

A robust discussion has arisen in the last twenty years or so over the possibility of connections between aesthetics and ethics. Several different issues have come to the fore as a result—including, but not limited to: whether ethical criticism bears on aesthetic criticism, whether audience members can become better or worse moral agents as a result of experiencing art, whether some individual works of art can be considered evil.

In this paper I will consider the question of whether ethical criticism should have any bearing on aesthetic criticism. One view that seems universally rejected in the field is that works of art might be aesthetically bad *simply because* they are morally bad. When we talk about whether and how evaluations of works of art are affected by moral evaluations, we have a tight connection in mind between the moral defects/virtues and aesthetic defects/virtues¹ a particular work has.

stronger still, holding that moral judgments are always relevant to aesthetic judgments. In this paper I will be dealing only with Carroll's argument for moderate moralism and his argument against moderate autonomism.

He argues for his view in several papers (1996, 1998a, 1998b, 2006), but the view stays consistent. He focuses primarily on narrative arts and begins by noting that narratives are, by their very nature, incomplete. It's left up to the reader² to fill in much of the narrative. Moreover, the author makes assumptions about the backgrounds of the readers. In the typical case the author and the reader will share a large portion of the respective sets of background knowledge. In order even to understand many narratives the reader has to draw from her cognitive and emotional stock. Some of the filling-in involves having emotional responses, some of which will be moral emotions. For instance, in a scene where Nicholas Nickleby is cheated, the reader feels anger *because* Nicholas was wronged. Thus, the reader is called on to make a moral judgment in order to render the narrative intelligible.

This would be sufficient to refute the radical autonomist, but Carroll hasn't yet shown that there is a relation between the moral and aesthetic judgments. He goes on to make the point that a central aim of most narrative works is to engage the reader—that is, to draw in the reader such that she is absorbed in the work. Works that aim to be absorbing and fail to do so are then aesthetically flawed as a result. Some works will fail to be absorbing, and they will so fail as a result of inviting readers to take up a perspective that the reader finds morally offensive. The reader will be unable to take up the perspective, thus keeping the reader from becoming absorbed in the work. The work then fails as art because of its being morally offensive to the reader.

Carroll uses many examples for various reasons, but the two most relevant to this discussion are a hypothetical tragedy featuring as its tragic hero Adolph Hitler—what we might

perspective that treats horrific murders as objects of satire, but the readers reject the invitation and fail to take up the narrative as prescribed by the author. Thus, the work's design is flawed because it involves a miscalculation of the moral judgments naturally arrived at by the readers.

Carroll concludes that, as these examples show, moral defects can have effects on aesthetic evaluations. In each of these examples, he writes, "the reason the work is aesthetically defective—in the sense of failing to secure uptake—and the reason it is morally defective may be the same" (235). Thus, m

They note that in the moral defect argument, there is nothing suggestive of aesthetic defect. This is why the aesthetic defect argument is needed as well.

Carroll's claim, however, is that the moral evaluation made in each example has the effect of lowering the aesthetic evaluation. Thus, the moral defect argument would have to either imply or have some effect on the aesthetic defect argument. Anderson and Dean think this hasn't been shown. They conclude, "The plausibility of Carroll's claim rests entirely on the fact that the two arguments share one common premise, but the premise is not sufficient to show that the work in question is either morally or aesth

Second, Carroll's argument seems dangerously close to violating the tightness constraint. He might be interpreted as arguing that a work of art could be aesthetically bad *simply because* it has some immoral elements or presents an immoral perspective. I admit that Carroll's position does have an intermediate step between the immoral perspective and

!

References:

Anderson, James C. and Jeffrey T. Dean. (1998) "Moderate Autonomism." *British Journal of Aesthetics* 38.