

COLLINGWOOD'S PHILOSOPHY OF ART  
AS A BASIS FOR VIRTUE AESTHETICS

by

David Collins

B.F.A., Film & Video, York University, 2002

M.F.A., Film & Video, York University, 2005

A thesis

presented to Ryerson University

in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in the Program of

Philosophy

Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2014

© (David Collins) 2014

## **AUTHOR'S DECLARATION FOR ELECTRONIC SUBMISSION OF A THESIS**

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I authorize Ryerson University to lend this thesis to other institutions or individuals for the purpose of scholarly research.

I further authorize Ryerson University to reproduce this thesis by photocopying or by other means, in total or in part, at the request of other institutions or individuals for the purpose of scholarly research.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

## **ABSTRACT**

In this thesis I show how Aristotle's approach to ethics can be applied to aesthetics in order to address normative concerns relating to practices of artistic creation and spectatorship, and how R. G. Collingwood's philosophy of art provides an understanding of these practices that works as a basis for such an approach. I begin by discussing the connection between aesthetic and ethical normativity as found in the thought of various prominent philosophers, and review the contemporary work done in the name of 'virtue aesthetics'. I then explicate Aristotle's ethics, with a particular focus on his definition of virtue and his discussion of practical wisdom, and give an overview of Collingwood's understanding of art and the role of imagination in artistic expression and understanding, before synthesizing the structure of Aristotle's ethics with the content of Collingwood's philosophy of art in order to arrive at an outline of a Collingwoodian virtue aesthetics.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I should like to thank Prof. Elizabeth ('Betty') Trott for her work in supervising this thesis, especially the amount of time she spent reading, re-reading and commenting on various drafts, and for the interest she showed in the connection of aesthetics and morality and in the practical applicability of philosophical ideas; Prof. R. Jo Kornegay for agreeing to act as second reader and for her detailed and rigorous feedback, especially on the sections dealing with Aristotle and contemporary virtue ethics; and Prof. R. Bruce Elder for stepping in at fairly short notice to act as my external examiner, and for the questions he posed during my defense.

Thanks also go to the other Davids in the department: Prof. David Hunter, Graduate Program Director, for encouraging my desire to pursue the thesis option and for his support with scholarship applications and funding for conferences; Prof. David Checkland, for suggesting that I look at MacIntyre's *After Virtue* in connection with this project; Prof. David Ciavatta, for reviewing the sections on Kant's and Schiller's aesthetics; and Prof. David Rondel of the University of Nevada, formerly of Ryerson, for discussions last year about the moral dimensions of art and for sharing his recent aesthetics-related paper with me before its publication.

I should also like to thank Prof. Boris Hennig for discussing certain of Aristotle's ideas with me, and for providing several translations of the original Greek; Prof. Glenn Parsons for clarifying which aspects of Collingwood's thought I should focus on explaining in order to try to clear up the misunderstandings still prevalent among many contemporary analytic aestheticians; and Prof. Emeritus Evan Cameron of York University for numerous discussions about philosophy and film, and for introducing me to Collingwood in the first place.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .....	iii
Acknowledgements .....	iv
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	
<i>Project Summary and Outline</i> .....	1
<i>Historical Context and Current Motivation</i> .....	3
<b>1. THE IDEA OF A VIRTUE APPROACH TO AESTHETICS</b>	
1.1 The Connection Between Aesthetics and Ethics .....	10
<i>Kant on Aesthetics and Morality</i> .....	11
<i>Aristotle, Plato and Appropriateness</i> .....	16
1.2 Two Approaches to ‘Virtue Aesthetics’ .....	19
<i>The Moral-Centred Approach: Kant and Schiller</i> .....	19
<i>The Structural Approach: Hume</i> .....	23
1.3 Woodruff’s Virtue Theory of Aesthetics .....	27
<i>Problems in Woodruff’s Theory</i> .....	30
1.4 Goldie on the Virtues of Art .....	34
<i>Problems in Goldie’s Theory</i> .....	35
<i>Strengths of Goldie’s Theory</i> .....	38
1.5 Kieran and Lopes on Virtue Aesthetics .....	42
<i>Kieran</i> .....	42
<i>Lopes</i> .....	44
1.6 The General Shape of a Virtue Approach to Aesthetics .....	48
<b>2. THE STRUCTURE OF A VIRTUE APPROACH</b>	
2.1 Aristotle’s Account of the Ethical Virtues .....	51
<i>Eudaimonia and Goodness</i> .....	53
<i>Virtue, ‘The Mean’ and Appropriateness</i> .....	57
2.2 Practical Wisdom, Imagination and the Unity of the Virtues .....	63
<i>Intuition, Comprehension, Discernment and Deliberation</i> .....	65
<i>The Imagination’s Role in Practical Wisdom</i> .....	69
<i>The (Limited) Unity of the Virtues</i> .....	73
2.3 MacIntyre on Virtues and Practices .....	74
<i>Oakley as a Supplement to MacIntyre</i> .....	78
2.4 The General Structure of a Neo-Aristotelian Virtue Approach .....	81

### **3. COLLINGWOOD’S PHILOSOPHY OF ART**

3.1 Distinguishing Art from Craft .....	84
<i>Representation, Magic and Amusement</i> .....	89
3.2 Art Proper, Expression and Imagination .....	95
<i>Art as the Expression of Feeling</i> .....	95
<i>Art as Imaginative Creation</i> .....	97
<i>Collingwood’s Theory of the Imagination</i> .....	99
<i>The Imagination as a Process</i> .....	103
<i>Imagination, Aspect Perception and Conceptualization</i> .....	105
<i>Imagination, Creation and Art</i> .....	108
3.3 The Normative Dimensions of Collingwood’s Aesthetics .....	113
<i>Good and Bad Art</i> .....	114
<i>The Corruption of Consciousness</i> .....	118
<i>The Dangers of Amusement</i> .....	125

### **4. OUTLINE OF A COLLINGWOODIAN VIRTUE AESTHETICS**

4.1 Why Collingwood’s Theory of Art Suits a Virtue Approach .....	129
<i>Why a Virtue Approach Fits Aesthetics</i> .....	130
<i>The Compatibility of Collingwood’s Aesthetics with Aristotle’s</i> <i>Approach to Ethics</i> .....	132
4.2 Virtues Internal to Aesthetic Practices .....	137
<i>Aesthetic Activity, Moral Character and Well-Being</i> .....	139
<i>Aesthetic Virtue</i> .....	144
<i>Aesthetic Practical Wisdom</i> .....	146
<i>Virtues of Creation</i> .....	150
<i>The Spectator’s Virtues of Reception</i> .....	157
<i>The Relation Between Aesthetic and Ethical Virtue</i> .....	164
4.3 Aesthetic Normativity .....	166
<i>Judging Artworks</i> .....	167
<i>Aesthetic Value and Pleasure</i> .....	172
<i>The Question of ‘Immoral’ Art</i> .....	176

### **CONCLUSION**

<i>Summation of Preceding Chapters</i> .....	184
Bibliography .....	187

# INTRODUCTION

## *Project Summary and Outline*

This thesis will show that R. G. Collingwood's philosophy of art and the virtue-based ethics of Aristotle as found in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (hereafter *NE*) can be taken as the joint grounds for a virtue aesthetics that addresses questions and issues arising from art practice (i.e. the creation and reception of artworks). The approach is similar to that taken by Linda Zagzebski in her development of virtue epistemology, and will offer an alternative to existing work on the topic of virtue aesthetics. In recent years a handful of contemporary philosophers of art, inspired by Zagzebski's work in epistemology, have either proposed initial sketches of a virtue approach to aesthetics (Woodruff 2001, Goldie 2007) or examined character traits that are beneficial or detrimental to art practice in terms of virtues and vices (Lopes 2008, Kieran 2010). However, a systematically worked-out virtue aesthetics comparable in scope to neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics and offering a genuine alternative to traditional ways of understanding art practices, rather than being an interesting addition to the dominant theories in aesthetics, has yet to be formulated.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, the various theories currently on offer under the name 'virtue aesthetics' are not fully or consistently modelled on Aristotle's understanding of virtue or the structure of his ethics. They overlook essential elements such as the relation between action, feeling and motivation, the role of practical wisdom, and the way in which a virtuous person comes to learn what is appropriate in a given situation, and as such are incomplete as extensions of a neo-Aristotelian virtue ethical approach to the field of aesthetics. In contrast, I contend that: (i) a complete theory

---

<sup>1</sup> The difference between my approach and that of contemporary aestheticians such as Lopes and Kieran parallels the distinction Rosalind Hursthouse (2005) has drawn between virtue ethics as a distinct normative position and 'virtue theory' as found in the work of philosophers such as Julia Driver and Thomas Hurka.

of virtue aesthetics should be modelled on a framework such as Aristotle's; (ii) Collingwood's account of art is particularly suited to such a framework; (iii) viewing Collingwood's aesthetics through a virtue approach allows certain aspects of it to come across more clearly than they have to most 20<sup>th</sup> century aestheticians.<sup>2</sup>

I begin in Chapter I by considering the relation of aesthetics to ethics and distinguishing two possible forms a virtue approach to aesthetics could take, before going on to give a critical overview of the existing work on virtue aesthetics by contemporary philosophers of art, which I argue has been insufficient. Chapter II lays out the central elements and structure of Aristotle's ethics, as informed by the work of contemporary philosophers such as Alasdair MacIntyre, Rosalind Hursthouse and Jessica Moss, and proposes a general model for the form a 'virtue approach to X' should take in order to be considered (neo-)Aristotelian. In Chapter III, I explicate Collingwood's aesthetics, arguing that his understanding of art offers a basis for *both* forms of virtue aesthetics discussed in Chapter I while fitting the Aristotelian model outlined in Chapter II, and that it is better suited to do so than other theories of art and so offers a basis for a more complete virtue aesthetics than has been proposed so far. Chapter IV synthesizes what has been worked out in the previous chapters, fleshing out a Collingwoodian virtue aesthetics on the bones of the Aristotelian model of a virtue approach.

The importance of practical wisdom and imagination for both virtue ethics and Collingwood's aesthetics will be explored throughout Chapters II – IV. Since practical wisdom is arguably the most central concept in Aristotle's theory of the ethical virtues, as the imagination is central to Collingwood's aesthetics, a focus on these two faculties and their interconnection

---

<sup>2</sup> I refer especially to Richard Wollheim (1972, 1980), and to those who have accepted the Wollheimian reading of Collingwood, such as John Dilworth (1998), who have tended to view Collingwood's words through presuppositions about the nature of art and the workings of consciousness that are incompatible with Collingwood's own, with the result that many of his central claims have been misunderstood and so have gone unregistered.



provides a natural starting point on which to synthesize these theories. In addition to outlining the place of practical wisdom in Aristotle's ethics and noting how this can be related to art practice, I will look at how Aristotle's remarks on *phantasia* can inform Collingwood's theory of the imagination and how Collingwood's writings on perception, emotion and the imagination can shed light on Aristotle's claim that practical wisdom allows one to *perceive*, rather than infer, what is appropriate in a situation (i.e. the Aristotelian mean).

Ultimately, I will aim to suggest how this virtue aesthetic approach might be applied to art practice, with virtues and vices pertaining to the creation of artworks by artists and their reception by spectators, and to certain philosophical problems in contemporary aesthetics. The remainder of this Introduction will situate my project historically and argue that the problems to which Collingwood saw his aesthetic theory as a solution are still faced by those engaged in the arts, and that understanding the solution he proposed in 1938 is important for addressing these problems as they are encountered today.

### ***Historical Context and Current Motivation***

In 2007 Roger Scruton published *Culture Counts*, a defence of 'high' Western culture – i.e. its philosophical and intellectual heritage, including canonical works of visual art, architecture, music and literature – against postmodernism's tendency to downplay, discredit or ignore the Western canon and its conviction that there are no standards of taste that are not merely subjective. This tendency can be seen in the prominence of Critical Theory and the acceptance of cultural relativism in many humanities disciplines. It can also be found in the general public's desire for the easy entertainment provided by commercial pop culture and the corresponding lack of interest in, and loss of awareness of how to engage with, traditional or 'serious' forms of art<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> The word 'serious' here should not be read as 'not funny', since comedies, satires, etc. number among the works Scruton thinks important; rather, it should be taken to mean 'expressing a mature understanding'.

that are not as easily consumable, requiring the active attention and committed engagement of spectators.

In mounting his defence, Scruton draws on a distinction made by Oswald Spengler in *The Decline of the West* (1921) between a civilization, understood as “a social entity that manifests religious, political, legal and customary uniformity over an extended period”, and its culture, consisting of “the art and literature through which [a civilization] rises to consciousness of itself and defines its vision in the world” (Scruton 2). For Spengler, civilizations form out of groups sharing a sense of identity and ways of understanding and responding to phenomena. He held that civilizations develop in stages, moving from the formation of religious, political and legal ties that formalize this unity to the emergence of an artistic culture that expresses its identity and so is the civilization’s consciousness of itself. He also held that when a culture declines, a society returns to being a mere civilization with the legal and political ‘body’ enduring after losing its cultural ‘soul’. A civilization that has lost touch with its culture will become ossified and wither, to be replaced by another civilization with a flourishing culture of its own.

Though he doesn’t discuss Spengler’s broader view of history, Scruton employs his notion of cultural decline to diagnose what he considers to be the current predicament of traditional values, bodies of knowledge and modes of thought in Western society, including its artistic works and practices. The first half of Scruton’s central thesis is that culture is important for three interrelated reasons: (i) it is a repository for the “shared meanings ... ideals and attachments” that provide members of a society with an identity and common purpose (Scruton ix); (ii) a culture, being formed by and composed of a series of judgments over time, “passes on the habit of judgment” to those enculturated in it, which he holds to be “vital to [their] moral development, and ... [to] the foundation of the rites of passage whereby young people leave the state of

adolescence and undertake the burdens of adult life” (Scruton x); and (iii) because a culture’s works of art and literature are sources of emotional knowledge or knowledge about what to do and what to feel – knowledge-what, as opposed to knowledge-that or knowledge-how – with emotional knowledge being an important contributor to the moral development of members of that culture. The second half of his thesis is that the consequences of a decline in culture include an arresting of moral development and a collective meaninglessness in the face of the absence of the context in which the aforementioned meanings and ideals functioned and made sense.

In other words, because culture is important for the formation of character in the members of a civilization, the decline of a culture entails a corresponding decline in character. By contrast, an engagement with and understanding of the traditions of ‘high’ culture, including philosophy, history and ‘serious’ artworks (i.e. traditional a liberal education), forms part of the process by which one matures and develops intellectually and morally. A person limited in or lacking these engagements and understandings will be less likely to mature and develop in these ways.<sup>4</sup> A life not only lacking an engagement with high culture, but in which it is replaced by consumable entertainment products – what Collingwood calls ‘amusement’ as opposed to ‘art proper’ – will be more likely to be held back in this maturation and development. Thus, a society’s prioritizing of entertainment over serious works of art will likely contribute to, and be an expression of, the moral and intellectual infantilization of its members.<sup>5</sup>

If Scruton is right that the current situation of the liberal and fine arts in Western society is a problem that needs to be addressed, and that it is a contemporary version of the problem that Spengler raised, it would seem natural to look to any solutions Spengler might have offered to

---

<sup>4</sup> While this may be less likely, it is not impossible; no *necessary* connection between such an education and moral development can be validly claimed, since a person can be moral, virtuous or practically wise without formal education or exposure to the arts.

<sup>5</sup> Film scholar Ray Carney explains this infantilization well in his analysis of the relation between the limited understandings of life prevalent in contemporary society and the simplistic ‘black-and-white’ visions of life presented by most commercial films. On this, see Carney 2003.

see if they could be applied to the problem in its current state. However, Spengler took himself to be describing the phases through which all societies inevitably progress as determined by what he saw as the essentially cyclical and repeating nature of history, so he not only did not offer solutions but would have thought there could be none. Fortunately, Spengler is not the only thinker to have addressed the issues with which Scruton is concerned. Collingwood, responding in *The Principles of Art* (1938) to many of the same events as Spengler, agrees with his diagnosis of the crisis facing European culture but rejects his historical determinism (cf. Collingwood 1927, 312-14, 319), and so leaves room for the possibility of a solution. While a number of other thinkers have addressed variants of this problem with a similar urgency,<sup>6</sup> Collingwood is the only one to have done so with a specific focus on aesthetics, and so his solution to the problem as he saw it is the most likely to prove useful in addressing the concerns raised by Scruton.<sup>7</sup>

The moral and social concerns found within *The Principles of Art* (hereafter *PA*) are striking. Collingwood discusses this problem in terms of a ‘corruption of consciousness’ that can occur on either an individual or a societal scale as a result of a false conceptualization of what is felt at the pre-conceptual level of experience (*PA* 216-21), claiming that the prevalence of ‘amusement art’ is perpetuating, if not contributing to, this corruption and suggesting ‘art proper’ as the remedy. At first reading, these passages of Collingwood’s are easy to dismiss as hyperbolic due to their phrasing, and if one is reading with the assumption that Collingwood is engaged in the same project as other 20<sup>th</sup> Century aestheticians and is aiming primarily to give an ontological or essentialist definition of art, the moral elements of his theory will likely seem tangential to what

---

<sup>6</sup> See Kierkegaard, *The Present Age* (1846); Husserl, *Transcendental Phenomenology and the Crisis of the European Sciences* (1936); Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944); Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology* (1954); Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987); Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (1985) and *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (1992).

<sup>7</sup> The postmodern critical theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, a pioneer of postcolonial studies and about as far to the left of Scruton as one can get, has also argued for the importance of the awareness of art and culture in *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (2013), although she does not focus on aesthetics philosophically in the way Collingwood does.

one will suppose are his main points. However, the mere fact that a claim is expressed in a way that can seem hyperbolic fails to count against its being true. On the second point, I would argue that it would be a mistake to view Collingwood's theory as primarily or exclusively an ontological one, and that what he is doing in the *Principles* cannot be understood properly unless one takes his project to be driven by normative concerns and regards the *Principles* as essentially a work of both aesthetics and moral philosophy – i.e. one that proposes an aesthetic solution to a moral problem.

In *An Autobiography* (1939; hereafter *A*), Collingwood insists that “you cannot find out what a man means by simply studying his spoken or written statements ... you must also know what the question was ... to which the thing he had said or written was meant as an answer” (*A* 31). If Collingwood's aesthetics is approached along these lines, one can see from his Preface that he primarily means it to be response to what he saw as the relation of art practice and theory in his day. He was especially concerned with the phenomenon of artists beginning to write aesthetic theories informed by their practice and to be influenced in turn by these theories in their making of art (*PA* v-vi). He makes this explicit by declaring the *Principles* to have “been written in the belief that it has a practical bearing, direct or indirect, upon the condition of art in England in 1937, and in the hope that artists primarily, and secondarily persons whose interest in art is lively and sympathetic, will find it of some use to them” (*PA* vi). Thus, the practical rather than purely theoretical intent of the *Principles* should be clear.

One could question the claim that the *Principles* should be read along primarily normative lines by pointing to the opening sentence, where Collingwood states: “The business of this book is to answer the question: What is art?” (*PA* 1). While this shows that he does mean to define art, he goes on to explain what, for him, a proper definition involves, specifying that he is not merely

looking for “a clear idea of the thing to be defined” (i.e. necessary and sufficient conditions) but rather sees a definition as an understanding of the relations of the thing to be defined to the other things “by reference to which one defines it” (PA 2). He goes on to explain that “[h]aving a clear idea of the thing enables [one] to recognize it when [one sees] it, just as having a clear idea of a certain house enables [one] to recognize it when [one is] there; but defining the thing is like explaining where the house is or pointing out its position on a map; [one] must know its relation to other things as well” (PA 2).

Whether or not this is a cogent theory of definitions, it is the one under which Collingwood was working and so it gives the context to understand what he would count as a genuine answer to the question “What is art?” *as he meant it*. He is not aiming to give a self-contained description so much as to understand art via its relations to other areas of life, to explain art not in terms of objects or their properties but in terms of a *practice*. This reading of his central question, and its clarification of the intended aim of his project, is supported when writes: “I do not think of aesthetic theory as an attempt to investigate and expound eternal verities concerning the nature of an eternal object called Art, but as an attempt to reach, by thinking, the solution of certain problems arising out of the situation in which artists find themselves” (PA vi).

Further support for the priority of the normative over the ontological in his project is found in his rhetorical questioning of whether “philosophy of art is a mere intellectual exercise, or [if it has] practical consequences bearing on the way in which we *ought* to approach the practice of art (whether as artists or as audience) and hence, because a philosophy of art is a theory as to the place of art in life as a whole, the practice of life?” (PA vii, my emphasis). Collingwood is not concerned just to understand what our art practices are and how they relate to our other activities, but to understand this in order to understand *how best* we may practice them, which is also a

partial understanding of how we may live well. Since his project is concerned with the impact of art on a person's character, it is in line with Scruton's concerns about the state of the arts in contemporary society. In light of these considerations, this thesis will explore the moral dimension of Collingwood's aesthetics in order to find a Collingwoodian solution to the problems raised by Scruton.

Since Collingwood's aesthetics is less compatible with other normative frameworks, Aristotelian virtue ethics, with which it fits better, will be the framework used to explore these moral dimensions.<sup>8</sup> Collingwood's concern with how the practice of art is and ought to be approached shows a particular kinship with MacIntyre's account in *After Virtue* (1984; hereafter AV) of a virtue as a character trait that allows one to achieve the goods internal to a practice (AV 187-94). Moreover, the circumstances that saw Elizabeth Anscombe (1958) turn to Aristotle's ethics are similar in some respects to the present situation in aesthetics, insofar as contemporary analytic philosophy of art lacks the resources to address the kinds of problems with which Scruton and Collingwood are concerned. This is largely due to a shift away from normative questions to focus on semantic and ontological ones, and a reluctance to make or defend distinctions between serious/'high' art and pop culture/'mass art'. Anscombe was frustrated with the disconnect between the ethical philosophies of her time and certain pressing moral issues arising from life, and the resulting inability of the former to address the latter. It is in this spirit that I look to Collingwood's aesthetics for a way to address the problems concerning how art is practiced and engaged with to which Scruton and thinkers such as Bloom, Postman, Carney and Spivak have drawn attention.

---

<sup>8</sup> Collingwood's claim that art cannot be reduced to a formula or technique doesn't fit well with deontology, and his suspicion of 'amusement' and lack of concern with pleasure or beauty is incompatible with hedonistic utilitarianism. While some of the value he attributes to art proper is not incompatible with G. E. Moore's utilitarianism or other forms of consequentialism, his rejection of any instrumental or means-end relations within art proper makes consequentialism in general less than fully compatible.

## **1. THE IDEA OF A VIRTUE APPROACH TO AESTHETICS**

This chapter will examine the notion of a virtue-based approach to aesthetics and survey what certain philosophers, past and present, have written on this and connected matters. In section 1.1 I consider the idea of applying the framework of an ethical theory to aesthetics and the possible points of connection between aesthetics and ethics that could justify such an application. In section 1.2 I discuss two directions a virtue approach to aesthetics could take and look at the historical precedents for each. In sections 1.3-1.5 I critically examine the positions of four contemporary philosophers who, in recent years, have put forward theories under the name ‘virtue aesthetics’ considering the strengths and weaknesses of these theories in order to reach an understanding of what should (and should not) be involved in a more fully realized virtue approach to aesthetics that would improve upon those proposed so far, with this understanding being summarized in section 1.6.

### **1.1 THE CONNECTION BETWEEN AESTHETICS AND ETHICS**

In *Virtues of the Mind* (1996), Linda Zagzebski justifies her application of virtue ethics to epistemology by noting that many epistemological notions have normative dimensions that overlap with areas of ethical normativity, e.g. those of a believer’s justification or warrant, epistemic responsibility, rational requirement for belief, etc. (Zagzebski 3-6). Given the greater overlap of many basic aesthetic notions with areas of ethical normativity (e.g. the concept of an artwork being ‘good’ or ‘bad’) and the way that many ethical evaluations borrow terms more commonly found in aesthetics (e.g. describing someone’s behaviour as ‘ugly’, or an act of generosity as ‘beautiful’), there is at least as much, if not more, warrant for an application of an ethical framework to aesthetics.



Moreover, there is greater precedence for such a move, since a number of philosophers have viewed ethics and aesthetics as being importantly similar, or as connected in some way. In several dialogues Plato suggests a close link between beauty and goodness,<sup>9</sup> in “The Three Normative Sciences” (1903) C. S. Peirce includes aesthetics under the category of normativity and even argues that it is fundamental to ethical normativity, and in the *Tractatus* (1921) Wittgenstein remarks that “ethics and aesthetics are one” (§6.421). However, ethics and aesthetics have tended to be viewed separately by most philosophers in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially those within the analytic tradition. When art does get discussed in relation to ethics, it often involves the ethical status of the content of a work of art – e.g. discussions about whether the representation of an ethically reprehensible action counts against a work’s overall aesthetic value – or whether the likely consequences of an artwork are morally problematic and so could provide grounds for censorship. What tends not to get considered is the link between aesthetics and ethics as branches of normativity in general.

### ***Kant on Aesthetics and Morality***

In “Aesthetics: The Mother of Ethics?” (1997), Marcia Muelder Eaton argues that this tendency to separate the aesthetic and the ethical originated with Kant and the formalist position that resulted from his attempt to find universal grounds for judgments of taste (Muelder Eaton 1997, 356). Faced in his *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (2000; hereafter *CPJ*) with the unavoidable subjectivity of judgments about the objects of sense-perception, Kant turned to the argument for the universality of the forms of perceptual experience he had worked out already in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1998; hereafter *CPR*), viz. the transcendental categories of space and time. His resulting view was that only a thing’s spatio-temporal features could be the object

---

<sup>9</sup> Connections between the beautiful and the good can be found in the *Symposium*, *Phaedrus*, *Philebus*, *Timaeus* and *Hippias Major*, and in the *Republic* (399e-403c) Socrates advocates cultivating a sense of beauty as part of the education of the young guardians in order to lead them to prefer morally good deeds. (On this, see Pappas 2012 and Schellekens 2007, 15-16, 95-96.)

of a universal aesthetic judgment since they are experienced in the same way by every human, given the nature of our faculties of perception. This avoids possible variations in experience from one person to another that make judgments relating to flavours, smells, etc. inevitably subjective (*CPJ* 108-9; see also Wicks 13-14). Thus, a judgment of aesthetic taste aiming at universality or objectivity, as opposed to a judgment of subjective ‘agreeability’, would only consider spatio-temporal properties such as structure or rhythm and leave out consideration of an object’s relations to or effects on anything else (*CPJ* 122-23; Wicks 21-23). Since ethics necessarily involves relations, bracketing all but a thing’s formal properties effectively would exclude ethical considerations from aesthetic judgment.

Another reason for seeing Kant as playing a role in the separation of aesthetics and ethics is his framing of aesthetic judgments as ‘disinterested’ and his explanation of aesthetic pleasure as a sense of ‘purposiveness without purpose’ accompanying one’s experience. In asking whether something is beautiful, Kant writes, “one does not want to know whether there is anything that is or that could be at stake, for us or for someone else, in the existence of the thing, but rather how we judge it in mere contemplation” (*CPJ* 90). In other words, aesthetic pleasure is felt when the formal elements one observes appear to have some purpose behind their arrangement without this being related to any instrumental purpose the bearer of these elements might have.

The worry here, discussed by Elizabeth Trott in “Kant’s Legacy: Murder as Art” (2009), is that if an aesthetic judge is unconcerned with what the object of her judgment is, what it does or what can be done with it, there seems to be no difference in principle between contemplating and taking pleasure in the form of a chair or in the shape of an atomic bomb’s mushroom cloud, or the formal arrangement of the ruined buildings and dead bodies left in its wake. This seems to allow an ‘aestheticist’ attitude wherein one suspends moral considerations and values things only

for the internal harmony or unity of their formal structures. While a person who adopts this attitude could be condemned on ethical grounds, Kant seems to have no resources to question the *aesthetic* judgment he makes. A person who reacts to a mass shooting by appreciating the ‘design’ of its planning and execution with the same attitude one might take to the choreography of a dance could easily be deemed to be doing something ethically objectionable, but Kant seems hard-pressed to justify the claim that his judgment of the situation as ‘beautifully planned’ or ‘balletic’ is mistaken. As Trott writes, this seemingly “enables us to freely choose how we will regard a work ... We don’t need to know at all if [a] depicted murder is about anything, has a cause or a reason. We can just view the spectacle, without moral judgment” (Trott 2009, 115).

However, viewing Kant’s aesthetic theory as licensing this sort of stance takes his comments on disinterestedness out of context and overlooks the connections Kant himself comes to make between aesthetic and ethical judgments. Kant’s requirement of disinterestedness or lack of purpose for aesthetic judgments is also required by him for universal moral judgments and so does not imply a lack of moral concern. As Trott goes on to point out, “Kant’s principle of indifference is generated by the same capacity of the mind that enables us to make moral judgments” (Trott 2009, 112). Thus, rather than thinking of it as involving a lack of care about the object of judgment, disinterestedness should be thought of as a matter of not taking into account how one might personally benefit or suffer from the existence, use or consequences of the thing judged.<sup>10</sup>

Although moral concerns initially appear to be severed from aesthetic considerations in Kant’s discussion of judgments of pure beauty (esp. §§4-7 of *CPJ*), he is unable to keep them

---

<sup>10</sup> The question of an object’s existence, and one’s interest in it, is the main – and perhaps only – point of difference between the sort of ‘disinterestedness’ Kant thinks necessary for aesthetic judgments and the sort he holds to be involved in moral reasoning. The thinking here seems to be that, if an action is judged by reason to be morally good, its performance increases the goodness it has as an idea or judgment (e.g. someone actually not lying, rather than just recognizing that lying would be wrong), whereas the beauty of an imagined object’s spatial proportions would not be increased by the object’s existence outside the imagination.

apart for long. For one thing, he come to associate the aesthetic category of the sublime with morality due to the way experiences of the sublime involve the consideration of an object in relation to ourselves as subjects and make us aware of the limits of our faculties of understanding and imagination to grasp the object in its totality, thus necessitating a turn to the faculty of reason, which posits abstract ideas such as infinity and freedom, to account for our experience, with this same faculty and the same sorts of ideas being employed in moral judgment. For another, and in light of the involvement of the same ‘disinterested’ mental capacity in both aesthetic and moral judgments, Kant comes to claim that because aesthetic experiences teach us to value things for what they are rather than for what they can do for us, a developed aesthetic sense, particularly when directed towards natural beauty, is indicative of a morally good character (*CPJ* 178). This leads to his claim that beauty is “the symbol of morality” insofar as it gives perceptible form to moral ideas (*CPJ* 225-28) or, as Elisabeth Schellekens (2007) puts it, provides “a sensible representation of the relation between reason and feeling in morality” (103).

Most decisively, Kant’s discussion of the distinction between free and adherent beauty shows his inability to separate the moral from the aesthetic. Judgments of free beauty are made independently of any concept of what the judged object is (*CPJ* 114). Judgments of adherent beauty, on the other hand, “presuppose such a concept and the perfection of the object in accordance with it” (*Ibid.*). That is, in judging adherent beauty one considers how well a thing fits or accords with the ideal of the kind of thing it is. As examples of objects of free beauty, Kant lists flowers, certain birds, abstract designs such as patterns on wallpaper, and ‘pure’ instrumental music. His main example of adherent beauty is human beauty, where the awareness that humans are autonomous rational and moral subjects (cf. Kant 1997, 40-41) is inseparable from an aesthetic judgment of a person’s appearance. He gives the example of Maori tattoos,

noting the formal design of “curlicues and light but regular lines” found in them “could be beautiful”, but are not when on a human body, since this clashes with the moral dignity inherent to a person by risking turning a moral subject into an object for appreciation (*CPJ* 115).

Given that adherent beauty is judged in relation to a concept and so admits of moral considerations, and that the paradigm examples of free beauty are natural objects, the appreciation of which Kant declares a sign of a morally good soul, it would seem that neither sort of aesthetic judgment is wholly separable from morality. Kant’s Maori example is especially revealing, since here he is unable to keep the notions of free and adherent beauty fully distinct. Note that his claim is not only a moral objection to judging a person according to the standards of free beauty, but also asserts that a design which, taken on its own, would be the proper object of a judgment of free beauty, is *not* beautiful when encountered inscribed onto a human body. Kant is claiming both (i) that the practice of tattooing the human body is problematic on moral grounds, and that in light of this the tattooed individual in question is *not* adherently beautiful, since his appearance doesn’t correspond to the ideal of human perfection, and (ii) that the abstract formal design of the tattoo is not beautiful given its context. Thus, by Kant’s own standards, even free beauty cannot be fully separated from any consideration of relations or concepts and so is not actually free of ethical considerations.

This conclusion is in tension, if not outright contradiction, with some of Kant’s statements; for instance, that “the beautiful, the judging of which has as its ground a merely formal purposiveness, i.e., a purposiveness without an end, is entirely independent of the representation of the good” (*CPJ* 111). While statements like this seem unambiguously to hold aesthetics and morality separate, they conflict with Kant’s remarks about beauty as the symbol of morality and with the claim that what would in itself be a proper object of a judgment of free beauty (e.g. a

purely formal design) is not beautiful even *qua* free beauty because of moral considerations (e.g. its being a tattoo on a person). That Kant initially tries to separate aesthetic taste from moral goodness but fails to maintain this separation through the entirety of his third critique suggests both (i) the overlap of aesthetic and ethical normativity, and (ii) that a deontic approach to ethics that conceives the good in terms of universal principles of right as derived by reason is not the right ethical framework from which to comprehend this overlap. Kant's argument for keeping aesthetic judgments free from considerations of agreeability, pleasantness and personal advantage still holds up, entailing that aesthetic quality can't be solely a matter of the pleasure a thing affords or the number of people who like it, and so a utilitarian approach to ethics is likely not the right one either. This leaves a virtue-based approach as the best candidate of the three major ethical systems for understanding the relation between aesthetics and ethics.

### ***Aristotle, Plato and Appropriateness***

A virtue approach could retain the claims of Kant's that seem right while also avoiding some of the above-mentioned tensions in his aesthetics. In addition to his claim about sensitivity to natural beauty being the mark of a good soul, which maps on well to the character-centeredness of a virtue approach, Kant insists that aesthetic judgments are not made by applying concepts in a way that could be captured by a determinate set of rules or principles (*CPJ* 228-29). In other words, making and judging art *can't* be done according to a formula, and so in this respect aesthetic normativity is more compatible with Aristotle's approach to ethics than with Kant's deontological view, since Aristotle also insists that the virtuous person's actions cannot be codified into a list of rules with universal application (*NE* I.3 1094b20-27; *NE* II.2 1104a1-9). Moreover, the tensions arising from Kant's Maori tattoo example and Trott's case of something immoral having aesthetically good form both involve a notion like appropriateness or fittingness.

The problem raised by the former example, and the reason why Kant claims the design of the tattoo is not beautiful (freely or otherwise) when marked on a person's body, is essentially to do with it being inappropriate, or 'not fitting', to consider another person in the way one considers the object of a judgment of free beauty.<sup>11</sup> The latter example also seems to be a matter of fittingness – the problem isn't *only* a moral *or* an aesthetic one, but involves the intuition that the combination of beauty and evil is itself inappropriate.

Fittingness is a fundamental normative concept grounding both ethical and aesthetic judgments, a precedent for which can be seen in the Ancient Greek term *kalon*, or 'fine', which is used by Plato and Aristotle in reference to both aesthetic and moral goodness. Not only does Aristotle use *kalon* to describe the aim towards which the virtues are directed (*NE* III.1 1110b11-12, *NE* III.12 1119b17)<sup>12</sup>, but he employs it in the *Metaphysics* when discussing the motivating cause of the movement of the soul (*Metaphysics* 1072a26-b4) in a way that is similar to Plato's association of beauty with the good in Diotima's account of love in the *Symposium* (204d-206a). Since Aristotle uses *kalon* equally in his ethical writings and in his writings on art (cf. *Poetics* 1447a9), it would seem that the good Aristotle has in mind in his discussion of virtue, and the good he associates with artistic quality are, if not equivalent, at least very closely linked.

There might seem to be a precedent in Plato for *not* taking *kalon* to mean fittingness or appropriateness. In the *Greater Hippias*, Socrates urges Hippias to tell him what 'the fine' (*kalon*) is in itself; one of the first suggestions Hippias offers is that "whatever is appropriate to each thing makes that particular thing fine" (290d), but Socrates dismisses this suggestion by arguing that something can be made to appear fine without genuinely being so, giving an example of a foolish person who looks fine when wearing clothes that suit him but who remains

---

<sup>11</sup> Note that one does not have to accept Kant's ethical position that it is *always* wrong to see people as means rather than ends in order to see that the question of appropriateness is central to this example.

<sup>12</sup> See also 1122b6-7 for this claim in relation to the virtue of magnificence, and 1106b10-15 for an analogy to craft.

a fool, and so not fine as a person (294a). However, since Socrates' argument rests on a conflation of the clothes' appropriateness for the man and the appropriateness of his appearance for his character, it fails to count against the definition of *kalon* in question – that a thing is fine (worthy of a sort of normative approval that motivates both aesthetic and ethical considerations) if and only if its manner of being, i.e. 'how it is', is appropriate to *what* it is. As with the examples from Kant discussed above, appropriateness as a normative criterion can be seen at work in Socrates' own objection, since it rests on the recognition that there is something inappropriate or not fitting (and thus, it is implied, not *kalon*) about a foolish person appearing noble.

Assuming appropriateness as the normative basis underlying both ethics and aesthetics may not suit aesthetic judgments of natural objects or places, since the notion of 'fitting' seems out of place without something like a Platonic 'form' to which a particular observed instance is thought to 'fit' (e.g. explaining a beautiful sunset in terms of how well it fits the ideal form 'Sunset'). However, since there are several candidates for criteria for such a 'fit' when it comes to works of art – authorial intentions, the nature of the medium, the requirements of the genre, historically developed conventions of art practices, etc. – it seems safer to hold this notion of appropriateness to be involved in normative aesthetic judgments of artworks. Doing so also provides a connection with Aristotle's ethics, since this concept of appropriateness underlies his notion of the 'mean' at which a virtue aims. Moreover, Aristotle's ethics is particularly suited to being applied to aesthetic considerations, since Aristotle includes character traits related to what we would call good and bad taste, such as wittiness and buffoonery (*NE* IV.8 1128a4-16), among the virtues and vices he discusses, allowing for one's aesthetic character or 'taste' to be considered as part of one's moral character, and vice versa.



## 1.2 TWO APPROACHES TO ‘VIRTUE AESTHETICS’

There are two ways one could understand the idea of a virtue-based approach to aesthetics. The first, which could be called the Moral-Centred Approach, focuses on why engaging with art is good, e.g. a focus on the role of aesthetic experience in moral education, or the ways in which learning how to make or appreciate art, and engaging in doing so, might aid in the development of a virtuous character. The second, which could be called the Structural Approach, focuses on how the normative aspects of art practice – what it is for an artist to create art *well*, or what it is for a spectator to experience art *well* – could be explained using the framework of Aristotle’s ethics, supplemented by considerations from contemporary virtue ethicists.

### *The Moral-Centred Approach: Kant and Schiller*

The Moral-Centred Approach is likely more familiar than the Structural Approach, having a precedent in a number of prominent thinkers. One such precedent is found in Kant’s views, discussed above, that sensitivity to natural beauty is a sign of a good soul and that beautiful works of art give perceptible form to moral ideas. While these views involve a connection between artistic taste and moral awareness such that developing the former would seem to lead to the development of the latter, they are not specifically virtue-oriented. The connection Kant posits is based on his understandings of the workings of consciousness and moral reasoning as developed in the rest of his philosophical system, in which reason has more of a place in morality than it does in virtue ethics. On Kant’s account, aesthetic experience is morally valuable only insofar as it prepares one to use reason and so employ the categorical imperative. One who could reason well enough to derive universal moral principles would seem to have no need to bother with art, and while she may be better able to experience beauty than someone who was not at the same level of practical reasoning, Kant seems to offer no reason for her to actually do so.

Perhaps the most obvious precedent for the Moral-Centred Approach is Friedrich Schiller's *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (2004; hereafter *AEM*). Writing in the shadow of the French Revolution and the failure of Enlightenment rationality in the face of the brutality of the Reign of Terror (cf. Wicks 39), Schiller goes a step further than Kant to argue that the ability to discern beauty is not just contingently useful, but is a *necessary* step in the formation of a person's moral character. As he writes, "the moral condition can be developed *only* from the aesthetic" (*AEM* 110, my emphasis) and "it is through Beauty that we arrive at Freedom" (*AEM* 27), with freedom being linked to the autonomy provided by moral reasoning. Schiller's claim is grounded on his view that, because aesthetic education involves learning to contemplate what is perceived through the senses, it allows one to rise above a merely passive reception of sensation and transcend the purely physical 'given', and thus to be in a position to imagine things being other than how they are experienced. Judging a thing to be aesthetically good or bad involves imagining how it could be worse or better, and so provides a bridge between passive sensibility and active reflection (*AEM* 119).

While Schiller was heavily influenced by Kant, there are significant differences that suggest Schiller's position is already close to a virtue-based account. Whereas Kant focuses on a single rational faculty employed in judgments of taste and moral reasoning, Schiller takes a more holistic view, emphasizing the integration of a person's perceptual, emotional and intellectual faculties as being necessary for moral awareness, with aesthetic education – i.e. the practice in making normative judgments about perceptual objects that comes with the experience of art and attention to beauty – bringing about this integration. Thus, Schiller prioritizes a balanced or harmonious character as opposed to Kant's singular focus on reason, which holds aesthetic judgments to be merely 'stepping stones' that prepare one to think morally. Unlike Kant,

Schiller's view of the relations between sensation, emotion and intellect is one of reciprocal action; "each one", he writes, "reaches its highest manifestation precisely through the activity of the other" (*AEM* 73).

This view of the holistic development of a person's character through the reciprocal action of her faculties, with her *moral* development occurring in proportion to the integration of those faculties, is plausible insofar as (i) rational reflection on the things one perceives or feels enables one to take in a greater range of perceptual details, in the way a trained painter will see more visual details or a composer will hear more complexity in a 'soundscape' than an untrained person, and to feel more deeply with a greater emotional attunement, and (ii) a greater awareness of the things one encounters perceptually, and one's affective responses to them, provides more material for reflection. Since beauty for Schiller and Kant is a matter of balance or harmony in an object's perceptible form, the awareness of beauty is an awareness of this balance, and since awareness of something (for both Schiller and Kant) involves consciousness forming a concept of it through its synthesis of the sensible manifold, the awareness of beauty in a perceived object involves a balancing or harmonizing in the perceiving consciousness (*AEM* 45-46).

Offering further support for a virtue-based reading, the main concern of Schiller's aesthetics is the ennoblement of character in the face of a tendency to prioritize principles of reason over feelings – a tendency he refers to as "barbarism" (*AEM* 50; cf. 34). "Intellectual enlightenment," he writes, "proceeds from the character, since the way to the head must lie through the heart." He goes on to claim, in what could serve as a summary of his thesis, that "[t]raining of the sensibility is [the] pressing need of our age, not merely because it will be a means of making the improved understanding effective for living, but for the very reason that it awakens this improvement" (*AEM* 50). He also states that "a cultivated taste [is] linked with clearness of

intellect, liveliness of feeling, liberality and even dignity of conduct” (*AEM* 56), and that “[t]he man lacking in form [i.e. lacking an integrated character] despises all grace of diction as corruption ... all delicacy and loftiness of demeanour as exaggeration and affectation” (*AEM* 56), implying not only that sensitivity to aesthetic quality is the sign of a well-developed character, but that aesthetic insensitivity is the result of a deficiency of character.<sup>13</sup>

Positions akin to Schiller’s can be found in more recent philosophers such as Iris Murdoch (1970), Martha Nussbaum (1990), Eileen John (1998) and Gregory Currie (1998), who all contend that works of art – with literature being the particular focus of all four – can play a role in furthering the moral development of their audiences/readers, with Nussbaum explicitly linking her views on the moral value of art to a neo-Aristotelian virtue ethical conception of morality. However, each offers a weaker version of Schiller’s account since none claim, as Schiller does, that the cultivation of aesthetic taste through an informed engagement with art is *necessary* for moral development. They also do not make the strong claim that engaging with art is *sufficient* for the development of a morally good character; as Murdoch writes, “even great art cannot guarantee the quality of its consumer’s consciousness. However, great art exists and is sometimes properly experienced and even a shallow experience of what is great can have its effect” (Murdoch 83). While Schiller never directly states that aesthetic education *entails* the ennoblement of character, the emphasis he places on it as the remedy for problems due to badness of character suggest that he thought it was at least close to sufficient.

These recent philosophers do not leave themselves as vulnerable as Schiller to the obvious objection that could be brought against the Moral-Centred Approach to virtue aesthetics: namely,

---

<sup>13</sup> Schiller holds the Ancient Greeks to be examples of cultivation and refinement and the harmony of the physical, emotional and rational (*AEM* 37-39), although he doesn’t refer to Aristotle and his mention of virtue is not directly associated with the Aristotelian sense of the term. Even if his conception of Ancient Greek culture is a romanticized one, it shows his ideal of moral development to involve something closer to a virtue-based understanding than to Kant’s deontology.

counter-examples of morally good people who have no taste for art and who seem unconcerned with beauty, or of vicious people who have a refined aesthetic sensibility.<sup>14</sup> While the above quote from Murdoch suggests that a possible response would be to say that the artworks in these counter-examples, and the spectators' engagement with them, were not of the right sort – i.e. it was not great art, or it was not properly experienced – this would require criteria for an artwork being 'great' and an aesthetic experience being 'proper', which the Moral-Centred Approach alone does not provide.

### ***The Structural Approach: Hume***

The Structural Approach to virtue aesthetics, which looks at how the normative aspect of aesthetic notions such as good taste, good art, and better or worse ways of engaging with and experiencing artworks can be explained according to a virtue-based framework, could provide such criteria. Thus, the Structural Approach would seem to be a necessary supplement to the Moral-Centred Approach. Although there are not as many historical precedents for the former as there are for the latter, Hume's essay "Of the Standard of Taste" (1757; hereafter *OST*) could be read as offering something close to a virtue account of aesthetic judgment and, by extension, of what counts as good art.

The question Hume aims to answer is how, given disagreement in people's aesthetic judgments, an objective (or at least intersubjective) criterion for resolving such disputes – a standard of taste – can be reached. He begins by comparing aesthetic disputes with disagreement over the application of ethical terms, noting that in both sorts of disputes the general terms ('beauty', 'elegance', 'virtue', 'charity', etc.) tend to be agreed upon as referring to valuable

---

<sup>14</sup> The first type of counter-example would be decisive against Schiller's claim of the necessity of aesthetic education for moral development, while the second type would cast doubt on his endorsement of aesthetic education as a good solution to problems stemming from bad character. While not fatal to the weaker positions of Murdoch, Nussbaum, John and Currie, such counter-examples would likely decrease the persuasiveness of their claims for art's value.

properties, and that the source of disagreement is the application of these terms to particular instances; i.e. not whether beauty or virtue is good, but whether a certain object is beautiful or a certain behaviour is virtuous. Foreshadowing Anscombe's "Modern Moral Philosophy" (1958), Hume argues that hard-and-fast ethical rules are unhelpful for resolving such disputes, writing that "people, who invented the word *charity*, and used it in a good sense, inculcated more clearly and much more efficaciously, the precept, *be charitable*, than any pretended legislator or prophet, who should insert such a *maxim* in his writings" (OST 346, original emphasis).

Hume looks to common sense understandings of aesthetic terms and their application in ordinary language, noting that common sense seems to agree that there is 'no disputing of taste' because preferences of sentiment are subjective and do not admit of mistakes.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, however, common sense also holds it to be obvious that certain artworks are aesthetically superior to certain others; few people today would disagree that Mozart's music is better *qua* music than Britney Spears', or that *Middlemarch* is better *qua* literature than *Twilight*.<sup>16</sup> Since there seems to be something close to universal agreement when there is a high degree of difference between the works judged, at least among people who are judging quality rather than personal preference, it would seem possible to formulate a standard of taste by taking these cases of agreement as a starting point.

The criterion Hume proposes for determining good and bad artworks, as well as determining good and bad taste in critical judgments of art, is found in the verdict of the 'true judge'. A true judge is someone who has a greater capacity for discernment and delicacy of taste due to having sensory organs in their optimal condition (e.g. having sharp vision, acute hearing, a sensitive

---

<sup>15</sup> Hume expression of this view is that "All sentiment is right; because sentiment has a reference to nothing beyond itself, and is always real, wherever a man is conscious of it" (OST 347).

<sup>16</sup> Why some people might prefer Britney Spears and *Twilight* could be accounted for by a distinction such as Kant's between judgments of taste or quality and judgments of mere agreeability, although Hume does not draw such a distinction.

palate, etc.) and possessing a certain amount of knowledge (e.g. of the audience for whom the work was meant, and the purpose for which the artist intended it), cognitive abilities (e.g. depth of imagination, endurance of attention span) and character traits (e.g. an openness to the unfamiliar, and consistency over time in her judgments). In these respects, as well as in the relative rarity of true judges among the population (*OST* 353), the figure Hume posits for his criterion is akin to Aristotle's virtuous person/*phronimos*. The *phronimos* is also held to be a paradigm example of the excellence of certain human faculties, with this excellence being founded on an idea of what is naturally fitting or proper for human beings (*NE* II.6 1106a15-25; *NE* II.6 1106b36-1107a2) making him disposed to be aware of what is best for a human to do or feel in a given situation, i.e. the 'mean' towards which it is best for a human to aim (*NE* II.6 1106b5-7, 20-23).

Hume argues that aesthetic judgments made by such a person will be more accurate than those made by a person whose sense organs are untrained or defective by nature, or who has undeveloped mental faculties such as a limited imaginative ability, blindness to detail or shortness of attention span. Similarly to the way Aristotle defines virtuous action and feeling in terms of what a virtuous person would do or feel (*NE* II.4 1105b5-8), Hume defines good aesthetic judgments and goodness in art in terms of the agreement of the majority of true judges over time, writing that "the joint verdict of such, wherever they are to be found, is the true standard of taste and beauty" (*OST* 355).

This might seem to leave Hume open to a charge of circularity, in that he defines good taste in terms of the taste that people with good taste have, which is similar to the charge that has been levelled against contemporary virtue ethicists who define right action in terms of how a virtuous person would act (e.g. Hursthouse 1999, 28). The best reply available to virtue ethicists – that

they are proposing a way to identify right actions but are not saying that these are right *because* they are done by a certain kind of person – is also available to Hume. He could say that the fact of near universal agreement on the aesthetic quality of certain ‘masterpieces’ by those we recognize to be true judges through the consistency of their judgments over time points to a standard of taste, which we could make use of to determine which judgments are more likely to be accurate. Hume is not claiming that certain objects are aesthetically good *just because* a certain group of people says they are, and so his account is not, strictly speaking, circular.

Just as Aristotle presupposes an understanding of human beings as rational, socio-political animals, from which he derives his claims of what is proper for a human, Hume presupposes a natural standard of excellence of human faculties and sense organs such that someone whose eyes are formed and work in the way they are supposed to by nature could be said to have normal or proper vision. “In each creature,” Hume writes, “there is a sound and a defective state, and the former alone can be supposed to afford us a true standard of taste and sentiment” (*OST* 349-50). He also presupposes that objects experienced as beautiful by qualified judges are “naturally fixed to excite agreeable sentiment” (*OST* 349), implying that there are objective, response-dependent properties that we register when experiencing things aesthetically, but only if we are sensitive and discerning enough.<sup>17</sup> This presupposition is also shared by Aristotle, since for him it seems to be an objective matter of fact that certain ways of acting or feeling will be the right or best ways for a human in a particular situation, and that it is this fact to which the *phronimos* responds.

If Hume’s account of a standard of taste is structurally similar to Aristotle’s ethical theory in its use of the ‘true judge’ and in its positing of abilities, traits and dispositions (basically, virtues

---

<sup>17</sup> The story Hume cites from *Don Quixote* about the wine tasters is meant to demonstrate this, since the flavours detected were objectively there to be tasted in the wine, as the discovery of the key proves.



of spectatorship or reception) by which true judges are defined, it is disanalogous in that it does not have a foundational principle that is itself valuable, akin to Aristotle's appeal to *eudaimonia* or human flourishing to which these virtue-like traits relate. As such, Hume's account, if taken on its own, is vulnerable to the charge that it provides no reason to think that it is good to be a true judge and have 'good taste', as Jerrold Levinson (2002) has argued. While Hume discusses pleasure as the end at which good taste aims (*OST* 348), this fits a utilitarian framework more than a virtue-based one. Accordingly, it would seem that the Structural Approach to virtue aesthetics needs to be supplemented by a Moral-Centred Approach, just as the Moral-Centred Approach needs a Structural Approach to supplement it, as discussed above. What this suggests is that any complete theory of virtue aesthetics will involve the integration of *both* approaches.

With these points in mind, the next three sections will survey the work of contemporary thinkers writing under the name of 'virtue aesthetic', examining their accounts in light of what has been discussed above. In doing so, I aim to work out the strengths and weaknesses of these thinkers' theories in order to see where they might inform the virtue approach to aesthetics based on Collingwood's account of art outlined in Chapter IV.

### **1.3 WOODRUFF'S VIRTUE THEORY OF AESTHETICS**

The first paper to explicitly discuss the potential of a virtue approach to aesthetics is David Woodruff's "A Virtue Theory of Aesthetics" (2001). Woodruff suggests that, when applied to the problem of defining art, "a virtue theory can unite some of what is valuable in many ... theories [of art] while avoiding certain prominent pitfalls" (Woodruff 23).<sup>18</sup> Adopting Zagzebski's definition of a virtue as "a deep and enduring acquired excellence of a person,

---

<sup>18</sup> Such pitfalls include the problems of 'first works' and so-called 'alien objections' faced by historical approaches to defining art (cf. Stecker 1996), and the inability of the institutional approach to provide sufficient conditions for art and to account for the normative weight carried by the word 'art' in ordinary language (cf. Neill and Ridley 2012).

involving a characteristic motivation to produce a certain desired end and reliable success in bringing about that end” (Zagzebski 136), and focusing on the motivational element, Woodruff proposes a structural model for a virtue theory in which a set of virtues are derived from a root motivation and arranged in a hierarchy according to the degree to which they are conducive to fulfilling that motivation. A virtue aesthetic theory built on this structure would be based around a root aesthetic motivation such as ‘appreciation’, with aesthetic virtues being character traits that are exercised in pursuing this motivation successfully, and ordered in terms of how necessary or conducive their exercise is to that motivation, e.g. appreciation. “These virtues,” Woodruff writes, “would be the basis for the explanation of actions relating to the objects that are appreciated,” i.e. actions performed in the course of the creation and reception of artworks, and would “provide the framework for defining and explaining the nature of art based on appreciation” (Woodruff 25).

Woodruff proposes six aesthetic virtues that aim at appreciation, and in terms of which art can be defined. In keeping with the idea of ordering virtues hierarchically, he groups them into two tiers with the second-tier virtues being foundational for those in the first tier. As first-tier virtues he lists *insight*, *sensitivity* and *vision*. He defines insight as “the ability to recognize what is in a work and its relationship to other associated works” (Woodruff 27) with the associated vice of deficiency being blindness to what is in the work and a tendency to miss the point, and the vice of excess being a tendency towards ‘overreading’ (i.e. attributing to a work properties or meanings that it doesn’t possess). Sensitivity involves “allow[ing] the work to affect us and shape our understanding of the subject”; the associated vice of deficiency is “brashness” while the vice of excess is “being overly affected” (Woodruff 28). Vision is defined as “the ability to recognize both the big picture and the small detail of a work; being able to see the unity, contrast,

and context of the work”, with the associated vice of deficiency being a narrow focus and the vice of excess being “abstractness” (Woodruff 28).

The second-tier virtues he lists are *creativity*, *persistence* and *courage*. Creativity is defined in general terms as the “precise expression of ideas”, with aesthetic creativity differing from intellectual creativity in that the latter’s precision is aimed at truth whereas the expression of ideas in the former is “related to appreciation”; the associated vice of deficiency is lack of imagination, and the vice of excess “disassociatedness” (Woodruff 28). Persistence is a matter of endurance in one’s engagement with and consideration of a work, or a willingness to spend time with a work so that more of its qualities can emerge to be appreciated; Woodruff describes it as “[t]he desire to appreciate the work fully by examining it repeatedly with an awareness of its context” (Woodruff 28-29) – although it is not clear why contextual awareness is a matter of persistence. The associated vice of deficiency is impatience, or the tendency to be easily distracted, and the vice of excess is obsessiveness (with both of these vices relating to persistence, but not to contextual awareness). Courage in aesthetic matters involves being able to “face what the work tells us about ourselves”, i.e. to be open to aspects of what a work is expressing that may strike one as unpleasant or discomfiting, with the associated vice of deficiency being “timorousness” and the vice of excess being “recklessness” (Woodruff 29). These three virtues are taken to be more fundamental than those in the first tier, since they are claimed to be necessary for the possession and exercise of insight, sensitivity and vision.

Woodruff then proposes a definition of art in terms of his virtue theory, viz. “artworks are products of actions brought about by the exercise of aesthetic virtues”, where those who produce them intend them to be objects of appreciation, and where they are appreciated by at least one person (which could include the artist herself) “with some degree of success” (Woodruff 30).

Accordingly, a work in a traditional art medium, e.g. a painting, created with the sole intention of delivering a political message may not count as a work of art, whereas a curator who saw in it an aesthetically pleasing use of form and displayed it with the intention that it be appreciated would thereby turn it into a work of art, since for Woodruff “[t]he process of presenting a found object as art is a form of production” (Woodruff 31).

### ***Problems in Woodruff's Theory***

Insofar as Woodruff intends his virtue aesthetic theory to provide a way to define art, his aim seems to be more ontological than normative. If his goal is indeed to find a better way to define art than those currently on offer, his choice of an approach modelled on a normative theory such as virtue ethics is an odd one, given that neither the *Nicomachean Ethics* nor contemporary virtue ethics means to give an ontological account of a comparable sort – e.g. to define ‘action’ or ‘character’ – but rather to present a normative position on these concepts by accounting for what makes an action better or worse, what counts as a *good* character, etc.<sup>19</sup>

Another weak point in Woodruff's theory is that his examples of aesthetic virtues are not clearly defined or distinguished from one another. It is not clear why the abilities he associates with insight, vision and sensitivity aren't functions of a single virtue such as *perspicacity*. What makes one's “ability to recognize what is in a work and its relationship to other associated works” the function of a trait or disposition (insight) distinct from those involved in the ability to “see the unity, contrast, and context of a work” (vision) or from the disposition to have our understanding of the work shaped by what's in it (sensitivity), when what is described under all three concepts seems to be a matter of perceiving a piece of art clearly and understanding it well?

---

<sup>19</sup> Even if Zagzebski's virtue epistemology, which does include a definition of knowledge in terms of the intellectual virtues, is Woodruff's model and not virtue ethics *per se*, Zagzebski's project is still primarily concerned with normative dimensions of epistemology – what makes one a better epistemic agent or ‘knower’ – and only secondarily with defining knowledge, so there is still a disparity between what Woodruff wants his theory to do and the intended purpose of the approach on which he models it.

Additionally, his definition of ‘creativity’ as “the precise expression of ideas”, with ‘aesthetic creativity’ being the “expression of ideas related to appreciation” is, ironically, imprecise, with the latter phrase being especially unclear. While precision of expression is an important trait for artists to possess and exercise, it isn’t clear why this is called ‘creativity’ when it is not directly related to novelty or originality, with which the notion of creativity is usually connected. It is also unclear why it is taken to be fundamental to vision and insight when the reverse would seem to be the case – surely one would need to perceive a thing clearly and fully in order to be precise in one’s expressions about it. Furthermore, Woodruff’s commitment to a virtue framework leads him to understand each trait he discusses as a ‘mean’ positioned between two associated vices, but with some virtues this seems done more to fit the framework than the trait. For instance, while openness to what a work expresses is certainly important for correct understanding and assessment, labelling this ‘aesthetic courage’ requires Woodruff to posit a vice of excess, i.e. ‘recklessness’, but it is not at all clear how anyone could be *reckless* in facing up to the feeling or perspective that a work of art expresses.

Another weakness of Woodruff’s theory is the vagueness of his use of ‘appreciation’ as a core motivation. Not only does he not offer a definition of ‘appreciation’ nor explain the sense in which he is using the term, but in some places ‘appreciation’ seems to mean something like ‘understanding’, such as in his talk of appreciating Beethoven’s *Symphony No. 5* more fully when he had more knowledge of its historical context (Woodruff 29), while in other places ‘appreciation’ is distinguished from understanding and seems to mean something more like ‘enjoyment’ or ‘pleasure’, e.g. in his talk of wanting students not merely to understand, but to appreciate, Shakespeare’s plays (Woodruff 26). Moreover, no argument is given for why appreciation should be considered the root motivation for all aesthetic virtues; Woodruff just

writes that, on a *eudaimonist* approach to virtue, “[a]ny sufficiently broad concept of the good life would include appreciation” and that on a “purely motivational approach” he can only state that appreciation is an “intrinsically valuable motivation” (Woodruff 26), with these claims being assumed rather than argued for.

The closest he comes to explaining his reasons for choosing appreciation is with his Shakespeare/student example, where he suggests that a root aesthetic motivation can be found by considering “what is lacking in cases of *mere exposure* to art” (Woodruff 26, my emphasis), and that we want students studying Shakespeare not just to understand the plays but to form an appreciation of them. However, it is not clear that a teacher of English literature *would* be most concerned with whether her students enjoyed what they were reading, or would be disappointed if a student expressed a solid understanding of a play but said he didn’t much like it. On the contrary, a student who is able to give persuasive reasons for why he did not enjoy one of Shakespeare’s plays and in so doing demonstrates a good understanding of the play’s structure, tone, treatment of theme, etc. is likely making a more cogent aesthetic judgment (that is, a judgment of the quality of the play as an artwork) than is a student who enjoys watching the play but is unable to say what is good about it.

This brings to light a problem inherent in Woodruff’s assumption of appreciation as the root aesthetic motivation. Given that not every work of art is as worthy of appreciation as every other (taking ‘appreciation’ broadly as positive or approving judgment), and that appreciation of a work could be misplaced or inappropriate, it is problematic to take appreciation in general to be of *intrinsic* value rather than being of *aretaic* valuable, i.e. good when done well or excellently. Rather, it would seem that *appropriate* appreciation would be what is valuable, and that *inappropriate* appreciation would be something to be avoided. If we do want other spectators,

e.g. one's friends or students one is teaching, to appreciate works of art such as Shakespeare's plays, it is likely because we already take it to be aesthetically good, i.e. one for which appreciation is an *appropriate* response, and conversely we would not hold a spectator who shows an appreciation for work we thought was clearly inferior to be exhibiting aesthetic virtues of spectatorship in light of that appreciation; rather, we would likely judge that person to be a poor aesthetic spectator – i.e. to have 'bad taste'.

In response to these criticisms, Woodruff could note that his aim is to work out the *structure* of a virtue aesthetic theory and that the specific root motivation, virtues, and definition of art could be different (Woodruff 25). However, it is not obvious that the form and content of a theory can be separated so neatly; note, for instance, how 'appreciation' features in his description of the basic structure of his theory even before he has declared it to be the root motivation he is assuming (Woodruff 25). Even if form and content can be separated here, the structure of his theory remains questionable. For one thing, arranging the virtues hierarchically is a departure from Aristotle's ethics and does not have a clear precedent in Zagzebski's virtue epistemology, and so does not seem to be an integral part of a general virtue framework. What may have inspired him to do so is the dependence of Aristotle's ethical virtues on *phronesis*/practical wisdom; however, Aristotle counts the latter as an intellectual virtue so that, while his theory may be said to posit *phronesis* as being fundamental to the moral virtues, there is no hierarchy of *ethical* virtues in Aristotle comparable to the one Woodruff proposes for his aesthetic virtues.

For another thing, his choice to differentiate moral, intellectual and aesthetic virtues according to motivation, following Zagzebski, and not according to mental faculty or operation as per Aristotle, could be questioned. Even if Zagzebski is justified in taking this approach for

epistemology, Aristotle's faculty-based approach seems more appropriate for aesthetics, given that it is more in keeping with the way aesthetics has traditionally been conceived in terms of a distinct mode of experience, tied in some way to the senses, rather than involving one's 'ordinary' mode of experience being directed by a distinct motivation.

Perhaps the most significant flaw in Woodruff's theory is that its structure ends up being unnecessary for the purpose for which the theory is intended. His stated reason for turning to a virtue approach is to find a way of defining art that avoids problems he sees inherent in other approaches; however, the definition of art at which he arrives – that something is art when it is produced in order to realize a core aesthetic motivation, and is successful – doesn't depend on a theory of aesthetic virtues but could just as well be based on motivation alone. If part of a theory's structure turns out to be extraneous to achieving the end that theory was designed to achieve, it doesn't make sense to treat it as important or fundamental to that theory. Thus, the theory Woodruff has worked out should be seen as more of a motivation-based theory rather than a virtue-based one analogous to Aristotle's ethics.

#### **1.4 GOLDIE ON THE VIRTUES OF ART**

While Woodruff only published one paper on virtue aesthetics, Peter Goldie has pursued the topic in three articles: "Towards a Virtue Theory of Art" (2007; hereafter *TVA*), "Virtues of Art and Human Well-Being" (2008; hereafter *HWB*), and "Virtues of Art" (2010; hereafter *VA*). In the first, Goldie suggests an 'analogy' between ethics and art, and proposes that Aristotle's ethics will provide a useful way of understanding art in light of this analogy (*TVA* 372). His central thesis is that "artistic activity, as expression of the virtues of artmaking and art appreciation, will, along with ethical activity and what Aristotle called contemplative activity, be a constituent part of what goes to make up human well-being" (*TVA* 373).



### ***Problems in Goldie's Theory***

In taking a *eudaimonist* approach over Woodruff's focus on motivation, Goldie's theory would seem to be closer to the framework of Aristotle's ethics than is Woodruff's. However, Goldie goes on to write that his theory is *not* "one according to which virtuous dispositions are *central*" (VTA 373, my emphasis), which is a departure from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, where the main concern is to work out an understanding of the virtues. Even though Aristotle does consider the virtues as dispositions that, when exercised, are constitutive of a good – i.e. flourishing or *eudaimon* – human life (NE I.7 1098a13-17), in the *Nicomachean Ethics* he does not work out a theory of *eudaimonia* apart from what is implied by its being constituted by the virtues. Furthermore, Goldie is inconsistent on the position of aesthetic virtues in his theory. He writes that his account is *not* one "according to which such dispositions are treated as being of non-instrumental value" (VTA 373), which suggests an instrumentalist view of the virtues on which they are valuable insofar as their possession and exercise leads to well-being. However, he also writes that virtues *constitute* well-being and that artistic activity is not valuable only insofar as it leads to a "hedonic mental state" (VTA 384), and that "possessing these traits, or at least exercising them in the right way, is intrinsically or non-instrumentally valuable" (VA 833).

Additionally, Goldie's focus on well-being doesn't include any mention of aretaic concerns, which would seem to be important to any virtue approach to aesthetics given how central the notion of something being *done well* is to the normative assessment of artworks. As such, Goldie's approach is closer to the Moral-Centred than the Structural one outlined above, although he argues for the importance of an engagement with art for well-being rather than specifically for the development of a morally good character. This is apparent from his examples of aesthetic virtues, which he divides into virtues of art-making and virtues of appreciation.

While he rightly notes that Aristotle understands a virtue to be a fixed disposition of character to feel and respond in a certain way, and a virtuous action to be one that is motivated by the right feelings and intentions, with these feelings and intentions being the product of such a disposition (VTA 381-82), Goldie goes on to characterize a virtue as involving a “cluster of traits”, listing “imagination, insight, sensibility, vision, creativity, wit, authenticity, integrity, intelligence, persistence, open-mindedness, and courage” (VTA 383) as traits involved in the aesthetic virtues. However, he doesn’t actually characterize these traits as *themselves* being aesthetic virtues; rather, he discusses the aesthetic virtues as if there were only two: *a* virtue of art-making and *a* virtue of appreciation.

That this is his view isn’t fully apparent in his first paper, perhaps on account of the comparative brevity of the section in which he discusses virtues as dispositions, but it is clarified in his later papers, in which he lists *being a good sculptor* (HWB 184) and *being a good composer* (VA 833) as virtues of art-making, and *having good taste* (VA 833) and the more specific *being a good judge of impressionist paintings* (HWB 184) as virtues of appreciation. These examples show that what Goldie has in mind when he writes of aesthetic virtues is unlike Aristotle’s notion of ethical virtue in several important respects. The primary difference is that *being a good artist* is not a trait like being courageous, generous or honest, but is more analogous to *being a good person*, which is not itself one of the virtues but rather a descriptor of a person who *has* the virtues. Similarly, *having good taste* would not seem to be itself a virtue of appreciation, but rather just what it means to have the virtues of appreciation.<sup>20</sup>

The other major difference is that Goldie considers those traits that *do* seem analogous to Aristotle’s ethical virtues – e.g. imagination, insight, etc. – to belong to the ‘cluster’ of traits that

---

<sup>20</sup> Cf. NE IV.9 1128b34: “moral strength is not a virtue but a mixed kind of characteristic”.

make up the virtues themselves, and so to correspond to the traits that enable a person to be, e.g., generous rather than to a trait like generosity itself. When discussing the Aristotelian virtue of generosity he lists such ‘cluster’ traits as a “perceptual capacity to ... perceive where generosity is called for, creativity to ... spot what is the right way to be generous in the particular circumstances,” common sense, and so forth (VTA 382). However, for Aristotle these abilities are not so much traits that ‘cluster’ to form the virtue of generosity as they are elements of practical wisdom/*phronesis*, the intellectual virtue that one needs to possess in order to be genuinely virtuous in the ethical sense. And while it is easy to see how certain traits Goldie lists as contributing to aesthetic virtue – e.g. insight, sensibility, vision and intelligence – could be accounted for by practical wisdom, not all could be reduced to practical wisdom alone – e.g. authenticity, integrity, courage and, arguably, creativity.<sup>21</sup>

Finally, there is a further disanalogy between Goldie’s characterization of *being a good composer* (or artist of another kind) as *the* virtue of art-making and the dispositions Aristotle characterizes as moral virtues. Most of Aristotle’s moral virtues involve the notion of a mean between a vice of excess on one hand and a vice of deficiency on the other, such that generosity is the mean between extravagance and stinginess (NE IV.1 1119b20-32), and while not every one of his moral virtues operates on this principle (e.g. justice, as will be discussed further in Chapter II), the ideas of balance and moderation are of central importance to Aristotle’s general conception of virtue. However, when it comes to something like *being a good composer* or even *having good taste*, it is not clear how this could be a mean between an excess and a deficiency. These are ways of being (and not, I would argue, ‘traits’) that admit of opposites, i.e. being a *poor* composer or having *bad* taste, which could be called deficiencies, but without anything that

---

<sup>21</sup> While Goldie lists creativity as a trait needed for generosity, it is not clear that the ability to “spot what is the right way to be generous in the particular circumstances” (VTA 382) is creativity in the same sense that would be used in relation to art.

could properly be called a vice of excess (being *too good* a composer?). Since ‘being a good artist’ and ‘being a good appreciator’ are the only qualities Goldie considers as aesthetic virtues, his theory doesn’t involve any idea of a mean, or balance between excess and deficiency; whereas Woodruff goes too far with the idea of a virtue being a mean in his talk of aesthetic ‘recklessness’, Goldie fails to address this aspect of Aristotle’s thought at all. In light of the differences between Goldie and Aristotle regarding virtues and the role played by practical wisdom, and the lack of an aretaic focus, and despite his prioritizing of well-being, Goldie’s proposed virtue aesthetic theory should not be seen as a genuine application of Aristotle’s ethical framework to aesthetic matters.

### ***Strengths of Goldie’s Theory***

There are several points Goldie makes about what a virtue approach to aesthetics should involve that seem right. For one thing, he is right to suggest that the focus of such an approach be on the activities involved in making and engaging with art, the intentions and feelings behind them, and “the traits of character and personality from which such intentions and motives spring”, as opposed to on the products of these activities, i.e. artworks *qua* physical objects, since physical objects cannot be virtuous (*TVA* 376-77). Although Goldie does not say this, it follows that, on the side of appreciation, focusing on the pleasure spectators get from encountering an artwork as the result or ‘product’ of their engagement leads to a consequentialist view on which it becomes difficult to make distinctions between appropriate and inappropriate pleasure-taking, as a virtue aesthetics analogous to Aristotle’s ethics would do.

Goldie also seems right about the extent to which ethics and aesthetics are analogous. He discusses the overlap of aesthetic and ethical concepts and terms, citing Colin McGinn’s claim that, in addition to ‘thick’ and ‘thin’ ethical concepts (e.g. ‘brave’ and ‘good’, respectively),

there is a third kind that are not quite as thick in terms of their descriptive content as ‘brave’, ‘generous’, ‘brutal’ etc., but which do have descriptive content of a particularly aesthetic nature: e.g. ‘fine’, ‘pure’, ‘vile’ and ‘foul’ (*HWB* 188, citing McGinn 1999). Goldie takes this to suggest an interweaving of our notions of virtue in the ethical, aesthetic and intellectual spheres, going on to note that we commonly speak of both aesthetic and intellectual activity as ‘brave’, ‘gentle’, ‘brutal’, ‘sensitive’, ‘(dis)honest’, and so forth. “We can as readily call the brushstrokes in an artwork brutal or the philosophical argument crude,” he writes, “as we can call the action of a generous person fine” (*HWB* 189).<sup>22</sup>

Goldie considers the possible objection that ethical virtues and aesthetic virtues are disanalogous because the former carry an expectation of “cross-situational consistency”, such that we expect a person who is genuinely honest to be honest in all areas of her life, and not just in certain ones, but the latter do not carry such expectations – we do not expect a good artist in one medium to be equally good in all other media, nor do we expect an informed appreciator of one art form to be an equally good judge of the other arts – and so, the objection goes, there are no *virtues* of art but rather “localized skills” (*HWB* 183-84). In response, Goldie points to a further compatibility between our ethical and aesthetic thinking: while we may not expect cross-situational consistency of the sort where we expect a good painter to be a good dancer, we do expect “a certain artistic *receptivity*, sensitivity, or openness outside [a] particular local domain of interest” (*HWB* 184, original emphasis). Just as we might deem a lawyer who is honest with his friends but dishonest in his legal practice not genuinely, but only ‘locally’ honest,<sup>23</sup> we would likely say that a person with genuine ‘good taste’ would be open and sensitive towards all

---

<sup>22</sup> A further example both of how our ethical and aesthetic terms overlap and of our expectations of people we consider to have genuine ‘good taste’ is that we talk of an isolated lapse of good taste, e.g. the classical violinist who listens to ‘bubble-gum pop’ music in her spare time, as being a *guilty pleasure*.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Hursthouse 1999, 10-12.

artworks. Thus, we would expect her to judge well within the scope of her knowledge, including being aware that she needed to have more knowledge about a particular art form or artist in order to be able to form an accurate judgement, just as an intellectually virtuous person will suspend judgment when he realizes that he doesn't yet know enough to judge properly.

Similar to the worry about cross-situational consistency is the question whether dispositions relating to aesthetic activities are *demanding* in the sense that ethical virtues are. Goldie writes, “[i]f someone is lacking in an ethical virtue then we are inclined to make a judgement that he is, at least in this respect, not a good *person*, whereas if someone is lacking in an intellectual virtue that is required for contemplation, or is lacking a virtue of art, we are not inclined to make the same judgment of him as a person” (*HWB* 187, original emphasis). However, this may have more to do with how we habitually tend to think of character than with an intrinsic difference between ethical virtues and dispositions to judge and appreciate art well. It seems plausible that, in certain circumstances, we might think less of someone's overall character on account of what we deem to be their ‘bad taste’ in aesthetic matters – for example, we might think that an adult who exclusively watches *Rambo*-style action movies and declares more thoughtful films to be ‘pretentious’ is exhibiting traits such as closed-mindedness, a lack of sensitivity towards the greater complexities of ‘serious’ films and a lack of insight into the adolescent nature of the appeal of action movies, and judge him to be unsophisticated or immature. While this judgment of character isn't as negative or serious as the judgment we would make of someone who is brutish or sadistically cruel, it doesn't seem *necessarily* less serious than judging someone for being stingy or arrogant.

A final point of Goldie's that seems both correct and an important consideration for a virtue approach to aesthetics relates to his argument for the way in which artistic activity is important

for human well-being. Developing his earlier claim that art is valuable for human flourishing because it “can appeal to, and reveal, our shared experiences and our shared emotional responses to those experiences” (VTA 386), he notes that artistic activity involves what he calls ‘emotional sharing’ over and above the way that contemplative activity in general can lead to an increase in ethical awareness by leading to a greater understanding of oneself and one’s world, as his example of the benefits of contemplating Picasso’s *Guernica* highlights (HWB 192). Emotional sharing, he writes, “arises where two or more people experience an emotion of a certain kind, directed to a particular shared object or to a shared kind of object, and those people are aware that they are experiencing the same emotion towards the same object” (HWB 192), and he claims that this is unique to artistic activity and experience. His support for this uniqueness claim is to say that unlike “contemplative intellectual activity” involving, for example, “a shared feeling of amazement at the subtlety of a Pythagorean theorem, or a shared wonder at the complexity of a double helix ... [art] can reach out to the full gamut of human experience and human emotion, to everything that is part of the human condition, not just our rational nature” (HWB 193).

While the ability of art to express a person’s emotions, as well as ideas, in a form that allows others to register and become aware of them would certainly seem to be an important component of a full, flourishing life given that humans are emotional as well as rational beings, Goldie’s claim that emotional sharing is *unique* to art seems unwarranted. After all, watching a sporting event or the results of an election can also lead to several people experiencing a shared emotion in response to the same object, and being aware that this is going on, but these are not artistic activities. Moreover, history, psychology and philosophy can all cover the “full gamut of human experience” in their various ways. Thus, his uniqueness claim fails without a further explanation of how shared experiences of artworks differ from these other experiences, which would involve

appealing to a theory of art that would account for this distinctiveness. Scruton's notion of art as providing its audience with 'knowledge-what' in the sense of knowing what it is like to feel the emotion being expressed would go some way towards accounting for this; as will be apparent from Chapter III, Collingwood's theory of art can provide the support that Goldie needs here.

## **1.5 KIERAN AND LOPES ON VIRTUE AESTHETICS**

Along with Goldie, Dominic Lopes and Matthew Kieran are the contemporary aestheticians most associated with the term virtue aesthetics. However, neither shares Aristotle's conception of a virtue, and neither one's approach involves the application or extension of a (neo-)Aristotelian virtue ethical model to aesthetic concerns, and so what each has written so far falls outside the strict scope of the two approaches of virtue aesthetics outlined above. Because of this, I will not explicate the positions advanced in their papers in as much detail as I have with Woodruff's and Goldie's; rather, I will mostly explain why what they are doing in their projects does not really fit with what I am doing in this thesis, but will still consider how their discussions of a different sense of 'virtue' in relation to art might inform the approach to virtue aesthetics I am taking.

### ***Kieran***

In his essay "The Vice of Snobbery: Aesthetic Knowledge, Justification and Virtue in Art Appreciation" (2010), Kieran's main concern is the justification of aesthetic judgments – i.e. whether or not one is "in a legitimate position to make aesthetic claims" (Kieran 245) – which is closer to what could be called 'aesthetic epistemology' than to normative aesthetics in the sense of a concern with better and worse ways of making and experiencing art. While the judgments in question may be normative, the concern with their justification is comparable to asking how we are justified in judging an act as compassionate or courageous, which wouldn't be a question for virtue ethics but would seem to fall instead under the scope of meta-ethics. Thus, Kieran's use of



the terms ‘virtue’ and ‘vice’ in relation to our activities of judging art would seem to be more analogous to their use within virtue epistemology rather than virtue ethics, and so his project is more aptly described as ‘virtue epistemology of beliefs about art’ than virtue aesthetics proper.

Rightly noting that on a virtue approach, the motives one has for acting, feeling or believing will matter more than just whether the action, feeling or belief is correct (Kieran 254), Kieran characterizes snobbery as “appreciation and judgment driven by reasons which are external to appreciation proper – in particular, for the sake of elevating [one’s] status” (Kieran 244). He considers this a vice since a disposition towards judging artworks based on non-aesthetic motivations such as reputation or status would call into question the justification of such a judgment, although he admits that such a judgment might still be correct; a snob about jazz might approve of and listen to genuinely good music, but for the wrong reasons.

If ‘snobbery’ is a disposition to claim that one likes or values artworks for reasons other than actually liking or valuing them, it does not clearly pinpoint a *distinctly aesthetic* vice. Rather, it seems to be an art-related instance of the general vice of dishonesty. The fact that dishonesty about one’s motivations for a judgment undermines a person’s justification for that judgment could be accounted for by saying that this is how dishonesty functions in its capacity as an *epistemic* vice, and that it does so for non-art-related examples as well. For instance, a ‘wannabe’ sports fan would be less justified in proclaiming the greatness of the local team if he does so to fit in with the crowd rather than out of a genuine interest in and understanding of sports, while someone who has experience in the sport and who can judge the quality of a player’s performance would be more justified in making the same judgment.

Moreover, it is not clear what virtue snobbery is either an excess or a deficiency of, or is opposed to, other than ‘being a good spectator’ – but, as I argue above, this is not a candidate for

an aesthetic virtue any more than ‘being a good family member’ is for an ethical virtue. If Kieran understands a vice as merely a trait or disposition that negatively affects someone in some capacity, it seems trivial for him to point out that someone who engages in art for the wrong reasons is not a good aesthetic appreciator. It does not seem that snobbery as Kieran describes it is a distinctly *aesthetic* vice, nor does it seem that it is a *vice* in the Aristotelian sense.

### ***Lopes***

Whereas Woodruff and Goldie aim to develop a virtue aesthetics inspired by Aristotelian ethics, in “Virtues of Art: Good Taste” (2008) Lopes proposes a virtue theory to explain the value of art by appealing to Moore’s notion of intrinsic goods rather than Aristotle’s conception of *eudaimonia*. While at first glance Lopes could be seen as offering a Structural Approach, his neo-Moorean framework and non-Aristotelian understanding of virtue make his project more analogous to what Hursthouse calls ‘virtue theory’ as distinct from virtue ethics proper (Hursthouse 2005, 99-100). Nevertheless, Lopes’ account of good taste as a virtue is worth considering for how it might inform a neo-Aristotelian approach to virtue aesthetics.

Lopes’ main concern is to show that good taste is a virtue in order to solve what he calls “otherwise intractable problems in aesthetics” (Lopes 197), though he doesn’t specify exactly what these problems are. Taking a virtue to be a trait that is “intrinsically good for its possessor”, as opposed to an instrumentally valuable skill, Lopes asserts that “good taste is a virtue only if (v) Good taste is intrinsically good” (Lopes 197) and then sets about trying to prove (v). Citing Moore’s claim that “if a state of affairs, *p*, is intrinsically good, then a state of affairs that includes a pro-attitude to *p* is also intrinsically good” (Lopes 201), he argues that, if beautiful states of affairs are intrinsically valuable, an appreciation of beautiful states of affairs will also be intrinsically valuable when it is of these states of affairs for their own sake (Lopes, 201-02).

Defining ‘good taste’ as “a disposition for [appreciating] beautiful states of affairs” (Lopes 203), and arguing that a disposition is intrinsically valuable if it disposes one towards something that is itself intrinsically valuable, he concludes that (v) is true. Considering the possible objection that beautiful states of affairs are good only when experienced, Lopes appeals to Thomas Hurka’s claim that “if  $x$  is instrumentally good at promoting intrinsic good  $y$  then [appreciating]  $x$  for promoting  $y$  is intrinsically good” (Lopes 202; cf. Hurka 2001, 17). Thus, even if beautiful states of affairs are thought to be of instrumental value insofar as they are conducive to being experienced as beautiful, where such an experience is what has intrinsic value, it could be argued that a disposition to appreciate such states of affairs for the role they play in experiences of beauty is still intrinsically valuable.

In applying Moore’s and Hurka’s arguments concerning intrinsic value to the disposition to appreciate beauty, Lopes is offering a consequentialist, rather than a neo-Aristotelian or aretaic, conception of virtue. This conception relies on there being “a list of basic intrinsic goods such as pleasurable and beautiful states of affairs” (Lopes 201) in terms of which virtues are defined, i.e. as dispositions that promote their realization. However, as Christine Swanton (2001a) has argued, ‘value-centred’ theories such as Hurka’s that rely on “‘base-level’ goods or evils, or intrinsic values or disvalues, understood non-aretaically” (Swanton 2001a, 214) take virtues to be derivative of these ‘base-level’ or intrinsic goods, whereas the (neo-)Aristotelian conception of a virtue as an excellence of responsiveness takes virtues to be primary and, in its ‘strong’ form, holds that there are no non-aretaic goods. Rather than taking pleasure or beauty to be intrinsically good, a virtue ethicist (as opposed to a ‘virtue theorist’, as per Hursthouse) will consider them good only when “handled *well* – i.e., virtuously, where ‘handling’ covers behaviour, motivation, and emotional response” (Swanton 2001a, 216, original emphasis). Just as there can be bad or

inappropriate pleasures, e.g. taking pleasure in another's misfortune, there can be inappropriate or disvaluable uses of beauty; it may not be aesthetically good for a work of art expressing a painful emotion to be rendered beautifully if this would be at odds with the feeling expressed. Thus, Lopes' idea that beautiful states of affairs and the experience of them are *intrinsically* good would seem false unless 'beautiful state of affairs' were understood broadly, as going beyond instances of perceptual beauty. In this case, the 'state of affairs' of a painting that expresses traumatic feelings being made to look pretty would not be 'beautiful' on the whole – but 'beauty' here seems closer to appropriateness or fittingness than to Lopes' use of the term.

Since Lopes' understanding of virtue is 'value-centred' and consequentialist, insofar as it focuses on a disposition to promote something that is taken to be a basic good, it is not so different from the "traditional theories of taste" which he writes "parallel consequentialist theories of moral virtue" (Lopes 201), and it is unclear what his account offers that is new, apart from a change in vocabulary. It is also unclear why he thinks his account will provide a better solution to certain 'intractable problems' in aesthetics, when these problems likely seem 'intractable' *because of* the consequentialist focus of the traditional theories Lopes thinks are unable to solve them. This would suggest, *contra* Lopes, that if one thought a virtue-based approach would solve these problems, a non-consequentialist account such as the Aristotelian one would be more promising than one based on Moore or Hurka.

Despite this, Lopes argues that his neo-Moorean explanation of why 'good taste' is good contributes more "to understanding art and the aesthetic" than Goldie's neo-Aristotelian one (Lopes 206). However, his understanding of the neo-Aristotelian account of virtue is flawed, since he writes that it "makes human well-being the basic, intrinsic good" from which the value of the virtues is derived (Lopes 206), and so assumes that virtue ethicists also admit of base-level

goods, even though this goes against the virtue ethicist's rejection of the thesis of non-aretaic value. *Eudaimonia* isn't a 'basic intrinsic good' in Hurka's sense, since it isn't a state one achieves by doing things *well* but rather is identical with doing them well, where these things are typical of 'natural' human activities; i.e. things involving our nature as rational, socio-political animals. As such, it would be mistaken to think of it as a 'result' that can be achieved as a consequence of acting a certain way, and so should not be equated with pleasure or happiness.

Lopes sets up a false dichotomy between goods as *either* instrumental *or* intrinsic, and writes that a neo-Aristotelian would have to assert that art is either one or the other type of good, without considering aretaic good as a third option. Rather than a neo-Aristotelian *either* committing herself to the implausible claim that art and artistic activities are only instrumentally good, *or* claiming that they are intrinsically good, a neo-Aristotelian could assert that art is valuable only insofar as it is done *well*, i.e. through the exercise of certain dispositions such as insight, creativity, precision, etc. that involve excellence of responsiveness and, similarly, that engaging with art is only good insofar as it is done *well*. Thus, rather than accounting for "appreciative activities" by appealing "to a prior notion of beauty" as traditional theories do, or to "a conception of human well-being" as Lopes thinks is the extent of the neo-Aristotelian approach (Lopes 207-08), a virtue aesthetic approach could focus on these 'appreciative activities' and distinguish between better and worse ways of engaging in them. In this way, 'good taste' could be taken to be a matter of engaging with and relating to artworks *well* without grounding this in a prior notion of either beauty or well-being.

Admittedly, Goldie writes as if he takes human well-being to be a basic good, so Lopes' argument may still work against Goldie's virtue theory. To the extent that it does, it points out a way Goldie's account differs from a virtue approach based on an aretaic understanding of value

analogous to the virtue ethics of Swanton, Hursthouse and other neo-Aristotelians. However, even if Lopes is right about this, his two counterexamples against Goldie's emotional sharing argument both fail. The first involves Sol LeWitt's *Floor Plan #4*; he writes that, despite being "a strikingly beautiful cube grid" it has "practically no power to mediate emotional sharing" (Lopes 208). This assumes the sharing must be between artist and audience, but if it is strikingly beautiful it would seem to facilitate emotional sharing of the sort Goldie discusses, i.e. between audience members (*HWB* 192), so this counterexample fails. The second example is of Manet's *Olympia*, which Lopes writes involves emotional alienation by evoking feelings of shame as opposed to emotional sharing (Lopes 208). However, if shame is a feeling Manet was expressing by painting *Olympia*, this would seem to be a case of emotional sharing in Goldie's sense, as would a number of spectators feeling the same response to the painting; even though the feeling is one of potential discomfort or embarrassment, it seems no less a candidate for emotional sharing than a tragedy that evokes painful emotions, so this counterexample fails as well.

Given that Lopes cannot discount emotional sharing as a reason for taking art to be partly constitutive of human well-being, and since he grants that human well-being is intrinsically good (Lopes 207), it would seem that he offers no substantial reason why Goldie's account cannot do the work Lopes wants done. If Goldie's account is sufficient for solving the problems Lopes raises, especially given his agreement that well-being includes contemplation (Lopes 209 fn.8) and considering that aesthetic engagement is a form of contemplation (cf. Broadie 401), it is not clear why Lopes' approach is needed.

## **1.6 THE GENERAL SHAPE OF A VIRTUE APPROACH TO AESTHETICS**

The discussion in section 1.1 suggests that if there is a common normative factor between ethics and aesthetics, it is likely something along the lines of appropriateness or fittingness, and

that this is best captured by the Greek notion *kalon*, which overlaps ethical and aesthetic senses of goodness. Since Aristotle's ethics already involves this notion of *kalon* or fittingness, it would seem to provide the best framework for understanding aesthetic practices in terms of this common normative factor.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, as argued in section 1.2, a complete virtue aesthetics requires both a Moral-Centred Approach and a Structural Approach, since the former needs an account of what makes an artwork aesthetically good and the latter needs a way of explaining why good art matters, i.e. why aesthetic goodness is good.

In light of these conclusions, as well as my consideration and critique in sections 1.3 - 1.5 of the accounts offered by Woodruff, Goldie, Lopes and Kieran, 'virtue aesthetics proper' will:

- (i) contain both Structural and Moral-Centred approaches, outlining how aesthetic virtues are to be characterized and answering the question why art matters;
- (ii) involve both virtues of creation and of reception/spectatorship, and note where these overlap;
- (iii) focus on the aretaic element or the excellence of virtue, and have the aesthetic virtues concerned with the traits involved in making art *well* or in relating to/engaging with art *well*;
- (iv) in doing (iii), focus on the reasons and motives behind one's creation of or engagement with artworks;
- (v) see aesthetic virtues as doing more than just 'promoting' a good, even if that good is *eudaimonia*;

---

<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, if as Goldie says "the ethical is understood broadly, as concerned with how one should live" (*HWB* 190, fn. 17), *all* virtues, including those pertaining to aesthetic or intellectual activity, will be 'ethical' in a broad sense, since these activities, when engaged in, are part of how one is living.

- (vi) stay true to Aristotle's practical focus rather than remaining a purely theoretical account, and give some idea of how one could be a better artist, or how one could engage with art better as a spectator or audience member.

In Chapter IV I propose an outline for such a virtue aesthetic approach based on Collingwood's philosophy of art. Before doing so it will be necessary (*a*) to set out the basic structure of a general virtue approach as derived from the *Nicomachean Ethics* along with the work of some neo-Aristotelian writers on virtue, especially MacIntyre, to which I turn in the next chapter, and (*b*) to explicate Collingwood's theory of art, which will be the focus of Chapter III.



## 2. THE STRUCTURE OF A VIRTUE APPROACH

In order to develop a virtue approach to aesthetics it is necessary to start from an understanding of what is involved in a virtue-based approach in general. This chapter explicates Aristotle's understanding of virtue as found in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, focusing on key methodological and structural elements that should feature in any virtue approach analogous to, or inspired by, that of (neo-)Aristotelian virtue ethics. Section 2.1 provides an overview of Aristotle's notion of a virtue, while section 2.2 focuses in more depth on practical wisdom/*phronesis*, and of the importance of imagination/*phantasia* for practical wisdom and thus for virtue. In section 2.3 I turn to MacIntyre's notion of virtues internal to practices, which will be an important supplement to Aristotle for developing the structure of a virtue approach to aesthetics, given that art making and spectatorship are both practices. While a full explanation and analysis of Aristotle's ethics is beyond the scope of this thesis, I aim to cover enough of its central features to suggest, in section 2.4, the structure or skeleton of a virtue approach that can then be fleshed out in relation to art and aesthetic concerns.

### 2.1 ARISTOTLE'S ACCOUNT OF THE ETHICAL VIRTUES

In the first two books of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle makes two methodological points about his inquiry that are important to keep in mind when considering the structure of a virtue approach, since the structure of an account will inevitably be shaped by the method of inquiry within which it is developed. His first point is that one should not apply the same standards and expectations to ethical questions and their answers as one would apply in logic, mathematics or other pure sciences. He writes that "precision cannot be expected in the treatment of all subjects alike [...] when the subject and the basis of discussion consist of matters that hold good only as a

general rule, but not always, the conclusions reached must be of the same order [...] a well-schooled man is one who searches for that degree of precision in each kind of study which the nature of the subject at hand admits” (*NE* I.3 1094b13-25; cf. *NE* I.7 1098a27-29). Moreover, he insists in Book II that “there are no fixed data in matters concerning action and questions of what is beneficial, any more than there are in matters of health [...] the agent must consider on each different occasion what the situation demands” (*NE* II.2 1104a3-9), and writes in Book III that “perhaps the chief distinction of a man with high moral standards is his ability to see the truth in each particular moral question” (*NE* III.4 1113a32-33).

This first methodological point can be termed *particularism*<sup>25</sup> insofar as Aristotle is claiming that ethics, to the extent that it deals with actions and their normative status, cannot be codified or reduced to universal, context-independent rules or formulae that can be applied straightforwardly or mechanically to determine which actions are right or beneficial in a given situation – in other words, that what is appropriate to do in a given situation will always be particular to that situation, and so can vary from one situation to another, such that any general

---

<sup>25</sup> This term cannot be used without extensive qualification, since (i) whether Aristotle is a ‘particularist’ or a ‘generalist’ is a heavily debated issue among virtue ethicists, and (ii) what each position involves is not agreed upon by those in the debate. T. H. Irwin (2000), who holds a generalist interpretation of Aristotle, conceives the debate as a disagreement about whether particular perceptual judgments or general principles have normative priority, understanding particularism to be the position that moral principles are true to the extent that they summarize particular perceptual judgments of virtuous agents, and generalism to be the position that particular judgments are correct insofar as they conform to true general principles (Irwin 103-04). However, Rosalind Hursthouse (2006) understands generalism to be the view that a virtuous agent is able to act well because she has propositional knowledge that acting well is doing X (e.g. not lying, helping others in need, etc.), whereas she understands the opposing position – which she calls ‘perceptualism’ rather than particularism – to hold that a virtuous agent is able to act well, not due to any propositional knowledge, i.e. of moral principles, but to certain intellectual capacities or skills that allow her to have insight into, or ‘see’, what acting well would involve on a particular occasion (Hursthouse 2006, 284-85). Furthermore, Uri Leibowitz (2009, 2013) defines generalism as the view that exceptionless principles are necessary for explaining moral phenomena, and particularism as “a meta-theoretical commitment to the possibility of explaining moral phenomena ... without appealing to exceptionless moral principles” (Leibowitz 2013, 125). Since Aristotle’s comments, quoted above, show that he thinks it is possible to explain moral phenomena without appealing to exceptionless principles, and strongly suggest that there are no *exceptionless* principles that can determine appropriateness but only ‘rules of thumb’ that are true for the most part, with what is appropriate to do in a given situation being particular to that situation, i.e. context-sensitive, it seems clear that Aristotle is a particularist in Leibowitz’s sense of the term (and likely is on Hursthouse’s as well). This is the sense of particularism that I am claiming as a methodological principle – what Leibowitz calls a ‘meta-theoretical commitment’ – of Aristotle’s ethics, which could be further qualified as ‘soft particularism’ in contrast to the ‘hard particularism’ of, e.g., John McDowell (1998), which is a more contentious position and one that is beyond the scope of this thesis to defend. Since I don’t discuss McDowell’s specific version of particularism in any detail, I will continue using the term ‘particularism’ on the understanding that by it I mean ‘soft particularism’ in Leibowitz’s sense.

moral principle will “hold good as a general rule, but not always” (*NE* I.3 1094b22). Since virtue ethics, on the Aristotelian model, is a particularist account in this sense and so offers an alternative approach to ‘universalist’ moral theories such as deontology and utilitarianism, a virtue approach to another normative domain, such as aesthetics, should share this particularism in order to offer an alternative to traditional ‘universalist’ theories within that domain.

The second methodological point Aristotle insists upon at the beginning of the *Nicomachean Ethics* is that his ethics is not meant to be a merely abstract inquiry with purely conceptual results, but one that will have a practical payoff. As he writes, “the purpose of the present study is not, as it is in other inquiries, the attainment of theoretical knowledge: we are not conducting this inquiry in order to know what virtue is, but in order to become good, or else there would be no advantage in studying it” (*NE* II.2 1103b26-28). This points once again to a difference between what is an appropriate goal for an ontological inquiry (i.e. to arrive at knowledge of what X is – likely what Aristotle means by “other inquiries”) and a normative one (i.e. for a difference to be made by realizing X in practice); even the talk of “advantage” at the end of the quote points to an essentially practical concern. This second methodological point holds that, along with being particularist, virtue ethics – and again by extension a virtue approach to another normative area – is essentially *praxis-oriented* in its focus on problems that arise from, and solutions that tie back into, lived experience.<sup>26</sup>

### ***Eudaimonia and Goodness***

Keeping these two methodological principles in mind, we can turn to an examination of the underlying structure of Aristotle’s account of virtue, and of the ethical virtues in particular. Aristotle begins, not with a notion of moral rightness in the modern sense, but by raising the

---

<sup>26</sup> With this focus of Aristotle’s ethics clarified, the mismatch noted in section 1.3 between Woodruff’s aim of developing a virtue theory as a strategy to *define* art, and the Aristotelian framework he seeks to use to do this, should be even more apparent.

question of what the good is for human beings and what sort of life would count as a good human life. He notes that all human activity can be said to aim at some desired end, i.e. an end that is taken to be good (*NE* I.1 1094a1-2), and distinguishes between two sorts of ‘good’: (i) a provisional or instrumental good that is good *for something* in the sense that it is both an end at which one can aim in action and a means to a further end which is also held to be good, with the first end being considered good insofar as it leads to the second; and (ii) the good at which all ends ultimately aim, and which is not itself a means to any other end (*NE* II.2 1094a18-22). An example of a provisional good would be money, since it is *only* good as a means to obtaining other things that may themselves be good, but has no value itself apart from its use as a means. The candidate Aristotle considers for the good at which all others aim is happiness, not in the sense of temporary or physical pleasure but in terms of *eudaimonia* or *eupraxis*, i.e. having a ‘good spirit’, flourishing, or “living well and doing well” (*NE* I.4 1095a20). Since it would not make sense to ask *why* someone wanted to live well, and since ‘for the sake of living well’ would make sense as an answer for why someone desired any provisional good, Aristotle argues that it can be thought of as the ultimate end aimed at by our actions (*NE* I.7 1097a35-b6).

In order to avoid a consequentialist interpretation of Aristotle such as that which Hursthouse criticizes Rawls for making (Hursthouse 2005, 100; cf. Rawls 92, 557), it is important to note that the Greek *eupraxis* means ‘faring well’ in the sense of both ‘being well’ and ‘doing well’, and thus it would be a mistake to assume that someone might aim to ‘do well’ as a means to, or for the sake of the further aim of happiness, flourishing or being *eudaimon*. In other words, well-being/*eudaimonia* is not so much a state that is reached through doing things well/*eupraxis* as it is partly constituted by this, and so well-being should be thought of as virtually synonymous with doing (and feeling) well, or appropriately. While people can be mistaken about what actually

would be good to do in a situation, it seems plausible that someone who chooses to do a certain action on a particular occasion is acting under the assumption, even if it is not consciously posited, that the overall best life he could live would involve doing that action on that occasion.

If happiness or well-being is, as Aristotle puts it, “a certain activity of the soul in conformity with perfect virtue” (*NE* I.13 1102a5), i.e. excellence in feeling, reasoning, deliberating and performing certain activities, the questions ‘Which activities?’ and ‘Excellent according to what?’ must be answered for well-being to be understood. Since it is *human* well-being and the virtues or excellences *for a human* that are under discussion, it follows that the activities in question will be ones characteristic of human nature, and that a definition or understanding of humanity will provide the criteria for excellence. Different accounts of human nature will prioritize different activities and posit different standards of excellence, and so could result in competing virtue ethical theories. However, these differences would be primarily differences of content, with the common form of a virtue approach involving a focus on the excellent performance of those activities taken to be central to the nature, function or ‘form of life’ of the thing the good of which is under consideration.

Aristotle defines humans as *rational, socio-political animals*. We are animals in that we have both nutritive and appetitive faculties or levels of our souls,<sup>27</sup> the first of which we share with all living things, including plants, and the second we share, along with sense perception, with animals (*NE* I.7 1097b35-1098a3). We are by nature socio-political to the extent that we cannot exist apart from some sort of community of fellow humans (*NE* I.7 1097b11). What does set us apart from other animals is our rational faculty, which not only obeys rules of reason but also is able to conceive them (*NE* I.7 1098a3-4). For Aristotle, the ‘activities of the soul’ that constitute

---

<sup>27</sup> Aristotle uses ‘soul’ to mean something like the functions of the body and mind taken as a whole, rather than an immaterial or transcendent entity; cf. *De Anima* (hereafter *DA*), 415b9-15.

human well-being when performed excellently are not merely the activities of our rational faculties, but the activities of any level of the soul that can be performed in accordance with reason (cf. *DA* II.3 414a29-415a14).

Since our rational faculties cannot directly affect the activities of the nutritive or biological level of our being – e.g. we cannot develop physically by merely willing to – there are no virtues that relate to activities at this level, although there could be for deliberate behaviours that indirectly influence our physical state such as eating well, exercising, avoiding things that will lead to ill health, etc. Since our desires and what we do in pursuit of them can be controlled through reason to at least some extent, there will be virtues pertaining to the appetitive or desiderative level of our being, as well as virtues of our rational faculties. Aristotle distinguishes the latter as intellectual virtues and the former as ethical virtues or virtues of character; this can be understood broadly as the difference between (i) thinking well and (ii) acting or feeling in accordance with good thinking. This lets us answer the second question raised above by positing reason or rational reflection as setting the criteria for human excellence. Thus, when it comes to an activity we share with animals, such as eating or drinking, it is better for us to perform it in a ‘reasonable’ or reason-governed way, e.g. avoiding unhealthy eating (*NE* III.11 1119a17-18), since in doing so we are most fully realizing our capacities and potentials as human beings.

Aristotle takes both emotions and actions to fall within the realm of ethical consideration, with the ethical virtues relating to passions, appetites and desires, and actions done from them. However, he points out that people are not praised or blamed for feeling a certain emotion, but for *the way in which* they feel it (*NE* II.5 1105b32-34), and similarly draws a distinction between an action that is performed and *the way in which* the agent performs it. This distinction leads him to differentiate between a virtuous action and a virtuous person, such that an action is, e.g., self-

controlled if it is the kind of thing a self-controlled person would characteristically do. A person is self-controlled if she performs self-controlled acts *well*, and out of an entrenched habit or firm disposition of character (*NE* II.4 1105a32-34), with the person choosing to do them for their own sake and not merely as a way of attaining some other good, and doing so gladly or with pleasure (*NE* I.8 1099a17-22). Aristotle compares this to the difference between a grammatically correct piece of writing and the writing of a literate person, noting that a person can produce a grammatically correct piece of writing without necessarily being literate (*NE* II.4 1105a23-24). This reveals several important aspects of Aristotle's ethics: (i) it prioritizes character over action, focusing more on *how* someone acted or felt than *what* was done or felt; (ii) it is an aretaic approach, being concerned with excellence in the 'how'; (iii) it takes virtues to be prohairesis, with actions needing to be voluntary or deliberate in order for the agent's character to be praise- or blame-worthy (see also *NE* II.9 1109b30-35).<sup>28</sup>

### ***Virtue, 'The Mean' and Appropriateness***

Given the particularism of Aristotle's ethics, explained above as the position that there are no fixed rules in matters of action and feeling that could be codified into a set of universal laws, the use of the word 'right' in English translations of passages such as *NE* 1106b21-23 and 1109a27-29<sup>29</sup> may be misleading if read in light of modern philosophy's concern with moral rightness, since the Greek word in the original that corresponds to the word 'right' in the translations is *dei*, which means something closer to 'inevitable', 'necessary' or 'right and proper' than to the

<sup>28</sup> While there might seem to be a paradox here as to how an act can both be voluntary or chosen *and* stem from a fixed (or "firm and unchanging character"; *NE* 1105a34), but Aristotle would consider an act *caused by* a disposition of character, or *hexis*, to be voluntary if the agent was in some way responsible for having that disposition, i.e. having voluntarily performed the past actions that led to its development (see *NE* III.5 1113b30-1114a22). In a recent unpublished paper, Boris Hennig has argued against the notion that virtues are "inner states of agents that make them act in certain ways" (15-18), although Hennig notes that his is the minority view amongst contemporary virtue ethicists.

<sup>29</sup> *NE* 1106b21-23: "to experience all this [i.e. feelings] at the right time, toward the right objects, toward the right people, for the right reason, and in the right manner – that is the median and the best course, the course that is a mark of virtue"; *NE* 1109a27-29: "to do all this [feel anger or give money] to the right person, to the right extent, at the right time, for the right reason, and in the right way is no longer something easy that anyone can do. It is for this reason that good conduct is rare, praiseworthy, and noble". The translations of these passages into English by Rackham, Crisp, Ackrill and Irwin are very close to Ostwald's here.

modern notion of ‘morally right’. A literal, though inelegant, translation of *NE* 1106b21-23 would read “the when it should be and on what occasion and towards whom and for the sake of what, and in what way it should be, is that which is in the middle, and is what is best, which precisely is what belongs to virtue” while *NE* 1109a27-29 translates literally as “the to whom and how much and when and for the sake of what and in what way is no longer for everyone and easy; this is why the well-doing is also rare and praiseworthy and good”, with *kalon* being the word translated here as ‘good’.<sup>30</sup> Because of the uses of the words *dei* and *kalon* – the latter of which, as discussed in section 1.1, can be read as ‘proper’ or ‘fitting’ in a sense covering the ethical and the aesthetic – and because the former passage occurs immediately following the claim that to feel too much or too little of an emotion is not to feel it properly (*NE* II.6 1106a19-20), it makes sense to read ‘right’ as ‘appropriate’, making virtue a matter of feeling or doing something for an appropriate reason, in an appropriate manner, towards the appropriate objects or people, etc.

This reading allows for more than one way of being virtuous in a given situation rather than assuming a *single* right thing to do or feel, which fits Aristotle’s understanding of a virtue not as a ‘one-size-fits-all’ disposition to act in a determinate, pre-specifiable, context-independent way<sup>31</sup> but as a tendency to characteristically and reliably feel and act in accordance with the particulars of a situation. This reading is also in keeping with Aristotle’s characterization of virtue as aiming at the median or mean in an ‘area’ or ‘sphere of action’. In short, the idea behind Aristotle’s doctrine of the mean is that an appropriate or virtuous way of feeling or acting strikes a balance between excess and deficiency, both of which are representative of ‘vices’ or ways of *not* doing well. As he writes, “our condition in relation to anger is bad, if our anger is too violent

---

<sup>30</sup> Thanks go to Boris Hennig for providing these translations, and for his explanation of the Greek sense of *dei*.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. *NE* I.6 1096a28: “the good cannot be something universal, common to all cases, and single; for if it were, it would not be applicable in all categories, but only in one”.



or not violent enough, but if it is moderate, our condition is good; and similarly with our condition in relation to the other emotions” (*NE* II.5 1105b27-29).

Since Aristotle understands the virtue or excellence of a thing in light of its natural or proper function, it could be said that just as a horse is good *qua* riding animal to the extent that it moves neither too quickly (which would increase the chances of its rider being thrown) nor too slowly (i.e. slower than the rider could walk on her own), but at a pace between these extremes, a human being is good *qua* rational animal to the extent that she acts and feels in a ‘reasonable’ manner, i.e. with reason responding to what a given situation ‘calls for’, in the same way that the role of a riding animal ‘calls for’ a certain speed of movement.<sup>32</sup> However, since humans are not *solely* rational, but also have emotions, desires, biological needs and vulnerabilities, etc., it follows that one could act *too* rationally by prioritizing one’s intellectual faculty while ignoring or suppressing the affective or desiderative parts of one’s being. Thus, even Aristotle’s focus on ‘right reason’ should be understood in terms of a mean, or as ‘appropriate reason’ – that is, reason in balance with the other faculties and capacities that characteristically make up a human being, rather than dominating these other faculties.

As Aristotle points out, while the mean is a sort of average between too much and too little it is not an exact arithmetical mean between two fixed points in the way that five is the arithmetical mean between two and eight, since this would require the end points of excess and deficiency to be fixed, with a spectrum of objective, quantifiable degrees between them. However, the very idea of a maximal or minimal amount of anger, beyond which it was impossible to feel more or less, is inappropriate considering that emotions don’t admit of quantification in this way, but can only be discussed in comparison with other occurrences of that emotion, e.g. one instance of

---

<sup>32</sup> What a situation ‘calls for’ could also be described as what is appropriate to or fitting for that situation in respect of an end that is internal to it; e.g. it is appropriate or fitting for a horse to move at a certain pace when carrying a rider, given that the situation of being ridden as a riding animal has the internal end of successfully carrying the rider faster than his own pace.

feeling anger being more or less angry than another instance, without anything like ‘anger on a scale from one to ten’.

Rather than being an objectively fixed arithmetical mean, Aristotle writes that a virtue is a mean “in relation to us” (*NE* II.6 1106a28), which is to say that it is both relative to humanity, since a moderate amount of food for a human being differs from a moderate amount for an elephant or a hummingbird, and is also agent-relative, since the same amount of food could be too little for a professional athlete while being too much for a sedentary student. Additionally, the mean in matters of virtue is relative to the situation the agent is in and the purposes she has, since what is excessive in one situation or with regard to one purpose may be insufficient in another. Furthermore, Aristotle notes that, while the vices of excess and deficiency are more dissimilar to each other than they are to their mean, in some cases the mean will lie closer to one extreme than another, in the way that courage is closer to recklessness than to cowardice (*NE* II.8 1109a1-3), which is another reason why the mean cannot be taken arithmetically.

With the mean being understood not as a mathematical average but a mark of appropriateness, i.e. a qualitative rather than purely quantitative balance between deficiency and excess in an emotion or sphere of activity, each virtue of character can be associated with a certain emotion or kind of action. From the examples of virtues Aristotle gives, two general types can be seen. The first type involve moderation in respect of a single emotion or way of acting, such as gentleness as a mean between short-temperedness and apathy in respect to feelings of anger, or self-control as a mean between indulgence and insensitivity in respect to the pursuit of bodily pleasures. The second type involve a balancing of two emotions or action types, where each vice involves an excess of one and a deficiency of the other, such as courage as a mean between feelings of fear and confidence, with an excess in this sphere, i.e. recklessness,

involving too much confidence and not enough fear, and with a deficiency in this sphere, i.e. cowardice, involving too much fear and not enough confidence.<sup>33</sup> The qualitative considerations here of what count as ‘too much’ or ‘not enough’ should be understood as relative to the particular details of a given situation; for example, more confidence and less fear may be appropriate or excellent when one is defending one’s country or family in battle, but not as appropriate or excellent when one is committing a burglary (cf. *NE* III.6 1115a30, *NE* III.7 1116a13-14).

Curiously, given its prominence in Aristotle’s thought, neither Hursthouse’s nor Zagzebski’s formal definition of ‘virtue’ mentions anything about balance or a mean. For instance, Hursthouse defines a virtue as “a character trait a human being needs for *eudaimonia*, to flourish or live well” (Hursthouse 1999, 29). While this is in keeping with Aristotle’s eudaimonism, it is technically compatible both with such a character trait being ‘natural’ rather than acquired and with it causally determining the agent’s actions rather than it being prohairetic. It also does not specify that the exercise of the character trait is constituent of, and not a separate means to, human well-being and so it does not capture Aristotle’s notion of virtue in its entirety. The definition offered by Zagzebski, “a deep and enduring acquired excellence of a person, involving a characteristic motivation to produce a certain desired end and reliable success in bringing about that end” (Zagzebski 137), seems to account for more elements of Aristotle’s understanding of virtue. However, without including something like the doctrine of the mean, or specifying that the end in question must be proper or appropriate relative to the agent, the situation and to human flourishing, it doesn’t preclude the end in question from being morally dubious, and so would be technically compatible with, e.g., being a successful thief or torturer.

---

<sup>33</sup> See *NE* II.7 1108a5-9 and *NE* IV.5 1125b26-35 on gentleness, *NE* II.7 1107b4-8 and *NE* III.10 1117b25-1118b8 on self-control, and *NE* II.7 1107a34-1107b3 and *NE* III.6 1115a6-1115b5 on courage.

Since Hursthouse's and Zagzebski's definitions make explicit certain aspects of virtue that are underemphasized in Aristotle's own formal definition when read apart from its context in his ethics, a combination of the three would best encapsulate the full Aristotelian understanding of virtue. Such a synthesis might read: *a virtue is a deep, enduring trait of a person's character, involving choice and acquired through habituation, consisting in a disposition to aim at and reliably succeed in hitting the mean relative to that person with regard to a certain type of action or emotion, where hitting that mean involves excellence and is constitutive of human flourishing.* This definition accounts for all the essential elements of an ethical virtue discussed by Aristotle and developed by neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicists such as Hursthouse.

The inclusion here of the doctrine of the mean in the definition of virtue should only be taken as necessary for ethical virtue, since Aristotle makes it clear that when he says that virtue aims at the mean, he is "referring to moral virtue, for it is moral virtue that is concerned with emotions and actions, and it is in emotions and actions that excess, deficiency, and the [mean] are found" (*NE* II.6 1106b15-18). Thus, intellectual virtues may not aim at moderation, and so may not have corresponding vices of excess and deficiency but may instead have one vice of opposition. For example, if 'awareness' is an intellectual virtue, the only vice corresponding to it might be something like 'obliviousness', without any notion of an excessive amount of awareness.

While the notion of a virtue as a disposition to aim at a mean might give a better understanding of what sort of characteristic it is, there remains the question of how to judge what is appropriate, excessive or deficient for a given person in a given situation. Because "there are no fixed data in matters concerning action and questions of what is beneficial" (*NE* II.2 1104a3-4), this question cannot be answered by offering a set of rules or by defining appropriateness in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. As Hursthouse points out, the notion of a 'right'

action can only be defined on a virtue ethical account as “what a virtuous agent would characteristically ... do in the circumstances” (Hursthouse 1999, 28), though it is important to note that it does not imply that this is what *makes* an action right, and so it is not as circular as it initially might seem. Aristotle’s own answer is that the mean is “defined by a rational principle, such as a man of practical wisdom would use to determine it” (*NE* II.6 1107a1). Since practical wisdom is the faculty that allows appropriateness and inappropriateness to be determined in the absence of fixed rules or formulae, it is of central importance to ethical virtue, which is why Aristotle devotes Book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics* to an account of it.

## **2.2 PRACTICAL WISDOM, IMAGINATION AND THE UNITY OF THE VIRTUES**

Aristotle classifies practical wisdom/*phronesis* as an intellectual virtue, i.e. an excellence of the part of the soul involved in reasoning, and distinguishes between two functions of our rational faculties. The first is involved in contemplation of necessary truths, or things that could not be otherwise, at a theoretical level and leads to the kind of knowledge of universals Aristotle calls ‘scientific’, e.g. mathematical knowledge. The second is involved in deliberation or calculation about things that could be otherwise, including practical matters such as actions (*NE* VI.1 1139a6-13). He characterizes practical wisdom as the excellence of this second, calculative function and says it is “a truthful characteristic of acting rationally in matters good and bad for man” (*NE* VI.5 1140b4-5), with acting rationally here being a matter of “calculating well with respect to some worthwhile end” (*NE* VI.5 1140a30).

This leads to a distinction between mere skill at calculating, ‘or cleverness’, which Aristotle defines as “the power to perform those steps which are conducive to a goal we have set for ourselves and to attain that goal” (*NE* VI.12 1144a25), and virtuous or excellent calculation, which is the work of practical wisdom and which involves both successful deliberation about

actions *and* the goodness of the end at which this deliberation aims. Since Aristotle writes that cleverness is necessary for practical wisdom (*NE* VI.12 1144a29), and that “a man cannot have practical wisdom unless he is good” (*NE* VI.12 1144a37), it would seem that practical wisdom is the cleverness of a virtuous person who desires good things because of his virtue and can succeed in attaining them due to his cleverness. Both are combined in the phrase ‘right reason’, which Aristotle uses when discussing how the mean is determined, since this not only implies that the reasoning is right, in the sense of being correct – e.g. having a true belief that doing P will lead to Q<sup>34</sup> – but that it is also reasoning about the right things – e.g. having Q be a genuine good, one that leads to *eudaimonia*, and with P being a good way of achieving it, i.e. an example of acting *well* such that ‘achieving Q by P’ would be a component of a flourishing life.

The necessity of virtue for practical wisdom, and of practical wisdom for virtue, is expressed even more strongly when Aristotle writes that “it is impossible to be good in the full sense of the word without practical wisdom or to be a man of practical wisdom without moral excellence or virtue” (*NE* VI.13 1144b31-33). This contrasts people with ‘natural’ virtue – those who are disposed to certain kinds of behaviour, such as gentleness, courage, honesty, etc. without this disposition being acquired or prohairetic – and people with ‘full’ virtue, who have acquired it through experience and who are deliberately, rather than automatically, gentle, honest, etc. While Aristotle’s talk of the importance of having the right starting point for the acquisition of virtue suggests that people can be disposed to being gentle, courageous, etc. either by nature or by having these dispositions instilled by others, dispositions formed in these ways will not be enough for *full* virtue because they are not acquired from direct experience through which one sees for oneself which ways of acting are good.

---

<sup>34</sup> Aristotle’s claim that excellence in deliberation is the correctness of a *process* of thought (*NE* VI.9 1142b13, my emphasis) further emphasizes the aretaic aspect of ‘right reason’, since it is not a matter of simply having a true belief but of arriving at it through deliberating *well*, which distinguishes practical wisdom from ‘shrewd guessing’ (cf. *NE* VI.9 1142b3-4).

### ***Intuition, Comprehension, Discernment and Deliberation***

In “Practical Wisdom: A Mundane Account” (2006), Hursthouse argues that the contrast between the *phronimos* (i.e. the practically wise person) and a naturally virtuous person allows for a better understanding of *phronesis* than the contrast with a clever vicious person. She notes that a naturally virtuous but naïve person will be inclined to try to act virtuously but is likely to make a mistake. For example, a well-meaning child might decide it would be good to help out his parents by making breakfast, but will not realize his lack of cooking skills will likely result in his burning the food, making a mess of the kitchen, and otherwise being less helpful than desired. Practical wisdom goes beyond the general understanding a naturally virtuous person has of what is good (e.g. ‘it is good to help others’) to an understanding of a greater range of morally salient aspects of a given situation. While a naturally virtuous person’s reasoning process might be captured by a practical syllogism – e.g. (1) it is good to help others; (2) making someone breakfast is helpful to them; (3) it would be good to make my parents breakfast – a practically wise person would realize that while (1) may be correct, (2) is not necessarily true since making breakfast can be done in better or worse ways, and that doing it poorly may not count as genuine helping. Moreover, the practically wise person would have a realistic sense of his own ability to make breakfast well, and would only undertake to do so if he were aware that he knew what he was doing well enough to get it right, and thus to succeed in being helpful.

The question remains as to what exactly allows the *phronimos* to realize what she needs to in order to get things right. Hursthouse warns against assuming this to be primarily a form of propositional knowledge, as it would make practical wisdom in principle codifiable and so able to be learned second-hand instead of from experience (Hursthouse 2006, 284). Also, knowledge of this sort can’t fully account for how practical wisdom functions, since simply knowing *that*

cooking for someone will not necessarily be helpful does not enable a person to judge whether it would be helpful in a particular situation. Because practical wisdom involves ‘knowledge-how’, the real question is “what intellectual capacities does [the *phronimos*] have ... that enable him to avoid the mistakes in action to which [others] are prone” (Hursthouse 2006, 285) and the possession and employment of which turn ‘natural virtue’ into full virtue?

These capacities are intellectual virtues which could be considered jointly constitutive of the rational element of practical wisdom; they are *nous* (intuition), *sunesis* (comprehension), *gnōmē* (discernment) and *euboulia* (good deliberation). Aristotle views these capabilities as connected, both with each other and with practical wisdom itself, writing that “we attribute good sense, understanding, practical wisdom and intelligence [Ostwald’s translation of *nous*, though I prefer Hursthouse’s ‘intuition’] to the same persons, and in saying that they have good sense, (we imply) at the same time that they have a mature intelligence and that they are men of practical wisdom and understanding” (*NE* VI.11 1143a26-28).

*Nous* is a capacity by which the *phronimos* is able to ‘see’ what is appropriate for a given situation. Aristotle takes this to be a kind of perception, “not the kind with which (each of our five senses apprehends) its proper object, but the kind with which we perceive that in mathematics the triangle is the ultimate figure” (*NE* VI.8 1142a28).<sup>35</sup> This example of ‘seeing’ a mathematical truth suggests that Aristotle has in mind the mental capacity that is involved in ‘grasping’ something as being the case – for instance, what I would be referring to if I were to say to someone “I see what you mean” – as opposed to rationally inferring it. While this experience of ‘grasping’ a truth does not involve any literal sensation, Aristotle’s insistence that

---

<sup>35</sup> Cf. *DA* II.6 418a7-26. By a sense’s proper object, Aristotle means “that which cannot be perceived by any other sense” (*DA* II.6 418a11-12). The kind of perception Aristotle takes *nous* to involve seems to be what he calls ‘indirect perception’, which, from the example he gives – seeing that someone is the son of Diares (*DA* II.6 418a22) – would seem to be a kind of aspect perception, i.e. seeing something *as* a certain thing (e.g. as the son of Diares, where the property ‘being the son of...’ cannot be seen in the primary sense) or having a certain quality (seeing that someone resembles the son of Diares).



it is a kind of perception nonetheless could be taken as claiming it to be more akin to perception than reasoning, since what is ‘grasped’ seems to strike one with a certain immediacy.<sup>36</sup> If Aristotle thinks of practical *nous* as a perceptual or quasi-perceptual capacity possessed by those with practical wisdom – “an eye with which they can see correctly” (*NE* VI.11 1143b13) – it is not immediately clear how a person learns or develops this capacity since our perceptual abilities such as our eyesight, hearing, sense of smell, and so forth seem to be natural abilities with which we are born, not ones we learn. Hursthouse suggests that it is clearer how the other rational capacities connected with practical wisdom – *gnōmē*, *sunesis* and *euboulia* – are acquired and developed through experience, and argues that understanding these as well as *nous* are important for a full understanding of *phronesis*.

*Gnōmē*, or discernment,<sup>37</sup> is an ability to judge when something is fair or equitable, and so is the faculty involved in judging appropriateness, excess and deficiency since fairness and equity are examples of the mean aimed at by the virtue of justice (cf. *NE* V.10 1137b9-12), and since the ability to determine a mean must also involve the ability to determine what would fall short of, or overreach, this mean. Because what is excessive, deficient or appropriate can change from one situation to another, *gnōmē* would seem to be the faculty that allows one to judge each case on its own terms, and to see when a general ‘rule of thumb’ does not apply, i.e. when a situation presents an exception to ‘the rules’. This would let a practically wise person be aware when an action that would normally fall on the side of vice, such as running away usually counting as cowardice, is in fact appropriate or called for, e.g. when not running away would likely lead to an avoidable or needless death.

---

<sup>36</sup> Compare the experience of doing a Sudoku puzzle and (i) inferring that a certain number goes in a certain square because the positions of other numbers entails this, and (ii) suddenly ‘seeing’ a relationship in the numbers one had not yet noticed, even though there is no change in one’s visual sensations of the puzzle.

<sup>37</sup> Ostwald translates this as ‘good sense’, and Rackham as ‘consideration’; the latter combines both the notions of a judgment, i.e. one that is well-thought-out, and considerateness for others, i.e. a kind, sympathetic or fair judgment.

While it may not be clear how *nous* is learned from experience, it is easier to see how experience with exceptions to the general principles or rules one has been taught, especially the experience of seeing what does work in those situations and understanding why this is so, could make one more disposed to spot future exceptional cases and to be able to discern what is appropriate in the absence of the safety net provided by general or universal principles. It would seem from the above analysis that *gnōmē* is what primarily enables the *phronimos* to determine the mean in a situation, and so is the answer to the question posed above about what lets the *phronimos* realize what she needs to realize in order to act well in a situation. To return to the example above, while reasoning may lead to someone knowing that the rule of thumb ‘making someone breakfast is helpful to them’ is not universally or always true, it would be *gnōmē* that would enable them to discern whether or not it would be true in a particular set of circumstances, i.e. to judge when a given situation presents an exception to the general rules of thumb.

While *gnōmē* enables one to determine appropriateness in the absence of hard-and-fast rules, this presupposes *sunesis*, or the ability to comprehend or understand situations correctly. This capacity applies to both situations one experiences first-hand and those one encounters second-hand through another’s description. This could be thought of as interpreting or ‘picturing’ the situation accurately based on how one understands the particular details of the situation that are experienced or described, as well as how these details connect or relate to each other. Put in terms of ‘seeing the forest for the trees’, it would be a matter of getting an idea of the forest based on seeing the particular trees or hearing them described, with *sunesis* being the capacity to form this idea accurately. Since correctly judging what is appropriate in a particular situation requires one to have an accurate understanding of the situation, while being mistaken about a situation will likely lead to a mistake in judging the mean, *sunesis* is necessary for *gnōmē*.

*Gnōmē* and *sunesis* are thus necessary for *nous*, and so for practical wisdom, but are not sufficient, since they allow someone to be aware of, and thus – if their desire is correct, as determined by their natural or full virtue – to aim at the mean, they do not help someone know how to attain it. This is where *euboulia*, or the ability to deliberate well about how a desired end can best be attained, is necessary. *Euboulia* would seem to be a similar capacity to that which Aristotle refers to as ‘cleverness’ and says is a component of, but not sufficient for, practical wisdom, since both involve the capacity to know what to do in order to successfully attain one’s goal. Because the *euboulia* of someone with practical wisdom is excellence in deliberation not just in relation to attaining a goal, but in relation to successfully hitting the mean, it would seem to require the possession of *gnōmē*, just as *gnōmē* requires *sunesis*. If the above characterization of these capacities is accurate, it is fair to say that *sunesis* is necessary for *gnōmē*, which in turn is necessary for *euboulia*, which together with the others is necessary for *nous*, and that *nous*, together with natural or full virtue which provides the motivation to act towards what one perceives as being good or appropriate in a given situation, constitutes practical wisdom.<sup>38</sup>

### ***The Imagination’s Role in Practical Wisdom***

Though the capacities discussed above might be constitutive of practical wisdom, they are not the only mental faculties involved in its operation. An understanding of a further faculty, that of imagination/*phantasia*, is important both to account for the perceptual character of practical wisdom and in order to appreciate the compatibility of Aristotle’s ethics and Collingwood’s

---

<sup>38</sup> One worry with the above characterization is that it might seem to leave little role for *nous* to play with *gnōmē* enabling one to apprehend or grasp what is appropriate, i.e. the mean, and *euboulia* enabling one to know how to attain it. One response would be to try to show that *nous* just is *gnōmē* plus *euboulia*, but this would stray from Aristotle’s usage; cf. *NE* VI.11 1143b3-5 where *nous* is responsible for grasping major and minor premises in a practical syllogism. Given that Aristotle holds *nous* to play an important, if not central, role in the *phronimos*’s perceptual capacity to ‘see’ appropriate courses of action, a better answer might be to say that *nous* is what lets one see what is appropriate in ‘normal’ cases, e.g. what allows a person in danger to appear to us as being in need of help, and that *gnōmē* is what lets one see that a particular situation is an exception to the ‘norms’, e.g. that the person who looks to be in danger is merely pretending for some ulterior motive. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to fully work out the relation between *nous*, *euboulia* and *gnōmē*; it will suffice to allow for some degree of overlap between these concepts.

aesthetics. Just as *euboulia*, *gnōmē*, and *nous* have been shown to be dependent on *sunesis*, *sunesis* can be shown to be dependent on *phantasia*; thus, excellence of imagination is also necessarily possessed by anyone with practical wisdom. As Jana Noel (1999) notes, “*phronesis* and *phantasia* have not often been linked in interpretations of Aristotle’s works” (Noel 278), but her own work on practical wisdom’s application in the philosophy of education, and Jessica Moss’s book *Aristotle on the Apparent Good: Perception, Phantasia, Thought & Desire* (2012), explore this connection in order to add to the understanding of both concepts.

In *De Anima*, Aristotle characterizes the imagination as “the process by which we say that an image is presented to us” and argues that “it is one of those faculties or states of mind by which we judge and are either right or wrong” (*DA* III.3 428a1-4), thereby allowing imagination to be more or less accurate – and this implies that the capacity to imagine accurately (i.e. veridical *phantasia*) would, as the excellence of a mental faculty, be an intellectual virtue. Noel discusses three dimensions of *phantasia*: “(1) passive reception of after-images, (2) production of mental imagery and (3) *kritika* – drawing distinctions” (Noel 280). The second can be seen in Aristotle’s discussion of *phantasia* making it “possible to call up mental pictures, as those do who employ images in arranging their ideas under a mnemonic system” (*DA* III.3 427b19-21), with discernment, deliberation and judgment about such ‘pictures’ involving the third dimension, which would seem to involve the capacity for aspect perception. As Noel writes, “*phantasia* is the capability that we have not only to perceive an appearance, but to say that we see it *as* an appearance of a particular type ... Thus *phantasia* goes beyond just the perception of an image, to the interpretive power of the individual to see that object *as* something” (Noel 281).

Aristotle writes that “imagination always implies perception, and is itself implied by judgement” (*DA* III.3 427b16-17). The idea here seems to be similar to Kant’s contention that

objects can only be represented to thought through what he calls sensible intuitions, and that the imagination is the mental faculty that allows us to represent objects in the absence of direct perceptual experience of them (*CPR* 255-57 [B148-152]). Or, as Jessica Moss puts it (in relation to Aristotle rather than Kant), “[t]he proper objects of thought are universal, imperceptible essences, but just as such objects only exist in enmattered form, so we can only think about them as such: as abstractions from particular, material, perceptible objects. And this means that thought of the thinkables cannot be exercised without simultaneous perception of the perceptible [and so] thought requires quasi-perception, *phantasia*” (Moss 143).

Imagination is also involved in what David Wiggins (1980) calls “situational apperception” (Wiggins 232-33) which is provided by *sunesis*, since understanding a situation through perception of its particular details involves seeing these details as ‘adding up’ to form a complex whole, ‘the situation’, which is not itself something that is seen, heard or felt directly but is only grasped in understanding. One who exercises practical wisdom must not only be able to understand a situation by seeing particular details as being relevantly connected; she must also be able to envision the multiple possibilities for action available in that situation and their likely outcomes or consequences in order to judge or deliberate about which would be better or more appropriate to do. As Moss writes, “Aristotle holds that things appear good to us, just as things appear large or small, in virtue of ... *phantasia* [and] things falsely appear good to us when *phantasia* misrepresents the world, just as in cases of perceptual illusion” (Moss xii).

For example, in exercising the virtue of self-control when faced with a tasty-looking but unhealthy dessert, imagination would be required both to see the dessert *as* being tasty in the first place – which, being a judgment about a possible experience not yet realized, would seem to involve imagining eating it and having a positive affect towards this imagined scenario – and to

judge that eating it would not be the most appropriate thing to do by considering the likely effects of doing so on one's future health and well-being. Since none of these effects has happened when one is in the process of deliberating, but rather is a future possibility<sup>39</sup>, this judgment would also seem to involve imagining these consequences with a certain feeling accompanying these imaginings, in this case a negative one to counterbalance the positive one felt when imagining tasting the desert. This is likely why Aristotle says that practical wisdom is a "capacity of forethought in matters relating to [one's] own life" (*NE* VI.7 1141a27).

Because imagination is required to judge that it *would be* good to do X in a given situation where doing X can only be an object of judgment or deliberation within thought, it would seem to be involved not only in *sunesis* but also in *euboulia*, where determining which possible action's outcome would most successfully lead towards the end goal of *eudaimonia* involves exercising *euboulia* on the various possible future particulars envisioned by *phantasia*. In this way, imagination can also be seen to inform *gnōmē*, since an awareness of what would and would not aim at *eudaimonia* would seem to be important for determining which things are nearer to, or further from, the mean in a given situation, where this mean can be considered as the action that would be most conducive to attaining *eudaimonia*. Since it also accounts for the perceptual aspect of *nous* (where 'seeing what would be good to do' is a matter of envisioning a possible action and seeing it *as* good), imagination would seem to be involved in every aspect of *phronesis* and moreover, because it is also necessary for all these aspects, it could be said to be the essential foundation of it. Thus, if there is an intellectual virtue corresponding to excellence in imagination the *phronimos* will necessarily possess it, and if it can be learned or developed through experience, this will be one of the ways through which practical wisdom is developed.

---

<sup>39</sup> Cf. *NE* VI.9 1142b12: "deliberation deals with objects which remain to be determined".

### ***The (Limited) Unity of the Virtues***

There is a further problem related to the question of how one comes to have practical wisdom that is caused by Aristotle's notion of the unity of the virtues. In his discussion of the relation between practical wisdom and ethical virtue, he writes: "as soon as [a person] possesses this single virtue of practical wisdom, he will also possess all the rest [i.e. all the ethical or character virtues]" (*NE* VI.13 1145a2). This adds to the chicken-and-egg-like problem of how one comes to possess practical wisdom when this requires that she already possess ethical virtue, which in turn requires the possession of practical wisdom in order to distinguish full from natural virtue. Moreover, requiring a virtuous person to be virtuous in every respect not only sets the bar quite high, and so makes virtuous people extremely rare, but seems to go against common sense by entailing that one cannot be genuinely courageous without also being generous and honest.

The solution may lie in Neera Badhwar's (1996) thesis of the limited unity of the virtues, which holds: "(1) The existence of a virtue in a particular domain of a person's life does not imply the existence of that (or any other) virtue in any other domain [...] (2) The existence of virtue in one domain implies the absence of vice as well as of ignorance in most other domains [and] (3) Every virtue requires the others within the same domain" (Badhwar 308). On this understanding, the virtues are still interconnected, such that one cannot have genuine courage when it comes to speaking out against injustice or oppression without also being honest in what one says in one's critique and exercising the principle of charity when considering opposing views, while not requiring the person who is courageous in this way also to have a firm disposition to be courageous with regard to physical danger.

Holding the virtues to be interdependent in this way while allowing for them to be independent between 'domains' or areas of life is intuitively plausible, and also finds support in

Aristotle, considering that he allows for someone to have practical wisdom “in a particular respect” rather than “in an unqualified sense” (*NE* VI.5 1140a28-32). Allowing practical wisdom to be limited to a certain domain or area of life, rather than requiring someone with practical wisdom to be disposed to aim at and hit the mean in every area, makes it easier to see how someone might acquire practical wisdom and ethical virtue, with both being had ‘in a particular respect’. One would need to have the right ‘starting point’, either through natural virtue or habits inculcated in childhood (cf. *NE* II.1 1103b23-25), so that one is disposed to feel appropriately in one’s emotional responses. This disposition would then shape the experiences one has, including disposing one to pay extra attention to experiences involving exceptions to general principles due to a desire to be appropriately attuned to future situations, so that gaining extensive experience in a particular domain or area will make it more likely to lead to the development of intellectual virtues necessary for, and partly constitutive of, practical wisdom – and that the development of these virtues in a person who is already well-disposed through natural virtue or inculcation could lead to these habits becoming virtues in the full sense, but with this person’s virtue being limited to operating within the domain of the experiences in question.

### **2.3 MACINTYRE ON VIRTUES AND PRACTICES**

What Badhwar means by a ‘domain’ of life becomes clearer when understood in light of Alasdair MacIntyre’s notion of virtues internal to practices. Moreover, this idea of MacIntyre’s offers a way to get from Aristotle’s broad conception of the virtues of character, which offer an answer to the question of what counts as an overall good life for a human, to a virtue approach to aesthetics, which will be narrower in scope insofar as it aims to offer answers to the questions of what count as good artistic creation and good spectatorship. Since art making and spectatorship are practices within people’s lives rather than forms of life themselves, the framework on which



a virtue approach to aesthetics (or to any other practice, e.g. healthcare or education) is built must be modified somewhat from Aristotle's broader framework, while staying true to the core structure of his ethics, and supplementing Aristotle with MacIntyre allows for this.

In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre considers the traits that different thinkers have counted as virtues at different times and in different cultures, asking whether there is "a unitary core concept of the virtues" (AV 186) to be seen among these varying accounts. He notes that they all involve a certain conception of "what any one fulfilling such-and-such a role ought to do," which he says "is prior to the concept of a virtue," and contends that "the latter concept has application only via the former" (AV 184). This suggests that most virtues are internal to a practice, since the idea of fulfilling a role makes sense only in relation to a practice containing that role as one of its elements, in the way the practice of medicine contains the roles of doctor, nurse and patient, the practice of education contains the roles of teacher and student, etc.

While MacIntyre writes that, for Aristotle, "matters are very different" given his conception of virtues as "attach[ing] not to men as inhabiting social roles, but to man as such" (AV 184), it could be argued that Aristotle takes being human (a rational, socio-political animal) as a role within the practice of life in general, though this construes both 'role' and 'practice' quite broadly. That Aristotle's idea of human life can be plausibly taken to be a 'practice' is supported by the fact that he defines human nature in terms of what it is characteristic for human beings to *do* rather than *be*, and so we can say that being human is something that is done or 'enacted'. Further to this point, MacIntyre notes that the idea of "the narrative order of a single human life" that grounds Aristotle's account of a good life for a human presupposes the idea of a practice (AV 187), so even if it is too much of a stretch to count living itself as a practice, the idea of 'life for a human being' still importantly depends on the notion of a practice and so is not entirely

separable from it. However, this construal is still too broad for the sense in which MacIntyre conceived of a practice.

MacIntyre defines a practice as “any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity” (AV 187). He distinguishes goods that are internal to a practice from those that are external by noting the latter are only contingently connected to the activity involved in that practice, and that they can be achieved via means other than engaging in that practice, whereas the former are inherently connected to the practice such that they can only be defined in terms of it, are only achieved by engaging in it, and “can only be identified and recognized by the experience of participating in the practice in question” (AV 188-89).

He illustrates this point with the example of the practice of portrait painting, noting that the money or prestige a painter might acquire due to her skill would be external to the practice itself, and in principle could be acquired without engaging in this practice *well* (e.g. through forgery), whereas the internal good consisting in the ability to reveal the ‘inner’ character of a person in the depiction of that person’s ‘outer’ appearance, and the accompanying ability of close attention to detail and insight into how external forms can be expressive of ‘inner’ states,<sup>40</sup> cannot be realized apart from participation in this practice (AV 189). As he writes, “what the artist discovers in portrait painting – *and what is true of portrait painting is true of the practice of the fine arts in general* – is the good of a certain kind of life” (AV 190, my emphasis), as opposed to the external goods of money and fame which are not the goods of any one *kind* of life. From this example, as well as his other remarks concerning musicians and artists, it is clear that

---

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Hegel on art’s potential to reveal “the spiritual in a sensuous way”, i.e. through external form (Hegel 1975, 433-34).

MacIntyre's understanding of a practice, and of virtue as a matter of fulfilling a role well within such a practice, is compatible with a virtue-based approach to aesthetics.

Only after defining his notions of a practice and of internal and external goods, and noting that different accounts of virtue all involve the notion of a practice and the internal goods that may be achieved by engaging in it well does MacIntyre offer a definition of virtues in light of these notions. "A virtue," he writes, "is an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods" (AV 191). This definition does not explicitly differentiate between lack of virtue and vice, but, since lack of virtue is already thought sufficient to prevent the realization of the goods internal to a practice, a vice might be characterized as a trait that would not only make this realization unlikely in a particular instance but would also make it even more difficult to acquire the relevant virtues. For example, a disposition of a painter to feel resentful upon failing to sell her paintings will stand in the way of her getting an initial sense of the satisfaction that comes from painting well regardless of whether one makes money from it, and so would make it more difficult for her to come to see the inherent value that painting has to offer.

On this understanding a vice, as a disposition of character, would be an 'internal' barrier to realizing the goods internal to a practice in a way that a lack of virtue would not, since a 'lack' is not anything that can be 'in' one's character. Similarly, the goods that are internal to a practice ultimately can be considered to be 'internal' to the practitioner, since they involve the excellence of her capabilities, and so have to do with her becoming a better person in respect to the practice (e.g. better as a painter). MacIntyre's internal goods are aretaic and character-centred, as befitting a virtue approach inspired by Aristotle's, with the focus being on the kind of person the

practitioner is more than her outward accomplishments, although the former will be known through the latter, insofar as a person's character can be judged only from the things she does and the way in which she does them.

The aretaic component or concern with excellence is here both a matter of surpassing oneself by becoming better at the activities involved in a certain practice – and so, better at realizing its internal goods – and of surpassing the accomplishments that make up the history and tradition of that practice. One does so by doing things that advance the practice itself by opening up new possibilities within it that others can take up and themselves try to go beyond; in other words, making progress in a practice involves adding to its evolving history by succeeding in new ways and thereby creating new ways in which other practitioners can succeed. This seems to be what MacIntyre has in mind when he writes that, while external goods “are always some individual's property and possession ... such that the more someone has of them, the less there is for other people ... it is characteristic of [internal goods] that their achievement is a good for the whole community who participate in the practice” (AV 190-91).

### ***Oakley as a Supplement to MacIntyre***

In addition to sharing the aretaic and character-centred aspects of Aristotle's conception of virtue, MacIntyre's notion of practice-based virtues shares its teleological structure. As Justin Oakley notes in “Virtue Ethics and Bioethics” (2013), *eudaimonia* is taken by Aristotle to be the “overarching goal of a good human life” (Oakley 205), with ethical virtues being determined by their relation to this goal, i.e. by whether their exercise is partly constitutive of, and so disposes one to aim at and realize, *eudaimonia*. Similarly, a practice as MacIntyre understands it involves an overarching goal inherent to it, i.e. the “standards of excellence” he claims are “partially definitive of that form of activity” (AV 187), and in relation to which the traits that will count as

virtues of that practice are determined. Just as different theories of human nature will lead to different overarching goals and so a different set of virtues, different understandings of a practice will entail different goals being taken as ‘overarching’ for that practice. For example, different character traits will count as ‘athletic virtues’ depending on whether the goal of athletic activity is held to be winning, having fun, or something else. While this suggests a ‘top-down’ approach where virtues are defined by a presupposed goal, the goal in question is open to modification ‘from the bottom up’. If someone can exercise a trait initially supposed to be a virtue for a given practice while not engaging in that practice *well*, it would suggest that the conception of that practice’s overarching goal, according to which this trait was supposed to be a virtue, is incorrect or at least incomplete.

Oakley goes on to note that in order for a trait that disposes one to achieving goods internal to a practice to count as a *virtue* as opposed to a skill, the practice itself must be a component of a flourishing human life, or at least involve “a commitment to a key human good” that is necessary for such a life (Oakley 205-06). This provides an answer to the problem of ‘evil’ practices such as torture, or potentially neutral practices such as computer hacking. MacIntyre’s answer to this problem is to admit that there “*may* be practices ... which simply *are* evil” (AV 200, original emphasis), but to argue that his account entails neither that such practices should be condoned nor that “whatever flows from a virtue is right” (AV 200). “That the virtues ... *are* defined not in terms of good and right practices,” he writes, “but of practices, does not entail or imply that practices as actually carried through at particular times and places do not stand in need of moral criticism” (AV 200, original emphasis).

After admitting that he is offering “only a partial and first account” (AV 201), MacIntyre suggests that something like Aristotle’s notion of a good life for a human being may be needed

to complement it. Oakley takes up this thought to show how it can be applied by stipulating that a trait is a virtue of a practice only if that practice itself can be located within the concept of a *eudaimon* life, while still holding that a trait counting as a virtue within a certain practice might not be a virtue beyond that practice. As he puts it, “traits can count as virtues in professional life [read: in a practice], even if they are neutral – or even perhaps, if they are vices – in ordinary life, so long as they help the practitioner serve [a] good that is needed for humans to flourish” (Oakley 207). Thus, virtues can be relative to practices, with these practices being part of the context that determines what is right or appropriate in a particular situation. A disposition to refrain from passing judgment on harmful behaviour might count as a virtue within the practice of social work if it allowed practitioners to help young offenders in ways that made their eventual rehabilitation more likely, where such rehabilitation is conducive to the flourishing of those people and to the community as a whole, even though a disposition to overlook harmful behaviour may be a vice in ordinary life. This allows for an account of virtue that is both practice-based and *eudaimonist* by connecting the way in which someone engages in a certain practice with her overall character and general approach to engagement in the world, such that exercising a virtue within a practice will also be an instance of doing-well in the sense of flourishing, as can already be seen in Aristotle’s notion of well-being as well-doing or *eupraxis*.

Even if it is accepted that someone can have limited virtue with respect to a certain practice or area of life, there still remains the question of whether someone who is virtuous in this sense can be vicious, as opposed to lacking virtue or being weak-willed, in other areas of life or with respect to other practices. Badhwar and MacIntyre disagree here; Badhwar holds this to be impossible, or nearly so, with the second assertion in her thesis of the limited unity of virtue which states “[t]he existence of virtue in one domain implies the absence of vice ... in most other

domains” (Badhwar 308), whereas MacIntyre seems to see no necessary ‘carry-over’ of dispositions from one practice to another, or from a practice to life in general. However, since MacIntyre holds that justice, courage and honesty are necessarily virtues of any practice with internal goods realized through the observance of standards of excellence (AV 191) – and I would add *self-control* to this list of virtues that are necessary for any practice – Badhwar’s position is plausible at least in respect of these virtues. Someone who is *genuinely* honest within the context of a particular practice will be so prohairetically and through the possession of practical wisdom, at least in its limited form, and so will have an understanding of why it is appropriate to feel and act honestly, at least within the sphere of operation of that practice. While it might not be logically entailed, it seems unlikely that such a person will be *viciously* dishonest outside of that practice, as opposed to being dishonest from weakness of will or due to an incomplete or mistaken understanding of the relevant particulars. Thus, Badhwar’s claim that a person with the virtues in one domain cannot have full vices in others is defensible, even though her claim that such a person cannot also be ignorant in areas outside this domain may not be.

## **2.4 THE GENERAL STRUCTURE OF A NEO-ARISTOTELIAN VIRTUE APPROACH**

In light of the above discussion of Aristotle’s account of ethical virtue and practical wisdom, supplemented by ideas from contemporary virtue ethicists, especially MacIntyre’s connection of virtues with practices, the general structure underlying a virtue approach to X modeled after Aristotle’s ethics can be worked out, where X is a particular practice or domain of human life. Such an approach will offer an aretaic and character-centred account of the normative aspects of X, being primarily concerned with what makes someone a good practitioner of X. Since, on a virtue approach, a good or right action within a practice cannot be understood apart from the notion of a good practitioner, what is good or appropriate to do when engaging in the practice

cannot be codified or defined in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions in a way that would arrive at a list of hard-and-fast rules or principles that held true in all cases. Rather, the notion of ‘the right way to do X’ will be definable as what a good ‘X-er’ will characteristically do in the circumstances, and so can only be learned through observing the examples set by good X-ers, which suggests a ‘role-modelling’ theory of how one learns to be a good X-er oneself.

Such an approach will also be teleological, with X being partly defined in terms of an overarching goal without which it is not a practice in the proper sense but only a collection of associated activities; this goal will relate to the ‘overarching goal’ of human life, i.e. *eudaimonia*, in that the realization of this goal will be partly constitutive of, necessary for or highly conducive to human flourishing. This overarching goal will determine a range of goods internal to X, the attainment of which will be partly constitutive of this goal. The ‘X virtues’ (e.g. aesthetic virtues) will be those character traits that dispose a practitioner to aim at and succeed in attaining one or more of these internal goods, and so the exercise of an X virtue will itself be partly constitutive of an internal good and also of the overarching goal, and so will either be partly constitutive of, or conducive to, well-being or flourishing in general. In this respect, all X virtues will count as ethical virtues in a broad sense.

Moreover, the X virtues will be prohairetic dispositions to act and feel in ways appropriate to a particular situation that arises in the course of practicing X, with appropriateness here being determined by excellence in practical reasoning about that type of situation. These dispositions will be prohairetic only if the person in question is aware of, and is motivated to realize, the overarching goal of X and possesses at least limited practical wisdom, involving intuition (*nous*), understanding (*sunesis*), discernment (*gnōmē*) and the capacity to deliberate well (*euboulia*) in relation to matters within the scope of X. This will entail that such a person also possesses the



ability to imagine well, or veridically (i.e. apprehend a situation through the perception of particular details, and accurately ‘picture’ possibilities for action and their future outcomes) concerning matters relating to X, with all of these intellectual capacities being acquired through extensive experience with X.

Given this structure, the alternatives of a motivation-based theory (e.g. Woodruff’s) and a *eudaimonist* theory (e.g. Goldie’s) are shown not to be exhaustive, since a virtue approach to a practice will involve both a motivational component, insofar as the virtues involve the motivation to realize the goal of that practice, and a *eudaimonist* component insofar as this goal will be constitutive of, or conducive to, human flourishing in general. Similarly, Lopes’ focus on ‘basic’ goods can be seen to depart from this structure, since any goods that the virtues will aim at will be internal to the practice in question, attained through the aretaic exercise of the skills and abilities involved in performing this practice, and unrealizable through means other than engaging well in the practice. With this structure in place a virtue approach to aesthetics, i.e. the practices involved in creating and experiencing art, can be sketched out. The first step in working out such an approach will be to define the practice and its overarching goal, which will involve the assumption of a certain understanding or theory of art, just as Aristotle’s ethics assumes a certain theory of human nature. The following chapter will explicate Collingwood’s theory of art in order to show that it offers suitable grounds for such a virtue approach.

### 3. COLLINGWOOD'S PHILOSOPHY OF ART

In this chapter I explicate the key elements of Collingwood's later philosophy of art as found in *The Principles of Art*, which was written to replace his 1925 *Outlines of a Philosophy of Art* after a change of his mind on several important points (PA v).<sup>41</sup> *The Principles of Art* is structured in three parts: the first focuses on disambiguating the aesthetic sense of the word 'art' by distinguishing 'art proper' from other things that commonly get called 'art' but which are really forms of craft; the second lays out a theory of the imagination, and its role in conscious experience, in order to support the claim that art proper is imaginative expression; the third completes Collingwood's positive account of art proper<sup>42</sup> and argues for its importance for the moral and 'psychic' well-being of society. Section 3.1 will focus on Collingwood's distinction between art and craft, while section 3.2 will explain Collingwood's positive account of art, including his theories of expression and imagination, and section 3.3 will examine the normative elements of Collingwood's theory, especially his notion of the 'corruption of consciousness' and his remarks on the artist's role in relation to the community.

#### 3.1 DISTINGUISHING ART FROM CRAFT

Collingwood's aim in the *Principles* is to answer the question 'What is art?' (PA 1), although he does not mean to do so in the sense that contemporary analytic philosophers might expect, i.e.

---

<sup>41</sup> This change may have resulted from the influence on Collingwood's thought of the work of Bernard Bosanquet and William Temple. The differences between Collingwood's 1925 views and those of Bosanquet and Temple are discussed in Morigi 2001; not only are these views of Collingwood's importantly changed in his 1938 work, but Collingwood's revised position on these matters is in line with Bosanquet and Temple. Collingwood would have been familiar with Bosanquet's work, and Temple's *Mens Creatrix* was published in 1935, the timing of which suggests that it might have prompted the revision in Collingwood's thought and played a part in his desire to publish his second, more comprehensive book on the subject. Another possible source of Collingwood's change of mind is his writing of *An Essay on Philosophical Method* (1933), where he develops his notion of the overlap of classes which can be seen at work in the first third of the *Principles of Art*.

<sup>42</sup> Hereafter I will simply use the term 'art' to mean 'art proper' when discussing Collingwood's aesthetics. I will put quotes around the word when used in familiar expressions or in reference to another thinker's aesthetics where it means something other than 'art proper' in Collingwood's sense.

by providing necessary and sufficient conditions for something to count as ‘art’. Such a definition would be useful for *recognizing* instances of the thing one has defined, but as Collingwood points out, to begin to do this one must already have an idea of the things to which the term to be defined refers or applies, and so already be able to recognize instances of that term; as he puts it, “no one can even try to define a term until he has settled in his own mind a definite usage of it” (PA 2). To even ask the question ‘What is art?’ in a philosophical sense implies the questioner has something in mind that she means by ‘art’ and wants to come to understand it more fully.<sup>43</sup> “What we want to do,” Collingwood writes, “is to clarify and systematize ideas we already possess” (PA 1), and as he insists, this involves understanding things or ideas *relationally*, i.e. by knowing not just what they are when taken ‘on their own’ but knowing ‘how they stand’ with other things or ideas, which requires getting clear on these things as well. His first step is to disambiguate the ways the word ‘art’ is used in common parlance by drawing distinctions between the kinds of things typically called ‘art’ and noting which are, and which are not quite, what we have in mind when we speak of art in an *aesthetic* sense – what one might call ‘fine art’, i.e. that which marks the intuitive difference someone has in mind when speaking of, e.g., ‘films’ as opposed to ‘movies’. Thus, the real question Collingwood is asking when he asks ‘What is art?’ is: ‘Of the things that get called ‘art’, which are the proper objects for philosophical aesthetics?’

He notes that confusions arise when a word is used in either an obsolete or an analogical way, or as a courtesy title (PA 7-9). An obsolete use occurs when there is some difference between a word’s past and present usage, with the word’s past sense being retained and partly

---

<sup>43</sup> Compare the sense in which someone can ask “What is X?” as a philosophical (i.e. metaphysical, broadly speaking) question, and the sense “What is X?” has when asked by someone learning a language. The second sense of the question could be rendered “What does *the word* ‘X’ mean?” while the first sense could be rendered “What *is* X, really?” which, as per Collingwood’s point, presupposes knowing the (or at least *an*) answer to the question asked in the second sense.

conflated with its present sense. An example would be noting that the German term *Wissenschaft* translates as ‘science’ and inferring that, since history is labelled a ‘*Wissenschaft*’, it is a science in the same way that chemistry, physics or biology is. Analogical confusions arise when a word is applied to something outside one’s own (or outside a culture’s) common experience, for which one doesn’t have a distinct word, as a ‘closest approximation’ to something for which one does have a word. Cross-cultural or historical misunderstandings can arise in this way, as illustrated by Collingwood’s example of someone who insists that *triêrês* (trireme) was the Ancient Greek’s word for something like a ‘steamer’ and so cannot correctly understand passages that refer to triremes since what is described does not sound like a steam ship (A 64). Courtesy titles involve a word’s affective connotations affecting the way the word gets used descriptively, e.g. the word ‘progress’ is used as a courtesy title when its connotations of positive advancement make a proposed change seem more beneficial than it may in fact be.

The main target of Collingwood’s disambiguation is what he calls the technical theory of art, which views art as a type of craft and takes artists to be craftspeople, and which is based on an obsolete sense of art deriving from the Latin *ars*, itself a version of the Ancient Greek word *technē*. His contention is that many contemporary theories of art are actually theories of craft, and so miss the point of what they are supposed to be talking about by conflating ‘art’ in the aesthetic sense with notions more properly belonging to craft. However, Collingwood argues, when the characteristic features of craft, and of this means-end relationship, are worked out, it can be seen that they are not necessarily shared by all works of art.

Collingwood lists the following features as being characteristic of works of craft: (a) crafting involves the application of a fixed process or technique, where the crafted object is the end to which this process/technique is a means; (b) craft objects are made to function instrumentally,

being themselves means to some end of their maker's or user's; (c) their making involves distinct planning and execution stages, with the end being "preconceived or thought out before being arrived at" (PA 15), and with the planner's idea of this end being precise; (d) there is a distinction between means and ends, the former being "passed through or traversed in order to reach the end, and [being] left behind when the end is reached" (PA 15), and with the idea of the end preceding the idea of the means in the planning stage and the execution of the means preceding the attainment of the end in the execution stage (PA 16); (e) there is a distinction between raw material and finished product, where the former is one concrete thing that gets transformed into another, i.e. the latter. This last distinction is similar to one between form and matter – in that case, the matter is the physical 'stuff' that subsists in, or is continuous between, the raw material and the finished product, whereas the form is what is changed in the transformation of the one into the other. Collingwood notes that he does not intend these various distinctions to be taken as a full set of necessary and sufficient conditions for craft, but insists that "where most of them are absent from a certain activity that activity is not a craft" (PA 17).

In his refutation of the technical theory of 'art', which holds that arts like poetry, painting, music, dance, sculpture, etc. are forms of craft and that artists are essentially craftspeople, Collingwood considers certain cases of artistic creation in light of the characteristic features of craft. Regarding the composition of a poem: (a) it is not clear that a poet applies a fixed, determinate process or technique, and while technique *might* be involved to the extent that the poet might decide to follow a certain rhyme scheme or poetic style (e.g. sonnet, villanelle, sestina), it *need not* be, and when it is involved it is not a means to the end of creating the poem in the same way that following a recipe or set of step-by-step instructions is a means to baking a cake, making a cabinet, etc. since merely choosing to follow a certain style or scheme does not

on its own bring the poet any closer to creating the poem; (b) the poem need not be created for the sake of any instrumental purpose, and not having a purpose or use does not make it any less of a work of art than a poem that does, e.g. one that is written in order to impress others or make them laugh; (c) it is not at all clear what the planning and execution stages could be, since if the poet ‘planned’ the poem in her head and then ‘executed’ it by reciting it or writing it down, the creation of the poem would occur entirely within this so-called planning stage, with the so-called execution being subsequent to the working-out of the poem – or, to put it another way, the poet can only have a precise idea of the poem once she has composed it, and so this is unlike a craftsman, e.g. a carpenter, who can have a precise idea of the cabinet she wants to build before it is built; (d) if there is no process or technique involved, and no ‘execution’ that is distinct from planning, there would not seem to be anything like ‘means’ by which the poet creates the poem in the way that a hammer, nails, etc. are means employed in building a cabinet, since a poet could compose a poem ‘in her head’; (e) there is no analogous distinction between raw materials and finished product, since even if ‘words’ or ‘language’ were thought to be the ‘raw materials’ with which the poet works, it is not the case that the poet chooses a certain instance of a word to use in the poem out of a finite amount of words in the way a carpenter chooses a certain piece of wood to use in a cabinet out of a finite amount of wood in the universe, nor is it the case that the poet takes a set of words or language in general and transforms them in the process of creating the poem. Thus, since art *need not* involve any of the features or distinctions characteristic of craft (though some works of art *may* involve certain ones),<sup>44</sup> art is not the same as craft and so the technical theory of ‘art’ is false.

---

<sup>44</sup> Since Collingwood has been misinterpreted as claiming that no work of craft could be a work of art, it is important to note that his point is not that works of art *never* involve these distinctions, but that *not every* such work does. His actual argument – works of craft involve these distinctions, not every work of art does, therefore art is not identical to craft – has been overlooked by many of his critics. See Ridley 1997b and Dilworth 1998 for discussions of these misreadings; see also Wollheim 1972, 1980.

The adoption and historical prominence of the technical theory of ‘art’ can be seen to involve a failure to fully distinguish the externalization of a work of art (e.g. the writing down or reciting of a poem) from its creation. In art forms such as sculpture or painting, where physical materials would seem to be more essential, a work’s creation may be coextensive with the artist’s shaping of these materials, such that an artist’s creation of a sculpture happens in and through her working of the stone, marble, clay, etc. This could very well lead somebody who considered only the physical working of these materials to think that these art forms were types of crafts. However, to do this would be to only account for one part of the whole process the artist is engaged in, and it would be a further mistake to assume that a poet’s writing down the lines she has thought of is analogous to the sculptor’s carving her stone. Rather than the *writing* of a poem being its creation, it would be more proper to think of the writing as the externalization or ‘publicizing’ of an instance of it. If this were not the case, one would have to hold the first written version of a particular poem to be the ‘real’ poem, or the first performance of a song to be the ‘real’ song, with subsequent instances being merely copies of this original. This would entail the implausible claim that no one can listen to a song *itself* other than at its first performance, but there is no justification for thinking this.

### ***Representation, Magic and Amusement***

After establishing a difference between art and craft, Collingwood examines three categories of activities and objects to which the word ‘art’ commonly gets applied – representations, ‘magic’ and amusement – and shows them to belong to craft rather than to art. The view that artworks are objects made to represent or resemble other things has been influenced by Plato and Aristotle, who both wrote of art in terms of *mimesis* or imitation. However, Collingwood argues that the typical reading of Plato’s theory of art, based on comments in Book X of the *Republic*

concerning artworks being deficient copies of instances of things, which are themselves copies of perfect forms (*Republic* 597d-599c), reveals only part of Plato's understanding of art. Since Plato specifies that the artworks to be censored in the ideal Republic are among those that are representational, it implies that he recognized a distinction between representational and non-representational art, and so did not hold art and representation to be synonymous (*PA* 46; cf. *Republic* 392d, 595a). Still, despite these typically unacknowledged nuances in Plato's thought, art and representation have been linked throughout much of the history of Western art, in part because of the view that Plato is thought to have held.

What Collingwood calls "literal representations" – created objects whose appearances correspond to those of another object, e.g. a realistic portrait or bust, or an actor's mimicking of a certain kind of body language typically associated with a certain emotion – are fairly clear cases of craft, since the object to be represented provides a prior end to which the artist can apply a technique as a means of reproducing its appearance in a given medium. The epitome of a literal representation, such as a photorealist painting like Chuck Close's 1968 *Self-Portrait*, demonstrates the competence or even technical excellence of its maker *qua* craftsman, but does not necessarily demonstrate that the maker is a good artist; a 'con artist' might be able to convincingly appear sad and desperate through applying the same techniques a stage actor might in order to convey those emotions, but this would not make him an artist in the aesthetic sense.

Collingwood considers two forms of representation that are more abstract, and which do not involve a full reproduction of a naturalistic appearance. The first form of abstract representation involves works that copy or reproduce only some of an object's features, where the result is not a 'realistic' or literal match appearance-wise, since at least some of the object's features will be missing. Collingwood gives the example of the spiral designs found in early Celtic art, which he



says could be the tracing of the patterns made by the movements of ritual dancers, and which might have evoked a similar dizzying or hypnotic response in viewers (*PA* 55); another example would be a drawing of a ‘smiley face’, which does not look like anyone’s actual head but which still represents a human face.

The second form of abstract representation, which Collingwood calls emotional representation, eschews perceptual resemblance and instead represents by evoking the kinds of feelings and reactions one has in response to the original object or occasion represented. Instrumental music can be representative in this way by evoking feelings associated with, e.g., a pastoral setting (‘Morning Mood’ from Grieg’s *Peer Gynt Suite*) or the hustle and bustle of downtown traffic (Mingus’ *Boogie Stop Shuffle*). Collingwood maintains that the difference between literal, partially abstract and emotional representation is one of degree and not of kind. The essence of representation, he argues, lies in the evoking of a response similar to that which one would have when encountering or experiencing whatever is being represented, with the perceptual resemblance of literal representation being a means to accomplish this and not itself the essence of representation (*PA* 57).

Collingwood sees the evocation of emotion as lying at the heart of ‘magic’ and amusement, many works of which are also representations in one of the above three senses. By ‘magic’ he means things made or done in order to evoke an emotion in an audience so that this emotion will discharge itself in the audience’s life beyond their experience of the magical work in a way that is practically or socially useful (*PA* 66-68). He uses the term ‘magic’ after urging readers to ignore its associations with stage illusions and fantastical powers, in part because he wishes to show how certain objects and activities involved in the rituals of so-called ‘primitive’ societies, e.g. war dances or rain-making rituals, are not poor attempts at science, which was the accepted

view in anthropology at the time (as in, e.g., Frazer 1922), but are sophisticated efforts to evoke useful emotions. Such rituals and objects are closer to art than science, although they are not art in an aesthetic sense but rather belong to craft. For example, Collingwood insists that cave paintings are called art only by analogy, and that to think that the people who made them back then were doing something along the lines of what ‘fine art’ painters are doing today would be to use the term ‘art’ mistakenly in an analogical sense, since cave paintings seem to have been to be used in rituals meant to boost morale, courage or adrenaline before hunting expeditions, and not presented to others as spectators for admiration or contemplation (*PA* 10).

Lest the reader think this kind of magic is found only in ‘primitive’ societies, Collingwood notes that many of the social rituals of contemporary Western culture, e.g. weddings, funerals, sporting events, etc., are meant to raise certain feelings in their participants or audiences that will carry over to have a desired effect on their practical actions, and that these rituals are no different in kind from a so-called ‘primitive’ war dance or fertility ritual. Similarly, works of advertising or propaganda, many of which use media commonly associated with art forms such as illustration, music, literature or cinema, are meant to serve the same function and so are magic rather than art. This would entail that literary or cinematic narratives intended to make the audience concerned about some social problem, e.g. an anti-war novel or a movie designed to elicit sympathy toward the poor or disabled, would not be works of art but rather magic, insofar as they were designed with a ‘utilitarian’ eye towards realizing this purpose.

Amusement or entertainment, to which ‘art’ gets applied as a courtesy title, currently is conflated with art far more frequently than are magic and representation. For Collingwood, every emotion has both an excitation and a discharge (*PA* 78), i.e. something that causes that emotion and some effect that is produced by it: an action, an involuntary muscular movement, a change in

one's thinking, etc. Both magic and amusement aim to excite an emotion, but whereas with magic this emotion is meant to be discharged in practical activity, with amusement the emotion is discharged within the course of the amusing experience and is not meant to carry over into the practical life of the audience (*PA* 78-79, 81). Aristotle's notion of *catharsis* could be an example of this, where feelings of fear and pity are evoked in the audience of a tragic drama in order for these same feelings to be purged within the course of the drama (cf. *PA* 98),<sup>45</sup> as would television sitcoms, horror films, and 'tear-jerking' romance novels, all of which involve the spectator consuming the work in order to feel the emotions it evokes, with the feeling of these emotions being sought for their own sake and not for any consequence that might follow from them. As well as works widely recognized as amusement, such as those listed above, one who goes to a 'fine art' gallery for the sake of getting pleasure from seeing beautiful things would be treating what may very well be works of art proper as objects of amusement while flattering themselves by thinking they were doing something more 'high-brow' (*PA* 90).

While Collingwood insists that works of craft such as representations, magical activities and amusing things are not really art, he is not implying that there is anything necessarily wrong or lesser about them. It would only follow that works of art are better than works of magic or amusement if 'art' was being used as a courtesy title, but Collingwood is clear about not taking it in such a way and so there is no snobbery in his saying, e.g., that works of popular entertainment are not art. In fact, he writes positively of certain uses of magic and, to a lesser extent, of amusement (to be discussed further in section 3.3). He writes positively about the 'folk art' of agricultural communities (*PA* 71-72, 101-02) and of rituals and ceremonies associated with patriotism and social life (*PA* 73-76), and explicitly endorses the importance of magic for human

---

<sup>45</sup> If the emotions that were purged within the course of the tragic play (or novel, or whatever) were ones the spectator already felt, and which hampered the spectator's engagement with practical life, and the work was designed to purge these emotions so that the spectator would not be hampered by them, then the cathartic work could be one of magic rather than amusement.

flourishing, writing that “magic is a necessity for every sort and condition of man, and is actually found in every healthy society” and characterizes a society where magic is devalued or ignored, which he feared was the case with Western civilization in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, as “a dying society” (*PA* 68-69; compare with Scruton’s and Spengler’s concerns, discussed above).

So far, this distinction between art and craft has focused on what art is *not* rather than what it *is*. Because Collingwood’s theory of art has been frequently misunderstood (especially in Wollheim 1972, 1980), it is important to clarify what he is *not* saying here before going on to consider what he does think art involves. Collingwood is not implying that a technique involving means directed towards an end is never involved in the creation of art, but only that this is not the ‘essence’ of art (cf. *PA* 26-27). Moreover, he does not mean to imply that the categories of representation, amusement, magic and art are mutually exclusive or refer to distinct kinds of objects. He clearly holds that art and craft can overlap,<sup>46</sup> writing that a representation, or “[a] building or cup, which is primarily an artifact or product of craft, may also be a work of art [but that] what makes it a work of art is different from what makes it an artifact” or a representation (*PA* 43). This implies that these categories refer not to objects but to *aspects* of them. As Aaron Ridley points out, the distinction is “between respects in which an object can be seen as a piece of craft, in the sense that it can be understood instrumentally, and respects in which it cannot,” and that “Collingwood doesn’t deny that works of art *can* be amusing, uplifting, fortifying or whatever, and can be so deliberately. His point is only that their success in performing this function is not what makes them works of art” (Ridley 1997a, 16).<sup>47</sup> Keeping this in mind we can turn to an explication of Collingwood’s positive account of art.

---

<sup>46</sup> See Collingwood’s *An Essay on Philosophical Method*, esp. pp. 28-31, for his view of the overlap of philosophical concepts, such that a distinction between concepts does not necessarily entail a difference in referents.

<sup>47</sup> The only categories that would be in some sense exclusive are magic and amusement, since these are defined by a difference in the way the evoked emotions are discharged (cf. *PA* 82). However, a work *intended* to be one could be *used* as the other, and a work could be intended to have a magical effect with regard to certain emotions while being amusing with regard to others.

### 3.2 ART PROPER, EXPRESSION AND IMAGINATION

After raising objections to theories that reduce art to craft, Collingwood notes that instead of ignoring such theories it would be better to seek to comprehend what those thinkers who held a technical theory of art got partly right, what they got wrong, and why they made the mistakes they did (*PA* 108). The fact that highly intelligent thinkers mistook one for the other points to the likelihood of some similarity between art and forms of craft such as magic and amusement. Collingwood's posits that, like magic and amusement, art involves emotions, although in a way that is not simply a matter of their evocation; art also involves making things, though not in the same way that physical 'raw' materials are made into a certain kind of object by a craftsman. From these two points of similarity, Collingwood raises two questions: 'What do artists do with emotions, if not evoke them?' and 'In what kind of making do artists engage, if not crafting?'

#### *Art as the Expression of Feeling*

In response to the first question, Collingwood writes that it is natural to speak of artists expressing emotions with their art, though what it is to express an emotion needs to be clarified. Expression is different from evocation for two reasons: a person who is expressing an emotion must actually feel (or, at least, have actually felt) it, whereas someone can evoke an emotion in another person without feeling it himself; more significantly for the purpose of distinguishing art from craft, to deliberately evoke an emotion in someone requires both knowing in advance what emotion one wants to evoke and having some idea of the means by which this can be done, but neither is necessary – nor, Collingwood suggests, possible – for expressing an emotion. "When a man is said to express emotion," Collingwood writes, "[a]t first, he is conscious of having an emotion, but not conscious of what this emotion is. All he is conscious of is a perturbation or excitement, which he feels going on within him, but of whose nature he is ignorant" (*PA* 109).

While expression in this sense is a deliberate process aimed at an end, i.e. conscious awareness of just what one is feeling, the exact nature of this end is not known in advance of the process; if it were, the process would be unnecessary. For example, one can try to remember a detail such as the number of people present at some past event one attended, knowing in advance only *that* there was a certain number, and knowing *what* this number is only once one has successfully remembered. Expressing emotions works in a similar way, Collingwood suggests, which is why “no appropriate means [for expressing] can be thought out in the light of our knowledge of [the emotion’s] special character,” and thus why expression is not a kind of craft but “an activity of which there can be no technique” (PA 111).

When one expresses an emotion, one becomes aware of what it is (and not just that one feels *something*). Collingwood writes that this changes the way in which the emotion is felt; one no longer feels at its mercy, so to speak, but feels in control of it to some extent. This is likely the kernel of truth behind the folk-wisdom that ‘talking about it’ can make someone feel better about something that is worrying or upsetting them, with talking being a medium of expression through which one works out, and so becomes more aware of, one’s feelings (PA 109-10). This is similar to catharsis insofar as they can both help to prevent negative emotions from having a detrimental effect in the course of one’s practical life. However, whereas in catharsis these emotions are discharged and so no longer felt, an expressed emotion is still felt while being brought more under one’s conscious control.

Expressing an emotion, in Collingwood’s sense, is not the same as describing nor displaying (what he calls ‘betraying’) one. In describing an emotion one puts a name to it, e.g. saying ‘I feel angry’, which characterizes it in general terms. However, the particular emotion one feels on a given occasion is not merely a general emotion – no one ever feels anger *in general* – but is

always an individual instance of a feeling to which such a term can apply in the way of having a ‘family resemblance’ to other feelings. Whereas describing generalizes, expressing an emotion individualizes it, i.e. accounts for its uniqueness and shows how it differs in quality from other similar emotions that might be described under the same name (PA 112). Thus, expression not only *need not* describe or name the emotion being expressed, but, if it is to be an accurate expression, it *should not*;<sup>48</sup> saying ‘Thanks a lot!’ in a sarcastic tone is far more expressive of disappointment or frustration than saying ‘I’m disappointed’ or ‘I’m frustrated’.

Just as a description lets someone know *that* one is feeling a certain kind of emotion, whereas expression gives someone an idea of *what it’s like* to feel this particular way, the distinction between displaying/‘betraying’ an emotion and expressing one can also be understood in terms of knowledge-that and knowledge-what. Displaying an emotion involves “exhibiting symptoms of it” (PA 121), e.g. growing pale, trembling and sweating betrays one’s fear. Such behaviour is often done automatically, before the emotion one feels is brought to consciousness awareness. Someone who deliberately does these things in order to show someone else that he feels angry, afraid, etc. is engaging in a form of craft: he is *representing* the emotion by choosing to perform these actions. This manner of representing an emotion by displaying behaviour characteristic of one who betrays that emotion is the basis of technical theories of acting.<sup>49</sup>

### ***Art as Imaginative Creation***

In response to the question ‘In what kind of making do artists engage?’, Collingwood writes that there are several common kinds of ‘making’ that do not typically involve any of the

---

<sup>48</sup> Consider how detrimental to the aesthetic effect of Eliot’s *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* (1917) any naming of the emotions expressed would be – for instance, if Eliot were to have used words like ‘insecurity’ or ‘self-doubt’ to describe the sentiment expressed by the repeated questions ‘Do I dare?’ and ‘How should I presume?’, where the repetition is itself part of the poem’s expressive character.

<sup>49</sup> Only general emotion-types can be represented in this way, which is likely why technical acting so easily falls into caricature or pantomime, with an actor broadly telegraphing an emotion of a certain kind so that spectators might get a general idea of the emotion-type being ‘signified’, but which doesn’t correspond to the way anyone ever feels a *particular* instance of that emotion.

characteristic features of craft – for instance, making a plan, producing a disturbance, creating demand for a product, etc. (*PA* 128), which are all done deliberately but which need not involve the employment of means directed to a pre-planned end (in the case of making a plan, this would require having a plan for how to make a plan, which is absurd), nor anything else ‘technical’. Someone can create a disturbance without planning to do so, and someone can make a plan, e.g. for what to buy at the grocery store, without necessarily involving any material aids (such as writing down a list). The things created here – the disturbance, demand or plan – are not physical objects but are nonetheless real, existing ‘in the heads’ of those who are disturbed or who feel the demand in the first two cases, and ‘in the head’ of the planner in the third case, and so this sort of creation resembles what a poet does when composing a poem in her head.

Collingwood uses the term ‘fabrication’ for the kind of making that is involved in craft, and reserves the word ‘creation’ for the sort of imaginative making that occurs with respect to art, and to things like plans, disturbances, etc. He argues that it is more natural to think of artists as creating works of art in this sense than it is to think of them as ‘fabricating’ them, though these situations could overlap such that the fabrication of a clay pot might coincide with the creation of a work of art in the medium of pottery. Because creation *can* be done in a person’s mind, whereas fabrication must involve physical materials, and because creation is different from reasoning, in which the ideas that are reasoned about must be known in advance, Collingwood concludes that it is an activity of the imagination, with a work of art being an act of imaginary creation. To avoid misunderstanding, he insists on a difference between the predicates ‘imaginary’ and ‘make-believe’. Something that is make-believe is by definition not real; a ‘make-believe house’ is necessarily not a house, although it might be something else, e.g. a cardboard box. However, something imagined is not necessarily real or unreal; I can imagine my



own house when I am away from it, and I can also imagine a house that is not real, such as a flying castle. If I imagine something I do not yet have any way of knowing, e.g. that someone walking towards me is dangerous, or that a letter is waiting for me at home, what I imagine could just as well be the case as not. Thus, when Collingwood claims a work of art proper is an imaginary creation, he is not claiming that it is unreal or necessarily separate from a physical embodiment such as a painted canvas or a dancer's physical movements.

The main points discussed above – the distinction between imagination and make-believe, and the potential overlap of art and craft such that something being an imaginary creation in some respects does not preclude it also being fabricated in others – should suffice to show that Collingwood's understanding of artworks as imaginary creations does not entail that he holds them to exist *only* 'in the head' in the sense of their being immaterial or purely 'ideal', although this has been the main point on which his theory has been misunderstood.<sup>50</sup> This misreading may in part be due to Collingwood's critics taking his statements about the creation of art as an imaginative activity out of context, either failing to understand them in the context of the theory of the imagination he develops in the second part of *The Principles of Art* or conflating this theory with early modern philosophical accounts of the mind that seem quaint or obsolete in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as those of Locke and Hume. For these reasons, it is necessary to explicate his theory of the imagination to ensure his idea of art as imaginative creation is properly understood.

### ***Collingwood's Theory of the Imagination***

Collingwood conceives of the imagination as the mental process that mediates between those of feeling and thinking. By 'feeling' he means both sensations and emotions as they are experienced on what he calls the psychical level, which are distinguishable by thought but which

---

<sup>50</sup> Wollheim, for example, characterizes Collingwood's theory as maintaining that artworks need never be physically embodied or externalized and that they exist *solely* as ideas within the minds of artists and spectators (Wollheim 1980, 36-37).

are always experienced together, with emotions being affective ‘charges’ or ‘colourings’ on sensations (*PA* 161).<sup>51</sup> This is the most immediate level of experience, where feelings are momentary, existing for a person only so long as they are felt and being in continual flux, such that what one feels at a given moment – a complex of sensations and emotions the combination of which he calls a ‘psychical field’ – is soon replaced by another psychical field, where any change in one of the sensations or emotions within this field results in a change to the field itself. Each feeling is unique, he contends, and “what we take for permanence or recurrence is not a sameness of feeling at different times but only a greater or less degree of resemblance between different feelings” (*PA* 159). While feeling at this level might seem to be passive, something undergone rather than done, Collingwood argues that feeling is something we do since it is a response on our part to stimuli (*PA* 196-97),<sup>52</sup> even if feeling is less active than other mental processes since we do not have as much control over the stimuli, and since we are less free in how we respond than we are in our thinking.

Collingwood holds that, as well as being more active, thinking contrasts with feeling in that thoughts are true or false while immediate feelings can never be mistaken; even in the case of an hallucination or illusion, it is something that is really felt, although someone can be mistaken in their thinking about what they feel or sense, e.g. seeing a stick halfway in water and thinking it is bent. Also, unlike feelings, the same thought can recur on more than one occasion or be thought by more than one person – for example, ‘two plus two is four’ is a single thought that several students in a math class can think at the same time, whereas each student will have a different

---

<sup>51</sup> That there are no emotions without a corresponding sensation on which it is the ‘charge’ is more plausible than the inverse assumption that there are no sensations without an emotional charge of some kind. While Collingwood does assume this, he admits it is only “probably true” and hard to verify (*PA* 162). The cogency of his overall theory of art does not rest on this assumption; it is sufficient for Collingwood’s purposes that at least some sensations are emotionally charged in such a way.

<sup>52</sup> With shades of Dewey and Merleau-Ponty, Collingwood writes: “sensation ... is on its bodily side a change arising within our own organism, and due to the energies of that organism itself. The afferent nerves through whose activity we feel a pressure on a finger-tip are not solid rods conveying that pressure itself to the brain; they are functioning in their own way as a special kind of living tissue; if they ceased to function in that way, no amount of pressure on the finger could give rise to a sensation” (*PA* 197).

sensation of the numbers as written on the blackboard or the equation as spoken by the teacher. Collingwood notes that much of our thinking concerns what we feel, specifically the relations between feelings; he calls this first order thinking ‘understanding’ or empirical thinking. Second order thinking, i.e. reasoning, concerns the relations between first-order thoughts and leads to logical or *a priori*, rather than empirical, knowledge (PA 165-67).

Construed in this way, feelings (i.e. sensations and emotions) are necessary for thinking, as thoughts are either about feelings or are about thoughts which are themselves about feelings. Thinking about a feeling involves relating or comparing it to other feelings, and so requires that we are able to have multiple feelings in mind at one time. However, since each feeling exists only while being felt, with one feeling ceasing to exist as soon as it is replaced by another, it is not clear how thinking can occur given only two mental processes. Thus, a third mental process by which we somehow ‘hold onto’ or perpetuate feelings after they have occurred in psychical experience is necessary for thought. This is where the imagination comes into play, though by this Collingwood means something more than just the ability to ‘picture’ things in one’s mind. Since he conceives imagining as being necessary for first-order thinking, which he says is the level of most of our thinking, imagination in Collingwood’s sense is much broader in scope than fantasizing or visualizing from memory – though these would be instances of imagining.

Just as we cannot be aware, through feeling, of a previous sensation while experiencing a present one, Collingwood writes that “mere feeling cannot even tell me what I *now* feel” (PA 222, my emphasis), since this would involve a comparison with other feelings. Thus, the most basic operation of the imagination is one of consciously attending to, and so becoming aware of, feelings as they occur. By focusing attention on a feeling in one’s immediate field of psychical experience, one is able not just to experience that feeling psychically, where one has a vague

sense of the presence of an indeterminate ‘something’, but to become aware of what it is. Once one has become conscious of what this something is, it can be conceived of, and so ‘held in mind’, after the immediate feeling is no longer part of one’s psychical field. The distinction between merely ‘receiving’ a feeling at the psychical level and actively attending to it can be thought of as the difference between seeing and *looking*, or hearing and *listening* (PA 203-04), i.e. between sensation or ‘mere sentience’ and *perception* or ‘consciousness’ in the sense of a process, i.e. as being aware of something, rather than as a metaphysical object (i.e. ‘my consciousness’). While it might seem odd to talk of perceiving and attending as kinds of imagining, this might come from the habit of conflating imagination and make-believe.

Activities such as making-believe, daydreaming and conceiving of possible future states of affairs presuppose an ability to remember previously experienced feelings, in keeping with the empiricist doctrine of these imaginative activities as involving new combinations of feelings one has come to know via experience (cf. Locke 16, 37-40). Moreover, memory presupposes prior conscious awareness or active perception of the thing remembered. Of the various sensations that make up one’s immediate psychical field, it does seem that one can only ‘hold in mind’ – i.e. continue to be aware of, or recall after a break in this continuity – things to which one has actively attended, with those sensations not attended to or consciously registered remaining outside one’s awareness in what Collingwood calls the “penumbra” of experience (PA 204), and so being unavailable to memory as literally unimaginable.

For example, if the radio is playing in my car but I am heavily distracted, I may not be consciously aware of the sounds coming from it though these are sounds within my psychical field which I register physiologically (or psychically) but not consciously. I may have a low-level awareness of there being *some* sound in my environment, and this will make a difference to

my overall conscious experience of that moment, even if this difference is also a ‘low-level’ one. This can be seen by the change in my experience when the radio suddenly goes silent; my attention being drawn to the fact that the radio is now *not* playing requires that my experience of the moment before included, on some level, the radio playing or else I would experience no change. If I ‘merely hear’ the sounds at this level they will be indeterminate: I will be aware that there are sounds, but will not be aware of what they are, and so will be unable to remember or repeat them even a short while later. For me to be able to do so requires me to actively listen to them rather than merely hear them. For Collingwood, the basic operation of the imagination, or ‘first order imagining’, is synonymous with active perception or conscious awareness, with the ‘second order’ being memory and the ‘third order’ involving making-believe, predicting, etc.<sup>53</sup>

Properly speaking, it cannot be a *feeling* that the mind thinks about or recalls, since feelings exist only in the moment they are felt and cannot recur afterwards; in remembering a song heard on the radio, one would not be re-experiencing the same sensory stimuli that were registered by the eardrums. What Collingwood is arguing is that conscious attention to a feeling changes or transforms it in some way, so it is no longer a *mere* feeling but something like a feeling, except for in its ability to endure or recur. Although Collingwood might seem to be positing something like Hume’s distinction between ‘impressions’ and ‘ideas’ (cf. Hume 1748, 316-17), whereas Hume conceived of these as mental objects differentiated in terms of their degree of force and liveliness, Collingwood is referring to different processes or ways of experiencing.

### ***The Imagination as a Process***

That Collingwood is talking about processes and not objects can be seen from his insistence that the analogy between ‘a perception’ of X and a picture of X is false, since in the latter case

---

<sup>53</sup> Collingwood does not himself distinguish between these ‘orders’ of imagining, though they follow from his account.

the picture and X each exist as distinct objects, whereas in the former the perception is not something “visibly present to us as [a body] we perceive” (PA 191). We do not ‘have’ a perception that we perceive; rather, ‘a perception’ just is an act of perceiving. That this is his meaning is also shown by his insistence that the difference between Hume’s ‘impressions’ and ‘ideas’ lies in the degree of control one has in the act of perceiving an impression versus conceiving an idea, with their difference in force or liveliness being “a distinction between our inability and our ability ... to control, excite, suppress, or modify our sensory experiences” and with an impression’s “force or liveliness [being] *a quality of the activity* which Hume calls perceiving it” (PA 184, my emphasis).

It is not the case, then, that sensory impressions have more of some property such as liveliness, but that we have less conscious control over the process of sensation than we do over the processes of imagination or thinking, and so talk of a perception or impression as a thing that forces itself upon us should be taken metaphorically. In his talk of consciousness transforming felt ‘sensa’ into ‘ideas of imagination’ (PA 215), Collingwood insists that Hume’s distinction should be taken as one between activities or processes rather than things, writing “[w]hen the light of consciousness falls on such *occupations*, they change their character; what was sentience becomes imagination” (PA 205, my emphasis), and that “[r]egarded as names for a certain kind or level of experience, the words consciousness and imagination are synonymous” (PA 215).

Despite their disagreement on other issues, Collingwood and Gilbert Ryle (2009) would seem to agree here. In discussing the imagination, Ryle – who is decidedly against the notion of ideas as mental entities – writes:

“imaging occurs, but images are not seen. I do have tunes running in my head, but no tunes are being heard, when I have them running there. True, a person picturing his nursery is, in a certain way, like that person seeing his nursery, but the similarity does not consist in his really looking at a real likeness of his nursery, but

in his really seeming to see his nursery itself, when he is not really seeing it. He is not being a spectator of a resemblance of his nursery, but he is resembling a spectator of his nursery” (Ryle 225).

If Collingwood is read as advocating a view of imagining similar to Ryle’s, which is consistent with his several comments on thinking, feeling and imagining as activities or ‘occupations’, his overall account of the imagination and its role in experience becomes more coherent than if read as more or less adopting the Early Modern/Humean picture of the mind and its ‘contents’.

Given that Collingwood takes consciousness and imagination to be synonymous processes, what he seems to have in mind by his talk of a conversion or transformation of felt sensations into ‘imagined images’ is a change in the processes by which a thing is experienced rather than a change in the object of these processes. On this reading, consciousness does not do something to an object of feeling in order to transform *it* into a different kind of object, i.e. an object of imagination. Rather, attending to a thing felt initially on the psychical level changes *the way in which* we experience it. Thus, Collingwood’s distinction between feeling and imagining is just the difference between physiologically registering sensory stimuli and consciously registering them, with the latter being a precondition of any thinking about them.<sup>54</sup>

### ***Imagination, Aspect Perception and Conceptualization***

For Collingwood, conscious perception or ‘first order’ imaginative awareness would seem to be equivalent to aspect perception, i.e. experiencing what one sees, hears, etc. *as being X*. This can be seen in his example of perceiving a matchbox as a three dimensional object based on a series of two dimensional sensations. Looking at the matchbox, he reports seeing only three sides facing him, but writes that he imagines the other three, the insides of the box, and the matches contained therein and so perceives (though does not strictly *sense*) it as a three dimensional

---

<sup>54</sup> This is the point Collingwood is making with his example (PA 140) of a scientific lecture being more than the mere noises the lecturer makes, but these noises heard as scientific thoughts, which involves the listener ‘reconstructing’ these thoughts in his or her head – i.e. comprehending how the noises are *meant*.

object having these features. Noting that Kant also insisted that imagination is necessary for understanding, Collingwood writes that “it is only so far as I imagine [the features not immediately present to sense] that I am aware of the matchbox as a solid body at all. A person who could really see, but could not imagine, would see not a solid world of bodies, but merely ... various colours, variously disposed” (*PA* 192). Imagining or perceiving always characterizes the thing imagined or perceived, in that we always imagine or perceive a thing *as* something, whereas merely feeling this thing does not. This relates to his remarks on expression; when he says that expression is *the process by which one becomes aware of what one feels*, what he is saying is that expression just is this characterizing activity of imagination.

While the imaginative characterization of something encountered through feeling must occur before it can be thought about – which is just to say that one must hear a noise *as* a certain sound before one can relate or compare it to other noises one has heard as sounds – a further level of characterization occurs through first-order thinking, i.e. understanding. This characterizing corresponds to what Collingwood calls describing or generalizing (*PA* 112), since it is not a matter of seeing a sensation as *a certain colour*, or of hearing a noise as *a certain sound*, but of thinking of a colour or sound as an instance of a general type – e.g. going from seeing a tile as having certain qualities of hue, saturation, brightness, etc. with each of these particular qualities combining to form the tile’s unique colour, to seeing the tile as, say, scarlet. This activity of thought, which could be called ‘conceptualization’, involves the application of a concept to a thing perceived, and so could be considered a further level of characterization beyond that involved in imagination; in other words, seeing a certain thing, ‘this X’, as being of a certain kind, such that ‘this X is Y’ – for example, seeing the tile as being coloured in a certain way, then thinking that this colour is scarlet, and then seeing the tile as scarlet.



Conceptualizing something one has perceived, i.e. thinking of it as a thing of a certain kind, is necessary for understanding and reasoning. However, the danger with conceptualizing is that it generalizes, and so one can fail to apprehend, *in its particularity*, something experienced through feeling, treating it not as a certain thing but as a thing of a certain kind by jumping too quickly from feeling to thinking. This is what John Dewey (1934) calls ‘recognition’ in contrast to perception. “In recognition,” he writes, “there is the beginning of an act of perception. But this beginning is not allowed to serve the development of a full perception of the thing recognized” (Dewey 54). For instance, if I see a dog in the pound and recognize it as being of a certain breed I can start thinking of it and responding to it in general terms, which I can use as an excuse not to continue to perceive it in its particularity, i.e. to be satisfied with taking it as being a kind of dog, rather than seeing it as the individual creature it is.

While recognition can be useful in that it allow for quick responses when these are called for, it gets in the way of full perception of individual things in their particularity. Recognizing a dog as a certain breed can be an excuse for me to stop attending to it perceptually, especially if there is a purpose served by my recognition, e.g. if I am looking to buy a dog of a certain breed. A syllogism corresponding to the thought process of someone who moves too quickly from perception to recognition (e.g. ‘I want to buy a poodle; this dog is a poodle; I will buy this dog’) will treat ‘this dog’ as equivalent to ‘poodle in general’ rather than the particular creature it is. One who spends more time observing a particular dog as an individual rather than as a thing of a certain kind is more likely to form a better understanding of that dog than someone who stops at recognition and assumes that one instance of a certain kind will do just as well as any other.

If this is combined with the above idea that all perception is essentially aspect perception, it would follow that the more fully one perceives something one feels or senses before forming a

particular conception of what it is, the more complex and accurate that conception will be. For example, the thought ‘this dog is a poodle’ is less complex and less accurate (though no less true), than the thought ‘this dog is one-foot tall and two-and-a-half feet long and has curly white hair and a puffy tail’. In terms of aspect perception, the first thought involves seeing the dog in terms of only one aspect, while the second involves seeing it in terms of four of its aspects, with each of these aspects being a feeling within a total psychical experience of the dog. While the first thought would be sufficient to answer the question ‘What type of dog is this?’, a thought based on a more complex or fuller perception of a thing will be more useful in that it will be able to answer more questions than a thought based on only one of a thing’s aspects. Furthermore, in a non-instrumental sense of ‘better’, a perception that involves a more complete awareness of a thing not only in terms of what it is but *how* it is (i.e. a qualitative awareness) will be a better perception of that thing *qua* perception. It follows from this that a well-developed imagination, in the sense of an ability to perceive things more fully, in more detail and in their particularity beyond what mere recognition allows, will lead to better thinking.

### ***Imagination, Creation and Art***

Understanding Collingwood’s notion of imagination in relation to feeling and thinking helps clarify his claim that a work of art proper is a creation of the imagination that expresses an artist’s emotions. In a very basic sense, since perceiving something rather than merely feeling it is done by attending to what one feels, and since attention is selective insofar as we can choose which feelings within a psychical field to focus on, when to do so and for how long, perception itself could be said to involve the creation of our experience. This is not to say that we create the things we sense and feel but that we are able, to some degree, to create the experience we have of them. For example, while the desk in front of me is not an imaginative creation of mine, if I close

my eyes while facing the desk and then choose to open them at a certain moment I can create my experience of seeing the desk at that moment, where if I had not opened my eyes that experience would not have existed for me.

If the things to which one chooses to attend, the order and duration of one's attention to them, and which of their aspects one attends to are ways of creating an experience for oneself through the activity of one's imagination, then artistic creation could very well be an instance of this kind of creation with artists being better *qua* artists insofar as they are better able to direct their attention to, and to become more fully aware of, the things they feel or sense without rushing to generalization. This is in keeping with the idea that good painters are able to see more, experienced musicians to hear more, and expert wine tasters to taste and smell more than other people; that is, to consciously attend to a wider range of feelings within their psychical fields, and to be able to do so *well*, i.e. in a way that creates a better experience of the thing felt. What counts as a 'better' experience can of course vary depending on what is called for by the situation, but, *ceteris paribus*, an experience of a thing could be considered better than another to the extent that it involves the conscious awareness of more of that thing's aspects, i.e. an awareness of a greater range of the feelings one has of it at the psychical level.

This is what Collingwood seems to have in mind when he calls expression the clarification of emotion, where a clarified emotion could combine a number of affective charges felt at the psychical level, reconstructing for consciousness their unity in the psychical field in which they are encountered together. Since, for Collingwood, feeling involves emotions and sensations, and since these can be attended to separately even though they are unified at the psychical level,<sup>55</sup> it would in principle be possible to clarify the sensations one has of a thing without clarifying the

---

<sup>55</sup> On this, see *PA* 162, where Collingwood allows that people can 'sterilize' sensations "by ignoring their emotional charge", something he thinks is common among modern 'civilized' people. (Cf. Spengler's distinction between civilization and culture.)

accompanying emotional charges. The close attention paid by a draughtsman or a purely representational painter to the perceptual features of his subject in order to reproduce its appearance could be described as clarifying how the subject looks; however, insofar as the resulting painting is *merely* representational, it would not express the emotional charges that accompany these sensations. For a representational painter to create art in Collingwood's sense, he would also have to clarify these emotional charges and so create an experience that brings to consciousness not just how the subject looked but *what it was like* to see it.

A work of art, then, should be understood as a conscious experience created through a process of engaged attention to sensations and emotions felt at the psychical level, with this experience not being separate from, but being constituted by, this process of attending, and where this experience expresses what it is like for the creator to feel the sensations and emotions involved, i.e. clarifies them for consciousness, making them available for understanding. When there is an obvious emotional charge accompanying a certain sensation, e.g. a soothing green or an irritating red, this will be part of what it is to feel this sensation, and so will be part of what is expressed by a work of art that involves attention to this sensation. If some sensations do not have such overt emotional charges, there will still be something it is like to feel them, and a work of art involving attention to these sensations will express, i.e. make available to conscious understanding, what is unique to that experience. Since, for Collingwood, all feelings are unique particulars, the expression of a given feeling or set of feelings will also be unique. This is why he says that expression individualizes where description generalizes, and that a work of art proper is "a certain thing" whereas a work, insofar as it is craft, is "a thing of a certain kind" (PA 114).

By defining art in this way, Collingwood is committed to the possibility of some artworks being created 'in the head' of the artist without any external embodiment, which seems plausible

given that poets and musicians can compose simple works without making a noise or writing anything down. However, if it is the case (which it seems to be) that there are no emotions without sensations of which they are the affective charge, any expression of an emotion must involve some sensible component, though these ‘sensibles’ need not be physical or external sensations. The musician composing a tune in his head will have to imagine hearing the notes involved, and the poet creating verse in her head will similarly have to imagine hearing, speaking, writing or reading the words in her poem. Thus, expression is necessarily mediated, even when it occurs ‘in the head’, with the medium involving real or imagined sensations.

Where this involves physical sensibles, the artist’s engagement with her medium – e.g. the painter’s engagement with her paints, brushes and canvas – will be part of this expression, since her engagement with it was part of the experience she created through which she clarified what she felt. Since every work of art is a certain thing, for certain works this physical engagement is a necessary part of that work’s creation, and so is not separable as ‘the craft component’ from ‘the expressive component’. Rather, these two are united: e.g. in a sculpted work of art, the sculptor’s way of shaping the stone or plaster while consciously attending to sensations and their emotional charges as she goes, just is the ‘expressive component’ of that work. On the other hand, when an artist’s working of physical materials is not part of the creation of the expressive experience but is done subsequently to this, as when a poet who has composed a poem in her head subsequently writes it down verbatim, her writing will not itself be part of the poem’s creation, being more like the production of an instance of the already created work.

When an artist’s medium of expression is physical, the process of creating the work of art will be publically accessible, either as this process occurs as in the case of an improvised jazz performance, or as a record of this process as in the case of a painting or a written poem. Insofar

as this process allowed the artist to become consciously aware of something she felt, and insofar as this process is publically accessible, it will make an awareness of that feeling available to the consciousness of a spectator who attends to the work similarly to how the artist attended to it when creating it. Thus, an artist not only expresses or clarifies what she feels to herself, but to anyone who can share in the experience she is creating by perceiving the embodiment of her work as the outward manifestation of her process of imaginative creation. While this may sound abstract, in more concrete terms it is just a matter of, e.g., a spectator looking at a painting and perceiving what the painter did in making it, i.e. seeing it as the result of a performance,<sup>56</sup> rather than looking at it and perceiving just an array of paint on a canvas (i.e. seeing it as a merely physical object) or perceiving any representational content it has (i.e. seeing it as a landscape). This is what Collingwood seems to have had in mind when he writes “[t]he noises made by the performers, and heard by the audience, are not the music at all; they are only means by which the audience, if they listen intelligently (not otherwise), can reconstruct for themselves the imaginary tune that existed in the composer’s head” (*PA* 139).

On this understanding of art as expression, artists who create works in publically accessible media are sharing their understanding of their psychical experience or feelings by making available to others the imaginative experience that makes this feeling understandable to themselves. Even when a work is done in the artist’s head, or where the artist creates a work in a physical medium but is the only one to ever see or hear it, the elements of the medium of expression are, in principle, necessarily sharable: the words a poet imagines are not ‘private’ in the sense of being comprehensible only to him. Moreover, the idea of the feeling that comes to be understood by a spectator is a distinctly new one, given the particularity of the feeling

---

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Davies 2004 for a theory of all artworks being performances, and Davies 2008 for an argument that Collingwood’s theory of art is such a performance theory.

expressed and thus the particularity of its expression, and thus artists, by making their distinct ways of seeing-as available for others, could be said to create new ways of being aware of, and so new understandings or ideas of, the world they share with their audience. This points to one of the reasons why art is valuable – it offers new ways of understanding the world.

### **3.3 THE NORMATIVE DIMENSIONS OF COLLINGWOOD’S AESTHETICS**

With Collingwood’s account of what art is explained, its normative aspects can be examined. As well as giving an account of aesthetic normativity, Collingwood’s theory involves a moral dimension on which the value of creating and engaging with art is both ethical and aesthetic, with the ethical and the aesthetic overlapping rather than being taken as two distinct kinds of value. There are two main areas of moral concern that I will discuss: (i) the ‘corruption of consciousness’, which he associates with bad art (i.e. art badly done) and for which he argues that good art (i.e. art done well) is an antidote, and (ii) the detrimental effects that can come from consuming amusement too much or for the wrong reasons, or from treating amusement as art, or works of art purely as amusement.

Rather than being a moral position implied by, but subsequent to, his theory of art as imaginative expression, these normative dimensions are central to Collingwood’s aesthetics; as discussed above (8-9 *supra*), Collingwood sees the purpose of a philosophy of art as giving guidance for “the way in which we ought to approach the practice of art (whether as artists or as audience)” which is part of one’s approach to life (*PA* vii), and so is within the realm of moral consideration. Since Collingwood held that philosophical theories are attempts at answering certain questions, and insisted that they must be comprehended as such in order to be understood properly (*A* 31; see also 8 *supra*), by his own standards his accounts of expression and imagination will not be understood fully if not seen in relation to these normative matters.

## ***Good and Bad Art***

Collingwood differentiates between judgments of thing as good or bad ‘in themselves’, i.e. as excellent or deficient things of their kind<sup>57</sup> and judgments of things as good or bad ‘relative to us’, i.e. as helping or hindering us in achieving our purposes (*PA* 280). Both types of judgment can be made of works of craft, in the way that, e.g., a fascist propaganda film could be said to be good *qua* propaganda for its ability to influence people but bad in light of the harmful consequences of this influence. However, because on Collingwood’s view art is not a means to an end, it would follow that judgments of an artwork’s *aesthetic* goodness or badness are always of the first type. While a work of art might also be used for instrumental purposes, the respect in which it can be so used is different from the respect in which it is art, and so while an object that is a work of art could in principle be judged good or bad relative to us, this would not be an *aesthetic* judgment of it, i.e. a judgment concerning the respect in which it is art.

If a work of art, *qua* art, is an activity of an artist’s through which she becomes conscious of what she feels, and when performed in connection with an external medium allows others to become aware of this feeling, then art is something that can be done more or less well (*PA* 300; see also 180-81). Thus, good works of art are successful performances of this activity, i.e. successful expressions of an artist’s feelings, while bad works of art are performances that fail to express what their creators felt. In writing “to express [something], and to express it well, are the same thing” since “to express it badly ... is failing to express it” (*PA* 282), Collingwood seems to be treating expression as something that is either done fully or not done at all, which would appear to leave no room for degrees of expression. However, there are reasons for thinking that Collingwood does, in principle, allow for degrees of expression. It is implausible that all works

---

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Aristotle’s discussion of goodness in relation to proper function/*ergon* in *NE* I.7 1097b23-1098a17, esp. 1098a8-9.



of art are equally aesthetically good, which would follow from a work of art being an expression, and a work that succeeds as an expression being good ‘in itself’. Also, in his *Autobiography* Collingwood writes that as a child he observed the activities of his parents’ artist friends and “learned to think of a picture not as a finished product ... but as the visible record ... of an attempt to solve a definite problem in painting, so far as the attempt has gone”, and that “no ‘work of art’ is ever finished” (A 2). If a work of art just is the artist’s expressive activity, this suggests that expression is not something that can be complete or finalized, and so a work of art will always be a limited or partial expression of what the artist felt.

For another thing, while it may be true that a single feeling, considered on its own, either is or is not expressed, Collingwood holds that what a person feels at any given moment, i.e. her psychical field, is a unity of multiple sensations and their affective charges which are co-present in experience and only individualized later in thought. If what is in question is whether a work expresses one or more of these feelings from within the artist’s field of psychical experience, then a work that does so would seem to count as art insofar as it succeeds in expressing some thing(s) the artist felt, without needing to express *all* of these feelings. If, on the other hand, what is in question is whether the work *fully* expresses such a composite experience, the work would seem to need to express each one of the feelings that comprise that experience as a whole. The latter cannot be what Collingwood meant, as it would be impossible to know when a work had not expressed every feeling that made up a given experience since, for Collingwood, expression is what makes feelings available to consciousness and so, paradoxically, these feelings would have to be expressed in order for someone to be aware that they had not been.

Collingwood seems to think that a work of art must succeed in expressing at least some of what an artist felt, which is in line with his comments about a work of art never being entirely

finished, since in principle there might always be more feelings within a total psychical experience of which one might come to be aware. This allows for degrees of aesthetic goodness within works of art; a work that expressed more of what the artist felt within a composite experience could be considered a fuller expression than one that only expressed a single part of that experience, with a work being better aesthetically the more it expresses of a total psychical experience. This fits with the way artists work since they often add to or modify what they have already done, e.g. a writer going back and changing a phrase or adding a sentence, or a painter adding colours or shading to an area of the canvas, and in doing this they might be said to be further clarifying aspects of what they felt. This also fits with the commonly held intuition that a work of art that is more complex, and which expresses or reveals more aspects or dimensions of its subject and expresses a greater and more nuanced range of emotions, is aesthetically better than one that is less complex, less nuanced or ‘one-note’.

On this view, all genuine works of art – i.e. all imaginative creations that express something their creators felt – will have some degree of aesthetic goodness. Bad art, i.e. imaginative creations that can be judged as aesthetically bad, are not genuine works of art on the view that art is expression, since they are not expressions of what their creators felt. This does not imply that works of craft made for magical or amusement purposes are bad art because they do not include an expressive component; Collingwood notes that in such works “there is no failure to express, because there is no attempt at expression; there is only an attempt (whether successful or not) to do something else” (*PA* 282; cf. 277). Rather, an aesthetically bad work is an unsuccessful attempt at creating art, “an activity in which the agent tries to express a given emotion, but fails” (*PA* 282). This is the result of an imaginative creation where the experience created does not clarify, i.e. raise to the level of conscious awareness, what the creator feels. While it might seem

that this makes artworks *instrumentally* or *consequentially* good insofar as they succeed as means to the end of making one aware of one's feeling(s), this would be a regression to the technical theory of art. For Collingwood, there is no separation between the imaginative experience created by the artist, her creation of it, and the conscious awareness of the feeling(s) expressed, so there can be no instrumental means-end relation 'between' them.<sup>58</sup> Thus, saying that a good work of art is a successful act of expression does not take works of art to function instrumentally, nor does it involve conceiving of aesthetic goodness in consequentialist terms.

There are two ways an attempt at creating art can fail. One is for an artist to begin to try to work out what she feels but to give up this attempt before succeeding, perhaps after struggling unsuccessfully to clarify these feelings. For example, a visual artist might draw and then erase several lines, thinking 'that doesn't feel right' upon seeing each one on the page, and after doing this for some time might abandon the process and move on to something else. In this case, the artist knows she has failed to create a work of art; she would say that, while she drew to the extent that she made lines on the page, she did not make *a drawing*. The other way an attempt at expression can fail is for the would-be artist to begin to work out what she feels but after starting to become conscious of her feeling, to deny or disown it, substituting the idea of some other feeling in her consciousness. This might occur because the person doesn't want to acknowledge what she actually feeling, in which case it is repressed, or because it seems too complex a feeling to be easily clarified, in which case the job of expressing it is shirked in favour of a 'ready-made' idea of a simpler feeling. This is a form of self-deception that Collingwood calls the 'corruption of consciousness', and which is the main target of his normative concerns and is related to the moral value he thinks art can have.

---

<sup>58</sup> Analogously, making a fist involves constricting muscles in one's wrist, but this isn't a technique for making a fist; making a fist just is the constriction of these muscles (cf. *PA* 161-62).

### ***The Corruption of Consciousness***

Collingwood's notion of the corruption of consciousness implies that the proper function of consciousness is to be aware of things as they are, so that one's understanding of the world is veridical and one's reasoning about it can be true. A person whose consciousness is corrupt misleads or deceives himself about the things in his immediate experience in order to avoid dealing with things the awareness of which might be unpleasant or difficult. Not only is a corrupt conscious bad *qua* consciousness for failing to perform its proper function, similar to the way an eye that doesn't see well is a bad eye, but because its failure is the result of self-deception, its badness is one for which the person can be considered culpable. Moreover, a corrupt consciousness is not just functionally deficient but is morally problematic insofar as it will prevent someone from addressing and correcting any bad situations that might be within his power to correct but which might be distressing to acknowledge. Someone who refuses to admit that a family member is engaged in harmful activities because it is a distressing truth to face will be unable to stop these activities, and someone who refuses to acknowledge a harmful or vicious habit of his own will be unable to do anything to change it.

While an artist deceiving herself about what she feels may not seem to have the same moral weight as someone deceiving himself about his son's kleptomania or his inability to control his temper, cases of a person denying what she feels in favour of a more palatable substitution are nonetheless instances of self-censorship or 'bowdlerization' (PA 218-29). These could still be said to be morally wrong to the extent that an act of deception or dishonesty is wrong when it is done to make things easier for the deceiver, and to the extent that it can create a habit of avoiding facing unpleasant or difficult truths that would dispose one to do so when faced with future moral problems. This partly explains why Collingwood called the corruption of consciousness

“not only an example of untruth [but] an example of evil” (PA 220), which admittedly seems hyperbolic in the context of discussing bad art. This claim could also be explained within an Aristotelian account of ethics by noting that, if *sunesis* is required for virtue and if *sunesis* depends on imagination/*phantasia* (see 70-71 *supra*), a corruption of consciousness that “infects the imagination” (PA 218) will interfere with the ability to understand the situations in which one finds oneself, and so will effectively prevent one from being or becoming virtuous.

Unlike the artist who abandons her attempt at drawing after realizing she was failing to express what she felt, a person acting with a corrupt consciousness is unable to know when she has failed to get something clear. If someone convinces himself he feels one way rather than another, she will think that a work of art that makes this new feeling available for conscious awareness will be a genuine expression. Such an artist will not only deceive herself but will deceive others if she presents her work to them as art, with the implication that it expresses feelings she actually felt.

As I have argued elsewhere (Collins 2013), one of the benefits entailed by Collingwood’s theory of engaging with art as a spectator is that, by seeing how another person (i.e. the artist) has become aware of the particular feelings they felt, one becomes better able to be consciously aware of one’s own feelings. Since, on Collingwood’s view, any feeling a person actually has will be a unique particular, a work presented as a genuine expression but where the artist has substituted the idea of a feeling – which, as an idea, will be generalized and so not actually the sort of thing that anyone might actually feel – denies the spectator this benefit. Moreover, to the extent that the spectator accepts this idea as a feeling, it will introduce a false note into his overall understanding of what feelings are, which could result in his misrecognizing his own feelings in future by unknowingly substituting generic ideas of feelings for them, since these are

easier to understand, thereby deceiving himself that this is what he feels. Thus, bad art is not only the product of a corrupt consciousness but potentially can corrupt the consciousness of a spectator who takes such a work to be a genuine expression.

Not only is bad art morally problematic but the moral value of good art, for Collingwood, has to do with its status as a remedy for, or protection against, the corruption of consciousness; thus, moral and aesthetic value ultimately overlap in Collingwood's thinking, with aesthetic goodness being morally good and aesthetic badness being morally bad. One clarification should be made here: Collingwood insists that 'morally bad' art is *not* art that expresses 'immoral' emotions if these are what the artist genuinely feels. Rather, the self-censorship of pretending that one does not have negative or undesirable feelings is what he takes to be wrong, with 'sanitized' or 'bowdlerized' works arising from such self-censorship being bad both aesthetically and morally.

That Collingwood thinks it wrong for an artist to refrain from expressing any 'bad' emotions he may feel follows from his view that psychical feelings, before they are expressed or brought to conscious awareness, dominate the subject who feels them, whereas through expression the subject is able to have some control over them (*PA* 208-09). Expressing one's feelings of, e.g., hatred or selfishness does not prevent one from feeling them, but it allows one to master them to some extent by being able to reflect on them, and so makes one more able to resist being influenced by them against one's better will. Thus, one who does not express his 'bad' emotions is more in danger of being subject to and so acting based on them, which is to say he is in danger of acting badly – an unexpressed fear can lead to cowardly behaviour, an unexpressed jealousy can lead to stinginess, etc.

The moral benefit Collingwood attributes to art is had both by the artist who expresses and so becomes conscious of what she feels and by the spectator who understands her expression and so

shares in the conscious awareness of these feelings. If the corruption of consciousness involves a failure to express, i.e. get clear on, what one genuinely feels, a work of art will serve as an ‘antidote’ to this by being a model of authentic consciousness for the one who creates it and for anyone who understands it. Collingwood’s notion of expression differs in this respect from the Romantic notion of art as the personal expression of an individual ‘genius’, making it more socially-minded. For Collingwood, there is no difference in kind between those who are artists and those who are not, only a difference in the degree of their “ability to take the initiative in expressing what all feel” (*PA* 119).<sup>59</sup> That is, an artist, through his imaginative engagement with his medium of expression – words, sounds, shapes and colours, etc. – is able “to solve for himself the problem of expressing [what he feels], whereas the audience can express it only when the [artist] has shown them how” (*PA* 119). Similarly, there is no difference in kind but only one of degree between works of art and everyday human communication through speech and gesture, with art being an intensification of the expressions in which everyone engages. As Aaron Ridley explains, a work of art “is not only a case of expression, it is ... an exemplary case”, and in grasping the work as the expression of a particular feeling of the artist’s, a spectator “is shown or reminded what it is like to get something clear” (Ridley 1997a, 41).

The social aspect of Collingwood’s theory of expression involves the artist’s ability to express ‘what all feel’, i.e. not just her private feelings, but the feelings of others as she understands them, or what could be called a public mood or ‘zeitgeist’. While there would still be some moral benefit in a spectator coming to understand the ‘personal’ expression of another’s idiosyncratic ways of feeling and ‘taking’ the world insofar as this gives the spectator a model of successful expression and gives him practice in looking beyond his own perspective to

---

<sup>59</sup> i.e. feelings at the psychical level of experience in general, not some particular feeling(s) thought to be felt ‘by all’.

empathize with another's, Collingwood sees what he calls 'aesthetic individualism' as limited in terms of the potential benefits art can have (PA 312-18). Rather than working strictly within the bounds of his own private experience and feelings and expecting others to understand his 'inner self', an artist can look beyond *his own* private perspective (rather than expecting his audience alone to do this) and seek to understand how others feel by creating works that engage with the perspectives of the community. In expressing these shared feelings, an artist can allow others to become more fully aware of things they feel by acting as a spokesperson for the community.<sup>60</sup>

This 'prophetic' function is something belonging art but not to craft, and so Collingwood contends it should be embraced by artists in order to show the value and potential of art as distinct from amusement, magic, etc. "The artist," he writes, "must prophesy not in the sense that he foretells things to come, but in the sense that he tells his audience, at risk of their displeasure, the secrets of their own hearts," which leads him to claim that art is "the community's medicine for ... the corruption of consciousness" (PA 336) insofar as it helps others to become conscious of feelings they might otherwise have ignored or failed to express themselves.

There might appear to be a contradiction between the claim that art is an antidote or medicine for the corruption of consciousness, which seems to take art to be a means for fighting this corruption, and Collingwood's earlier claim that art is neither an end to which there are means nor itself a means to an end. This apparent contradiction can be dissolved by noting that art could be said to be an antidote to the failure to get clear on what one feels just because it is success in getting clear on one's feelings; as Ridley puts it, "the cure for getting something wrong is getting it right" (Ridley 1997a, 40), with 'getting it right' not being a means to the end

---

<sup>60</sup> Collingwood's view is remarkably similar to the one expressed by T. S. Eliot in a 1953 essay in which he writes: "A poet may believe that he is expressing only his private experience; his lines may be for him only a means of talking about himself without giving himself away; yet for his readers what he has written may come to be the expression both of their own secret feelings and of the exultation or despair of a generation" (Eliot 1953, 3). Given how close this is to what Collingwood himself wrote, it would not be surprising if Eliot read Collingwood and was influenced by him on this point.



of not getting it wrong, since these are equivalent. Moreover, while Collingwood argues that there is no means-end relation involved in the making of art proper, this does not preclude a work of art, once made, from performing a function or being used by someone to do something. If artworks could not be used in any way as means to an instrumental end once they have been created, they could not be used as examples in the process of teaching others to make art well, but they obviously can. What would be precluded is an artist creating a work of art by setting out deliberately to make something to fight the corruption of consciousness, since there can be no technique for expression; such an attempt would result in a work of magic rather than art.

Collingwood's talk of a spectator coming to grasp the feeling an artist is expressing leads to another apparent contradiction. He writes that, by expressing what he feels in an external medium, an artist "is treating himself and his audience in the same kind of way; he is making his emotions clear to his audience, and that is what he is doing to himself" (*PA* 111), which seems unproblematic. However, he goes on to claim that "when someone reads and understands a poem, he is not merely understanding the poet's expression of his, the poet's, emotions, he is expressing emotions of his own in the poet's words, which have thus become his own words" (*PA* 118), and that a painting "produces in [the spectator] sensuous-emotional or psychical experiences which, when raised from impressions to ideas by the activity of the spectator's consciousness, are transmuted into a total imaginative experience identical with that of the painter" (*PA* 308). Statements like these seem to go against his earlier insistence that feelings cannot recur and do not exist beyond the moment in which they are experienced.

This is only a contradiction if one reads Collingwood as claiming that a spectator's re-enactment of the imaginative activity that constitutes the artist's expression involves a 're-creation' in the spectator's consciousness of the psychical feeling of the artist that the work

expresses. However, since expressing an emotion is different from evoking or arousing one, the spectator need not come to feel the emotion expressed in order to apprehend the work as an expression; what the spectator shares with the artist is the understanding of the emotion that expression makes possible. While Collingwood is not ideally clear in his terminology, statements such as the above should be read in light of his distinction between sensations and emotions felt at the psychical level, and the conscious awareness of these that comes from active perception, i.e. imagination at its basic level of operation, which he alternately calls “ideas” (PA 203), “images” (PA 173) and “emotions of consciousness” (PA 234), with ‘emotion of consciousness’ being synonymous with the consciousness of an emotion.

It is the latter that Collingwood thinks are shared between artists and spectators, and to which he refers as the ‘total imaginative experience’. In saying this he is not implying that the spectator and artist have an identical *mental object* in their minds that they imagine, but rather that they have the same conscious awareness or understanding of the emotion that has been expressed. This is comparable to saying that someone who reads and understands another’s words comes to think for himself the same idea that the author was thinking when he wrote the words, which does not imply that there is an identical mental object corresponding to the subject of those words in the minds of both people, but that they both are thinking of or understanding that subject in the same way, i.e. are sharing an engagement in the same mental *process*.

When read in this way, Collingwood can be understood to hold that what is shared between artist and spectator is the imaginative understanding of a feeling rather than that feeling itself, which is more plausible and more illuminating regarding the value of art. Engaging with works of art as expressions to be understood rather than as means to ends is a way of understanding what another person has felt when this feeling would otherwise be unknowable. This parallels

Scruton's claim that art provides emotional 'knowledge-what' necessary for moral development (Scruton 34-35), and echoes Spivak's call for an aesthetic education that would teach people "to enter another's text" (Spivak 6) and "imagine the other responsibly" (Spivak xiv).

### ***The Dangers of Amusement***

As well as the corruption of consciousness, Collingwood raises moral concerns with his remarks on amusement. Given the strength of his worries about both matters, and given that he expresses them using similar language (e.g. in terms of moral or psychological 'disease'), these two concerns might at first glance appear to be the same, with Collingwood seeing amusement as the result of the corruption of consciousness. However, these concerns involve separate worries and, although they are not unrelated, they should be seen as distinct problems in order for Collingwood to be properly understood on both points.

As discussed above in section 3.1, amusement is primarily meant to evoke and discharge emotions in a spectator. A work of amusement is not necessarily the product of a corrupt consciousness; one could be made by someone who is fully aware of what he is trying to make, without involving any self-deception or failure to get clear on anything.<sup>61</sup> A work of amusement would only be the product of a corrupt consciousness if its maker was (or thought he was) trying to express a particular feeling with it but settled instead for evoking a generic idea of a feeling while convincing himself that he had created a genuine expression, but this is not intrinsic to amusement and so is not where Collingwood's worry lies.

Collingwood explains the problem he sees with amusement/entertainment in terms of its potential effect on a spectator's emotional energies, described in terms of a metaphor of debit and credit. An emotion evoked by a work of amusement is felt in response to a make-believe

---

<sup>61</sup> This also follows from Collingwood's assertion that bad art is the products of a corrupt consciousness and his reminder that works of amusement, magic, etc. are not bad art since they are not, properly speaking, works of art in the first place (cf. *PA* 277).

scenario – e.g. fearing for a character in a dangerous fictional situation – and is discharged within the amusement experience – e.g. relief from one’s fear when the character gets saved at the end of the story. The emotion is thereby kept separate from “the affairs of ‘real’ [i.e. practical] life” (PA 94), involving a bifurcation between reality and make-believe within the spectator’s emotional life. This bifurcation is not necessarily *created* by having make-believe emotions evoked through amusement, but may be intrinsic to imagination; however, amusement exploits this bifurcation and can exacerbate it to a point at which it becomes problematic.

The danger arises, Collingwood writes, “when by discharging their emotions upon make-believe situations people come to think of emotion as something that can be excited and enjoyed for its own sake, without any necessity to pay for it in practical consequences” (PA 94). An emotion that is ‘paid for’ is one that follows some effort, preparation or care: for example, the satisfaction a student might take in doing well on an assignment on which she worked hard, as opposed to the pleasure another student might feel upon receiving a good grade without putting in much effort. A consumer of entertainment is analogous to the second student, in that he does not have to put anything into the emotions that are evoked, but is ‘given’ these emotional experiences in a way comparable to a student being given, rather than earning, a good grade. In terms of Collingwood’s debit/credit metaphor, the first student has ‘invested’ in the positive feeling she has in response to her grade, so this feeling is connected to her preceding activities in a way that the second student’s feeling is not.

This is not an automatic consequence of consuming works of amusement, but depends on the way in which one uses such works. Collingwood admits of a more positive use for amusement, which he calls ‘recreation’, and which involves using entertainment as a temporary break that refreshes or ‘re-creates’ one’s energies and so allows one to return to practical life with renewed

effectiveness (*PA* 95); this is its metaphorical ‘credit effect’. Collingwood is not against pleasure or enjoyment, or even against entertainment *per se*, but is against enjoyment that is, so to speak, ‘cheap and easy’, since this can lead to a greater appetite for make-believe emotions, which are free of ‘costs’ and consequences, than ‘authentic’ emotions felt in response to things in one’s real life, and which are not so freely had. This can lead to “practical life, or ‘real’ life, becom[ing] emotionally bankrupt; a state of things which we describe by speaking of its intolerable dullness or calling it a drudgery” (*PA* 95). Whereas art, which expresses and so allows a spectator to understand a real emotion of the artist’s, could be said to sharpen the spectator’s perceptual awareness of particulars by drawing her attention to them, amusement, which hands the consumer an easy-to-feel emotion designed to be generic enough to be evocable in the ‘lowest common denominator’ so as to be consumable by the widest possible audience, could be said in contrast to dull the spectator’s attention to detail and to cover over particular differences, leading to a generic, fabricated experience. When such an experience is indulged in as recreation there may be no danger, whereas there is when one comes to see the consumption of such experiences as valuable in themselves; when ‘escapism’ comes to be more valued than the ‘real life’ from which one is escaping.<sup>62</sup>

While the worry about the potential of an over-use of amusement to make people feel their lives are ‘emotionally bankrupt’ is separate from the worry about the corruption of consciousness, they are not entirely unrelated. Although Collingwood doesn’t explicitly connect the two, it follows from his account of both problems that a habit of consuming works of

---

<sup>62</sup> A recent example of what Collingwood is discussing here, about which he seems to have been prescient, is the phenomenon observed upon the release of *Avatar* (dir: James Cameron, 2009) of spectators reporting feeling depressed after seeing the film. One representative comment (taken from over 1,000 such comments posted on-line) puts it, “after watching *Avatar* for the first time yesterday, the world seemed ... gray. It was like my whole life, everything I’ve done and worked for, lost its meaning.” Even if the authors of the numerous comments posted along these lines are exaggerating, a large enough number of people did seem to experience a strong positive feeling for the make-believe world of the film such that they reported being more emotionally invested in it than in the real world even after the movie had ended. On this, see Piazza 2010.

amusement for the sake of enjoying how they make one feel could lead to people being more likely to treat art as amusement insofar as it disposes them to focus on, and think of the work in terms of, their own feelings rather than trying to understanding the work as the expression of someone else's. Thus, the unreflective consumption of entertainment can make one less likely to understand a work of art *qua* expression or dispose one to think of emotions in generalized terms rather than to be aware of them in their particularity, which would effectively counteract the way that art can work as a 'medicine' against the corruption of consciousness.

Moreover, an artist who conflates art with amusement and, when creating a work, focuses on calculating which emotions to evoke in spectators rather than expressing her own emotions by working them out in her process of creation, will effectively be prevented from making works of art proper, and this could lead to her being in 'bad faith' insofar as she thinks of herself as an artist rather than an entertainer. Thus, while there is no necessary connection between the dangers Collingwood sees in the misuse of amusement and the corruption of consciousness, the former has the potential to foster or perpetuate the latter.

With Collingwood's account of art and its normative dimensions explained – and with the notion of virtue aesthetics and the framework of a neo-Aristotelian, MacIntyre-influenced virtue approach explicated in Chapters I and II, respectively – the ground is set for a discussion of the structure and content of a virtue approach to aesthetics based on Collingwood's understanding of art, and how such an approach could be useful for explaining the value of artistic creation and spectatorship for a flourishing human life, drawing attention to the overlap of aesthetics and ethics within the broader category of normativity, and offering a solution to certain problems found within the philosophy of art.

## **4. OUTLINE OF A COLLINGWOODIAN VIRTUE AESTHETICS**

This chapter synthesizes the structure of Aristotle's ethics as applied to a practice with Collingwood's account of art in order to propose a virtue approach to aesthetic normativity that is more analogous to Aristotelian virtue ethics and based on a more suitable understanding of art than are the virtue approaches suggested by Woodruff, Goldie and Lopes. Section 4.1 explains why this synthesis of Collingwood's aesthetics and Aristotle's approach to ethics is justified, and section 4.2 discusses aesthetic virtues of both creation and reception – what makes someone a good artist and a good spectator, respectively – and the implications for judging aesthetic quality. I will not attempt to give anything like an extensive or exhaustive list of aesthetic virtues and vices, but rather will highlight a few that seem most important to art practice on Collingwood's account. Section 4.3 focuses on how practices of artistic creation and reception are conducive to human flourishing or *eudaimonia*, while section 4.4 suggests how a Collingwoodian virtue aesthetics could be applied to problems in the philosophy of art dealing with aesthetic normativity and with ethical issues in art.

### **4.1 WHY COLLINGWOOD'S THEORY OF ART SUITS A VIRTUE APPROACH**

Just as any virtue approach to ethics will involve an understanding of human nature, with different theories of human nature leading to different virtue ethical systems, any virtue approach to aesthetics will involve some understanding of art. Showing that Collingwood's account of art is especially suited to a virtue approach will justify the choice to use it as the basis for the virtue aesthetics proposed here. I will also show why a virtue-based approach is appropriate for understanding the normative aspect of aesthetics, even apart from the synthesis with Collingwood's account that I propose.

### ***Why a Virtue Approach Fits Aesthetics***

While the overlap of aesthetic and ethical normativity, as discussed above (see section 1.1), justifies an approach to aesthetics modelled after an established ethical system, it could be asked why virtue ethics should be chosen as a model over utilitarianism or deontology. A hedonistic form of utilitarianism focusing on maximizing pleasure, when applied to aesthetics, would entail the overly simplistic view that aesthetic goodness<sup>63</sup> is a matter of the enjoyment or pleasure a work of art brings to spectators; however, works of art can be aesthetically good without being pleasurable to experience, as shown for instance by the paintings of Francis Bacon and the experimental sound-work of musician/performance artist Diamanda Galás. A more sophisticated utilitarianism based on the promotion of more than just pleasure might be a better fit, but no matter which ‘basic goods’ artistic creation and spectatorship were thought to promote, there would likely still be a number of counterexamples of aesthetically good works of art that did not promote that particular ‘good’.

Furthermore, a purely consequentialist framework would make aesthetic goodness instrumental in that it would hold a work of art (or the practice of creating or experiencing it) to be good only insofar as it was a means to the promotion of some non-aesthetic ‘basic good’. This would reduce aesthetic goodness to non-aesthetic goodness, not ‘explaining’ aesthetic normativity so much as explaining it away. Positing something like ‘beauty’ as a basic good, as G. E. Moore does (see Moore 200-02), might avoid this problem by allowing for intrinsic, rather than merely instrumental, aesthetic goodness. However, this would still be problematic since, for one thing, beauty has been notoriously difficult to define, and for another it is not clear that every aesthetically good work must be beautiful (consider again Francis Bacon’s paintings).

---

<sup>63</sup> For the sake of simplicity, and to stay within the scope of this thesis, I am bracketing considerations of the aesthetic quality of things other than artworks, such as natural objects, etc.



An approach to aesthetics modelled on deontic ethics (commonly called aesthetic formalism; see Muelder Eaton 2008) takes aesthetic goodness to be definable in terms of universal principles that identify properties that provide sufficient conditions for a work of art to be aesthetically good; properties typically singled out are those such as unity, complexity and intensity (see Beardsley 462-63). As with the problem of counterexamples to ‘basic goods’ like pleasure or beauty, there are likely to be many counterexamples to any ‘rules’ or ‘guidelines’ for aesthetic quality that can be formulated. There is a high degree of diversity among artworks made by different artists, as well as within the bodies of work of individual artists, as befitting a practice where creativity is central; where there is so much variation – and with new variations continually emerging – it is doubtful that universal, exceptionless rules about what makes all works of art aesthetically good can be found. Appealing to the results of psychological studies that show what a large number of people prefer might be thought to help, but this runs into the problem of deriving normative claims from descriptive ones. Just because the things a majority of people prefer may possess certain shared properties, e.g. unity or intensity, it does not follow that these properties are the ‘essence’ of aesthetic goodness, nor does it follow that every object that possesses these properties will be aesthetically good.

As well as these reasons why other ethical approaches may not be suited to questions of aesthetic normativity, there are some positive reasons for thinking that a virtue ethical approach would be suitable. For one thing, talk of something being a good painting, a good poem, etc. seems to refer to its being well-made or well-done, and so an aretaic conception of goodness seems already to be involved in normative aesthetic judgments, at least more so than notions of ‘duty’ or ‘obligation’, or pleasure or the promotion of other ‘basic goods’ which may be the focus of judgments of agreeability or utility – but, as Kant has shown, these are not properly

speaking *aesthetic* judgments. For another thing, aesthetic education is closer to the way Aristotle conceived of ethical education than it is to being taught to follow rules or to calculate utility. One learns to be an artist not by learning rules or formulae to apply but through role-modelling and imitation, with the development of habits through practice and the acquisition of a wide range of experience generally being necessary for becoming a good artist (cf. *NE* II.1 1103a15-17, *NE* II.1 1103a30-34 and *NE* VI.8 1142a12-20 on how one learns to be virtuous or practically wise). Being a good artist, like being a good person, would seem to require something like practical wisdom or intuition, with becoming a good artist being a matter of developing a ‘feel’ for what works in one’s chosen medium, allowing one to judge appropriateness in particular cases, instead of acquiring general knowledge of what does and does not work that applies to all or most cases.

Because of the similarities between normative aesthetic judgments and Aristotle’s virtue-based approach to ethical normativity, and between aesthetic education and the virtue ethical notion of the development of a virtuous character, and because the priority of intuition over rules in aesthetic practice is analogous to the role of practical wisdom within virtue ethics, a virtue-based approach to aesthetics seems justified.

### ***The Compatibility of Collingwood’s Aesthetics with Aristotle’s Approach to Ethics***

As noted above, any virtue aesthetics based on Aristotle’s approach to ethics will be based on some understanding of art. This understanding must be one that allows for a distinction between practical wisdom and mere ‘cleverness’ with respect to the making and judging of artworks in order to be compatible with the structure of an Aristotelian virtue approach due to the centrality of practical wisdom in Aristotle’s ethics. Without such a distinction, a ‘virtue’ would merely be a trait or disposition that enables one to realize a certain end successfully without including a sense

of when, and in what way, that end is appropriate to realize, which is a departure from Aristotle's notion of a virtue. This notion of cleverness corresponds with the idea of technical skill or craft, since it involves knowing the means to use in order to achieve a pre-envisioned end. Because Collingwood's aesthetics differentiates between art and craft, it allows for the required distinction. Furthermore, while it is not necessary for the understanding of art on which a virtue aesthetics is based to involve normative concerns, it seems fair to say that, since Collingwood's theory already contains a view of the value of art for human well-being it is more suited to virtue aesthetics than a theory of art which does not, all else being equal.

Since, for Collingwood, artistic creation is not an end to which there are means, not only does his understanding of art *allow for* a distinction between practical wisdom and cleverness, but it would seem to *require* practical wisdom in order to explain how an artist can judge when what she does in the course of creating an artwork is appropriate or not. As Collingwood writes, "[a]ny theory of art should be required to show ... how an artist, in pursuing his artistic labour, is able to tell whether he is pursuing it successfully or unsuccessfully" (PA 281). If art were merely a matter of technical skill this could be explained in terms of rules or principles known to the artist or in terms of a plan from which the artist is working, in the way that a carpenter can judge when she is building a cabinet correctly by appealing to technical rules – e.g. the proper way to cut wood evenly, the best angle at which to drive in a nail, etc. – or to the blueprints of the cabinet as the standard to which her product should conform. In the absence of such a technical explanation, something like practical wisdom, consisting of an ability to 'see' or 'feel' appropriateness, is necessary in order to explain how artists can do this.

As well as being compatible in terms of the necessity of practical wisdom for both accounts, Collingwood's aesthetics shares a number of similarities with Aristotle's approach to ethics.

Both involve an essentially practical focus. For Aristotle the purpose of the *Nicomachean Ethics* “is not ... the attainment of theoretical knowledge: we are not conducting this inquiry in order to know what virtue is, but in order to become good” (*NE* II.2 1103b26-28), and for Collingwood an aesthetic theory is not primarily “an attempt to investigate and expound eternal verities concerning the nature of an eternal object called Art, but ... an attempt to reach ... the solution of certain problems arising out of the situation in which artists find themselves” (*PA* vi). To emphasize this point, Collingwood notes in his preface that *The Principles of Art* was written mainly for an audience of artists with an interest in aesthetic theory and not for purely academic philosophers who have no connection to art practice (*PA* v-vi).

Also, Collingwood is what could be called an aesthetic particularist because he holds all feelings (i.e. sensations and emotions) to be unique and non-recurring, from which it follows that a genuine expression of a given feeling will be similarly unique, and therefore that every expression of a feeling – which is to say every work of art – will be different in some significant way from every other (cf. Ridley 1997b, 271 on Collingwood’s theory implying the uniqueness of artworks). Whether Aristotle is a moral particularist is debatable (see 52 *supra*), but it seems fairly safe to say that for Aristotle, what is best or most appropriate to do or feel in a given situation (i.e. the mean) will always be specific to that situation, with any difference between situations possibly leading to there being a different mean for that situation.<sup>64</sup> Thus, for Aristotle ethical virtue – i.e. doing the appropriate thing or having the appropriate emotional response in a given situation, in the right manner and to the right degree, directed towards the right objects or people, etc. (cf. *NE* II.6 1106b21-23) – is non-codifiable insofar as it cannot fully be captured by

---

<sup>64</sup> Note that this is compatible with there being general moral principles that are true ‘for the most part’ – e.g. that, all else being equal, it is good to be generous, honest, courageous, etc. – since what will count as generous, honest or courageous in a particular situation may differ from what will count as these things in another, and certain situations might require the exercise of one virtue at the expense of another, e.g. when the brave thing to do might be to tell a lie, or the honest thing to do might be to refrain from being generous in some way.

a set of universal, context-independent, exceptionless rules. Similarly, Collingwood's account of art, especially his particularism about emotions and their expressions, entails that aesthetic goodness is non-codifiable in the same way, such that there can be no exceptionless rules concerning whether certain features of an artwork are aesthetically good or bad, since their normative aesthetic status will depend on what is appropriate to the emotion that artwork is expressing, with that emotion being unique and so transcending any normative principles meant to apply universally.

Additionally, Collingwood's conception of the imagination is in line with Aristotle's, with both agreeing that imagination is an intermediate faculty between sensation and thinking, and that it is necessary for judgment. While Aristotle does not make much of the imagination in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, it can be seen to underlie *sunesis*, and so be necessary for practical wisdom, according to his philosophical psychology as laid out in *De Anima* as shown by Moss and Noel. Also, the importance of emotions in Collingwood's theory makes it more compatible with an Aristotelian virtue approach than a theory of art that emphasized the properties of artworks alone. For Aristotle, how one feels in response to events is an important part of ethical virtue in addition to how one acts. Collingwood's view that every immediate experience carries with it an affective charge or colouring, and that an awareness of these affective charges is involved in a person's consciousness being good (i.e. not corrupt), complements Aristotle's position, since a virtuous person will not only feel appropriately but will be aware of this feeling, and be aware of it as appropriate, which means that a virtuous person's consciousness must be uncorrupted in Collingwood's sense. Moreover, Collingwood's distinction between immediate feelings at the psychical level and emotions as expressed in consciousness – the latter being the objects of one's thinking about what one feels – could help explain how a virtuous person's

feelings are prohairetic. While one doesn't choose the affective charges that accompany one's sensations, the imagination gives one some control over one's consciousness of those feelings, and it could be this capacity that lets the virtuous person respond to what she encounters appropriately in terms of both her emotions and her actions.<sup>65</sup>

As a potential objection against the very idea of applying Aristotle's notion of virtue to aesthetics, it might be pointed out that certain of Aristotle's remarks explicitly deny this possibility. In writing about art or 'applied science' as distinct from 'pure science' or knowledge of theoretical principles and from practical wisdom, Aristotle distinguishes between production and action, i.e. things that are made and things that are done (*NE* VI.4 1140a1-2). Both are objects of deliberation, being things that could have been otherwise, but Aristotle argues that productions are different from actions, writing "art is identical with the characteristic of producing under the guidance of true reason" (*NE* VI.4 1140a10-11) and that "since production and action are different, it follows that art deals with production and not with action" (*NE* VI.4 1140a16-17). Because practical wisdom only applies to deliberations regarding actions, and since practical wisdom is necessarily involved in the exercise of virtue, it would follow that art, understood in terms of production, is not the sort of thing to which virtues could apply.

This would be a valid objection to basing virtue aesthetics on a technically-oriented theory of art, since Aristotle is speaking of production here in terms of what Collingwood would call craft (with the word translated by Ostwald as 'art' being *technē* in the original). Aristotle's point is that virtue is not the proper normative concept to apply to objects made by people, e.g. tables, shoes, or paintings understood as representations or mimetic objects, since these things are good

---

<sup>65</sup> While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to go into any depth on this point, Collingwood's account of emotions, and his distinction between psychological feelings and emotions of consciousness, might go some way towards offering a solution to the problem of how one develops prohairetic or deliberate emotional dispositions when feelings do not seem to be deliberate. See Kosman 1980 for a discussion of this problem.

or bad in an instrumental sense and not in the sense of having a good character or possessing virtues. However, because Collingwood understands art not primarily in terms of objects that result from production – e.g. paint on canvasses, or amounts of marble or stone arranged into certain shapes – but rather in terms of the artist’s activity of imaginative creation (cf. *PA* 300), his theory of art is immune from this objection. Moreover, the fact that Collingwood considers art to be an activity is a further reason why his aesthetic theory is compatible with a virtue approach, since an agent’s activity is the sort of thing that can be judged in terms of virtues.

Collingwood’s understanding of art may not be the only one suitable for use as the basis of a virtue aesthetics modelled on Aristotle’s ethics. However, any suitable understanding of art will have to include a distinction between art and craft in order to meet the necessary conditions of allowing for practical wisdom as opposed to mere cleverness and focusing on actions rather than production. Since Collingwood’s account meets these two conditions, and is compatible with Aristotle’s thought in the ways listed above (though these points of compatibility are not strictly necessary for an understanding of art to be a suitable basis for virtue aesthetics), it seems eminently suited to a virtue approach.

#### **4.2 VIRTUES INTERNAL TO AESTHETIC PRACTICES**

As has already been argued (in sections 1.2 and 1.6), a virtue aesthetics proper will combine both structural and moral-centred approaches. In other words, it will posit character traits that are exercised in realizing the goods internal to artistic creation and reception as aesthetic virtues, as per MacIntyre, as well as show, as per Oakley, how artistic creation and reception each “involve a commitment to a key human good ... which plays a crucial role in enabling us to live a humanly flourishing life” (Oakley and Cocking 74). Both the structural and moral-centred elements of the theory will centre on the ‘overarching goals’ of the practices of artistic creation and reception,

just as Aristotle's ethics centres on *eudaimonia* as the overall goal of a human life, with these goals being derived from the account of art on which the theory is based – in this case, Collingwood's – just as Aristotle's notion of *eudaimonia*, or the good of a human life, is derived from his account of what it is to be human (cf. Oakley 205).

The overarching goal of the practice of creating art on a Collingwoodian account will be the expression of feelings, including emotions and, more broadly, 'qualia' or 'what it was like' for the artist to have had a certain experience. The goal of the practice of engaging with artistic creations, i.e. spectatorship or reception, will be the imaginative understanding of these works as expressions of their creator's feelings. The phrase 'imaginative understanding' is meant here to distinguish the kind of understanding that is the goal of art spectatorship from purely intellectual or rational understanding. It is not primarily a matter of the spectator having 'knowledge-that' a work of art they encounter is expressing a certain emotion, but a matter of the spectator understanding this emotion 'feelingly', i.e. having an understanding of what it is like to feel it.

This might best be called 'appreciation', *not* in the sense of enjoyment of the work (though this may occur) but in the sense of the word in which someone can 'appreciate' another's reasons for doing something.<sup>66</sup> Note that someone who appreciates another's reasons for acting has more than just propositional knowledge of the person's reasons, and in some sense 'feels' or 'gets' why they have those reasons and why their action stemmed from them. Note also that appreciation in this sense doesn't entail that the appreciator shares or agrees with these reasons; I can appreciate why someone was angry enough to, say, vandalize another's property without condoning that person's actions or being motivated to act the same way myself. This is why a spectator appreciating a work of art as the expression of a certain emotion does not necessarily

---

<sup>66</sup> If this is what Woodruff means by 'appreciation' as a central aesthetic motive, his virtue theory may be more coherent than I have argued, but it is not clear from his examples, some of which seem to use 'appreciation' as 'enjoyment'; however, this would make his theory more applicable to the reception of artworks than to their creation (Cf. 31-33 *supra*).



feel that emotion herself – at least not on what Collingwood calls the psychical level of experience, though she may feel it to some extent on a purely imaginative level, i.e. imagine herself feeling it.

### ***Aesthetic Activity, Moral Character and Well-Being***

Both expression and appreciation, in the sense specified above, can be shown to play a role in human flourishing or *eudaimonia*; thus, a Collingwoodian virtue aesthetics is partially a moral-centred approach, involving an account of why it is ethically good, in Aristotle's broad sense of ethical, to create or engage with art well. Expression, in Collingwood's sense of clarifying one's immediate experiences for consciousness and so becoming aware of them, can be seen as necessary for human flourishing insofar as flourishing involves living in a truthful, balanced or harmonious way. For one thing, expression brings about balance or harmony among one's faculties (what Aristotle and the Ancient Greeks would have called faculties of the 'soul'; cf. *AEM* 73, 119) by connecting the rational or intellectual part of one's being to one's emotions and physiological sensations, making one more consciously attuned to one's immediate experiences and feelings.

For another, expression brings one into harmony with the world by putting one 'in tune' with it through this attunement to what one experiences at the immediate or 'psychical' level, which includes contact with the world through bodily sensations. The successful clarification for conscious awareness of what one experiences, including the affective component, thus allows one to have a correct or veridical understanding of the objects of one's experiences, and so allows for truthful reasoning about the world. Inaccurate understandings or mistaken perceptions of things, and the false thoughts that are based on these understandings, can be due to a failure to clarify what one experiences. When this is based on an 'honest mistake' it can be corrected

through further experience, e.g. taking a submerged stick that appeared bent out of the water and looking at it again, and the failure is not a culpable one. When it is due to self-deception or the corruption of consciousness, however, the failure is culpable and it is more problematic since it is not so easily corrected; a person who wilfully ignores or misconstrues to himself an object of his experience will not even think to look again or seek to verify, or correct, his initial judgment, and so will persist in his inaccurate understandings, which will ‘taint’ or make prone to falsehood any thinking he engages in about this object.<sup>67</sup>

This is not, of course, to say that someone must be a practicing artist in order to have a non-corrupt consciousness, but that someone who understands her experiences correctly, and so is able to engage in truthful thinking or sound reasoning about the objects of her experience, will imagine well, i.e. perceive/be aware of things as they are, neither overlooking aspects of these things nor adding aspects that are not there through assumption or embellishment. One does not need to create art in order to do this, but one will need to be able to do this (i.e. perceive correctly) in order to create art well. This might be the thinking behind Collingwood’s assertion that “every utterance and every gesture that each one of us makes is a work of art” (*PA* 285); not that someone who angrily shakes her fist is as much an artist as a person who paints a picture or writes a poem, but that insofar as this gesture genuinely and deliberately expresses how she feels, there is no difference in kind, but only in degree, between this person’s imaginative understanding of how she feels and that involved in an artist’s clarification of her feelings through the process of creating art.

Even if Collingwood holds the rather broad view that every expressive act is a work of art and so everyone whose consciousness is not wholly corrupt is an ‘artist’, this does not mean that

---

<sup>67</sup> To put it another way, reasoning that involves even one false premise will be unsound, and so not entirely good *qua* thinking, even if one’s conclusion happens to be true and one’s thought process is valid.

everyone engages in expression to the same extent. The practice of an art form by one to whom the term ‘artist’ typically refers – e.g. a painter, dancer, poet or musician – could be seen as a focused, refined form of this natural capacity for expression in which everyone engages, with the works of art such a person creates being exemplary forms of human expression. This observation is in line with Collingwood’s assertion that all that distinguishes people called artists from everyone else is their ability to “take the initiative in expressing what all feel” (*PA* 119), and is not very different from Aristotle’s notion of the virtuous person being someone who characteristically exercises the capacities that most or all humans share in excellent ways.<sup>68</sup>

However one takes Collingwood’s broader claims about what counts as art, an uncorrupted consciousness can be seen to be a component of a flourishing human life. A corrupt consciousness prevents one from flourishing by creating an imbalance between one’s thinking and feeling, by putting one out of touch with one’s world, and by jeopardizing one’s capacity for correct understanding (i.e. *sunesis*), which is a necessary component of practical wisdom and so of ethical virtue. Practicing artistic creation involves sharpening one’s attention and perceptual capacities in the way that, e.g., drawing or painting increases one’s capacity to see greater detail in visual forms and to be aware of a finer range of colours, composing music or playing an instrument makes one more aware of sonic details and more likely to perceive relationships between sounds such as rhythms, harmonies, etc., or writing poetry deepens one’s awareness of nuances of linguistic meaning and the ways that words can be used. As Collingwood writes, “a great portrait painter ... intensely active in absorbing impressions and converting them into an imaginative vision of the man, may easily see through the mask that is good enough to deceive a less active and less pertinacious observer, and detect in a mouth or an eye or the turn of a head

---

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Collingwood’s remarks on the difference in degree of awareness between merely looking at something and looking at it while painting it, *PA* 307-08.

things that have long been concealed” (*PA* 309). Thus, engaging in artistic practices will help someone be better able to attend to and perceive things within the field of her total psychical experience and to clarify these experiences for consciousness, and so being a creative artist is conducive to one’s well-being.<sup>69</sup>

Creating art would seem to be conducive to well-being even apart from the artist sharing her work with others. Someone who writes poems or paints pictures in order to help work out or make sense of his feelings and experiences, but who keeps these works private and is the only person to see them, could still benefit from his working out of these feelings and the emotional-mental balancing this would involve, just as someone can benefit psychologically or emotionally from keeping a private diary in which he recounts his daily experiences to himself in order to understand them better or to become more aware of his life as a coherent whole. However, this assumes that the works the person creates are genuine expressions of feelings he has had; if they are, he will benefit from making them in the ways described above, but there is always the risk that they are products of a corruption in the maker’s consciousness and so are not genuine expressions. Similarly, someone can deceive himself in his diary by omitting certain details of his experiences or by embellishing them, both of which would result in a misleading account of his life and what he felt. This points to an epistemic problem raised by an artist who creates works only for himself: given that someone whose consciousness is corrupt is not aware that it is, someone who is the only audience for his creations will be unable to tell with certainty if they are genuine expressions or not (cf. *PA* 314). This does not mean that someone cannot genuinely express themselves in artistic creations that no one else sees, but that the person’s well-being

---

<sup>69</sup> A similar benefit can be had from working on projects Collingwood would consider craft rather than art, as Bernard Bosanquet maintained, to the extent that craft-work aims at precision, involves careful attention to particulars and affords the opportunity to see directly when one’s actions result in a better or worse outcome, and so makes one aware of value (on Bosanquet’s view, see Trott 2007, esp. 119-21). That this value may be shared to some extent by the fabrication of craft-objects does not detract from it as a reason why artistic creation is conducive to human well-being.

may be incomplete without some confirmation from others that their expressions have been genuine. This need for conformation could be why nearly all artists, even fairly private ones who create as a hobby rather than with a view to publicizing their work, feel compelled to share their work with at least a limited selection of others in order to get some feedback or to have some support for their own opinion of the value of their work.<sup>70</sup>

If one of the reasons why artistic creation is conducive to well-being is that it involves expressing one's feelings to others as well as for oneself (cf. *HWB* 192-93 on what he calls emotional sharing), it follows that art is not only part of the artist's well-being, but is conducive to the well-being of those who experience or engage with the work. In other words, being a spectator of art is conducive to human flourishing. The benefits of appreciation for well-being, in the sense of coming to understand, from the inside, the emotion that the artist felt and has expressed in her creation, include a greater awareness of possible ways of feeling than the spectator could have gained from only attending to his own feelings; in other words, engaging with art can give us access to new ways of perceiving, feeling, and understanding.

Because one who aims to understand a work of art in terms of what it expresses is concerned with how another felt about something rather than with how he himself feels, engaging with art can exercise one's capacity for empathy and so can dispose one to look beyond one's immediate perspective and see or feel things from other points of view (cf. Collins 2013, 201-04). While there is no *necessary* connection between the ability to appreciate artworks and empathy or benevolence towards other people, it seems plausible that someone who is disposed to appreciate how another has felt, as this feeling is expressed in an artwork, will be more disposed to be aware of how other people feel, which is necessary for ethical virtues like justice, generosity or

---

<sup>70</sup> This is an empirical claim that is nearly impossible to prove, since an artist who has not shared her work with anyone else will be unknown as an artist, with her work being unknown as art, but based on my personal experience with creating art, as well as my acquaintance with others who make art, this does not seem an unreasonable conjecture.

friendliness, even if this awareness *alone* cannot necessarily motivate someone to act according to these virtues. Furthermore, it could be argued that one cannot make judgments of another's conduct as either ethical or unethical (i.e. virtuous or vicious) without properly understanding that person's reasons for acting, including how that person felt, and so the kind of awareness that engaging with art in terms of its expressiveness helps to develop can be seen as necessary for ethical judgment. For both of these reasons, being a good aesthetic spectator can be conducive to the development of a good moral character (cf. Kant, *CPJ* 178).<sup>71</sup>

Since both artistic creation and reception can be shown to play a role in *eudaimonia*, Collingwoodian virtue aesthetics has a clear moral-centered component and so meets one of the two conditions outlined above in section 1.6 for any full virtue approach to aesthetics, which is also a requirement for a practice to have virtues, according to Oakley's reading of MacIntyre. However, engaging in artistic creation or spectatorship will only be constitutive of well-being if done *well*, which leads to the other aspect of a full virtue aesthetics account: its structural component. This involves deriving aesthetic virtues from the overarching goals of art practices, i.e. expression for artists and appreciation for spectators, which will result in virtues of creation and of reception, i.e. dispositions that good artists and good spectators characteristically possess.

### ***Aesthetic Virtue***

Since aesthetic activity involves the overlap of both thinking and feeling, given the position of the imagination as mediating between these two faculties for both Aristotle and Collingwood, the traits that will count as aesthetic virtues will be a combination of what Aristotle would have classified as intellectual and ethical virtues. Ethical virtues, for Aristotle, are excellences of the appetitive or desiderative part of a person's soul, relating to one's feelings and actions, which are

---

<sup>71</sup> David Rondel argues for a similar view of the moral benefits of engaging with artworks in "The Moral Consequences of the End of Art" (2014).

held to be characteristic ways of feeling rather than capacities to feel since, as Aristotle writes, people are not “praised or blamed simply because [they] are capable of being affected” by a given emotion (*NE* II.5 1106a7-8), but for the way in which they are affected, e.g. how one is angry, rather than whether one feels angry or not (*NE* II.5 1105b32-33). Unlike ethical virtues, which Aristotle insists cannot be capacities, at least some intellectual virtues would seem to be capacities rather than characteristics (or possibly capacities that are characteristically possessed by certain people), as shown when he writes that practical wisdom involves “the capacity of deliberating well about what is good and advantageous for oneself” (*NE* VI. 5, 1140a25-26) and when he states that “good sense [*gnōmē*], understanding [*sunesis*], practical wisdom [*phronesis*], and intelligence [*nous*]” are “capacities” (*NE* VI.11 1143a26-28). These capacities are still acquired human excellences, although, unlike many of Aristotle’s ethical virtues, they do not seem to involve a mean between excess and deficiency, but rather are opposed by a single vice in the way that excellence in understanding, discernment and deliberation are opposed by tendencies to misunderstand, fail to discern and miscalculate, respectively, and with understanding or discerning *too much*, or deliberating *too well*, being incoherent as ‘vices of excess’. Thus, while some aesthetic virtues will be means between extremes of excess and deficiency, not all will be.

Furthermore, some of the traits, qualities or capacities characteristically possessed by good artists will not be virtues in either sense, but will be necessary preconditions for the possession or exercise of aesthetic virtues, just as possession of some amount of wealth or property is necessary for a person to have and exercise the virtue of generosity, but possessing wealth is not itself a virtue. Among the things that will be characteristically involved in creating art well but which are not virtues *per se* is the knowledge or understanding of expression as the overarching

goal of artistic practice. This does not have to be explicit knowledge; it could just be an implicit understanding of ‘what counts’ or an intuitive sense that there is something more to art-making than aiming to evoke emotions in others, and that a work of art’s value does not depend necessarily on whether people like or dislike it. This is analogous to how, for Aristotle, a virtuous person will have some sense of *eudaimonia* as the ultimate goal at which to aim but will not necessarily understand it in terms of its being an ‘ultimate goal’. Just as the right understanding of what is good for a human is the necessary starting point for ethical virtue, the right ‘starting point’ for artistic creation will be an understanding (whether explicit or implicit) of art in terms of expression. Just as someone whose idea of human flourishing is to amass wealth or power or to experience sensual pleasures as often as possible will be unable to become virtuous on account of having the wrong ‘starting point’, someone who thinks that the ultimate purpose of art is to arouse emotions in others, or to make things that people will like in order to become rich, or to raise awareness about social issues, will be effectively unable to become a good artist (though they may be a skilled craftsperson) until their understanding of art changes.

### ***Aesthetic Practical Wisdom***

Connected with having the right starting point when it comes to understanding the purpose of art is the importance of having practical wisdom in the sphere of art-making, since knowing what would be good to do is insufficient for virtue without also knowing how to do it. Just as practical wisdom in the sphere of ethics, defined as a disposition to aim at and succeed in hitting the mean, can be thought of as a conjunction of the right understanding of the good with intellectual capacities such as discernment and cleverness, practical wisdom within the aesthetic sphere can be thought of as a combination of an understanding of art as expression with imaginative capabilities and sufficient technical skill in some art medium (with technical skill here being



analogous to cleverness). While this inclusion of technical skill might seem to depart from Collingwood's understanding of art, it is important to keep in mind that, despite his attack on the technical theory of art (i.e. the position within aesthetics that art is a kind of craft), and his insistence that there can be no technique for expression, Collingwood does not deny the role played by technique in the creation of artworks. He denies the sufficiency of technique for the creation of art, but affirms its necessity, explicitly asserting that "no work of art whatever can be produced without some degree of technical skill, and, other things being equal, the better the technique the better will be the work of art" (PA 26). Thus, it is consistent with Collingwood's theory to include technical skill among the abilities a good artist will characteristically possess.

Analogously to the way general practical wisdom involves the capacities of *nous*/intuition, *sunesis*/understanding, *gnōmē*/discernment and *euboulia*/good deliberation as these relate to appropriateness in matters of action and feeling, the limited form of practical wisdom specific to aesthetic virtue will involve versions of these capacities related to appropriateness in matters of imaginative creation and expression. A person might be aesthetically discerning or intuitive without being so when it comes to her actions in the ethical sphere, e.g. her treatment of others. Still, it seems plausible that possession of aesthetic practical wisdom and its constituent capacities will make it easier, for the most part, for one to develop general practical wisdom; someone who has learned to be discerning in her understanding of artworks and her judgment of their aesthetic value will likely find it easier to develop these abilities in relation to understanding the motivations of others (as well as her own) and judging ethical situations.<sup>72</sup>

Aesthetic *sunesis* would be a capacity for introspective understanding of one's immediate experiences, including apprehension of the affective component of experience at the psychical

---

<sup>72</sup> This is largely why philosophers like Martha Nussbaum and Eileen John think that engaging with art benefits a person's moral development, with their focus on literature likely due to the importance of understanding the characters' reasons for actions in reading narrative fiction. On this, see Nussbaum 1990 and John 1995, 1998.

level and awareness of, or conscious attention to, the qualitative aspect of a given experience (i.e. ‘what it’s like’) instead of merely being aware of the ‘external’ objects of that experience. Aesthetic *gnōmē* would involve an awareness of feelings (both sensation and emotion) in their particularity, or in terms of their differences from other feelings, with a greater capacity for discernment here allowing for a greater awareness of the slight differences between very similar things (e.g. attention to the subtle nuances of shifts in mood or emotional tone, or to minute differences of shading or saturation in colours). In this way, it can be seen as a refinement of aesthetic *sunesis* just as general *gnōmē*, as “sympathetic understanding” (*NE* VI.11 1143a19), is a refinement of general *sunesis*. An awareness of the relations between feelings, in addition to the awareness of the feelings themselves, falls within the sphere of these two capacities but is difficult to attribute to one over the other; it seems that *sunesis* would make one aware of these relations while *gnōmē* would be involved in judging the appropriateness of these relations, e.g. which combinations of feelings/sensations cohere or ‘go together’ better than others. (Cf. *PA* 281 on the necessity of a “vigilant and discriminating eye”.)

Aesthetic *euboulia* would involve a sense of how best to express a given feeling (or a coherent set of feelings making up a unified experience) through creative imaginative activity, and so would involve some degree of knowledge of various forms of expression, though not necessarily of traditional artistic media. Although *euboulia* is Greek for ‘deliberation’, it cannot here be a matter of inferring or rationally calculating the means by which a feeling or set of feelings is to be expressed, since expression for Collingwood is not an end to which there are means. While the distinction between technique and aesthetic *euboulia* is difficult to work out fully – which could explain why it is so easy to fall into thinking in terms of the technical theory of art even after accepting Collingwood’s arguments against it – it might best be described as the

ability of an artist to work from ‘instinct’ rather than having to engage in active deliberation about what she is doing, in the same way that an experienced driver doesn’t have to think about or plan what to do at each moment but will instinctively respond to the conditions of the road, except in unusual circumstances that call for active practical reasoning. This is the ability that musicians and actors exhibit when improvising, which is more of an intuitive awareness of the available possibilities, and of which of these possibilities will ‘work’ or ‘fit’ best, than it is a skill that can be learned separately from simply learning to create in the art form in question.

While this ability allows one to act well, or successfully, without having to reason about what one should do, the actions of someone who is ‘going on instinct’ in this way are able to be seen in hindsight as a rational process. A musician improvising on his instrument will create a piece of music that can then be written down, and if the song is good it will look like the result of a series of good decisions as to what notes to play, how to modulate the timing, etc. This is analogous to the view within virtue ethics that a practical syllogism is best thought of as a reconstruction, after the fact, of an agent’s reasons for acting, and not as a series of thoughts the agent mentally worked through step by step before acting (see Hursthouse 2006, 299-303). This ability likely develops from practice in actively deliberating about how to do something when one is learning, with beginners needing to think more about what they are doing and what should come next than those with more experience.

Aesthetic *nous* could be considered an amalgam of the above three capacities, being an overall intuitive sense of aesthetic appropriateness. While general practical wisdom, and the four capacities it involves, are classified by Aristotle as intellectual virtues, i.e. excellences of the rational part of the soul exercised in thinking about what could be otherwise (*NE* VI.1 1139a6-9), aesthetic practical wisdom and the four associated capacities described above could be classified

as *imaginative* virtues, i.e. excellences of the faculty of imagination, with there being some degree of overlap with feeling at the point at which pre-conscious psychical feelings start to become available to consciousness, and with thinking at the level of basic understanding, and with these virtues operating on a level of consciousness that is more intuitive than intellectual.<sup>73</sup>

### ***Virtues of Creation***

Other aesthetic virtues will count as excellences of the imagination in its various functions, but will be more analogous to Aristotle's ethical virtues. The virtue of what I have called 'first order imagining' (see 103 *supra*) could be called *Perspicacity*, and would involve excellence in active conscious perception or the ability to perceive in terms of aspects. While excellent perception might seem more like a capacity than a characteristic, it is not meant in the sense of someone having naturally sharp eyesight or more sensitive taste buds, which could be distinguished as excellence in the capacity of sensation instead of perception<sup>74</sup>; rather, it involves how one attends to one's immediate experience, including sensations, in order to 'make sense of' the world, and is, as an active conscious process, exercised voluntarily. One element of perspicacity would be accuracy of perception, or being aware of things as they are, and since things generally have multiple aspects or are able to be 'taken' in more than just one way, accuracy of perception will also involve perceiving a thing in terms of several of its aspects, and so having a more complete awareness of it. This would extend to perceiving relations, e.g. hearing a resemblance between two voices, feeling one thing as being heavier than another, or seeing that an object of a certain shape will fit into a certain space at a certain angle.

---

<sup>73</sup> The painter Francis Bacon is just one example of an artist who affirms that artistic creation is more intuitive than intellectual, saying "one has an intention, but what really happens comes about in working ... In working you are really following this kind of cloud of sensation in yourself, but you don't know what it really is. And it's called instinct. And one's instinct ... fixes on certain things that have happened in the activity of applying the paint to the canvas" (quoted in Warburton 48). Such comments from art practitioners reinforce many of Collingwood's claims about art and the mental (emotional and perceptual, as well as rational) processes typically involved in its creation.

<sup>74</sup> Someone with acute senses might have a limited ability to *perceive*, i.e. attend to and find meaning in sensory experience, while a partially deaf or nearsighted person might have greater *perceptual* ability although his senses were diminished (cf. PA 304).

Because perspicacity involves consciously directed attention or perception rather than passive or physiological sensation, it could be considered on the model of an ethical virtue as a mean between vices of deficiency and excess. The corresponding vice of deficiency could be called *Obliviousness*, being a disposition to overlook parts of one's immediate experience, or to fail to perceive a thing in terms of its relations to other things (e.g. failing to see resemblances or be aware of differences) or in terms of more than one of its aspects (e.g. seeing a book as 'just a book', and not as a potential doorstep or weapon).<sup>75</sup> There is not a very good name for the vice of excess, but it could somewhat awkwardly be called *Over-perceiving*, being a disposition to see aspects of a thing, or relations between things, that did not actually obtain. Another way to put this would be to say that perspicacity involves veridical imagination, with obliviousness being connected to a lack of imagination and over-perceiving being connected to an 'over-active' imagination tending towards make-believe, with the person seeing things as being other than they are, e.g. through wishful thinking or paranoia.

Similarly, when it comes to 'third order imagining', i.e. the combination of remembered sensations or feelings so as to 'picture' new things, or to 'picture' something in a new way, the corresponding virtue could be called *Creativity*. Being the excellence of this use of imagination, creativity could be understood as a mean between a vice of deficiency, i.e. *Literal-mindedness* or the disposition to take things only at 'face value' and not conceive of how they might be otherwise, and a vice of excess, i.e. *Outlandishness* or the disposition to 'picture' things in ways so bizarre, implausible or impractical that they cease to maintain a connection with the world of one's actual experiences, and so would be unlikely to express anything one actually felt. Where perspicacity involves an awareness of the particularity of each feeling and experience, creativity

---

<sup>75</sup> Obliviousness would include what Wittgenstein (1953, 224<sup>e</sup> remark 257) describes as 'aspect-blindness'.

analogously will involve the ability to create an expression that is just as particular, a certain thing rather than a thing of a certain kind. As Collingwood writes, “art does not tolerate *clichés*. Every genuine expression must be an original one” (PA 275, original emphasis), with clichés being a particular danger of literal-mindedness.

While it is relatively easy to see how a disposition towards literal-mindedness would hinder someone’s ability to be a good artist, outlandishness might be harder to distinguish from creativity as beneficial to artistic creation, but this should be easy to see by considering examples such as deliberately illogical stories that stretch narrative credibility, wildly surreal paintings, or pieces of avant-garde music made up of discordant sounds made by improbable objects (e.g. slabs of meat being hit by hammers) and noting that ‘works’ such as these are rarely considered good art, and often come across as being ‘weird for the sake of weird’, i.e. as too calculated rather than genuinely expressive of anything from the maker’s experience. However, it is important to keep in mind that the mean, or what is appropriate, will always be relative to the context, i.e. the feeling being expressed, and so sometimes what works appropriately for one piece of art might seem to border on outlandishness, as with Picasso’s *Les Femmes d’Alger*, Nijinsky’s choreography for *Afternoon of a Faun*, or Schoenberg’s atonal music.

Because the ‘third order imagining’ exercised by creativity presupposes ‘second order imagining’, or the ability to hold feelings/sensations in mind, a good artist will have an accurate memory and the ability to concentrate their attention on feelings/sensations once they are no longer directly perceived. This ability is important for an artist to explore and express a feeling or set of feelings throughout the process of creation, especially when this process is a long one, as in the writing a novel, the painting of a mural or the sculpting of a large statue. Being able to remember the experience that inspired a work and accurately recall what it was like seems

necessary for an artist to know when something she has created is a successful expression of that particular feeling and not another, and so is necessary for any uncorrupted consciousness. A good memory is not a virtue, since it is not prohairetic; rather, it seems to be a skill that is necessary for some aesthetic virtues, in the way that having money is necessary for generosity.

A good memory – especially the ability to hold one’s attention on a feeling after it has passed from one’s immediate experience – is necessary for the aesthetic virtue of *Dedication*. This is similar to Woodruff’s ‘persistence’ in that it involves endurance when it comes to one’s efforts to work out or express what one feels, but also implies an artist’s commitment to successful expression, i.e. to getting clear on precisely those feelings (cf. *PA* 113-14). The vices Woodruff associates with ‘persistence’ can apply here as well, with dedication positioned as a mean between *Impatience* on the side of deficiency, being a disposition to give up the task of expressing oneself, perhaps falling back on ready-made generic ideas of emotions as substitutions for what one has really felt, and *Obsessiveness* on the side of excess, being a disposition to tinker with or add to one’s creation after the point where one has succeeded in expression, when such additional work detracts from the aesthetic quality of the work by introducing elements that are not genuinely related to the feeling(s) expressed.

Analogous to perspicacity, but related to emotions rather than perception, is the aesthetic virtue of *Sensitivity*, being a disposition to be attuned to the affective side of experience. As Collingwood writes, “an artist who is not furnished ... with deep and powerful emotions will never produce anything except shallow and frivolous works of art” (*PA* 279), so emotional attunement seems to be a necessary condition for being a good artist. Like many of the ethical virtues Aristotle describes, sensitivity is a virtue related to excellence in the feeling of emotions, but unlike those ethical virtues, which are dispositions to feel the appropriate response to a

situation or stimulus (i.e. to feel the right things), sensitivity is a disposition to attend to what one feels in the right way or to the right degree, regardless of what emotions one feels.<sup>76</sup> Sensitivity will go beyond attunement to one's own feelings to include empathy, i.e. an awareness of the feelings of others, since attunement to a wider range of feelings will, *ceteris paribus*, make one a better artist than will a limited range of feeling (cf. *PA* 119-21).

The vice of deficiency here, which could be called *Insensitivity*,<sup>77</sup> is the disposition to ignore, repress or otherwise be unaware of the affective component of one's experiences, which Collingwood describes as a "habit of 'sterilizing' *sensa* by ignoring their emotional charge[s]" and which he claims is prevalent among educated adults, at least in contemporary Western civilization, but is less common in children and artists (*PA* 162-63). The vice of excess could be called *Sentimentality*, being a disposition to embellish or 'overplay' the affective component of one's experiences or to respond emotionally to a greater degree than is warranted or necessary. Both insensitivity and sentimentality involve a false consciousness of one's experience in that the former results in the failure to be aware of a significant part of this experience, while the latter results in an exaggerated awareness of things.

MacIntyre writes that honesty, courage and justice are required for doing well in or realizing the internal goods of any activity, and so will count as virtues across all practices (*AV* 192-93). One aspect of *Honesty* in aesthetic practice would involve an artist being honest with himself about what he feels and whether his creation has really expressed this, which seems to be the same as his having an uncorrupted consciousness. The corresponding vice of *Dishonesty*, i.e. self-deception about one's feelings/experiences or one's success in expressing them in a given

---

<sup>76</sup> While this may not seem to be a candidate for a virtue, since emotions are something we undergo rather than something we choose and so are not prohairetic, the element of attunement or conscious awareness makes it active to at least some degree; we may not be able to choose which feelings we have, but we can choose *how* we feel them, to some extent.

<sup>77</sup> This should not be conflated with the 'insensitivity' Aristotle writes of in connection with not taking delight in pleasures (*NE* III.11 1119a6-7), though the deficiency Aristotle has in mind might count as an instance of what I mean by insensitivity.



creation, seems to be identical to the corruption of consciousness. The other aspect of honesty as an aesthetic virtue of creation would be a matter of an artist being honest in her presenting to others of her creations as art, i.e. genuine expressions; dishonesty in respect to this would involve an artist presenting what she knew were failed attempts to properly work out what she felt, or which contained clichés rather than the authentic expression of particular feelings, as if they were finished works of art. While this type of dishonesty would not necessarily involve the corruption of consciousness, since the artist is not deceiving herself here, intentional misrepresentation of a failed expression as a successful one is something that a good artist would not characteristically do, and so counts as an aesthetic vice. There would only seem to be a vice of deficiency here; an ‘excess’ of honesty does not make sense in this context since it is not clear what an excess of honesty about a work’s status as art would be, and since the notion of one’s consciousness being *too* uncorrupted seems incoherent.

Aesthetic *Courage* in regard to creation would function in a similar way to honesty, being a disposition to be open to accepting one’s feelings when they are unpleasant or distressing, without trying to censor, make more palatable or ‘bowdlerize’ them. The vice of deficiency here, *Cowardice*, would be the tendency to repress or ‘sugar-coat’ feelings one doesn’t want to acknowledge as one’s own, and so would essentially be one form of dishonesty. As with aesthetic honesty, there does not seem to be a vice of excess here. This type of courage, taken together with the honesty described above, seems to be what Collingwood is referring to when he writes of “the perfect *sincerity* which distinguishes good art from bad” and in his insistence that an artist “must be absolutely *candid*; his speech much be absolutely free” (PA 115, my emphasis). Another form of aesthetic courage, this time in regard to an artist’s response to feedback about her work, would involve a disposition to be open to constructive criticism and to

be able to judge the relevance or worth of another's judgment (which would also involve discernment) – this could also be considered a form of modesty or fallibility. The deficiency here, *Lack of Confidence*, would be a tendency of an artist to be overly affected by criticism and to rely on the approval or disapproval of others in her own assessments of her work, with a vice of excess corresponding to this form of courage being a disposition towards over-confidence or *Arrogance* in the face of criticism, ignoring the feedback of others when this disagrees with the artist's pre-formed judgment of the quality of her work; both would hinder an artist's ability to learn from feedback and criticism intended as constructive (cf. *PA* 313-14).

What would count as a specifically aesthetic form of justice is problematic. While an artist treating her co-workers or her audience in a fair and respectful manner would involve justice, such actions seem to involve justice in its broader ethical sense and not to have as much to do with expression as the overarching goal of artistic creation. An artist who treated others unfairly, or who cheated people in some way, e.g. in relation to the cost charged for finished works or commissions, might be seen as ethically flawed, but this does not seem to be an impediment to her ability to create works that authentically express her feelings or experiences.<sup>78</sup> The only way in which justice seems to apply to the creation of art in respect to the authenticity of expression is in an artist 'doing justice to' (i.e. staying true to) the feeling or experience she is trying to work out or express, but this use of 'justice' seems more metaphorical (or perhaps analogical) than literal, and would be better expressed by a term such as *Integrity*. A connection between artistic integrity and justice in an ethical sense might be found insofar as integrity involves staying true to oneself by staying true to the feeling one is expressing (which is a part of one's experience; hence the personal aspect of artistic expression as opposed to craft) and in doing so resisting the

---

<sup>78</sup> Justice here might also include an artist acknowledging her debt to other artists, since this would be part of knowing when the feelings that are expressed in a work one has created are genuinely one's own, as opposed to the 'copied' feelings of others as they have been expressed elsewhere.

corruption of consciousness, and so could be seen as a kind of fairness to oneself. Also, by creating works that express one's feelings, perspective and experience in a way that communicates an understanding of these things to others, one is engaging in what Goldie calls 'emotional sharing'; since a refusal to share one's perspectives or feelings could be seen as unfair when others could benefit from this sharing, an artist sharing her work with others in order to communicate the understandings she has worked out, in the process of creating the work, could be seen as acting fairly towards them.

The traits listed above as aesthetic virtues relating to the creation of art might already be familiar as dispositions that ideally good artists generally are thought to have, and may seem obvious to most practicing artists, but the lack of any 'new discoveries' here should not be seen as a problem; both Collingwood and Aristotle work from a 'common sense' understanding in their aesthetics and ethics, respectively, and so it is fitting if the aesthetic virtues I have described map onto existing ways of thinking by artists. What seems less common, however, is the idea of judging *spectators* as good or bad in terms of their relation to and engagement with works of art. While the idea of a 'right' way to experience art seems implausible and snobbish if thought of in terms of 'rules' or formulas to follow, it seems right that, since engaging with art is an activity, there will be better and worse ways in which one can do so.

### ***The Spectator's Virtues of Reception***

Assuming the overarching goal of aesthetic reception or spectatorship is appreciation, i.e. gaining an imaginative understanding of the work as the expression of a certain feeling or experience had by the artist, and in doing so grasping what it would be like to feel that emotion or have that experience, but not necessarily feeling that emotion oneself (though this may happen), the aesthetic virtues relation to the reception of art will be dispositions that are

necessary for, or conducive to, doing this well, with vices of reception being dispositions or habits that hinder one from having this sort of appreciation. Many of the virtues of reception will overlap with virtues of creation, though they aim at a slightly different end. Furthermore, just as ethically virtuous people will be good judges of the ethical status of another's action, most or all good artists will also be good spectators, and so possess dispositions to aim at one or the other of these ends, depending on the situation. Not only do good artists have to be able to understand their own work *qua* expression in order to judge whether or not it is successful, but part of the process of developing the artistic virtues will involve appreciating the works of other artists and seeing where others have succeeded or not in their expressions.

In order to grasp the particular feeling or experience that a work of art expresses – to be aware of it as a certain thing, rather than to recognize it as a thing of a certain kind – in the absence of any ‘rules’ or formulae that one can rely on to infer what the work is expressing and judge its success, a good spectator will need to possess a form of practical wisdom.<sup>79</sup> *Sunesis* would allow the spectator to have an overall understanding of the work as a whole, and to be aware of her own experience of the work at the psychical level, in terms of both the sensations felt in her encounter with the work and the affective colourings of these sensations when experienced together. A broad understanding of the ‘general’ feeling a work expresses (i.e. the ‘family’ of feelings within which this particular feeling has a ‘resemblance’) would be had thanks to *sunesis*, though this understanding would need to be refined through *gnōmē* and *nous* for the spectator to become aware of this feeling in its particularity. *Gnōmē* would be exercised in a spectator's awareness of finer details of the work, and of the relations between these details or parts, as well as of the relations between each of these parts and the whole they together

---

<sup>79</sup> As Hugo Meynell (1986) writes, “The function of the critic seems to be largely to specialise in *phronesis* in relation to works of art – to advise the public on which works of art will be worth attending to, and to what extent” (11, original emphasis).

comprise. This would include the spectator's judgment of the appropriateness or 'fittingness' of these relations, e.g. understanding why it works to have a certain note of a certain length come at a certain point in a song by being aware of how this note *fits* with the others.

*Euboulia* would seem to be less important for spectators since the works they encounter are presumably finished and cannot be otherwise than they are.<sup>80</sup> However, judging the appropriateness of part of a work in relation to other parts or to the whole, or of the appropriateness of the whole as the expression of the particular feeling one understands the work to be expressing, requires one to imagine other ways the work might have been and judge how these differences would have made the work better or worse. Judging a painting to be 'garish' implies the colours would have been better if they had been otherwise, which involves being able to imagine them as different. Thus, a form of *euboulia* consisting of the ability to judge which creative decisions would have resulted in a better or worse work is necessary for good spectatorship. While technical skill is not required, some knowledge of the medium is necessary for a spectator to be aware of the different possibilities that were available to the artist when she was creating the work, i.e. the respects in which it could have been otherwise. Technical skill will give one this knowledge, which is why those who have experience creating in an art form are able to understand a work in that form in terms of the creative process of which it is a result.

*Nous* as it is involved in reception would be similar to its function in creation, giving a spectator an intuitive sense of the overall aesthetic appropriateness and expressiveness of a work, with the spectator understanding the work 'on its own terms', so to speak, or as a certain thing, and understanding the feeling or experience expressed as distinct and unique, allowing her to

---

<sup>80</sup> They can, but not without becoming a different work, in the way that a drawing by Willem De Kooning became *Erased De Kooning* by Robert Rauschenberg. Works of interactive art made to be altered by spectators, such as works by Felix Gonzalez-Torres (described in Hessler 2011), might seem to pose problems here. If such works are expressive, this aspect is to be found within the concept rather than in the physical component of the work, with the latter rather than the former being what is altered.

distinguish it from similar feelings and experiences and so to avoid generalization. This would also include an awareness of the work as the result of the artist's creative activity, with the spectator understanding the work within the context of a dynamic process rather than taking it as if it were a static object that could be considered 'in itself', apart from its history as someone's creation. In this way, a spectator with *nous* can see the perceptual details involved in the work's form as intentionally chosen, and so can see it as a performance of the artist who made it, just as an ethically virtuous person's practical wisdom, and in particular their capacity of *nous*, can see the intention behind another's actions, e.g. seeing someone hand someone else money as an exercise of generosity rather than as a mere series of bodily movements.

In order for the capacities involved in practical wisdom to be exercised well by a spectator, she must also have the right 'starting point' in the form of knowledge, or at least an implicit understanding, that the goal of aesthetic engagement is to gain an imaginative understanding of a given work of art as a unique expression as opposed to aiming for a purely intellectual understanding, treating the work as a series of symbols to decode or as a semiotic text to deconstruct, or for mere amusement, treating it as entertainment to be consumed. In many ways this is a matter of the attitude the spectator takes to art as a general 'sphere of life', just as aiming at *eudaimonia* is an attitude one takes towards living. This largely involves a setting aside of any personal interest in, say, pleasure derived from the content of the work considered on its own (e.g. wanting to see 'pretty' paintings or be told 'nice' stories; essentially to have the work conform to what one finds *agreeable*), or the political message or view of human nature that a work endorses (e.g. wanting the work to conform to ideas that one has already decided are *right*), or in being seen as the sort of person who likes a certain artist or type of work, none of which are, properly speaking, *aesthetic* interests.

This attitude of taking works of art on their own terms, with the spectator bringing himself to them instead of expecting them to cater to him (with the latter belonging to consumption as opposed to appreciation or understanding), might be considered *Justice* in the context of reception, albeit loosely, i.e. being ‘fair to’ the work and, by extension, to the artist who made it. This requires the virtue of *Dedication*, which in regards to reception involves both patience, or a good attention span, and a sense of charity in which one assumes the artist has successfully expressed some feeling or experience in the work and takes the time to try to see what this is. The associated vices of *Impatience* and *Obsessiveness* function as they do for artistic creation, only here they are directed towards understanding the feeling expressed rather than to expressing it. An impatient spectator will be one with a short attention span or a poor ability to focus and a disposition to give up trying to understand a work if its ‘meaning’ is not made immediately apparent, while an obsessive spectator will be disposed to over-think a work, giving it more attention than it warrants, i.e. more than is necessary to grasp what it expresses.

In the context of reception, *Perspicacity* will be a disposition of a spectator to perceive the parts of a given work of art, including the relations between sensible parts and the whole work and their qualitative aspect or affective charge, fully or in detail; a visual art critic will see more detail in a painting, a music critic will hear more in a symphony (e.g. the ability to perceive, and not just rationally infer, a composer’s use of sonata form in the first movement), a sommelier will taste a more complex and greater range of flavours in a good glass of wine, and so forth. In contrast, an *Oblivious* spectator will only be aware of the basic or most overt details in a work, while one who is *Over-perceptive* will pay attention to more aspects of a work than are salient for aesthetic appreciation (e.g. attending to the font in which a copy of a poem or novel has been printed), or will imagine more details or relations than are in the work; the latter will most likely

happen in memory as opposed to in direct experience. Analogously, a *Sensitive* spectator will be disposed to be attuned both to the feelings expressed by a work and the feelings evoked in her by the work (which need not be the same), being aware of shifts in mood and tone, or what in general could be called the ‘emotional texture’ of a work, especially in temporal media such as music, film, theatre and dance.<sup>81</sup> *Insensitive* spectators will tend to be unaware of these aspects of a work, while *Sentimental* spectators will be disposed to take aspects of the work to be more emotionally significant, expressive or evocative than they are best experienced as being.<sup>82</sup>

While spectators do not create the works of art they experience, Collingwood holds understanding a work to involve the spectator imaginatively *re-creating* or *re-enacting* the ‘total imaginative experience’ that is the expression or clarification of the artist’s feelings or psychical experience (PA 251, cf. 308-11). Thus, it makes sense that being a good spectator will involve the virtue of *Creativity*, applying here to interpretation rather than to the creation of a work as it does for an artist. A creative spectator will be able to think ‘outside the box’, so to speak, and deal with novel ideas, experiences and feelings well enough to work out an understanding or interpretation of the work that does justice to the work as a certain thing, i.e. in its particularity, and without generalizing. On the other hand, a *Literal-minded* spectator will resort to generalizations and clichés in his understanding of a work and what it expresses, while a spectator inclined towards *Outlandishness* will be disposed to come up with implausible interpretations, such as reading a work as being a complex allegory when it was not intended as such or as having a ‘hidden meaning’ when no such meaning was intended, and where beyond

---

<sup>81</sup> Cf. Hume: “One obvious cause, why many feel not the proper sentiment of beauty, is the want of that *delicacy* of imagination, which is requisite to convey a sensibility of those finer emotions” (350, original emphasis). Several of the traits I list as aesthetic virtues are mentioned by Hume, though only in the context of reception/spectatorship.

<sup>82</sup> There seems to be an asymmetry between insensitivity and sentimentality in the contexts of creation and reception, such that insensitive spectators likely will prefer sentimental works of art, since such works will ‘hit their audience over the head’, so to speak, with broad and obvious emotions. While sentimental spectators wouldn’t necessarily prefer works made by insensitive artists, i.e. works drained of or lacking in emotion, they would seem more likely to make such works out to be more expressive than they are. The appeal of ‘kitsch’ for some people may be explained by these above tendencies.



the artist's intentions the particulars of the work, i.e. its perceptible parts and their relations, do not support such a reading; an example of this would be a reader interpreting Robert Frost's *Stopping By the Woods on a Snowy Evening* as 'really' being a poem about Santa Claus.<sup>83</sup>

The virtues of *Honesty* and *Courage* will overlap in the context of reception, in that they will both have to do with a spectator's openness to the feelings a work is expressing in terms of her willingness to understand and even appreciate them when these feelings may not be ones the spectator is comfortable with. Since aesthetic appreciation involves understanding what it is like to feel or experience what the work expresses (without necessarily having to feel or experience it oneself), works that express feelings a spectator judges to be negative or finds unpleasant, such as anger, hatred or depression can pose a challenge to a spectator, since to understand and appreciate (though not necessarily 'enjoy') these works requires emotionally engaging with them to some extent. A good spectator, i.e. one who characteristically succeeds in appreciating a work of art in terms of what it is expressing, will be willing to bracket her considerations of 'agreeableness' in order to understand what the artist was doing by making a 'difficult' work.

Some artworks, such as Sarah Kane's play *Blasted* or Gaspar Noé's films *I Stand Alone* and *Irreversible*, can be harrowing to experience but worthwhile for their insight into extreme feelings and states of mind that express human weakness, vulnerability and even vice. A disposition to resist uncomfortable feelings, which would be better termed *Timorousness* than 'cowardice', will effectively prevent a spectator from appreciating such works and so from coming to grasp these insights in the way that art allows but a purely theoretical understanding

---

<sup>83</sup> While not usually quite as far-fetched as this example, I strongly suspect that many of the Marxist or psychoanalytic 'readings' of artworks found in post-modern literary criticism, film theory, cultural studies and other disciplines where the so-called 'death of the author' has been accepted uncritically, are instances of the vice I am calling outlandishness in these critics' reception of the works in question. In my experience, encouraging students of film, English, etc. to interpret works in these ways can hinder their abilities to see a work of art clearly for what it is (i.e. in terms of what the artist actually did in creating it, and what she meant by it) and dispose students to be more interested in what they can do to a work in terms of 'decoding' or 'deconstructing' it than in approaching it on its own terms in the way discussed above.

does not. This also applies to openness to experience, through artworks, points of view with which one does not agree – e.g. a conservative viewer not being open to a story with a liberal viewpoint (or vice versa). The lack of courage or openness on the part of a spectator is akin to an artist's self-censorship of her feelings; if good art must be absolutely candid and perfectly sincere, then a spectator must be open to this candour and sincerity, so long as it is authentic, in order to avoid the possible corruption of consciousness that comes with the selective awareness of feelings (cf. *PA* 115, 336).<sup>84</sup>

In short, nothing within the scope of human feeling will be foreign to a good spectator when it comes to genuinely expressive artworks. While some works *are* designed to attract attention through sensational subject matter or the use of shock tactics, and while others *are* meant merely as propaganda for certain agendas rather than genuine expressions of emotion, and while these works may not be worth engaging with aesthetically, a good spectator's *phronesis* will come into play here and allow them to discern whether or not a given work is likely to be a genuine expression of the person who made it, and so worth understanding/appreciating.

### ***The Relation Between Aesthetic and Ethical Virtue***

Since the traits listed above as aesthetic virtues are internal to the practices of artistic creation and reception, there is no strict entailment between possession of aesthetic virtues and having ethical virtue; a person may be a good artist or spectator while not being ethically virtuous, and someone may, through weakness of will, tend towards certain aesthetic vices while otherwise being an ethically virtuous person. However, insofar as many aesthetic virtues are excellences of the imagination, and since the *sunesis* required for ethical virtue presupposes a good or veridical imagination (see 70-72 *supra*), someone who develops these virtues through the practice of

---

<sup>84</sup> As with creation, there does not seem to be a vice of excess related to courage or openness in spectators. While a tendency to value works simply for their 'difficult' content, thinking that this makes them more 'mature' or 'edgy' or whatever, might seem a possible vice of excess here, this tendency would be a failure of practical wisdom/discernment rather than an excess of courage.

artistic creation or spectatorship will be better able to develop ethical virtue. Similarly, insofar as many aesthetic vices involve a weakness of the imagination, someone with these vices will be less capable of becoming ethically virtuous – for instance, dispositions to be unaware of or to misjudge the perceptual or emotional dimensions of one’s experience will effectively prevent someone from perceiving/judging the ethical mean in a situation.

Additionally, if ‘ethical’ is taken in Aristotle’s sense as a matter of having a good character (with the literal meaning of *eudaimon* being ‘of good spirit’), with good character understood in terms of dispositions to do well (i.e. to *eupraxia*) in the activities one undertakes, then, if someone undertakes to pursue activities that fall within a certain practice, and if that practice is conducive to human flourishing and so admits of virtues and vices internal to it, possessing and exercising the virtues internal to that practice could be considered ethically good behaviour (in the broad sense of ‘ethical’) whereas having and acting on the vices of that practice could be considered a sign of an ethically flawed character. Another way of putting this would be to say that, for Aristotle, ethically good and bad behaviour involves acting appropriately or inappropriately, respectively, within the context of one’s situation, and that the standards internal to a practice in which one is acting, based on the practice’s overarching goal, form an important aspect of the situation in which one is acting, and in terms of which appropriateness and inappropriateness (i.e. the general rightness or wrongness of one’s actions) are determined. Thus, someone who has decided to pursue artistic activities, whether as a creator of artworks or as a spectator, and who does so well can to some extent be considered ethically, and not just aesthetically, praiseworthy in terms of how this reflects on their overall character, and conversely someone who pursues artistic activities and does so viciously can be found ethically blameworthy to some extent.

This is not to say that someone who has a bad singing voice, or who is colour-blind and so unable to appreciate paintings, is ethically flawed. These traits are not chosen and so are not blameworthy, and while they may prevent one from engaging well in artistic practices, engaging with art is only conducive to, but not necessary for, human flourishing, and so such a person is not prevented from developing ethical virtue; she could pursue other worthwhile activities that are also conducive to flourishing. Someone who cannot draw well but who could in principle learn to do so is also not ethically flawed on this view, since the ability to draw well is a technical skill and so not a virtue, and thus the corresponding inability is not a vice. However, if someone professing to be an artist has an entrenched disposition towards, e.g., literal-mindedness, sentimentality or self-censorship and creates works that are clichéd, sentimental or bowdlerized, that person's creation of these works can be judged as ethically flawed. Thus, the creation of genuinely bad art, in Collingwood's sense, is a moral as well as an aesthetic issue.<sup>85</sup>

This applies equally to spectators. A person's tendency to take works of art literally or to insist on imposing implausible or outlandish interpretations on them, or his disposition to relate to works of art solely in terms of his own amusement, expecting them to cater to what he likes, can be seen as ethical character flaws. On the other hand, being disposed to be open to the feelings and experiences others have expressed through their artworks can be seen as a sign of an ethically good character.

### 4.3 AESTHETIC NORMATIVITY

A virtue approach to aesthetics is meant primarily to answer normative rather than ontological questions about art, i.e. to offer an explanation as to when works of art are good or

---

<sup>85</sup> This conclusion is supported by Aristotle's inclusion of *wittiness* as a virtue and *buffoonery* and *boorishness* as vices in both his *Nicomachean* and *Eudemian Ethics* (*NE* IV.8 1127b34-1128b7; *EE* III.7 1234a4-23). N.B. *NE* IV.8 1128a11-12: "such sallies [i.e. jokes] are believed to be movements of the character, and, like bodies, characters too are judged by the way they move".

bad rather than to propose criteria for when something is to be counted as a work of art, which is why any virtue aesthetics will presuppose as a starting point, rather than argue for or seek to prove, a certain understanding of art – and which is why Woodruff’s ambition to use a virtue approach to address problems raised in attempts to define art is misguided (see 27-28, 30 *supra*). Similarly, Aristotle’s ethics does not aim to define a human life or an action but presupposes definitions of these and asks when each is good. Since, on Collingwood’s account a ‘work of art’ is an activity of an artist’s (with ‘work’ taken as a verb rather than a noun), the question of when a work of art is good or bad should be understood as asking when an artist’s creative activity is good or bad, rather than focusing on the product of this activity. In being an ‘artist-centred’ aesthetic theory as opposed to an ‘object-centred’ one, the Collingwoodian virtue aesthetics outlined above is analogous to virtue ethics’ focus on an agent’s character over her actions.

This is not to deny that artists produce physical objects (or perhaps ‘physical events’, in the case of musicians, dancers and actors) through their creative activity, but only to assert that the *aesthetic* status of these objects/events lies in the process of their creation. A physical object or event is experienced aesthetically, or *qua* art (and bracketing what can be called an aesthetic experience of nature, human beauty, etc.), only when it is seen as an end stage of such a process, i.e. as an expression of the character of its creator, just as an action must be considered in terms of its agent’s intentions and overall character, rather than merely as a physical movement of a body in space, in order to be a candidate for ethical judgment. Human consciousness and intentions are just as central to the concept of art as they are to our ethical concepts.

### ***Judging Artworks***

A virtue approach will define the aesthetic goodness of a given work of art in relation to the traits it holds to be aesthetic virtues, and likewise will define aesthetic badness in terms of those

it holds to be aesthetic vices. Just as neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicists define right action in terms of “what a virtuous agent would do in the circumstances” (Hursthouse 1991, 219) following Aristotle’s assertion that “acts are called just and self-controlled when they are the kind of acts which a just or self-controlled man would perform” (*NE* II.4 1105b5-6), a virtue aesthetics will define a good artwork as one that is the sort of thing a good artist (i.e. one who possessed the aesthetic virtues) would create when exercising those virtues in the circumstances. Similarly, a bad artwork will be defined as the sort of thing a bad artist (i.e. someone with aesthetic vices) typically would create in those circumstances.

This general definition of a good (or bad) artwork will apply to any virtue approach to aesthetics modelled after (neo-)Aristotelian virtue ethics, with differences between what multiple virtue approaches count as good (or bad) works of art stemming from differences in the traits each one counts as aesthetic virtues (or vices), and in how each understands the ‘circumstances’ of a work’s creation. For a Collingwoodian virtue aesthetics, these ‘circumstances’ will be a matter of the feeling or experience of which the work in question is an expression and the medium of expression or art form in which the work is created. To flesh out the basic definition given above, the answer that a Collingwoodian virtue aesthetics in particular will give to the question ‘What is a good work of art?’ will be ‘The sort of thing that someone who is creative, perspicacious, sensitive, etc., and who has aesthetic practical wisdom along with an understanding of a given medium of expression, would create as the expression of the feeling or experience in question’.

That this is in line with Collingwood’s position on the normative judgment of artworks (which is not to say that Collingwood’s theory of art is itself a virtue-based one *per se*) can be seen in his comments about Ben Jonson and T. S. Eliot, where he praises them for their

“imaginative vision[s]” and the scope of their experience, which (following the critic Edith Sitwell) he takes to be able to enlarge a reader’s own experience given that reader’s understanding of their poems as expressing those visions/experiences (*PA* 27). Collingwood is focusing here on the characters of the poets in question rather than on their poems considered as objects independent of the minds that created them, and so could be said to be already taking an ‘artist-centred’ as opposed to an ‘object-centered’ approach to the judging of art. While it might be objected that Collingwood is talking here about what makes these poets good, and not what makes their *poems* good, it is implied by the context in which he is giving these examples of Jonson and Eliot that the poems to which his remarks refer are good poems *because of* their ‘imaginative visions’, by which Collingwood seems to have in mind some combination of the traits I have called creativity, perspicacity and sensitivity.<sup>86</sup>

Because of Collingwood’s particularism about expressions, the question ‘What is a good work of art?’ seems far too general to count for him as a legitimate aesthetic question. As already discussed, Collingwood’s aim is “to attempt to reach ... the solution of certain problems arising out of the situation in which artists find themselves” (*PA* vi), which is to say that he aims for his theory to be applicable in art practice. The question ‘What is a good work of art?’ will be as little likely to arise in the course of an artist’s practical engagement as the question ‘What is a right action?’ is in the course of a person’s everyday life. The normative concerns that *will* arise will be particular, and will refer to specific possibilities for artistic or ethical choices arising from a particular circumstance, being a situation in which an action is called for, or a feeling or experience that calls for expression. Thus, the kind of questions that the Collingwoodian virtue aesthetics I am proposing is best suited to answer will be of the nature ‘How can I [i.e. one who

---

<sup>86</sup> Cf. *PA* 23 for the initial talk of a part of Jonson’s *Cynthia’s Revels* that provides the context for the comments referred to above, and *PA* 333-35 for further comments on Eliot, and in particular *The Waste Land*.

is already trying to express something through a particular medium] express this *well*?', with the answer not being put in terms of means to which good expression is an end, but in terms of the ways in which one can express it, just as on a virtue ethical approach the important question for an agent to ask is 'How can I act *well* in this situation?', with the way in which one acts being even important than the general type of action one does – not just doing X (e.g. giving someone money) but doing it in the right manner, at the right time, etc. (cf. *NE* II.6 1106b21-23).

An artist who possesses full aesthetic virtue will not need to stop and ask this question, but will intuitively apprehend, through her aesthetic practical wisdom, how she can express herself well in the situation at hand. When learning to become a good artist – i.e. while still developing the aesthetic virtues – a person will likely need to actively think this through when faced with a creative decision that admits of several possibilities (e.g. a number of possible notes that could come next in a song one is composing). This will involve 'stepping back' from the work and imagining herself as a spectator encountering the work as it would be under each possibility (e.g. imagining, in turn, how the song would sound if notes A, B, C ... etc. came next. For this reason, developing the aesthetic virtues of creation requires the possession and exercise of aesthetic practical wisdom in relation to reception, which is just to say that good artists will also need to be discerning, intuitive spectators who are able to understand their own works by looking at or listening to them in progress, imagine them as being otherwise, and make a comparative judgment of aesthetic appropriateness between these potential ways their works could be.<sup>87</sup>

The way a virtue approach to aesthetics answers the question of what makes for good (or bad) art can also be applied to the question of when an aesthetic judgment is good (or bad), which will be crucial for a complete virtue aesthetics given the importance of the ability to judge

---

<sup>87</sup> This is akin to how, in order to develop full ethical virtue, a person will need to be able to grasp situations and discern the mean in terms of action or feeling.



aesthetic appropriateness for becoming a good artist. A good aesthetic judgment can be defined as one made by someone who possesses and is exercising the aesthetic virtues as related to reception, i.e. someone who is intuitive and discerning and also perspicacious, sensitive, open to uncomfortable feelings, etc., whereas a bad aesthetic judgment can be defined as one made by someone who possesses and is judging under the influence of aesthetic vices, i.e. someone who is impatient, oblivious to detail, sentimental, prone to implausible interpretations, etc.

This suggests a way of dealing with many aesthetic disagreements; that a judgment of a work's aesthetic value made by someone who has and is exercising the virtues of reception to a greater extent – i.e. who understands the feeling or experience the work is expressing and is open to considering these feelings or experiences, who sees more details of the work and understands how they relate to each other and to the work as a whole, etc. – will be more accurate than the judgment of someone who has and is exercising these virtues to a lesser extent, or of someone who has an aesthetic vice. This view is along the lines of Hume's view of the judgment of 'true judges' setting the criteria for aesthetic value, but because a virtue approach to aesthetics, as I have described it, will also account for what makes an artwork aesthetically good (i.e. that it was created by an aesthetically virtuous artist), whereas Hume's account only explains how to recognize an aesthetically good thing but does not account for what makes it so.

It should be pointed out that, just as many virtue ethicists distinguish between a virtuous action and an act done *from virtue*, such that someone who is does not possess full virtue (who may, for example, only be strong willed) can act virtuously on some occasion if their action is what a virtuous person would have done in that situation, whereas a fully virtuous person is one who will characteristically act *from virtue* (see, e.g., Swanton 2001b, 32-33; Van Zyl 187-88), any plausible virtue aesthetics will make a similar distinction between a good artwork and one

created by a good artist. It would be problematic to hold that only someone who is a good artist, i.e. who possesses the aesthetic virtues, can create a good work of art; for one thing, this would entail that no one who is learning to become an artist and is still on her way to developing the aesthetic virtues could create an aesthetically good work, but experience shows this not to be the case and in fact suggests that success in creating aesthetically good works is an important part of what allows someone to develop as an artist and so to acquire aesthetic virtues, just as getting into the habit of acting well is part of the process of someone becoming ethically virtuous.

To avoid implausibility, it should be specified that the virtue aesthetics I propose would hold that: (i) good works of art can be created by people who are not themselves good artists in the sense of possessing the aesthetic virtues, if these works are such that they are what someone with the aesthetic virtues would have created as an expression of the same feeling; (ii) good artists are those who will characteristically (but not necessarily always) create good works of art; and (iii) someone with aesthetic vices will only create a good work of art by accident.<sup>88</sup> It should also be clarified that these points hold with relation to good aesthetic judgments and spectators as well.

### *Aesthetic Value and Pleasure*

One point on which the virtue aesthetics proposed here diverges from most other accounts of aesthetic value is the role of pleasure. Whether a work is aesthetically good has no relation, on this account, to the amount of pleasure that can be had from encountering it, and similarly the goal of spectatorship is taken to be ‘appreciation’ in the sense of an active imaginative understanding of an expressed feeling rather than the enjoyment of the feelings it arouses. This lack of an essential or necessary connection between aesthetic goodness and pleasure does not, of course, mean that pleasure or enjoyment is not typically felt by a good spectator when

---

<sup>88</sup> Note that this allows for the possibility of a good artwork for which its creator is not praiseworthy in her capacity as an artist.

encountering a good artwork; however, the pleasure a good spectator will feel will not be the same as the enjoyment typically felt in response to works of amusement one likes, nor will it be the sensual pleasure frequently associated with ‘the aesthetic’ throughout the history of the philosophy of art. The nature of this pleasure and the role it plays in a spectator’s aesthetic experience will be similar to the way pleasure features in Aristotle’s ethics.

While Aristotle writes that a virtuous person enjoys acting from virtue (*NE* II.3 1104b3-9), he does not equate this enjoyment with sensual pleasure, as can be seen from his claim that a truly self-controlled person is one “who abstains from bodily pleasures and enjoys doing so” (*NE* II.3 1104b5). He is suspicious of pleasure in that it can lead people to pursue the wrong things if it is not felt rightly, i.e. directed towards things that are good or ‘noble’ (*NE* II.3 1104b30-34), which is why he finds it essential that “men must be brought up from childhood to feel pleasure and pain at the proper things” (*NE* II.3 1104b12-13) in order for them to be capable of becoming virtuous. This suspicion is reinforced when he writes that, when aiming at the mean “we must be especially on our guard against pleasure and what is pleasant, for when it comes to pleasure we cannot act as unbiased judges” (*NE* II.9 1109b8-9).

Aristotle’s view seems to be that the virtuous person will not aim at what is pleasant when aiming at the mean, i.e. will not act *from* pleasure, but will enjoy acting according to the mean, i.e. will take pleasure in acting virtuously. This can be seen from his talk of pleasure as something that completes an activity (1174b23) and his characterization of it as “a completeness that superimposes itself upon [the activity], like the bloom of youth in those who are in their prime” (1174b32-34), i.e. as an emergent property that supervenes on an activity that is already good, rather than as something that comprises the activity’s goodness. Thus, the kind of pleasure a virtuous person takes in acting virtuously is not the same as the enjoyment or sensual/bodily

pleasure that can be a goal for the sake of which one acts, but is instead a sense of satisfaction accompanying the rightness or goodness of her actions.

Analogously, on a Collingwoodian virtue aesthetics a good artist will characteristically feel a sense of satisfaction when she has created a good work of art, i.e. one that succeeds in expressing something she has felt, and which does so well, even if she does not find the work ‘beautiful’. Likewise, a good spectator will characteristically feel satisfaction from perceiving and understanding how the artist of a given work has expressed herself well, similarly to how a sports fan might get enjoyment from seeing an athlete perform excellently, apart from any enjoyment or disappointment felt because of who wins the game. Good spectators will also characteristically derive satisfaction from successfully exercising their own abilities to understand and appreciate art when interpreting or judging a work well. This satisfaction is not an instance of getting pleasure *from* an artwork in the traditional sense of having pleasurable feelings evoked by the work, but involves taking pleasure in the excellent pursuit of aesthetic activity, i.e. in doing something well, or in recognizing when someone else has done well.<sup>89</sup>

For both good artists and good spectators, this satisfaction cannot be their motive for engaging in artistic activities since it is not an essentially *aesthetic* motivation; it is not to do with either expression or appreciation (in the sense used above) for its own sake, but rather treats these as means to an end – a feeling of enjoyment. On the part of a spectator, this is to treat art as amusement, i.e. as something to be ‘used’ for how it makes one feel, while on the part of an artist, this would be to treat the creation of art either as magic, i.e. as a kind of ‘therapy’, or as something done for the sake of amusement, in the way that one can entertain oneself by coming up with amusing limericks or thinking of an interesting story. While the therapeutic use of

---

<sup>89</sup> Hugo Meynell argues for a similar view of artistic appreciation, holding that the satisfaction a spectator feels in experiencing artworks is not just pleasure, but an intellectual satisfaction that is “gained from [the] exercise and enlargement of the capacities constitutive of human consciousness” (Meynell 26). As excellences of the imagination, the aesthetic virtues are such capacities.

artistic creation may be beneficial and may play a role in a person's flourishing, it is still an instrumental use of both the art form in question and of our imagination, and so is not truly an *aesthetic* activity, although a work created from such a motive may end up being a successful expression, and so good *qua* art, given the distinction between someone acting as a good artist and a good artwork discussed above.

The creation of art pursued as entertainment is more problematic; while a good work of art might still result from this, by treating imaginative creation as something to do as a diversion from the concerns of practical life, one is taking it not to be serious, or a practical pursuit in itself, but is holding it apart from the rest of one's life. Treating art this way will make it difficult for both artists and spectators to develop or retain the virtue of *dedication*, since if the creation or reception of art is pursued for its potential to amuse, one will not be likely to continue to pursue it when it ceases to be so. It also hinders the realization of the goods internal to art practice, which are realized precisely insofar as works of art are not 'used' for anything.

Because a work of art is not held to be good *qua* art insofar as it is enjoyable, or evokes pleasurable emotions, there will be no contradiction between someone liking a work that he does not judge to be aesthetically good, or between someone judging a work to be aesthetically good without liking it. This accounts for the difference Kant noted between judgments of agreeability and judgments of aesthetic quality, and allows for the possibility that someone has negative or unpleasant feelings evoked by a given work of art *and* derives satisfaction from appreciating it for being an excellent expression of something the artist has felt, with such a response exercising the virtue of aesthetic courage or openness; an example might be a spectator appreciating Francis Bacon's paintings while finding them disturbing. Although there is a distinction between the feelings a work might evoke in a spectator and the feelings it expresses, the possibility of

appreciation without enjoyment leads to the question of whether one can appreciate a work of art as an excellent expression if the feeling it expresses is negative or unpleasant, and thus whether a work of art can be aesthetically good while expressing an immoral or ethically vicious emotion.

### ***The Question of ‘Immoral’ Art***

Most philosophical discussions that raise ethical questions about art presuppose that an artwork’s ethical status has to do with its content, i.e. whether characters and actions it represents, or the messages it endorses, are moral or immoral. This view is central to Tolstoy’s *What is Art?* (1898) in which he claims that the aesthetic value of a work is wholly dependent on the moral – or more precisely, religious – worth of the emotions it arouses in spectators through the content it depicts or, in the case of music, through its use of form (Tolstoy 123-38).<sup>90</sup> A focus on the ethical status of a work’s content can also be seen in Book III of Plato’s *Republic* (386a-392c) where Socrates discusses the corrupting potential of stories that portray gods acting badly, in Aristotle’s *Poetics*, where he claims that tragedies should not depict good things happening to bad people and that in general the characters should be portrayed as good (*Poetics* 1452b34-35, 1454a15-18), and in Hume’s “Of the Standard of Taste”, where he writes that “where vicious manners are described, without being marked with the proper characters of blame and disapprobation; this must be allowed to disfigure the poem ... and however I may excuse the poet, on account of the manners of his age, I can never relish the composition” (*OST* 358). This focus on a work’s representational content is also dominant in the contemporary discourse on art and morality; see, for instance, Jacobson (1997), Gaut (1998), Hanson (1998), Devereaux (1998), A. W. Eaton (2003) and Schellekens (2007).

---

<sup>90</sup> Although Tolstoy is known as an expression theorist of art, his understanding of ‘expression’ is different from Collingwood’s insofar as he takes the expression of a feeling to be its transmission from an artist to one or more spectators, with its evocation in the spectator taken as the criterion for successful expression (cf. Tolstoy 38), whereas for Collingwood expression and evocation are distinct.

By locating the moral status of artworks in the content they present or the feelings they elicit, these concerns focus on aspects that Collingwood would consider to be craft, and so are not concerned with the moral status of a work *qua* art but with its moral status *qua* representation, amusement or magic. Plato's worry involves the potential of stories to evoke feelings that will influence spectators in undesirable ways, whether the influence is on their future character or on their responses to the telling of the story, so it really has to do with the use of stories as magic or amusement rather than with their expressive capacity (cf. *PA* 46-50, 98). Similarly, Aristotle's claims about the ways in which good tragedies should depict virtue and vice in its characters are not meant to be about the *moral* goodness of tragedies but their effectiveness as amusement. His point is that tragedies will fail to evoke and purge pity and fear in spectators if the characters are not seen as good people or if other emotions, such as outrage at a villain's good fortune, or mere sympathy instead of pity, are evoked instead (*Poetics* 1452b34-1453a6). Hume's concern would seem to be the only one of the three that deals with the effect of objectionable content on a spectator's *aesthetic* judgment of a work. However, aesthetic value for Hume is largely a matter of the pleasure a work affords (*OST* 348-49), and so while it can be conceded to Hume that morally objectionable content can make a work harder for one to enjoy or find agreeable, it does not follow that such content will detract from its value as an expression, or from the possibility of its appreciation by a spectator with the aesthetic virtue of courage.

The direction taken by the contemporary debates about art and morality can be seen in Berys Gaut's claim that "the ethical assessment of attitudes manifested by works of art is a legitimate aspect of the aesthetic evaluation of those works, such that, if a work manifests ethically reprehensible attitudes, it is to that extent aesthetically defective, and if a work manifests ethically commendable attitudes, it is to that extent aesthetically meritorious" (Gaut 182). While

this particular claim of Gaut's is disputed by many, it shows that what is in question in the debate is the ethical status of the attitudes that a work 'manifests', by which is meant the imaginative and emotional responses a work promotes or "prescribes" to its spectators (Gaut 192-93). That this is the proper focus for the debate seems widely accepted by those participating in it, regardless of whether they agree or disagree with Gaut's position.<sup>91</sup>

If the question is whether a work can be aesthetically good and endorse an immoral attitude, Collingwood would say that the promotion or prescription of an attitude is a function of craft and not art, as it involves the arousal of a positive feeling directed towards what the attitude favours, or of a negative feeling directed towards what it disparages as in the case of a work that promotes an anti-racist attitude or prescribes a fear of global warming. Thus, from a Collingwoodian perspective the debate is one about the ethicality of the use of a work *qua* amusement (if what is being prescribed is a make-believe adoption of the attitude for the sake of enjoyment, as in the case of a horror movie that prescribes an attitude of fear or suspense towards the fictional events it contains) or *qua* magic (if the attitude, e.g. environmental concern or the desire for fast food, is prescribed in order to affect the actions of spectators outside their experience of the work) rather than a work's *aesthetic* value, i.e. how good it is *qua* expression.

The salient question for one who accepts Collingwood's distinction between art and craft is whether a work of art can *express*, rather than merely evoke or represent, an immoral or vicious feeling and, if so, whether the *aesthetic* value of a work of art is affected by the moral status of the feeling it expresses.<sup>92</sup> In response to the first part of this question, Collingwood would

---

<sup>91</sup> For a general overview of this debate and its participants' positions, which shows that this focus on 'manifested' attitudes and 'prescribed' responses is generally accepted, see Schellekens 64-76.

<sup>92</sup> Expressing an immoral feeling should be distinguished from 'exhibiting' or 'betraying' one (cf. *PA* 121-23). While a work of art might inadvertently betray, e.g., an artist's feelings of racism or narcissism, this will not be intentionally done and so the artist may have no conscious awareness that he feels these things even after the work has been made – and thus the work will not count as an *expression* of these feelings.



answer ‘yes’, since he denies any distinction between “those [feelings] suitable for expression by artists and those unsuitable”, writing that “whatever is expressible is expressible” (PA 115), and since there is no reason to think that the moral status of a feeling would affect its expressibility, just as the moral status of an action has no effect on whether it can be performed. In response to the second part of the question, however, Collingwood’s answer would seem to be ‘no’.

An expression is successful insofar as it clarifies a feeling for consciousness, regardless of the nature of that feeling, and since good works of art just are successful expressions, in principle a work of art could be aesthetically good (i.e. good *qua* expression) even if the feeling it expressed was vicious or immoral, e.g. one of racial hatred or violent jealousy. For Collingwood, a genuine act of expression begins with the expresser not knowing, i.e. being consciously aware of, just what it is she feels (PA 111), and so there can be no question of an artist selecting which of her feelings she will express in a given work before she has done so. As Collingwood insists, “the artist as such must be absolutely candid”, which is not to say that an artist should choose to be candid rather than not, but that “he is an artist *only in so far as* he is” (PA 115, my emphasis). The feeling will only become available for consciousness to judge as moral or immoral after it has begun to be expressed. An artist choosing to stop expressing a certain feeling when it proves to be immoral, rather than being honest about what she feels and dedicated to expressing it fully, would be guilty of a corruption of consciousness, and so Collingwood would consider it *worse* for an artist *not* to express an immoral feeling she genuinely felt than for her to express it.

This commits Collingwood to the view that a work of art that expresses an immoral feeling is aesthetically good *only if* it expresses this feeling authentically, i.e. as vicious or immoral. He would seem also to be committed to saying that a work created by a vicious person that successfully expressed the positive feelings its creator genuinely held towards certain immoral

actions, as the Marquis de Sade's *Juliette* could be said to express positive feelings about the sexual torture of innocents (cf. Gaut 188), could be just as aesthetically good as another work that successfully expressed its author's virtuous feelings. However, this would be somewhat premature, since it is based on a partial understanding of Collingwood's view. Although he says there can be no question of which feelings are appropriate to express prior to their expression, he goes on to say that, once the artist has worked out her feelings and so become conscious of them, she is in a position to select which are more suitable for *public* expression (PA 115), and while this is not itself an aesthetic choice in Collingwood's sense, since it is not part of the expression of these feelings, it is an ethical choice and so is open to ethical judgment.

What Collingwood means should be clear when considering the difference between reflecting on how one feels in order to better understand one's feelings, and explaining to others how one feels. While the latter may in some cases be inappropriate or unethical (e.g. rude or hurtful) and while the feelings in question may not be virtuous *to feel*, it would never seem inappropriate or unethical for one to reflect on and gain a better understanding of one's feelings; on the contrary, it could be argued that reflection and understanding are always good, since without them one would be unable to choose to change how one feels for the better, and since the alternative is the corruption of consciousness. In light of this, Collingwood's denial that the aesthetic value of a work of art is affected by the moral status of the feeling(s) it expresses can be seen not to preclude ethical judgment of what a person does with a work of art once it is created.

It would not be necessarily wrong for an artist to share with others an artwork expressing an immoral feeling, just as it is not always inappropriate to tell someone about a vicious feeling one has had; the positive value of what Goldie calls 'emotional sharing' can obtain even when the emotion that is shared is negative or pernicious. An immoral feeling is by definition one that is

inappropriate or wrong to feel (cf. *NE* II.6 1106b16-20). If expressing a feeling, in Collingwood's sense, involves clarifying that feeling for consciousness and so making it available for understanding by the rational part of the mind, and if a work of art is an activity of expression, with a particular work being aesthetically good insofar as it expresses more aspects of its creator's psychical field of experience within which that feeling occurred, i.e. the complex of sensations and emotions that make up a unified experience (cf. 115-17 *supra*), then a work of art that expresses a vicious or immoral feeling will involve the consciousness of why it is inappropriate or wrong to feel (and not merely *that* it is wrong) insofar as it is a good work, i.e. one that clarifies that feeling more fully.<sup>93</sup> Thus, a good work of art that expresses a vicious feeling will make its spectators aware of it *as* vicious, and so will have a positive rather than a negative moral effect – although the work cannot be seen as a means to this effect, since that assumes a prior understanding of the feeling in question and so makes the work one of craft, i.e. a vehicle to convey a predetermined 'message', rather than art.

If an artist, in creating a work of art, expresses and so comes to be conscious of a feeling of hers that is vicious or immoral, and she either represses her awareness of this aspect of the feeling or acknowledges it to herself but chooses to construct her artwork from that point on in a way that presents this feeling in a more positive light (which is to say: presents a different, more positive feeling in its place), she is guilty of a corruption of consciousness and so her work will be aesthetically bad. This possibility accounts for works that appear to be genuine expressions of vicious feelings where the work presents the feeling in question as more palatable or more appropriate than it actually is; e.g. de Sade's *Juliette*. Moreover, if a spectator encounters a work that misrepresents, and so fails to express authentically, a vicious emotion, and he accepts the

---

<sup>93</sup> Cf. *PA* 122: "A person who expresses something thereby becomes conscious of what it is that he is expressing, and enables others to become conscious of it in himself and in them."

work's misrepresentation of that emotion, this could be seen as a lack of aesthetic virtue on the part of the spectator, e.g. a lack of discernment, sensitivity, etc. If, on the other hand, a spectator encounters a good artwork that expresses a vicious emotion and thereby makes its viciousness clear, and he represses or chooses to ignore his awareness of this aspect of the work and takes a more positive view of this feeling than is appropriate, the spectator would also be lacking in aesthetic virtue, e.g. lacking *sunesis*, or having a disposition for obliviousness or insensitivity. The artwork itself would not be to blame for this misunderstanding on the spectator's part if it were a good work of art.

If it is seen as a problem that good artworks that express negative or vicious emotions can have a potentially bad influence on spectators who misunderstand them or do not experience them properly (which would seem to be Plato's real worry about art in the *Republic*), the answer would not be to censor art and prescribe that only artworks expressing positive or virtuous emotions should be made publically available, since this would be to deny or repress awareness of the full range of human feeling, and so would be akin to a corruption of consciousness on a societal scale. Instead, the solution is to try and inculcate the aesthetic virtues of reception in people so they will be disposed to understand artworks well and will not be as likely to make these mistakes. Thus, a commitment to aesthetic education would seem to be part of the solution to the problems raised by Collingwood and Spengler in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, and again by Scruton, Spivak, Bloom, Postman, Carney and others at the end of that century and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup>, relating to the negative societal effects of a decline in the creation of and ability to appreciate serious works of art – i.e. those that express a mature understanding and require committed engagement, and so are not open to quick-and-easy 'consumption' – with such works and their appreciation being at least a partial remedy for the sense of loss of value and meaning,

and the rise of scepticism or nihilism about the possibility of objective moral (or aesthetic) judgments that Scruton and Spengler would call the decline of Western civilization and which Collingwood would call the corruption of our social consciousness.

This is not to say, of course, that an increase of serious art and ‘cultured’ spectators will solve all or even most problems in society, but insofar as the situations Collingwood, Scruton and the others discuss are admitted to be problems – and insofar as other problems are caused or exacerbated by clichéd thinking, literal-mindedness, insensitivity or sentimentality (e.g. a disposition to be susceptible to manipulative appeals to emotion), and other such vices of the imagination – aesthetic awareness can be a solution and so should be encouraged to that extent. In order for aesthetic education to be effective in cultivating such an awareness, it must be pursued in accordance with an understanding of art, the moral value of its aesthetic value, and the ways art should (and should not) be practiced by creators and engaged with by spectators such as the Collingwoodian virtue aesthetics I have begun to develop here.

## CONCLUSION

### *Summation of Preceding Chapters*

In this thesis I have shown how problems of aesthetic normativity – i.e. questions of what makes a work of art, an artist, a spectator or an aesthetic judgment better or worse – can be addressed by applying an Aristotelian virtue ethical approach to the creation and reception of art considered as practices. In order to accomplish this, there were six steps I needed to pursue:

- (i) Explicate the key elements of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, as well as the work of several contemporary virtue ethicists working in the Aristotelian tradition, in order to derive a general model for a Aristotelian virtue approach to a practice that can then be applied to aesthetic practices. MacIntyre's notion of virtues as traits exercised in the realization of goods internal to a practice helped to provide a 'bridge' between Aristotle's ethics, which are meant to apply broadly to a human life, and the application of his methods to a single practice.
- (ii) Give an account of the nature of these aesthetic practices in terms of a particular understanding of art that is generally compatible with a virtue ethical position, especially in respect of the non-codifiability (arguably, the particularism) and the resulting importance of practical wisdom in Aristotle's ethics.
- (iii) Justify my choice of Collingwood's understanding of art as a foundation for explaining art practices. By showing how Collingwood's aesthetics is compatible with Aristotle's ethics, and by explicating Collingwood's aesthetics in a way that (a) shows his views to be more plausible than the mischaracterization of them prevalent among aestheticians in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, and (b)

emphasizes the normative concerns and the essentially practical focus at the heart of Collingwood's philosophy of art, I have demonstrated its suitability as the basis for a virtue approach to aesthetics.

- (iv) Synthesize the 'form' of the virtue ethical approach worked out in step (i) with the 'content' worked out in step (ii) in order to present an outline of a Collingwoodian virtue aesthetics that (a) gives examples of virtues of artistic creation and reception exercised in the excellent pursuit of the overarching goals of expression and appreciation, in Collingwood's senses of both of these terms, (b) explains how these goals are conducive to human flourishing, and (c) demonstrates the implications of this approach for questions of aesthetic normativity.
- (v) Review the existing literature on 'virtue aesthetics', both in terms of (a) the historical precedents within aesthetics for what could be called a virtue approach, in particular Schiller and Hume, and (b) the contemporary papers inspired by the 20<sup>th</sup> Century revival of virtue ethics and the application of a virtue model to the field of epistemology, in order to see which elements of these previous thinkers' attempts seem right, and so should be included in a good virtue approach to aesthetics, as well as which elements seem to be mistaken, and so should be avoided or improved upon.
- (vi) Consider the relation between ethical and aesthetic normativity as two sub-classes of 'normativity-in-general', so as to provide context for, and a justification of, my overall project of adapting an existing ethical framework to aesthetics.

I began in Chapter I by doing the last two things, since they seemed important to establish the context for my project and the tradition within aesthetics in which I am working. In Chapter II, I

focused on explaining Aristotle's ethics and the additional insights contemporary virtue ethicists have provided, especially regarding practical wisdom and the idea of virtues of a practice. In Chapter III, I turned to Collingwood's theory of art, both explicating it and discussing its implications for the practices of art creation and reception, and for normative aesthetic judgment. With these things done, in Chapter IV, I synthesized the points made in the first three chapters in order to present an outline of a Collingwoodian virtue aesthetics, finishing the chapter by showing how this approach could be applied to a problem that lies at the intersection of aesthetics and ethics, viz. the question of an 'immoral' artwork.

I hope to have shown that the Collingwoodian virtue aesthetics proposed here might be useful in thinking about the problems that Scruton and others have raised associated with the disappearance of 'high' culture and the predominance of consumable entertainment products in contemporary society by suggesting ways for understanding both the negative effects of the latter on people's habits and ways of thinking and the reasons why the former should be resisted or reversed. In addition to this application of the theory, there are a number of questions or issues to which it might be applied going forward. In particular, I think there are interesting and significant implications of this theory for aesthetic education, relating both to its importance and to the ways in which it should be approached. Also, applying this theory to a range of particular examples drawn from the artworld, especially ones that pose conceptual problems to attempts to define or categorize art, would show that Collingwoodian virtue aesthetics can offer an interesting or useful perspective on such 'problem' artworks will both help to demonstrate its usefulness and go some way towards defending Collingwood's understanding of art and showing the potential of its scope and applicability.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ackrill, J. A. (1973), *Aristotle's Ethics*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Anscombe, G. E. M. (1958), "Modern Moral Philosophy". *Philosophy* 33, 1-19.
- Aristotle (1957), *De Anima*, trans. W. S. Hett. In *Loeb Classical Library: On the Soul, Parva Naturalia, On Breath*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2-206.
- (1962), *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. M. Ostwald. New York: Bobbs-Merrill.
- (2004), *Metaphysics*, trans. H. Lawson-Tancred. London : Penguin Books.
- (2011), *Eudemian Ethics*, trans. A. Kenny. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- (2013), *Poetics*, trans. A. Kenny. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Badhwar, N. (1996), "The Limited Unity of Virtue". *Nous* 30:3, 306-329.
- Beardsley, M. (1981), *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing.
- Black, D. (1982), "Collingwood on Corrupt Consciousness". *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 40:4, 395-400.
- Bloom, H. (1987), *The Closing of the American Mind*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Broadie, S. (1991), *Ethics With Aristotle*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Carney, R. (2003), "What makes art great? Thoughts about the 'dark vision' of Solondz, LaBute, Mendes, and Anderson". Online: [people.bu.edu/rcarney/indievision/darkvision](http://people.bu.edu/rcarney/indievision/darkvision).
- Collingwood, R. G. (1925), *Outlines of a Philosophy of Art*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- (1927), "Oswald Spengler and the Theory of Historical Cycles". *Antiquity* 1, 311-325.
- (1933), *An Essay on Philosophical Method*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- (1938), *The Principles of Art*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- (1939), *An Autobiography*. Oxford: Clarendon.

- Collins, D. (2013), "Expressing a Certain Vision: James, Collingwood and the Value of Artistic Pursuits". *Proceedings of the European Society for Aesthetics* 5, 193-205.
- Currie, G. (1998), "Realism of Character and the Value of Fiction". In J. Levinson (ed.), *Aesthetics and Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 161-181.
- Davies, D. (2004), *Art as Performance*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- (2008), "Collingwood's 'Performance' Theory of Art". *British Journal of Aesthetics* 48:2, 162-174.
- Devereaux, M. (1998), "Beauty and Evil: The Case of Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*". In J. Levinson (ed.), *Aesthetics and Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 227-256.
- Dewey, J. (1934), *Art as Experience*. New York: Perigee Books (2005 reprint).
- Eliot, T. S. (1917), "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock". In *Collected Poems: 1909-1962*. London: Faber and Faber, 1963, pp. 13-17.
- (1921), "Hamlet and his Problems". In *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 87-94.
- (1953), "Virgil and the Christian World". *Sewanee Review* 61:1, 1-14.
- Frazer, J. (1922), *The Golden Bough*. New York: Avenel, 1981 reprint.
- Gaut, B. (1998), "The Ethical Criticism of Art". In J. Levinson (ed.), *Aesthetics and Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 182-203.
- Goldie, P. (2007), "Towards a Virtue Theory of Art". *British Journal of Aesthetics* 47:4, 372-387.
- (2008), "Virtues of Art and Human Well-Being". *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume LXXXII*, 179-195.
- (2010), "Virtues of Art". *Philosophy Compass* 5/10, 830-839.
- Hanson, K. (1998), "How Bad Can Good Art Be?". In J. Levinson (ed.), *Aesthetics and Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 204-226.

- Hegel, G. W. F. (1975), *Aesthetics*, vol. 1, trans. T. M. Knox. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Heidegger, M. (1954), "The Question Concerning Technology". In *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. W. Lovitt. New York: Harper & Row, 1997, 3-35.
- Hennig, B. (ms.), "On What a Virtue Is". Online: [www.borishennig.de/texte/2013/virtue.pdf](http://www.borishennig.de/texte/2013/virtue.pdf).
- Hessler, S. (2011), "One Small Piece of Candy in Felix Gonzalez-Torres' Art". Online: <http://smallworldsproject.com/2011/04/19/felix-gonzalez-torres>.
- Horkheimer, M. and Adorno, T. (1944), *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. E. Jephcott. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002 reprint.
- Hume, D. (1748), *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. In *The Empiricists*. New York: Anchor Books, 1974, 307-430.
- (1757), "Of the Standard of Taste". In G. Sayer-McCord (ed.), *Moral Philosophy*. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 2006, 345-360.
- Hurka, T. (2001), *Virtue, Vice, and Value*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hursthouse, R. (1991), "Virtue Theory and Abortion". In R. Crisp and M. Slote (eds.), *Virtue Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, 217-238.
- (1999), *On Virtue Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- (2005), "Are Virtues the Proper Starting Point for Morality?". In J. Dreier (ed.), *Contemporary Debates in Moral Theory*. Oxford: Blackwell, 99-112.
- (2006), "Practical Wisdom: A Mundane Account". *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 106, 283-307.
- Husserl, E. (1936), *Transcendental Phenomenology and the Crisis of the European Sciences*, trans. D. Carr. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970 reprint.
- Irwin, T. H. (2000), "Ethics as an Inexact Science: Aristotle's Ambitions for Moral Theory". In B. Hooker and M. Little (eds.), *Moral Particularism*. Oxford: Clarendon, 100-129.
- Jacobson, D. (1997), "In Praise of Immoral Art". *Philosophical Topics* 25, 155-199.
- John, E. (1995), "Subtlety and Moral Vision in Fiction". *Philosophy and Literature*, 308-319.

- (1998), “Reading Fiction and Conceptual Knowledge: Philosophical Thought in Literary Context”. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 56:4, 331-348.
- Jones, P. (1972), “A Critical Outline of Collingwood’s Philosophy of Art”. In M. Krausz (ed.), *Critical Essays on the Philosophy of R. G. Collingwood*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 42-67.
- Kant, I. (1997), *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. M. Gregor. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- (1998), *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. P. Guyer and A. Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- (2000), *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, trans. P. Guyer and E. Matthews. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kieran, M. (2010), “The Vice of Snobbery: Aesthetic Knowledge, Justification, and Virtue in Art Appreciation”. *Philosophical Quarterly* 60, 243-263.
- Kierkegaard, S. (1846), *The Present Age*, trans. A. Dru. New York: HarperCollins.
- Kosman, L. (1980), “Being Properly Affected: Virtue and Feeling in Aristotle’s Ethics”. In A. Rorty (ed.), *Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Leibowitz, U. D. (2009), “A Defense of a Particularist Research Project”. *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 12, 181-199.
- (2013), “Particularism in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*”. *The Journal of Moral Philosophy* 10, 121-147.
- Levinson, J. (2002), “Hume’s Standard of Taste: the Real Problem”. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 60:3, 227-238.
- Locke, J. (1689), *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding (Abridged)*. In *The Empiricists*. New York: Anchor Books, 1974, 7-133.
- Lopes, D. M. (2008), “Virtues of Art: Good Taste”. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume LXXXII*, 197-211.
- MacIntyre, A. (1984), *After Virtue*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.

- Meynell, H. (1986), *The Nature of Aesthetic Value*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- McDowell, J. (1998), *Mind, Value and Reality*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- McGinn, C. (1999), *Ethics, Evil, and Fiction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Moore, G. E. (1902), *Principia Ethica*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1998 reprint.
- Moss, J. (2012), *Aristotle on the Apparent Good: Perception, Phantasia, Thought & Desire*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Muelder Eaton, M. (1997), "Aesthetics: The Mother of Ethics?", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 55, 355-64.
- (2008), "Aesthetic Obligations". *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 66, 1-9.
- Murdoch, I. (1970), *The Sovereignty of the Good*. London: Routledge and Keegan Paul.
- Neill, A. and Ridley, A. (2012), "Relational Theories of Art: the History of an Error". *British Journal of Aesthetics* 52:2, 141-151.
- Noel, Jana (1999), "Phronesis and Phantasia: Teaching with Wisdom and Imagination". *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 33:2, 277-286.
- Nussbaum, M. (1990), *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Oakley, J. (2013), "Virtue Ethics and Bioethics". In D. Russell (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Virtue Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 197-220.
- Oakley, J. and Cocking, D. (2001), *Virtue Ethics and Professional Roles*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Pappas, N. (2012), "Plato's Aesthetics". In *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Online: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/plato-aesthetics>.
- Peirce, C. S. (1903), "The Three Normative Sciences". In Peirce Edition Project (eds.), *The Essential Peirce, Volume 2*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998, 196-207.
- Piazza, J. (2010), "Audiences Experience 'Avatar' Blues". Online: [www.cnn.com/2010/Showbiz/Movies/01/11/avatar.movie.blues](http://www.cnn.com/2010/Showbiz/Movies/01/11/avatar.movie.blues).

- Plato (1997), *Greater Hippias*, trans. P. Woodruff. In J. Cooper (ed.), *Plato: Complete Works*. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 898-921.
- (1997) *Republic*, trans. G. Grube, rev. C. D. C. Reeve. In J. Cooper (ed.), *Plato: Complete Works*. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 971-1223.
- (1997) *Symposium*, trans. A. Nehamas and P. Woodruff. In J. Cooper (ed.), *Plato: Complete Works*. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 457-505.
- Postman, N. (1985), *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*. New York: Penguin Books.
- (1992), *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*. New York: Random House.
- Rawls, J. (1971), *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Reeve, C. D. C. (2013), *Aristotle on Practical Wisdom*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Ridley, A. (1997a), *R. G. Collingwood*. London: Orion Publishing.
- (1997b), “Not Ideal: Collingwood’s Expression Theory”. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 55:3, 263-272.
- (1998), “Collingwood’s Commitments: A Reply to Hausman and Dilworth”. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 56:4, 396-398.
- Rondel, D. (2014), “The Moral Consequences of the End of Art”. In V. L. Marchenkov (ed.), *Between Histories: Art’s Dilemmas and Trajectories*. New York: Hampton Press, 13-24.
- Ryle, G. (1949), *The Concept of Mind*. New York: Routledge, 2009 reprint.
- Schellekens, E. (2007), *Aesthetics and Morality*. London: Continuum.
- Schiller, F. (2004), *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, trans. R. Snell. Mineola, NY: Dover.
- Scruton, R. (2007), *Culture Counts*. New York: Encounter Books.
- Spengler, O. (1926), *The Decline of the West, vol. I*, trans. C. F. Atkinson. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.

- Spivak, G. C. (2013), *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Stecker, R. (1996), "Alien Objections to Historical Definitions of Art". *British Journal of Aesthetics* 36:3, 305-308.
- Swanton, C. (2001a), "Virtue Ethics, Value-centredness, and Consequentialism". *Utilitas*, 13:2, 213-235.
- (2001b), "A Virtue Ethical Account of Right Action". *Ethics* 112, 32-52.
- Tolstoy, L. (1898), *What is Art?*, trans. R. Pevear and L. Volokhonsky. London: Penguin Books, 1995 reprint.
- Trott, E. (2007), "Bosanquet, Aesthetics, and Education: Warding off Stupidity with Art". In W. Sweet (ed.), *Bernard Bosanquet and the Legacy of British Idealism*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 113-126.
- (2009), "Kant's Legacy: Murder as Art". *Ultimate Reality and Meaning* 32:2, 108-118.
- Van Zyl, L. (2013), "Virtue Ethics and Right Action". In D. Russell (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Virtue Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 172-196.
- Warburton, N. (2003), *The Art Question*. London: Routledge.
- Wicks, R. (2013), *European Aesthetics: A Critical Introduction from Kant to Derrida*. London: Oneworld Publications.
- Wiggins, D. (1980), "Deliberation and Practical Reason". In A. O. Rorty (ed.), *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 221-240.
- Wittgenstein, L. (1921), *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. C. K. Ogden. Mineola, NY: Dover, 1961 reprint.
- (1953), *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. Oxford: Blackwell, 2001 reprint.
- Wollheim, R. (1972), "On an Alleged Inconsistency in Collingwood's Aesthetic". In M. Krausz (ed.), *Critical Essays on the Philosophy of R. G. Collingwood*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 68-78.

—— (1980), *Art and its Objects*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Woodruff, D. M. (2001) “A Virtue Theory of Aesthetics”. *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 35:3, 23-36.

Zagzebski, L. (1996), *Virtues of the Mind*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.