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ARTICLE

Two Dogmas of the Artistic-Ethical Interaction Debate

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Abstract

Can artworks be morally good or bad? Many philosophers have thought so. Does this moral goodness or badness bear on how good or bad a work is *as art?* This is very much a live debate. *Autonomists* argue that moral value is not relevant to artistic value; *interactionists* argue that it is. In this paper, I argue that the debate between interactionists and autonomists has been conducted unfairly: all parties to the debate have tacitly accepted a set of constraints which prejudices the issue against the interactionist. I identify two demands which are routinely placed on arguments seeking to establish interaction and argue that they are, in fact, mutually conflicting. There are two upshots. First, in light of this, it is unsurprising that arguments for interaction have failed to meet with everybody's satisfaction. The constraints are such that no argument can meet them. Second, recognizing this helps us uncover a new, promising, but hitherto overlooked strategy for establishing artistic-ethical interaction.

Keywords: Art and morality; artistic value

Introduction

Can artworks be morally good or bad? Many philosophers have thought so. Indeed, philosophers working on the issue of morality in art in the past twenty years or so have been almost unanimous that they can, citing examples such as Leni Riefenstahl's Nazi propaganda film *Triumph of the Will* and W. D. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* as particularly clear examples of morally bad artworks.[1]

Outside of philosophy, it is not hard to find examples of moral properties being attributed to artworks. Consider the 2012 film *The Help,* a well-intentioned film about racism in America in the 1960s, which has sparked debate about whether it is itself racist. The Association of Black Women Historians released a statement about it, in which they argue that:

> Despite efforts to market the book and the film as a progressive story of triumph over racial injustice, *The Help* distorts, ignores, and trivializes the experiences of black domestic workers. We are specifically concerned about the representations of black life and the lack of attention given to sexual harassment and civil rights activism.[2]

Examples such as these suggest that there is at least a pretheoretic tendency to take artworks to be susceptible to moral, as well as aesthetic and artistic, assessments. Within philosophy, and outside of it, there is (perhaps surprisingly) little controversy on the issue of whether moral goodness and

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[1] See Devereaux (1998, esp. 227–56); Walton (1994); Dickie (2005); Gaut (1998, 182); Gaut (2007, esp. 228–52); Carroll (2000, esp. 374–81); Harold (2006); Anderson and Dean (1998); Kieran (1996, esp. 346–49; Eaton, (2012, esp. 289).

[2] Ida E. Jones, "An Open Statement to the Fans of *The Help*," Association of Black Women Historians, August 12, 2011, http://abwh.org/political-action-statements.

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badness can be properly attributed to artworks. The question that has really divided opinion is the further question of whether this moral goodness or badness is relevant to the goodness or badness of these works *as art.* Suppose *The Help* is, despite the writers' intentions, racist. Does this make it a less good film? Does this make it less good *as art*? Or should we say instead that it is bad in one respect—ethically—but when it comes to assessing it in a different respect—artistically—facts about its ethical value are neither here nor there? It is this second question to which this paper is directed.

Call the view that moral value is not relevant to artistic value *autonomism*; call the view that it *is* relevant *interactionism.*[3] In this paper, I argue that the debate between interactionists and autonomists has been conducted unfairly: all parties to the debate have tacitly accepted a set of constraints that prejudices the issue against the interactionist. I identify two demands that are routinely placed on arguments seeking to establish interaction and argue that they are in fact mutually conflicting. No argument can meet them both.

There are two upshots. First, it renders it unsurprising that arguments for interaction have failed to meet with everybody's satisfaction. The constraints are such that no argument can meet them. Second, recognizing this helps us uncover a new, promising, but hitherto overlooked, strategy for establishing artistic-ethical interaction.

After some preliminary clarifications are made in section 1, the paper comprises four main parts. Sections 2 and 3 identify the two assumptions that jointly result in an unfair playing field for the interactionist. In section 4, I discuss which of these two incompatible assumptions should be rejected. I argue that there are, in fact, independent reasons for rejecting both. In section 5, I say a bit about the ignored strategy and why it looks promising.

1. Preliminaries

1.a Varieties of interactionism

While my focus here is the debate between those who argue that moral value can bear on artistic value (interactionists) and those who argue that it cannot (autonomists), most interactionists argue for some specific form of interactionism rather than just for interactionism *per se.* In the now-standard terminology:[4] ethicists and moderate moralists disagree about whether moral value bears on artistic value in every case (ethicism), or in only some (moderate moralism). Ethicists also disagree with immoralists about the direction of the bearing—(moderate) immoralists hold that moral flaws can be artistic merits (extreme immoralism—the view that moral flaws are *always* artistic merits—does not appear to be an occupied position).[5]

While interactionists may disagree with each other about rather a lot, however, they are united in their commitment to what autonomism denies: that moral flaws and merits—at least sometimes—bear on artistic value in one direction or another. The interactionist arguments I discuss in what follows are each arguments for a particular species of interactionism, but my focus here is on the debate between interactionists of all stripes, on one hand, and autonomists, on the other.

1.b Moral properties

Three related debates concerning moral and artistic evaluation fall outside the remit of this paper. First, metaethical and meta-aesthetic questions about how we should understand the evaluative

[3]This follows a fairly established usage: see Stecker (2005); Stecker (2010), ch. 12; Lopes (2005), esp. ch. 5*;* Harold (2011); Smuts (2011). Note that, like these authors, I do not intend the term "interactionism" to convey anything specifically causal.

[4]This terminology originates from Noël Carroll's helpful taxonomy. See Carroll (2000). Note that some philosophers urge a departure from the standard terminology. Giovannelli (2007) proposes a rather radical overhaul, and Gaut (2007) more modestly proposes a slightly different understanding of the term "ethicism."

[5]Those who argue for immoralism tend to make the weaker claim that moral flaws *can* be artistic merits, not that they always are. See, for example, Kieran (2002); Jacobson (1997); John (2003); Eaton (2012).

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terms "moral value" and "artistic value." Are they devices for reporting features of the world, or do they serve only to report or express human attitudes? I will not take a stand on this question here.[6]

Second, there is a significant body of literature on what the moral character of an artwork consists in. The prevailing view is that the moral character of an artwork is a matter of the moral character of the attitudes manifested in the work.[7] Alternative suggestions include the way the work was made,[8] the consequences of engaging with the work,[9] the purpose for which the work was made,[10] the moral viewpoint of its actual, implied,[11] or posited[12] author, and the extent to which it challenges its audience morally.[13] What I go on to say in this paper is independent of how that debate is to be resolved.

A third debate concerns whether artworks are the kinds of things to which moral properties can legitimately be ascribed. This question can arise even if one is perfectly happy with ascribing moral properties to things more generally; one might simply worry that there is some kind of category mistake involved in ascribing moral properties to artworks. I noted above that it is standardly assumed that this is not a mistake. For the purpose of this paper, I will not challenge this assumption.

1.c Artistic value

In addition to the question of whether the ethical value of an artwork is relevant to its artistic value, it is sometimes asked whether it is relevant to its *aesthetic* value. Depending on how "aesthetic value" is understood, this second question may be the same as the first; some stipulate that by "aesthetic value," they will mean artistic value.[14] There is, however, a notable lack of consensus regarding how the term "aesthetic value" should be understood. Where they can be read as different questions, then, the focus here is on the first. This is just the question of whether the ethical value of a work can affect how good it is as art.[15]

2. The first dogma

In this section, I argue that the artistic-ethical interaction debate has proceeded as though all participants accept a certain constraint on the form that arguments for interaction should take.

[6]Most participants in the interactionism debate set aside these metaevaluative questions. Presumably the thought is that however one understands ascriptions of ethical and artistic merit, as long as one agrees that it is legitimate to make such ascriptions (i.e., barring error theories), the question of how these relate will still arise. And this is so whether that legitimacy is cashed out in realist terms or otherwise. An exception is Harold (2011), who argues that metaethical and metanormative questions do bear on the question, as metanormative antirealism entails autonomism.

[7]See Carroll (1996, 232–34); Gaut (1998, 182); Jacobson (1997, 167).

[8]This suggestion is discussed (and rejected) in Stecker (2005, 139–40) and Harold (2006, 260–61).

[9]See Posner (1997); Nussbaum (1990). See also Stecker (2005) and (2010), who distinguishes between "micro" and "macro" consequences.

[10]This is discussed in Harold (2006, 260).

[11]Booth (1988).

[12]Devereaux (2004).

[13]Harold (2006). These options need not be understood as exclusive. Some argue for just one of these to the exclusion of the others (see, for example, Gaut [1998], and [2001, esp. 432]), but others take the moral character of an artwork to have several potential sources (see Stecker [2005, esp. 139–40]). If one takes the latter view, there may be not one but several interactionism questions, depending on which kind of moral properties of artworks one has in mind (Giovannelli [2007, 120–21] makes this point). In which case, one could in theory be an interactionist about one kind of moral property, but an autonomist about another. If that is the case—and I don't take a stand here either way—then the claims I defend in what follows should be taken to apply to each one of these interactionism debates.

[14]See Gaut (2007, 26-42); Harold (2006, 260). See also Vermazen (1991, 266).

[15]Some philosophers have expressed skepticism about artistic value (see Lopes 2011). It is a presupposition of the interactionism debate—at least in its standard form—that such skepticism is mistaken. But for arguments against skepticism about artistic value, see Dodd (2014), Hanson (2013), Hanson (2017), Huddleston (2012), and Stecker (2012).

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There are two kinds of strategy one could take to try to establish artistic-ethical interaction. First, one could try to establish interaction indirectly via some other property. In other words, argue as follows:

(i) Identify some property P where either all parties to the debate already accept that P is relevant to artistic value, or where one can supply an argument for P's relevance to artistic value.
(ii) Argue that the ethical character of an artwork bears on the extent to which it possesses P.
(iii) Conclude that ethical value bears on artistic value, since it bears on P, and P bears on artistic value.

The relation of "bearing on" here is understood very broadly. A property could bear on artistic value in a constitutive sense or in a causal sense. Call this kind of strategy an *indirect strategy* since it is an attempt to secure the relevance of ethical value to artistic value *indirectly*, via some intermediary property.

Second, one could try to establish interaction directly, without going via some intermediary property. Call such strategies *direct strategies.*

Participants in the artistic-ethical interaction debate, as I shall argue, have proceeded as though the only kind of acceptable interactionist argument is the indirect kind. No one, to my knowledge, has pursued direct strategies. This is in marked contrast with the situation in parallel debates: debates concerning the artistic relevance of other kinds of property, such as originality and cognitive value. In both of these debates, those who argue for interaction—and indeed, those who argue against interaction—frequently do so by appealing to what is often referred to as "critical and appreciative practice."

Harold Osborne (1979) argues for the irrelevance of originality to artistic value by appealing to our actual artistic appraisals:

> There is an element of timelessness in our appraisals of artistic masterpieces. Unlike scientific theories, great works of art are not superseded and do not lose their value when they are no longer new. We appreciate the memorable works of all ages without knowing or greatly caring to what extent they were novel in their time. (227)

Matthew Kieran, Oliver Conolly, and Bashar Haydar argue for the relevance of cognitive value to artistic value by appealing to critical practice:

> Critics often do advert to considerations of truth in evaluating works as art. Critical terms of praise or blame such as profound, insightful, sentimental, shallow, callow, often do pick out the beliefs and attitudes conveyed through a work. (Kieran 2009, 196)

> Many of the terms we use to assess works of literature are cognitive in nature. We say that a work is profound, insightful, shrewd, well-observed, or perceptive, and conversely that it is shallow, or sentimental, or impercipient. A common thread running throughout this terminology is that works of literature are ascribed cognitive features affecting the value of those works qua literature. Use of this terminology therefore implies adherence to a substantial philosophical theory, cognitivism, the thesis that (1) works of literature have cognitive content, and (2) this content enhances their value as works of literature. (Conolly and Haydar 2007, 111)

And Gordon Graham (2005, 72) argues for cognitivism from its ability "to explain and justify a range of artistic appraisals."

These are all examples of direct strategies because they try to establish the artistic relevance of some target property *without* going via an intermediary property. Instead, they appeal to critical

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and appreciative practice and claim to find evidence there that the target property bears on artistic value. In each case, the argument involves no claims about the relevance of anything else, besides the target property, to artistic value.

Is appealing to critical and appreciative practice a good way to argue? Is it the only way of arguing directly or are there other ways? These are further questions, and I'll say more about them in section 4. The point to note for now is that arguments of this kind are commonplace in debates about cognitive-artistic interaction, and about the interaction of originality with artistic value. In the remainder of this section, I will argue that this is not true of the artistic-ethical interaction debate. I will talk through four much-discussed arguments offered by philosophers in support of artistic-ethical interaction and show how they all qualify as indirect strategies.

2.a The uptake argument

Noël Carroll's uptake argument is intended to establish the truth of what Carroll calls "Moderate Moralism," the thesis that the ethical value of an artwork at least sometimes affects that work's artistic merit.[16] Narrative artworks, Carroll argues, very often *solicit responses* from their audiences; the fictional events are often presented in ways that are designed to get the audience to have a particular kind of emotional response. But artworks can be better or worse designed in this respect. Works don't always *get* the audience responses that they solicit. Works can be unconvincing or strike their audience as manipulative, characters that are designed to be sympathetic might fail to win audiences over.

Carroll argues that, in general, we ought to find uncontroversial the claim that when an artwork fails to get its audience to respond in the way solicited, this constitutes an artistic flaw in the work in question. This has some prima facie plausibility. Take Oscar Wilde's famous criticism of Dickens's *The Old Curiosity Shop,* that "one must have a heart of stone to read the death of little Nell without laughing."[17] Most people understand this to be an artistic criticism of the work. One can't claim of a narrative work that a scene central to it that was supposed to be deeply sad and poignant is, in fact, hilarious, without thereby saying something that bears negatively on an overall assessment of the work's artistic merit.

Call the ability of an artwork to get the responses from its audience that it solicits, the ability to *secure uptake.* The claim, then, is that the failure of an artwork to secure uptake is an artistic flaw. Carroll's key move is to argue that if we accept this, we ought to accept that moral flaws can detract from a work's artistic value, since moral flaws are sometimes what prevent works from securing audience uptake. Carroll (1996, 232) takes Brett Easton Ellis's novel *American Psycho* to illustrate this point:

> The author intended it as a satire of the rapacious eighties in the USA. He presented a serial killer as the symbol of the vaunted securities marketeer of Reagonomics. However, the serial killings depicted in the novel are so graphically brutal that readers are not able morally to get past the gore in order to savour the parody.

American Psycho fails to secure audience uptake *because* of its moral flaws. And so, argues Carroll, since failing to secure uptake is an artistic flaw, the novel is artistically flawed because morally flawed.

[16]See Carroll (2000, esp. 377–78, and [1998a]). It is worth noting that Carroll, in fact, frames his argument in terms of aesthetic merit, and it may be that he intends this to be understood as distinct from artistic merit. If that's the case, then the argument I am focusing on is not strictly Carroll's, but rather an argument that has been widely attributed to him (see, for example, Davies [2007, 173–82]; Kieran (2006, esp. 134); and John (2003, esp. 332–34). Little hangs on this for my purposes, however, since the argument I am discussing has been hugely influential in the literature, and merits discussion, even if strictly speaking it is not the argument Carroll intended to make.

[17]Cited in Ellmann (1987, 441).

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What I'm interested in here is not whether Carroll's argument works or not, but rather the structure of the argument. The uptake argument is an indirect strategy, since it proceeds by identifying a property that it argues is relevant to artistic value—in this case the ability to secure uptake—and then argues that ethical value can affect it.

2.b The merited response argument

Berys Gaut's merited response argument is superficially similar to the uptake argument, but importantly different. Here the intermediary property is not the ability to actually secure uptake, but what Gaut calls the *meriting* of uptake. Gaut (1998; 2007, 231) argues that what matters to artistic value is that the responses the work prescribes from its audience are *merited*. He argues that a horror film may be unscary or a joke unfunny whether or not people, in fact, respond with the prescribed fear or hilarity respectively. And in such cases, the work is guilty of prescribing a response that it doesn't merit. Gaut thinks we should agree that this is an artistic flaw, and takes his task, then, to be to show that immoral responses are never merited.

Again, what I want to draw attention to here is the structure of Gaut's argument. Despite the difference in content, it is similar in form to Carroll's uptake argument in the following way: Gaut is attempting to establish the artistic relevance of ethical value by arguing that:

(i) meritedness of prescribed response is relevant to artistic value, and
(ii) ethical value affects meritedness of prescribed response.

2.c The moral beauty argument

The moral beauty argument, also from Berys Gaut, is a very different argument for artistic-ethical interaction. Here the starting point is the claim that one particular species of beauty is moral beauty. Artworks that are morally meritorious, it is claimed, exhibit moral beauty, and artworks that are morally bad exhibit a corresponding moral ugliness. So, for example, the racism that makes *Birth of a Nation* morally bad is also a way in which it is ugly. So, insofar as we accept that beauty is an artistic merit, and ugliness a demerit, we should accept, argues Gaut (2007, 114–32), that the moral value of an artwork affects its artistic value, since moral value is a kind of beauty, and beauty is relevant to artistic value.

Here the intermediary property is beauty. Gaut is arguing that the ethical character of a work bears on its artistic value because it bears on its beauty, and beauty bears on artistic value.

You might, nonetheless, be tempted to classify this as a direct argument. It is claiming, after all, that moral merits are *a species of* beauty (and that moral flaws are a species of ugliness), not merely that the moral character of a work *affects* its beauty, but rather that the moral character can *constitute a kind of beauty*.

But this is mistaken. It is not a necessary condition on an argument's qualifying as indirect that the links it draws to the intermediary property must be merely causal, or that they cannot be constitutive ones. What makes an argument qualify as an indirect strategy is that it tries to establish the bearing of some target property on artistic value *by drawing a link from that target property to some intermediary property, and drawing another link from the intermediary property to artistic value*. The links in question can be causal, constitutive, or whatever. What matters is that the case for the target property's artistic relevance is made in terms of links *of some kind* to the intermediary property.

2.d Cognitivist arguments

The last kind of interactionist argument I will discuss comprises a group of arguments which I will call cognitivist arguments. Berys Gaut, James Harold, Matthew Kieran, and Noël Carroll have

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suggested cognitivist arguments for moderate moralism;[18] Matthew Kieran (2002) has also put forward a cognitivist argument for (moderate) immoralism.

The arguments all begin with the cognitivist claim that if an artwork has cognitive value—if it enhances our understanding of something—then this is an artistic merit. And then, depending on whether it is moderate moralism or immoralism that is being argued for, it is then argued that moral merits, or flaws, can help a work to achieve this.

On the moralist side, it is argued that richly detailed narrative artworks can shed light on important moral issues and teach us significant moral truths, by making us imaginatively engage with certain morally relevant possibilities. For Gaut, the novel *Sophie's Choice* "shows us that moral life can present acute, irresolvable dilemmas, and so teaches us something very significant about morality—and something denied by some philosophers such as Kant."[19]

If, as cognitivism maintains, cognitive value bears positively on artistic value, and if moral merits can enhance a work's cognitive value, then we have an argument for the claim that the moral merits of a work at least sometimes bear positively on its artistic value.

On the immoralist side, it is argued that there is one kind of cognitive benefit that immoral artworks are especially, possibly uniquely, well placed to give us. The thought is that a well-rounded understanding of the good must involve an understanding of the potential appeal of the morally bad. Of course, one non-ideal way of achieving this is to do morally bad things oneself, but, the immoralist argues, another way is to engage with artworks that encourage morally bad responses. Graham Greene's *The Destructors*, to use one of Matthew Kieran's examples (2002, 68–69), skillfully seduces readers into cheering along a fictional gang of teenagers in the destruction of a kind widower's house. Kieran argues that this makes *The Destructors* a morally flawed work, but that this moral flaw is also what is responsible for the insight offered into how someone can be tempted into doing morally bad things. Putting this together with the cognitivist claim that this insight is an artistic merit, we arrive at immoralism—moral flaws can be artistic merits.

In both cases, moral flaws or merits are claimed to bear on artistic value by bearing on cognitive value, which in turn affects artistic value. Such cognitivist arguments, like the other arguments we've discussed, are indirect strategies since they try to establish the relevance of ethical value to artistic value *via* cognitive value.

2.e Summary

I've discussed the four main kinds of argument for ethical-artistic interaction and I've argued that all of them are *indirect* strategies: they try to establish the relevance of ethical value to artistic value via some intermediary property. Given the use of direct strategies in other, parallel debates, such as those concerning the artistic relevance of cognitive value and artistic value, the failure to explore direct strategies here cries out for explanation. A very plausible explanation is that people are implicitly accepting one of the following as a constraint:

IND: the only acceptable kinds of arguments for interaction are indirect strategies.
IND*: indirect strategies are *preferable* to direct ones.

One consideration in favor of attributing a commitment to IND is that some philosophers come very close to explicitly voicing a commitment to IND. Berys Gaut, for example, argues that appealing to critical and appreciative practice cannot succeed in establishing interaction (2007, 90–106). If it turns out that appealing to critical and appreciative practice is the *only way* to argue directly, then this amounts to a statement of IND.

[18] Gaut (2007, 133–202); Carroll (1998b, 126–60); Harold (2008); Kieran (1996).
[19] Gaut (2007, 163–64). See also Carroll (1998b) and Harold (2008).

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On the other hand, one reason it's plausible to think people in the debate subscribe to IND* is that indirect strategies have an attractive feature: they promise to shed some light on how the artistic-ethical interaction works. If successful, they do more than just establish artistic-ethical interaction; they also tell us something about the nature of the interaction. If Carroll's uptake argument succeeds, it tells us not just that an artwork's ethical character can affect its artistic value, but that it does so by affecting the work's ability to secure audience uptake, If Kieran's cognitive immoralist argument succeeds, it does more than just establish that moral flaws can increase an artwork's artistic value, but that they can do so by providing important psychological insights. If people in the debate are impressed by the potential of indirect strategies to be illuminating in this way, and if, in addition, they notice that indirect strategies aren't as readily *available* in the parallel debates, this would explain why direct strategies are pursued in those debates and not in the artistic-ethical interaction debate.

A commitment to IND, or the weaker IND*, constitutes what I'm calling the first dogma of the artistic ethical interactionism debate.

3. The second dogma

The second dogma is encapsulated in an influential objection to a major interactionist argument, Noël Carroll's uptake argument discussed above. Recall that the uptake argument starts from the claim that ability to secure uptake is relevant to artistic value, and then tries to establish that ethical value can affect ability to secure uptake. In the terminology introduced in section 2, this is an indirect strategy that uses ability to secure audience uptake as an intermediary property.

Various objections have been raised to the uptake argument.[20] Here, however, I want to focus on a particular objection that has been—at least to my knowledge—unanimously accepted by those who discuss it, which I will call the qua problem.[21]

The objection, in short, is that Carroll's argument does not show that "a moral problem *qua* moral problem is an artistic defect in an artwork." This objection was first presented by James Anderson and Jeffrey Dean in their paper "Moderate Autonomism," where they argue against Carroll that:

> Whilst he may have shown that in some cases a moral problem in a work can prevent its audience from engaging in the way the work requires, and that this is an artistic flaw […] this is not sufficient since it is not the moral problem qua moral problem that is detracting from artistic value, but rather the moral problem qua barrier to audience uptake. (1998, 157)

In other words, "the moral features *qua* moral features play no direct role. […] Rather, they are significant only in so far as they block an audience's responses to the work."[22]

Matthew Kieran also puts the objection the following way:

> Objects can have multiple aims. A gun, for example, can be made both to function well as a gun and to be highly decorative. Now, in certain cases, it may be that the overly elaborate nature of the decoration may impair the ability of the gun to function as a gun—the baroque decoration may weigh the object down too heavily, the detail may stop the mechanism from working properly, and so on. But this does not show that, as such, the nature of the decoration is relevant to evaluating the nature of the object qua gun. All it shows is that sometimes other aspects of the object may impinge on its capacity to function in this way. It is not internal to *evaluating things as guns* that decoration as such be taken into account. (2001, 26–27)

[20]See, for example, Davies (2007, 173) and Connolly (2000).

[21]See, for example, Dickie (2005); Kieran (2005, 26–27); Harold (2011, 140); and Connolly (2000, esp. 305–6).

[22]Kieran (2001, 26).

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By the same token, it is argued, even if Carroll is right that a work's moral features can impinge on its ability to secure audience uptake, and even if he's right that uptake is relevant to artistic value, this does not establish that it is internal to the evaluation of an object qua artwork that ethical value as such be taken into account.

The complaint, I take it, is this: to establish interaction in any interesting sense, we need to do more than Carroll's argument has done—we need to show that moral features *qua moral features* are relevant to artistic value. All that Carroll's argument shows, however, is that moral features *qua something else* are relevant: a moral feature is relevant only insofar as it also qualifies as an inhibitor of uptake.

This, then, is the second dogma that has shaped the interactionism debate:

> *The Qua Constraint:* any successful argument for interactionism must do more than just show that moral properties are relevant to artistic value; it must show that they are relevant *qua moral properties.*

I am not going to take a stand here on whether the qua constraint should be accepted. Rather, my concern is to point out that one definitely cannot accept it if one also accepts IND or IND*.

It is because Carroll's strategy is an indirect one that the qua problem (QP) objection can be made. *Any* attempt to establish the relevance of moral value to artistic value *in this indirect way*—by establishing the relevance of moral value to some intermediary property that is argued to be relevant to artistic value—is vulnerable to the objection that it is "not the moral value qua moral value" that is doing the work. If the qua problem *is* a problem, then, it is not a problem particular to Carroll's account, but rather a problem for indirect strategies in general.

Gaut's merited response argument, in linking moral flaws to artistic value via the claim that moral flaws make a response unmerited, can by the same token be charged with establishing the artistic relevance of moral flaws only *qua things that make a prescribed response unmerited.* The moralist cognitivist argument establishes the relevance of moral flaws *qua cognitive demerits* and of moral merits *qua cognitive merits.* The immoralist cognitivist argument establishes the relevance of moral flaws *qua cognitive merits.* The moral beauty argument establishes the relevance of moral merits *qua beautiful features,* and of moral flaws *qua ugly features.*

Someone might object here that this is too quick. As I argued in section 2, indirect strategies can draw constitutive, rather than merely causal, links between the relevant properties. Take the moral beauty argument. On one reading, at least, it takes moral flaws to *constitute* a kind of ugliness, which in turn they take to *constitute* a kind of artistic flaw. And indirect arguments of this kind might be thought to avoid the qua problem.

This is mistaken. To the extent that it's a fair criticism of the uptake argument that it's not the immorality that's doing the work, it's also applicable to the moral beauty argument: if moral flaws weren't ugly, then they wouldn't be artistic flaws. The QP is not a complaint that *no link has been established* between moral flaws and artistic flaws—the complaint is that it's not *the right kind* of link. Specifically, the complaint is that the link is in some sense conditionalized on moral flaws counting as some other thing, P. That it is only **insofar as/to the extent that/in virtue of the fact that** a moral flaw is a P, that moral flaws bear on artistic value. In other words, the link between moral flaws and artistic flaws is in some sense *conditionalized on their being Ps* (and conditionalized also on Ps being artistic flaws). But even if the link between moral flaws and P is constitutive rather than, say, causal, the result is still a thesis about the bearing of moral flaws on artistic value that is *conditionalized on moral flaws being Ps.*

It's a further question, of course, whether this conditionalization really does, as the QP assumes, render the link *not of the right kind.* But the point here is that if the qua problem is a problem at all, it is a problem for all of these arguments and, moreover, it is so precisely because they are indirect strategies. The moral is this: we shouldn't be surprised that no satisfactory interactionist argument has been found if we insist that to be acceptable, interactionist arguments must be both indirect and

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avoid the qua problem. No argument can do this; the requirements are incompatible. One of these two constraints, therefore, must be rejected.

4. Where to go from here?

I've argued that we should either start taking direct strategies seriously or reject the qua constraint. Which course of action should we favor? My focus in what follows will be to argue that we should start taking direct strategies seriously. Note, however, that this doesn't commit me to retaining the qua constraint. It may be that both features of the debate need to change. What I want to argue now, however, is that whether or not the qua constraint is rejected, the failure to explore direct strategies threatens to make the autonomist's task easier than it should be, and the interactionist's task harder: anyone who holds that direct strategies don't need to be considered is prejudicing the issue against the interactionist, even if they also reject the qua constraint.

We've already seen a prima facie reason to be suspicious of the neglect of direct strategies in the art-ethics debate: these strategies are pursued with respect to other parallel questions, such as the questions about cognitive value and originality. But this is far from a full argument. It just establishes that those who think that direct strategies are not worth pursuing in the art-ethics case owe some explanation. Here I present a more conclusive reason to doubt that a restriction to indirect strategies would be justified. I argue that such a restriction prejudices the debate against the interactionist.

If the interactionist's aim is to show that ethical value affects artistic value, then pursuing indirect strategies exclusively has the effect of restricting her options to showing that ethical value affects something else that affects artistic value (be that the ability to secure uptake, the meritedness of the prescribed responses, the cognitive value, or something else). Sure, that is *a way* of ethical value affecting artistic value, but it's not the *only* way that it could. The other way would be for ethical value to be one of the things on the same level as the ability to secure uptake, the meritedness of the prescribed responses, and so on. In other words, there is the possibility that ethical value affects artistic value not by affecting something else that affects artistic value, but directly. Both parties to the debate on ethical-artistic interaction have proceeded as though they implicitly assume, unfairly to the interactionist, that this avenue is closed off, that the answer to that question is "no." It is remarkable that interactionists have let this go unchallenged. The assumption that only indirect strategies are acceptable would significantly limit, without argument, the options for arguing that the interaction in question *does* happen.

But why, it might be protested, should we think there is, even in principle, this other possibility? I argue that we are, in fact, committed to the claim that *some* properties have this status. Two arguments can be given that show that this is the case: one is that denial of this as an in-principle possibility leads to infinite regress, the other is that there is at least one example which is standardly taken to realize this possibility. If we are committed to saying that some properties have this status, there is a genuine question about whether ethical value does.

The argument from infinite regress

First, if we think there is a question at all of whether some property affects artistic value, we are committed to the claim that some properties do so directly. Even indirect strategies presuppose that some properties are directly relevant to artistic value. If property A affects artistic value, it must do so either by affecting some other property that is relevant to artistic value, or by affecting artistic value directly. If it does so by affecting some other property, B, we can then ask whether property B affects artistic value directly or via some other property, C. Each time we resist claiming that the property in question affects artistic value directly, we do so by invoking another property, about which the same question may be asked. For this form of explanation to be successful, there must be

some property at the end of the chain that affects artistic value directly. Otherwise we have an infinite regress of artistically relevant properties, each of whose artistic relevance is explained in terms of another artistically relevant property. So, on pain of infinite regress, some properties must be directly relevant to artistic value.

The argument from examples

There is at least one property that philosophers unanimously take to be directly relevant to artistic value and that is aesthetic value. This claim needs some explicating, given that, as pointed out above, the term "aesthetic value" has a number of different usages. This issue is perhaps further obscured by the fact that some philosophers use the term "aesthetic value" as, by stipulation, synonymous with "artistic value."[23] On this latter usage, the claim that aesthetic value is relevant to artistic value would, of course, be trivially true, but other ways of using the term are such that any link to artistic value would be substantive. Some, for example, use the term in a way that is linked to a certain kind of experience,[24] others use it as a term for beauty and related notions,[25] others still take it to be linked to the form of something, or to its perceptual characteristics.[26] What is noteworthy is that in all of these cases, there is a consensus that *some property* that's plausibly denoted by "aesthetic value" is relevant to artistic value. And moreover, this does not appear to be dependent on taking it to be relevant to some other artistically relevant property.

Of course, there is disagreement about whether aesthetic value is the *whole story* with respect to artistic value, or whether more besides the aesthetic is artistically relevant. Some, for example, argue that cognitive value is not properly categorized under the aesthetic, but is relevant to the assessment of artworks as art. Others argue that "aesthetic value," properly construed, is broad enough to encompass cognitive value.[27] What is striking, though, is that however "aesthetic value" is construed, the claim that aesthetic value is at least one factor relevant to artistic value is rarely disputed.

The point here is that standardly at least one property is taken to be relevant to artistic value in a way that doesn't hinge on its relevance to something *else.* Hence, we already do recognize that it is an in-principle possibility for a property to be directly relevant to artistic value (since, in at least one case, we already take this possibility to be realized). Given this, it is at least an intelligible question to ask whether ethical value is also one such property.

Alternative methodologies?

The argument from infinite regress and the argument from examples show, in different ways, that we must allow that some properties affect artistic value directly. Given this, we must recognize that there is a genuine question of whether ethical character is one such property. This question, moreover, is one to which indirect strategies are unable to speak, since they can show, at most, that ethical character affects artistic value via affecting some other artistically relevant property.

If this is correct, if there is this other possibility for how ethical value could interact with artistic value, how would one go about showing that such a possibility obtains or doesn't obtain? How could we show that ethical value bears on artistic value if we're not doing it via other things we already agree bear on artistic value?

The first thing to say is that the plausibility of my claim in no way hinges on the prospects of a workable answer being provided to this methodological question. My central point is this: there is a

[23] Gaut (2007, 26–42); Harold (2006, 260); Vermazen (1991, 266).
[24] See Beardsley (1962, 620); Budd (2002, 14); and Stecker (2005, 139).
[25] Zangwill (1998): p. 75.
[26] Eaton (2004).
[27] See, for example, Lopes (2011).

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genuine question—Is ethical value something that affects artistic value without affecting something else that does? Sure, there is a methodological issue of how one should go about answering that question. One thing that *definitely* doesn't look like a respectable answer to this question, though, is, "Oh, we'll just have to assume that it is not." And that is what, effectively, has been done until now. Thus, even if it is unclear how the claim—of any given property—that it directly bears on artistic value is to be established, the fact remains that there are at least some properties of which this claim would be true.

One suggestion, though there may be others, considers looking at what happens with respect to those questions where indirect arguments are not the only kinds of arguments that are made. Looking at direct strategies in parallel debates in section 2, we saw that they tend to appeal to critical and appreciative practice—to the art-critical judgements we, in fact, make. (Do we tend to rate a work more highly as art on the basis of its originality? Do we tend to take cognitive value to bear positively on our overall assessment of a work?) So why not do this in the case of ethical value? Why not ask: do we tend to take ethical value as relevant when assessing a work's overall artistic merit?"

One worry: does this just assume that everyone's art-critical judgements are right? Would this just ignore the possibility of making a mistake? There are three things to say to this.

First, the claim is not that if people, in fact, treat ethical value as relevant, that conclusively proves that it is relevant. It's rather that, as a methodological principle, we should try to adopt a theory that is in accordance with what we, pretheoretically, think on an issue. Of course, if it turns out that such a theory runs into problems, we reject it, but we should try to avoid adopting a theory that is radically revisionary if we don't have to—that is, unless there are significant theoretical benefits to doing so.

Second, the strategy of consulting our critical and appreciative practice is used rather a lot in parallel debates, as discussed, so if there's a problem with it for the ethical value debate, then there would be a problem with it in these other debates too.

Third, we should think about what reasons we could give for our belief, discussed above, that *aesthetic* value bears on artistic value. If it turns out these reasons all involve appeal to critical and appreciative practice, then we must either consider revising this belief about aesthetic value or reconsider our skepticism about appeals to critical and appreciative practice.

5. Why direct strategies look promising for interactionism

I've argued that direct strategies should be taken more seriously in the debate about the artistic relevance of ethical value. In other cases where direct strategies are employed, the particular direct strategies used involve appeals to critical and appreciative practice.

It seems to me (although I'm not going to try to demonstrate this conclusively here) that if these kinds of strategies are pursued in the art-ethics debate, lots of plausible arguments for ethicism start to emerge. Here are two fairly speculative reasons to think that this is the case. Let's look again at the arguments we cited about the artistic relevance of originality and cognitive value.

First, consider again the arguments used by Kieran (2009) and Conolly and Haydar (2007, 111). They argued that the use of cognitive terms (such as "profound," "insightful," "well-observed") in art-criticism supports the thesis that cognitive considerations are relevant to artistic value. Can a parallel argument be run for ethical value? I think the answer is clearly affirmative. There are plenty of critical terms that have an ethical component. In fact, most of the terms used here ("sentimental," "shallow," "insightful") are examples; but consider also "sensitive," "humane," "big-hearted," and on the other hand, "cruel" and "voyeuristic."

Second, let's look again also at Harold Osborne's argument *against* originality being relevant to artistic value. He argued that it is not relevant because, "We appreciate the memorable works of all ages without knowing or greatly caring to what extent they were novel in their time (1979)**."**

Can a parallel argument be run in the ethical case? It seems that the following statement would be significantly less plausible: "We appreciate the memorable works of all ages without knowing or greatly caring to what extent that are ethically sound." On the contrary, we very often notice, and

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care deeply about, the ethical character of a work. Our awareness of a work's moral character figures in our appreciation inescapably.

These are, of course, speculative, but they do at least suggest that *if* arguments from critical and appreciative practice are admissible in the artistic-ethical interaction debate, there would be no shortage of evidence to draw on to support interactionism in this way.

Conclusion

To summarize, I've argued that interactionism about ethical value has been treated unfairly. The debate has proceeded as though the following are desiderata on arguments seeking to establish interactionism:

IND/IND*: The argument must be an indirect strategy/indirect strategies are to be preferred.
QP: The argument must establish not only that ethical value bears on artistic value, but that it does so *qua ethical value* and not qua something else.

I argued that IND/IND* and QP are in fact incompatible. They can't both be genuine *desiderata*, because no argument can meet both of them. At least one must be rejected. Moreover, I argued that there are independent reasons why IND/IND* could not be a genuine *desidaratum*: treating it as a *desideratum* would essentially involve arbitrarily ruling out an entire kind of way that ethical value could be artistically relevant. I then gave some, fairly speculative, reasons for thinking that the prospects for interactionism look pretty rosy once we stop behaving as though the only available arguments are indirect strategies.

Whether or not this last, speculative, line of thought is persuasive, however, the prospects for interactionism look at least rosier than they initially appeared. We've seen that the way the playing field is ordinarily set up guarantees that interactionism cannot be established; by identifying this, and putting it right, we've shown that interactionism is in a better position than ordinarily appreciated.

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