory or disapprobatory attitudes. The very endorsement of an ethical perspective on the narrated events is a matter, it appears, of prescribing responses to the narrative’s perceivers with respect to those or related events. And I have already emphasized that it would be preferable, if possible, for a discussion on the ethical criticism of narratives to remain neutral with respect to these metaethical debates.

Moreover, it is now worth pointing out that treating together, if not conflating, the notion of a narrative’s possessing an ethical perspective with that of a narrative’s *advocating* such perspective may risk deflecting attention from the ethical perspective to the prescriptions to perceivers, and ultimately give an unnecessarily reductive representation of what an ethical perspective *is*. Since this is a defect that pervades several of the theories in this debate, not just Gaut’s, and one involving a notion, that of a narrative’s ethical perspective, central to my own argument (see Chapter 7), I should briefly discuss that notion here.

Several authors have referred, under different names, to what I have been calling an ethical perspective. The manifested attitude that the merited-response argument makes use of is certainly close enough to that notion. We have already seen some of the difficulties, however, of constructing the notion of a narrative's attitude or perspective in terms of the responses the work prescribes. That definition of a narrative's perspective, vis-à-vis the characterization that I will favor, concentrates on the responses it aims at eliciting, hence it calls attention to the *audience*. Such an approach is obviously quite suited to discussions of how the morality and immorality of narratives may affect the appreciation of them by their perceivers.²⁴ Yet such discussions have proved incapable of grounding an argument for the ethical criticism of narratives. Gaut's merited-response argument, while appropriately concentrating on the work itself, via the notion of the responses *the work* deserves, still remains linked to an emphasis on the audience, via the notion of response. Hence, some of the above-mentioned concerns do arise, on the account's possibly shifting attention away from what should be the object of both ethical and artistic judgment: the work's perspective on things – on the events and characters it narrates as well as on related ones.

The reply to these concerns, on behalf of the supporter of an argument based on the notion of response, however, could be quick and apparently quite straightforward. For one could point out that when a narrative prescribes, say, a tragic response, it is not just prescribing fear and pity to the narrative's perceivers, it is also presenting the narrated events as *worthy of* fear and pity. Likewise, a narrative that prescribes horror is

prescribing fear and disgust as the appropriate response to some monstrous being, hence is presenting such a being as fearsome and disgusting.²⁵ And so on and so forth.

Prescribed responses do appropriately focus attention on the evaluation of the narrated events themselves, for the prescribed responses are endorsed by the narrative as appropriate.

The above is a somewhat roundabout way of showing that narratives, by prescribing responses, do after all refer to the world – not just to the world of the narrative but, sometimes to a considerable extent, to *our* world. Although such a reasoning goes, in my view, in the right direction (see Chapter 7), it is in a sense, however, limiting. For events are not just subject to emotionally charged classifications, as worthy of fear, pity, disgust, etc. Rather, they are also classifiable as seen within more global worldviews that are constituted not just of prescriptions to respond emotionally but of ethical principles, categorizations, conceptualizations, value attributions, etc. (see Chapter 7). Furthermore, even if ethical perspectives, conceived of as complex evaluative frameworks, were ultimately to be reducible to attributions of value properties to things, not necessarily must the value attribution occur by means of the prescription of a response.

Finally, consider that the important notion of the “complete set of prescriptions” introduced by Gaut is ambiguous, between the complete set of prescriptions a work prescribes and the complete set of prescriptions a work prescribes *to a certain (kind of) perceiver*. A work’s ethical perspective must be constituted or expressed by the whole

set of prescriptions a work prescribes, considering *all* the possible different perceivers of the work. However, the merited-response argument relies on the prescriptions to the perceiver of a work, for it is the work's *perceiver* who has reasons not to respond in the way prescribed when the prescribed responses are (ethically) unmerited. It follows that, while it appears that the merited-response argument is referring to the ethical status of a *work's* perspective or attitude, by appeal to the complete set of prescriptions, it in fact fails to so refer to such a perspective or attitude, by its focusing on the response prescriptions on the work's perceiver. For not necessarily is the complete set of prescriptions prescribed to a given (sort of) perceivers the same as the complete set of prescriptions prescribed by an artwork. The only solution to this problem would be for the argument to appeal to some sort of conjunction of the sets of responses prescribed to the various possible (sorts of perceivers). Yet, in such case, there would no longer be a use for the notion of the set of responses prescribed to the work's perceiver, and the argument could just be reformulated in terms of the work's attitude or perspective.

In sum, while Gaut, with his ethicism, presents a theory that appropriately refers to the notion of a work's attitude (what I would call a work's ethical perspective), by providing a response-based argument for such theory, he ends up putting the cart of the prescribed responses before the horse of the ethical perspective. It is because a work has a given ethical perspective that it prescribes certain things to its perceivers, and not the other way around. Furthermore, the widespread fact that narratives appeal to different sorts of perceivers in different ways shows that there is more than one cart to be pulled

by the same horse, and hence that defining the work's ethical perspective in terms of the responses prescribed to the work's perceivers is either misleading, in case only one sort of perceiver is looked at, or redundant, in case all the possible sorts of perceivers are looked at.

10. Ethical and Artistic Reasons.

The main problem with the merited-response argument is that it appears to be either question-begging or guilty of equivocation. In the argument as reconstructed above, premise (4) establishes that when we have reason not to respond in the way a work prescribes, that is an artistic failure of the work; and premise (6) claims that we have reason not to respond when the responses prescribed by the work are ethically reprehensible. The first question that comes to mind is whether the two premises are using "reason" in the same sense. If they are not, then the argument is based on an equivocation and the conclusion stated in (7) does not follow. If they are, then for (7) to follow, the sense of "reason" employed throughout the argument must be one that is *both* subject to ethical criteria *and* relevant to artistic value, hence one that employed in premise (4) would make that premise, and the argument, guilty of begging the question in favor of ethicism.

This objection has already been brought against the merited-response argument, by Jacobson (1997) and by Anderson and Dean (1998). Indeed, it was even discussed briefly by Gaut himself, when replying to possible objections to the merited-response

argument. To the charge of structural unsoundness of the argument, for its moving from ethical to artistic merit, or from ethical to artistic reasons, Gaut responds that the transition from one set to the other is soundly made thanks to the “substantive claim” appearing here as premise (3), which states that what responses a work prescribes is aesthetically (i.e., artistically) relevant. Gaut claims to have defended such a premise “by appeal to the language of art criticism and [by] a supporting claim that art deploys an affective mode of cognition” (1998b, 197).

Yet, Gaut’s dismissal of the objection is unconvincing. To start with, premise (3), again, can be interpreted in two different ways. It can be taken as saying, noncontroversially, that part of the success of a work depends on its success in *artistically* meriting the responses it prescribes;²⁶ or as saying, controversially, that part of the success of a work depends on meriting the responses it prescribes, *in any sense* of “meriting.” Yet, if (3) is interpreted in the former sense, then, again, the conclusion can follow only if some other part of the argument equivocates, on the sense of “reason” or on that of “merit.” If, on the other hand, the latter interpretation is chosen, then a separate argument must be provided for premise (3), which is now shown to be as controversial as it is fundamental to the merited-response argument for ethicisim. Accordingly, Gaut will have replied to the objection only if his reasoning in support of (3) is really sufficient to support the needed interpretation of that premise. Let us see whether his appeal to the language of art criticism, and the supporting claim on art employing an affective mode of cognition, are indeed up to this task.

As such, the appeal to the language of art criticism only supports the trivial claim that artistic merit matters artistically. Gaut provides some examples: “thrillers that do not merit the audience being thrilled, tragedies that do not merit fear and pity for the protagonists, comedies that are not amusing, melodramas that do not merit sadness and pity are all aesthetic failures in these respects” (1998b, 194). Of course, the appeal to examples cannot be sufficient to establish a claim as general as (3), since (3) is formulated with no reference to genres and so must be supported by more general reasoning. Gaut’s reasoning here seems to be inductive, if not a mere statement of a general view that he must consider to be virtually self-evident:

Works outside these genres, which similarly prescribe a range of responses, are likewise aesthetic failures if the responses are unmerited. And in general it is a bad work of art that leaves us bored and offers no enjoyment at all (Gaut 1998b, 194).

This reasoning could raise understandable qualms, since horror, comedy, and thriller are well established genres, indeed ones that are at least partly individuated by the distinctive responses they prescribe – be they fear and disgust, amusement, or suspense – while here the thesis is stated in general, for all genres (see e.g., Anderson’s and Dean’s 1998 criticism). I will not pursue this objection, however, since it suffices to conclude that the appeal to the language of art criticism is able to show only that the question of merit of the prescribed responses does matter artistically but only if “merit” is used in its artistic sense, i.e., with respect to the goals of the work. Hence, surely a propaganda work aiming at having its perceivers respond with admiration to some political figure fails if

such figure, in the work, does not merit, from the artistic point of view, to be responded to with admiration.²⁷

Furthermore, if the appeal to the language of art criticism were supposed to include an appeal to the fact that art critics do in fact consider ethical criteria when judging the question of merit of prescribed responses, then the argument would again be open to the charge of begging the question, since the philosophical discussion on ethicism is precisely aimed at determining whether certain art-critical practices are legitimate or not.

The natural way to argue for the artistic relevance of the ethical question of merit, by means of a broad conception of what makes a response merited, is to maintain that certain responses are subject to ethical criteria of applicability, and thus that when a narrative prescribes one such response it automatically subjects itself to such ethical criteria. Indeed, Gaut appears to endorse this view. His argument is based on the normative character of responses. Of de Sade's works, for instance, he remarks that they prescribe amusement at the torture of innocent beings (Gaut 1998b, 192); yet, the torture of innocent beings does not merit amusement as a response; hence the failure of the work, artistically, in that respect. Furthermore, when defending ethicism with respect to the humor of jokes, Gaut (1998a) bases his argument precisely on the notion that certain responses, such as amusement, are normative – they are subject to an assessment of their correctness in terms of their target. Hence, Gaut claims, for instance, that if the ancient Romans found the devouring of people by lions in the Coliseum amusing, they were

simply mistaken (1998a, 61). I shall discuss this view below (section 12). For, on the other hand, Gaut also presents a somewhat peculiar characterization of the question of the ethical merit of a response. I want to first discuss this somewhat atypical characterization, since it opens the merited-response argument to an objection formulated by Daniel Jacobson, which, though ultimately not endorsable in its specific terms, deserves a somewhat detailed discussion.

11. Ethical Reasons and Conditions of Warrant.

When expanding his claim that responses are subject to evaluative criteria, and that some of them are ethical ones, Gaut appears to endorse a principle that can be stated thus: an ethically blameworthy response is a response that it would be immoral to give; an ethically praiseworthy response is a response that it would be moral to give. The focus of such a definition is clearly the *subject* giving the response rather than the *object* towards which said response is addressed:

I can criticize someone for taking pleasure in others' pain, for being amused by sadistic cruelty, for being angry at someone when she has done no wrong, for desiring the bad. [...] If we actually enjoy or are amused by some exhibition of sadistic cruelty in a novel, that shows us in a bad light, reflects ill on our ethical character, and we can properly be criticized for responding in this fashion. (Gaut 1998b, 194)

This is connected to what Gaut names the “*affective-practical* conception of ethics,” one in which people are criticized not only for their actions and motives but for their feelings

as well: “we criticize people for being crude, insensitive, callous, or uncaring; we praise them for being warm, friendly, and sensitive” (1998b, 186).

Although the affective-practical conception of ethics certainly has its merits, Gaut’s application of it here risks bringing about a damaging confusion on the evaluative criteria for responses. Indeed, the above construal of the criteria to which responses are subject opens the door to the objection advanced by Jacobson: in brief, that artistic reasons to respond or not to respond to an artwork should not be confused with ethical or prudential reasons (1997, 170 ff.). Such objection is autonomist in character, since it proclaims a distinction between artistic considerations and considerations of other sorts, specifically, ethical and prudential considerations (see Chapter 3). It must be remarked that Jacobson’s objection is brought forth within a more general project aimed at defending the view that the “conditions of warrant” of an emotion should never be confused with considerations of other sorts, such as ethical and prudential considerations (see also D’Arms and Jacobson 2000). Indeed, Jacobson holds that the conditions of warrant of an emotion are “logically distinct” from any ethical or prudential considerations. Hence, he claims that, although it can be ethically wrong (for instance, because harming others) or prudentially wrong (because harming you) to respond with emotion *F*, that has nothing to do with whether the response *F* is warranted, i.e., with whether the situation has the evaluative property Φ with respect to which *F* is appropriate. *Amusement*, for instance, is a response that is warranted when it is directed to objects, people, or situations that have the evaluative property of being *funny*. Hence,

in terms of conditions of warrant, responding with amusement is warranted provided that the object is indeed funny. Yet, it is easy to imagine a situation in which being amused would be wrong, either morally or prudentially: when being amused is offensive to someone, or when the joke is uttered in circumstances that would make being amused at it embarrassing.²⁸

Jacobson's general claim of complete independence of the conditions of warrant from ethical considerations is certainly controversial, in light of the many emotional responses that have a moral shape, and hence that are such that ethical criteria are integral to the conditions of warrant of the emotion.²⁹ Indeed, I propose (see n. 30 below) that admitting that the conditions of warrant of at least some emotions in at least some circumstances are at least in part ethical has more explanatory power than Jacobson's (and D'Arms's) radical view. In any event, the distinction between conditions of warrant and ethical considerations, construed in terms of the morality of responding in a certain way, is helpful, and allows to reformulate the objection to the merited-response argument with no need to embrace the more radical claim on conditions of warrant being always independent of any ethical consideration. Indeed, the objection can simply be based on the very fundamental assumption that I have attributed above to Gaut, namely, that a response is immoral if it would be morally wrong to give it. Such an assumption, I claim, fails to sufficiently focus on the question of appropriateness of a response with respect to the *object* of the response, independently of the evaluation that can be given of the person giving the response.

In a sense, the above-stated principle risks reversing the order of explanation between the judgment of an emotional response and the judgment of someone having it, for at least part of the reason why one can be criticized for, e.g., being amused by sadistic cruelty is that *sadistic cruelty* is not amusing. Other things being equal, sadistic cruelty, so we are assuming, is not a fitting object of amusement. Gaut himself, in the above quote, mentions being angry at someone who did nothing wrong as an example of a response for which one could be criticized. Yet, it is important not to lose sight of the main reason why someone being angry in that way is criticizable: because innocent people do not merit anger, not because that would put the angry person in a bad light. The evaluative criteria of a response, construed with reference to the *subject* giving the response, make up a more complex notion than that of the evaluative criteria with respect to the response's *object*. While the latter notion is part of the former, the former is not part of the latter. That the two notions are different as well as not equivalent can be shown also by recalling instances in which, say, responding in a way that would be appropriate with respect to the object may nonetheless open us to criticism for so responding. What my brother did to me may well merit my anger, but nonetheless, ethically, I ought not to feel the anger, if that puts me at risk of also expressing it when only negative consequences could follow from that. As Jacobson (1997) would have it, anger would be the fitting emotion, since the situation is worthy of anger, or warrants anger, and yet feeling angry would be ethically the wrong thing to do in the circumstances.³⁰

In sum, to the extent that the defense of the merited-response argument is based on a conception of the ethical evaluative criteria of certain responses as amounting to the morality or immorality of *having* such responses, the argument is open to the objection that, while having an emotion may very well be immoral, such emotion may still be fitting to the situation – hence the failure of the merited-response argument for confusing ethical considerations with considerations of warrant. Accordingly, we must look at a defense of the argument, and in particular of the claim that the question of merit of responses matters artistically, that looks at considerations of warrant of the prescribed responses as including ethical criteria.

12. Merit in Context.

The only possible defense of the argument for ethicism must claim that some responses are subject to ethical criteria in the sense that ethical considerations are constitutive of the conditions of warrant – they determine the formal object of the response. The morally good, for instance, and not the morally bad, can be the object of admiration, the unjustly suffering the object of pity. Such a view coheres well with Gaut's appealing, as a supporting claim, to an affective-cognitive conception of art, for such an appeal amounts to the claim that art prescribes responses that, being partly cognitive in nature, are subject to evaluative criteria. Since, Gaut argues, "[s]ome of these criteria are ethical ones" (1998b, 194), it follows that narratives prescribing responses that fail for ethical reasons fail for the very goals that they aim at. The resulting view would then claim that as a

narrative prescribes, say, admiration for a character, in the way that *The Triumph of the Will* prescribes admiration for Hitler, the narrative submits itself to the evaluative criteria proper for admiration, hence failing artistically to the extent that Hitler is not admirable. Hence, the merited-response argument could ultimately be safe from the dilemma between equivocation and question-beggingness raised above (section 10).

In a view like the one just presented, the focus appropriately is on the object of the response, specifically on whether it fits the prescribed emotion (or the emotion fits the object). And yet this is somewhat a strange way to conceive of the evaluative criteria of a prescribed response, for it appears to assume that such criteria are independent of the point of view from which the evaluation of the response is prescribed or given. In contrast, I submit, responses like anything else can be evaluated from a variety of points of view. My manifesting dissent to how my friend behaves with her children may be ethically praiseworthy and yet wrong from the point of view of etiquette. Or if she is not my friend but rather my boss, my response will likely be wrong from a prudential point of view. Again, when I respond with enthusiasm at the news that you are going to make sushi for dinner, and yet have reasons not to trust the way you store your raw foods, I may be responding in the most elegant but possibly not the most prudent way. I will suggest that, not only are responses merited or unmerited depending on the *context* – something that Gaut would likely admit – but that the context also contributes to indicating from which *points of view* the question of merit must be determined. It follows, I claim, that the mere fact that a response is ethically unmerited cannot be taken

as automatically counting towards determining the artistically relevant merit of a prescribed response. In fact, shortly, I am going to point out how Gaut himself is implicitly committed to acknowledging that sometimes an ethically unmerited response ought to be given for artistic reasons, a fact from which I will derive my final objection to the merited-response argument.

Indeed, the claim that prescribed emotional responses are subject to evaluative, and in some cases ethical, criteria, makes room for a possible confusion. It does, of course, serve the goals of the ethical criticism of narratives to say that, when a narrative prescribes a response F towards an object that fails to be Φ , the narrative has failed in that respect. Such a view conceives of emotional responses, so to speak, as *perceptive*: responses to properties such as Φ . However, the autonomist could legitimately appeal here to *projective* powers that prescribed responses must be acknowledged to have. A response like admiration, for instance, would not have a fitting object in (the historical) Hitler, for Hitler fails to have the property of being morally good, or worthy of admiration. However, that is not sufficient to exclude the possibility that the prescription of an admiration response in the context of *The Triumph of the Will* succeeds in projecting onto Hitler (or the Hitler of *The Triumph of the Will*) qualities that would make him worthy of admiration. Indeed, with respect to what I have called the “projective powers” of prescribed responses, there are two things to notice. First, whenever a prescription is recognized by a competent perceiver for what it is, the prescription is, in that sense and to that extent, successful. This success could be

described as a success in showing that the property Φ is being projected onto the object O. Second, in the context of, say, a narrative, the successful projection of a Φ onto O may be accomplished by means of successfully projecting onto O some properties, ϕ_1 , ϕ_2 , etc., which would make O have Φ . Of course, O may not be apt to actually have Φ (or, for that matter, to have ϕ_1 or ϕ_2 , etc.) and hence the prescription may ultimately fail with respect to its object. Yet, whether the *projection as such* is successful cannot depend just on O – it must also depend on the context in which O has been placed (partly in virtue of the very attribution of Φ to it).

Accordingly, whether a prescribed response is merited by its object cannot just be settled by whether the object as such merits the response. Rather, part of what settles that question will have to do with how the object is presented within a narrative. For instance, Hitler may very well fail to merit admiration in light of what he in fact did as a statesman but he might still be, in a sense, worthy of admiration within a well constructed narrative, such as *The Triumph of the Will*. It follows that, when assessing the artistic success of a narrative, its success or failure in prescribing responses cannot just depend on the choice of the objects of such responses. It must also depend on what, roughly, we can call formal features – how, for instance, the response prescription is arrived at. Hence, even if Hitler is not a fitting object of admiration, and hence in that respect a narrative prescribing he be admired may be deemed unsuccessful to an extent, the same narrative may, in another respect, be successful in *making* Hitler in the narrative worthy of admiration.

The former objection to the merited-response argument acquires its full force only after considering that Gaut himself acknowledges, although implicitly, that the merit of a response partly depends on the narrative context. The merited-response argument is formulated with reference to the whole set of prescriptions of a work, in order to allow for the above-mentioned possibility of, say, a work prescribing amusement at an innocent's suffering only to the effect of showing how seductive evil can be. It follows that responses that, taken individually or in a different context, would be unmerited ought yet to be given, so as to appreciate the work of art with its overall ethical perspective. That is, Gaut allows not only that sometimes unmerited responses are in fact given by insensitive perceivers. He is also committed to allowing that some other times unmerited responses *ought to* be given. The sense of this "ought to" is, however, obviously an artistic sense, and in particular one that is independent of ethical reasons. For, if a narrative perceiver lets herself being influenced by the ethical reasons she does have against responding in the prescribed manner, she would in fact, in this hypothetical case, *lack* artistic sensibility. By contrast, if the narrative's perceiver is artistically justified in not responding as prescribed by the work, in virtue of the ethical qualms she has, then the narrative itself is in that respect artistically a failure.

By no means, however, is such a failure necessary. Narratives – it is the very possibility recalled by Gaut – can prescribe evil within an overall ethically praiseworthy perspective. The consequence for the merited-response argument, however, is for the view to acknowledge that the artistic context can indeed allow for artistic "oughts" that

are independent of ethical reasons. Accordingly, the objection to the merited-response argument arises of why the artistic context should not be allowed to play the same role it can play with respect to individual responses towards the overall ethical perspective of a work as well. *The Triumph of the Will* prescribes admiration for Hitler. Had it done so in order to show us how easy it can be to find evil fascinating, the work could in principle have been successful according to Gaut. Hence, the objection could be, why can't the work be successful, artistically, even when the response does not serve an ethically praiseworthy purpose? In other words, Gaut's allowing for ethically unmerited responses that nonetheless ought to be given in order to fulfill the overall artistic project of the work, in fact brings about a separation between artistic and ethical merit – in other words, between artistic and ethical reasons, artistic and ethical “oughts,” or artistic and ethical merit. Yet, with that separation in place, the argument no longer goes through: the interpretation of premise (3) is again the least ambitious one, and the appearance of logical soundness can only be the result of an equivocation.

The only way for Gaut to respond to this objection is by claiming that in fact the ethically unmerited responses ought to be given not just in order to fulfill the work's overall artistic project, but precisely to fulfill the work's overall ethical perspective as well. Hence, it is, he could claim, an *ethical* reason that bears upon the prescription to respond, in the course of this hypothetical narrative, in a way that is *prima facie* immoral. The response is, in itself, ethically unmerited, but it ought to be given, where the “ought” is once again an ethical one.

Now there is no longer equivocation, but rather the general claim that certain responses have ethical criteria of applicability, criteria that can, on occasion, be overcome only for ethical reasons. Such a claim, combined with premise (3), on the artistic relevance of the responses a work prescribes, would finally make the argument sound. Yet, I cannot see any non-question-begging reason for endorsing such a general claim. For within an argument that aims at showing the artistic relevance of ethical reasons, what could be the grounds for stipulating that, in the hypothetical example, ethical reasons not to respond can be overcome only by other ethical reasons? Moreover, the general claim is simply false on general grounds. Reasons of one kind can bear on reasons of another kind, and so determine whether a response ought to be given. As I contemplate whether to express my opinion at a faculty meeting, I may have professional, even ethical, reasons to do so, and yet realize I ought not to do so on prudential grounds. In a different sort of case, I may have financial and prudential reasons to purchase the least expensive eggs, and yet refrain from doing so for ethical reasons that come from my knowing how the eggs were produced. Accordingly, it would be only natural – and in fact it will be part of my claim below (Chapter 7) – to say that, while we have ethical reasons not to respond with admiration for Hitler to *The Triumph of the Will*, we nonetheless have some artistic reasons to do so. Surely, admiration should be considered, according to a cognitive view of affective responses, as subject to criteria of correctness or applicability; and surely admiration, or at least admiration for a moral hero, should be recognized as having a moral shape in the sense that it is subject to ethical criteria of

applicability. However, if the meritedness of a response partly depends on the context within which the response occurs, so that even an otherwise unmerited response ought on occasion to be given, and, if with respect to *The Triumph of the Will* the relevant context is the artistic one constituted by the work and the genres it belongs to with its ultimate artistic goals, then it is not too far-fetched to claim that Hitler ought to be seen as somewhat admirable within that context. A successful argument for the ethical criticism of art must be capable of acknowledging such a claim.

We can conclude that the merited-response argument has failed to demonstrate that a work manifesting a morally reprehensible attitude is a worse work of art because of that, and a work manifesting a morally praiseworthy attitude is instead a better work of art because of that.

¹ See, e.g., Stolnitz (1992) and Diffey (1997).

² As recounted below, Carroll's argument relies on the fact, if it is a fact, that morally sensitive audiences would, e.g., not respond to immoral narratives. It is, then, not completely clear how such narratives may turn up being corruptive, at least for what those selective audiences are concerned. Hence, it appears that the legitimacy of the ethical criticism of narratives, if grounded on the former fact – the lack of response from morally sensitive audiences – should not be grounded on the latter fact – that some audiences will have their understanding confused by such narratives. Of course, Carroll can indeed make both claims, provided that the audiences he refers to are different ones. Yet, that further confirms the appropriateness of looking at Carroll's argument for ethical criticism with no reference to educational or corruptive potentials of narratives.

³ The argument is effectively summarized in Carroll (1998c, 419-422). A more extensive presentation of it can be found in Carroll (1998b).

⁴ In fact, perhaps, Carroll's examples are too casually chosen, if a distinction should be drawn between a narrative leaving aspects of a fictional world underdetermined and a narrative requiring or recommending that certain details be filled in. This is true of all representations, of course, such as a painting like Manet's *The Street Singer*. Of such painting I would want to claim that correctly understanding it requires the assumption (however implicit and automatic) that the woman has feet while they are not shown in the painting, while it is left undetermined whether she is wearing shoes of one color or another. Of course, in order to declare which features are left underdetermined, the appropriate interpretive work must be done. It is not underdetermined, I would claim, that the woman is wearing shoes, and not sleepers, or that she is not barefooted.

⁵ In fact, as the example of anger shows, the number of emotions having, at least in part, a moral shape is larger than the number of so-called moral emotions. (I take the phrase "moral shape" with reference to emotions from D'Arms and Jacobson 2000).

⁶ See, e.g., Grice (1981).

⁷ How a narrative aims at certain responses, whether ultimately in virtue of the artist's intentions in producing the work, or rather in ways more disconnected from such intentions, should be left open. Though Carroll elsewhere (1992) happens to espouse a form of intentionalism, we need not commit his argument to any specific position in this regard. The argument as such does not depend on the truth of one specific theory of interpretation.

⁸ Incidentally, by no means do I intend to deny that the narrative's ethical perspective is what makes it ethically defective as well as artistically defective. My point is simply that such a feature is necessary, indeed in a very basic way, to the moralist position, that it should not be treated as, in itself, an argument for moralism. If the argument is correct, it follows that the same feature is both an ethical and an artistic reason. Yet, that is a consequence of the argument, a claim the argument supports – by itself, it cannot show the argument is correct.

⁹ I do not mean to generalize from these claims (though I presume in many ways one could indeed legitimately generalize). Perhaps, compassion, for instance, might on occasion be a vice in the statesperson, or unfairness be a virtue in the parent.

¹⁰ It must be emphasized that the theory, in the restricted form one might want to consider – as appealing only to those narratives that aim at the responses of morally sensitive audiences – must refer to works that *exclusively* aim at those audiences, for an immoral narrative aiming at them as well as at other audiences would still be successful with respect to the latter.

¹¹ Notice that there are two different ways in which a morally sensitive, though not ideal, audience can fail to give the appropriate response to a work: it may fail to detect the moral status of the work or, in spite of a correct detection, it may fail to give the ethically appropriate response. The two examples Carroll discusses both exemplify failure of the first kind.

¹² Presumably, the same could be said of a morally enlightened work, the morality of which, however, is hidden from the narrative's perceivers.

¹³ Carroll (1996, 233-234) explicitly refers to imaginative resistance and to Walton's (1994) investigation of that.

¹⁴ I follow Gaut in considering it appropriate to talk of *works* manifesting attitudes (1998b, 200 n.). However, see also section 9 below.

¹⁵ I am presenting this interpretation of the view because Gaut claims that even music with no text, such as Shostakovich's symphonies, can be the object of ethical criticism. In fact, Gaut adds the proviso that the music can be subject to ethical criticism "if we can properly ascribe to [it] a *presented situation* and a prescribed response to it" (1998b, 193, emphasis added). He also defines the scope of "response" as "covering a wide range of states directed at *represented events and characters*" (Gaut 1998b, 193, emphasis added). Hence, Gaut actually seems to see representationality, although very broadly conceived, as necessary to the manifestation of an attitude. Since I concentrate on narratives, the issue is not relevant here. Yet, it is worth mentioning that a response can be prescribed, for instance by a piece of music without text, and hence be subject to the question of merit, but without any representation of characters or events; rather, I suggest, *the music itself*, or parts thereof, could *be* the object of the prescribed responses, even of a response that is ethically assessable. And, at least in principle, the question of the *ethical* merit of the prescribed response could arise.

¹⁶ The fact that Kieran concentrates mainly on the educational potential of narratives, and hence to a dimension of ethical judgment of narratives that I have found to be not central to the ethical criticism of narratives, is irrelevant to the present point.

¹⁷ See, most notably, Stevenson (1937).

¹⁸ I borrow the label of "neo-sentimentalism" from D'Arms and Jacobson (2000). Of course, the contemporary neo-sentimentalists (McDowell 1985, 1987, Wiggins 1987, Gibbard 1990, Anderson 1993, and Blackburn 1993) do not just claim that the emotions and attitudes expressed are *had* by the person who utters the value judgment but also that they are *endorsed* by him or her as in some way *appropriate* (see also D'Arms and Jacobson 2000, 70).

¹⁹ I take this pluralism to be an expansion of what Jerrold Levinson (1987b) maintains regarding the assessment of musical performances. Elsewhere, Levinson quite agreeably makes the point that the same artistic work can have a message for “insiders” and a rather different one for “outsiders,” as it appears to be the case with many pieces of rap music (1995, 80). Of course, accepting this pluralism about the experience of narratives has nothing to do with embracing a relativistic approach to the appreciation of art, or even less perhaps to its understanding. Indeed, that some artworks allow for a variety of legitimate experiences might explain some of the appeal, however wrong-headed and ill-grounded, of a relativistic approach, for such plurality – which depends, in my view, on the nature of the work, albeit in relation to its prospective perceivers – may be mistaken for a plurality depending on the stipulative authority of the perceivers themselves, irrespective of the work. Though there is no need to pursue this any further here, it should be added that such pluralism applies to both the issue of interpretation of a work and that of the work’s appreciation. Indeed, I would claim that the pervasiveness of the existence of a plurality of possible experiences of a given artwork is especially central to the issue of appreciation, and can hence be fully explained only if the interpretation of a work is indeed separated from its appreciation.

²⁰ Hume’s famous remark, which Booth takes inspiration from, is that we “choose our favourite author as we do our friend” (Hume [1757] 1995, 266).

²¹ This is true, for instance, of some jokes. The same, say, Jewish joke may appeal differently to different members of the audience depending on whether they are Jewish or not. For some interesting cases discussed along these lines, see Cohen (1999).

²² Thus, we could say that the particular responses that are prescribed and that yet do not constitute or represent the work’s overall attitude are not in effect prescribed by the work itself (thanks to Jerrold Levinson for this suggestion). Perhaps, they would be best described as just being prescribed *in* the work.

²³ As Goodman relatedly pointed out with regard to the notion of expression, a painting expressing sadness does not necessarily make its viewers sad (1976, 46).

²⁴ It is also suited to views interested in the modifications that narratives can bring to the character of their perceivers – another dimension of ethical assessment that I have already set aside (see Chapter 4).

²⁵ I am here relying on Carroll’s (1990) account of horror.

²⁶ Not everyone considers even this claim uncontroversial. Anderson and Dean, for instance, claim that even if the descriptions of whaling practices that can be found in Melville’s *Moby Dick* turn out to be incorrect, that would not be a defect of the work despite the work’s presumably prescribing belief in such practices being the actual ones (1998, 159). I will in fact disagree with such a claim in the following chapter.

²⁷ A less clumsy formulation would be that the political figure fails to be, in the work, admirable.

²⁸ This claim can still be made even after having distinguished between *being* amused and *expressing* such amusement, e.g., by laughter, for the former can predispose to the latter and hence make more probable that one could offend someone or find oneself in an embarrassing situation.

²⁹ The controversy may be on the claim itself or on what seems to be one of the assumptions behind it, namely, that ethical considerations with respect to responses are only those on whether it would be morally

right to have the response.

³⁰ Jacobson would also want us to add that my brother's meriting anger is a question of warrant logically distinct from ethical considerations. Yet, that's obviously not right, in consideration of the fact that my brother merits anger for doing wrong. Indeed, acknowledging that some conditions of warrant include ethical considerations – albeit not on whether responding in a certain way would be morally right or wrong – allows for the investigation of some relationships between partly ethical conditions of warrant and ethical considerations on the response. When, for instance, someone deserves anger, he would be in no position to complain if he does receive an angry response, for that is indeed the response *he* deserves, even if the person who is angry at him may very well be doing the morally wrong thing, and hence be himself subject to ethical criticism. Furthermore, the latter person's response, although (we have been assuming) not the morally right one in the circumstances, may be partly condoned in virtue of the object of the response actually deserving anger. Indeed, acknowledging that the conditions of warrant of some responses are partly ethical may be capable of accounting for considering the judgment on giving the response on a par as an all-things-considered ethical judgment, one weighing what would come, from a given response, to the person giving it, to the object of the response, as well as to whatever or whomever else is affected by it.

Chapter 7

ETHICAL CRITICISM AND THE AIMS OF REALISM

1. Introduction.

This investigation began with the experience of narratives, in particular with the analysis of the emotional processes prompted by narrative engagement. It soon appeared clear that a variety of emotional processes require perspective-taking, often of the cognitive and of the evaluative kind (see Chapters 1 and 2). Perceiving a narrative with understanding and appreciation may invite or require taking on different characters' perspectives on what those characters experience in the story, but may also invite or require taking on the perspective of the work as a whole, on the narrated events and characters as well as on related kinds of real events and people (see Chapter 5, section 3).

The very fact that we are often invited to assume perspectives different from those we typically occupy in real life creates the possibility of a mismatch between normative beliefs and those that engaging with the narrative may require us to assume. Hence, it is quite natural that some arguments for the ethical criticism of narratives would rely on

those phenomena that go under the label of “imaginative resistance,” claiming that works that fail ethically may also fail artistically, insofar as they fail to receive the responses they aim at. We saw that both Walton and Moran, for instance, suggest arguments of this sort, if without much developing of them (see Chapter 5). And we saw that Carroll, too, developed an argument ultimately along those lines: works that fail ethically fail to receive uptake, or to be absorbing, for that reason (see Chapter 6). One of the merits of Carroll’s view is that it also allows us to claim that narratives that are ethically sound succeed artistically for that reason. Another merit of the account is that it refers to the artistic goals integral to a narrative, which Carroll indicates as the narrative’s aiming at receiving uptake or being absorbing, in order to establish that at least *some* narratives, by being moral or immoral, are better or worse artistically because they succeed or fail “on their own terms” (1996, 233).

Such an argument faces several damaging objections, however. Here, let me recall only two of them, specifically those that in some way are also damaging to the approaches more directly linked to the notion of imaginative resistance. First of all, it is not clear how many narratives aim at being absorbing in the way that Carroll indicates, for some narratives may derive some of their artistic success from doing precisely what according to Carroll would make them fail to be absorbing, namely, confusing the ethical understanding (Chapter 6, section 7). Similarly, it is not at all clear that narratives cannot use imaginative resistance for artistic purposes, knowingly inviting such resistance.¹ Second, and most importantly, Carroll’s account (and, to the extent that they are

developed, Walton's and Moran's) depends on the responses that narratives *in fact* receive. And certainly there are immoral narratives that, at least amongst certain audiences, receive all the uptake they aim at, with no imaginative resistance (Chapter 6, section 5). In general, people's actual responses are not a guarantee that the work deserves, ethically or artistically, such responses.

Berys Gaut's ethicism and the argument for it, I claimed, are superior for this reason (see Chapter 6, section 8). Applied to narratives, ethicism holds that those works that have an immoral attitude fail artistically because of that, and that instead narratives with a moral outlook succeed because of that, independently of the responses the actual narrative perceivers happen to give. For, quite obviously, actual audiences may be mistaken and, in the same way as they can let themselves, say, be scared by what is not really scary, or pity a character who does not really deserve to be pitied, so can they respond favorably to what in fact deserves blame, or unfavorably to what in fact deserves praise. Gaut's view, however, is still based on the notion of response, for it construes the attitude of a narrative in terms of the responses the narrative mandates. And the argument Gaut proposes in support of his ethicism relies essentially on the notion of response, claiming that prescribed responses are merited or unmerited, and that being moral or immoral are ways of being merited or unmerited. I criticized Gaut's argument in a few ways but mainly because of its failing, I claimed, to distinguish between two ways in which a response can be merited or unmerited: either as such, or in the context in which it occurs (see Chapter 6, section 12). Gaut's argument fails to account, I

maintained, for the fact that some narratives can succeed, for instance, in *making* certain responses merited within the context of the narrative, at least to an extent, even if from an ethical point of view independent of the narrative, those responses are unmerited.

Progress can be made, I suggest, by shifting from the notion of *response* to a work to that of the *ethical perspective* embodied in a work. For, as suggested in Chapter 4, narratives embody points of views or perspectives, and can be ethically judged for that.

2. A New Proposal.

The view that I propose can be stated thus: whenever a narrative's ethical perspective can be subject to ethical judgment without betraying the artistic goals of the work, the perspective's ethical status contributes, in a systematic way, to the narrative's artistic value, in the sense that when the narrative's perspective is a praiseworthy one, the narrative is a better narrative, artistically, because of that; and when the perspective is a blameworthy one, the narrative is a worse narrative, artistically, because of that. In other words, my view claims that the ethical status of a narrative's perspective legitimately counts as a dimension of artistic evaluation, so that just as narratives can be judged to be artistically good or bad for their success or failure in being, say, aesthetically pleasing, narratively unified, emotionally engaging, or original, so can they be artistically judged for their embodying a moral or immoral perspective. An integral part of my proposal is that the ethical status of a narrative's ethical perspective is to be determined in terms of its being *fitting* to the real world. Indeed, the argument that I will present shortly will

make essential use of the claim that, when a narrative's ethical perspective is judged from the moral point of view, it is for the perspective's attempt to fit the real world, in a sense that I will specify.

My thesis is similar to Berys Gaut's ethicism applied to narratives, specifically, first, for its having a pro tanto structure and, second, for its concentrating on the overall perspective of the narrative – in Gaut's proposal, the overall "attitude" of the work – rather than on individual aspects of it. Hence, it is especially important to underline the differences between Gaut's account and the one I here defend. In general, my account differs from Gaut's for not requiring that the notion of a narrative's ethical perspective be analyzed in terms of responses. Rather, the argument I am going to propose is grounded on the notion of a narrative's ethical perspective *as such*, in conjunction with a claim on the artistic aims that are built into narratives (see sections 3 and 4 below). The main difference between the two accounts is that my view is compatible with admitting that some narratives may be artistically successful partly for their success in prescribing unmerited responses, unmerited, that is, with respect to their objects, as is the case, I have argued (Chapter 6, section 12), with Riefenstahl's *The Triumph of the Will* (as well as with admitting that some narratives may be artistically unsuccessful because they fail to prescribe responses that are, with respect to their objects, merited). Moreover, in my view, the criteria for determining the ethical status of a narrative's ethical perspective are somewhat historically relative, with consequences for both the ethical and the artistic

assessment of the work. I will expand on these two points below (sections 6 and 7 below).

Furthermore, my view includes a conditional clause, and hence it leaves it an open question how the view should be classified. In fact, that this point can be left open is arguably an advantage of my account, not a defect of it. For it will inevitably be disputed whether all types of narratives that embody an ethical perspective are therefore subject to ethical judgment, in the sense that their ethical perspective succeeds or fails to be fitting to the real world. I shall briefly address such dispute below, to the extent that it is philosophical (section 5). However, I suspect that another side of the discussion belongs to the art criticism of individual narratives or genres thereof, and I will keep neutral with respect to that. Accordingly, the precise classification of my view partly depends on what happens to be true of the actual narratives that are produced.

Naturally, since my view claims that there is a systematic relationship between ethical and artistic value, it is, according to the taxonomy I presented in Chapter 3, a form of *moralism*. Also, it is in a sense, a form of *moderate* moralism, for it is meant to claim that the ethical status of a narrative is relevant to the narrative's artistic status only for those kinds of works that can be evaluated ethically for how well the narrative's ethical perspective fits the real world. The view, however, is possibly classified as a form of *radical* moralism if it turns out that it is impossible for a narrative to embody an ethical perspective that is subject to ethical assessment and yet in a way that makes it artistically irrelevant. Whether or not that is the case, my suggestion will be that most narratives that

embody an ethical perspective are legitimately subject to ethical assessment in virtue of the perspective's fitting or failing to fit the real world, and that, in most cases at least, their degree of fittingness is artistically relevant, since being fitting to the world is one of the artistic aims of such works. Hence, mine should be conceived of as at least a fairly broad version, in scope, of moderate moralism, as it will become even clearer after I present my characterization of what an ethical perspective is and of how integral that is, in general, to the nature of a narrative.

I now move on to explain the argument. Since my thesis is expressed in terms of a narrative's ethical perspective, the argument in support of it will first have to explain what an ethical perspective is (section 3). This will also allow us somewhat to gauge the scope of the theory, i.e., the extent to which ethical perspectives can be attributed to narratives. The next step will be to show how identifying a narrative's ethical perspective is of artistic relevance (section 4). Then I will argue that when we judge an ethical perspective from an ethical point of view, we do so for the applications such a perspective might have in the real world (section 5). I will claim, in particular, that one ethical judgment that can be made of a narrative's ethical perspective is in terms of its fitting or failing to fit the ethical reality it applies to. Next, I will show how, when a narrative's perspective entails some real-world applications, such a commitment is artistically relevant (section 6). That is, I will have to argue for the artistic relevance of the narrative's ethical perspective succeeding or failing to fit the ethical reality that falls under its scope. Such an assessment is artistically justified, I will claim, because in most

cases at least, fitting reality is an artistic goal internal to the narrative. Indeed, by having such a goal, narratives commit themselves to the criteria of evaluation proper to a form of *realism*, albeit only for the relevant respects. Hence, loosely speaking, “truth to the world” becomes one dimension of artistic judgment for such works. Finally, as further defense, but also further explanation, of my view, I will reply to some possible objections to the theory (section 7).

3. Ethical Perspectives.

Narratives are representations. Distinctive of representations is that they do not just represent their subjects – for narratives, characters and events – but always represent them *as* something or other, in virtue of how the representation is achieved (see Goodman 1976 and Budd 1993). Alfred Hitchcock’s *North By Northwest* does not just represent its main character, Roger Thornhill (Cary Grant), but represents him as a relatively young man.² The narrative also represents him as irresponsible and immature, at least at the beginning of the movie. Hence, representation-as can also comprise features that are evaluative or that have evaluative aspects. In the same movie, for instance, the US secret services agents are represented as callous and manipulative.

Yet narratives are not just representations and, as a consequence of that, they represent-as, I submit, in more articulate ways than representations that are not narratives do. One of the things that distinguishes narratives from non-narrative representations is that narratives represent – either by verbal narration or by enactment and showing – a

temporally extended sequence of events, which are found together in the same story according to *some* connection between those events.³ Of course, this is just a sketchy characterization of the concept of a narrative, and in a different project it would need expansion and refinement. However, for our purposes, it will suffice. Notice that it is broad enough to cover narratives in different media, indeed to cover even art objects that one might have thought should not count as narratives at all, and which I instead claim should be included under the notion in the quite general sense of it that is applied in this work.

Consider, for instance, Gian Lorenzo Bernini's sculpture of Apollo and Daphne, apparently portraying Apollo at the moment in which he captures Daphne. This sculpture, I submit, does more than represent Apollo's capture of Daphne – it *narrates* the event as it develops overtime. Consider that, as viewers of the sculpture in the Galleria Borghese in Rome, we are supposed to enter the room where the artwork is positioned in such a way that we will first see the figure of Apollo only, running towards something that his body, however, obscures from our vision. As we walk around the sculpture, we see that Apollo is chasing Daphne, not having quite caught her; and finally, as we see Apollo grabbing her, we realize he is actually grabbing the laurel tree into which Daphne, for her plea, has been transformed.

Throughout a narrative, characters and events are represented under some description or other. In general, I submit, as the narrative unfolds, its perspective with respect to the narrated events emerges, partly constituted by the very unfolding of the

story. Accordingly, there is for narratives a sense in which they represent their characters and events *as* seen from the overall perspective emerging from and informing the narrative. For our purposes, I am interested in the more directly ethical component of such perspective, and I name that component the work's *ethical perspective*. Of course, there may be normative parts of a work's perspective that have nothing to do with ethics. In *North By Northwest*, for instance, the narrated events are very much presented in a self-reflexive manner by the filmmaker, as instantiations and comments upon the art of filmmaking.⁴ Components of such a perspective may even be evaluative but not in the ethical sense. However, concentrating on the notion of ethical perspective, so as to advance my argument in favor of the ethical criticism of art, should not suggest a narrow understanding of the notion itself, for it is part of an ethical perspective, I submit, anything that can contribute to the experience of the narrated and related events in an ethics-laden manner. In fact, while I suspect that virtually any narrative has a perspective, if sometimes minimal or scattered, I do not claim that all narratives have an *ethical* perspective in my sense, although probably most do.

Let us expand on this key notion somewhat. Several authors have referred to the notion of a narrative's ethical perspective, albeit under different names and often without much analysis. Martha Nussbaum has for a long time emphasized how narratives present us with ethical conceptions of life (see, e.g., Nussbaum 1990). Indeed, she even talks of the *perspective* of a work as "the sense of life that animates the work taken as a whole" (Nussbaum 2001, 240). Interestingly, Nussbaum notices how a work's perspective may

embrace elements of different generality, within and without the fiction. Yet, her interest is really in what happens to the reader:

On one level, [with respect to Sophocles's *Philoctetes*,] we see the sufferings of Philoctetes with compassion for a world in which this good and admirable man suffers unbearable pain. More generally, we think of acute physical suffering and have compassion for those in its grip. On a still more general level, however, we are encouraged to think of his sufferings as "things such as might happen," and thus to consider, in a more general way, the vulnerability of human beings to reversals and sufferings. (Nussbaum 2001, 240)

To my argument, in contrast, what is primarily relevant is the ethical perspective of a narrative, in whatever medium, as an integral element of the work itself.

Eva Dadlez (1997) aptly emphasizes that the ethical perspective of a work should not be conceived of simplistically. With reference to Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, for instance, she remarks how the "distinct ethical perspective in Austen's writing" must be found by noticing, say, the repeated "affiliation [in Austen] of the moral with the personal and the emotional" (Dadlez 1997, 120), hence avoiding the mistake of extracting the writer's perspective just from what certain characters feel. I should add that the ethical perspective of a work should not be identified with that of the narrator either, when one is present, and not only because narrators can be unreliable (as blatantly unreliable is the voice-over narrator in Stanley Kubrick's *Barry Lyndon*). The work's perspective, I submit, emerges from the narrative as a whole, and, as it provides the narrative's evaluative outlook on the narrated characters and events, it encompasses the narrative's overall set of relationships with the real world. Dadlez concentrates (as does

Nussbaum) on the emotional responses that a narrative expresses, in particular on the “construals” of parts of the world – people and events, and more generally kinds of people and events. I intend instead to propose a broad characterization of a narrative’s ethical perspective, as not limited to the emotional responses that are shown or elicited, but as constituted also of principles, categorizations, conceptualizations, as well as the advancing of hypotheses, the raising of questions, the manifesting of concerns.

Ultimately, a narrative’s ethical perspective thus conceived can be considered a way to experience the world as construed in a certain way and as calling for certain emotions, as instantiating certain principles, characterizations, and conceptualizations, as well as allowing for certain hypotheses, questions, and concerns.

Daniel Jacobson characterizes the notion of ethical perspective as “an organic whole,” expressing “the author’s point of view on what is and what should (or should not) be” (1996, 332). Indeed, it is important to emphasize not only the merely descriptive component of ethical perspectives but their normative side as well. Yet, contrary to Jacobson’s assumption, I will argue below that an ethical perspective is not necessarily *expressed* by a narrative – rather, the perspective is primarily *had* by it, or *embodied* in it. Moreover, the ethical perspective is not necessarily that of the actual author of the work, for a narrative may turn out to embody a view the narrative’s author had not intended. Whatever the case may be, it is advisable to concentrate on the narrative’s ethical perspective rather than on that of its author.

As it happens, Berys Gaut's ethicism is grounded in a notion similar to what I am spelling out here, for it refers to the work's overall attitude. Gaut rightly emphasizes that a work's attitude is the attitude emerging from the work as a whole. He also manages to make room for some of the nuances of a work's attitude with respect to what it refers to, by claiming that works' attitudes in fact "can run the gamut from unmixed approval through neutrality to unmixed disapproval, and also include various complex and nuanced attitudes that display both approbatory and disapprobatory aspects, such as those revealed in jealous and conflicted attitudes" (Gaut 1998b, 183-184). But whereas Gaut insists on construing the work's attitude in terms of the responses it prescribes, I prefer to keep neutral about the issue of whether a narrative's perspective can ultimately be reduced to, or be identified only by means of, a set of prescribed responses (see also Chapter 6, section 10). Moreover, the complications that can be part of a narrative's ethical perspective, as well as the complications of a person's worldview, can hardly be done justice to in terms of the nuances between pro and con attitudes, for they encompass the application of ethical principles, categorizations, and other more complex matters.

It is very important to characterize a narrative's ethical perspective in light of what a narrative *is*, that is, as a representation of events developing and/or linking other events over time. For, although one can also speak of the objects of non-narrational representations as being represented from a perspective, with respect to a narrative, a perspective is more easily linked, I submit, to the hypothesis of an agent commenting on the narrated events as they develop through the narration as well as after the narration is

concluded. That is, as a narration is more a *process* than just a representation, so is a narrative's perspective more of a complex whole than just a point of view. And a narration is also a whole out of which a reflective vision is likely at some stage to emerge.

A number of theorists have developed the notion of an implied author (most notably, Booth 1961 and 1988, and Levinson 1995) or of an implied film maker (especially Wilson 1995), to whom to attribute beliefs and intentions expressed by a work, including the "message" the work embodies (see especially Levinson 1995), indeed to whom to attribute the creation of the work for what it is. Wilson refers to the implied film maker in experiential terms, as the agent who guides our attention towards certain elements and not others of the narrated events, who asks us, for instance, to look at a character's actions with both skepticism and irony (1995, 135). Without taking sides on the separate issue of the nature of interpretation, such approaches may help us characterize a narrative's ethical perspective as the evaluative framework, the worldview if you like, in terms of which the work presents the events it narrates. My own characterization of an ethical perspective is influenced by those approaches. But mine should be considered as a characterization of what a narrative's perspective *is*, without implication for the separate issue of how such a perspective should be *identified*.

The notion of an ethical perspective should not be construed as the same as the "message" the work conveys or even, more narrowly, the "moral of the story." Walton is right in emphasizing that "[n]ot all works have messages or morals (even on rather

generous construals of these notions)” (1994, 31). Perhaps for a message to be expressed by a narrative, it must be advocated or asserted by it, at least indirectly. In any event, a message, even when construed broadly (as, e.g., in Levinson 1995),⁵ is still a narrower concept than what I mean by an ethical perspective, which may be embodied by a work even without being expressed by it, and which is better understood as a way of experiencing some part of the world than as a message about it.

Surely, often the expression of a message indicates the ethical perspective of a work, yet that is most often, I submit, just one aspect of such a perspective. Hence, for instance, as Ibsen’s *An Enemy of the People*’s message is about the dangers of going along with the opinion of the majority, the work’s ethical perspective also includes an ethical view on the various characters in the play, on their changing their minds throughout the story, and on the different ways in which they relate to each other. In sum, a narrative’s ethical perspective is often more complex and more detailed than just the message a work has to convey. Again, some narratives simply do not have a message to convey, though they do embody an ethical perspective. Think, for instance, of soap operas: there is no doubt that they embody a perspective, on the importance of certain relationships, on the value of love and the disvalue of betrayal, etc. Yet, it would not always be appropriate to claim that they convey messages on such things. Furthermore, consider that sometimes a narrative may just not take a position on the events it narrates, and while such an attitude of detachment is part, I contend, of the narrative’s perspective,

it does not amount to the expressing of a message, say, that detachment with respect to those sorts of events is legitimate.

Moreover, as Robert Stecker has pointed out with regard to works of literature, a perspective may be “merely entertained by [the work’s] writer” without being affirmed by him or her (1987, 269). In cases in which a view is only entertained by a work’s author, or entertained *in* a work, an overall ethical perspective in my sense may still emerge – e.g., one that considers a certain view worthy of being entertained with regard to the real world. Accordingly, with respect to Levinson’s observation that in many cases we may be “unable to decide whether a view we discern in a work is plausibly attributed to its maker as held, rather than merely considered, explored, or tried on for size” (1995, 73), the proposal I here advance holds that whether a view is held or considered or explored or tried on indeed matters to determining the precise ethical perspective of a work. As for the impossibility, in some cases, of determining the precise perspective of the work, that could mean two different things: that the work’s ethical perspective is not fully accessible to us; or else that the perspective itself is indeterminate, in which case, I submit, its indeterminacy is part of the very perspective (see also sections 4 and 5 below).

To sum up, I propose that narratives embody an overall perspective, the ethical side of which I have dubbed the narrative’s *ethical perspective*. A narrative’s ethical perspective can be conceived of by analogy to the perspective that a person may have with respect to certain events. Accordingly, a narrative’s ethical perspective is, typically at least, a complex matter, often irreducible to just a point of view, and hardly

summarizable in any simple way, or even impossible to paraphrase in a way that separates it from the narrative that embodies it. By this, I do not mean to suggest that all narratives will have views of the world that are so complex and articulate that they cannot be reduced to one sentence. I just maintain that it need not be so, and suggest that often it will not be so.

Hence, an ethical perspective is ultimately a way in which the world – the world in which we live – ought to be experienced, where the “ought to” has a fully ethical sense. Experiencing the world in a given way means seeing certain patterns of salience and not others, conceiving of ethical categories (such as, “the good,” “the virtuous,” “person,” etc.) as having a certain scope, and projecting certain predicates rather than others.⁶

The analogy between a narrative’s ethical perspective and the outlook on things or worldview of a person gives further plausibility to the above characterization of the former notion. Sometimes, a certain view of the world expresses itself rather explicitly by means of an individual judgment, say, that the Holocaust was a fine thing, or that the end of the apartheid regime in South Africa was a praiseworthy development in human history. Yet, I claim, those should typically be seen as components or expressions of more complex worldviews. For I have suggested that we conceive of an ethical perspective as not just made of judgments or principles, but also of conceptualizations, emotional responses, and ways of seeing and experiencing things and people. It takes a

sexist ethical perspective not just to say, “Her place is at home,” but also not to see as important what she does, or not to see it at all.

That a certain worldview is being held by someone can be shown, or betrayed, in a variety of ways besides its explicit expression and advocacy. A worldview may be behind, e.g., hand-waving towards the hypothesis that the historical reality of the Holocaust might have been exaggerated, or behind the claim – in the context of discussing the evil of the Holocaust – that we should not forget the victims of Stalin in the Soviet Union, and so on and so forth. Hence, a view of the world may be behind, and be betrayed by, a series of judgments and comments, and not necessarily explicit ones. Indeed, a view of the world need not be shown by judgments at all, for it may be embodied in certain actions or even omissions.

Likewise, narratives’ ethical perspectives get construed in a variety of ways and thanks to a number of elements: not only through the explicit comments by a narrator or by one of the characters, but also, for instance, by showing an action as having certain consequences and not others (see also Dadlez 1997, Chapter 4).⁷

What is most important to emphasize is that a narrative’s perspective is integral to the narrative that embodies it in the sense that the narrative is not just a means to the communication of such a perspective (although it may *also* be a means to that), nor is it always (or even often) separable from its actual embodiment in the particular narrative. Perhaps even with simple narratives, such as the fables of Aesop or of Phaedrus, where the moral of the story is clear and indeed sometimes even spelled out in an explicit

statement, the work's perspective would still be stripped of something important were it to be separated from the story that exemplifies it, for we are often interested in the perspective *as instantiated* and not just in the perspective *as such*.⁸ Furthermore, whether the moral is presented at the opening or at the end of the fable, it still affects the experience of some of the narrative's elements.⁹ A work's ethical perspective does not just provide a rationale or moral of the story, it also determines how to experience the narrated events – not just some characters as good while others as evil, or something as a good or a bad thing to have happened, but a given occurrence as fortunate, a character trait as admirable, a turn of events as surprising, a given pattern of behavior as inexplicable, an evil deed as inexcusable, a vice as standing at the extreme end of a virtue, a person's reaction as puzzling, a public remark as inappropriate, a choice as inevitable, and so on and so forth.

Of course, a narrative may, in the process of building a certain ethical perspective, invite an experience that is informed by a *different* perspective. For instance, it is common for the different characters of a novel to express a range of ethical perspectives (a point emphasized in Jacobson 1996). However, the perspective that emerges from the narrative *as a whole* likely will still inform, retrospectively, one's view on those perspectives.

In many cases, a narrative's perspective is only discerned by the narrative's perceiver some time *after* the direct exposure to the narrative. Narratives, especially good narratives, leave us reflecting, re-running in our head their crucial moments. Such

experiences count as experiences of the work and may very well contribute to reconstructing the narrative's ethical perspective (see also section 4 below).

There can be no doubts that identifying a narrative's perspective is part of getting the meaning of the work, of apprehending it, of appreciating it with understanding. Different theories of narrative interpretation will differ on what determines a work's outlook on things and on what it takes to find it; yet that narratives do not just narrate but do so with approval, disapproval, or indifference, that they present characters and events as seen through an evaluative framework, that they embody a way of looking at some parts of the world, will be widely accepted. I now expand on this somewhat.

4. Art Criticism and Narratives' Ethical Perspectives.

Individuating the ethical perspective of a narrative is certainly part of legitimate art-critical practice. First of all, understanding and engaging with a narrative already includes apprehending parts of its ethical perspective. For instance, when, reading George Orwell's *1984*, we recognize Winston Smith and Julia as two people, two individuals who have saved their individuality (or have had it saved), or when we hope that Winston will somehow survive torture – not so much in the sense of not losing his life, but in the sense of not losing his identity – we are already, I submit, apprehending and reconstructing the ethical perspective of *1984*.

Yet the individuation of such perspective goes beyond merely reading with understanding and with appropriate engagement. It is a primary goal for art criticism, in

this case for literary criticism. Hence, the ethical perspective of the work will not just be summarizable in an easy formula – say, that the main risk of totalitarianism is the destruction of the self. Which ethical perspective should be ascribed to a work is a matter for serious literary discussion, conducted in light of repeated readings and of the variety of factors that help in correctly interpreting a work. Accordingly, part of the job of identifying the ethical perspective of *1984* involves assessing whether the book is really committed to a certain view of an individual's identity – as necessarily intimate and necessarily threatened by anything public – or rather embraces it only for the sake of satirical critique of totalitarian regimes.¹⁰

That many narratives embody an ethical perspective does not imply that there exists only one correct interpretation of a narrative, let alone one that is easy to determine. We should admit that a narrative's ethical perspective might on occasion be out of reach of a single interpretation, and at best emerge from a variety of interpretations. Furthermore, it is undeniable that the same narrative may offer a variety of *different* experiences, not all of which can be had during one and the same exposure to the work.

Stanley Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut* can work as a good example for several of my claims so far. This movie admits, I claim, of at least two different readings: a psychological reading – centered on the fears of the main character, Bill Harford (Tom Cruise), of being found sexually inadequate; and a social reading – centered on the bargains that the lower-class characters make with the members of the upper classes, and

on the different positions, in that respect, in which we find the Harfords themselves. The viewer who tries to access the movie's overall ethical perspective will no doubt need several viewings, in order to identify enough of the visual and narrative elements that, by blurring the distinction between reality and dream or hallucination, suggest that Bill Harford might be projecting onto the outer world elements of his own inner reality. Multiple viewings will also be necessary to detect suggestions (specifically, I claim, references to Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*) that the character's path might be a dangerous one, headed to damnation (perhaps, the damnation of having finally seen the shallowness of his own character), though damnation is ultimately apparently averted.

The alternative interpretation – one not incompatible with the former, but nonetheless one that emphasizes different factors and that, at the same time, gives different meanings to the same symbols – is that of *Eyes Wide Shut* as a crude representation of the objectification of people, in fact even of the use of people's lives in service of the satisfaction of unworthy desires in a strongly hierarchical society. Once both interpretations are considered, the very ending of the movie, perhaps the place where its contradictory title finds its explanation, is somewhat pessimistic on both counts: the protagonists do not appear to have learned much about their own psychologies, nor do they really evince horror for the social reality with which they have long before struck a bargain.¹¹ If we admit that the judgments implicit in the film's conclusion (whatever those are) are part of the work's overall ethical perspective, we must recognize that such perspective emerges from two different interpretations, perhaps

two interpretations that cannot always be held together. For instance, is the association between Alice Harford (Nicole Kidman), or even the young Helena (the Harfords' daughter), and the prostitute Domino (Vinessa Shaw) part of the structure of a somewhat neurotic dream, or a commentary on all those women having been purchased and placed into a specific role within the strata of society? The pessimistic conclusion of the movie, I am claiming, embraces both of these readings; hence, both of them are part of the overall ethical perspective of the work.

The movie will also offer different experiences, depending on whether one interpretation is held in mind more than the other: the costume shop owner, Milich (Rade Sherbedgia), will appear almost magically capable of knowing what is going on with Bill – as it often happens in dreams – or as willing to be corrupted, in fact willing to sell himself and his own daughter as only someone can who has already in effect sold it all.¹² Also, where the emphasis goes may have much to do with the narrative's perceiver's nature and interests and experiences. Nussbaum's remarks quoted above, for instance, continue by emphasizing how there are “numerous different spectatorial options” (2001, 240) offered by the most general perspectives embedded in *Philoctetes*: “One spectator might focus on bodily pain, another on deception, another on the general vulnerability of human life to unexpected reversals” (2001, 241). Likewise, while watching Hitchcock's *Psycho*, the viewer may think, if a woman, of her own body's vulnerability, if a man of the vulnerability of the body of women he cares about (Nussbaum 2001, 246).

On the other hand, I suggest that the different interpretations and experiences of a work, taken together, do offer *an* experience of the work, in a sense – and that this fact has something important to do with the work having *a* perspective. Even if it could not be apprehended by just *one* exposure to the film, the ethical perspective of *Eyes Wide Shut* is still integral to the work, for it is *the same* work that offers itself to several interpretations and experiences, and because there still remains, quite likely, something that can be characterized as experiencing *Eyes Wide Shut* with *its* ethical perspective – it is the experience of the work that can be had *after* viewing it, when reflecting upon it.

In any event, different narratives' ethical perspectives may have different relationships to the experiences offered by a work. And even when there is no way to keep those experiences united under one experience, there still is something that counts as the work's ethical perspective. If, for instance, the work appears to endorse contradictory (narrow-scope) perspectives, it should still be considered as having *a* (global-scope) perspective, albeit a contradictory one. In every case, from the easiest to the most complex kind, a narrative's perspective, I suggest, frames for us a slice of reality so that there is that portion of reality as experienced through that narrative.

I have dwelled on the example of this movie also because it exemplifies other claims I made above (section 3): specifically, first, that the perspective of a narrative may emerge *after* the direct exposure to the work, and, second, that a narrative's ethical perspective may have a *complex* nature, and hence may include, for instance, internal contradictions, ambiguities, and vagueness. This example also allows to recall a point

made by Robert Stecker with regard to literature, but one that can easily be extended to narratives in any medium, namely, that there is a well recognized value, one that Stecker dubs “interpretation-centered value”: the value we grant to some works for their allowing, and indeed inviting, a number of different construals (1997, 270).¹³

A narrative’s ethical perspective, in sum, is an integral and valuable part of the artwork, and identifying it and apprehending it is a legitimate part of art criticism.

5. The Ethical Evaluation of Narratives’ Ethical Perspectives.

It is quite normal to judge a narrative morally for the ethical perspective it embodies, analogously to how it is normal to judge a person morally for her view on things, whether such a view is embodied in what a person says or writes or does, or, for that matter, fails to say or write or do. Indeed, it would take a rather narrow conception of ethics to maintain that expressions of views on the world are not proper objects of ethical evaluation. Gaut defends a similarly broad conception of ethics, one that he describes as “affective-practical,” when advancing his view that the attitudes a person or a work of art expresses are subject to ethical assessment. People can be judged – he claims in Aristotelian vein – not just for what they do but also for how they feel (Gaut 1998b, 186). Similarly, but more broadly, my claim is that it is legitimate to consider as falling under the scope of ethical evaluation entire evaluative frameworks, perspectives from which the world is experienced in a value-laden manner. It is on these grounds, I submit, that we can judge ethically not just people’s attitudes but such things as newspaper articles,

historical commentaries, political speeches, and, of course, narratives. The judgment is not on the consequences of the article, commentary, etc., but on the perspectives they embody.

What sort of ethical evaluation can that of an ethical perspective be? I propose that, when ethically judging an ethical perspective, we judge the extent to which it *fits* the real world. If ethical perspectives are evaluative frameworks that comprise conceptualizations, categorizations, applications of ethical principles, projections of ethical attributes, and so on, then the notion used to indicate when an ethical perspective is a good one must be broad enough to accommodate the different dimensions of an ethical perspective. I propose *fittingness to the world* as such a notion. Then, depending on which aspect of the ethical perspective is being evaluated, other, more specific notions will become relevant: the right, the good, the admirable for example. Especially with respect to narratives, it is helpful, however, to have a more general notion to formulate an assessment on the ethical perspective as a whole. Such assessment will, then, comprise more specific judgments on, say, whether a given action was really justified or a given character a good person or some character trait really admirable. But it will also comprise assessments on, say, whether an option for action was really worthy of consideration, a character's response to the circumstances adequate, or a virtue applied at the right moment. It will also depend on less clear-cut aspects, such as to what extent a wrong action could be considered excusable, a situation a dilemmatic one, a hypothesis for ethical justification a plausible one, and the like.

There is an alternative way of describing what fittingness amounts to: insofar as an ethical perspective provides a way of experiencing a certain part of reality, an ethical perspective can be said to fit that reality when it is ethically appropriate to experience it that way. Moreover, fittingness to the world allows for degrees, in terms of the extent to which it approximates a correct way, ethically, to experience reality.

It is important to construe these claims appropriately. They do not, I submit, entail the view that there is going to be every time *one* correct way of experiencing some part of the world. For an ethical perspective may be a fitting one because it matches *a* correct way of construing a certain slice of reality.¹⁴ Also, although my claims are naturally construed as presupposing the existence of some true, underlying background ethics, in principle they need not be so. The ethical criticism of narratives could be shown to be a legitimate art critical practice, and one based on the notion of fittingness to the world, even if some form of relativism or of subjectivism were to be correct. One could still ask whether a narrative's ethical perspective is fitting to the world (or is a correct way of experiencing the world) even if the relevant sense of fittingness (or correctness) were to be cashed out relativistically or subjectivistically. And the question of the bearing on artistic value of such judgments of fittingness or correctness could still be raised. Whatever the case may be, I think it is reasonable to recognize how discussions on the fittingness of narratives' ethical perspectives may comprise *both* normative *and* metaethical dimensions. And, if the ethical criticism of narratives can be shown to be legitimate as an art critical practice, there is no reason not to consider as

artistically relevant some metaethical elements as well. A narrative's perspective may be judged not only for its showing as evil what is (or is to be judged as) evil, but also for its, say, advocacy of a metaethical position. Some of Luigi Pirandello's plays, for instance – *Right You Are, If You Think You Are* comes to mind – appear to embrace a relatively radical form of relativism, indeed one that is both epistemological and ethical. The artwork can certainly be judged in terms of the fittingness to the world of such a view. And the judgment of fittingness must not be construed simplistically: even from a point of view that rejects relativism, a narrative's perspective that investigates the possibility of relativism being true with the due amount of subtlety and complexity may be deemed more fitting than a perspective that too uncritically or simplistically rejects relativism (see also section 7 below). In general, and finally, my claims should not be construed as presupposing widespread agreement on normative or metaethical issues. Ethical disagreements and disagreements on the nature of ethics do exist, and an ethical perspective may be fitting to the world largely for acknowledging their reality.

In sum, my claim is that, when judging art narratives' ethical perspectives from the moral point of view, we judge them for the extent to which they fit the real world or, more precisely, the extent to which they match a perspective that would be ethically appropriate with respect to the real world.

There is, however, a well-known objection to any approach of this sort. It is based on the claim – as T. J. Diffey, for instance, has stated it – that in “the case of art [...], reference is suspended” (1995, 30). Hence, Diffey can ask “[h]ow can a work of art

be faithful to the facts [...] if art is not by its nature fact-stating?” (1995, 30).¹⁵ Even when art seems to refer, he claims, it is better to say that “it seems to intimate a reference which we pick up, not that it is referential *tout court*” (Diffey 1995, 30). The fact is that, for Diffey, “[a]n aesthetic response to art involves the suspension of reference by taking the work to be holding up states of affairs for inspection, scrutiny, or, to use the traditional term, contemplation” (1995, 30).

There are several reasons to reject this objection, however. First of all, not all artistic narratives are fictions, at least in the sense in which fiction lacks reference to the real world. Narratives that portray real events and people, such as biographies and documentaries, certainly refer to real people and events. And some of them surely are works of art. Hence, the objection lacks the generality it is aiming to (see also Gaut 1998b, 187).

Most importantly, it is not so clear that art narratives, even when they are fictions, cannot in any way assert. In fact, the very connection between fiction and non-assertiveness may be largely misguided. Kendall Walton, for instance, has suggested that a fiction could be assertive from beginning through end, say, if it belonged to “a genre of historical novel in which authors are allowed no liberties with the facts and in which they are understood to be asserting as fact whatever they write” (1990, 79). Many more narratives – Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* among them – certainly *include* assertions that do not lose their assertive power just because they are part of a fiction (Walton 1990, 79).

Furthermore, surely whole fictions can be produced in order to make an assertion.

Walton, again, points out how, in general,

[a]ssertions can be made in any number of ways: by producing a declarative sentence while delivering a lecture, by raising a flag, by honking a horn, by wearing a rose, by extending one's arm through a car window. There is no reason why, in appropriate circumstances, one should not be able to make an assertion by writing fiction (Walton 1990, 78).

However, these assertive powers that fictions – amongst which many narratives – have are by no means sufficient to account for the scope I intend to give to my claim that narratives can be assessed in terms of their fittingness to the real world. Indeed, Walton himself admits that “[p]erhaps writing fiction is more often a means of performing other illocutionary actions – suggesting, asking, raising an issue, reminding, encouraging to act – than a means of making assertions” (1990, 78).

Levinson (1995, but also 1981) has convincingly accounted for the shared intuition that “many works are reasonably taken as *saying* something, in an extended sense, that is, as implicitly advancing some proposition, endorsing some perspective, or affirming some value” (1995, 70). His analysis is not aimed at showing that authors *directly* assert certain propositions through their works (amongst his examples are two narratives in my sense, Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* and Browning's *My Lost Duchess*), but that nevertheless those “messages” are legitimately ascribed to their works. Accordingly, Levinson suggests, artworks can express views in a way that is quite close to asserting.

It is also worth adding that Diffey's claim that art can only show views, i.e., present them for consideration, ultimately sets a limit to what a narrative, and an artwork more generally, can do, at least a limit on the artistic goals it can have. Hence, if Diffey were to be right, narratives that really aim at presenting a view "for our consideration" (as, perhaps somewhat ironically, Rod Serling used to say when introducing new episodes of *The Twilight Zone*) could not be distinguished from those that instead go as far as endorsing such a view. Indeed, that a narrative may convey a message – perhaps by means of indirect assertion but nonetheless by assertion – is something that cannot be excluded from the realm of artistic possibilities just on a priori philosophical grounds. And even if it were actually the case that what is artistic can never assert, the truth of such a negative claim could not be taken to involve the additional, positive claim that the only thing that artworks can do is to present views for consideration. The burden of proof is on the philosopher to explain the difference between narratives that appear to have different artistic goals with respect to the views that they present, for some indeed seem to present a view just for contemplation, while others appear to endorse it, and yet others to deny it. Possibly, in some respects at least, Quentin Tarantino's movies just *present* ethical views that justify violence; yet, it would be false to claim the same, say, of Alan Parker's *Mississippi Burning* with respect to the racist views it presents – for clearly the movie *rejects* such views.

At any rate, whether a narrative is assertive or not, directly or indirectly, the ethical perspective it embodies can be compared to the world and morally judged in

terms of how well it fits the real world.¹⁶ For perhaps no narrative is ever fully fictional in a sense, or at the very least, no narrative that embodies an ethical perspective. Let me briefly expand on this suggestion.

A *fully* fictional narrative, in the sense of a narrative presenting a content that could in no way be tested vis-à-vis the world, would have not only to be limited to the presentation of *individual* fictional characters and events but also of characters and events that are fictional *in kind*. It would have to include exclusively kinds of characters and events that have attributes so different from their real counterparts that they can no longer be recognized as such. Naturally, examples of such radical deviations are most easily found in science fiction and in fantasy literature. Time travel stories are about a sort of “travel” so different from whatever we label by that term in the real world that any a comparison between the two sorts of travel could arguably be considered pointless. Or the books in Jorge Luis Borges’s *The Library of Babel* are so different from what *we* know as books, to possibly make a comparison between them and our books seem silly. However, consider that even in such cases, elements of the fiction fail to be fully fictional: time traveling may be represented as being in some physical way rough and dangerous; some at least of the books in the “Library” are such that they could be read in the same sense in which our books can be read. Most importantly, one must look for the right sorts of comparisons between the two worlds – the fictional world of the story and the real world – to see where the importance of comparing a work’s narrative perspective to our world comes in. For the point of time travel stories is often to show what would

happen, metaphysically and psychologically, if someone were actually to be able to travel back in time or see the future; they represent time travel as more or less desirable; they make us face the reality that what we do in the present will affect the future. Similarly, in Borges, what we are asked to imagine is perhaps the *possibility* that each of us might necessarily be like a librarian in the Library, or that the dream of explaining the universe might turn out to be a nightmarish realization of our inescapable limitations and solitude.

More specifically, with respect to narratives' *ethical* perspectives, it may be a condition of the very intelligibility of them that their normative components cover actual elements as well. For, whether a given (fictional) outcome is represented as (in the fiction) desirable, or a certain character as (in the fiction) generous, or the like, such representations may not be understandable except on the grounds of norms applicable to the real world: on what really counts as a desirable outcome or as a person's generosity. Of course, in some fictions what counts, say, as generosity might be different from what counts as generosity in our world; yet, I suggest, at some level of generality a connection between the normative elements of the perspective and the real world must be found for the perspective to be understandable. Thus, for instance, whatever in the fiction counts as an act of generosity, it will at least be an act in the same sense in which acts are acts in the real world, it will have to be a virtue in the same sense as virtues are virtues in the real world, and so on and so forth. That is, perhaps, a narrative's ethical perspective could not really be understood as an *ethical* perspective if *all* of its normative components were to be subverted or inverted.

In any case, at least typically, when a narrative represents a fictional outcome as desirable or a character as generous, it represents them this way for the sort of outcome or the sort of character they are. The generality involved in the normative framing of a certain fictional situation may vary: a fictional character may be represented as deserving pity qua young, defenseless woman or, more generally, qua person or, even more generally, qua being capable of emotions. It is thanks to the generality that the normative framing can take that it is perfectly appropriate to pity fictional characters such as E.T. in Stephen Spielberg's homonymous movie. Yet, as we do that, we are actually embracing, I suggest, part of an ethical perspective that condemns violent intrusion into the lives of other sensitive beings just because they are different from us.

None of this is aimed at denying the fact that the point of some fiction is precisely that of *reversing* or *distorting*, in the fictional representation, what we consider to be the case in the real world. Take, for instance, the TV show, *The Addams Family*, where what is evil is represented as good, virtues as vices, and so on.¹⁷ Yet, the very reversion that is thus accomplished can be recognized only by means of a comparison with what we consider to be the correct perspective on the world.

Kendall Walton has asked whether *morality fiction* is possible, perhaps in the same way as science fiction is possible (1994, 37).¹⁸ What I am suggesting here is that, in *one sense* at least, morality fiction is *not* possible (and perhaps, in *that* sense, nor is science fiction). As seen in Chapter 5 above (section 6), Gendler has suggested that, as fictions import truths from the real world onto the world of the fiction, so do they also

export (or aim at the exportation of) fictional truths into the real world. What I am suggesting is that when a view of the world amounts to the work's perspective, it is then nonfictionally endorsed by the work, in the sense that the work aims at the exportation of components of the perspective onto the real world. In particular, when the view in question is an ethical view, it will likely enter into some relationship with the work's ethical perspective: the work may endorse it, in which case the view is an integral part of the narrative's ethical perspective, or reject it, in which case the narrative's perspective partly emerges from such rejection. Of course, a view can also just be presented by a work, entertained as a hypothesis, investigated, or contemplated. In at least some of such cases, the narrative might be said to be "morality fiction." Yet, I submit, the fiction does not correspond to the work's having an ethical perspective fictionally; rather, the ethical perspective of such works would include, nonfictionally, a commitment to considering such a view as worthy of being entertained as a hypothesis, or of being investigated or contemplated, or just of being imagined.

The above claim, that a narrative cannot have an ethical perspective just fictionally, as well as the related claims on applicability to the real world as a condition for the intelligibility of an ethical perspective qua ethical perspective, could all be viewed just as suggestions, for my argument only needs a conditional claim, that *if* or *when* a narrative's ethical perspective is subject to ethical judgment, it is for the degree to which it fits the real world.¹⁹ Such a claim is compatible with the possibility of works that

succeed in doing morality fiction, that is, succeed in having a radically distinct ethical perspective, but only fictionally.

Furthermore, given the way my proposal was formulated in section 2, even this conditional claim is further limited in its scope, hence is safer from possible objections. For the potentialities for artistic creation with narratives cannot be limited by a philosophical argument. Hence, while I suspect that narratives that embody an ethical perspective and are subject to ethical judgment in terms of fittingness to the real world can be so judged without betraying the work's artistic goals, I am going to allow that, in principle, there may be genres of narratives such that they may embody a perspective and yet, for artistic goals proper to that genre, *not* be subject to ethical evaluation in terms of fittingness to the real world; or, perhaps equivalently, I am going to allow for the possibility that there may be genres of narratives such that they may embody a perspective that is subject to ethical evaluation in terms of fittingness to the real world and yet, for artistic goals proper to that genre, such ethical evaluation may be irrelevant to their value as art. Whether any such narratives in fact exist is a matter that can be left to art-critical investigation, and indeed to the history of narratives, to determine.

My conditional claim does justice to the intuition that those fictional characters and events that are worthy of our praise or condemnation or the like are worthy in virtue of their being fictional exemplars of real (kinds of) people and real (kinds of) events. A conditional claim of this kind risks restricting, at least in principle, the scope of the theory it is aimed to support. Of course, my characterization of what an ethical

perspective is and of how it is an integral component of many narratives already suggests that the scope of my view is indeed quite broad. Yet, something more can be said about the fact that many narratives do aim at presenting views on the real world as an artistic goal integral to them. That is, my view will receive further support from an appropriate characterization of *realism* in narratives, and of being realistic as a way for narratives to belong to a very broadly conceived *genre*.

6. Realism.

In the previous section, I have characterized the moral status of a narrative's ethical perspective in terms of the degree of its fitting the real world. Yet, the argument for the form of moralism that I am proposing will go through only if the degree of fittingness to the world of the narrative's ethical perspective can be shown to have artistic relevance in evaluating the work. My argument to that effect will consist in combining, first, the claim that, for most narratives at least, embodying an ethical perspective amounts to being committed to embodying a fitting perspective, and, second, the claim that aiming to embody a fitting perspective amounts to being committed to the claims of a form of *realism*, that is, amounts to belonging to a realistic *genre* in a sense to be specified. The first claim has already been established in the previous section. Such a claim can here be presented in an equivalent form, i.e., that *if* a narrative does not aim at embodying a fitting ethical perspective, then it cannot be judged ethically. In such a case, of course, the question of the ethical criticism of the narrative does not even arise.

Notice that, of the two claims, the first is indeed the more important one, for it is by itself sufficient to allow the claim that those narratives that aim at embodying a fitting ethical perspective succeed or fail *on their own terms*, to use Carroll's expression (see Chapter 6), that is, with respect to goals internal to them. With regard to such a claim I will add one more example, to guard against misconstrual of the claim. The Marquis de Sade's works all aim, although to different degrees, to embody an ethical perspective that intentionally distorts accepted morality. Hence, those works might be thought to prove that it is not difficult to find narratives embodying perspectives that are subject to ethical evaluation, but which nonetheless don't aim at embodying fitting perspectives. However, in my view, even de Sade's works are committed to providing a fitting ethical perspective. The fact that they do so by subverting widely accepted moral claims or that they happen to simply get it wrong in no way makes them less committed to projecting a view of the real world that aims at fitting it. Or under a more benevolent interpretation of at least some of de Sade's works, if the narrative aims only at suggesting that an alternative set of moral values may be the correct one, the work would still be committed to presenting a fitting perspective – specifically one viewing such alternative values as worthy of consideration. Either way, I insist, the work is committed to letting what is actually the case with respect to the real world determine the fittingness of the perspective it embodies.

The second of the above-mentioned claims has, in my argument, the primary function of showing that, for narratives, success or failure in embodying a fitting ethical

perspective not only *may* be a success or failure of those works for goals they are internally committed to – but that those goals *in fact* correspond to well entrenched artistic goals, namely those of realism. It is not difficult to accept the claim that narratives that aim at embodying ethical perspectives that are fitting in my sense aim at being realistic. But the sense of realism here employed should be specified.

“Realism” is, of course, a term with a variety of meanings in connection with art, or, as Kendall Walton puts it, “a monster with many heads desperately in need of disentangling” (1990, 328). My view does not require classifying all the different sorts of realism, but only highlighting the sort that emerges from ethical assessments of a narrative’s perspectives. Such realism, however, will turn out to be a cluster of possible correspondences, or lack thereof, between the view on reality embodied in a work and such reality.

Let us first consider some other senses in which a narrative may be said to be realistic. A narrative may be considered realistic because it represents certain characters and events as they or their real-life counterparts actually are. That is, there may be a correspondence between what the narrative attributes to those characters and events and the attributes they actually have. Such a form of realism corresponds perfectly to the realism of a painting, say, a portrait, representing its sitter as having a large nose, and that can hence be considered accurate in that respect. This sort of matching or lack thereof can certainly involve ethical and ethically relevant features. A narrative, for instance,

may misrepresent historical characters and events: a generous person be described as selfish, or a generous act as not having occurred.

Yet, the question of realism may also apply to the normative claims that a narrative projects onto the world. For a narrative may not just represent certain things as existing or certain people as having certain characteristics, but also in some way project the claim that, given the evidence that is available, one should believe in the existence of such things or in the attribution of such characteristics. Thus, for instance, a documentary on UFOs and extraterrestrial life may not just represent our universe as including extraterrestrial life, but also try to make the case that we ought to believe in such a representation. Naturally, some of the normative elements a narrative embodies may be of the ethical sort: a narrative may contain the view that certain people and events ought to be judged or experienced or categorized (and so on and so forth) in a given ethically relevant way.

Notice that both of the above senses of realism are to be assessed independently of, let us call it, the power of persuasion of the artwork with respect to the features it projects onto the world. Whether a work is, in the above senses, realistic depends on its actual matching or failing to match the way the world is, not on how well it may bring the perceiver to believe that the world is that way. The latter capacity that many narratives have is often referred to as “realism.” Yet, in itself that has, at most and only occasionally, an instrumental relationship to realism in my sense, for certainly the realistic representation of parts of reality may be used to misrepresent, overall, that

reality. Consider, for instance, the techniques used by Leni Riefenstahl in her infamous *The Triumph of the Will*.²⁰ Certainly, the work realistically represents, for the most part, the joyful acclamation of Hitler in Nuremberg. Yet, it does that in order to project what ultimately is a misrepresentation of reality: of Hitler as a good man, the savior of Germany from decades of darkness, a leader worthy to be followed. It is here that the narrative fails in its representation of reality, and it is because of that that it is, I submit, ethically and artistically defective in that respect.

The sense of realism to be employed in this argument is *very general*, not because it includes other senses in which a narrative is realistic, but because it signals the overall degree of matching between the view of the world that a narrative embodies and the world itself. Such a view may, in turn, emerge from realistic as well as nonrealistic representations. For sometimes the best way to faithfully represent the human condition is by representing nonhuman beings or, more generally, the best way to shed light on the real world is by describing a fictional world. Accordingly, the species of realism I am here cashing out is not an umbrella concept for other, more specific, forms of realism. Rather, it has to do with the overall matching of the narrative's ethical perspective with the parts of reality that the ethical perspective applies to, although the different matching relationships involved may be of different kinds, depending on whether the perspective's overall fittingness emerges from, say, an action being represented as right or a character as good or a character trait as desirable, and so on.

This sense of realism is very general also because it applies to many narratives of different kinds and in any medium. Indeed, it might be considered as a sort of *supergenre* embracing narratives that in fact belong to very different genres. Yet, it is also *selective*, in that it applies only to those dimensions along which a work is committed to a faithful representation. In fact, it could be described as a *thin* notion of realism – realism in whatever respects (although I am here interested only in the ethical ones) a work aims at being realistic. Hence, this notion of realism embraces a variety of artworks that ordinarily would not be classified as realistic: cartoons, surrealist works, sci-fi novels, and so on and so forth. Of course, the realistic representation may require recognizing through rules of distortion, such as in the case of *The Addams Family*.

The notion of realism that is thus cashed out not only has the above-mentioned characteristics of generality and selectivity, allowing us to find instantiations of it virtually everywhere amongst narratives, it also has considerable explanatory power with respect to what interests us as perceivers of narratives. For, in general, we are interested both in the nature of reality itself *and* in the rendering, by narratives, of such reality. And, so far as ethical and ethically relevant elements of reality are concerned, we are interested both in *them* and in *how they may be experienced*. There is here another reason to insist that narratives' ethical perspectives do apply to the real world, beyond those mentioned in the previous section. For if they didn't, a great deal of our interest in them would disappear. Indeed, to narratives' ethical perspectives applies what Robert Alter says about realism of character in particular, namely, that “[v]ery few people will

take the trouble to read a novel or story unless they can somehow ‘identify’ with the characters, live with them inwardly as though they were real at least for the duration of the reading” (1989, 49).

My claim with respect to ethical perspectives is twofold: 1) that we are interested in them as the sort of view someone could embrace with respect to the very ethical reality we live in, and 2) that we are interested in such perspectives actually matching approaches that are in fact correct with respect to such reality. My argument for moralism only refers to the latter aspect, since it claims that narratives embodying fitting ethical perspectives are artistically better, in that respect, than narratives embodying unfitting perspectives. Yet, my view receives further support from its being compatible with the former aspect, too, insofar as it allows to acknowledge that sometimes we may find narratives that embody an immoral perspective to be artistically valuable, not just *in spite* of their immoral perspective but rather, in part and in a sense, *because of* such perspective:²¹ we may be interested in *the way* in which the perspective is presented or advocated, as well as, more generally, in things such as *that someone* could find such a perspective to be correct, or that such a perspective might *possibly* be correct.

This feature of my view is especially important, since often moralism is objected to by recalling examples of narratives for which the very embodiment of an evil perspective seems to contribute to the work’s artistic value. Lawrence Hyman (1984), for instance, refers to Shakespeare’s *King Lear* as achieving dramatic effect precisely by means of arousing our moral disapproval. More recently, Matthew Kieran has claimed

that a narrative such as Martin Scorsese's *GoodFellas* is aesthetically rewarding partly thanks to "the defectiveness of its moral perspective" (2003, 60). Yet, my view can account for all such cases, explaining the contribution that apparently the evil perspective appears to make and insisting, in a non-*ad hoc* manner, that those narratives' embodying an evil perspective – to the extent that they do – as such detracts from their value as art (see also section 7 below). For my account of what a narrative's ethical perspective is allows us to show how often immoral views, presented within a narrative, may be instrumental to the emergence of a different overall ethical perspective, which is really the one the narrative embodies (as might be the case with *King Lear*). Furthermore, my view is compatible with considering any ethical perspective, even evil ones, as indirect objects of appreciation when appreciating the way they are presented or advocated (which might be true of both *King Lear* and *GoodFellas*), yet without giving up the thesis that the perspective itself, by being evil – hence unfitting to the reality it is partly about – detracts from the work's artistic value. Consider a parallel with a piece of journalistic commentary, presenting a very elegant (in whatever sense) hypothesis with respect to the causes behind some major international conundrum, a hypothesis that, however, turns out to be false. Certainly, the falsity of the hypothesis will negatively affect the value of the piece as journalism, and yet in a way that is compatible with recognizing the piece *some* journalistic merit deriving from its embracing such a hypothesis. Finally, some of those alleged counterexamples may be deriving artistic value, compatibly with the view I am

advocating, from the very fact that an admittedly evil perspective may be maintained in a work, and perhaps even possess an air of plausibility.

It is important to emphasize a few additional characteristics of my approach to these matters. First of all, that ethical perspectives commit narratives to the criteria of correctness proper to realism only in selected respects further explains how evil perspectives may be found in otherwise artistically valuable narratives. Consider that an overall evil perspective may be composed of a variety of elements, some of which may be not at all questionable. In Jonathan Demme's *The Silence of the Lambs* or, for that matter, in Thomas Harris's original book, we may be presented with an ethical perspective that, at times at least, considers certain killings of innocent beings as less horrible than others (notably, the killing of ambulance workers by Hannibal Lecter, on the one hand, and that of the young girls by "Buffalo Bill").²² Yet, through that work, we are also presented with an ethical perspective that praises, with respect to the character of Clarice Starling, the powers of one's will to overcome fears and insecurities dating back from one's childhood. Or, again, it may be part of the movie's perspective that it suggests a certain view of homosexuality as a dangerous-to-others perversion,²³ but it is also part of the same perspective that women have all the capacities to affirm themselves in male dominated environments such the FBI as are depicted in the movie. Assuming for the sake of argument that the perspective of this movie is overall ethically unfitting, such perspective would still retain some morally praiseworthy elements. The form of moralism I am advocating claims that ethical assessment is legitimately considered *one of*

the dimensions determining the overall artistic value of a narrative. Yet, ethical assessment itself is now revealed to comprise a variety of dimensions, and while a narrative may score high, ethically, in some respects, it may score low in others.

The selectivity of the realistic commitments of a narrative also allows accounting for the importance of determining, when assessing a narrative artistically, the relative *weight* that the different dimensions of an ethical perspective have within it. Indeed, it is important to recognize that not all ethical commitments are *central* (as opposed to *peripheral*) to a narrative's ethical perspective in the same way. For instance, the above-mentioned killing of the ambulance workers in *The Silence of the Lambs* arguably is treated somewhat lightly only because it has mainly a narrative role to play – allowing Lecter to escape, and reaffirming the characterization of him as a resourceful and dangerous killer – rather than because the narrative is really committed to treating some killings more lightly than others. In other cases, however, the differential treatment of the loss of life may be more central to a narrative's perspective, and hence be ethically more problematic, such as in many Westerns of the older generation, where the lives of the Native Americans were certainly portrayed as more expendable than those of the white men fighting them.

Of course, which dimensions of an ethical perspective should be considered central to it, and which instead considered peripheral, will largely depend on the genre the narrative belongs to. It may very well be appropriate to criticize Victor Fleming's *Gone with the Wind* for its embedding stereotypes of women as immature beings, or of

African-American slaves as not being too bothered by their lack of freedom. Yet, artistically, the criticisms must also be given the appropriate weight in light of the commitments that a film ultimately devoted to romance inherently has.

Furthermore, it is important to emphasize that narratives are to be considered as historically situated entities, and thus their ethical perspectives as well. The importance of locating a work in its historical context is, of course, already noted in Hume's remark in *Of the Standard of Taste* that, with respect to a poem endorsing immoral views, he might "excuse the poet, on account of the manners of his age." Yet, Hume continues by claiming that he "never can relish the composition." ([1757] 1995, 267). The view that I am here presenting, however, allows us to relate, in a way, the ethical judgment – hence the artistic judgment as well – of a work to that of the artist. For, while the view is neutral with respect to what determines the ethical perspective of a work, hence neutral with respect to debates on the role of the author's intentions, or on referring to hypothetical and implied authors, it can claim that ethical perspectives are ways of looking at the world, and hence are subject, when judged for their fittingness, to historically dependent criteria in the same way as the views that people hold are.

This has at least two important consequences. First, that a certain view was widely and unquestioningly shared at the time that a narrative was produced may allow relegating it to the periphery of the work's ethical perspective that includes such a view. Hence, for instance, a novel that narrates a romantic affair taking place in some pre-Civil War Southern state may embody a perspective that, amongst other things, approves of

slavery. Yet, to the extent that the narrative's main point is that of telling a love story, those elements of its ethical perspective that have to do with slavery may be relegated to the background, while those elements having to do, say, with the fair treatment of the loved one may be regarded as central. Accordingly, a narrative of this sort could be ethically criticized less severely for its immoral commitments in part "on account of the manners of [its] age." Since, however, I am only suggesting that the *commitment* to certain ethical claims implied by a narrative be relativized to the historical context, and not the claims themselves, room is made for sparing the ethical criticism of art from the accusation of anachronism, yet without endorsing any form of relativism in ethics.

The second important consequence of considering narratives' ethical perspectives as partly determined by their historical context is that of possibly reframing aspects of the question of the asymmetry between moral and epistemic deviances, which was discussed in Chapter 5 with respect to imaginative resistance. Leaving now the issue of resistance aside, a historical relativization of a narrative's ethical commitments may help us explain why we are more willing to excuse epistemic mistakes – say, mistakes regarding the nature of the universe, regarding what would cure diseases, regarding the geographical location of places, etc. – than moral mistakes. For one could argue that moral mistakes are indeed, typically at least, less excusable than epistemic ones, insofar as the "truths" of morality (where, admittedly, the correct view may just amount to recognizing that certain cases are problematic) are, typically at least, more accessible simply to reason than the truths of physics or biology or geography. Accordingly, there is perhaps, typically at

least, a sense in which narratives are more committed to their ethical claims than to their nonethical claims. With geography or physics or biology, a narrative may be allowed claims that fall under a “to the best of our knowledge” clause more easily than with its ethical claims.

In sum, on my view the critic of, say, Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is engaged in legitimate art-critical practice when asking questions about the moral status of the novel. Yet, in order to assess the work’s ethical perspective appropriately, she will have to determine to what extent the novel is committed to a racist point of view and an endorsement of slavery – i.e., determine to what extent the various elements of the perspective are central or peripheral to it – but also to consider to what extent we could reasonably have expected the novel as a historically located entity to embody a different sort of perspective.

The version of moralism here defended has several advantages, which are worth listing. The view concentrates on a dimension of ethical evaluation – the assessment of narratives’ ethical perspectives – that appropriately refers to an element essentially related to the distinctive nature of the individual narratives as well as present in narratives belonging to different media and genres. The notion employed to formulate the judgment of the perspective – fittingness to the real world – is broad enough to account for the intuitions behind response-dependent accounts, and yet remain neutral with respect to the issue of whether a narrative’s perspective is to be construed just in terms of prescribed responses. By being formulated conditionally, the view is safe from

objections invoking the improbable possibility of narratives that are subject to ethical evaluation for the ethical perspective they embody but in a way that is artistically irrelevant. Since the view is formulated for those *kinds* of narratives embodying ethical perspectives that have implications for the real world, it succeeds in establishing the existence of a systematic relationship between artistic and ethical value – a relationship that systematically holds for all those narratives that belong to the transmedium, transgenre form of thin realism I have embraced. The characteristics of this thin conception of realism have proved to be able to account for a good number of artistically relevant factors: that narratives are committed to a realistic representation of reality only along selected dimensions and with different levels of commitment; that such commitments depend on the genres the narrative belongs to as well as on the narrative's history; and, finally, that a narrative's ethical perspective is related to the historical period that expressed it, and hence that historical factors must be taken into account when determining the bearing of the work's ethical status on the work's artistic worth.

In the next section, I will address some possible concerns that one might have with my theory, and endeavor to respond to them. This will give me an opportunity to further elucidate the theory I espouse.

7. Some Possible Objections.

One concern with respect to the version of moralism I have proposed might be that the theory appears to be biased in favor of realistic art narratives, while in fact there are

narratives that are great works of art precisely because *nonrealistic*. Yet, the view I propose is not biased in favor of any particular genre or artistic commitment whatsoever. It only maintains that *when* a narrative is committed to a certain form of realism – specifically to embodying an ethical perspective that fits reality – then it is correctly assessed in that respect, for the perspective’s degree of success in being fitting. Such a claim is compatible with acknowledging the existence of narrative genres that are devoted to the distortion of reality in various ways. Indeed, having formulated the view conditionally, it even allows for the existence of genres devoted to the distortion of the moral reality, hence in my terms to the intentional embodiment of unfitting ethical perspectives. What the theory suggests, however, is, first, that there are reasons to be skeptical regarding the existence of such genres of narratives, and, second, that once the notion of a narrative’s ethical perspective is appropriately construed as the general, overall ethical view embodied by a narrative, at least most of the narratives that in some way traffic with ethical issues will be shown to be committed to the presentation of a fitting perspective. That is, while my theory derives most of its theoretical strength from its being conditionally formulated, it acquires a very broad scope from its characterization of the notion of ethical perspective and of the related notion of a thin, very general, and aspect-dependent form of realism.

The view I am proposing seems to be able to account for the moral complexities of artistic creation with narratives: the use of unethical views or intentional distortion of the moral reality for instance. Nonetheless, the view might be thought to be in fact quite

naïve. One might claim that my view is committed to accepting as legitimate “easy” ways of making better art. It appears that according to my view one could improve a narrative by merely adding to it a correct ethical statement but without the narrative doing anything with it: without expanding upon it, investigating it in its complexities, and integrating it within the narrative itself. Indeed, it seems that one could increase the artistic value of a narrative just by piling up trivially true moral claims and attaching them to the narrative.²⁴

There are, however, several reasons why my view is not committed to such a naïve account of the mechanisms for making better narrative art (or, relatedly, of the activity of narrative art criticism). First of all, my view makes essential reference to the notion of narratives *embodying* their ethical perspectives. Hence, the mere *adding* of a statement or the like to a narrative, without real integration into the narrative, with no elaboration of it or coherence between it and the rest of the work, would hardly count for the statement to be embodied into the narrative. Second, fittingness should not be confused with truth. For an ethical perspective to be fitting, it is not enough that it is made of true claims. Rather, fittingness to reality is often a matter of depth, reflectiveness, even vagueness and ambiguity perhaps, with respect to a reality that is itself often complex, dilemmatic, unclear, vague, and ambiguous.

Accordingly, an admittedly morally correct claim, which is however just made in passing in a narrative, would both throw doubt on such a claim really being integral to the work’s perspective and, if it is part of the perspective, would likely affect its

fittingness. For it is an ethical mistake – a lack of fittingness – to be shallow and quick with respect to what deserves depth and careful elaboration. Furthermore, fittingness is a somewhat holistic concept. Hence, the addition of a true claim to an ethical perspective may indeed *diminish*, all things considered, the overall fittingness of the perspective. Trivial ethical truths can have the effect of trivializing an ethical perspective which is about something nontrivial, hence taking away from the perspective's ethical value and its artistic import. And, in general, a claim that fails to cohere with the rest of an ethical perspective may affect the perspective's overall fittingness. Consider, for instance, adding to a perspective of indignation at the horror of human rights violations in the former Yugoslavia claims on the importance of promise keeping even in trivial cases, such as the promise not to park one's car in one's neighbor's space or of feeding one's pet fish regularly. While such claims do have their moral standing, the very addition of them in such a context may have the effect of casting an air of shallowness on the much more serious claims about horrible crimes against humanity.

The above must, in turn, be construed correctly. My view may allow that in many cases, when a true claim is successfully added to a narrative's ethical perspective, it does add, as such, to the perspective's fittingness as well as to the work's artistic value (provided, of course, that such a claim hits a dimension of realism to which the work is committed). Yet, such addition of fittingness and artistic value, first, may in itself be minimal and, second, may affect the work's perspective's overall degree of fittingness, hence the work's overall artistic value. In any event, the specific contribution of any

ethical claim to an ethical perspective is a matter for art criticism to determine, and my view is not committed to any naïve prediction on the conclusions of such an art critical investigation.

Finally, my view allows for claiming that, even where the addition of (trivial) ethical truths contributes (perhaps minimally) to the ethical as well as the artistic value of the narrative, or where it leaves such values unchanged, it may have *other* artistic negative effects. It may, for instance, affect the narrative's unity or coherence or power to elicit suspense, or indeed any number of artistically relevant features of the work.

The above objection could actually take a different form, namely as the claim that fittingness itself commits my view to a certain naïveté, for even the above-mentioned perspective of indignation towards crimes against humanity is in a sense trivial: certainly, we don't need a narrative to express such a perspective, for we already know that that is indeed the appropriate one with respect to such tragic events.²⁵ Even this reformulation of the objection, however, fails to do the theory justice. For an integral part of my view is the claim that a narrative's ethical perspective cannot, for the most part at least, be detached without loss from the narrative that embodies it. Hence, even if, by necessity, attempted philosophical articulation of narratives' ethical perspectives will invariably be somewhat simplistic ("indignation for the horrors of human rights violations"), in no way does that mean that the perspective itself as embodied in the work is simplistic.

There are two final concerns to be addressed, ones related to the strategy of objecting to any theory that maintains a systematic relationship between artistic and

ethical value by presenting counterexamples of narratives that appear to be exploiting evil for artistic purposes. In addition to the responses I provided above in section 6, it is now important to clarify my theory's position on the relationship between artistic and ethical value in those narratives that appear to be using evil for artistic purposes. For the very fact that there are narratives that seem to owe some of their artistic success to their endorsement of evil would seem to prove that my view is false.

However, my view is not committed to claiming that evil can never be used for artistic purposes. Specifically, evil can be used for artistic purposes in two ways. First, evil can certainly be the *content* of a narrative and even be endorsed *in* the narrative, without thereby being endorsed *by* the narrative. My view is about the artistic relevance of the narrative's ethical perspective as it emerges from the different movements the narrative goes through, including the provisional endorsement of evil. Second – and more germane to the objection – the view is not committed to claiming that the endorsement of evil can never contribute to the artistic value of a narrative, or in fact that the endorsement of good can never detract from that value. The view more simply states that the endorsement of evil always counts *against* the work's artistic value, and the endorsement of good always counts *in favor* of the artistic value; and that is compatible with admitting that there may be cases in which the endorsement of evil may be instrumental to the achievement of an artistically valuable result, and the endorsement of good detrimental to the achievement of an artistically valuable result. The view is based on the claim that an ethical perspective that has application to the real world subjects a

narrative to an artistic judgment in terms of its succeeding or failing to be faithful to the world. That is compatible with the narrative being subject to *other* dimensions of artistic judgment, e.g., for its succeeding or failing in being witty (assuming that being witty is one of the artistic aims of the narrative). Those cases in which one artistic goal, such as being witty, is achieved by means of immorality will have to count as cases in which one artistic goal is achieved *at the expense of* another.

Perhaps an analogy with the multiple effects of a drug might help here. If a drug has beneficial effects, say, destroying harmful bacteria, but can do that only by also having somewhat harmful effects, such as destroying helpful bacteria, it can be praised for one thing and blamed for the other. A more general analogy might be that of an action that, although ethically praiseworthy in one way, can be brought about only by achieving some *other* undesirable effect, such as when the saving of a person's life can be achieved only by amputating one of her limbs. My view claims only that the morality or immorality of a narrative's ethical perspective counts artistically, positively and negatively respectively. It does not exclude that the same feature may also count in other ways.

The above specification also allows us to fend off one last accusation of naïveté, which derives from considering my version of moralism as committed to claiming that any immoral art narrative could be improved by removing the immorality.²⁶ Such a commitment, the objection would continue, would indeed be naïve, because some narratives would lose most of their artistic interest were the immorality removed from

them; indeed, some works would even be destroyed, or made unrecognizable, as the artworks they are. An artwork may, for instance, be witty partly thanks to the immorality of the point of view it embodies; hence, were the immorality removed, the work's wit, or even the very artwork, would be destroyed.

However, in no way is my view committed to naïve claims about the corrigibility of immoral works of art. The theory is only committed to the claim that a narrative *would be* a better narrative artistically speaking *if* its immorality could be removed, *and* all other things remain equal. As in the example above, it is perfectly rational to claim that a given drug would be a better drug if it were possible to remove its power to destroy beneficial bacteria while leaving all other powers unchanged, most notably its capacity to destroy harmful bacteria. Likewise, I claim that *if* it were possible to have the same work of art and the same amount of wit without the immoral component, that *would be* preferable artistically. This is one way of underlining the legitimacy of the art-critical practice known as the ethical criticism of narratives, rather than any sort of departure from it.

¹ In this respect, notice that Walton's position would allow for this possibility, for Walton suggests that resistance would indicate a failure of a work *if* the author *meant* the resisted propositions to be fictional (1994, 45; see Chapter 5, section 4, above).

² Incidentally, this shows how even basic instances of representation-as may partly depend on the context, for Roger Thornhill is represented as young partly by giving him a relatively young mother (between Cary Grant and Jessie Royce Landis, Thornhill's mother in the movie, there was in fact a difference in age of only four years; see Wilson 1995, Chap. 4).

³ A somewhat similar account of what a narrative is can be found in Sturrock (1992). See also George Wilson's (2003) helpful summary of what counts as a minimal agreement amongst most narratologists: "it has been widely agreed that a genuine narrative requires the representation of a minimum of two events and some indication of the ordering in time of the events depicted. It is often claimed, in addition, that the domain of the narrative events has to exhibit at least some sort of fragmentary causal structure" (Wilson 2003, 393).

⁴ See the enlightening comments in this respect in Wilson (1995, Chap. 4).

⁵ Levinson's construal is certainly broad since he can claim that "many, if not all, works of art [...] end up saying something" (1995, 73).

⁶ This should not be conceived of as entailing a realist metaethical stance. For ethical perspectives are not just descriptions or representations of the world but ways of experiencing the world that are normatively charged – and it will be up to the correct metaethical theory to account for the nature of the normative element.

⁷ Of course, as the attitude of a person is partly a function of the context in which she speaks and acts, so is the perspective of a narrative partly a function of the historical context in which it is placed at production – an issue that will have to be further addressed below (section 6).

⁸ I here follow what Levinson says about messages in art, in particular his claim that "with art we appreciate the *unique way* in which the artwork embodies and carries its message" (1995, 82). See also Budd (1995, 15).

⁹ A similar point is made by Carroll (1991) with respect to jokes and their punch lines: the punch line retroactively explains the relevance of elements of the joke. The ethical perspective of a narrative – whether a joke, a fable, or other – I suggest, is the whole evaluative framework that arises from the development of the story, and affects the experience thereof.

¹⁰ Compare Wayne Booth's insightful commentary, which inspired some of my comments in the text but to which my comments do only partial justice (1988, 241-244).

¹¹ In fact, rather than horror, their response to what has apparently happened – including the possible violent death of two people – might even be that of sexual titillation. Of course, what I am here pointing to are perhaps more *aspects* of interpretations than *complete* interpretations. For even the ending of the

movie is ambiguous, on the one hand presenting Bill and Alice reconnect in the golden atmosphere of Christmas, and on the other hand leaving us in the dark on the details of Bill's confession (*what exactly did he tell his wife?*), and presenting the couple, of all things, *shopping* in an upscale department store, one filled with anonymous people (as anonymous were the dancers at the two parties, whether masked or not) as well as with objects – the stuffed tigers, the baby crib – effectively connecting them and their daughter to the prostitute Domino.

¹² Which experience and interpretation dominates is very much a matter of emphasis – I am not claiming, with respect to this work, that the two interpretations or experiences are incompatible and that, e.g., the above-mentioned symbols cannot be experienced, at the same time, both as references to a dreamlike reality and as social commentary. Yet, I would claim, when the story is experienced as dream, the social commentary on reality may lose some of its bite; when experienced as reality, a number of events may then be left unexplained.

¹³ Partly with goals different from mine, and indeed by using a partly different terminology, Nussbaum also emphasizes the existence of multiple experiences that are allowed by a narrative, depending on the nature of the narrative's perceiver: "One spectator [of Sophocles's *Philoctetes*] might focus on bodily pain, another on deception, another on the general vulnerability of human life to unexpected reversals" (Nussbaum 2001, 241).

¹⁴ Likewise, the same event – say, the O. J. Simpson trial – can indeed be reported in different and nonetheless all correct ways, depending on which aspects of the story are emphasized, as a consequence of the difference in interests of the intended audience (see Kieran 1998).

¹⁵ In fact, Diffey's more direct concern is with what we can *learn* from art; yet his claims have relevance to the more general issue that I address here.

¹⁶ Compare to what Levinson says of representational works: "[they] provide a content that can be held up and compared to the world or parts thereof" (1981, 279).

¹⁷ The example is discussed by Gendler (2000, 77). See also Chapter 5, section 6, above.

¹⁸ Walton's own answer is also to the negative (see Chapter 5, section 4, above).

¹⁹ Of course, an ethical perspective could also be judged from other ethical points of view, such as the consequences it is likely to have on certain kinds of perceivers (see Chapter 4).

²⁰ A good account of this documentary is offered by Mary Deveraux (1998).

²¹ Consider, for instance, Riefenstahl's *The Triumph of the Will*. Despite a tendency, in philosophical literature, to concentrate on the artistic success of this work as deriving exclusively from its formal features, appropriate consideration must be given to the fact that the work also appears to be quite successful, on its own terms, qua propaganda (see also Chap. 5, fn. 12 above). Yet, its success as propaganda is essentially bound to its perspective. See also Jacobson (1997) and Deveraux (1998).

²² I am assuming this interpretation only for the sake of argument. It is quite possible that the movie and the film are not quite committed to such normative claims (see also below, on the distinction between

central and peripheral commitments).

²³ Again, I am assuming this interpretation just for the sake of argument.

²⁴ Thanks to Robert Stecker for suggesting this cluster of possible objections.

²⁵ Carroll (1998b) offers a fairly comprehensive response to a similar objection of triviality with regards to what can be learned from art (cf. Stolnitz 1992 and Diffey 1997).

²⁶ Indeed, Daniel Jacobson, in order to argue against moralist views of Humean origin, such as Carroll's and Gaut's, posits that "the moral defects of the poem's [Emily Dickinson's *Tell All the Truth but Tell it Slant*] ethical perspective can sensibly be deemed a blemish – that is, an aesthetic flaw – only if the poem would be improved, aesthetically, by its alteration" (1997, 183). My response in the text is also meant to disambiguate this implication of the moralist's position, showing that it allows for two interpretations, the harmful one suggested by Jacobson and the harmless one I indicate. Pace Jacobson, moralism need not be committed to the former, but just to the latter.

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