Chapter Seventeen

Trust in the Artist and the Audience: Aesthetic Virtue and the Hermeneutics of Faith

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D.H. Lawrence, writing about the critic's task of interpreting the meaning of literary works, famously claimed that one should "never trust the artist," but should "trust the tale" (Lawrence 1923/1990, 4). While his point is plausible for its purpose—to note that a work's meaning cannot safely be assumed to be just what its creator says it is, but must be found in and supported by the work itself—we contend that there is another sense in which trusting the maker of a work of art is important for apprehending and appreciating it as the work it is, and, we argue, necessary for doing so *well*, in a way that realizes the distinctive values that artworks and our engagements with them can have. While this involves a spectator's trust in an artist, there is a reciprocal kind of trusting on the part of artists toward their audiences which, we argue, is likewise central to creating art *well* and so realizing the values of the practice.[1]

This differs from the ways in which trust has most often been discussed by contemporary philosophers of art, who have tended to focus on trust in relation to "aesthetic testimony"—i.e., whether and to what extent we are justified in trusting second-hand reports and evaluations of artworks that we have not directly experienced ourselves—or look to narrative artworks for examples of situations and relations between characters that illustrate certain kinds of trust that are then analyzed for their moral or political value.[2] Our focus, however, is on a different dimension of trust that can feature in practices of artistic creation and reception but which has not yet received much attention from philosophers.[3] Highlighting this trust-based dimension of

artistic practice not only adds to our understanding of the normative dimension of these practices—i.e., what it is to be a good artist and a good audience member—but brings out a connection between the artistic and the moral spheres of human cultural life.

Since trust is central to, and arguably necessary for, making and engaging with art *well*, we understand it as an *aesthetic virtue* within an aretaic value framework.[4] Our notion of aesthetic virtues differs from how they are commonly talked about in the recent "virtue aesthetics" literature, being modelled on ethical virtues as conceived in the (neo-)Aristotelian virtue ethical tradition rather than counting as virtues on, say, a consequentialist understanding of value, which is the predominant view that is found in the existing literature. Accordingly, before discussing trust we first specify the conception of an aesthetic virtue with which we are working. We then outline the dispositions to trust and to be trustworthy that we argue are aesthetic virtues, and discuss how these dispositions are crucial for the realization of a cognitive value that art can have, how this cognitive value relates to some ways in which art can be morally and socially valuable, and how, as virtues, these trust-related dispositions of artists and audience members point to a moral dimension of artistic creation and reception.

Aesthetic Virtues on an Aristotelian Framework

To date, the term "virtue aesthetics" has been applied to discussions of traits or dispositions that contribute positively to the creation or, more often, the appreciation of artworks, with "aesthetic vices" being dispositions that detract from these. However, none of the main discussants in the established literature models their account of virtues and vices after neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics and its agent-based aretaic approach to normativity.

The understanding of virtues as dispositions to realize one or more basic intrinsic goods found in Dominic Lopes's "Virtues of Art: Good Taste" (2008), for instance, comes from G.E. Moore and Thomas Hurka, who operate on broadly consequentialist axiological frameworks, rather than from Aristotle (Lopes 2008, 201-03; cf. Hurka 2001). Both David Woodruff, whose paper "A Virtue Theory of Aesthetics" was the first to raise the idea of a virtue-based approach in the philosophy of art, and Matthew Kieran, whose several papers on aesthetic virtues and vices have done the most to establish the notion in contemporary philosophy of art, take Linda Zagzebski's virtue epistemology as the model for their theories rather than virtue ethics (Woodruff 1991, 24; Kieran 2011, 41-42). Moreover, neither Woodruff's aim to develop an ontological theory of art from a hierarchy of aesthetic virtues, nor Kieran's focus on the justification of aesthetic judgments—i.e., on whether or not one is "in a legitimate position to make aesthetic claims" (Kieran 2010, 245; cf. Kieran 2011, 33-34)—correspond to virtue ethics' concern with what it is to be a good person or, derivatively, with what it is for an action to be right (see Hursthouse 1999, 28). While Peter Goldie comes closest to Aristotle in his agent-centred approach and *eudaimonistic* focus on how art contributes to well-being (Goldie 2007, 376-77, 386; Goldie 2008, 192), his account does not map onto the virtue ethical model in its treatment of aesthetic virtues, its lack of an aretaic concern with making or appreciating art *well*, and its neglect of practical wisdom/*phronesis*, a neglect common to the other writers discussed above despite its centrality in Aristotle's ethics.

Insofar as existing approaches in the "virtue aesthetics" literature are framed within non-aretaic and largely consequentialist value theories, treating virtues as dispositions to realize goods that are themselves held to be valuable independently of the idea of virtue,[5] they correspond to what Rosalind Hursthouse calls "virtue theories" in moral philosophy as distinct

from virtue ethics proper (Hursthouse 2005, 99-100). This distinction can be stated briefly in terms of two claims: (*i*) that "the concept of virtue is irreducible," and (*ii*) that "an ethics of virtue [alone] cannot provide action guidance," with virtue *theorists* accepting *ii* but denying *i*, and virtue *ethicists* accepting *i* and denying *ii* (Ibid., 99). In other words, virtue theorists will think that virtues are important but not sufficient to base a normative theory on, and so will seek to reduce the notion of a virtue to some other, non-aretaic notion of goodness or value that is taken to be more fundamental and so can serve as the basis of an ethical theory. In light of this distinction, it is clear that the existing literature so far only contains "virtue theories" of art but no "virtue aesthetics" analogous to virtue ethics in moral philosophy.[6]

What would a virtue aesthetics look like if developed on the (neo-)Aristotelian model, being analogous to virtue ethics as an approach to normativity with respect to artistic creation and reception? For one thing, it would be agent-centred and aretaic, focusing on the excellence of these practices—what it is to do them well—and defining the artistic value of artworks, or what it is for them to be good *qua* art, in terms of virtues of art-making: i.e., that a work counts as artistically good by being the sort of thing that an artist who was exercising the virtues of artistic creation would characteristically produce.[7] In this, it would map onto virtue ethics' focus on the excellent realization of a person's nature *qua* rational being, and its definition of right action as the action that a virtuous person would characteristically do in the same circumstance. For another, it would be broadly *eudaimonistic*, with aesthetic virtues defined according to an understanding of how making and engaging with art can foster human well-being, and with the exercise of these virtues being constitutive of the excellent pursuit of these practices and, so, of well-being or a life well lived, rather than being instrumental means to achieve either well-being or a good artistic product.

Just as ethical virtues are dispositions to act and feel appropriately, or according to a "mean" that avoids both excess and deficiency in action and emotion—e.g., *courage* as a disposition to feel the right balance of fear and confidence for the situation one is in, and to act accordingly—aesthetic virtues of creation will be dispositions involving actions and feelings that are characteristically involved in making art, with aesthetic virtues of reception being dispositions involving actions and feelings characteristically involved in engaging with art as a spectator. What is appropriate to do or feel in the course of making or engaging with an artwork, and so what counts as an instance of being a good artist or a good spectator, will be in at least some respects specific to a given occasion—and, likely, to a given work—and will not be codifiable or specifiable in advance (cf. Aristotle 1962, 1094^{b}22; Hursthouse 2006, 284-85), with discernment, judgment, and taste, informed by practical wisdom acquired from experience, being necessary for determining the mean that an aesthetic virtue will dispose its possessor to aim at and characteristically hit.

Thus, an aesthetic virtue on our understanding can be defined as an entrenched, acquired, voluntarily enacted disposition to feel, act, and respond in ways that are appropriate to situations that arise in the course of making or engaging with art, and to do so for the right reasons. For example, as a virtue of art-making, *creativity* might be a disposition to imagine new forms and ways of doing things—e.g., new uses of familiar mediums—in contrast to *literal-mindedness*, or a disposition to take things at "face value," and to *outlandishness*, or a disposition to let one's imagination "run wild" to the point of losing internal coherence and correspondence with the actual world.

As noted, virtue aesthetics must be *eudaimonistic* to be analogous to virtue ethics, which is to say that any characterization of traits or dispositions as virtues in the Aristotelian sense will

require these dispositions, and the practice of which they are virtues, to be connected with well-being or flourishing in general. That is, if the good performance of activities in a given practice does not contribute to overall human flourishing, there will not be *virtues* of that practice, though there may still be traits, skills, habits, etc. that are conducive to achieving its goals. So, a complete virtue aesthetics will contain an idea of how making and experiencing art *well* are partly constitutive of—although perhaps not strictly necessary for—human flourishing, entailing that the virtues of a specific practice will always have a moral dimension, i.e., will be ethically good as well as good for that practice.

Now that our understanding of aesthetic virtue has been outlined—both to set up the discussion to follow and to avoid potential confusion if any readers are familiar with the existing "virtue theoretical" uses of this term—we can turn to consider how trust might be, or be central to, a virtue of this kind.

Trust as an Aesthetic Virtue

Because trust is most plausibly a relation between two or more people, we can begin by asking where trust might come into play in the relation between an artist and the audience of her work.[8] Furthermore, to consider how trust might be an aesthetic virtue—where this is a disposition to act and to feel in certain ways—we can refine our question and ask: What situations that occur in the course of making and engaging with art are occasions for actions and feelings involving trust between artist and audience?

Trust in the Artist and the Audience

For audiences, trusting an artist can involve being open to her work and the experience it offers, trusting that the work warrants and will reward active attention and serious engagement: i.e., that there is something "to be got" from the work, and that it is worth getting.[9] This trust will partly guide a spectator's engagement, having them initially approach a work by considering what the artist was going for with the work and looking for how it might be successful, not by applying any pre-existing criterion but by being open to the work on its own terms and to how it might add to or revise their prior ideas of what can be artistically good. This presupposes that the artist *was* going for something with the work and that she succeeded in realizing it, at least to a sufficient degree. Of course, as an initial working assumption that governs one's engagement with a work this is fallible: it is always possible that an artist never got clear on what she was going for, or did not successfully embody or express it in what she made. This is not a problem, however, as the virtue in question here is not a disposition to successfully grasp the meaning or value of a work—this would be another aesthetic virtue, e.g., "perspicacity"—but to have the kind of attitude and motivation for engagement that would be necessary for reliably and consistently apprehending, interpreting, and evaluating artworks well, where *not* starting from this working assumption would hinder these activities.

As a parallel, we might think of how a disposition to initially trust people and look for the good in them is part of being a good friend, being necessary for realizing the non-instrumental goods internal to friendship. As with friendship, where an initial faith in a person's goodness can in fact bring out what is good in them, a spectator's trust that an artist succeeded in creating something of value may in some cases help their work's value to be realized, i.e., for it to

manifest in the spectator's experience of the work, "realized" in both the epistemic sense of something coming to be known and the metaphysical sense of something coming into being.

One might wonder if the fallibility of this attitude of trust poses another problem for a disposition to count this attitude as a virtue. With a bad artwork that does *not* reward serious engagement because its maker never got clear on what she was going for or failed in her attempt to achieve it, the trust that a spectator might have that the work will possess these qualities might seem to be misplaced and could even hinder the proper judgment and evaluation of the work. However, this mistakes the disposition of a virtuous spectator to *initially* look for what is good in a work and for what its maker did well for a kind of "blind faith" in the work's goodness or in the artist's success that would be one of the two extremes between which virtuous trusting is a mean.

If habitual, this sort of blind faith in the goodness of artworks—perhaps because of their authors' popularity, their critical acclaim, etc.—would count for a spectator as an aesthetic vice, being an excess of trust. Likewise, a disposition to approach artworks with suspicion or doubt regarding their artistic goodness, their makers' competence or success, or their worthiness as an object of committed engagement, would be a vice of deficiency. Both dispositions would get in the way of realizing the value that engaging with artworks can have, making audience members less likely to grasp a work's artistic flaws or merits, respectively, and so closing them off from properly apprehending and appreciating a work for what it is.

For the artist, trust can manifest in a disposition to trust their audience to be able to understand and appreciate the work they are making on its own terms, i.e., that they will be capable of grasping and appreciating what the artist is doing in making the work, and will be able to meet the demands that an unfamiliar, complex, or otherwise difficult work might make on

them. While perhaps not always strictly necessary for creating good art, this kind of trust in the audience of the work that an artist is making is important for the likelihood of the artist's success in realizing what she was going for and in making something that rewards engagement. This is because such trust will give the artist room to fully work an idea out or follow a feeling to its full development without holding back or limiting themselves for fear that the audience won't be able to follow the directions in which the work is developing. Also, this will more likely result in a work that is genuinely original and offers a new perspective, and so is worthwhile for an audience to engage with—or at least will reward their engagement more than a clichéd or unoriginal work.

This disposition to trust the audience is the opposite of "dumbing down" or otherwise curtailing one's work to make it more consumable, palatable, etc., which manifests a kind of distrust toward the work's eventual audience with a disposition to do this counting as an aesthetic vice for the artist insofar as it will more likely lead to a clichéd and unoriginal work.[10] If this is a trust-related vice of deficiency, the corresponding vice of excess would be a disposition to overestimate an audience's capacity for grasping complexity—for example, their ability to fill in any gaps that the artist may have left in a fictional work's narrative—and an overconfidence that the audience will find the work meaningful or rewarding.

Why a lack of trust in the audience to be able to "get" a work without it being "dumbed down" would be artistically disvaluable is addressed above and, in any case, should be more intuitively obvious. Why overestimating an audience's capacities for understanding and appreciating a work would also be disvaluable is that it risks making the "vicious" artist's work not only complex or "difficult" but actually inaccessible and therefore not rewarding of any engagement that could reasonably be expected of a spectator. This is not a matter of making a

work that is *appropriately* complex or difficult—i.e., one for which the complexity or difficulty pays off by being part of what makes engaging with the work rewarding—and so it does not preclude good artists from making works that only a few people will understand or will be positioned to appreciate, since genuine erudition is not artistically disvaluable. Rather, it is a matter of the artist failing to realize that what she made is not reasonably apprehensible or comprehensible, being obscure and abstruse rather than merely complex. This likely involves a further failure of the artist to realize that they have not (yet) succeeded in making a unified work that coherently hangs together and has something to it that is worth getting. Thus, an excessive faith in the audience can be a form of self-deception as to the meaningfulness or value of one's work, when it in fact fails to mean or be valuable in the way one imagines.

Trustworthiness in the Artist and the Audience

If the trust-related dispositions of a good artist and a good audience member are aesthetic virtues, it implies that reciprocal dispositions of artists and audiences to be *worthy* of this trust will also be aesthetic virtues. Being a good artist will not only involve trusting the audience in the ways outlined above: it will also involve being aware of, and being disposed to live up to, the trust that good audience members will place in one by not declaring a work to be finished until it *can* reward the right kind of attention or engagement, where there *is* something of significance to be got from it. In one sense, making works that fit these criteria is just a matter of making *good* art, or at least of not releasing a work for public reception until it attains a certain level of value; hence, it will plausibly involve many other dispositions that will be virtues of artmaking in their own right. Why a disposition to be worthy of an audience's trust in particular will be an aesthetic

virtue, in addition to these others, is that it is a matter of the other aesthetic virtues being exercised for the right reasons, where one of the reasons for exercising them—which is to say, one reason for making art *well*—is to live up to the trust that a good spectator will place in one as the maker of the work they are engaging with: to hold up one's end of the implicit artistic bargain, as it were.

Likewise, good audience members will not only be disposed to trust artists as discussed above, but will be disposed to be worthy of an artist's trust in their capacities to attend to and engage with a work in appropriate ways in order to appreciate it properly, rather than, say, casually consuming it or resisting it when a work is unfamiliar, difficult, or even initially unpleasant. Again, this will largely involve exercising whatever other virtues are involved in being a good spectator of art, and will also be a matter of exercising these other virtues for the right reasons: to hold up *their* end of the bargain, so to speak.

This points to the way that artistic practices are inherently relational, requiring the mutual participation of both artists and audiences. Obviously, one can only be a spectator and engage with an artwork if someone has made it, so spectators need artists simply to be spectators. More controversially, artists might be thought to need audiences in order for their creative activities to count as works of art. And, because artists and audience members are mutually dependent on each other to play the roles they do in artistic practice, the attitudes and reasons that are involved in engaging in these practices *well* will always in part be other-directed, and not only directed toward the artwork as a stand-alone object existing apart from this relational practice.

One might wonder whether the dispositions to trust and the dispositions to be trustworthy outlined above are two distinct but closely related virtues, or whether they are different aspects of a single virtue. After all, one might think that being disposed to be open to approaching a

work on its own terms and to look first for the ways in which it might be valuable, or for what the artist did that was successful, just is being worthy of the artist's trust in one's ability to engage appropriately with the work. Likewise, one might think that an artist being disposed not to "dumb down" their works but to develop them in whatever complexity and in whatever direction is needed to fully realize them, just is to be worthy of a spectator's trust that one has made something worth attending to.

Whether these are two related aesthetic virtues or whether they are parts of the same virtue is a question that we will bracket here, since exactly how the trust-related dispositions are individuated as aesthetic virtues does not matter for the present discussion so long as it is clear how they can translate into action in the course of creating and engaging with art, and how and why they are partly constitutive of what it is to be a good artist or a good audience member. Since their being virtues entails a connection to *eudaimonia* or human flourishing, these dispositions are not only related to artistic values—i.e., with the notion of something being good *qua* art, or with the idea of proper appreciation—but to why art is valuable or important, and why making or engaging with it well is good to do.

The Value of Trust as a Component of Good Artistic Practice

The values of creating or engaging with art that the trust-related virtues help to realize, and which the vices of excess and deficiency hinder, largely have to do with art's capacity for enabling what we call *perspectival sharing*.[11] In creating artworks, artists can embody or express a point of view or perspective on some phenomenon in the world, whether an issue, an event, an object, or the artistic medium itself, and whether the perspective is cognitive, emotional, or

perceptual. And by engaging with that work, audience members can come to grasp this perspective, which expands not only their knowledge but their capacities for experiencing, giving them new *ways* of seeing, feeling, or understanding.[12] This capacity of art is valuable cognitively, morally, and socially, with the dispositions for trusting and being trustworthy outlined above being necessary for realizing it, making trust central to art's value and importance for human flourishing.

Trust and the Cognitive Value of Art

One advantage of counting trust as an aesthetic virtue is that it helps to shed light on how art is, or can be, cognitively valuable. Much has been written about the cognitive value of art: roughly, the idea that art contains various cognitive benefits that spectators can obtain from engaging with it. While philosophers traditionally have framed this discussion in terms of the audience gaining justified true beliefs from artworks, especially works of literature, most aesthetic cognitivists now hold that art offers something broader such as understanding, cognitive enhancement, or awareness, in keeping with pluralistic views of epistemic value in contemporary epistemology.[13] For instance, some suggest that art enables us to develop new hypotheses, change our world-views, or take different perspectives on an issue. On their view, engaging with art enables us to see the world from a wider, more nuanced position, one that enables spectators to appreciate the experiences of others. Defenders of aesthetic cognitivism also often argue that art offers potential for moral development and growth, either by showing us morally nuanced situations and inviting us to reflect on them, or by giving us a complex, concrete understanding of what certain moral concepts imply.

The view that art can be a source of knowledge of some kind presupposes that at least some artists are epistemically worthy of trust: i.e., that they can be taken to be reliable in their depictions, and are not deceiving us by presenting false views. For instance, to credit Theodore Dreiser for giving us insight into the world of show business in early nineteenth century Chicago in *Sister Carrie*, for enabling us to understand the American dream through such characters as Carrie and Drouet, and for having us reconsider the value of money and social status, presupposes that Dreiser was sufficiently informed about these things, reliable in presenting them in his work, and sincere in reporting what he took to be true.

However, anti-cognitivists would argue that we have no reason to think this.[14] Dreiser was a novelist, not a historian or a sociologist, and though he may have written about the things he saw around him, he nevertheless had "poetic license" to twist facts as he saw fit for his artistic purposes. Furthermore, for many of the things he wrote about, such as his reflections on social forces or consumerism, it is not clear how we could test his insights for veracity or what evidence he could provide in their support. Considering also the ways in which the aesthetic aspects of a work can evoke emotions in the audience and sway them towards accepting certain false views—as is done in propaganda—some would argue that it is a mistake to look to art for cognitive benefits, if only because art, as a practice, is not meant to provide them. This is one reason why there are no institutional constraints that guide art's search for truth: artists are not expected to be experts on the topics they write about, and neither art critics nor audiences are primarily concerned with checking works for veracity. One might think, then, that we should not put our trust in artists or their works as reliable sources of knowledge.

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to fully defend aesthetic cognitivism, but we will note two ways in which our account of trust as an aesthetic virtue can help.[15] For one, the

cognitive value of the perspectival sharing that the artist's and audience's mutual trust and trustworthiness make possible is not a matter of the audience gaining propositional knowledge-that; rather, it is a matter of the expansion of their cognitive capacities by the new perspectives they imaginatively encounter and entertain in appreciating an artwork, so it withstands traditional objections that focus on art's role as a reliable source of justified true beliefs.

For another, when the traditional debate over aesthetic cognitivism asks whether literary fiction can be a reliable source of knowledge, this has been framed in terms of fairly basic acts of reading, e.g., understanding the literal meaning of the sentences one reads and forming beliefs based on their propositional content. However, we would argue—in keeping with our virtue-based approach—that engaging with art reliably has cognitive value only insofar as it is engaged with *well*, i.e., by a spectator who first approaches a work trusting that its maker succeeded in expressing something and that the spectator can benefit from a committed engagement with it. There is arguably a degree of cognitive value in the spectator initially placing her trust in an artist even if their work turns out *not* to reward her engagement, since trust here would be a necessary step on the way to a warranted negative judgment of a work, and so will positively contribute to a proper apprehension and understanding of it. However, the full cognitive value of perspectival sharing will be realized only when the artist succeeds in making something worth engaging with, or, in the terms of our account, was worthy of the spectator's trust. As long as it is possible for both artist and spectator to exercise dispositions to trust and be trustworthy when creating and engaging with a work, their respective making of the work and engagement with it will involve a sharing of perspectives, and so will have cognitive value.

This explanation of how art can have cognitive value makes sense of several commonly held views in both the philosophy and practice of art. Epistemic aims, including aspirations to

provide moral education, have been part of artistic practice from the beginning, notwithstanding Plato's early dismissal of poetry for reasons similar to those stated above. While philosophers have focused on the fictional dimension of art and adopted strict standards of knowledge that are incompatible with the artistic liberty to imaginatively create rather than factually report, artists, critics, educators, and serious audiences have rarely dismissed art's mimetic relation with the world outright, or given up on its close focus on human situations. Moreover, the view we argue for is found even in those who deny the importance of truth in art or its capacity to provide epistemic benefits understood in terms of propositional knowledge, e.g., in Lamarque and Olsen's (1994) humanistic conception of literature, despite their anti-cognitivism. As John Gibson reminds us, literature—and his point extends to art generally—is an archive of human experience to which we turn when we want to have "our understanding of the world refined, augmented, even shocked…" (Gibson 2007, 1). Such a view presupposes that at least part of the value of literature is its capacity to portray the complexity of human experience and, by doing so, to provide new means of dealing with and understanding our own experience, the perspectives of those around us, and the overall world we experience.

This explains why so much art, regardless of its imaginative, fictional, or otherwise counterfactual elements, is revelatory of certain aspects of our world. This does not imply that artists are experts in the things they depict in their work, but it acknowledges that artists are often careful in how they present certain facts, spanning not only garden-variety issues but numerous psychological, moral, and political dimensions of life. Our assessments of their works are often sensitive to the credibility of their portrayal of characters or their depictions of particular situations they are describing: whether with respect to their depiction of a particular emotional state, ethical dilemma, or social environment, we expect artists not to misrepresent them, or at

least not to do so without artistic reasons and to take care that any "artistic license-taking" is non-deceptive. This implies that part of the audience's disposition to trust includes trusting the artist's commitment to deal with topics the relevance of which surpasses a particular time and place, being of general value for humanity, and trusting that the artist's portrayal of these topics, as they feature in lived experience, is an authentic expression of this experience and is neither trivial or superficial nor exaggerated. Because artworks that successfully handle such dimensions of life will, all else being equal, be better aesthetically and cognitively, excellence in the practice of art-making requires artists to handle these issues in a faithful—that is, trustworthy—manner.

Art's Moral and Social Value: Respect and the Hermeneutics of Faith

The trust between artist and audience that partly constitutes good artistic practice is not only connected to art's cognitive value but is important for its moral and social value. This is a separate issue from the moral or political assessment of a work's content. Whereas most discussions of art in relation to morality or politics focus on the latter—e.g., the moralism-autonomism debate in analytic aesthetics, or the ideological critiques of artworks that is now commonplace in art history and disciplines within "cultural studies"—our focus is on how the acts of making and engaging with art can themselves be morally and socially, and not just aesthetically, good.[16] It is also distinct from the question of whether engaging with art has benefits for the development of moral character, as discussed by figures such as Iris Murdoch (1971; 1993) and Martha Nussbaum (1985; 1990), since the focus there is on the instrumental value of engaging with art for its valuable effects, whereas ours is on the moral and social value of the engagement itself.

The dispositions of good artists and audiences to trust one another, and to be worthy of each other's trust, give art an inherent relational and hence social component. Making a new perspective available to others so that they can enlarge their cognitive and hermeneutic horizons, capacities for feeling and understanding, etc. is a generous act and thus has *pro tanto* moral worth. Moreover, the relations of trusting and trustworthiness that are part of good artistic practice instantiate other positive social relations that are themselves morally valuable insofar as they involve openness to and respect for the other(s) to whom one is relating through the artwork, as well as respect for the work itself as something of value.

For the artist, trust in her audience to be capable of properly apprehending or "getting" her work, and an associated refusal to "dumb down" her work to make it more consumable, treats the audience with respect and so to this extent is a morally good form of interpersonal relation. *Not* trusting one's audience in this way—e.g., assuming a work needs to be simplified or made easier for them to get it, or pandering to them by giving them something they are already familiar with and are presumed to like—is morally blameworthy insofar as it is a form of disrespect. And since the extent of a work's eventual audience is not known at the time of a work's creation, the respect for the audience—whoever they may be—that is shown by the artist's trust in them is effectively a respect for humanity in general.

This moral dimension of art-making, separate from any moral assessment of the content depicted in, or the subsequent use of, an artwork, may seem counterintuitive, though this is likely due to the comparative neglect of this moral dimension of art by philosophers compared to their focus on contents and uses. However, it accords with and accounts for certain experiences of art, such as the feeling of *betrayal* that an audience member can have when encountering a work that is either facile and pandering or willfully abstruse: e.g., a kitschy, sentimental song expressive of

false emotions, or a "pretentious" film that is unnecessarily complex and fails to come together as a coherent or meaningful whole. It is hard to make sense of this feeling that the creator of such a work is not only lacking artistic skill but is, in some sense, also *morally* blameworthy unless one considers it in terms of a failure of the artist to be worthy of the trust that a good audience member will put in them as part of engaging with their work.[17]

For the spectator, initially trusting that an artist succeeded in creating something worth engaging with and taking their work on its own terms in order to apprehend what might be good about it, rather than imposing an external framework or set of expectations onto the work or wanting it to present them with perspectives they are already familiar with and approve of, also has *pro tanto* moral worth as a form of openness to otherness. This involves a readiness to bracket one's prejudices, established beliefs, and existing values and to seriously consider the perspective a work is presenting and how the work might be artistically good, even when this may be something distant, unusual, or unsettling. This openness to engaging with a work and with the artist's imaginative vision or understanding as embodied in it, is another socially positive way of relating to others and to the world outside oneself insofar as it not only involves respect for the artist but is an exercise of empathy and of what Iris Murdoch calls "unselfing" (Murdoch 1971, 82-86). This is not merely a matter of empathy, though, but the kind of good-faith opening-up of one's perspective to another's that is a precondition for genuine dialogue and positive interpersonal relations, including politically positive relations such as solidarity.

In these ways, making and engaging with art well—i.e., in accordance with aesthetic virtues including trust—are themselves morally and socially positive acts, while making or engaging with art poorly, when it is culpable—i.e., when one could have done better—is not only aesthetically but also ethically blameworthy. As noted, this is distinct from ethical or

political praise or criticism for an artist on the basis of the contents of their work, with the focus instead being on the way in which a work is made or engaged with on the part of the artist or spectator, in keeping with a character-centred, virtue-based normative approach.

In response to the potential worry that, in some cases, putting one's trust in an artist and being open to a work's perspective will be morally or socially *dis*valuable—e.g., trusting Leni Riefenstahl's vision of the Third Reich as embodied in *Triumph of the Will*—we would note that a good spectator's disposition to trust that an artist made something artistically good and worth engaging with does not entail acceptance or endorsement of the perspectives in the work, but only that she will engage seriously with them and seek to understand them from the inside, so to speak. Moreover, the trust of a good spectator is not "blind faith" in a work's value—this would be an aesthetic vice—but is initial and open to revision, just as a disposition to initially assume the trustworthiness of a potential new friend does not preclude one from judging that person to be untrustworthy. On the contrary, an initial attitude of good faith or trust is necessary for a later judgment of an artist's untrustworthiness or of a work's artistic failure to be fully warranted.

At least for the audience, the disposition to trust can be seen as a way of enacting what Paul Ricoeur and others have called a "hermeneutics of faith" as opposed to a "hermeneutics of suspicion." As Ray Carney puts it, "rather than debunking the [artwork] and imposing [their] own language upon it," a good spectator, one who engages with artworks in a way that realizes their value, "allows the [work] its own unique and alien way of speaking and … attempts to bring himself … into relationship with it" (Carney 1995, n.p.). As he goes on to argue, the spectator

> cannot hold himself safely above or outside the text, superior to it, but must dive into it and make himself vulnerable to it, entering into an intimate encounter with a difficult and potentially disorienting experience. He must … allow the text to inhabit him and teach him entirely different forms of knowing. He must expose himself to the true otherness of genuinely foreign points of view and unfamiliar ways of seeing and feeling. He must risk becoming temporarily or permanently lost in a wilderness of unformulated experience. (Ibid.)

Such radical openness involves a vulnerability on the part of the audience, which makes trust all the more necessary for this engagement, and makes the betrayal of that trust by an artist who fails to live up to it with the works they create all the more objectionable.

If trust as an aesthetic virtue of reception is largely equivalent to a disposition to adopt a hermeneutics of faith towards artworks, it follows that a disposition to relate to art in the mode of a hermeneutics of suspicion—i.e., to seek, from the outset, to "debunk," "deconstruct," or "problematize" a work—whether this takes the form of Derridean deconstruction or politically-minded ideology critique, will be an aesthetic vice since it will hinder the proper apprehension and appreciation of artworks and will prevent the distinct kinds of moral, political, and social value that engaging with artworks can have from being realized in one's encounters with them. This does not mean, of course, that a hermeneutics of suspicion is *never* warranted as a way of analyzing or critiquing art, any more that a disposition to trust being a virtue of friendship means that suspicion of another's motives or actions is never appropriate. It does, however, mean that this is inappropriate—and so a vice of the practice in question, whether art or friendship—for it to be one's default mode of engagement.

Conclusion

How we engage with artworks, whether as makers or audiences, has an inherently social dimension, since it is not only a matter of relating to a physical object, e.g., a painted canvas, or words on a page, but to another person with the art object mediating this relation. This entails a moral dimension to making and engaging with art, where performing these activities well is not just a matter of an artist exercising technical skill to create something that bears aesthetically valuable properties or a spectator perceiving these properties, but of how one regards and relates to the "other" in the artistic interaction. To be performed well, this interaction needs to involve respect for and openness to the other, with trust and trustworthiness being an essential component of these attitudes and therefore of good artistic practice. On a *eudaimonistic* virtue-based approach to aesthetic normativity and value, how one creates or engages with art is both an aspect and an expression of one's overall moral character and is tied to living well or flourishing as a human.

Making and engaging with art in ways that involve trust and trustworthiness, as outlined above, models socially and morally positive interpersonal relations, not only in the sense of giving us practice in such relations, but actually instantiating and exemplifying them, at least when one's relation of trust is with the artist "behind" a work, rather than a fictional character or an implied author. One practical consequence of this view is that it shows how approaches in art education that habituate students to relate to artworks through a hermeneutics of suspicion—e.g., by training them to see art first and foremost through a pre-formed political lens and to "problematize" artworks before understanding them with charity and on their own terms—are

*mis*educational, making students less able to engage with art well, i.e., in ways that will realize the distinct kinds of value, including the social and political value, that artistic practices can have when done well.[18]

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[1] We use “spectator” and “audience member” interchangeably in this chapter to refer to the one who encounters and appreciates a work of art (technically, the “recipient”), unless referring to a specific artform where reference to a reader, listener, etc. would be clearer in context.

[2] For discussions of trust in relation to aesthetic testimony, see Nguyen 2017 and Hills 2022. For an analysis of trust relations between fictional characters in a narrative work, see McGeer 2008.

[3] Two exceptions can be found in recent work by C. Thi Nguyen (2021) and Kalle Puolakka (forthcoming). Puolakka looks beyond aesthetic testimony to consider the trust that readers place in literary authors. Our view is broadly compatible with Puolakka’s, although we are also concerned with the trust that artists can have in their audiences. Nguyen writes about trust in what he calls an artist’s “sincerity,” by which he means the artist’s commitment to trying to realize aesthetic value rather than, say, being motivated by commercial success, popularity, etc. Nguyen’s “sincerity” is similar to one side of the mutual trust relation that we consider here, although Nguyen holds that audiences need only trust the artist to have been primarily motivated to make their work aesthetically valuable, whatever they might understand “aesthetic value” to be. However, our view discussed below takes the audience’s trust to be a matter of trusting not only that the artist had the right motivations but also that he succeeded in making something that *is* artistically good, in keeping with Aristotle’s virtue ethics in which a virtue is a disposition not only to aim at the virtuous mean but to reliably succeed in achieving it in action.

[4] Aretaic value (from the Greek *arētē*, or excellence) is concerned with what it is to be *good as* some thing: most broadly, for Aristotle, with what it is to be a good person and to live a good life *qua* human being. We use the term “aesthetic virtue” in keeping with existing literature in the philosophy of art (discussed further below), although “aesthetic” here should be read as “artistic,” with no particular associations with beauty.

[5] See Levno Plato and Aaron Meskin’s entry for “Aesthetic Value” in the *Encyclopedia of Quality of Life and Well-being Research*, which characterizes virtue aesthetics as “explor[ing] the psychological and behavioural dispositions that are most conducive to the recognition and production of aesthetic value” (Plato and Meskin 2013, 77).

[6] See Goldie 2007, where he writes that his theory is “not one according to which virtuous dispositions are *central*,” nor is it “one according to which such dispositions are treated as being of non-instrumental value” (Goldie 2007, 373, original emphasis). See also Woodruff’s claim that virtues are dispositions to aim at bringing about things that are characteristically involved in,

or necessary for, "achieving appreciation" as a "root aesthetic motivation" (Woodruff 1991, 25-26).

[7] Our concern is with artistic value, or what it is to be good *qua* art, rather than "aesthetic" value understood traditionally in terms of concepts such as beauty or other properties that are pleasant to experience (mainly through the senses). We will nevertheless continue to talk of "aesthetic virtues," which may be read as synonymous with *artistic* virtues, to avoid awkwardness and stick with the term of the existing discussion.

[8] We are bracketing considerations of the *self-trust* that an artist or an audience-member might need to have in order to create or engage with art well. Appropriate self-trust in one's capabilities as an "aesthetic agent" might be important for a full account of aesthetic virtues, however, we want to focus here on the relational dimensions of trust while acknowledging that they are not necessarily the only way in which trust can feature in artistic practice.

[9] Our approach here resembles that of Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen, who stress the importance of taking what they call a "literary stance" towards a literary work, which they define as "an expectation of (and consequently the attempt to identify) a certain type of value, i.e., literary aesthetic value" (Lamarque and Olsen 1994, 256). This is further defined as an expectation of imaginative-creative value, and of a work's mimetic dimension, i.e., its depiction of "humanly interesting content" (Ibid., 265). While we find their approach inspirational, we do not presuppose an institutional definition of literature as they do; also, our focus is broader than aesthetic appreciation alone.

[10] Cf. artist and philosopher Adrian Piper's insistence that "no artist … is required by a viewer's ignorance to make simplistic art" (Piper 1996, 186).

[11] This is similar to what Goldie (2008) calls "emotional sharing," though it goes beyond emotions to include cognitive, imaginative, and perceptual perspectives, since not all artworks are emotional in character but all arguably embody a perspective of some kind.

[12] It is important that what is shared here, and what the audience gains, is not merely the "content" of the perspective that the work expresses, but the *way of* "taking" this content that is embodied in the expression. We are not claiming that audiences will come to agree with the perspectives that a work expresses—e.g., a perspective on romantic love that takes it to be all-consuming and ultimately destructive—but that apprehending and entertaining this perspective in their imaginative engagement with a work that expresses it gives audiences an understanding, from the inside, of what it is like to experience something through this perspective—e.g., what it is like to desire another in such a way.

[13] See, e.g., Young 2001.

[14] For the founding argument for modern anti-cognitivism in aesthetics, see Stolnitz 1992. For a recent view that artists are not worthy of our trust as reliable sources of knowledge, see Currie 2020.

[15] For a more detailed defence, see Vidmar Jovanović 2019.

[16] On the moralism-autonomism debate, see Carroll 1996, Anderson and Dean 1997, and Gaut 1998. For one influential example of an ideology-based critique of art, see Berger 1973.

[17] This is distinct from the way in which spectators can feel "betrayed" upon learning that an artist whose work they admire has acted immorally (see Matthes 2021). If this is truly a feeling of betrayal, rather than disappointment, it is not clear that it is a betrayal of a warranted trust, or at least not a trust that is internal to the practices of making and engaging with art, since an expectation that an artist will be a morally good person is extraneous to these practices and how well they are realized.

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