MORALITY AND ART

Lecture 1: Introducing the Problem

Ms. Daisy Dixon
KRAFFT’S IDAHO TEAPOT (2003)
JONES’S HATSTAND, TABLE, AND CHAIR (1970)
SERRANO’S *IMMERSION (PISS CHRIST) (1987)*
GENTILESCHI’S JUDITH SLAYING HOLOFERNES (1620)
MORALITY AND ART: 3 QUESTIONS

• Can (and should) an artwork be assessed ethically in the first place?

• Are the ethical features of an artwork ever aesthetically relevant?

• If so, what’s the relation between a work’s aesthetic properties and ethical properties?
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LOLITA

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№ 66

THE TRAVELLER’S COMPANION SERIES
MORALITY AND ART: AIMS AND PLAN

• Lecture 1 Introduction: the problem, overview of positions and the nature of the debate
• Lecture 2 Autonomism: Radical and Moderate
• Lecture 3 Ethicism (a moderate form of moralism)
• Lecture 4 Contextualism: immoral art, and the nature of imaginative resistance
DEFINITIONS AND CONCEPTS: AESTHETIC VALUE

• The value of an artwork *qua* art - how good or bad a work is in itself as a work of art (as opposed to its value as an investment object, or a doorstop)

• Aesthetic properties and aesthetic terms

• Intrinsic features ['conceptual core'] vs. extrinsic features (Lillehammer 2008)

• *Aesthetic value (wide)* vs. *Aesthetic value (narrow)*
DEFINITIONS AND CONCEPTS: AESTHETIC VALUE

- Aesthetic value (wide) “The use of the term ‘aesthetic’ often suggests a narrow focus on the beautiful or on formal properties of works; but, since these uses cannot capture the whole range of what we intuitively….accept as aesthetic properties, there is less temptation to exclude the ethical and cognitive from the aesthetic domain…” (Gaut, 2007: 40)
DEFINITIONS AND CONCEPTS: ETHICAL VALUE

• “The notion of the ethical in the broad sense concerns the entire domain of character excellences and deficiencies…and that the notion of the ethical in the narrower sense, that of the moral, though not without tensions, concerns the kinds of motivations and feelings that we have towards other people.” (Gaut, 2007: 48)
DEFINITIONS AND CONCEPTS: ETHICAL VALUE – RELATIONS

(a) External

- Micro-consequences
- Macro-consequences
- Means of production
DEFINITIONS AND CONCEPTS: ETHICAL VALUE – RELATIONS

(b) Internal

• Depiction

• Perspectives/attitudes
DEFINITIONS AND CONCEPTS: ETHICAL VALUE – RELATIONS

(b) Internal

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• Perspectives/attitudes
MORALITY AND ART: 3 QUESTIONS

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MORALITY AND ART: 3 QUESTIONS

• Can (and should) an artwork be assessed ethically in the first place?

• Are the ethical features of an artwork ever aesthetically relevant?

• If so, what’s the relation between a work’s aesthetic properties and ethical properties? monotonic/polytonic, and symmetric/inverted
MORALITY AND ART: HISTORY OF THE DEBATE

• Humanist ➔ Moralism
MORALITY AND ART: HISTORY OF THE DEBATE

Moralism

• Can (and should) an artwork be assessed ethically? YES

• Are ethical features of an artwork ever aesthetically relevant? YES Radical vs Moderate

• If ethical features of an artwork are ever aesthetically relevant, what is the relation between these ethical values and the artwork’s aesthetic value? Monotonic and symmetric: (the relation always goes$_m$: ethical flaw-aesthetic flaw, ethical merit-aesthetic merit$_s$)
MORALITY AND ART: HISTORY OF THE DEBATE

• Humanist ➔ Moralism
• Formalist ➔ Autonomism
Autonomism

• Can (and should) an artwork be assessed ethically? Radical: NO, Moderate: YES

• Are ethical features of an artwork ever aesthetically relevant? NO

• If ethical features of an artwork are ever aesthetically relevant, what is the relation between these ethical values and the artwork’s aesthetic value? Radical autonomists: there is none. Moderate autonomists: at most there’s an ‘indirect relation’
MORALITY AND ART: HISTORY OF THE DEBATE

• Humanist ➞ Moralism
• Formalist ➞ Autonomism
• Transgression ➞ Immoralism
MORALITY AND ART: HISTORY OF THE DEBATE

Immoralism

- Can (and should) an artwork be assessed ethically? YES
- Are ethical features of an artwork ever aesthetically relevant? YES
- If ethical features of an artwork are ever aesthetically relevant, what is the relation between these ethical values and the artwork’s aesthetic value? Radical Immoralists: monotonic and inverted (It is always_{m} ethical flaw-aesthetic merit, ethical merit-aesthetic flaw_{in}) Moderate Immoralists: polytonic, and both symmetric and inverted (It can sometimes be flaw-flaw_{s}, flaw-merit_{in}, merit-merit_{s}, or merit-flaw_{in})
MORALITY AND ART: THE POSITIONS

• **Moralism** Radical forms (Tolstoy) and Moderate forms (Moderate Moralism – Carroll, and Ethicism – Gaut)

• **Autonomism** Radical and Moderate forms (Anderson & Dean)

• **Immoralism** Radical and Moderate forms (Eaton and Kieran)
MORALITY AND ART: THE (RE)POSITIONS

• **Moralism** Radical forms (Tolstoy) and Moderate forms (*Moderate Moralism* – Carroll, and *Ethicism* – Gaut)
• **Autonomism** Radical and Moderate forms (Anderson & Dean)
• **Immoralism** Radical and Moderate forms (Eaton and Kieran)
MORALITY AND ART: THE (RE)POSITIONS

- **Ethicism** (Remaining weaker Moralist position)
- **Autonomism** (Radical and Moderate forms (Anderson & Dean))
- **Contextualism** (Moderate Moralism and Moderate Immoralism)

The ethical value of a work, when aesthetically relevant, does contribute to its aesthetic value, but contextualists deny that aesthetic value always varies symmetrically with ethical value (contra Ethicism) - a work’s aesthetic value can be both enhanced and hindered by ethical flaws
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Can an artwork be assessed ethically?</th>
<th>Are the ethical features of an artwork always or sometimes aesthetically relevant?</th>
<th>When the ethical features of an artwork are aesthetically relevant, what is the ‘value-interaction’ between the ethical and aesthetic properties?</th>
<th>(Which means…)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Radical Autonomism</strong> (Bell, Fry)</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Moderate Autonomism</strong> (Anderson &amp; Dean)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Radical Moralism</strong> (Tolstoy)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>Monotonic, symmetric</td>
<td>Always: ethical flaw = aesthetic flaw, and ethical merit = aesthetic merit</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Ethicism</strong> [weaker form of Moralism] (Gaut)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Monotonic, symmetric</td>
<td>Always, when aesthetically relevant, an ethical flaw = aesthetic flaw, and ethical merit = aesthetic merit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contextualism</strong> [encompassing Moderate Immoralism and Moderate Moralism] (Carroll, Kieran, Eaton)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Polytonic, symmetric or inverted</td>
<td>Sometimes, and when aesthetically relevant, an ethical flaw = aesthetic flaw and an ethical flaw = aesthetic merit, and an ethical merit = aesthetic merit and an ethical merit = aesthetic flaw</td>
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