



The Impact of Aesthetic Values on Moralism: An Ethical Perspective

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Abstract

Aesthetics and morality have been intensely entangled throughout the history of art. The relationship between morality and art brings forward important questions about the artistic representation, the impact of aesthetics on society, and the obligations of artists. One of the fundamental ways in which morality intersects with art is through the content and subject matter of artworks. Artists have often used their work to pursue and challenge ethical issues, like societal injustices, inequities, enormities etc. Art can perform a role as a powerful tool for drawing attention to social issues, and for positive changes. At the same time, the relationship between morality and art is complex and multifaceted. While some artworks are explicitly ethical in their themes, others are more ambiguous or open to explication. This raises questions about the extent to which artists have a moral responsibility to their audience. Some argue that all art is inherently moral in nature, because it reflects the values and moral understanding of the society. Others contend that art can and should exist for its own sake, separate from moral considerations, and that the freedom of expression is a crucial aspect of artistic creation. And aesthetic value of an artwork may exacerbate our moral understanding and moral sensibility.

Keywords

Art, Aesthetics, Aesthetic Value, Morality, Autonomism, Ethicism, Moralism

The relationship between aesthetics and morality is complicated and multifaceted, related to the human values and experience. Aesthetics, a branch of philosophy deals with the art, appreciation of beauty and nature, and on the other side morality is connected with the ideal of human behaviour, principles of human actions. One common appearance is aesthetics or artworks may have moral explication, regarding our moral actions and moral judgments. Besides other perspectives that aesthetic experience may have an intense impact on our moral sensibilities. When we confront to something aesthetically pleasing or beautiful, it can impinge emotions such as empathy, tenderness, or sympathy. These emotions can cherish a sense of relation to others and sensation of moral considerations. For instance, a piece of art may motivate us to incline with the human moral values like social justice and equality or human conditions. When we encounter a beautiful artwork or appearing a pleasant sunset, it may evoke moral sensitivity or a sense of compassion, sympathy, feelings of fear, bonding with others. So aesthetic experience or some works of art can fecundate our ethical understanding and enrich moral values like respect for others, care, empathy etc.

Besides, some philosophers argue that there is a huge connection between aesthetics and morality, exposing that moral considerations are unabated with aesthetic judgments. According to this view, our all-aesthetic preferences are not extremely subjective, but also informed with moral principles and moral values. For example, we can find a work of art morally repugnant if it instigates violence or perpetuate detrimental thoughts or trends. So, in that sense, aesthetic judgments may reverberate our ethical commitments, sensibilities or contribute to our moral discernment. Some philosophers also argue that ethical values are implicit in aesthetical judgments. Our aesthetic proneness is not always subjective, but it can also ascertain moral principles and moral values. For example, we can find some artworks are ethically obnoxious or heinous if they exacerbate social discrimination or violence. So, in that view, aesthetic appreciation or evaluations are entangled with moral apprehension and evaluation, as our appreciation of beauty are fabricated by our moral values and beliefs.

Through the history of art, we can find that art has been used as a powerful tool to incriminate social injustices, immoral actions or behaviour. For example, if we see the famous painting 'Guernica' by Pablo Picasso, which is created in respect to the bombing at the Guernica town during the Spanish War, is a robust anti-war statement. Through its entire imagery and emotional intensity, his work reflects as a harrowing reminder of the subversive impact of conflict and impingement on civilians. Moreover, another neoclassical painting 'The Death of Marat' by Jacques Louis David, delineates the assassination of Jean-Paul Marat, a native French revolutionary figure. David's portraiture of Marat's slaughter as a martyrdom for the justice and equality focus the moral dilemmas ethical complexities of political activities.

These artworks offer intense and poignant reflex on social injustices, immoral actions, and moral straits, urging people to imagine the complexities of human behaviour. By involving these artworks, viewers are prompted to question embedded power structures, confront painful truths, and figure out alternative perspectives on the morality, and issues of justice. Some philosophers think they may show that the moral properties of an artwork can have an impact on its aesthetic values.

The interactionist philosophers think that there is a necessary connection between artistic value and the moral value. Though some have refused this view that an artwork may be judged as being ethical or unethical. Other philosophers think that the moral streams of an artwork affect its aesthetic value negatively, and some of them believe that the ethical flaws of an artwork may promote its aesthetic value.

The view of fundamental autonomists is that artworks cannot be considered in moral terms. They count those two values are extremely independent and it doesn't make any sense that aesthetic object may evaluate in moral terms. It is a sort of category mistake. These radical autonomists think that artworks are not considered with the attribution of ethical properties. Richard Posner firmly refuses that art may associate to moral education.¹ On the other hand, moderate autonomists accept that artworks may be judged for its ethical value and they concede that we may delineate artworks as impeccable or unethical. Moderate autonomism is intimidated by any argument which shows how moral value of an artwork impact on its artistic value.²

The interactionist philosophers that they may show there is an impact of an artwork's moral properties on its aesthetic value. Noël Carroll, an interactionist seems that sometimes moral flaws and artistic defects are identical and moral virtues and artistic virtues are equivalent.³ The main argument of Carroll of moderate moralism is "uptake argument". An artwork needs an emotional uptake, that its object is to awaken emotional responses to the viewer's uptake.⁴ The argument of uptake only befits if anyone is committed that the artistic value of an artwork be assessed from the viewpoint of a ethically sensitive audience, though Carroll didn't give any argument in support of the claim.

Now Berys Gaut offers a different argument called "merited response argument" which is better than Carroll's uptake argument. This position is more valiant than moderate moralism, that the moral scars sometimes reduce or enhance artistic value.⁵ This strong position is ethicism. Ethicism contains that if any artwork owes an aesthetically pertinent moral virtue, it will always consider as an aesthetic flaws or artistic virtues. In general artworks attempt to instigate particular responses to the appreciator. For instance, thrilling movies refer a thrilling and stirring response with a scaring scene. Though some movies fail to incite desired scare to the audience. So, in this case, the intended reaction is unmerited. Sometimes it may occur due lack of aesthetic composition. On other purpose, the referred response is unsuited on moral grounds. In this regard, the artwork is aesthetically lacking for its moral

defects. The claim is barely that the aesthetic value of the work is compromised, as why it depends on a response that shouldn't be accepted, as it is not deserved on moral grounds.

Ethicism is also given away to the idea that a moral perspective of an artwork is going to promote the artistic value of the work. Gaut believes that the acquired response argument can vindicate this too, as a morally commendable notion of an artwork delivers reason to take up the response arranged by the work. It is quite true that a morally flawed artwork is not always aesthetically imperfect. Actually, ethicism emphasizes to the concept that the manifested substance of an artwork will be considered for its aesthetical evaluation. If an artwork evolves any unethical attitude, still it would be commendable for some hidden or unique transcendental properties. For example, if we notice the great artwork *Rape of Europa* by Titian, which seems to be morally flawed, because there are no signs of violent force against Europa, rather the painting reflects that the woman is enjoying the act instead of interference.

In this way, we have emerged to the exposition that how aesthetic value of an artwork is reduced with the ethical flaws or defects. Though some authors believe that sometimes the flawed ethical aspect of an artwork may enrich the aesthetic value of it. And this view is entitled with the name 'immoralism'. Daniel Jacobson thinks that an ethically condemnable artwork sometimes counts as artistically worthy because it impels us to react to its substance in which way that we should not react.⁶ Matthew Kieran's view is also like Jacobson that an artwork's immoral perspective sometimes promotes aesthetic value.⁷ It is significant to focus that immoralism does not eliminate the possibility of ethical flaws that negatively instigate the aesthetic value of an artwork.⁸

Now we can presume that artworks impart some responses about moral thoughts and attitudes. Besides artworks may have the potentiality to express moral sentiments or thoughts towards its representations. Though it is controversial that whether artworks have the efficiency to teach something about morality. Even some philosophers also express uncertainty about the relation between artworks and morality. But we all know that our life events can exacerbate the sense of morality or may enhance the moral understanding. We have already seen that artworks have the potentiality to teach us some moral knowledge which is presented by the interactionists. Though Posner declines that artworks cannot augment the understanding of morality. He does not think that artworks have any remarkable impact on morality. But Martha C. Nussbaum consider that we may obtain moral knowledge from artworks, like paintings, novels etc. He thinks that moral knowledge is not a mere set of general principles or rules, rather it is more than because moral knowledge in compounded of emotions, feelings, desires, wilful activities.⁹

Here, I conclude that there is a certain possibility of obtaining ethical knowledge and moral understanding from artwork, because it has an efficiency which may enhance our moral understanding and sensibility and the moral values of artworks can augment aesthetic values of it. So, if all these aspects are considered as true then moderate moralism may be established.

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