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# Art and Morality

Edited by José Luis Bermúdez and Sebastian Gardner

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# Art and Morality

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**Art and Morality**

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Sebastian Gardner and  
José Luis Bermúdez

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# Art and morality

## An introduction

*José Luis Bermúdez and Sebastian Gardner*

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The relations between art and morality are manifold and complex, and the contributions to this collection do full justice to the richness of the subject matter. The contributors are all agreed that the realm of the aesthetic cannot, and should not, be divorced from the realm of the moral, but this general idea is worked out in as many ways as there are papers. Our aim in this introduction is to introduce the main themes and problems broached by the individual contributors and to sketch out some features of the more general framework within which the individual papers can be located.

For the purposes of this introduction we will divide the papers into two groups. In the first group are those papers dealing with the more theoretical issues emerging at the intersection of ethics and aesthetics. These will be discussed in the first part of the introduction. The second part of the introduction will deal with those papers exploring the relation between art and morality in more concrete terms, pursuing the theme with reference to particular forms of art, works of art, artistic categories, and historical figures and traditions. This grouping reflects a difference in emphasis, rather than a distinction of principle. The papers in the first part are all informed by reflection on the evaluation of art and the practice of criticism, while theoretical issues about the relation between art and morality are never far below the surface in papers in the second group.

### I

Philosophers concerned with aesthetics have frequently discussed the nature of the judgements that we make about art, the types of reason upon which they rest and the ways in which they might be justified. In considering the role of ethical considerations in thinking about art, a useful place to begin is with the relation between aesthetic judgements and moral judgements. This theme is very much to the fore in the opening essay in the collection, Michael Tanner's 'Ethics and aesthetics are — ?'. Tanner explores the suggestion, originally made by Arnold Isenberg and developed in different ways by Frank Sibley, Mary Mothersill and Richard Wollheim, that understanding aesthetic

judgements requires first-hand acquaintance with the work being judged. Tanner terms this the *acquaintance thesis*. The acquaintance thesis is closely connected with the thought that aesthetic judgements are not grounded in general principles (principles of taste) from which particular judgements can be derived. Many of the central concepts featuring in aesthetic judgements can only be 'filled in' by attention to specific features of the work of art, with this experience providing the ultimate justification of those judgements. This feature of aesthetic concepts (Sibley) and critical communication (Isenberg) rules out understanding the grounds of aesthetic judgements in terms of general principles. If this suggestion about aesthetic judgements is well-founded, then a *prima facie* difference between moral judgements and aesthetic judgements immediately emerges. Moral judgements, one might think, can be understood and communicated perfectly well without any first-hand acquaintance with the actions they concern. It is perfectly possible to describe an action in a way that makes manifest how it falls under a particular principle and hence how it should be judged.

Tanner does not dispute that this is often possible, but considers whether all moral judgements can be understood in these terms. There is, he thinks, a striking asymmetry in the types of examples that are considered in aesthetics and in ethics. Whereas in aesthetics our interest lies primarily with the exceptional (with works of art that have a claim to greatness), in ethics the concern is frequently with the mundane (with forms of behaviour whose regulation is essential for social existence). Perhaps, Tanner suggests, the acquaintance thesis ceases to apply when we move beyond the morally mundane to a form of ethical thinking in which what is being judged is not whether actions fall under general principles, and how those principles might be grounded, but rather the attractiveness of a particular way of living one's life and the value of transforming one's life in that direction. The ethical value of a lived life can only be captured, Tanner thinks, through a form of acquaintance (in the sense of acquaintance in which reading a well-written biography counts as acquaintance). He makes the point in the context of Robert Craft's *Chronicle of a Friendship*, which recounts the conductor's long friendship with Stravinsky.<sup>1</sup>

Craft's skill is such that it is Stravinsky's vitality which appears to be the agent of the book's, and it even seems to be part of the point of the book that this should be so. One knew, independently of Craft's wonderful book, that Stravinsky *had* prodigious vitality, from the sheer inventory of his doings, his travelling, range of friends, and compositions. But the portrayal of them incontestably presents one with an ideal of a full though illness-stricken life which nothing lacking the book's congruent energy

1 Robert Craft, *Chronicle of a Friendship* (New York: Knopf; London: Gollancz, 1972).

would have conveyed. At this point the ethicist and the aesthetician become one.

(this volume, p. 35)

As the final sentence makes clear, there are deeper issues here than the applicability to ethics of the acquaintance thesis. One way in which works of art can contribute to moral thinking is by portraying different ideals for the lived life in a way that offers the form of acquaintance with them required if they are to be judged, compared and perhaps even adopted.

Some complementary suggestions about the role that works of art might play in moral education are raised and explored in Christopher Hamilton's chapter 'Art and moral education'. Hamilton begins by considering what might be termed imagination-based conceptions of the way in which works of art can be morally significant. These are accounts of the relation between art and morality on which the moral significance of art lies in developing our imaginative capacity to be sensitive to the needs, emotions and moral qualities of other people.<sup>2</sup> Hamilton does not dispute that this type of insight into the inner life of others is a characteristic of many works of art, and indeed an important part of their value as art. He does, however, question whether such insight must always be morally beneficial. As he points out, 'the very possibility of a certain type of cruelty increases as we get to understand the inwardness of a given individual in all its richness and detail' (this volume, p. 40). And, for this reason among others, many works of art are deeply morally ambiguous.

Hamilton does not, however, think that the moral ambiguity of many works of art is in any sense an obstacle to finding an important role for art in moral education. Quite the contrary. This is, he suggests, precisely where we should look for the moral significance of art. Works of art that present a moral point of view that seems disturbing and/or reprehensible can be valuable precisely because they lead us to explore the meaning of our moral beliefs. In part this is because they can remind us that we are not 'morally finished beings', both by showing how apparent moral certainties can be deeply ambiguous and by presenting situations with which what we take to be our moral beliefs cannot cope. But it is also because works of art foreground the concept of style (in the sense of 'style' in which Alfred North Whitehead remarked that 'style is the ultimate morality of mind').

[A]mong all the things art can offer us, one of the most important things it can do is allow us to see a person's concrete, enacted attempt to achieve

2 See Martha Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990) and *Poetic Justice* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), Frank Palmer, *Literature and Moral Understanding* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) and Noël Carroll, 'Art, narrative, and moral understanding', in Jerrold Levinson ed., *Aesthetics and Ethics: Essays at the Intersection* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

his own style – I mean, most centrally, the attempt to achieve such a style on the part of the creator of a work of art. Which is not to say that it is only in art that we see this. And neither is it to say that we see this in all works of art: it is rather that the possibility of such a confrontation helps structure for us the very concept we have of art. But because this is so, and because one way in which we can be helped to achieve our own style is by being brought into contact with those who have their own style, the experience of art often holds out the promise that through it we, too, might come to find our own style – if, that is, we are the kind of person who looks to art for such things.

(this volume, p. 54)

For Hamilton, then, the moral significance of art is not tied to its ability to persuade us to choose a particular style of living, or ethical ideal. It lies rather in, first, reminding us that we might well need to make some such choice and, second, in illustrating one way in which such a choice might be made and pursued. Fixing a moral perspective upon the world is, at least in part, a matter of developing a personal style – and the artist's own struggle to develop a personal style can, Hamilton suggests, be both an example and an inspiration.

Both Hamilton and Tanner develop ways of thinking about the moral significance of art that eschew what is sometimes called *ethicism*, namely, the view that works of art are to be judged by moral criteria in such a way that (what is taken to be) a moral defect will *ipso facto* count as an aesthetic defect. Ethicism is tackled directly in Matthew Kieran's contribution 'Forbidden knowledge: the challenge of immoralism'. Kieran rejects ethicism in favour of the more nuanced suggestion that 'the moral character of a work is relevant to its value as art to the extent that it undermines or promotes the intelligibility and reward of the imaginative experience proffered by the work' (this volume, pp. 56–7). On Kieran's view the morally reprehensible character of a work of art can be an aesthetic virtue, while moral commendability can equally be an aesthetic vice.

As Kieran notes, one way of defending ethicism is through a broadly speaking cognitivist conception of artistic value, according to which an important consideration in evaluating works of art is the extent to which they deepen our understanding of ourselves and the world.<sup>3</sup> It is often thought that such a conception of artistic value directly entails ethicism, on the twin assumptions, first, that an immoral work *misrepresents* the nature of morality and, second, that nothing that misrepresents something can deepen our understanding of that thing. Kieran takes issue with the second of these

3 Such approaches are taken by Nussbaum in the works referred to above and by Wayne C. Booth in *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (Berkeley and LA: University of California Press, 1988).

assumptions, suggesting instead that ‘in exploring a morally defective perspective a work may deepen our appreciation and understanding in ways that would not happen otherwise’ (this volume, p. 63). In defending this claim he draws attention to the contrastive and comparative nature of our understanding of the morally good. The discriminatory abilities and capacities that make possible our understanding of the good need to be honed and refined in experience of the morally ambiguous and the morally reprehensible – particularly in the type of imaginative experience provided by works of art, a type of experience in which it is possible to suspend one’s moral judgements and moral attitudes.

There is, however, a long tradition in thinking about our response to works of art denying that such a suspension of one’s moral judgements and moral attitudes is at all possible. The most famous statement of this line of thought comes in a well-known passage from Hume’s essay ‘Of the standard of taste’ where Hume points out the difficulties of entering imaginatively into what is taken to be morally reprehensible. Here is the passage.

Whatever speculative errors may be found in the polite writings of any age or country, they detract but little from the value of those compositions. There needs but a certain turn of thought or imagination to make us enter into all the opinions which then prevailed, and relish the sentiments or conclusions derived from them. But a very violent effort is requisite to change our judgement of manners, and excite sentiments of approbation or blame, love or hatred, different from those to which the mind, from long custom, has been familiarized. And 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.<sup>4</sup>

In more recent times Kendall Walton has defended a position explicitly indebted to one strand of Hume’s thinking in this passage – the strand that suggests an impossibility, rather than simply an impropriety or a lack of willingness, in trying to enter imaginatively into what one takes to be a radically deviant morality. Mary Mothersill’s contribution ‘Make-believe morality and fictional worlds’ is an examination of an exchange between Kendall Walton and Michael Tanner on what has come to be known as the ‘problem of imaginative resistance’.

As Mothersill notes, there is an important distinction to be made in thinking about whether we can enter in imagination into the morally reprehensible. The real difficulty (if there is one) comes, not with entering in imagination into a fictional world whose inhabitants hold moral beliefs that one finds

4 David Hume, ‘Of the standard of taste’ (1757), reprinted in *Of the Standard of Taste and Other Essays* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), pp. 226–49.

unacceptable, but rather with entering into a fictional world in which those moral beliefs are supposed to be justified – and hence that one can only enter by oneself taking them to be justified. In the exchange on which Mothersill is commenting, Tanner objects to Walton's putting the point in these terms. In line with the views expressed in the paper discussed earlier, Tanner suggests that it is wrong to think of works of art, particularly the great nineteenth- and twentieth-century novels, as putting forward moral beliefs as part of the fabric of a fictional world. Instead, maintains Tanner, the great novelists are putting forward their own visions of how we should live our lives, and part of what it is to engage with those works is to work out for oneself the extent to which one shares that vision. Novels do not affirm particular moral propositions, which one might find objectionable and hence impossible to espouse even in imagination. Rather, they present total views of the world and how one should live in it, with which we need to engage – something we cannot do without entering into those views in precisely the way Walton claims not to be possible.

Mothersill agrees with Walton that we do, as a matter of psychological fact, have difficulty in entering into some of the evaluative perspectives presupposed by works of art. The example she considers is Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, an important part of the moral fabric of which is taken up by the supposed grave moral evil of amateur theatricals. This, she thinks, is a moral stance that it would be difficult to imagine being justified. Nonetheless, Mothersill agrees with Tanner that Walton's conception of what it is to imagine the truth of an evaluative perspective is impoverished. What is at stake, she thinks, is a type of dramatic imagination in which what one does is to rehearse a moral perspective to see whether it 'fits'.<sup>5</sup> What Walton describes as the problem of imaginative resistance would, Mothersill suggests, often be described more accurately as one's having tried on a particular perspective and discovered that it fails to fit. On other occasions it might better be described as a resistance, not to a particular moral perspective, but rather to the feeling of being manipulated. The phenomenon to which Walton draws attention is real enough, Mothersill thinks, but needs to be described more accurately.

One of the chief reasons for the sorts of overlap between ethics and aesthetics that we have been examining is the existence of a central core of concepts that can feature in both moral and aesthetic judgements and that seem, moreover, to have the same sense across these two types of use. Examples are the concepts of shallowness, obscurantism, sentimentality, vitality and decadence. These are concepts that, when applied in aesthetics, import an ethical overtone to aesthetic judgement – and conversely, that add an aesthetic dimension when deployed in moral judgements. Several of the

5 Mothersill draws explicitly on a paper by Richard Moran in which this conception of imagination is explored in some depth: 'The expression of feeling in imagination', *Philosophical Review* 103, 1994, 75–106.

contributors comment on the existence of such concepts and on their importance in thinking about art. Hamilton, for example, points out that the concept of style falls into this category. Two papers in this collection are devoted to exploring these concepts.

Michael Tanner's 'Sentimentality' (originally published in 1977 in the *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* – the only chapter in this collection previously published) develops an account of sentimentality in which it emerges very clearly why the charge of sentimentality is so serious, whether levelled at a person or at a work of art. The sentimentalist, according to Tanner, is guilty of an excess of feeling and a failure to control and deploy it constructively. He refers to 'the pointless inner proliferation of feeling which is sentimentality' (this volume, p. 109). The sentimental person, or sentimental work of art, luxuriates in feelings without either any serious engagement with the state of affairs that brought them about or any attempt to move through the feeling towards action. Tanner's exploration of the concept of the sentimental is bound up with his conception of what the ideal life should be – and should be understood in the context of his suggestion, considered earlier, that certain core works of art (the ones that we are inclined to think of as great works of art) need to be understood in terms of the vision of the ideal life that they put forward. Tanner, in common with Leavis, Lawrence and (in some of his moods) Nietzsche, thinks that the 'ideal of life' incorporates a certain 'fullness of emotional vitality'. The distinguishing mark of the sentimental is the absence of any such vitality. Genuine artistic expression, no less than a genuinely valuable moral life, requires feeling to be tempered by thought in a way that allows it to be channelled into action.

The concept of sentimentality is closely related to the concept of decadence, which is the subject of José Luis Bermúdez's contribution 'The concept of decadence'. Bermúdez explores the possibility of developing an account of the concept of decadence (what he calls a formal conception of decadence) that does not depend either upon assuming an ethico-aesthetic ideal from which the decadent can be seen as a falling away, or upon situating the decadent work of art within the type of narrative of world-historical growth and decline characteristic of the nineteenth century, and now somewhat out of fashion. The core of the concept of decadence, Bermúdez suggests, lies in the notion of an imbalance. This imbalance is not, as one might first think, the type of imbalance manifested in a preoccupation with form over content (assuming that sense can be made of this traditional opposition). Rather, Bermúdez suggests that the key to understanding decadence is the concept of *expressive form*.

A work of art's expressive form is the contribution its formal features make to its expressive capacity, understanding expression in a broad sense on which abstract ideas and ethical perspectives can be expressed no less than emotions and feelings. Correspondingly, a work displays imbalance with respect to expressive form when its formal features are not in harmony

with its expressive aims. This imbalance can occur in (at least) two ways. It might be that a work of art's expressive aims outstrip its formal resources – as we find in works of art that are bombastic or maudlin. But the charge of decadence is most applicable when the imbalance works in the opposite direction. It might be the case, for example, that a work displays formal features that are doing no work in realising its expressive aims, as with music written purely to display the virtuosity of the performer, or poetry written to illustrate an arcane metrical scheme. Or it might be the case that a surfeit of formal machinery is brought to bear on an expressive task that cannot bear the weight. The point with regard to the relation between art and morality is that an important class of breakdowns at the level of expressive form can be characterised using an essentially moral vocabulary, reflecting a lack of integrity and self-discipline.

The idea that integrity and self-discipline are virtues in an artist is, of course, a way of looking at the relation between art and morality that has a distinguished ancestry. Rather less familiar is the idea that integrity and self-discipline form part of the framework for understanding the activity of the critic – and, indeed, offer a way of understanding why and how criticism as an activity can carry a form of ethical success. This nexus of ideas is explored in Aaron Ridley's chapter 'Critical conversions'. Ridley sets out to explore the issues raised by Nietzsche's comment in *Beyond Good and Evil* that "My judgement is my judgement": no one else is easily entitled to it.<sup>6</sup> The question he addresses is: what makes it the case that someone is entitled to a critical judgement as their own? The issue here is really what counts as honesty and integrity in responding to a work of art. Ridley suggests that we need to understand such integrity and honesty in terms of three different requirements upon the critic. First, the critic must attempt to do justice to the work of art itself. Second, the critic must attempt to do justice to his own experience of the work. And, third, the critic must attempt, in articulating his own experience of the work, to order and negotiate between the various values informing that experience.

Of these three requirements, Ridley suggests that in an important sense the first collapses into the second. The evaluation of a work of art cannot be divorced from the evaluation of the experience it offers and hence, doing justice to the work is, in an important sense, a matter of doing justice to one's experience of it (although, of course, one needs to be sufficiently open to the work to allow one's experience to be shaped by it, as opposed to by what one expects to get out of it or what one hopes to get out of it). But the notion of doing justice to one's experience of a work of art can be understood in two different ways. In its simpler form it is a matter of articulating the experience of the work in the light of the values drawn upon in the experience. Even

6 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking, 1966), section 43.

bearing in mind the complexities introduced by the fact that the experience of art tends to involve striking a balance (or, as Ridley puts it, negotiating) between different values, doing justice to this experience can be viewed as a matter of articulating it correctly and evaluating the work of art in a manner commensurate with such an articulation. Greater complexity appears when the critic's evaluation brings to bear values not directly involved in the experience of the work of art – when the process of evaluation involves a further process of negotiation between values over and above the negotiation involved in the experience itself. Here there may be no single way of doing justice either to the experience or to the work. In both cases, however, the critic is required to reflect upon, and arbitrate between, the potential conflicts between values that a work of art evokes. 'And', as Ridley puts it, 'the criticism that he produces [. . .] clearly betokens a kind of ethical success, a kind of systematic triumph of truthfulness over laziness, insincerity, pretentiousness and self-deception and indeed over any of the many ways in which the character or force of one's own values can remain obscure, especially to oneself' (this volume, p. 140). The extent of the achievement depends, of course, upon the range of values drawn upon in the experience of art and the critic's preparedness to negotiate in hitherto unexpected ways. Exposure to such criticism can, Ridley suggests, lead to what he terms a critical conversion.

## II

The chapters in the first group, although they are concerned with theoretical issues that abstract from the concrete differences between the various forms of art, and although they advance claims that have application to works of art in general, tend to focus for argumentative and illustrative purposes on literature more closely than on any other form of art. This emphasis is common and natural in philosophical discussion of the relation between art and morality: imaginative literature possesses clearly the potential for portraying different ideals for the lived life, moral ambiguity, conceptions of the good and so forth, in an intricate, conceptually nuanced manner. It raises the question, however, whether the intersection of art and morality which is affirmed by all of the writers in the present volume characterises equally and to the same degree works of art in all media. Even if all works of art are subject to moral evaluation, as part of their artistic evaluation, it may be doubted that, for example, music, as a supremely formal and abstract art, or painting, as, an art that centres on visual perception, can carry the same weight of moral meaning as literature – except in so far as, and only to the extent that, they are made to incorporate literary, narrative or dramatic material. In this light, it seems to be no accident that music and painting should be comparatively neglected, in favour of literature, when the moral significance of art is being argued, and so frequently appealed to in contexts where views of art

that assert its autonomy and independence from moral concern are being defended.

Roger Scruton and John Armstrong indicate, however, the reasons why this view cannot be correct in any straightforward sense. As shown by their chapters, in both of which particular works of art are interpreted with care and in detail, it is possible for moral meaning to penetrate music and plastic art no less deeply than literature, and to be intrinsic to the value of musical works and paintings in ways that are specifically musical or pictorial. Thus, to the extent that there are fundamentally different, discrete modes of connection of art with morality, there is no reason for thinking that they correspond with any degree of exactness to the different forms of art.

Taking the case of a composer whose work continues, now in the second century of its reception, to arouse extreme reactions, both moral and aesthetic, and both *pro* and *con*, Scruton's paper examines Wagner's *Ring*. Contained at the centre of this work and penetrating its every aspect is, Scruton argues, a complex and multilayered vision that possesses the depth and significance of a philosophical system, and that indeed requires philosophical concepts for its proper elucidation. Wagner represents in the *Ring*, as Scruton interprets it, a comprehensive and integrated view of the relation of humanity to nature and of the moral framework of human life – of the conditions for human self-realisation and the origin of human evil, of the identity of the personal and the political and of the different fundamental forms of value – that has many elements in common with the German idealist inheritance that Wagner absorbed through his reading of Feuerbach, but which Wagner also enriches and transforms.

The essential point, which is emphasised by Scruton and demonstrated by his detailed analysis of many musical examples, is that this philosophical vision of Wagner's cannot be grasped without aesthetic, specifically musical experience and understanding. In order to grasp the thought of Wagner's that the *Ring* expresses, it is necessary not merely to understand the drama as presented in the libretto and in theatrical form, but to *hear* the appropriate musical developments: the music is 'the primary vehicle through which the action is accomplished' (this volume, p. 143); 'Wagner, by exploiting the musical potential of his motives, moves forward on the political and the spiritual levels simultaneously' (this volume, p. 159); 'Whenever the action seems incomplete, contradictory or mysterious the puzzle is resolved by the music, so that we feel, even if we do not understand, the rightness of what is happening on the stage' (this volume, p. 161). Because the musical features that are essential for a recognition of Wagner's moral and spiritual outlook are dynamic and incorporate historical developments within the drama and the music, they elude the method of *Leitmotiv*-analysis, which in fact leads inevitably to false construals of Wagner. Grasping the thought contained in the *Ring* becomes accordingly a case of knowledge by *acquaintance*, with instances of musical *movement* providing the objects

of acquaintance. Wagner's philosophical view is thus both embodied at a fundamental musical level and lies at the heart of the work's artistic and cultural value. Scruton's understanding of the *Ring* vindicates, therefore, claims for Wagner's artistic greatness, and it does so on grounds that include essentially moral understanding.

Turning from music to painting, Armstrong draws a sharp distinction between two moral functions that pictures may be and have been thought to have, and makes two initial concessions. The distinction is between painting which does no 'more than delineate the objects of moral regard' (this volume, p. 170), by representing morally deplorable and morally admirable subjects as respectively repulsive and attractive; and painting that enhances and contributes to moral understanding. Armstrong's first concession is that the latter ambition, in its chief historical forms – Plotinus' conception of visible beauty as intimation of the spiritual beauty that is an aspect of the morally Good, and Ruskin's conception of depictable nature as a divinely established vehicle for the communication of ethical truths – 'relies upon a framework of metaphysical assumptions which most people now find incredible' (this volume, p. 171). The second concession is that painting is indeed limited as an art form in its capacity to engage with moral understanding, in certain respects: it cannot, for example, articulate the differences in modality that are needed to represent certain morally relevant features of people and situations.

That painting can and does nevertheless fulfil the second function, of contributing to moral understanding, Armstrong proceeds to show by contrasting two paintings with overt moral content: a panel of Sassetta representing St Francis performing an act of charity, and Poussin's *The Ashes of Phocion Collected by his Widow*. The former does not for various reasons – none of which presuppose or imply artistic defectiveness – generate moral understanding: 'the picture simply asserts the commonplace conviction that St Francis performed a good deed [. . .] The moral content of the picture is thin and insubstantial in comparison with the complexity and subtlety of Christian ethics' (this volume, p. 174). Poussin, by contrast, 'stands at the opposite extreme from Sassetta's panel' (this volume, p. 182) in this respect. Through the composition of the painting, the nobility exhibited by Phocion's wife is located in relation to a broad, normative 'vision of social order and of human life' (this volume, p. 179), and the moral quality of her action is made visible to the spectator through its expressive aspect: the emotional and cognitive background constructed in the picture elicits in us the requisite state of mind for moral appreciation. This function is bound up in an especially intimate manner with the distinctive nature of painting as a form of art: we return again and again to paintings because they have the 'capacity to give a point of refuge and point of return to something which is, precisely, vulnerable and fleeting – yet highly valued' (this volume, p. 182). We thereby learn – in a richly experiential mode – of the rationale

or underlying framework of our moral evaluations. The conceptual limitation on painting's power of moral figuration that was initially conceded is thereby doubly compensated.

The concluding five chapters in the collection have a historical orientation, and exemplify different methods of pursuing critical issues in the context of historical writings. The philosophical authors discussed by Anthony Savile, Alex Neill, Sebastian Gardner, Christopher Janaway and Colin Lyas belong to a tradition of philosophical reflection on art that grows out of Kant's philosophy. This tradition, while of course displaying enormous diversity, is unified by certain broad assumptions concerning the nature and importance of art, included in which are (first) a belief that new philosophical materials, not provided by earlier (classical, rationalist, empiricist) philosophical systems, are needed in order to elucidate art correctly, and (second) an enlarged conception of the rights and duties of art. In parallel with the increasing cultural importance assigned to art in the course of the nineteenth century, the philosophy of art post-Kant shows a heightened sense of the role that art can (and, according to some theorists, must) play in philosophical enquiry. This development brings in its wake a new uncertainty regarding the relation of art to morality, and opens up new possibilities for understanding it. The whole set of debates that is reflected and pursued in the present volume – regarding the extent and importance of the relation of art and morality, and its correct philosophical understanding – belongs to this historical development. This makes it natural and appropriate for philosophers who are concerned with the interaction of ethics and aesthetics to examine the historical figures who have helped to create the context of present-day thought about art: in particular, Kant, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche.

Kant's own theory of art is still regarded widely as considerably less important and convincing than the general theory of the aesthetic that is contained in his account of pure judgements of taste in the 'Analytic of the Beautiful'. This account, through its characterisation of taste as distinct from empirical cognition and moral consciousness and as in a special sense disinterested, has been responsible historically for sponsoring a number of formalist aesthetic programmes, in which it is denied that there is any essential connection of art with morality. And yet, one of the greatest attempts in the history of philosophy to unify the aesthetic and the ethical – to demonstrate by philosophical means the oneness that neo-Platonism claims to intuit and that is, as Tanner observes, asserted so gnominically by Wittgenstein – is Kant's claim that beauty is 'the symbol of the morally good'.

Savile approaches this claim of Kant's, too often pushed aside on account of the difficulties that (Savile acknowledges) it involves, by way of a concept that figures prominently in Kant's 'Critique of Aesthetic Judgement' but has remained without sufficient illumination: Kant's notion of the 'ideal of beauty'. Savile shows first that the account of taste extracted from Kant's Analytic by 'autonomists' in the philosophy of art – those who deny that the

ethical and aesthetical are ‘intimately and inextricably intertwined’ (this volume, p. 185) – confronts difficulties, concerning among other things the justification of the key assumption that different individuals share a common aesthetic sensibility, and then that Kant’s ideal of beauty is designed to address these difficulties. The notion of an ideal or ‘maximum’ of beauty is bound up with Kant’s technical concepts of ‘dependent’ (conceptually informed) beauty and of ‘reflective’ judgement (where the particular is given and the task for the judging subject is to find the principle under which it is to be brought), but Savile shows that Kant’s reasoning concerning the need for an ideal of beauty is intelligible independently of anything peculiar to the Kantian system. The ideal of beauty, Kant says, must be identified with an ideal human figure, and Savile shows how, by virtue of this identification, morality enters Kant’s equation. Morality is, therefore, essential to Kant’s justification of taste, *pace* autonomism: it transpires that the ‘stoutest’ (this volume, p. 185) autonomist is in fact a ‘heteronomist’, and that Kant’s philosophy of art is much more than a mere addendum to his theory of taste.

A further innovative result suggested by Savile concerns the conception of moral goodness that is supported by reflection on aesthetic experience: ‘the initially undifferentiated idea of moral goodness’ – which appears to be Kant’s – ‘has progressively given way’, over the course of Savile’s enquiry, ‘to a finer grained notion, that of an array of ethical goods to which we are variously responsive’ (this volume, p. 202). Savile concludes with an indication of the major adjustment that is required by this result, and which in Savile’s consideration constitutes a move in the direction of greater plausibility, namely that claims for what Kant takes to be the a priori character of the ethical and the aesthetical give way to an acknowledgement that both rest on ‘a straightforwardly contingent thought’ (this volume, p. 202). Kant’s conception of the linkage of art and morality would in this way become available from the Humean perspective to which Kant’s aesthetics are standardly regarded as opposed.

Throughout its history, the philosophy of art has ascribed special importance to the category of tragedy. In the pre-modern and early modern periods, this can be understood largely in terms of the primacy which was accorded generally to classical culture and thought, more specifically, in terms of the artistic pre-eminence of Attic tragedy in the neoclassical canon, and the fact that tragedy occupies such a dominant place in what arguably lacked until recently a serious rival in the theory of art, Aristotle’s *Poetics*. In the later modern period, tragedy remains central to reflection on art, but for very different reasons, which have instead to do with the attempt, originating in German romanticism and German idealism, to locate in art a privileged source of truth. Thus tragedy comes to be regarded as articulating a higher or deeper philosophical truth than is available from within the confines of ordinary – extra-artistic and thus non-tragic – experience. A result of this development is that the relation between tragedy and morality, which is regarded in the

neo-Aristotelian tradition as stable and secure, becomes unsettled and is rendered open to reconstruction. Accordingly we find – most famously in Hegel and Nietzsche, but also in Schopenhauer, Schelling and others of the period – interpretations of tragedy that construe its meaning as either non-moral (Schopenhauer, Schelling), anti-moral (Nietzsche) or moral only in an un-commonsensual, philosophically complex fashion (Hegel).

Working in this historical context, Neill and Gardner are both concerned to direct the philosophical consideration of tragedy beyond the familiar and well-trodden territory of the alleged problem of pleasure in tragedy, and to defend a view according to which the value of tragedy is constituted centrally by the truth that it contains.

Neill's chapter provides a detailed study of Schopenhauer's theory of tragedy, which emphasises its close relation to Schopenhauer's metaphysics and shows it to be defensible on grounds that are plausible. Schopenhauer's thesis that artistic contemplation (music excepted) takes as its true object the quasi-Platonic Ideas that correspond to the different grades of objectification of Will, is applied by him to the case of tragedy to yield the theory that tragic representations reveal to us (the Idea of) the morally indifferent and unspeakably painful character of life in general, which is the necessary result of the self-antagonism of the will in the sphere of individuation. Consequently – as a vehicle for the same all-important philosophical truth as is established discursively in Schopenhauer's philosophy – tragedy occupies, for Schopenhauer, a pre-eminent position in the hierarchy of the arts.

This has been thought to set, Neill notes, a *prima facie* problem for Schopenhauer. Given his cognitive account of the value of tragedy, and the content of the cognition that according to Schopenhauer tragedy embodies, it appears very hard to explain why we should take any more pleasure in the experience of tragic works of art than we do in the first-hand, artistically unmediated experience of the unbearable reality that tragedy presents in synopsis. Neill considers first various responses to this problem that might be made on Schopenhauer's behalf by drawing on his conception of artistic experience as a state of subjective tranquillity or by referring to the 'objective' side of the experience of art (its presentation of the Ideas), but he concludes that these will not do the trick. Ultimately, Neill argues, the right response for Schopenhauer to take is to note that the original objection, and indeed much discussion of the putative hedonic paradox of tragedy, is premised on the hedonic theory of value – the view that it is necessary, in order for such and such to be deemed valuable, that it should be a source of pleasure. If we 'abandon the hedonic theory of value', then 'the fact that becoming acquainted with the Ideas presented by tragedy is not pleasurable' is 'no bar to seeing the experience in question as valuable' (this volume, p. 210). That Schopenhauer does not hold the hedonic theory of value is in any case shown, Neill argues, by his conception of the forms of art as ranked in order of value and by his ethical theory. And for a full answer to the question of why for

Schopenhauer tragic cognition has value we must turn, Neill concludes, to his theory of salvation.

Gardner offers a Nietzschean view of the relation between tragedy and morality, supported by a suggestion as to how the metaphysical meaning of tragedy may be understood. The compatibility of tragedy and morality that is asserted in much historical writing about tragedy, and that remains a tacit assumption in much contemporary writing on the subject, is contradicted, Gardner claims, by the considerations (first) that tragedy and morality each assign a different and conflicting value to suffering, and (second) that tragic affirmation is morally indifferent. In support of the first point, Gardner examines critically the moral interpretation of tragedy proposed by Schiller, and argues that Schiller's Kantian view – by virtue of its theodicean implication, that suffering can be morally compensated or redeemed – negates an essential condition of tragic response. The second point – that the value that we find in tragic representation and which provides the ground of the affirmative moment in our response to tragedy, is indifferent to the claims of morality – is shown, Gardner claims, by central examples of tragic works, in which it is clear that the value expressed in tragic affirmation is not morally conditional, that we accord tragic value irrespective of moral failure or achievement, and that this value is – in the perspective afforded by the experience of tragedy – more fundamental than moral value. (It also points to the speculative hypothesis, which a number of theorists have entertained in different formulations, and which Gardner suggests as a ground for tragic value and thereby as an explanation for tragedy's independence from morality, that at the core of the experience of tragedy lies a realisation of the bare form of human life.) If this is correct, then in each of these two respects, the perspective of tragedy conflicts with that of morality.

This insight of Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*, Gardner claims, can be detected, in nascent form, in earlier discussions of tragedy in German philosophy. Gardner goes on to suggest however – here departing from Nietzsche, who continues in later writings to pit the tragic perspective against the moral perspective – that the conflict of tragedy and morality need not be regarded as final: it remains conceivable that both perspectives can be reconciled. The important point, according to Gardner, is to appreciate that, if the compatibility of morality and tragedy is to be maintained – let alone, if positive moral meaning is to be ascribed to tragic art – then this requires speculative philosophical labour: it cannot be regarded as part of the manifest meaning of tragic experience, lying at its surface; nor can it consist in the straightforward identity of world-view that is claimed standardly in neoclassical theory and in much humanist critical practice.

Just as philosophy can ask about the relation of art and morality in general, so can it raise the question of its own artistic elements and of their moral force. This question is raised in an urgent fashion by Nietzsche's philosophical enterprise. It is a very familiar observation that the salience in Nietzsche's

writings of extraordinary literary qualities has fuelled the suspicion that his philosophy is fundamentally irrationalistic and that his radical philosophical claims are presented in emotionally charged, philosophically ‘unprofessional’ prose precisely because they lack a sober argumentative grounding. Yet, Nietzsche’s literary excellence is at the same time one aspect of the deep appeal that his philosophy holds for many of his readers, and for such readers the stylistic qualities of his writing are felt to be not alien, but integral, to the justification of his philosophical outlook. The general question of how and whether artistic means may be employed legitimately in pursuit of philosophical ends, and of whether there could be an indispensable role for artistic methods in philosophical writing, is therefore put in sharp focus by the more specific question of the problematic character of Nietzsche’s texts.

As Janaway notes, recent approaches have tended to go in one of two directions with respect to Nietzsche’s literary style and methods. Postmodern readings have laid a great emphasis on Nietzsche’s style or rhetoric, which they have conceived as the essential instrument of his critique of traditional philosophical notions (of determinate textual meaning and so forth) – at the cost of cutting this critique loose from the diagnostic claims to psychological truth which are necessary in order to rationalise the use of style or rhetoric as a philosophical instrument. Analytic reconstructions have tended to exhibit ‘relative silence on questions concerning his literary methods’ (this volume, p. 266–7), opening themselves to the reasonable complaint that they violate a basic explanatory condition which work in the history of philosophy should aim to meet.

Janaway’s account of the function of Nietzsche’s literary methods cuts straight between these two approaches. Focusing on Nietzsche’s method of provoking affective responses in his reader – of shame, temptation, embarrassment, revulsion, disquiet, admiration – Janaway shows how *On the Genealogy of Morals* is designed to provoke such reactions as part of its procedure of revaluing moral values. After its ‘false beginning’ of scientific objectivity, the First Essay of the *Genealogy* changes gear, ‘probing’ and ‘calling into consciousness’ ‘the affects of the reader’ (this volume, pp. 262, 265). Nietzsche’s ‘rhetoric of imaginative provocation of the affects’ flows ‘naturally from his descriptive moral psychology’ (this volume, p. 268). In the light of Nietzsche’s view of human psychology, and in view of the changes in inclinations and aversions that he regards as desirable and seeks to bring about,

here is a programme that would at least make sense: detach people from their practice of making moral judgements, thereby enabling them to feel non-moral inclinations and aversions. How to detach people from making moral judgements? Show them the inherited affects of which these judgements are the *post facto* rationalisations. How to show people the affects they have inherited? Provoke affective responses in them, and invite them to reflect on the explanation for their having them.

(this volume, p. 270)

Several of the Nietzschean themes explored by Janaway – concerning the proximity of art to philosophy, and the pursuit of ethical ends through the medium of each – are also treated in the chapter by Lyas. Lyas observes that, while there are compelling reasons for thinking that there is ‘something up’ with morality in the modern age, our understanding of why this should be so – of what it is exactly that is rotten in the state of morality – remains poor. Accompanying this disquiet regarding morality – not necessarily, but in some important cases, such as that of Nietzsche – is a strong attraction to art, which may be regarded as providing access to sources of motivation and orientation that are closed off to, if not by, morality. The theme of discontent concerning morality thus joins with that of the transformative power of art, and the question is, how we may suppose that art is capable of effecting the kind of deep inner transformation that some, like Nietzsche, have sought to find in it.

Lyas pursues the suggestion that the answer lies with a concept central to modern aesthetics, the concept of expression. In the first place, Lyas argues, the conception of expression developed by Croce offers a general way of understanding how philosophical and artistic interests may converge: philosophical conception qualifies as a form of the sense-making activity that Croce calls expression. This explains the way in which both philosophy and art can arouse a sense of recognition – ‘the sense that what is expressed was in some sense already known to us’ (this volume, p. 282) – but it leaves unexplained, Lyas notes, the ‘difference in kind between the illumination that is produced by philosophical articulations and that produced by artistic articulations’ (this volume, p. 283). Taking again the example of Wagner, Lyas suggests that we find in Wagner’s works a diagnosis of our discomfort regarding morality, and that the transformative potential of art can be understood in terms of what art, understood as Crocean expression, can show us regarding what it is like to live with different sets of values from those which we actually find ourselves with. Both the critical understanding of our condition and the potential for transforming it are contained in the depths of the work of art, and they are made available to us in a mode that is equipped to stimulate and facilitate self-transformation, that is, artistically rather than through self-consciously philosophical reflection. Which is of course not to deny, as Lyas emphasises, in agreement with Tanner (whose writings on Nietzsche and Wagner Lyas refers to throughout as a basis for his discussion), that serious, perhaps insuperable obstacles may stand in the way of actualising the possibilities opened up by art.

The origin of this collection lay with José Luis Bermúdez’s suggestion that we should assemble a collection of papers in honour of Michael Tanner. Over a lifetime of teaching at Cambridge, Michael Tanner has kept alive and fostered a spirit of passionate, critical engagement with philosophy, music and literature, expounding an outlook in which philosophical rigour seeks to join with the understanding of art, and in which both are directed to the end of achieving fullness of life. For the good fortune of his inspiration and

influence, many of us remain deeply grateful. Michael's interests and orientation are visible in the contributions of those whose papers formed the basis of what grew into the present collection. His agreement with or approval of what his former students argue for here is, of course, another matter.

The editors wish to thank Denis Bevington, Emma Gardner and Irene Ibison for their help, much appreciated, in preparing the manuscript; and the Aristotelian Society for permission to reprint Michael Tanner's paper, 'Sentimentality', from the *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 77, 1977, 127–47.

## Chapter I

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# Ethics and aesthetics are — ?

Michael Tanner

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My title is taken from the *Tractatus*, where Wittgenstein famously claims that ethics and aesthetics are one. I shall not be discussing *his* reasons for making this striking claim, the result as it seems to me, of a disastrous extrapolation, in ethics, from Kant's already catastrophic transcendental moral psychology, where the source of moral value is placed in the noumenal will; and in aesthetics, an equally disastrous adoption, or adaptation, of Kant's and Schopenhauer's view of aesthetic experience as 'disinterested contemplation', and therefore removed from the causal nexus and any consequent *practical* concerns. In the *Notebooks 1914–16*, the entry for 7 October 1916 runs in part: 'The work of art is the object seen *sub specie aeternitatis*; and the good life is the world seen *sub specie aeternitatis*. This is the connection between art and ethics.'<sup>1</sup> The connection had not, at that time, become an identity, but it is clear in what direction Wittgenstein was moving, and how he would arrive – and not only from motives of maximum gnomicness – at his later formulation. Crudely speaking, the further you abstract yourself from particular phenomena, the easier it is to proclaim their identity. The merging, for one bad reason or another, of two of mankind's most remarkable enterprises was common at the end of the last century and the beginning of this; and even so extravagant a genius as Wittgenstein was in many ways, some of them surprising, a child of his time, and in part a fascinatingly gamey mixture of fin-de-siècle Vienna and debut-de-siècle Cambridge.

Wittgenstein's views on ethics and aesthetics have made very little impact, largely no doubt because it is so hard to determine what they are, itself a result of his reluctance to spell them out at any length. In discussions since the Second World War, the tendency among philosophers who have interested themselves in both fields has been much more to draw extreme contrasts between them, thereby harking back to Kant and one line of thought that issued from him; and it is largely the nature and validity of these contrasts that I shall be discussing, especially in relation to the concepts of autonomy,

1 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Notebooks 1914–16*, ed. G. H. von Wright and G. E. M. Anscombe, English trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1961), p. 83c.

authority and principles as they occur in the two fields. This is, I realise, much-trodden ground, but not often well-trodden, so a fairly speedy synoptic traversal of it may still serve a useful purpose.

The most striking contrast between morality and art, as they are studied from a contemporary philosophical viewpoint, is the place that evaluation is often thought to occupy in relation to them. No one wishes to claim that it is out of place in morality: on the contrary, insofar as there is a widespread tendency to think of moral judgements as overriding, it is *there, par excellence*, that evaluation occurs; whereas aesthetic evaluation is regarded by many philosophers as at least suspect, at worst (or best, depending on your general outlook) impossible and this claim is sufficiently widespread to need to be taken seriously by an aesthete.

One route to this contrast can be succinctly sketched as follows: moral judgements of particular actions, whether prospective or already performed, must always be based on principles, whatever status these principles are accorded. That is common ground among subjectivists, philosophers such as those who, while in fact espousing subjectivism, claim to be unable to understand it, objectivists and fashionably designated realists. But judgements of particular works of art are not based, or at any rate not in a similar way, on principles, and the relationship of what have often been called phenomenal properties to their aesthetic properties, and the further relationship between aesthetic properties and judgement of the works in which they are present, is powerfully disanalogous to the relationship between a description of an action and the moral judgement passed on it. And, this line of argument concludes, when the lack of analogy is adequately explored, it reveals that the whole notion of aesthetic evaluation is thoroughly questionable. In a paper which still commands a great deal of attention – thereby bearing witness to the primacy, in philosophy, of assertion over argumentation – Stuart Hampshire writes ‘The spectator-critic in any of the arts needs gifts precisely the opposite of the moralist’s: he needs to suspend his natural sense of purpose and significance.’<sup>2</sup> Though this and related claims in Hampshire’s paper have often been dealt with, it is clear that they retain an attractiveness, and the attractiveness is not wholly specious.

Perhaps the easiest way to elicit what truth there is in Hampshire’s paper, and to locate the cynosure of its confusions, is to list some platitudes about morality and art respectively. First, about morality: (1) The first point of moral principles and injunctions is to get people not to behave badly in certain ways of an obvious kind, and to behave tolerably in some elementary ways. Since it is necessary for the continuance of any society that people, e.g. refrain from killing one another, at least under most circumstances, and that they usually tell the truth and exhibit fidelity to contracts, there are some extremely

2 Stuart Hampshire, ‘Logic and appreciation’, in W. Elton ed., *Aesthetics and Language* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1954), p. 166.

familiar moral rules which are imposed on every member of society. (2) The worse an action is, morally speaking, the more it matters that it should not be performed: this is little more than a variation on (1). (3) The violation of these basic moral principles is only permissible if there is a strong conflicting principle which overrides the others. There is a certain amount of controversy about this – in other words, about which principles are the most basic; it is widely held that the judicial execution of an innocent man is not justifiable even if an enormous amount of good results from it, since that act will have poisoned the wells, as it were; and Anscombe thinks that sodomy is not permissible under any circumstances whatsoever; but that is something that distinguishes her from most contemporary moralists. (4) All moral actions are universalisable, that is, if action A is right for person P then *ceteris paribus*, any other person in relevantly similar circumstances to P should perform an action of type A. (Hampshire, it is worth pointing out here, is confused about this: he says that ‘anyone [. . .] who moralises necessarily generalises’,<sup>3</sup> which is true if one recognises that generalisation, unlike universalisation, admits of degrees; if one doesn’t recognise this, as I think that, at least in this passage, Hampshire fails to, then one is likely to commit the Kantian error of thinking that moral principles are not only universalisable, but that they also generalise over all men, or all rational beings; a confusion that results in some of Kant’s most notoriously outlandish moral views.)

Now some platitudes about art and aesthetic judgement: (1) There are no *obvious* aesthetic principles or rules which can be said, in any serious sense, to be basic and useful. While it is no doubt wise not to write a piece of music entirely outside the pitch-perception of human beings, or to collaborate in producing a novel so long that even a speed reader would need more than the average life-span to get through it, these don’t occur to one as principles with which to equip the aspiring artist. (Nor do injunctions like ‘Be interesting!’) (2) *Prima facie*, while the worse an action is the more important it is that it should not be performed, and the harsher the judgement on its performance, the worse a work of art is the *less* it matters (and here it is clear that I do believe in the possibility of aesthetic evaluation). This point needs expansion: but the most common meaning I attach to ‘appalling work of art’ is that it is so incompetent as to be beneath notice. When Nietzsche rashly sent to Hans von Bülow his early orchestral composition, the ‘Manfred Meditation’, von Bülow wrote: ‘If you really feel a passionate urge to express yourself in music, you should master the rudiments of musical language: a frenzied imagination, revelling in reminiscences of Wagnerian harmonies, is no sort of foundation to build upon’,<sup>4</sup> something that many late nineteenth-century

3 Loc. cit., p. 164.

4 Letter of 24 July 1872, in Marie von Bülow, *Hans von Bülows Leben, dargestellt aus seinen Briefen*, Zweite Auflage (Leipzig, 1921), pp. 220–2.

composers might well have put up over their desks or pianos. That is the right note to strike with incompetent amateurs: but when von Bülow can't resist adding 'your *Meditation*, looked at from a musical viewpoint, is the precise equivalent of a crime in the moral sphere', he is making a mistake, since, as he says at the end of the letter, 'your music is not detrimental to the common weal, of course, but something worse than that, detrimental to yourself, seeing that you can find no worse way of killing time than raping Euterpe in this fashion'. But it is precisely what is detrimental to the common weal that is, par excellence, 'a crime in the moral sphere'. There are, I think, at least two other forms of artistic badness (and here I disagree with Professor Beardsley who in *The Possibility of Criticism*<sup>5</sup> thinks that there are only diminishing degrees of artistic goodness): the trivial and the corrupt, the latter naturally calling for critical exposure and denunciation. So the first two platitudes here concern lack of basic principles, and the unimportance of aesthetic badness in its commonest form. (3) While moral principles are employed both to prescribe and to judge actions, aesthetic judgements are chiefly made *after the event*; that is, there is at least one way in which the moralist has more urgent tasks to perform than the critic. (4) The way or ways in which aesthetic judgements are universalisable are much more complicated and obscure than those in which moral judgements are.

Moving on from these pretty obvious, though not sempiternal truths (some which seem very plainly correct to us would have been dismissed scornfully by many of our predecessors, especially, I think number (1) of the list of aesthetic platitudes), there is a further and crucial contrast to be drawn. While I can give you, as nearly as possible, a 'purely descriptive' account of an action from which you will be able to conclude that it was good or bad (*ceteris paribus* clauses being always remembered), I cannot provide you with a more or less purely descriptive account of a work of art from which you can conclude that it is good, though it seems more plausible to say that from such an account you can conclude that it is bad – a single note unvarying in any respect and lasting twenty minutes, for example. It is this feature of aesthetic discourse that Richard Wollheim, in the second edition of *Art and its Objects*, refers to as 'a well-entrenched principle in aesthetics, which may be called the Acquaintance principle, and which insists that judgements of aesthetic value, unlike judgements of moral knowledge, must be based on first-hand experience of their objects and are not, except within very narrow limits, transmissible from one person to another'.<sup>6</sup>

It is at this point that my promised topics of autonomy and authority make their entry: for the autonomy of aesthetic judgement, if not that of ethical judgement, seems indisputable, granted the well-entrenchedness of the

5 Monroe C. Beardsley, *The Possibility of Criticism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1970).

6 Richard Wollheim, *Art and its Objects*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 233.

Acquaintance principle; it might, indeed be thought that the Acquaintance principle gave a more precise force to the term 'autonomy' than it would otherwise have, if one felt, as I do, that the concept of autonomy is less clear than its frequent unexplained use by philosophers suggests. One might try to make a point which, cursorily stated, seems perspicuous but becomes harder to grasp when one ponders it, in this way. Take the following three cases: the legal man; the moral man; and the aesthetic man. It is required of the legal man only that he does not infringe the law; his motives are irrelevant – he may well, like almost everyone, including to the scandal of his Cambridge friends, the saintly G.E. Moore, proclaim truly that he only pays income tax because he could be penalised if he didn't; and similarly with many of the other laws he keeps on the right side of. If he *does* infringe certain laws, his motives may well be of interest in a court of law, but if he doesn't, that's all there is to it – he is a 'law abiding citizen', which is the most we can require of him in that dimension. The moral man is equally required, in the first place, to obey moral laws – and the first duty of the moralist is to ensure that people do. It goes without saying that motives enter in a much more intimate way in assessing someone as a good, moral man; but without venturing further onto the treacherous territory where this issue beckons, it can safely be said that many, if not most of the correct or good acts which people perform are not done from a sense of duty or conformity to, or reverence for, the moral law, nor does it seem desirable, in many cases, that they should be, but from habit, or the desire for the quiet life, or fear of disapprobation, or what Kant calls 'pathological affection'. It is only in the framework of a fairly highly developed and sophisticated society that the motives for acting morally command much, let alone sovereign attention. Kant was a very unworldly philosopher.

The primacy of getting people to do the right things, or pass the right moral judgements, is connected, though not straightforwardly, with the transmissibility of moral knowledge, to use Wollheim's expression. But the fact that I may lead a certain kind of life which at least enables me to get by morally, and that I can pass, with point, moral judgements on others for reasons other than the 'correct' ones, means that, at a surface level at least, sincerity and first-handedness of moral judgement are not universally required. The sheer fact that morality is necessary because of a conflict between what we would like to do and what we ought to do is enough to demonstrate that sincerity, though a crucial concept in ethics isn't one that can be invoked in a straightforward sense. If one takes 'sincerity' in the most naive way, as a congruence between the inner and the outer life, it is precisely what we do not require much of the time. Of course, as we shall see, there is enormously more to sincerity than that glib little account allows, and it enters the moral life and our estimates of it at many points, but in its crudest forms it clearly can't be called a virtue.

When we think of sincerity in morals, it is in the first place in relation to actions: in fact, in the case of many moral actions it may not be the obvious,