

## Art, Imagination, and the Cultivation of Morals

I

In aesthetics and the philosophy of art, two pictures of art's relation to morality predominate. On one picture, let us call it *ethicism*, there is the notion that art proper, however indirectly, prescribes and guides us toward a sound moral understanding of the world. The historical precedent for this kind of picture is strong: the classical Greeks looked to the Homeric poems to render their moral cosmos intelligible, and the Victorians fueled a dramatic expansion of art galleries in order to enlighten and ennoble the masses. However, at least within the dominant strand of philosophical aesthetics, this picture has traditionally been given short shrift. On the alternative picture, let us call it *aestheticism*, the spheres of morality and art are thought of as autonomous rather than complementary. The aestheticist's historical precedent is similarly strong: Plato's disparagement of art rests upon the presumption that art bears no necessary relation to morality, and Oscar Wilde's "art for art's sake" concerns the perfections of beauty severed from the burden of moral intimation.

Typically, it is presumed that the arguments in favor of aestheticism are far stronger than the crude, wishful thinking constitutive of ethicism. The aestheticist need not even deny that an artwork may contingently cultivate ethical insight. Rather, she need only point out that we value, as art, works like the Marquis de Sade's *Juliette* which promote apparently immoral understandings of the world and others. That is, we may properly enjoy the pleasures an artwork affords whilst recognizing that, morally speaking, the view represented in the work is itself flawed. For example, a work which gets us to imagine torturing another with pleasure may be, as art, equally as valuable as, or more valuable than, one which gets us to imagine the same event

with disgust. Contrastingly, what is taken to constitute morally or politically correct art may possess little of artistic value; hence, the aestheticist can explain the evaluative fallacy committed by those who would evaluate art on moral grounds. The fact that artistic and moral value may come apart like this, the aestheticist claims, proves that artistic value must be morally neutral. The truth is that the pleasures afforded by art are of value in and of themselves independently of any relation to the appropriate moral understanding of the events portrayed.<sup>1</sup>

Yet, I will argue, the arguments against the role of moral evaluation in art, which strengthen the presumption in favor of aestheticism, can only undermine a crudely instrumentalist conception of art's relation to morality; that is, where an artwork is conceived of as morally significant to the extent it evokes morally sound responses and understandings. Contrastingly, *contra* aestheticism, an account of art which recognizes an inherent link between what is represented artistically and moral understanding may yet prove more adequate to our judgment and evaluation of art. Any account of art which recognizes the pleasures inherent in the peculiar and vivid imaginings prescribed by artworks must allow for a distinctive relation to moral understanding. It is through what we imagine and the promotion of imaginative understanding in engaging with artworks that art may justifiably lay claim to the cultivation of our moral sensibilities.

II

At least typically, artworks prescribe us to imagine certain characters and states of affairs.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the nature of an artwork's prescribed

imaginative content is partly determined by the way it is artistically shaped and manipulated: for example, the particular medium, genre, and artistic conventions utilized. Through prescribing particular imaginings, an artwork promotes particular imaginative understandings of the state of affairs represented. Recognition that the primary point of art lies in its engagement of our imagination might suggest an instrumentalist defense of the link between art and morality. Art engages one's sympathetic imagination with regard to various types of people in possible situations. Thus, an artwork may encourage us to consider and to become open to people, dilemmas, and states of affairs we might otherwise have dismissed out of hand. In this way, as R. M. Hare argues, art may contribute to our moral thinking and outlook.<sup>3</sup> So, for example, George Orwell's *1984*, Paul Nash's *We are Making a New World*, or Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* may open our eyes to the brutality of totalitarianism, the desolation of war, or the ennobling aspects of humanity.

It is important to recognize that the imaginings prescribed by a particular artwork are not necessarily open to questions of truth in terms of facticity. Nonetheless, Hare argues, artworks are open to the question of verisimilitude: whether what is represented as happening would really be so and whether the morally relevant features have been highlighted or suppressed. Hence, art is often subjugated in favor of state propaganda or multifarious sociopolitical causes. However, propagandistic art is not flawed, on this conception, because it attempts to prescribe a particular moral or sociopolitical understanding of the world. Rather, state propaganda is flawed as art because, *qua* propaganda, it seeks to misrepresent or occlude morally relevant features of the state of affairs portrayed. Of course, as Hare suggests, good art can only be, at best, a very weak defense against immoral thought and fanaticism, for, just as our own consciences may be twisted and distorted in our upbringing, so too our sympathetic imagination can be misdirected.

Now, artworks are not themselves articulations of moral principles and their groundings. This is, more properly, what moral philosophy and applied ethics involves. Rather, artworks prescribe us to imagine particular characters, situations, dilemmas, actions, and their conse-

quences. Thus, Hare suggests, we can only learn from the imaginative experience an artwork affords insofar as it illuminates new features or principles.<sup>4</sup> Take, for example, Neil Jordan's film *The Crying Game*. Our imaginative sympathies are engaged, crucially, before one of the central features of the situation is revealed; namely, that the "girl" Stephen Rea has fallen for is, in fact, a transsexual. Had this been revealed earlier, the imaginative sympathies of many spectators would not have been engaged as deeply, if at all. But, once engaged, the film illustrates a case which, for many, challenges the application of their moral principles. The film foregrounds the case of "deviants" such as Dil who, it suggests, are just as worthy of human concern as are you and I. Thus, those who would discriminate against transsexuals in this regard, by virtue of their deviance, are forced, to the extent they take the film seriously, to reflect upon the proper application of their moral principles. Moreover, the film forces us to reflect upon the ambiguous nature of sexuality, personal identity, and human love. In this way an artwork may help us to learn through imaginatively vivifying the commitments and consequences of applying certain moral principles.

Hare's position suggests that we will only learn from artworks where they represent what is likely to happen to us or represent types of people we are likely to recognize.<sup>5</sup> It is this kind of view which, unsurprisingly, lay behind the foisting of moralizing tales upon Victorian children. Now, interpreted strongly, Hare's presumption that we can only learn from artworks if they are relevantly similar to our own experience and worlds seems flawed. Consider H. G. Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, which prescribes us to imagine experiences which we are never likely to, or even could, have. Despite this, Wells's book perhaps enables us to see that non-human creatures are not outside the remit of moral concern and, moreover, that cruel and disastrous consequences may result from abrogating nature's fundamental processes. The inevitable partiality of experiences represented in an artwork do not entail that only people with those kinds of experiences can engage with the artwork concerned. Indeed, the force of works like *Doctor Moreau* or *The Crying Game* depends upon the fact that the protagonist's situation is outside of our ordinary, everyday experi-

ences. The whole point of imagining in our everyday lives, and engaging with artworks, involves the appreciation of experiences, identifications, and situations we have not or previously could not have imaginatively understood. This is true whether the imaginings themselves are extrapolations from our own experiences and identifications or not.

However, a weaker version of Hare's argument need not depend upon the presumption that what is portrayed must, in all relevant respects, be identifiable with our own experiences.<sup>6</sup> Rather, Hare's argument suggests that the representation of extraordinary experiences may bear significantly upon our own. That is, in order to recognize what is portrayed as relevant to ourselves, we must be able to bring aspects of what is portrayed under principles we either do or could conceive of holding. This, Hare holds, could only be a matter proper to a reflective understanding of why moral principles hold good and how they apply across cases. Hence any truly significant development of our moral understanding and sensibilities can only come from the realm of moral thought. Thus, Hare concludes, art can only provide a small instrumental aid for developing one's moral sensibilities. Therefore, art cannot bear any inherently significant relation to our moral sensibilities.

But then why consider artworks significant or illuminating? Presumably, under this construal, it would be better to reflect upon the relevant moral principles themselves, or to learn from the appropriate field of inquiry. It could be suggested that, typically, the empirical knowledge required to gain imaginative acquaintance with a particular value is underspecified. Hence it may be filled out by the imagination; grounded upon one's prior knowledge of the world. But this still does not explain why engaging with an artwork should peculiarly promote our understanding. Indeed, on Hare's conception, it would be better to search for more information or conceptually to disentangle the lacunae in our moral theory, rather than to allow the imagination to be an unreliable substitute for reflective understanding.

It would seem that, at best, artworks may serve a moral function by illustrating the application of moral principles. The only difference between an artwork and a moral philosophy example is that the former may make us attend to

a morally relevant feature in a more pleasurable, vivid, and diverting manner. But since this can only be a contingent relation, we should be wary of the power of the imaginings promoted by artworks. After all, as Plato argued, we might be tempted to mistake their vivacity for justification.<sup>7</sup> More fundamentally, the possible relationships between imagined and actual worlds are determined by theoretical considerations anyway. Therefore, whether an artwork is of moral significance or not depends upon the relationship of what it portrays to moral principles and their application in our world.

Hare's instrumentalist defense of the link between morality and art opens up the gap between artistic value and what we may learn from art. We may learn far more, on his view, from an artistic failure than from an artistic masterpiece. After all, a bad artwork may bring our attention to a particular moral principle we had failed to recognize, whereas an artistic masterpiece may be concerned with a moral principle already presumed. Therefore, an instrumentalist defense of the link between art and morality can only prove inadequate. To the extent Hare recognizes that the link is contingent, he must allow that the artistic and moral value of an artwork are independent of each other. To the extent moral value is still thought to be relevant to artistic value, instrumentalism cannot but remain open to the classic objections brought against moralism in the arts: that it falsely reduces art to the status of moral and political propaganda.<sup>8</sup>

### III

The fundamental problem with Hare's instrumental defense of the link between art and morality is the recognition of artworks only as particular illustrations of general moral principles and their application. Yet we normally consider that which is merely illustrative to be inherently flawed as art.<sup>9</sup> Underlying our disparaging use of the term "illustrative" is the presumption that nothing has been added in the pictorial representation, except perhaps obfuscation, that could not or should not have been captured in the form of propositional thought. With what is mere illustration properly contrasted then? Presumably an artwork should not merely exemplify or tell us about the world; rather, it

should *show* us. As Iris Murdoch would have it, art "is the most educational of all human activities and a place in which the nature of morality can be *seen*."<sup>10</sup>

But what is it for a work to show us the nature of morality, or how the world is, could be, or should be? Iris Murdoch's claim amounts to the idea that art, in particular literature and painting, enable us to better understand moral reality. The basis for her argument is the claim that moral reality is necessarily context variable and thus particularist. Literature, she claims, enables our faculty of moral perception to become more richly differentiated and discriminating. Thus, art enables us to see more clearly what is actually the case. This is because, she argues, peculiar to painting and literature is the ability to realize the particular, concrete nature of experience, something which reflective inquiry passes over as a matter of irrelevant indeterminacy. Perhaps then, generally, artworks proper prescribe us to imagine, and thus show us, the rich particularities of human states of affairs in a way in which mere reflective inquiry or contemplation necessarily cannot. If sound, Murdoch's argument would afford art a distinctive relation to moral inquiry, something with which the reflective disentangling of moral principles cannot, as a matter of principle, be concerned. Moreover, literature and art generally might then, as Murdoch suggests, be considered a far richer, more inclusive, and thus superior form of moral inquiry than that afforded by abstract, philosophical reflection.<sup>11</sup>

However, Murdoch's argument apparently depends upon a highly contentious thesis about the nature of moral reality: particularism.<sup>12</sup> The core notion is that moral theory *per se* is necessarily inadequate to, and thus distortive of, human morality. According to philosophers like Hare, what we should do depends entirely upon how our favored moral theory applies in a particular case. The relationship between our moral principles and actions is conceived of as almost entirely one way. Hence, if a utilitarian realizes that her intuitive presumption against abortion conflicts with the happiness of the greatest number, then her mere prejudice should be modified.<sup>13</sup> But, according to particularism, our moral sensibility cannot and should not be so enfeebled. Rather, what is appropriate depends upon the particularities of the case, and can only

be a matter for moral judgment and discrimination. Thus, reflective inquiry concerned with moral principles can have no significant effect, except distortively, upon human practices and ethics.

Far more needs to be said about particularism than can be stated here. However, the fundamental dilemma which faces any form of moral particularism undermines Murdoch's case for a close link between art and morality. On one horn of the dilemma, moral particularism ends up implausibly and uncritically exempting received ways of carrying on from reflective inquiry and criticism. Murdoch, amongst many others, would certainly not want to embrace a picture which ultimately precludes the possibility of being, morally speaking, mistaken. However, this consequence can apparently only be avoided at the cost of accepting the second horn of the dilemma, namely, recognizing that it is perfectly compatible with foregrounding the rich particularities of certain cases to allow that there is a symbiotic interplay between moral principles and judgment.<sup>14</sup> That is, recognizing the role of moral judgment is consistent with the recognition that ethical principles, at least partly, determine what is the right, wrong, or permissible action. The normative evaluation of actions relies upon reference to such principles, in order, apart from anything else, to facilitate consistent action across cases. Indeed, in pursuing reflective inquiry, philosophy enables us to examine and thus deepen our appreciation of, or critically modify, the values, concepts, and moral principles we live by.<sup>15</sup> For one who values what reflective philosophical inquiry can achieve, and is impressed by the basic dilemma facing moral particularism, Murdoch's argument can only be deeply unattractive. But must the idea that there is a close link between art and morality depend upon such a strong, perhaps implausible, thesis about the nature of moral reality? No.

We can, I think, recognize the justificatory and deliberative role of moral principles whilst holding that moral understanding can properly be promoted in art because it is more particular or discriminating. Recognizing the true relationship between art and morality more properly arises from recognizing the centrality of imaginative understanding to moral understanding. What we must appreciate is that what we learn from good artworks is distinctive in kind from,

for example, what we learn by using counterexamples in philosophy, the knowledge afforded by acquiring more detailed information about an event or from reading moralizing tracts dressed up as stories. Murdoch's insight inheres in the recognition that not all moral learning and understanding is reducible to matters of general principle. Her mistake is to presume that therefore moral learning and justification *per se* makes no significant recourse to principles at all.

The notion that art may make a noninstrumental contribution to our moral understanding, whilst disavowing moral particularism, may suggest Martha Nussbaum's Aristotelianism. Nussbaum holds, like Aristotle, that there are general principles which guide human relationships and activities, yet they are certainly insufficient for virtue without judgment. Hence, the recognition of what it is good to do in a particular case requires the sensitive, discriminating faculty of perception. Thus, in discussing *The Golden Bowl*, Nussbaum states that Henry James "shows us how perception without responsibility is dangerously free-floating, even as duty without perception is blunt and blind."<sup>16</sup>

But recognizing that practical deliberation requires both rules and autonomous, nonrule-governed judgment need not commit one to an Aristotelian conception of morality. After all, as Onora O'Neill amongst others has pointed out, Kant emphasizes that the very application of the categorical imperative requires autonomous judgment.<sup>17</sup> The very circumstances of a case affects how the universal principle of morality applies; hence, it is necessary to pick out the salient features of a given case, to imaginatively construe the differences and analogies between the present situation and other cases, and to envisage what the application of various rules or maxims legitimated by the categorical imperative might entail. Thus, even for Kant, we require discriminating, perceptive, and imaginative descriptions about the situation in order to see what the categorical imperative might require in a given case. Any significant moral theory hoping to prove adequate must recognize the necessity of judgment. The point here is that commitment to the idea that, through the imaginative experience afforded, art may develop and enhance our moral discrimination need not depend upon any one picture of morality.

The importance of imaginative understand-

ing can be brought out if we recognize that to conceive of morality as reducible to adherence to moral principles is to remain blind to the real demands that the world and others may justifiably make upon us. It is to regard people, dilemmas, and situations as always falling under the application of some principle or other.<sup>18</sup> Of course, to understand that particular cases fall under certain principles is to have learnt something about, and is a prerequisite of, moral action. For example, taking cigarettes from a newsagent's without paying, or taking an old lady's photograph frame containing a photo of her deceased husband both fall under the principle that stealing is wrong. However, if this is all one understands, then one still lacks a proper moral understanding of the two actions. Stealing the photograph is far worse than stealing the cigarettes, in a way in which no principle can account for. The photograph retains an inherent, personal, immeasurable value for the old lady and is at least symbolic of what she herself, at least in part, is. If we cannot understand this, that abrogating the moral principle against stealing can be exacerbated by such features of a situation, then our lack of understanding arises from a failure to imaginatively understand and care for others. This, of itself, constitutes a defect in moral understanding.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, it serves to highlight the importance of imaginative understanding for our ordinary moral thinking.

At this juncture, it is crucial to distinguish explicitly the two forms of understanding our moral thinking apparently involves. Thin understanding typically involves the kind of reflection Hare suggests is constitutive of moral deliberation, justification, and understanding; that is, a concern with explicating and critically assessing the nature of moral principles, their relationship to a given moral theory, and how they should be properly applied. Indeed, this is a typical picture of what is involved in doing moral philosophy. Contrastingly, imaginative understanding typically involves striving to imagine, to grasp, and to appreciate what the appropriate way of looking at and acting in the world is.<sup>20</sup> This typically includes matters such as the appropriate way to feel for, to regard, and to respond to others. We imagine and imaginatively assess the ways we think of and feel about another under certain possible circumstances: how

we might feel in their situation, and how that should affect what we might do.<sup>21</sup> Thus, imagining plays an essential role in our everyday, moral deliberations. For imaginative acquaintance is required in order to fully imaginatively understand aspects of ourselves, others, and the world.

Our moral thinking cannot be reducible to questions purely concerned with matters of moral theory and principle and their application. This explains why merely learning a set of moral principles, and doing moral philosophy, is insufficient for moral understanding. When deciding what I should do in relation to another, I do not refer to an implicit theory about her rank ordering of preferences and beliefs. If we imaginatively understand another, then we do not need recourse to principles or theoretical reflection in order to know what we should do. To know what is likely or what it is good to do depends upon a sound imaginative understanding of others and the world.<sup>22</sup>

Now, I am not denying that principles have any role to play in moral justification, deliberation, or learning. But moral principles tend to be prohibitive and presuppose an imaginative understanding of what it is we should aspire to be and how we should see the world. Such imaginative understanding is cultivated through developing the capacity to imagine and to appreciate what exemplary, wise, and kind people would do under various circumstances.<sup>23</sup> This is because people, exemplars, and stories afford an imaginative understanding of the world which cannot be conveyed merely by citing or blindly applying moral principles. The thick concepts of everyday moral discourse and discrimination can only be grasped through the promotion of imaginative understanding. Of course, we may later come to thinly understand their fairly specific criteria of applicability. Nonetheless, to grasp thick concepts, such as courage, kindness, tolerance, and generosity, we must imaginatively understand something about the nature of that to which they are being applied. We may be told that tolerance is listening to the opinions of others and respecting their right to have them. However, a grasp of what it is to be a truly tolerant person may require imaginative acquaintance with what can be involved, rather than a merely abstract, theoretical recognition that toleration requires one to listen to the opinions of

those one disagrees with as well as those one is naturally predisposed toward. Rather, we may have to imagine the position of, say, Martin Luther King Jr. when he defended the right of racists to speak freely.

It is important to realize that I am not claiming that theoretical reflection and principles cannot deepen our understanding of morality and art. Indeed, if I were, philosophical aesthetics or moral theory would be either redundant or counterexamples. However, what I am claiming is that such reflection is significant insofar as it appropriately modifies our imaginative understanding. That is, theoretical understanding is significant because it arises from and may modify imaginative understanding. Thus, a morality based purely upon principles, allowing no room for imaginative understanding and judgment, could never hope to be adequate to the moral demands of the world. Morality depends upon an imaginative understanding of ourselves and others, in order to make correct moral decisions. Art as such typically stimulates and engages the imagination in order to promote a sound appreciation of what the imaginings concern and thus serves to promote imaginative understanding. This concerns the quality of our thinking about and understanding of the world. It is through the imaginative understanding that art is tightly linked to our moral aspect. Our moral perception and sensibilities are themselves dependent upon our imaginative understanding of the world, people, and forms of life.

Through engaging with artworks we may come to learn and imaginatively understand aspects of the world to which we might otherwise have remained blind. In this way one may learn to attend to aspects of the world which, prior to one's imaginative engagement with a particular artwork, one would have dismissed. This is true of good artworks, whether they are of apparent, immediate relevance to our everyday experience or not. Hence we may learn from both works which represent a world close to our own, and events far removed from the nature of our world. Through the power and vivacity of the imaginings they promote, artworks may engage our imaginings about subjects and people to which our imaginings, on their own, would remain inadequate.<sup>24</sup> Hence, *The Crying Game* can cultivate our imaginative understanding, where our more ordinary imaginings may have failed us.

Thus, artworks can extend our imaginative understanding in a way our ordinary imaginings could not. Art may distinctively cultivate our imaginative understanding and moral sensibilities.

## IV

It might be objected that linking imaginative understanding, and thus art, to moral understanding remains open to two basic objections. Firstly, it remains unclear how artworks may prove as insightful about ordinary, familiar aspects of our lives, as distinct from those we would not otherwise be acquainted with. Obviously, *1984* may inform those who have not lived under an authoritarian regime about the nature of such states and what it is to live under them. But how can a work which concerns our particular world be informative about what we already know? Secondly, the account still appears open to the standard objection against moralism in art. If the imaginative understanding prescribed in art is primary, and is held to be closely linked to moral understanding, then the suggested account fails, falsely, to recognize good art which is manifestly immoral, in terms of the imaginative understanding prescribed.

If artworks could only illuminate aspects of life radically different from our own, then most art would have to be considered insignificant. Yet the significance of Homer's poetry, Michelangelo's artistry, Dickens's novels, or Kubrick's films does not depend upon whether one is unfamiliar with the time, events, and types of characters represented. If this were so, then their work would hardly have been of value to many of their contemporaries. Obviously the painting of everyday subjects by artists seeks to illuminate rather than merely illustrate the banal and obvious. Think of Millet's portrayals of everyday, working peasant life, Rodin's *The Kiss*, Degas's depiction of prostitutes, Constable's evocation of the English countryside, and so on. The techniques, viewpoints, and aspects manipulated in all these artworks aim to promote imaginative understanding. The insight afforded is not merely concerned with strange and foreign worlds. Artworks often touch upon features, values, and concerns which are of immediate concern to our own lives: representations of life, birth, lust, death, love, work, home, the countryside, urban society, war, religion, and so on. Their point is

to evoke a particular imaginative understanding in relation to the subject portrayed and thus to deepen our imaginative understanding of our own world.

So how can art illuminate what we are already familiar with? Artworks seek to prescribe and shape our imaginings in particular ways. They do so by seeking the right way to convey what it is they seek to represent. That is, artworks attempt to find the right description. The right description can develop, through our imaginings, a deepened imaginative understanding of the nature of our world and possibilities. Artworks do not function as mere vehicles of information. Of course, the choice of subject itself indicates that something is to be taken as worthy of our attention. An artwork does not merely repeat the familiar or tell us about the unfamiliar. Rather, it seeks to bring home a particular imaginative understanding of a world. Thus the way our imaginings are prescribed and shaped distinctively affects the nature of what we are to understand imaginatively. This is precisely what makes our imaginative engagement with artworks distinct from the flux of ordinary experience. Art utilizes and provides a common pool of imaginative resources and techniques, from stock myths and stories on through to perceptual categories or feelings. But it is precisely in drawing upon, extending, constructing, and developing these resources that art can draw our attention to aspects of our world which we had previously missed.

Good artworks, as distinct from typical pieces of journalism, say, do not merely draw our attention to features of the world or imagined worlds. In journalism or bad science fiction what we react to are the features, events, or possibilities to which our attention is drawn, independently of the way they are represented. However, in art we react to the way the features, characters, and events are portrayed. What the artwork cultivates in our imaginings is a possible way of imaginatively understanding the state of affairs represented. The artwork directs us toward the way certain things are to be seen and imaginatively understood, as opposed to merely stating that "they are or might be." The work, its manipulation of conventions, style, and associations, prescribes particular imaginative experiences and, possibly, the reordering of our expectations. It develops a possible way of

thickly understanding our natural and social world.

Consider, for example, Vincent van Gogh's *The Potato Eaters*. At the time it was painted, the details and features of everyday peasant life would have been familiar to all. Although it may be of sociological interest to us now, it is not here that the artistic value of the work lies. What van Gogh sought was a way of representing his subjects which would evoke an imaginative understanding of the harsh living and working conditions of his subjects. He does this through a particular laboring and abstraction of style, attempting to bring home the rough, coarse, hard aspects of their lives:

I personally am convinced I get better results by painting them in their roughness than by giving them a conventional charm. ... If a peasant picture smells of bacon, smoke, potato, steam—all right, that's not unhealthy ... if the field has an odour of ripe corn or potatoes or of guano or manure—that's healthy, especially for city people. Such pictures may *teach* them something. But to be perfumed is not what a peasant picture needs.<sup>25</sup>

What the work may teach us does not lie so much in knowing about the conditions of the peasants. This is something most city people would have known about, and is something we can easily find out about from our history books. The work is not a substitute for or a paraphrase of such information. If this were so, then the point of engaging with the work would be lost as soon as one found a more detailed source of information about the conditions of the peasantry. What the picture may teach us is that a particular imaginative understanding of the peasant's lives is appropriate; that despite, or perhaps because of, their harsh conditions, their lives contain an earthbound simplicity and goodness to be recognized and cherished. Van Gogh is concerned to present us with what he takes to be an appropriate understanding of these people, through prescribing our imaginings in certain ways. The way the peasants unthinkingly share their meager sustenance, the way their gazes are directed and show concern for others manifests this imaginative understanding. Of course, we might criticize van Gogh for an overly sentimental, quasi-religious reverence for peasants. What would be at issue here is whether

the imaginative understanding promoted by the work is the appropriate one. It is important to emphasize that this criticism would not arise because the work may be fictional. Rather, it arises because the claim is that, if van Gogh was really to deepen our imaginative understanding of peasants, then he should have represented them in a slightly different way.

The aestheticist may well interject here. After all, she will complain, van Gogh talks of evoking the smell of bacon and guano. The point of the work is to utilize and evoke aesthetic qualities. Indeed, of all the artists we might discuss, van Gogh is the least likely to lend himself to the ethicist's case. For surely in van Gogh's work as a whole we see the basic drive of the modern movement made manifest: the primacy of the aesthetic over the moral. One just has to look at his work from Arles to see van Gogh's concern for aesthetic and stylistic coherence. The blazes of color expose us to the sun's piercing light, baked orange earth, and intense blue-black sea of the south of France. The scratching, slashing, stroking brush mimics the movements of natural forms calligraphically, so that the gnarled olive trees and the weathered limestone reveal a pattern to the landscape which would be lost by more traditional tonal shading. The representation of the landscape in such a manner, evoking the stifling air, the heat, the space, the distance, through vivid color, brush marking, and gouging, surely conforms to the aestheticist's picture. Indeed, the intensity of color, the complexity of the paint markings, scratchings, and layerings, and the underlying unity of the calligraphic contortions fit perfectly with Monroe Beardsley's primary aesthetic criteria.<sup>26</sup>

Nonetheless, we can show how the aestheticist's objection is misconceived by teasing out an important underlying assumption. A significant part of the reason why we value the intense colors and calligraphic contortions of van Gogh is because we can see Arles, and aspects of landscapes elsewhere, as he represents it to us. Even the most expressionistic of his works show us how the ancient olive groves, the gnarled, clawing tree roots, the stratified, cavernous limestone hills, and the tumultuous, windswept clouds may look. The landscape is not used by van Gogh as some springboard for his artistic or, as the cliché would have it, manic fantasies. Rather, through the use of a developed, formal-



ized style, he is attempting to represent in a fresh, bold, and nuanced way how the landscape may, in fact, be understood. It is important to realize that it is not just a question of how the landscape may be perceived. Rather, the work expresses a particular way of conceiving of or valuing the landscape. If this were not so, then there would be no significant relation between van Gogh's use of color and strokes, the means of representation, and the landscape. Of course, the colors would still be vibrant, the style calligraphic, and his work of aesthetic value. But the significance of the work, in terms of revealing how the landscape may be understood in a particular way, would be lost. We would not be able to see van Gogh in the landscape around us. We might then say of van Gogh that he was a great colorist or stylist, but not that he was a great artist.

The point is not merely that a work's cognitive content has artistic value. After all, Magritte's *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* would be enough to show us that. For the whole point of the work depends upon the spectator realizing both that the thing represented is a pipe and yet, as it is a painting, that it is not. Rather, the way a work prescribes us to look at and imagine the object concerned, achieved through different mediums, styles, and genre constraints, constitutes part of the work's content. Our evaluation of the artistic value of the means of representation partly depends upon whether we think them appropriately fitting to what they are used to represent. This should not be confused with mere representationalism: the idea that visual art aims to mimic how things actually appear. Rather, the point is that the way van Gogh prescribes us to attend to the landscape may deepen our visual experience not merely by foregrounding aspects of the natural world we had previously neglected, but by revealing an understanding of landscape as a place from which order can be forged, emotions given form, and solace sought. If we cannot grasp how landscape may be thus understood, then presumably we will think that van Gogh misrepresents how we can and do relate to landscape.

Far from being beside the point, it is the putative relation between the object of the work and the way we are prescribed to understand it, for example, through the means of representation, which affords art significance. Hence, to

say we cannot understand the object in the manner prescribed, or that the work prescribes an inadequate understanding, is a telling criticism. This applies to aesthetic features as much as it does to moral features. If the steam, guano, and bacon had been evoked through a highly finished style, the rough, coarse, earthy nature of the foods would have been sanitized. More importantly, had the peasant's postures changed from those of people with arms outstretched and gazes directed toward each other to ones hoarding their lot, distrustful, and uncaring of each other, then the whole nature of the work would be radically different. Whether van Gogh gives us an appropriate description or understanding applies equally to sensations and people. Given that the primary focus in *The Potato Eaters* is the peasants, their state, and their attitudes toward one another, it is the prescribed understanding of them which is of primary significance.

The important point here is that *The Potato Eaters* does not enhance our moral understanding merely by giving us novel information about the world or by instantiating the "right" moral theory. For the moral significance of artworks more fundamentally lies in their exploration of our values and commitments. Through identifying with the peasants in *The Potato Eaters*, we imagine not merely the conditions and dilemma of the peasants represented, but, as prescribed by van Gogh's work, we may imagine and thus learn what it would be like to share our meager sustenance with others, how we would feel, think, and be in the light of a certain kind of regard or concern for others. Hence, artworks may extend or deepen our understanding of the values and commitments which underlie our actions and desires. Furthermore, artworks may thus shape our moral understanding in terms of what we value by showing us how to act and desire in morally fruitful or harmful ways. Thus, through reading Dostoevski's *Crime and Punishment*, we may imaginatively experience what a commitment to a kind of Nietzschean self-worship and regard might amount to. Indeed, in the very narrative of the central character, Raskolnikov, we see how broad valuational changes in commitment may come about through altered ways of looking at things. Initially Raskolnikov thinks he is above ordinary morality and so kills the shrewish moneylender for his own benefit. Yet through the consequent alien-

ation from his fellow man, juxtaposed with his actions of spontaneous generosity, Raskolnikov comes to question the nature of his actions and, ultimately, seeks redemption. His very experience changes the nature of and his commitment to the values he initially espoused. Similarly, in the imaginative experience afforded by identifying with Raskolnikov, we may explore, deepen, and possibly modify our own moral understanding in terms of the things we broadly value and our commitment to them. Hence, art may be morally educative not just in a trivial or contingent sense, but also by shaping, deepening, and modifying the very way we come to understand the world and to value things in it.

Of course we should acknowledge that the imaginative understanding of peasants prescribed by *The Potato Eaters* may be partially inadequate and, nevertheless, that it is of artistic value. This is because it still affords a significant possible light by which we may look upon the world and others, one which may deepen our own imaginative understanding. For example, the way we imagine the peasants' attention as directed toward others, even whilst in deprived circumstances themselves, may enhance our understanding of generosity of spirit and compassion, of altruism's relationship to love, fear, and death. Thus, through engaging with such a work, we may come to see new aspects of the poor and the downtrodden, and of our relationships with others. Indeed, we may come to cultivate a greater concern for others, through the modificatory effect the work has upon our own imaginative understanding. We may become more aware, and appreciate more closely certain aspects of our world, others, and ourselves. Art itself distinctively promotes imaginative understanding precisely because the way something is represented in part prescribes and shapes the very content of what is to be imagined and the understanding promoted. Art cultivates our imaginative understanding in a distinctive way, a way in which our ordinary imaginings cannot.

v

The suggested account of the link between art and morality also enables us to explain the problematic status of works such as Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*. It is only the ethi-

cist's account which can recognize both that the film is artistically valuable and yet, ultimately, radically flawed in a fundamentally artistic and dangerous way. What Riefenstahl's work attempts to show us is that a particular imaginative understanding of the Nazis and their Führer is appropriate. Of course, Riefenstahl disingenuously claimed that it was "a pure historical film ... film vérité"<sup>27</sup> and was therefore merely an historical documentary of events of the 1934 Nazi rallies at Nuremberg. But the specific technique, composition, and editing is purposefully designed to promote the glorious certainties and vision of fascism. The opening shot of the airplane sweeping down from the timeless, glorious sky through the mists and emerging over Nuremberg is no accident. For the heroic, God-like figure of Hitler is descending from the heavens to lead the faithful, the German nation, in its great rebirth toward its epic future glory. The oppressive beauty of the images, the dynamic moving shots, the framing of the crowds, the heroic isolation of Hitler, the sweep of banners, and the torch light resolve are all edited together to evoke the feeling of a heroic, certain destiny. It is no accident that Hitler, who commissioned the film, thought it an incomparable glorification of the beauty and power of the Third Reich.<sup>28</sup> All the skill of great artistry and the aesthetic power of the image are subordinated to evoking and promoting a commitment to the values, certainties, and belief in the predestined future of Nazism. The work cultivates in us the imaginative understanding that the destiny to which the Nazis march is one of a glorious, righteous, victorious crusade against the impure forces of the world.

Now, we can recognize the innovative and artistic way our imaginings are prescribed toward this understanding by the film. Furthermore, we may take great pleasure from some of the unusual and striking images we perceptually imagine. All of these things are of artistic value and render the work valuable *qua* art. However, the imaginative understanding which these imaginings are directed toward promoting is itself radically flawed. It is not just inappropriate in the way in which we may criticize van Gogh's *The Potato Eaters* as being overpartial, sentimental, or naive. Rather, it is fundamentally at odds with virtually every significant aspect of the true nature of Nazism. That is, the imagina-

tive understanding promoted constitutes a fundamental and radical misunderstanding of what it represents. Far from being an appropriate description, it cultivates a radically unsound imaginative understanding. For *Triumph of the Will* arranges the power and numbing beauty of aesthetic images in order to evoke the feeling that everything, everyone, has a purpose in the great order of Nazism. It seeks to make sense of all individuals, all the members of the crowd, in terms of their allotted place in the order of things, and fails. In essence it betrays the particularities of those who make up the crowds in favor of the simplistic certainty that is itself constitutive of fascism. It does not promote true insight but only the admiration of a viciously immoral creed. Therefore, though it is of artistic value, *Triumph of the Will* cannot be a truly great artwork. It is of artistic value because of the way it prescribes particular imaginings. Nevertheless, it is of artistic disvalue to the extent that it promotes a fundamentally false imaginative understanding of its subject. It is the significance of art, then, that enables us to explain just why *Triumph of the Will* is artistically appealing, problematic, and dangerous. For Riefenstahl's artistry is put to service in the false glorification of power and the Third Reich. The insight and imaginative understanding art aims to promote constitutively includes moral understanding. Therefore, to the extent a work promotes immoral imaginative understandings of the world, it is deeply flawed and thus disvaluable as an artwork. *Triumph of the Will* is, moreover, a dangerous work because not only does it show us how Nazism conceives of the world and our place in it, it also attempts to convince us, to persuade us through artistry and aesthetic power, falsely, that this is how the world and humanity should be understood.

A great virtue of the ethicist's account is the fact that he can acknowledge hard or complex cases. For example, even where a work promotes an imaginative understanding which is immoral in certain respects, it may still have aspects which promote a deep insight into the world. For example, Ezra Pound's *Cantos* at various stages explicitly promotes a crude and vicious form of anti-Semitism:

And those who had lied for hire;  
the perverts, the perverters of language,

the perverts, who have set money-lust  
Before the pleasures of the senses.<sup>29</sup>

Although this anti-Semitism mars the value of the work, it does not render it wholly disvaluable as a work of art. Despite the confusions and repellent aspects of the imaginative understanding Pound promotes, there still remain artistically valuable aspects to the work. This is because Pound's brutal anti-Semitism is fused with an imaginative grasp of the possible requirements of moral integrity. Pound's use, development, and modification of various poetic conventions and devices serve to develop a finer imaginative appreciation of the world in this respect. Hence we can say that Pound intimates how a concern with the poetic element of language may betoken intellectual and emotional honesty; a concern passed over by those who disregard the senses or by those whose senses are easily lulled into contentment. Of course, the irretrievably immoral aspect of Pound's *Cantos* may make our imaginative engagement with it extremely difficult, given, that is, that we possess moral understanding ourselves and are repelled by the immoral, fascistic understanding of Jews that the *Cantos* advocates. But this kind of difficulty and ambivalence we have toward such works cannot be accounted for by the aestheticist. After all, according to aestheticism, the moral understanding manifested in a work cannot bear any significant relation to its value *qua* art. Contrastingly, ethicism can recognize in this kind of case that, on balance, the disvalue of the work as art may or may not outweigh the possible value of the other aspects of imaginative understanding the *Cantos* has to offer us. Thus, though perhaps great in certain respects, and of some value as art, Pound's *Cantos* may not be considered truly great art.

It is quite compatible with holding that artworks are disvaluable as art to the extent they promote immoral imaginative understandings of the world that we can recognize works such as *Triumph of the Will* as good artworks. This is, however, despite the overall imaginative understanding they promote. It is only because of the prodigious artistry, the pleasure the imaginings themselves afford, and the glimpses they afford into how those who constitute the subjects of the work might imaginatively understand themselves and misunderstand the world, that they

may be considered as artworks. The work would have been better, *qua* art, had it vilified just as well that which it seeks to glorify. Whether the imaginative understanding promoted is of moral value or not is centrally relevant to the work as art. Artworks which engage the imagination are concerned not merely to entertain and promote pleasurable imaginings. They aim to intimate, through these imaginings, particular imaginative understandings of what they represent, and thus, though the relations are complex, our world. Therefore, though we may rightly value the pleasures afforded by art, pleasure is only the mark of art's primary value, which inheres in its engagement of the imagination and cultivation of our imaginative understanding. As imaginative understanding includes moral understanding, there is a close link between art's promotion of imaginative understanding and its cultivation of moral insight.<sup>30</sup>

## VI

One of the things that distinguishes us as human moral agents is our imagination. It is through our ordinary imaginings that we can achieve an imaginative understanding of ourselves, others, and the world. Furthermore, it is through at least much of the cultural practice of art that we can develop our imaginative understandings in peculiarly significant and powerful ways. The aspectual nature of art entails that the way we are prescribed to imagine something partly constitutes the nature of what we are to imagine. Our imaginings are constrained and guided in particular ways. Hence, art may distinctively manifest and cultivate imaginative understandings of human experience and values. Moreover, through prescribing that the viewer imagine what it would be like to be a certain character or to see the world a certain way, artworks may deepen our understanding of what commitments to certain values and ways of understanding others and the world might involve. Hence, art may extend or lead us to modify what we ourselves value and how we want to be. Morality depends upon imaginatively understanding others, and how the world might be, in order to make sound moral judgments. Thus, through promoting imaginative understanding, art may distinctively cultivate ethical insight. This is distinctive in kind from the understanding pro-

moted by mere reflection or philosophical inquiry. Therefore, art distinctly promotes the form of understanding required for moral understanding. Art can widen, develop, and deepen our imaginative understandings of ourselves, others, and our world. Good artworks will do so for most people, across time and cultures, far better than mediocre ones. Great artworks are those which may promote the imaginative understanding of many people, across many times and cultures.

The argument provided does not afford a knockdown case against aestheticism. After all, the committed aesthete may well refuse to recognize that the engagement of the imagination, and thus cultivation of imaginative understanding, is a primary value of art. However, I have argued elsewhere that art's significance arises from the imaginative experience afforded and thus the understanding promoted.<sup>31</sup> The ethicist's account recognizes as appropriate the significance we accord art, the idea that art should in some sense "be true to life," and thus the problematic nature of artworks which falsify morally significant features and cultivate flawed values. Conversely, the aestheticist cannot afford the pleasures of art any greater significance than those afforded by ten pin bowling, and conceives of art as distinctly unrelated to human life, and so cannot recognize the complexity of works such as Pound's *Cantos* and Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*. The traditional strength of the case in favor of aestheticism has relied upon the moralist's apparent inability to square the possibility of morally flawed works with their possible artistic value. Yet I have articulated a sophisticated version of the link between art and morality which remains adequate to our evaluation of artworks and, moreover, can explain why works such as *Triumph of the Will* are problematic. Indeed, given that the aesthete cannot explain why such works should be considered problematic in the first place, the presumption must now lie in favor of a sophisticated ethicism.

Our evaluation of an artwork not only constitutes a judgment upon the work as art, it also substantially reflects our own concerns, goals, values, and imaginative appreciation of the world. Imaginative understandings of life are always normative, even if this merely inheres in their negativity, and are always open to norma-

tive judgment. Thus a work which promotes a false imaginative understanding of others and the world is disvaluable as art. Since knowing what is the morally right or good thing to do depends upon imaginative understanding, there must be a close link between art and morality. Art, through engaging our imagination, can promote, cultivate, and deepen our ethical insight. Where an artwork promotes an immoral imaginative understanding, the work is disvaluable as art.<sup>32</sup>

Art thus allows for a distinctive and fuller exploration of possible imaginative understandings of the world and others than can be afforded in our ordinary imaginings. It is in the cultivation of our imaginative understanding that art provides a more rounded quest in moral inquiry than mere reflection can provide. But, and this is where Murdoch's perception fails her, art cannot replace or occlude philosophical inquiry. For the distance afforded by philosophical reflection enables us to become clearer about the nature of our relations within, and imaginative understanding of, the world. Nonetheless, imaginatively engaging art peculiarly cultivates an irreplaceable and distinctive form of understanding required for moral understanding. Of course, it is through imaginatively engaging with a truly great artwork that one will experience what it is that makes art such a central human cultural practice. Yet still, it is through philosophical argumentation and rigor, through the form of inquiry and questioning we have been pursuing, that we can come to understand theoretically how and why this is so, and that is because art may cultivate and afford a truly deep, imaginative understanding of ourselves, others, and the world.<sup>33</sup>

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1. See, for example, Monroe C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1958), pp. 456–470, and Jerome Stolnitz's "On

the Cognitive Triviality of Art," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 30 (1992): 191–200, for arguments of this kind.

2. Kendall Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe: On the Foundations of the Representational Arts* (Harvard University Press, 1990), argues for the centrality of playing games of make-believe when we engage with representations of any kind. Roger Scruton, *Art and Imagination: A Study in the Philosophy of Mind* (London: Routledge, 1981), also argues for a different but related and highly sophisticated account of the role of the imagination in art. I say typically because it might be objected that such accounts only apply to representational art and not to abstract art or music. But this is, I would suggest, to confuse a valuable means of promoting imaginative experience with the end itself. After all, even the most abstract art enables us to imaginatively explore the nature and conditions of our perceptual experience. However, as I do not have the space to address this concern here, those who are unconvinced of such a claim should qualify my argument in terms of representational art.

3. R. M. Hare, *Freedom and Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), chap. 9, pp. 180–185.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 183.

5. There are strong parallels here to much contemporary literary criticism. A classic example is Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s, "Talking Black," in *The State of the Language*, eds. Christopher Ricks and Leonard Michaels (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), pp. 42–50, which argues on these and on political grounds for the defense and promotion of a peculiarly "Black" literature.

6. Any argument which depends upon the strong version must, in any case, be false, for the obvious reason that our imagined experience cannot be the exact simulation of every thought, feeling, and sensation the relevant character would have in the situation portrayed. For, apart from anything else, the intentional gaze of the imaginer is obviously other directed, whilst that of the person being identified with is self-regarding.

7. Plato, *The Republic*, trans. W. K. C. Guthrie, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1956), Book III, 386–392, pp. 140–149.

8. Hence, Frank Palmer, *Literature and Moral Understanding: A Philosophical Essay on Ethics, Aesthetics, Education, and Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 170, amongst others, straightforwardly presumes that to think art has a moral or social purpose must be to reduce, wrongly, artworks to mere vehicles of propaganda.

9. For example, although the climate of critical opinion is currently changing, the Pre-Raphaelites are often fatuously dismissed in such terms due to their obsessive, novelistic attention to detail.

10. Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (London: Routledge, 1970), pp. 87–88.

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 86–89, and *Metaphysics As A Guide To Morals* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1992), pp. 85–90.

12. See Jonathan Dancy, "Ethical Particularism and Morally Relevant Properties," *Mind* 92 (1983): 530–547; John McDowell, "Values and Secondary Qualities," in *Morality and Objectivity: A Tribute to J. L. Mackie*, ed. Ted Honderich (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985); and David McNaughton, *Moral Vision* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), for more recent attempts to extend and defend particularist conceptions of moral reality. Of course, to the extent that Murdoch retains a commitment to some kind of

Platonism, however ambiguously, it is not obvious that she is a particularist in all respects.

13. Obviously rule utilitarians, indirect and two-level consequentialists, such as Hare himself, can give a more sophisticated story about allowing our ingrained prejudices a more significant role. Nonetheless, the presumption remains that in such cases, rationally speaking, the prejudice is misplaced and, if taken into account, is an exception itself justified in terms of a higher order rule, such as the promotion of overall happiness.

14. Despite the more recent arguments for moral particularism, cited above, it remains fundamentally unclear how anyone could endorse particularism without thereby either endorsing relativism or recognizing that moral principles informatively carry across cases.

15. It is important to realize that the recognition of the role of moral principles need not commit one to the idea that principles are reducible to a rule or to rules which wholly determine the rightness, wrongness, or permissibility of any given action. After all, a moral pluralist will want to recognize both that moral principles are informative and that knowing what to do will, in part, depend upon what sort of person one is and how one sees or understands the particularities of the relevant situation. See, for example, W. D. Ross's *The Right and the Good* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1988) and Berys Gaut, "Moral Pluralism," *Philosophical Papers* 22 (1993): 17–40.

16. Martha Nussbaum, "Finely Aware and Richly Responsible: Literature and the Moral Imagination," in her *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 155.

17. Onora O'Neill, "The Power of Example" in her *Constructions of Reason: Explorations of Kant's Practical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 165–186, and Barbara Herman, *The Practice of Moral Judgment* (Harvard University Press, 1993).

18. See R. W. Beardmore, *Art and Understanding* (London: Macmillan, 1971), p. 66, who makes something like this point via a discussion of Samuel Butler's *The Way of All Flesh*.

19. Thus, *pace* Hare, to conceive of morality as constituted wholly by the following of moral principles can only prove inadequate. Rather, moral principles are more like a backstop for when our imaginative understanding of ourselves, others, and the world fails us.

20. I have adapted Bernard Williams's contrast between thick and thin concepts for my contrast between the two distinct kinds of understanding. Williams argues that our everyday, specific, substantive, thick ethical notions both have specific criteria of application and express judgments of value, for example, concepts such as courage, generosity, and kindness. The application of these concepts to people constitutively includes an evaluation of them. See Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (London: Fontana, 1985), pp. 129–130, 143–145.

21. Presumably it is the recognition of something like this kind of relation that underlies our use of the term imaginative. That is, one must have imagined many possibilities in order to see that this particular action or pictorial composition would achieve the desired goal peculiarly well.

22. Simulation theory essentially holds that in understanding the behavior of others, we do not require the possession of a theory, tacit or otherwise, about the propositional

attitudes of folk psychology. Rather we simulate the states and reasoning processes underlying another's actions. See *Natural Theories of Mind*, ed. Andrew Whiten (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), for recent developments in contemporary psychological research which suggest the primary importance of mental simulation in attempting to understand others.

23. Hence, setting an example is of crucial importance in bringing up children, and the reason why we learn more from stories than the abstract explication of principles. The importance of role models in moral education was first recognized, in contemporary social psychology, by Albert Bandura and Frederick J. McDonald, in "The Influence of Social Reinforcement and the Behaviour of Models in Shaping Children's Moral Judgment," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 67 (1963): 274–281. If simulation theory is sound, and we do not need to formulate a theory of mind in order to interpret and thus understand others, then it should be unsurprising that much of our moral learning may be afforded through stories, i.e., imagined characters and states of affairs. See Paul L. Harris, "The Work of the Imagination," in *Natural Theories of Mind*, ed. Whiten, pp. 283–304. Of course, Friedrich Schiller did not require the insights of contemporary social psychology to see that our imaginings on both an everyday level, and, in particular, in engaging with art, is crucial to our personal and moral development. See Schiller's *Letters On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, trans. E. M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957).

24. Thus, as Ruskin observes, in relation to the work of Tintoretto, one must distinguish "the Imaginative Verity from falsehood on the one hand, and from realism on the other. The power of every picture depends on the penetration of the imagination into the TRUE nature of the thing represented, and on the utter scorn of the imagination for all shackles and fetters of mere external fact that stand in the way of its suggestiveness." John Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, ed. D. Barrie (London: André Deutsch, 1987), vol. II, sec. II, chap. III, p. 266.

25. Letter No. 404, 30 April 1885, *The Complete Letters of Vincent Van Gogh* (New York: New York Graphic Society, 1958), quoted by Rosemary Treble, *Vincent: The Paintings of Van Gogh* (London: Hamlyn, 1989), p. 32.

26. See Beardmore, *Aesthetics*, pp. 456–470.

27. As quoted in David Thomson, *A Biographical Dictionary of Film* (London: André Deutsch, 1994), p. 633.

28. *Ibid.*

29. Ezra Pound, *The Cantos of Ezra Pound* (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), Canto XIV, p. 61.

30. This is not to deny that someone may watch *Schindler's List* and still remain a Nazi. Art may develop our moral understanding but it does not necessarily redeem those who are wantonly evil and knowingly spurn the requirement to be moral.

31. Matthew Kieran, "The Impoverishment of Art," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 35 (1995): 15–25.

32. Of course, I am not claiming that there is a necessary link in the sense that art is required for there to be imaginative understanding. As I have suggested, we can and do develop our imaginative understanding in our ordinary, everyday lives. Rather, the point is that art engages and develops our imaginative understanding in peculiarly powerful, vivid ways. Moreover, through doing so, art has the capacity to modify and deepen in quite profound ways how we

come to imaginatively understand ourselves, others, and the world.

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