

THESIS

A METAPHYSICAL ANSWER TO THE APPROPRIATENESS QUESTION IN  
AESTHETICS

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Gabriella LaRose

Department of Philosophy

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Master's Committee:

Advisor: Domenica Romagni

Katie McShane

Kit Hughes

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## ABSTRACT

### A METAPHYSICAL ANSWER TO THE APPROPRIATENESS QUESTION IN AESTHETICS

The aim of this project is to give a new, descriptive answer to the appropriateness question in aesthetics. The appropriateness question asks *how is it appropriate for ethical value to affect aesthetic value in aesthetic cases?* I give a two-step argument for a metaphysical relationship between ethical content and aesthetic experience which is conditional on ethical content being aesthetically relevant and narrative being present. I argue that there is an inherence relationship between ethical content and narrative, where the former inheres in the latter. This relation holds in virtue of the mutual dependence between ethical content and narrative. I then use Noel Carroll's content approach to aesthetic experience to argue aesthetic experience supervenes on narrative content. This supervenient relationship captures the emergence of aesthetic experience while retaining the spirit of Carroll's discussion of aesthetic experience. Ultimately, I argue that because narrative is *a feature* of aesthetic experience and further because ethical content is *a feature* of narrative, there is a metaphysical relationship between ethical content and aesthetic experience. Simply, when a narrative exists (even an imagined narrative) and moral content is present, then a metaphysical relationship will exist between ethical content and aesthetic experience.

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## DEDICATION

For my mom, Ginger.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	iii
DEDICATION.....	iv
CHAPTER 1 .....	1
1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2 The Appropriateness Question.....	2
1.2.2 Autonomism.....	4
1.2.3 Moderate Moralism.....	4
1.2.4 Ethicism .....	6
1.2.5 Robust Immoralism.....	7
1.3 An incomplete answer to the appropriateness question.....	9
1.3.2 Noel Carroll .....	9
1.3.3 Berys Gaut .....	11
1.3.4 A.W Eaton.....	12
1.4 A new approach .....	14
1.4.2 Stepping back from value .....	16
CHAPTER 2 .....	20
2.1 Introduction.....	20
2.2 Understanding narrative.....	21
2.3 Narrative and ethical content .....	28
2.3.2 Inherence generally.....	31
2.3.3 Ethical content inheres in narrative.....	32
2.4 Narrative content and aesthetic experience.....	37
2.5 Conclusion .....	43
CHAPTER 3 .....	44
3.1 Introduction.....	44
3.2 Consideration of objections .....	44
3.2.2 Transitivity objection.....	45
3.2.3 Normative-Descriptive Objection.....	48
3.3 Upshots of this account.....	49
3.3.2 The shift of emphasis .....	50
3.3.3 A compatible metaphysical picture.....	52
3.3.4 Static works are better understood.....	54
3.4 Conclusion .....	57
REFERENCES .....	61

## CHAPTER 1

### 1.1 Introduction

Imagine two friends, Karen and Barb, discussing the hit show *The Sopranos*. Karen takes issue with a particular episode of the show called *The Second Coming* (2007). In that episode, Tony's daughter, Meadow Soprano is out on a date when a man she knows as Coco approaches her and begins making lewd comments. When her father, mob boss Tony Soprano hears of this, he goes to find Coco and make things right. When Tony finds Coco, he pistol whips and curb stomps the man—the scene is quite graphic (*Ibid.*). Karen thinks that the show, and more specifically this scene, is immoral to such a degree that it is therefore unwatchable. Barb disagrees. *Sure, there are some bad things that happen in the show, but it is not strictly encouraging this behavior. It is a work of fiction, it doesn't have to be morally good to be a good show!* She might think, *there are other aspects of the show that are great, like say, the acting performances, the score of the show, cinematography, etc.* None of these things assuage Karen, she seems adamant. She thinks that the show is so immoral and upsetting that she cannot continue to watch it. In other words, the immorality of the show undermines any aesthetic enjoyment Karen might have of *The Sopranos*. How are we supposed to feel about these kinds of cases? If you share Barb's attitude in this case, we might ask *how is it appropriate that the ethical value affects the aesthetic value of the show for Karen?*

Basically, this case calls for an answer to a specific question in the aesthetics literature, what I will call *the appropriateness question*. Here, I'll outline a few different responses to what I call the appropriateness question (how is it appropriate that moral<sup>1</sup> content affects an aesthetic

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that I will be using moral and ethical interchangeably throughout this project. Although there is a meaningful difference between these two terms, such a distinction would be outside the scope of this project.

experience?) from Noel Carroll, Berys Gaut, and A.W. Eaton. I then argue that these answers all presuppose some metaphysical relation at the foundation of the relationship between moral value and aesthetic value. I provide some reasons in support of stepping away from value in order to answer a different, more precise appropriateness question. My goal for this project is to give a descriptive, metaphysical answer to the appropriateness question, and then outline why this metaphysical answer is an improvement to the canonical literature.

## 1.2 The Appropriateness Question

A canonical question in the literature is what I will call here “the appropriateness question.” This question, most simply, asks “How is it appropriate for ethical value to affect aesthetic value?” This question seeks to give an explanation for our intuitions about cases like the one presented in the introduction. In this section, I give an overview of the different ways this appropriateness question has been answered in the literature. First, I talk about the appropriateness question in depth to show that it is by its very nature ambiguous as stated. Then, I will quickly outline the autonomist position on the appropriateness question. Next, I outline a family of what have become canonical answers to the appropriateness question from Noel Carroll, Berys Gaut, and A.W. Eaton. As a whole, this section will set up a more in-depth discussion of how these answers to the appropriateness question are incomplete in section 1.3.

The appropriateness question vaguely asks *how is it appropriate for ethical value to affect aesthetic value?* We can think of plenty of different kinds of answers to this question, all which address different aspects of the issue. Although each philosopher I engage with here does seem to address the same question, and furthermore think of themselves as answering the same question, this may not obviously be the case. If we interpret the word ‘how’ differently, or

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For all intents and purposes, I collapse these two terms into one here.

emphasize different words like ‘value’ or ‘aesthetic’ within the question, the answer to the appropriateness question will be different. Giving emphasis to different parts of the question generates a different target of inquiry for the appropriateness question.

For instance, asking “How is it appropriate for ethical *value* to affect aesthetic *value*?” emphasizes how these different kinds of value affect one another. An answer to this question would require a normative answer<sup>2</sup>, one that would have to create a taxonomy of kinds of value and outline how those types of value interact with one another. A similar response could be given if the emphasis in the question is on the word affect (how is it appropriate for ethical value to *affect* aesthetic value?). This might call for a causal answer to the appropriateness question, one which disambiguated the causal effects of ethical value on aesthetic value. Shifting the emphasis to the word ‘appropriate’ (how is it *appropriate* for ethical value to affect aesthetic value?) calls for a similarly normative answer to the appropriateness question, where appropriateness is the central concern. Further, answering this appropriateness emphasized question requires determining in which contexts ethical content is relevant to these aesthetic contexts. So, an answer to this slightly different appropriateness question might seek to explain our intuitions that it is appropriate for ethical value to affect aesthetic value. If we were to emphasize “how” in the appropriateness question (*how* is it appropriate for ethical value to affect aesthetic value?) this would call for a kind of descriptive answer. One could give an answer about the metaphysical relationships, the ontological status of art, etc. This (the *how*-emphasized appropriateness question) is the formulation I take myself to be answering here. I will return to that issue in section 1.4. For now, this section seeks to disambiguate which formulation of the

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<sup>2</sup> Here by ‘normative’ I simply mean that the answer required would have to engage with value, which would terminate in some taxonomy of values. This taxonomy of values would be normative insofar as it would likely require a commitment to some moral theory or value theory.

appropriateness question is being addressed in the current literature.

### *1.2.2 Autonomism*

First, it is necessary to address a position which will not get much consideration here, autonomism. This position understands moral value and aesthetic value to be completely separate kinds, which cannot affect one another. More specifically, the autonomist position is that “it is never the moral component of the criticism *as such* that diminishes or strengthens the value of an artwork *qua* artwork” (*emphasis in original*, Anderson and Dean 1998, 152).

Anderson and Dean argue that ethical criticism and aesthetic criticism of a work of art are conceptually distinct from one another, and answer the appropriateness question by saying ‘it is never appropriate.’ The two kinds of value, ethical and aesthetic, operate on different axes and are incommensurable with one another. This is based on the metaphysical relations at play in the autonomist ontology of art. For the autonomist, the moral realm and the aesthetic realm are autonomous from one another. They are completely distinct, which prohibits any interaction between what is moral and what is aesthetic. The autonomist position, then, is simply that even if an artwork conveys a morally defective perspective, this moral perspective is completely separate from any aesthetic critiques that can be made about the work of art. You can critique a work of art ethically or aesthetically, but the moral evaluation cannot affect the aesthetic evaluation, and vice versa. This metaphysical answer is the closest in *kind* to the answer to the appropriateness question I hope to give here, although it will be in direct opposition to the ontological picture sketched by Anderson and Dean.

### *1.2.3 Moderate Moralism*

Now, we can turn to the recently dominant family of views within the literature. Noel Carroll is known for the moderate moralist position, which answers the appropriateness question with an

emphasis on *appropriate*. His answer hinges on establishing the conditions under which ethical value affects aesthetic value, which happens most notably when variable framing occurs by the artist. Variable framing is used by artists to focus the audience's attention to specific moral details in order to elicit a specific kind of response, for instance, reinforcing the role that the character plays in the overall narrative. To unpack this a bit more, when the moral aspects of an artwork are emphasized by the artist in such a way that they arouse moral emotions, that ethical value is aesthetically relevant and thereby affects the aesthetic value of a work of art. However, only *sometimes* can a moral defect be an aesthetic defect and only *sometimes* can a moral merit be an aesthetic merit (Carroll 2013, 371-2). Carroll argues that we can determine aesthetic value by evaluating the "disjunctive set of sufficient conditions for categorizing aesthetic experiences of artworks" (Carroll 2002, 164). He does not explicitly include ethical or moral value in this disjunctive set of conditions, although we might think that this is implied in his account.

Carroll's concern, it seems, comes from the potential endorsement of immoral points of view and immoral narratives (Carroll 2000, 144; Carroll 2013, 373). When a work of art mobilizes the audience to either respond morally or immorally, the subsequent arousal of certain emotions, beliefs, and other mental states is what affects the aesthetic evaluation<sup>3</sup>. Moral content, according to Carroll, can aid or pervert the audience's moral understanding via the emotive uptake of the audience (Carroll 1996, 228). The emotive uptake, or the emotional arousal elicited in response to a work of art, for Carroll, is dependent on the variable framing done by the artist (Carroll 2010, 6-7). In this way, when works of art promote immoral perspectives, it is sometimes an aesthetic defect. This is because the artist is endorsing and pre-focusing that immoral content for

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<sup>3</sup> The term 'mobilization' ought not be understood causally. Mobilization is instead a function of moral uptake, or the emotional arousal elicited in response to a work of art. We can think of mobilization as a kind of 'calling for' a certain response.

the audience such that this variable framing undermines the aesthetic experience for the audience. So, Carroll's answer to the appropriateness question is, simply, that ethical value mobilizes audiences differently in virtue of the work of art's variable framing, and thereby affects aesthetic value due to this variable framing and emotive uptake. This account emphasizes the conditions under which it is appropriate for ethical value to affect aesthetic value.

#### 1.2.4 Ethicism

Berys Gaut is the main advocate for ethicism in aesthetics<sup>4</sup>. Gaut seeks to answer the appropriateness question with an emphasis on '*appropriateness*' as well. To answer this question, he creates a taxonomy of *pro tanto* principles, which determine which kinds of ethical failings are in all cases aesthetic defects (Gaut 2007, 49). His account is monotonic, where "positive ethical content [is] always associated with positive aesthetic qualities" while these *pro tanto* principles seek to explain when ethical failings are aesthetic defects (Gaut 2007, 52). *Pro tanto* principles are formulated in terms of extrinsic and intrinsic merits/demerits.

For instance, instantiations of an extrinsic moral demerit undermine the presence of some other good ethical quality<sup>5</sup> (Gaut 2007, 62). As a clear example of this, we can imagine some artwork which is comedic that prescribes a certain kind of response, like laughter. If the work of art is not funny, then it seems like laughter is not a merited response of the audience to the piece.

The *pro tanto* principles work by gauging if that work of art is in fact comedic to the extent that

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<sup>4</sup> It should be noted here that Gaut argues that immoralism (Eaton), the moderate moralist (Carroll), and the ethicist position (his own) can be collapsed into a widely construed formulation of moralism (Gaut 2007, 54-55). I want to avoid collapsing these positions into one another because it is the norm within the literature to keep these positions separate. Gaut seems to be unique in that he sees both Eaton and Carroll's positions to be compatible with one another and more generally, a centralized moralism.

<sup>5</sup> Note that this is not a value-laden statement. Gaut is not making a claim about intrinsic versus instrumental value. Instead, intrinsic and extrinsic here are as they relate to the work of art itself. Here, these terms are meant to function similarly to the phrase "in so far as." (Gaut 2007, 60). Gaut's pluralistic view of moral import is highlighted most clearly by these in so far as statements.

(*pro tanto*) laughter is prescribed. So, this constitutes an aesthetic failure of the work of art in that the prescribed response is not merited by that work of art. This is a case where an extrinsic demerit (failing to merit the prescribed response to a work of art) undermines the aesthetic value of that work of art. In similar moral cases, these *pro tanto* principles assist in weighing differing moral considerations across time and characters within a work of art in order to give an understanding of the moral valence of the piece *on the whole*. Gaut precludes some kinds of moral content from being influential in an aesthetic evaluation, namely those that are not “aesthetically relevant” (Gaut 2007, 66). Moral value is aesthetically relevant only when the work engages some other-regarding actions, feelings and motives that are not merely instrumental concerns (Gaut 2007, 45-6). These other-regarding actions, feelings, and motives must be deployed by the use of artistic means, not merely by style of the piece (abstract, representational, cubist, etc.) or how the artist regards the subject (Gaut 2007, 85). Therefore, moral value is aesthetically relevant when this morality is deeply intertwined in the work of art. So, Gaut’s answer to the appropriateness question is fairly simple. How is it *appropriate* for ethical value to affect aesthetic value? Well, because that ethical content is aesthetically relevant! The *pro tanto* principles are merely filters that determine when ethical value affects the aesthetic value.

### *1.2.5 Robust Immoralism*

Next, A.W. Eaton is known best for developing the robust immoralist position in aesthetics. The robust immoralist stance argues that it is in fact appropriate to import moral value into aesthetic evaluations and that some immoral value can constitute an aesthetic merit within a work of art (Eaton 2012, 281). So, Eaton seems to answer two different formulations of the appropriateness question: how it is *appropriate* and how ethical value *affects* aesthetic value.

First, the appropriateness formulation. Eaton says because artists who depict immoral content can challenge their own conception of what is moral or immoral, the presence of immoral content within an artwork can be a sign of artistic achievement and this should be seen as an appropriate way for ethical value to affect aesthetic value (Eaton 2012, 283). Eaton uses the example of a rough hero to explain how the mixture of virtues and vices exhibited by a character can make the audience both morally repulsed by and also drawn to a seemingly immoral character (Eaton 2012, 283). Then, she shifts into talking about how one kind of value *affects* the other. The rough hero's actions require the audience to adopt conflicting attitudes about the character.

These conflicting attitudes point to an aesthetic merit in the work itself as it challenges competing conceptions of ethical behavior (Eaton 2012, 288). She argues that works can be openly immoral in nature and this immorality can contribute to a positive aesthetic evaluation because the artwork challenges our conceptions of what is moral and what is immoral (Eaton 2012, 290). Here, her discussion answers the appropriateness question with an emphasis on how these kinds of values interact with one another. She argues that a work of art which is immoral on the whole can still be viewed as having a moral defect and thereby an aesthetic defect. But, the same work of art can still be partially lauded for the artist's ability to appeal to the audience and their inner vices. This reflects the conflicting attitudes one must adopt in order to appreciate the immoral work aesthetically. So, simply, it is appropriate for ethical value to affect aesthetic value because ethical value in works of art can engage our moral sensibilities and challenge our conception of morality.

Here I've given a short survey of different ways that the appropriateness question has been answered in the literature. Given different emphases of the question, we can get vastly different

kinds of answers. Here I outlined four positions, starting with the autonomists, who believe it is never appropriate for ethical value to affect aesthetic value. I have also given a brief outline of how Carroll, Gaut, and Eaton answer the appropriateness question. In the next section I will discuss how these answers to the appropriateness question are incomplete, insofar as they presuppose various metaphysical relations in the background.

### **1.3 An incomplete answer to the appropriateness question**

So, now we seem to have a clear picture of how a few different people have answered the appropriateness question in the literature. In this section, I argue that the answers given to the appropriateness question in section 1.2 aren't wholly satisfactory. I hope to show, here, that each of these answers to the appropriateness question presuppose some metaphysical relation at the foundation of their answer. This provides the motivation for this project moving forward, which I will outline in the final section of this chapter.

#### *1.3.2 Noel Carroll*

First, Noel Carroll's moderate moralism. Carroll seems to be answering the appropriateness question if we formulate the question as "How is it *appropriate* for ethical value to affect aesthetic value?" His answer addresses the *way* that ethical value can affect the audience of a work of art. Specifically, in an article which seeks to defend Carroll's content approach to aesthetic experience, he distinguishes between the form and the function (content) of a work of art. He says "form is a matter of the ensemble of choices intended to realize the point or the purpose of the artwork" (Carroll 2015, 183). Content elements of artworks speak more to what perspective it expresses. He goes on to argue that an artwork's moral defectiveness is sometimes a content element and sometimes a formal element (*Ibid.*, 186). This depends on how the moral defectiveness affects the audience's engagement with the artwork. When moral defects are a

content element, it creates a kind of imaginative resistance, where the audience is unable to properly engage with the work of art because they cannot inhabit the moral space required by the artwork. When it is a formal element, the moral perspective hinders the purpose of the work of art. (*Ibid.*, 186). So, there seems to be two distinct ways in which moral content<sup>6</sup> can be seen as influencing an overall aesthetic experience: through content or form. In either case, this account seems to presuppose some kind of metaphysical relationship between ethical value, aesthetic value, and an aesthetic experience.

We might think of Carroll as asserting a constitutive relationship between the formal parts of the artwork and the artwork as a whole. For Carroll's purposes, constitution can be understood as a part-whole relationship where the parts (the formal properties, expressive properties, etc.) are in a meaningful way distinct from the whole, but still nonetheless build the identity of the whole. Carroll argues that we can determine aesthetic value by evaluating the "disjunctive set of sufficient conditions for categorizing aesthetic experiences of artworks" so if we understand moral value as a formal feature of a work of art and as a sufficient condition for an aesthetic experience, the relation here would be constitution (Carroll 2002, 164). However, Carroll is fairly clear that the relationship between moral value and aesthetic value is not *merely* a constitution relationship<sup>7</sup>. This is likely due to his content understanding of moral value in art. If moral value was merely a formal element of an artwork, then it seems perfectly reasonable for there to be a constitutive relationship between moral value and aesthetic experience. But because moral value is sometimes a content element of the artwork, it is in some ways dependent on

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<sup>6</sup> The term 'moral content' here is neutral with regard to whether the content is considered morally good or bad and so is therefore value-neutral.

<sup>7</sup> Carroll argues that these properties (formal, expressive, and aesthetic) capture the form of an artwork, but there is also a subject-dependent, qualitative aspect to aesthetic experience that is not captured through a strict constitution relationship. (Carroll 2015, 171-2).

audience engagement with the piece, which is not neatly deterministic in the way that a constitutive relation would require. So, because there is something unique (and sometimes variant) about the way individuals are affected by the moral perspective of a work of art, the relationship here is not merely one of constitution. Beyond this, Carroll does not put forth another alternative of how we should understand this relationship, he merely asserts that it cannot be constitution because of this content element of moral value.

### 1.3.3 Berys Gaut

Gaut seems to be answering a different (but related) question: *When/ In what contexts is it appropriate for ethical value to affect aesthetic value?* Despite outlining a positive monotonic structure (where positive ethical value is always an aesthetic merit), he is silent on how the relationship works between negative ethical value and aesthetic value. Although the presence of extrinsic demerits are a *sign* of an overall aesthetic flaw in the work, this does not mean that the presence of any aesthetically relevant extrinsic demerit necessitates an aesthetic flaw in the work<sup>8</sup> (Gaut 2007, 63-4). There are certainly cases in which negative moral value has no effect whatsoever on the aesthetic value of the overall piece, because that moral value is not aesthetically relevant. So, we might then think this means that the underlying metaphysical relationship at play here is causality— where these extrinsic or intrinsic demerits somehow *cause* a lower aesthetic value in some cases, and in others these demerits are causally inert. But understanding the impact of immoral art solely in terms of its effects on audiences (which would be a mere causal relation) would be wrong in Gaut's view because the *effects* on the audience are not necessarily a sign of an intrinsic demerit of the work (Gaut 2007, 229). We can imagine a case where an artwork calls for a reverent response, but an audience member finds the piece

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<sup>8</sup> It should be noted though that this does not mean a work can be made better aesthetically by making it moral (Gaut 2007, 63).

funny, so she laughs. Simply because she laughed in response to this work of art does not mean that the work necessarily calls for that specific response, or even that this response is appropriate. We can further add that her laughing might not be a marker of some intrinsic demerit or merit of the piece, she might have some other reason (like an inside joke with a friend) for her laughter. Just because there are some effects on the audience (like laughing or feeling moral emotions), that does not necessitate their actually being aesthetic demerits intrinsic to that work of art. So, causation does not seem to be the proper relationship here.

Gaut cannot merely talk about the consequences of immoral or moral value and instead turns to what kind of impact the value has on the work as a whole. In cases where the moral content is aesthetically relevant, the audience must properly assess it within the context of the work of art in order to properly situate these moral issues as intrinsic/extrinsic and moral/immoral. So, it seems this relation is something over and above mere causality. Therefore, Gaut wants to discuss moral content that contributes to aesthetic contexts as aesthetic properties which contribute either negatively or positively to artistic value. He must therefore require some kind of deep, metaphysical relationship between ethical value and aesthetic value, although he is not explicit as to what this relationship might be. So, despite a precise taxonomy of *pro tanto* principles to guide when and how ethical value affects aesthetic value, Gaut still presupposes some, unnamed, metaphysical relation between aesthetic value and ethical value.

#### *1.3.4 A.W Eaton*

Alternatively, Eaton believes that aesthetic value does not map on to our intuitions about morality, and that sometimes, immoral depictions can affect aesthetic value positively (immoral actions can be merits or demerits, depending on the particulars of the case). Oddly enough, despite the fact that Eaton is the least explicit of these three thinkers about the more fundamental

metaphysical relationship between ethical value and aesthetic value, she is very explicit when sketching *why* such a relationship might hold. Eaton argues that it is not merely the presence of immoral acts that make a work unethical, because reducing the ethical to the aesthetic seemingly eliminates the aesthetic impact and focuses quite clearly on *merely* the ethical content (Eaton 2003, 169). She says that artworks are ethically defective insofar as they *call upon* viewers to adopt morally wrong sentiments. However, this does not require the audience to actually take on immoral attitudes as their own in response to the ethical defect. Instead the artwork merely must *call upon* the audience to adopt immoral attitudes. In that sense, it is not a causal relationship. She says, instead, “[I]t is wrong on ethical grounds for us to enter into these sentiments, and yet refraining from responding in this way would cause us to miss a significant aesthetic dimension of the work” (Eaton 2003, 167). So, the emphasis is not on the causal effects of immoral content on the audience. Rather, Eaton emphasizes the way in which the audience must either enter into immoral sentiments (which is, under her account, an immoral act) or else miss a significant aesthetic dimension of the experience.

In her response to a criticism about moral uptake, or the actual adoption of immoral sentiments in response to a work of art, she formulates what she calls the ‘Objection from Creepiness’ (Eaton 2003, 177). This objection seeks to make explicit what the issue with immoral artworks is. The issue, most specifically, is either that “I *cannot* enter into the work’s sentiments or simply that I *should not*” (*emphasis in original*, Ibid., 176). In this objection, she imagines a work of art in which its true aesthetic value is only accessible to morally corrupt individuals, or “creeps.” In this case, an individual would have to take on the attitudes or identity of a creep in order to fully understand the aesthetic success or failure of the work. She says, “What’s special about the creepy case is that we have to do something that’s bad for us in order

to get inside the work; we would have to become creeps, even for just the moments that we spend with the work, and this is contrary to our flourishing” (Ibid., 177). Because we need to occupy this immoral mental space, or *become* creeps, in order to appreciate the artwork ethical value becomes internal to the work of art. This is because in order to aesthetically appreciate the artwork, we must occupy this moral space which is an integral part of the experience as a whole. So, in this sense, when ethical value affects aesthetic value, it is because the ethical value somehow becomes *internal* to the work of art itself. The ethical content, and therefore value, is tied to the aesthetic appreciation; we must occupy that immoral space (so to speak) while we are evaluating the artwork. It seems plausible that Eaton has assumed some kind of part-whole<sup>9</sup> relationship between sufficiently relevant ethical value and aesthetic value, although she is not explicit about this. What she is explicit about, though, is that the ethical value of the work as a whole is a *dimension* of the artwork that has to also be attended to. Ethical value therefore affects aesthetic value in virtue of its being internal to an aesthetic experience. However, Eaton does not say what metaphysical relation, in particular, this internality claim entails.

#### **1.4 A new approach**

In the previous section, I argued that Carroll, Gaut, and Eaton all presuppose some metaphysical relationship between ethical value and aesthetic value. In this section, I outline the positive goals for this project. I also defend my choice to step back from value claims (so to speak). I do this first by highlighting a common concern about incommensurability of kinds of value. I then discuss the shift in the appropriateness question that will be addressed in this project.

I just argued that Carroll, Gaut, and Eaton all presuppose a metaphysical relationship

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<sup>9</sup> I want to note that I do not mean a proper part-whole relationship here. I simply am saying that Eaton might be assuming some metaphysical relationship between parts and a whole as *kinds*.

between ethical value and aesthetic value. All three accounts operate within the same kind of family of answers to the appropriateness question, which all suppose that it *is* appropriate for ethical value to affect aesthetic value. This family of moralist answers to the appropriateness question all seek to identify the conditions under which it is appropriate. Further, they seem to all think of themselves as answering the same appropriateness question, while they might also be addressing different aspects of the question. In this project, I argue that there is a different way to approach the appropriateness question. This new answer will proceed from the same starting point: our intuitions about how to respond to these cases. So, here it might be helpful to return to one of these intuition cases and show how we might be motivated to approach the appropriateness question a bit differently.

If you remember from the introduction, we might have the intuition that critiquing works of art on a moral basis is perfectly fine. We might object to shows like *The Sopranos* depicting such graphic violence, which make audience members wrestle with how they ought to regard Tony as a character. For some, this kind of a display detracts from the experience of the show, so much so that they shut off their TV. This seems like a natural intuition about works of art which unabashedly depict immoral actions. But how should we move forward with this intuition? One way to move forward is to try to articulate and defend a metaphysical relationship between moral value and aesthetic value. This relationship might reflect a more fundamental cousin of the appropriateness question: what I call here the *in virtue of what* question.

Asking this *in virtue of what* question (*in virtue of what is it appropriate for ethical value to affect aesthetic value?*) gets at whether or not there is a deep-rooted metaphysical relationship between ethical value and aesthetic value. A metaphysical answer to the appropriateness question seems to be consistently assumed within the literature, as I have just argued. But,

making such a relationship explicit as opposed to implicit gives a more precise foundation from which to build the canonical discussion about appropriateness. With a more precise foundation, one that asserts a specific metaphysical relationship between what is ethical and what is aesthetic, we are better positioned to discuss the minutia of what constitutes an ethical demerit or merit within aesthetics. In other words, the canonical discussion can proceed without objection on these metaphysical grounds. So, if we were to answer this new *in virtue of what* appropriateness question (*in virtue of what is it appropriate for ethical value to affect aesthetic value?*) with a metaphysical answer, we can better inform the canonical discussion of appropriateness. Providing a potential candidate for this informative metaphysical relationship is the goal for this project.

#### *1.4.2 Stepping back from value*

Before proceeding to the positive argument for my position here, I ought to defend some of the ways in which I deviate from the canonical discussion. Most discussions about this relationship between moral domains and aesthetic domains occurs by talking about two kinds of value: ethical and aesthetic. The canonical discussion is concerned with the positive or negative ethical value associated with a particular work of art and how that value affects the overall aesthetic evaluation of that piece. There is a worry advanced by the autonomist position that different kinds of value are incommensurable with one another. If this incommensurability concern holds, it would result in aesthetic value and ethical value being distinct from one another. In that case, it does not seem immediately obvious (at best) or possible (at worst) that it is appropriate for ethical value to affect aesthetic value. These two kinds of value would be distinct from one another as well as being, in a sense, incomparable. The incommensurability concern motivates a further shift in my positive account presented here: that we might move

away from value. The *in virtue of what* question seems to require a metaphysical discussion, one that would be highly muddled by concerns of value. So, by stepping back from discussions of value, we might be able to get at the heart of the relationship between ethical domains and aesthetic domains, without a needless commitment to any value pluralism or metaethical position.

To further unpack this worry about value incommensurability, describing a metaphysical relationship between different kinds of value would presuppose a particular value structure. For instance, a pluralist about value might argue that different kinds of value are incommensurable with one another. In that case, I would align myself with the autonomist position, because it would be impossible for ethical value to affect aesthetic value. If I was a value monist, I might argue that aesthetic value and ethical value are not actually distinct from one another. In this case, there would be no need for this discussion, because the two kinds of value would collapse into one another.

No matter what my commitments about value are, a first order, content-based metaphysical discussion seems to be conceptually prior to any discussion about metaphysical relations between different kinds of value. For this reason, I step back from value here, so to speak. Instead of discussing how ethical value affects aesthetic value, I will address how ethical content affects aesthetic experience<sup>10</sup> (which is comprised of content). I do not seek to address how different kinds of value affect one another, advance any particular value structure, or commit myself to any metaethical position. Instead, I advance a position that describes the way different

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<sup>10</sup> I adopt here Noel Carroll's disjunctive set of sufficient conditions for an aesthetic experience, under which "one is having an aesthetic experience of an artwork just in case one is attending with understanding to the formal properties and/or the expressive properties and/or the aesthetic properties and/or the reflexive relations of the aforesaid properties (or just one of them) of the artwork to the relevant spectator" (Carroll 2015, 172). I discuss this more in section 2.4.

kinds of content (ethical and aesthetic) are metaphysically related to one another. I advance an explanation here of how some ethical content comes to bear on the aesthetic experience of artworks.

To make this clearer, consider the following example. We can imagine some man (X) who stabs another man (Y). The act, X stabs Y, is a bit of content. The value of this content arises from the different moral lenses, explanations, or commitments one applies to this content. Even if the value of this claim is entailed by the mere propositional content “X stabs Y,” there is still a comprehensible piece of content which is separate from any evaluation (or value judgment) of that statement. So, here, by talking about content instead of value, we do not need commitments to how (or if) value is built or how different kinds of value interact with each other. I do not have to commit to “X stabs Y” as having a particular moral valence (as either moral or immoral). In this way, I can remain silent on this value problem, while still outlining a metaphysical discussion of aesthetic content and ethical content. Although this is obviously a departure from the way this relationship is discussed in the literature, I argue here that talking in terms of content makes explicit the unreflective presuppositions made by the figures discussed above.

So, we can now shift the appropriateness question to: *how is it appropriate for ethical content to affect aesthetic content (aesthetic experience)?* This allows space for a metaphysical discussion without the complications of value laden claims and the complicated metaphysics of value. However, this new question is still ambiguous as written. When asking how different kinds of content affect one another, the answer can be causal or mereological. A causal answer to this question would hold that ethical content has some kind of causal effect on aesthetic content. This causal story is ruled out by other commitments in Carroll, Gaut, and Eaton, as we saw above. For ethical content to be causally influential on aesthetic content, any aesthetic theory

would need to be highly subject-dependent<sup>11</sup>. For instance, remember back to the *Sopranos* example. If the ethical content of a given episode of the show causes some change in the aesthetic properties of that work of art, that cause seems to be indeterminate at best, random at worst, assuming that audience reactions are a part of the causal relata. This is because for some people like Karen, watching Tony Soprano curb-stomp an enemy causally detracts from the aesthetic experience severely. For others like Barb, they find the action to be excusable (or at most defensible). Demarcating between these two opposing reactions seems to require a corresponding explanation, and mere causation seems insufficient. In creating a causal story accommodating both these distinct responses to the same case, there needs to be some explanation as to why the same cause elicited different effects for Karen and Barb. If we want to avoid aesthetic particularism (which seems to be an underlying motivation for this line of inquiry), then it seems we need further metaphysical explanation.

So, we can slightly shift the appropriateness question again: *In virtue of what is it appropriate for ethical content to affect aesthetic content (aesthetic experience)?* Undoubtedly this is a different question from the canonical question but retains the spirit of the discussion. The answer to this more precise question will require a metaphysical answer, where the specific kind of relationship between ethical content and aesthetic experience is formulated explicitly. Therefore, the ultimate goal for this project is to make explicit the implicit presuppositions made within the canonical aesthetics discussion of appropriateness. The hope is that with a precise, metaphysical understanding of the relationship between ethical content and aesthetic experience, the canonical discussion proceeds without issue.

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<sup>11</sup> Here, subject is meant to refer to the audience observing and evaluating a work of art. The term object will refer to the artwork itself.

## CHAPTER 2

### 2.1 Introduction

In Chapter 1, I reviewed some of the aesthetics literature which seeks an answer to the *appropriateness question*. I first discussed the way that different authors have answered the appropriateness question, which asks, “*how is it appropriate for ethical value to affect an aesthetic evaluation?*” The literature typically provides an answer to the appropriateness question in terms of how values interact with one another. So, this answer is usually formulated in a normative sense, where different kinds of values (ethical and aesthetic) interact with and affect one another. Here, I talk in terms of content, in order to show why *ex hypothesi* a metaphysical relationship does exist between ethical content<sup>12</sup> and aesthetic experience. After establishing this foundational metaphysical relationship, the canonical discussion can proceed without presupposition. So, here, I hope to provide a descriptive, metaphysical answer to the appropriateness question, which will describe *in virtue of what* it is appropriate for ethical content to affect an aesthetic experience.

In this chapter, I will give a two-step argument for a metaphysical relationship between ethical content and aesthetic experience which is conditional on ethical content being aesthetically relevant and narrative being present. Simply, when a narrative exists (even an imagined narrative) and aesthetically relevant moral content<sup>13</sup> is present, then a metaphysical relationship will exist between ethical content and aesthetic experience. First, I establish an

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<sup>12</sup> Again, I am understanding ethical content as some content which is ethical by nature. Here ethical content is meant to capture both explicit propositions and emotive responses to a work of art. I discuss this more in depth in section 1.4.2. This is hopefully an agnostic enough understanding of moral content such that I do not have to commit to any particular metaethical stance.

<sup>13</sup> To be explicit I will be using ethical content and moral content interchangeably throughout. See footnote 2 for more on this.

understanding of narrative in section 2, borrowed from David Velleman. I argue that philosophical accounts of imagination can help explain attributing a narrative structure to static works of art. Then, in section 3, I argue that there is an inherence relationship between ethical content and narrative content. In section 4, I use Noel Carroll's content approach to aesthetic experience to argue aesthetic experience supervenes on narrative content. Ultimately, I argue that because narrative is *a feature* of aesthetic experience and further because ethical content is *a feature* of narrative, then there is some general metaphysical relationship between ethical content and aesthetic experience.

## **2.2 Understanding narrative**

In order for the two-part argument to hold, I first need to provide a robust discussion of the concept of narrative. Because the proposed relationship between ethical content and aesthetic experience requires narrative, it is necessary to disambiguate that concept here. Discussions about narrative are usually had in reference to literature. Consider the narrative of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. As an audience member of *Huck Finn* (i.e. someone reading the novel), you're in a good position to intuitively grasp the corresponding narrative. As you turn from page to page, a story is built. It's a story about emancipation from society, for Huck, and for Jim, emancipation from slavery (Twain 1965). The novel has a clear narrative: a progression of events for the audience to access and evaluate. Here, I want to talk about the concept of a narrative and how it might be applied to cases other than the obvious literary ones, like *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

Simply, the narrative of a work of art can be understood as the underlying story or history. This narrative history can take many different forms with regard to temporality and correspondence with real-world events—they can be sequential, factual, and/or fictional. In each

respective case (e.g. a sequential narrative versus a fictional narrative), there are not significant differences in the way narrative is treated under this account. Further, I am not convinced that the argument turns on a particular conception of narrative. For instance, Peter Brooks' distinction between plot and narrative, where narrative requires a level of cognitive understanding above mere plot devices would also likely be compatible with this account, although it would require deeper commitment to narrative being cognitive than I would like to argue for here<sup>14</sup> (Brooks 1984). For the purposes of my discussion, I will adopt David Velleman's account of narrative. As I will unpack later, Velleman's account of narrative focuses particularly on the arousal of emotions, which works well with this project. Then, after describing narrative, I will show that narrative is not only found in literature or film, but can also be present in static representational artworks, which I see as an upshot of what is presented here. I will finish up this section with a discussion of how imaginative simulation helps to fill out the concept of narrative as I understand it here.

David Velleman argues that narrative recounts events and emotional cadences. When a narrative is present, there must be (1) successive recounted events and (2) the ability to initiate and resolve these emotional cadences (Velleman 2003, 18). Emotional cadences, as Velleman understands them, are cycles of emotional tension and relaxation that hold together the story (Ibid., 13). An emotional cadence is simply the characteristic way that emotive states wax and wane. Instead of narrative cohesion arising out of temporal succession or causation, cohesion arises out of the emotional cadences experienced. He uses the analogy of a clock to make this point clearer, where tensions created by the narrative are perceived as a *tick* and the relaxation of this tension is the *tock* that the audience seeks, a clear resolution to the tension (Ibid.). Although

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<sup>14</sup> I don't have the space to talk about all of the accounts of narrative but for more discussion of the concept see (Carroll 2001, 119-20), (Danto 1986), or (Brooks 1984).

Velleman talks about narrative in the context of literary works, the same framework can be applied to film and static representational artworks. The extension of narrative concepts to film seems to be the most natural, so I will address it first.

Consider a classic film, the 2005 rendition of *Pride and Prejudice*, directed by Joe Wright. This movie is an adaptation of the classic Jane Austen novel, which Velleman would agree has a clear narrative. In both the film and novel, we follow the Bennet sisters on their search for love and marriage in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Austen 2004; Moggach 2005). The journey of the main character, Elizabeth “Lizzie” Bennet, throughout this film most clearly exemplifies a narrative. Over time, we see Lizzie’s relationship with Mr. Darcy become increasingly tenuous, as she learns conflicting information about Darcy. After finding out that it was Mr. Darcy who kept her sister from entering into a seemingly happy marriage, we have the clearest example of emotional cadence begin. This *tick*, creates tension in the audience, as they struggle with what the proper emotive response is to the character of Mr. Darcy. In an emotional and grand conclusion, the audience finally gets the *tock*, or relief they seek. Mr. Darcy admits his love for Lizzie, and goes out of his way to right his wrongdoings toward the Bennet family (*Ibid.*). The resolution here is satisfying for the audience, as it resolves the main instance of tension within the film.

This example is a particularly interesting case because it is a film adaptation of a novel. Velleman would most likely grant that Jane Austen’s novel, *Pride and Prejudice* is an example of narrative. The only substantial difference between the novel and film adaptation is the medium through which it is being conveyed. It would be ridiculous that the same story can’t be narratively understood solely because of its medium. We might think that the *Pride and Prejudice* film inherits the corresponding narrative from the literary work it was recreated from. However, we shouldn’t understand film as only *inheriting* narrative from a corresponding

literary work. For instance, the critically acclaimed movie, *Parasite* also has a clear narrative structure. After its box office success, the film was adapted into a graphic novel. It is not the case that *Parasite* only became a narrative work when it was adapted into a graphic novel, but instead had a narrative in its cinematic form (*Parasite* 2019). Thus, it is clear that narrative can be present in cinematic projects<sup>15</sup>. Film, though, might seem to be too simplistic of an example—it's a more controversial claim to say that static works of art, like paintings, can demonstrate these same narrative features. I argue here, though, that such a case can be made for narrative appearing in static works of art.

Let's look at Aaron Douglas' famous painting, *Into Bondage* (1936, National Gallery of Art). In this painting, Douglas shows a group of African people being bound for enslavement in the Americas. The main focal point for the piece is a man with his head turned toward a shining star in the sky. In order to see if narrative is present in this static case, let's take the conditions Velleman sets out for narrative one at a time. First, recounting events as to make a story. Here in Douglas' *Into Bondage*, we see in the forefront a wooded area and a procession towards the sea where ships sail on the harbor. Douglas seems to use perspective and depth to convey succession. It is clear that movement is occurring, and the audience is able to abstract forward to the events that are likely to follow. Douglas uses space (the separation of foreground and background) to mimic a temporal relation, despite the fact that this is non-obviously temporal. The successive events are not literally depicted in the painting itself, but the audience is able to anticipate what will likely happen next. This abstraction is an instance of imaginative simulation. Without imagination or pretense, the audience is met with the synchronic depiction of enslaved persons being taken from their homeland. But, with a simple exercise of one's imagination, we

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<sup>15</sup> It seems important to point out that this is relatively uncontroversial claim. For discussions of this see (Carroll 2010).

can extrapolate lives and stories forward and backward for each of the figures depicted.

What this demonstrates is that succession can be built by either the artist themselves (via the work of art itself temporally<sup>16</sup>) or the audience (through imagination). When the narrative is not obviously constructed by the artist, I argue that the audience *seeks* to create a cohesive narrative to make sense of the work in front of them and will use imagination or pretense to satisfy this. Here, imagination should be understood as “the capacity that underpins our ability to simulate perspectives that differ from the one available to us through experience” (Liao 2011, 79). I’m not committed to understanding imagination for aesthetic purposes as creative or recreative imagination (from Liao), only that “an important part of our engagement [with aesthetic experiences] is imagining the content of the narratives” (Ibid., 84). For instance, if a short film was shown where a woman walks through a grocery store hastily, grabbing items off the shelf with urgency, the audience might conjure up imagined backstories or explanations as to why she is acting in such a way. It may be the case that she is late for something, was given notice of a dinner party last minute, or that her partner got the wrong ingredients for the meal. We might think of this as the audience projecting facts about their own individual lives onto the incomplete story in order to create one, cohesive narrative.

Similar to the imagined context from the grocery story example, we can also create an imagined understanding of the narrative of *Into Bondage*, where we might imagine the main figure’s capture and horrific enslavement. With this act of imagination by the audience into the successive events that led up to what is being represented in *Into Bondage* as well as what might occur afterward, we begin to see a cohesive story form, being told through succession. This

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<sup>16</sup> It also should be noted that the less controversial case of narrative in film can also rely on imaginative reconstruction to develop a cohesive story. Cases like the film (*Memento* 2001) or (*Irreversible* 2002) both require audience imagination to piece together the narratives as they are not literally depicted.

cohesion does not come from the author establishing a causal link between events. So, it is *not* the case that Aaron Douglas imbued *Into Bondage* with strict causal chain between the African men and women being bound for enslavement that unify the work into a single, cohesive narrative. But instead, the cohesive narrative arises out of (1) successive events, which can be filled in by imagination and (2) emotional cadences that connect them. So, let's look at the second component, the ability to imitate and resolve emotional cadences.

Emotional cadence, here, is a bit trickier to understand than in the non-static cases like *Pride and Prejudice* and *Parasite*. But *Into Bondage*, especially when seriously attended to, can give similar tension and relief states that Velleman requires. He adopts De Sousa's four characteristic stages of affective responses<sup>17</sup>, which together characterize Velleman's understanding of emotional cadence in narrative. First, there is an arousal of emotion by characteristic conditions. In order to have these emotions aroused in the audience, it is necessary that the audience pays careful attention to *different aspects* of the painting. In the foreground of the painting we see a man gazing at a bright star while in shackles. Looking across the background and scanning the painting, the eyes are drawn to the brightly colored shackles on the enslaved persons shown, which might elicit a strong emotional response of fear or anger in the audience. Second, there will be characteristic physiological symptoms. This might arise in different characteristic ways, some individuals may cry, some may have accelerated heartbeats, or that classic 'lump in the throat' feeling. This is a sign that emotive tension has been established, it is the *tick* of emotional tension. Next, an emotional cadence requires a motivational disposition toward occasionally deliberate behaviors<sup>18</sup>. For *Into Bondage*, this disposition might be instantiated in a variety of

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<sup>17</sup> For De Sousa's discussion of the stages of affective response see (De Sousa 1984) and (De Sousa 1990).

<sup>18</sup> However, it should be noted that these behaviors do not have to be deliberate. Although these motivational dispositions can sometimes happen automatically, they can also be directly controlled through voluntary action. One

different ways, depending on the psychological facts about the observer.

Finally, there must be a characteristic extinction of emotion, the *tock* of emotional tension. As I said before, *Into Bondage* can be interpreted to give the audience feelings of sadness, anger, or pain. This painting is undoubtedly powerful, and the emotional resolution to the painting is not the extinction of emotion, but the decay of the more immediate emotions, leaving the audience with a feeling of reverence or grief<sup>19</sup>. Velleman asserts that the reason why some emotions remain despite emotional resolution is that some emotions contain their emotional antecedent. Emotions such as disappointment and grief presuppose a prior affect<sup>20</sup> (having been hoped for and having been loved, respectively). Other emotions like anger and fear are more simple, Velleman says, because they are usually the initiators of this emotive process. Nonetheless, once these emotions decay or are extinguished, the audience can be sure an emotional cadence has been achieved.

*Into Bondage* serves as a good test case to show that narrative can be present in static, representational artworks. When a member of the audience imagines her own narrative (or more commonly imagines the bits and pieces needed to fill in a cohesive narrative), she holds certain facts constant and counterfactually constructs the resulting narrative<sup>21</sup>. So, the imagined narratives are “constrained with respect to what is held constant” (Liao 2011, 88). The resulting narrative gives rise to different emotions in the audience. These emotional responses guide and

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important thing to note here is that, while these dispositions are a necessary part of the emotional cadence, Velleman doesn't require the individual to follow through by acting on these dispositions.

<sup>19</sup> Although some kinds mental states will remain past decay (such as grief, disappointment, etc.), Velleman here focuses on the Aristotelian understanding of *kartharsis*, or resolution to emotive states.

<sup>20</sup> Although this distinction is not essential to the argument here, it might serve helpful to highlight why Velleman allows for some emotive states to persist after *kartharsis*.

<sup>21</sup> Liao and Gendler refer to this as “counterfactual reasoning” (Liao 2011, 88). In this sense, an audience member holds some set of facts constant (e.g. the facts of what a work of art strictly depicts) and “let[s] things run” (*Ibid.*).

ground the emotional cadences the audience experiences, which brings cohesion to a narrative. So, in cases where there is not a cohesive, pre-constructed narrative for a representational work of art, the audience can imagine a narrative for the artist<sup>22</sup>. This introspective act of imagination helps to understand why a strictly constructed narrative originating from the artist is unnecessary to assert that moral content inheres in narrative.

However, some works of art are less clearly story-telling narratives. We might think of some abstract film or painting that does not seem to have a clear narrative, like a Rothko. These sorts of cases do not serve as a defeating objection to what is presented here because narrative does not have to be present in every artwork. A Rothko's being non-narrative does not undermine the presence of a narrative in other, more obvious static cases. Instead, my position here is very qualified. Velleman's account merely helps us understand how narrative is present in at least some of these static cases. It is not my position to argue for a narrative being present in all static works of art. So, in this section, I've argued that David Velleman's understanding of narrative can be extended to more kinds of media than he explicitly suggests. I've shown that film and some static representational artworks can deploy narrative, either through careful attention to the work or through imagination. Now that I've established that narrative can be present in non-literary cases, I will argue in the next section that narrative and ethical content are metaphysically related to each other through inherence.

### **2.3 Narrative and ethical content**

This section will look at the relationship between narrative and ethical content. First, I will take a look at Gaut's relevancy conditions for moral import and show how these relevancy

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<sup>22</sup> Imagination or acts of pretense also occur when motivational information is withheld from a narrative. Audiences sometimes fill in minor details or motivational speculations about character's mental states or desires in order to create a cohesive narrative.

conditions serve as a filter for what ethical content is influential on narrative. Then, I will argue that the relationship between narrative and ethical content is that of inherence. Throughout, I will discuss the case of *The Rape of Europa* and how imagination can help us to understand more clearly the inherence relation at play.

The case of Titian's *The Rape of Europa* is unique because the ethical qualms that most historians have with the piece come not from what the painting strictly depicts, but instead from *how* Titian depicts Europa's abduction (1560, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum). The painting is not obviously vulgar, aggressive, or immoral. When looking at the work of art, there is no explicit signaling that an assault will occur shortly after the abduction being depicted. A.W. Eaton, specifically, discusses the particulars of this painting in her paper, *Where Ethics and Aesthetics Meet: Titian's Rape of Europa*. Eaton notes that although the painting has indications that an assault will occur (the ominous storm clouds, the large fish swimming by the bull, and Europa's precarious posture on the bull's back), the viewer is spared of the more gruesome images that could have been painted to depict this myth. Further, she argues that Titian eroticizes the rape, using different particular features of the work such as Europa's placement on the bull, the color scheme, etc. (Eaton 2003, 162). For instance, Europa's face does not immediately convey a feeling of fear, distress, or pain. Instead, she looks excited and triumphant. These particular artistic choices, the ways in which Titian chose to represent Europa's abduction are what in particular make this artwork immoral. So, a painting of the same scene, depicted from a different perspective that did not eroticize Europa's rape, might not be ethically marred in the same way as Titian's painting. For this reason, the particulars of Titian's *Rape of Europa* serve as a great test case for looking at the connection between ethical content and aesthetic experience in static works of art.

Immediately a question arises of whether or not Titian's morally questionable depiction of this event is even relevant to our narrative understanding of the piece as a whole. So, let's turn to Berys Gaut's relevancy conditions on moral import. These relevancy conditions determine when moral content is importable into aesthetic contexts and when this content bears on the aesthetic value of the work as a whole<sup>23</sup>. The label of what is ethical (or moral) must be applied only to other-regarding actions, feelings and motives that are not merely instrumental concerns (Gaut 2007, 45-6). These other-regarding actions, feelings, and motives must be deployed by the use of artistic means, not merely by style of the piece (abstract, representational, cubist, etc.) or how the artist regards the subject (Ibid., 85). So, it wouldn't simply be enough for Titian to himself have a morally defective opinion or perspective on rape. The work of art itself must communicate that defective perspective through its content. Gaut talks about how artists may use light, brushstrokes, pictorial construction, and a plethora of other strategies to dispense a moral understanding of the work itself. These insights to artistic means do not have to be explicitly stated or conveyed, but should be integrated into the particulars of that work of art (Gaut 2007, 87).

In the case of *The Rape of Europa*, the way some moral content passes relevancy conditions is by convincing viewers, through artistic means, to affectively respond in a particular way to the representation of Europa and the events she must endure. So, more specifically, the particular look on Europa's face could give the impression that she sought or took pleasure in her own abduction. Our regard for Europa as a character in this painting cannot be instrumentally concerning, but should elicit a sympathetic response in viewers who understand the associated narrative. In this way, it seems that the presence of ethical content is necessarily referential to the

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<sup>23</sup> Although Gaut's discussion is about moral value as opposed to content, his conditions on relevance are still useful here even though this discussion is not about value.

narrative, when there is a narrative to reference. The moral content from the work of art is, in a way, intelligible *because* of the narrative. This reference, I will argue, is a marker that the relationship between ethical content and narrative is inherence.

### 2.3.2 *Inherence generally*

Inherence is a bit of a mysterious relation between any two relata. We can think of it most simply as predication, where X inheres in Y just in case X is predicated of Y. In a proposition, when a predicate is predicated of some subject, the predicate is contained within the subject term. This predication relation requires a kind of reciprocal dependence, where the predicate is dependent on the instantiation of the subject and the subject is similarly dependent on the instantiation of the predicate. In this way, inherence is a robust kind of particular property attribution, rather than a more general part-whole relation. It requires two particulars like a statue and the height of that statue, rather than general concepts like artworks and size<sup>24</sup>. An inherence relation can therefore hold between any particular metaphysical component relata. Let me explain this relation below in more simple terms.

For example: consider a particular statue, let's say Michelangelo's *David* (1501, Accademia Gallery Of Florence). The height of *David* is predicated of the *David* statue. In order to have a physically real statue, *David* must be a certain height. Let's say *David* is 6 feet tall, for the sake of the example. Of course, it is not necessary that *David* have a particular height of 6 ft tall, but it does have to have some determinate height. In order for the statue to be a real instantiation in the physical world, it has to have some determinant height, so the height cannot be removed from our understanding of a physically real statue. What I mean here is that height is

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<sup>24</sup> I don't find it necessary to explain at length why inherence must hold between particulars rather than general concepts. In short, if something is predicated of some general concept (or as Pelletier calls them, mass terms) that inherence relation will suffer from indeterminacy, which defeats the purpose of inherence. For a longer discussion of why inherence cannot hold between general concepts and must refer to particulars, see (Pelletier 2007).

integral to the statue's identity, and so it cannot be separated from the identity of the statue as a whole. It is, in some ways, internal to the statue itself. The statue is dependent on the height of the statue, because you cannot have a physical object without some determinate height for that object.

Alternatively, the height of *David* is dependent on the statue itself. It is not possible to just have '6 feet tall' existing without some subject for that height to describe as being 6 feet tall. We cannot understand height as merely a proper part of the statue, because we cannot neatly remove the height from the 'whole,' or the statue, like we could if the relation was merely a part-whole relationship. There is a 2-way, mutual dependence between the height of the statue and the statue itself. Both the height and the statue itself are dependent on each other, there cannot be a height without a statue and there cannot be a physical statue without a determinate height. So, we can think of inherence similarly—when X inheres in Y, there is a reciprocal dependence where X becomes *internal* to Y. I will argue in the next section that this is the best way to understand the relationship between ethical content and narrative.

### *2.3.3 Ethical content inheres in narrative*

So, we might formulate the relationship between ethical content and narrative as an inherence relation. In that case, ethical content inheres in a given narrative for a work of art. Ethical content and narrative are therefore reciprocally dependent on one another, and further dependent on the particular ethical content and particular narrative within the artwork. To put this in terms of property attribution, ethical content is a property of a given narrative, but is not separable from the narrative. Just as you cannot have redness without a thing that is red, you cannot have content without narrative. Narrative does not have to be ethical, but it does have to have some content, and sometimes this content is ethical. This ethical content cannot exist on its

own, it has to inhere in something to contextualize it. So, this is the same kind of reciprocal dependence discussed above. Just as the statue does not have to be 6 feet tall in particular, the narrative does not have to be ethical, although it can be. Any narrative has determinate content, and in some cases that content is moral. When there is ethical content within a narrative, it is dependent on narrative for context, and the narrative is dependent on that ethical content to be instantiated as a narrative.

Digging deeper into the particular relationship between ethical content and narrative, there are still relevancy conditions that guide whether or not ethical content is relevant to, and therefore inhering in, narrative. For this, we can turn back to Gaut's relevancy conditions on ethical content. Relevant ethical content must be defined in terms of other-regarding actions, feelings, and motives that are deployed by the use of artistic means, not merely by style of the piece or how the artist regards the subject<sup>25</sup> (Gaut 2007, 85). This ethical content is then, in turn, comprised of a series of events within the narrative, which are tied together by emotional cadences. So, the way that moral content inheres in narrative content is with successive events which comprise the ethical content, which in turn are tied together by the emotional cadence which elicits a specific response in the audience, a response which is specifically moral in nature<sup>26</sup>. When this moral emotive response triggers an emotional cadence, we can assume that a narrative is present. This, hopefully, shows the 2-way dependence at play between ethical content and narrative. A narrative needs content (and sometimes that content is ethical) and

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<sup>25</sup> There will obviously be borderline cases which press on these relevancy conditions. But, since I am adopting Gaut's relevancy conditions, any critiques of these conditions are not mine to answer to.

<sup>26</sup> As before, I don't mean 'moral' to be a positive value-claim. Instead, I mean moral as in relating to an ethical domain. A moral response, then, could be one of approval or disapproval. By 'moral in nature' I merely mean that the response is constituted by an emotive reaction to some moral content. I do not wish for this to commit me to any metaethical position in particular. I am not claiming that the ethical content is nothing over and above this emotive response, but mere that this ethical emotive response is characteristic of relevant ethical content within a work of art.

ethical content needs a narrative to contextualize it. Thus, an inherence relation holds when (1) the ethical content is aesthetically relevant under Gaut's conditions and (2) a narrative is present under Velleman's account.

A simple case might round out this discussion nicely. We can consider Caravaggio's *Judith Beheading Holofernes* (1602, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica). The painting depicts a woman, Judith, plunging a sword into the neck of a man, Holofernes. The biblical story the painting depicts is not so well known that any layperson would immediately be aware of the narrative, though some may immediately know the story. The empathetic feeling one might have towards either Judith or Holofernes is dependent on the narrative, which is constructed by the audience and based in part on their familiarity with the biblical story<sup>27</sup>. Some people may take this painting to depict the merciless killing of a man by a villain, and experience emotional cadences characterized by feelings of disgust, frustration, or disturbance in response to this imagined narrative. These responses are called for insofar as the painting is graphic, and they do not possess knowledge of the narrative in any other context. The ethical content one takes to be a part of this painting, then, wholly depends on the knowledge (or lack thereof) of the associated narrative of the piece.

Others, though, may be acquainted with the biblical story of Judith, a young widow who befriends and then kills Holofernes in order to save her people from invasion and likely death. This narrative calls for different emotional cadences characterized by feelings of pride, retribution, or justice. With this associated narrative, it seems the painting has different ethical content, although some content will remain the same (such as Judith plunging a sword into

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<sup>27</sup> In this way, it might be argued that all instances of narrative require some form of imagination, where the audience imagines the facts against their own human experience in order to arrive at some counterfactual conclusion that *had* Europa been a metaphysically real person, *then* the emotional cadences felt by the audience when engaging with this work of art are appropriate.

Holofernes). However, this ethical content is given different context depending on the narrative, with this biblical narrative, we might consider Judith to be a kind of hero. So, both of these narratives for the same work of art call for distinctly different moral responses to the painting, The ethical content and associated narrative are mutually dependent on one another. So, we can understand moral content as being predicated of, or inhering in, whatever narrative the audience associates with the work.

Let's turn back to the case of Titian's *The Rape of Europa* to drive home this point about inherence. The painting has some determinate amount of ethical content in virtue of the particulars of that painting. That ethical content is relevant to the artwork because it conveys a defective, other-regarding attitude towards sexual assault, namely that Titian eroticizes rape. This defective attitude is relevant because it is deployed through his artistic means (the perspective, color scheme, etc.) and so is inseparable from the narrative of the work. This is because in order to understand the narrative as depicting an erotic scene, we must reference the colors and stylistic elements employed by the artist. This requires both the metaphysical point about inherence and an epistemic point as well. In order to understand and make sense of the ethical critiques of the painting, we must be acquainted with the myth. We must have some belief about the narrative content in order to understand how the color scheme used in the painting can be seen as ethically defective.

We might think that a less dreamy or seductive depiction of this myth wouldn't necessarily call for the same kind of response from the audience. This is because a different background narrative wouldn't demand that the audience shares the attitude of eroticizing rape. A different depiction of the same event might call for the audience to denounce Zeus' behavior, making the work less morally problematic. These differing appropriate reactions to the piece arise from the

particulars of the painting, so a differing attitude towards assault is insufficient to change the ethical content of the *Rape of Europa*. Eaton discusses this kind of emotive response extensively, but does not explicitly attribute the response to a narrative<sup>28</sup> (Eaton 2003). Narrative, though, is an important addition to Eaton's understanding because of the possibility of audience-imagined narratives. As Eaton emphasizes, some individuals might have inappropriate responses to works of art like Titian's *Rape of Europa* (Eaton 2003, 177). These inappropriate responses are a signal that ethical content and narrative are not deterministically instantiated in the audience, they are clearly variant.

These varying moral intuitions about the painting are traceable to different agent-dependent factors, like how they understand the narrative or whether or not they share the necessary moral intuitions<sup>29</sup>. In any case, moral content is dependent on narrative content for context, substantiation, and sometimes imagination such that the audience can cultivate a proper emotive response to the work in front of them. In this way, the moral content within a work of art is internal to, and is in a way inseparable from, its narrative. You cannot have intelligible and informative moral content without a contextual referent (narrative).

In this section, I argued that aesthetically relevant moral content inheres in narrative. I do this first by showing that these characteristically moral emotive responses pass Gaut's relevancy conditions. Then, I give an overview of what inherence is and why it is the best way of understanding the relation between moral content and narrative. I leaned heavily on Velleman's

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<sup>28</sup> Although Eaton doesn't explicitly attribute the response to a narrative, one could make the case that she is only able to discuss the kind of emotive response she does because she is already construing the painting as a narrative. Nothing serious hinges on interpreting Eaton that way, but on a charitable interpretation of that piece, what is said here is completely compatible with Eaton's argument.

<sup>29</sup> It is not the purpose of this project to assert that there is one correct interpretation of the narrative of a work of art, or if a specific narrative understanding is required to properly evaluate the work of art. The issue of moral realism within aesthetic cases is outside the scope of this project. Here, the focus is on establishing the fact that all aesthetically relevant moral content inheres in the corresponding narrative structures, when that narrative is present.

understanding of narrative, and show that acts of imagination of the kind we established in section 2.1 can explain differing interpretations of the moral content for a work of art. Finally, I reinforce the fact that ethical content and narrative are mutually dependent on one another. In the next section, I will argue that narrative is supervened on by aesthetic experience and discuss some of the reasons why we must understand the relationship that way.

## **2.4 Narrative content and aesthetic experience**

Now, with a solid understanding of how moral content inheres in narrative, we ought to also understand how narrative content relates to aesthetic experience. As we established in chapter 1 of this project, there are a multitude of ways to understand what an aesthetic experience is. Here, I find it most helpful to adopt Noel Carroll's infinite disjunctive approach to aesthetic experience. First, I argue that narrative ought to be understood as a formal property<sup>30</sup> (as opposed to an expressive property or aesthetic property) of aesthetic experience. Then, I'll highlight a worry about emergence. To accommodate emergence, I argue that the relationship between properties of aesthetic experience and the aesthetic experience as a whole ought to be supervenience. Then, I end this section with a brief discussion with some potential objections to this interpretation of Carroll.

Carroll holds that there is an infinitely large set of actual or hypothetical elements to aesthetic experience (Carroll 2015, 172). He does not wish to make an exhaustive list of the potential candidates for the disjunctive elements of aesthetic experience. That being said, he puts forward four candidates for this disjunctive statement; he says: "one is having an aesthetic experience of

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<sup>30</sup> Here I'm adopting Noel Carroll's definition of formal property. Carroll says that "form facilitates function" (Carroll 2015, p 177). A formal property, then, should be understood as a feature that facilitates the function of the work of art. In this way, paint colors are formal properties of a painting insofar as the paint color facilitates the intended function of that painting, which is to provide a certain kind of aesthetic experience, whether that be dreamy, hellish, or what have you.

an artwork just in case one is attending with understanding to the formal properties and/or the expressive properties and/or the aesthetic properties and/or reflective relations of the aforesaid properties” (*Ibid.*). The first thing to note here is that these are inclusive disjuncts, which means that as few as one or as many as all of these conditions are sufficient for aesthetic experience. But, also, that there are two distinct kinds of properties within this disjunction. The first three proposed kinds of properties in the disjunct are formal, expressive, and aesthetic properties. Formal properties relate to the form of the art (brush strokes, paint color, etc.). Expressive properties qualitatively capture what the painting depicts or seeks to convey. Aesthetic properties, according to Carroll “denote qualities like brittleness or garishness that, although not expressive properties, are like them in that they refer to the qualitative dimensions of artworks” (Carroll 2015, 171). These property-types all seem like normal candidates for a constitutive understanding of aesthetic experience. But, the final candidate, reflexive relations of the aforesaid properties, appears to be different in kind than the others. I understand at least some *reflexive relations of the aforesaid properties* to be referring to the emergent properties of the experience. There will be more on this later, but for now, it is important to signpost that one of these disjuncts references a *reflexive relation* of the other three kinds of properties proposed.

This inclusive disjunction is incredibly careful, I hope to be equally as careful in the following few paragraphs. Here, I don’t wish to assert anything over the following: when narrative is present within a work of art, narrative is a formal property of that work of art. The aesthetic experience supervenes on the formal properties of the work, along with the other kinds of properties present. Carroll says these disjuncts are “ways in which the purposes of the artworks are articulated or embodied” (Carroll 2015, 174). It seems natural to assert that narrative is a *way* the purpose of a work of art is articulated or embodied, e.g. through emotional

cadences and successive events. Each unique pairing or omission of properties, including the presence and content of a narrative, come together as parts to build the larger aesthetic experience (Ibid, 171). So, we might think that there is some kind of part-whole relation here, although beyond characterizing the relation between aesthetic experience and its elements as disjunctive, we might remember that Carroll does not give an explicit metaphysical candidate. Carroll does maintain that the relation here is *not* constitution. This is because he does not believe that there is *merely* a part-whole relation between properties and experience. If the relationship between the different parts of an aesthetic experience were merely constitution, it seems the experience would be reducible to its parts. But, there is still a sense in which the aesthetic experience is emergent from its requisite parts.

Consider, for example, the Sistine Chapel. When you observe this work of art, you appreciate a certain set of facts about the formal, expressive, and aesthetic properties of the intricate frescos on the ceiling that build the experience. This arguably includes a narrative and its moral content. Nevertheless, knowing descriptive information about these kinds of properties will not include the experience, or the unique properties that emerge, when these properties are unified into one experience. Mere understanding of the aesthetic parts that create the experiences pales in comparison to the actual, lived aesthetic experience of standing within the chapel looking upwards at the ceiling. Consider some person, Tom, who can attend to all of the formal properties of the Sistine Chapel. Tom can take note of the perspective, proportion, color scheme, technique, etc. But, Tom falls prey to a reductionist understanding of the Sistine Chapel, like Danto's Testadura. Arthur Danto discusses a test case in *The Artworld*, where a man, Testadura, cannot see the artistic difference between a sculpture of a bed and an actual bed. Danto sees this as indicative of a failure to understand the sculpture as an artwork, like failing to see a paint

splatter as more than a paint splatter. He sees the paint as merely paint and the artwork as merely a bed. Therefore, this Testadura case is meant to show that without theory to situate something as art, Testadura will still mistake art for reality. So, much like Testadura, Tom only sees these “sticks as sticks” (Danto 1964, 579). Tom doesn’t get the awe-inspiring feeling that many people report when experiencing the Sistine Chapel. In this important way, by only attending to the formal properties of the work of art, Tom has failed to actually have an aesthetic experience of the Sistine Chapel. It seems to be the case that there is something gained by the audience by experiencing Michelangelo’s frescos in person that cannot be achieved merely by identifying the formal, expressive and aesthetic properties. Some new properties seem to emerge. This emergence, or *something over and above*-ness, is an important facet of the relation between these disjunctive parts and aesthetic experience, respectively. Because there seems to be a unique over and above-ness to the parts of an experience, aesthetic experience must possess some property that its parts do not. This leads me to believe that the right way of characterizing the ontological relation at play here is supervenience.

Most simply, supervenience is a metaphysical relation where a change in the properties being supervened on will necessitate a change in the supervening properties, but not necessarily vice versa. Here, I have in mind a kind of weak supervenience. Weak supervenience holds that when an aesthetic experience, E, supervenes on some artwork, A, if A has some property X, then there is some property Y in E such that Y contains X, and everything that has Y has X (Leuenberger 2008, 750). The nuance here comes from discussing individual kinds and properties. A stronger sense of supervenience requires a modal claim about nearby possible worlds, whereas weak supervenience holds between particulars in the same world<sup>31</sup>. Because this supervenience claim

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<sup>31</sup> For a more nuanced discussion of supervenience generally see (Leuenberger 2008).

is limited to individual works of art and the experiences of those particular works, a weak supervenience relation is sufficient. Think about this in terms of the *emergence* of aesthetic experience. If any of the disjunctive facts were changed (like, for example, if Michelangelo had depicted God as a female) the *experience* of the work would necessarily be changed because of that artistic choice<sup>32</sup>. But, if the experience changed (like, for instance, if it was a particularly stormy day out and the lights went off in the chapel, giving it a kind of haunting impression on the audience) it is not necessarily the case that any properties *of the work of art* changed. A change in the experience might occur because some of the emergent properties have changed, like, in this case, the circumstances surrounding attending to the frescos. This highlights the important asymmetry between this infinite set of disjunctive properties and the aesthetic experience itself.

An example at this point might be helpful. Consider the disjunctive set of aesthetic properties for Michelangelo's *The Creation of Adam* (a part of the Sistine Chapel's intricate ceiling) (1512, *Musei Vaticani*, Sistine Chapel): {a, b, c, d, . . . N}. All of these properties contribute to, in other words build, the experience looking at *The Creation of Adam*. But, there is also something unique about the experience in itself that you cannot get from the facts about the disjunctive set. So, the properties we can attribute to the experience itself would be the set of properties for the painting as well as the emergent properties that arise from evaluating the work of art as a whole. This would be the conjunction of the original properties of the piece and a new set of emergent properties: {a, b, c, d, . . .} & {α, β, γ, . . .}. Here, the second set of properties are ones that

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<sup>32</sup> Of course, there is a kind of demarcation problem that arises out of this claim. For instance, if the change was more trivial (e.g. if Michelangelo used a brush with one fewer bristle or something just as seemingly inconsequential) it wouldn't intuitively make a difference in the overall experience. There will always be these borderline cases with any medium. Because we are talking about experience here, in order to change the experience the property-change would need to be a noticeable difference, so it would need to be past the threshold of noticeable human perception to be significant.

emerge from the specific experience of the viewers. Any change, though, in the initial set of aesthetic properties will cause a change in the experience as a whole. For instance consider a case where two works of art have nearly identical sets of aesthetic properties: Painting 1: {a, b, c, d, . . .} and Painting 2: {a, c, d, . . .}. The omission of property b in the second painting will necessitate a numerically different work of art and thereby a different experience. But, a change in any of the emergent properties does not necessitate a change in the set of other properties (formal, expressive, aesthetic, etc.). In short, the disjunctive set of properties (formal, expressive, aesthetic, etc.) is supervened on by the aesthetic experience.

With an understanding of the supervenient relationship between the formal properties and aesthetic experience, let's return to more familiar territory. Specifically, let's revisit Carroll's understanding of the formal aesthetic properties. Looking back at our example from above, there will be an infinite disjunct of formal aesthetic properties that are supervened on by aesthetic experience. Painting A has the following properties: {a, b, c, d, . . .}. Here, all I am arguing is that when a narrative is present in a work of art, that narrative will be one of the properties in this disjunct. Applied directly this means that for the set of properties for Painting A, we can suppose some letter a= narrative. From what we understood about emergence and supervenience, the omission of narrative or a change in narrative, will have a corresponding change in the aesthetic experience. Further, we know that any moral content, when it inheres in narrative, becomes *internal* to that narrative. With moral content being internal to a narrative, and narrative being supervened on by aesthetic experience, we can safely say ethical content is *a feature of* an aesthetic experience. This entails that any change in ethical content, which constitutes a change in narrative, will entail a corresponding change in aesthetic experience as a whole.

## 2.5 Conclusion

In chapter 2, I formulated a two-part argument for the metaphysical relationship between narrative and aesthetic experience. In section 2.1 *Understanding narrative*, I adopted David Velleman's understanding of narrative, which has two conditions: (1) successive recounted events and (2) the ability to initiate and resolve these emotional cadences (Velleman 2003, 18). I applied this framework to non-conventional mediums (film and static art) to argue that narrative is not merely a literary device. I turned to Liao's account of imagination to show that artists make choices in static works that prompt the audience to imaginatively simulate sequential events and the emotional cadences connecting them. In section 2.2 I discuss Gaut's relevancy conditions and how they limit the scope of moral import in individual cases. Then, I argue that the ontological relation between moral content and narrative should be understood as inherence, as moral content necessarily references the emotional cadences that Velleman requires. In 2.3, I turn to the second part of my argument. I discuss Noel Carroll's infinite disjunction approach to understanding aesthetic experience. After showing that the relation between narrative and aesthetic experience cannot be that of constitution, I describe the emergence of aesthetic experience and settle on the relation being supervenience. After a discussion of the logical structure of supervenience, I apply the relation to specific cases in aesthetics. Finally, I assert that because inherence creates a reciprocal dependence between ethical content and narrative, and then narrative is supervened on by aesthetic experience, there exists some metaphysical relation between ethical content and aesthetic experience.

## CHAPTER 3

### 3.1 Introduction

So far, I've argued that ethical content should be considered a feature of aesthetic experience. In chapter 2, I formulated a two-part argument for the metaphysical relationship between narrative and aesthetic experience. Using Velleman's understanding of narrative, I argued that there exists an inherence relationship between ethical content and narrative, where the former inheres in the latter. Then, using Noel Carroll's disjunctive set of sufficient conditions for aesthetic experience, I argued that narrative is supervened on by aesthetic experience. I then argued that because these two metaphysical relations both involve narrative content, ethical content should therefore be understood as *a feature of* aesthetic experience.

In this chapter, I first consider some objections to my argument. I highlight two different objections, an objection from transitivity and a normative-descriptive objection. I respond to both and hope to show that the normative-descriptive objection may in fact be an upshot of my account, rather than a bona fide objection. Next, I highlight three different upshots to my account, two of which are philosophical and one of which is more practical. Finally, I give a comprehensive summary of my argument in some concluding remarks.

### 3.2 Consideration of objections

Here, I will address two different objections one might raise to my account and some ways to ameliorate these concerns. First, I'll address a non-transitive objection, where someone might suggest that a transitive relationship cannot hold across an inherence relation and a supervenient relation. Because inherence entails a kind of supervenient relationship, I ultimately dismiss this objection. Then, the second objection I address is that my account focuses on

content rather than value. Most of the aesthetics literature discusses the relationship between ethical value and aesthetic value. Here, I usually talk in terms of content, as opposed to a normative, value-laden discussion of this relationship that is more common in the literature. I argued in chapter 1 that discussing content as opposed to value makes for a more precise discussion of the metaphysical presuppositions in the current literature. I argue here that the other alternative, making the descriptive-normative jump, would be more controversial than the limited argument made here.

### 3.2.2 *Transitivity objection*

The first of these objections is that transitivity does not hold across different metaphysical relations. My argument hinges on there being *some kind* of transitive relationship between inherence (where ethical content inheres in narrative) and then supervenience (where narrative is supervened on by aesthetic experience). The non-transitive objection would hold that this loose transitive claim does not hold across two different metaphysical relations. For instance, if the relationship at both levels were that of inherence or supervenience, a transitive relationship would allow us to make claims about ethical content inhering in aesthetic experience in virtue of its inhering in narrative content, which inheres in aesthetic experience. Without an identical metaphysical relation at both levels, this objection holds that I can only claim these relations exist in their respective cases (i.e. between ethical content and narrative content, and also narrative content and aesthetic experience), but not necessarily *across* metaphysical relations.

Because there is not a robust discussion of transitivity across different metaphysical relations in the metaphysics literature, I cannot strictly appeal to the literature for a rebuttal of this objection. Also, it would be too ambitious to include a full and exhaustive discussion of that issue here. For the time being, it is important to note that it is only required that I show *some kind*

of relationship between ethical content and aesthetic experience, not that there is a strictly transitive relationship across these two relations. To make this point clear, I want to appeal to the first discussion of inherence from chapter 2.

At the first level, I argued for an inherence relation between ethical content and narrative, where ethical content inheres in a given narrative. Inherence can be understood as a predication relation, where the predicate is predicated of, and therefore inheres in, the subject. We can think back to our discussion of the statue of *David* to make this point clear. The height of the statue is predicated of, and inheres in, the statue of *David* as a whole. *David* is dependent on the height of the statue, because in order to be really instantiated in the world, it has to have some determinate height. The height is similarly dependent on the instantiation of a real object, the statue of *David* as a whole. I want to reiterate here, in response to the non-transitive objection, that the height of the statue becomes *internal to* and inseparable from the statue as a whole in virtue of this mutual dependence. So, we might think that inherence entails a kind of supervenience<sup>33</sup>. The height of *David* is a feature of that statue as a whole, and a change in the height of the statue (like, say, if the statue was 5 feet tall as opposed to 6 feet) will necessitate a change in the statue as a whole. However, a change in the whole does not necessitate a change in the height of that statue. We can imagine an exact replica of the statue of *David* which was sculpted out of pre-chewed bubble gum. This change in the statue as a whole does not necessitate a change in the property *height*. The height might remain the exact same, down to the millimeter, while the materials used to build the statue are completely different. So, while the height of the statue, is predicated of, and therefore inheres in, the statue as a whole, the statue supervenes on the height of *David*.

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<sup>33</sup> I mean here that inherence entails a weak supervenience, of the same kind that is sketched in section 2.3. A strong supervenience claim might be appropriate, but a commitment to weak supervenience is sufficient for the discussion here and is much simpler to prove. For more discussion of what is entailed by supervenience, see section 2.3.

We can suppose this is indicative of the kind of metaphysical relation inherence is. So, my argument for ethical content inhering in narrative also entails that narrative supervenes on ethical content. A change in ethical content will necessitate a change in narrative, but a change in the narrative will not necessarily entail a change in ethical content. This also means that ethical content is *internal* to a narrative and so should be considered as a feature of that narrative as a whole.

At the second level, there is a supervenient relationship between narrative and aesthetic experience, where aesthetic experience supervenes on narrative. This means that the narrative, in a way, becomes internal to the aesthetic experience as a whole. Because ethical content is, at the first level, internal to, inhering in, and supervened on by narrative, and then at the second level that narrative is supervened on by aesthetic experience, there is an intuitive way in which ethical content is a *feature of* that aesthetic experience. To unpack this a bit, a change in ethical content necessitates a change in narrative. Because narrative is then, in turn, one of many supervenient bases<sup>34</sup> for an aesthetic experience, a change in the narrative necessitates a change in aesthetic experience. So, a change in the ethical content of a work of art necessitates a change in the overall aesthetic experience, because a change in ethical content necessitates a change in narrative. We might think, then, that this argument does not require any kind of metaphysical transitivity across different metaphysical relations, because the nature of those relations entail a kind of transitivity. Therefore, to reject this more precise articulation of the way that a change in ethical content necessitates a change in aesthetic experience as a whole, one would need to recharacterize the metaphysical relations outlined here.

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<sup>34</sup> The term ‘supervenient bases’ corresponds here to the potential candidates in the disjunctive sufficient conditions proposed by Carroll. These disjuncts are supervenient bases because they are non-emergent properties being supervened on by aesthetic experience. For more discussion of this see (Leuenberger 2008).

### 3.2.3 Normative-Descriptive Objection

The other objection I will consider concerns the descriptive aims of this project. The concern here is that if I do not address issues of value, then this project fails to be relevant, in the broader context, from the beginning. Usually, when the relationship between morality and aesthetic value is discussed, it references value. In Jarold Levinson's book, *Aesthetics and Ethics: Essays at the Intersection*, the compiled works all discuss the way that ethical *value* and aesthetic *value* are related (2000). My account does not discuss the issue in terms of any value – in fact, I explicitly avoid that terminology. I make no such attempts here to connect my descriptive claims to any theory of value. This objection, I think, fails to be defeating in any meaningful way. In fact, it seems that the failure to talk normatively is an upshot of my account rather than a demerit.

Talking in terms of content and metaphysical relations gets at a different *kind* of question, which is a step removed from the normal discourse. Instead of addressing *to what degree* or *in what way* moral value impacts an aesthetic experience, I address in virtue of what moral content can affect an aesthetic experience. By talking about content, the normatively laden impact issue is bracketed, and the focus is shifted to how it is possible that such a relationship between ethical content and aesthetic experience could be asserted in the first place. By talking about the descriptive relations between ethical content and aesthetic experience, the normative question can proceed with a strong foundation to work from.

There are a few practical reasons for limiting the project to a descriptive discussion. First, the metaphysical relationship between different kinds of value is, without hyperbole, a can of worms it would not be beneficial to open here. Discussing how we can move from this descriptive account to a normative taxonomy of value seems to be outside the scope of this project. It would be ambitious to tackle value-pluralism separated from this discussion, let alone trying to argue

for this connection in addition to the argument presented here. My hope for this project was such that any metaethical position can be superimposed onto what I present here to formulate a more cohesive and comprehensive answer to the appropriateness question. For now, I hope to make explicit the metaphysical presuppositions within the literature and more clearly formulate a metaphysical relationship between ethical content and an aesthetic experience.

Now that I have addressed both objections here, I plan to show some of the upshots of my account in the next section. First, there was an issue of transitivity. I argued here that inherence entails a kind of weak supervenience, which tracks a change in ethical content to a change in overall aesthetic experience. This obtains in virtue of the fact that there is a mutual dependence at the level of inherence, which gives rise to the one-directional dependence of supervenience. So, in the case that a weak transitivity does not hold across metaphysical relations, there still would exist some kind of metaphysical dependence, which vindicates my position here. The second objection argued that because my account does not talk in terms of value, it fails to be relevant to the canon of the literature. In fact, I believe that the second objection might only *appear* to be a demerit of my account. I think making only descriptive claims about the way moral content and aesthetic experience are related is, in fact, an upshot of my account. In the next section I hope to show how this choice to deal only with descriptive relationship between moral content and aesthetic experience gives rise to both practical and philosophical upshots.

### **3.3 Upshots of this account**

Here I want to consider a few different upshots to accepting my position. I have established that there is a metaphysical relationship between moral content and aesthetic experience, where moral content inheres in narrative and narrative is supervened on by aesthetic experience. This two-part dependence relationship between ethical content and aesthetic

experience does not require an immediate commitment to a value structure, and the metaphysical relation I argue for here is at least partially responsible for the intuitions we have in this regard. Here, I want to address three different upshots of this project. First, I address how the shift of emphasis (discussed at length in the previous section on objections) can be seen as a validation of our intuitions about immoral works of art. Then, I argue that this metaphysical picture is largely compatible with Gaut, Carroll, and Eaton's answers to the appropriateness question. Finally, I discuss how this project might provide a sort of scaffolding to understand static works of art where ethical content is not clearly apparent. I contrast this with examples in film, where depicting immoral actions can be more evident and therefore more clearly aesthetically defective.

### 3.3.2 *The shift of emphasis*

First, there is an obvious shift in the way I discuss the relationship between the ethical and aesthetic. Here, I am discussing the relationship in terms of content alone. The shift in emphasis allows for a more solid basis on which the canonical question can be reconsidered. The upshot here is that this project answers a more basic question about the relationship between ethical content and aesthetic experience, which will better inform the canonical discussion about value relationships. This was discussed to an extent in the objections section of this project, but as this shift in emphasis should be understood as an upshot, it deserves further discussion here. Usually, the canonical discussion addresses how a certain kind of content (i.e. propositional content involving ethical claims) affects aesthetic value. I called this the '*how question*' in section 1.2. When the focus of discussion is on the *how question*, Gaut and Carroll talk descriptively about how the norms and practices of aesthetic evaluation are influenced by ethical content. A clear example of this is Gaut's merited response argument. The merited response

argument seeks to answer the question of how emotional responses (generally discussed in terms of moral responses) are merited by engaging with a work of art (Gaut 2007, 227). Gaut's discussion comes as an expansion of the canonical *how question*, developed by Hume and taken up by many philosophers since then (e.g. Carroll, Jacobson, Zemach, etc.). Gaut, though, explicitly says it is not that ethical demerits (note: here *demerit* is already an indicator that the conversation is had in terms of normative language) *bring about* any kind of aesthetic demerit (Gaut 2007, 234). This would be too far-reaching. Instead, the merited response argument focuses on *how* ethical demerits in fact are aesthetic demerits. Although the merited response argument is informative, I have not given it full consideration here as it does not seek and answer to *in virtue of what* ethical content affects aesthetic content.

Here, the emphasis is shifted to *in virtue of what* the ethical affects the aesthetic. I find this discussion to be more basic than Gaut's merited response argument and more generally, the debate of which the argument is a part. Also, the *in virtue of what* question appears more basic than most arguments asserting some kind of relationship between aesthetic value and ethical merits/demerits. The *in virtue of what* question seeks a comprehensive answer to a more generic appropriateness question. If it is, in fact, appropriate to import ethical content into aesthetic content, then the *in virtue of what* question seeks to establish an explicitly metaphysical connection between the ethical content of an artwork and the overall aesthetic experience. In this way, I see the *in virtue of what* question to be more basic than the *how question* that Gaut and so many others have sought an answer to. With a more comprehensive answer to the *in virtue of what* question, answers to the *how question* can proceed without injury. So, I see answering the more basic question to be a valuable addition to the canonical discussion in the literature.

Similarly, by avoiding conversations about value, we have a metaphysical basis to build our

more normative, value-laden assumptions on. I could have sought an answer to the *in virtue of what* question with regard to value, but it seems that route would lead the project into meta-ethical territory and I have principled reasons for choosing to not engage with these metaethical issues. This is because answering the more basic *in virtue of what* question about value would require a commitment to how value is generated. And of course, that issue is not settled in any philosophical domain. Discussing the issue of moral import in terms of content, on the other hand, only requires a descriptive answer to the *in virtue of what* question. In that way, this project might have a very narrow scope of applicability in the aesthetics literature. However, I think of this more basic discussion as fundamental to the more complex discussions about value. So, although this project has a more limited scope and different emphasis than the traditional canonical question, I see the narrow focus to be a helpful addition to the way this issue is traditionally discussed. So, with an answer to the more basic, metaphysical question, we are in a better position turn back towards the canonical question of the literature.

### *3.3.3 A compatible metaphysical picture*

Another upshot of this account it that is operates in the background of the canonical discussion within the literature. It can serve as an explanation of the metaphysical picture behind the theories Carroll, Gaut, and Eaton sketch in their discussion. I hope that this project can serve as a compatible metaphysic for these three accounts to justify their positions, which I see as an upshot. In my discussion of the metaphysical relationship between ethical content and aesthetic experience, I borrow notions from each of these thinkers.

In chapters one and two, I adopted Berys Gaut's relevancy conditions for moral import (when moral content is sufficiently relevant that it affects aesthetic experience) (Gaut 2007, 45-6). These relevancy conditions are not an explicit target of critique from Eaton or Carroll, and so

I do not take them to be wholly incompatible with their accounts. I then, in chapter two, adapted Eaton's objection from creepiness, which shows that ethical defects are internal to that aesthetic experience (Eaton 2003, 177). This served as a motivation for characterizing the metaphysical relationship between ethical content and narrative as inherence, because inherence also features this internality point. Gaut's picture of intrinsic or extrinsic merits and demerits seems to map on to this point about internality such that this is not a problem. An intrinsic merit or demerit seems to speak (on Gaut's account) to something internal to that work of art because these merits or demerits are not the product of uncritical acceptance (Gaut 2007, 103). Instead, they invite the audience to consider the moral merits and demerits of *adopting* the point of view of what is being represented. So, there is a connection between moral content, the audience evaluating that perspective, and the work of art itself (*Ibid.*). These *pro tanto* principles, then, reflect what is internal to that work of art (the perspectives and moral sentiments conveyed) and what is external to that work of art (such as the audience reaction to that work).

However, asserting that ethical content is internal to a narrative might be a point of contention for Carroll, although his discussion of moral uptake on behalf of the audience also seems to be compatible with the claim that moral content is internal to a narrative. Carroll does not explicitly outline whether or not moral content is internal to a given work of art, but he does address how moral defects can inhibit the aesthetic appreciation of that work of art because of moral uptake. This makes it likely that he has in mind ethical content being internal to narrative. Carroll concludes that "the deepening of our moral understanding and emotions may contribute dramatically to our intense absorption in a narrative. And in such cases the way in which the narrative addresses and deepens our moral understanding is part and parcel of what makes the narrative successful" (Carroll 1996, 236). So ethical content, and therefore the way that the

audience engages with this ethical content, is essential to what makes a narrative successful or unsuccessful. We might interpret this to mean that ethical content is internal to a narrative.

Although Carroll is not explicit about this, I take his remarks as an indication that our accounts are compatible on this point. I also use Carroll's disjunctive set of sufficient conditions in chapter two for aesthetic experience to help characterize the relationship between narrative and aesthetic experience as supervening (Carroll 2015, 172). By adopting Carroll's disjunctive approach, I capture the emergence of an aesthetic experience, which seems to be a compatible notion for most aesthetic accounts.

I am agnostic on whether Carroll, Gaut, and Eaton's position can be collapsed into one centralized moralist position, as Berys Gaut asserts (Gaut 2007, 54-55). However, if such an attempt were made, I believe the metaphysical picture given here would be compatible with such a view. By sketching a compatible, metaphysical picture of the relationship between ethical content and aesthetic experience, I allow all three of these accounts to move forward without unwarranted presupposition, as well as allowing for a collapsed, unified moralism as Gaut suggests may be possible. This appears to be a clear upshot of this account, because it does not seem contingent upon any one account of appropriateness. Of course, my account is incompatible with the autonomist position, but as I addressed in the first chapter, the autonomist never feels it is appropriate for ethical value to affect aesthetic value, contrary to the moralist intuition.

### *3.3.4 Static works are better understood*

Another upshot of this account is that it gives us a better framework for understanding static works of art that have ethical content in them. It seems that the discussion of cases like *The Rape of Europa* are discussed as a contrast class to the more obvious film or literary discussions,

where immoral acts are both more apparent and more influential in the evaluative process. In cases like *The Sopranos*, there is a clearer link between the story as a whole and the way experience can be marred or made better by portraying graphic, immoral murder scenes. How, critics ask, can a painting convey ethical content at all? Well, it seems easy to depict moral content. We might think of a case where a painting depicts a murder, like *Judith Beheading Holofernes* from chapter 2. Where the issue arises, then, is whether the artist endorses that ethical content, or takes a moral stance on what is strictly depicted. This is partially reflected in how we ought to regard the subjects of the painting, like whether we regard Judith as a hero or a villain. In some cases, the artist may depict ethical content but fail to endorse it. Here I have in mind some feminist depictions of rape or assault<sup>35</sup> which, although they strictly do not endorse the immoral act, depict or convey morally relevant events. In fact, some instances of depicting ethical content seek to strictly denounce immoral acts like rape. But, in the strict denouncement of immoral acts, the artist is still required to depict and convey ethical content.

So, here, it doesn't have to be the case that the artist endorses some moral or immoral content for ethical content to be conveyed. I argue that ethical content within a static artwork is given this context, which can help distinguish when moral content is being depicted or endorsed, through narratives, which are either simulated by the audience or stipulated by the artist. This context guides whether or not the artist endorses or denounces whatever ethical content is present in the artwork and, to some degree, affects whether or not that artwork is on the whole moral or immoral. Even though a painting or other static work of art only gives a snapshot of a narrative, the audience extrapolates forward and backward, creating a cohesive story to contextualize

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<sup>35</sup> For an example of depicting or communicating rape without endorsing the act, see Suzanne Lacy's performance art series titled *3 Weeks in May* for James Wood's *Garage Gallery* (1977). For a more clearly static case, see Jenny Holzer's photography series "Lustmord" (1993–94).

ethical content they find to be relevant to the piece. In the same way that ethical content in *The Sopranos* is contextualized via the storyline, static works of art can be understood in the same way. So, the previously mysterious way that ethical positions could be expressed and endorsed by static works is clearly understood through narrative.

So, we no longer must require an *explicitly stated* narrative in order to understand that ethical content can be conveyed in a work of art, static or not. *The Rape of Europa*, for instance, has a narrative associated with it, whether that narrative is explicitly stated in the work itself (Eaton 2003, 160-162). The reference to Greek mythology is sufficient for variable interpretations of the work itself (Eaton 2003, 163). Because the epistemic access to this myth might be limited, I argued that, for those who are familiar with the narrative, being repulsed by the work is an appropriate moral response to this particular depiction of Europa's alleged abduction. I tried to explain how, for those who are unfamiliar with the myth, the moral content expressed may not be accessed by the audience, allowing for more favorable interpretations of the piece. This sort of variance in interpretation previously was troubling, as it reflected a more general worry about whether or not ethical defects "considerably diminish" or merely function as a "deformity" of the aesthetic value of a work (Eaton 2003, 170). With the proposed framework of narrative (using either explicitly stated narratives or simulated ones), we can account for the varying impact of immoral content in works of art by appealing to the specific narrative the audience is applying to the painting.

This ought to be seen as an upshot of this account. It seems less controversial to make claims about moral quandaries impacting the aesthetic evaluation of films. There are ways in which entire storylines can be unethical, which make the audience intuitively drawn to or repulsed by the work as a whole. Without extending this framework to static artworks, there did not seem to

be an analogous philosophical basis for understanding why audiences can feel similarly drawn to or repulsed by static works. Hopefully, in applying the same framework to static works of art, we are better equipped to articulate why these kinds of responses are warranted and appropriate in response to paintings or sculptures. Of course, there are more difficult cases that are still exempt from the discussion here. However, the goal here was to make a limited argument which expanded our understanding of the relationship between ethical content and aesthetic experience, not to fully settle this issue. Still, this project does give us a more tangible framework for understanding how static works of art can communicate ethical content beyond the bare-bones content the work actually displays, which I believe to be an upshot of this account.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

The aim of this project has been to give a new, descriptive answer to the appropriateness question in aesthetics. The appropriateness question asks *how is it appropriate for ethical value to affect aesthetic value in aesthetic cases?* In chapter 1, I outlined some different ways that the literature answers this question. I focused primarily on three different accounts, from Noel Carroll, Berys Gaut, and A.W. Eaton. Although the autonomists reject the appropriateness question, we can take their ontological approach as a new way to understand the appropriateness question for the different moralist positions (the moderate moralist, ethicist, and robust immoralist). Each philosopher places different emphases on the appropriateness question, which explain the varying answers given in the literature. Noel Carroll answers the appropriateness question by arguing that ethical value mobilizes audiences differently in virtue of the work of art's variable framing, and thereby affects aesthetic value due to this variable framing and emotive uptake. This cognitive account emphasizes the *conditions* under which it is appropriate for ethical value to affect aesthetic value, these conditions are most notably met when variable

framing occurs by the artist themselves to prefocus this ethical content. Berys Gaut answers the appropriateness question by arguing that because that ethical content is aesthetically relevant, it affects aesthetic value. He further explicates *pro tanto principles* which function as filters that determine when ethical content affects the aesthetic value. A.W. Eaton answers the appropriateness question by arguing that it is appropriate for ethical value to affect aesthetic value because moral content in works of art can engage our moral sensibilities and challenge our conception of morality.

I then explored how these answers to the appropriateness question are partially incomplete, because they fail to answer a more fundamental question: *in virtue of what is it appropriate for aesthetic value to affect aesthetic value?* This more fundamental question, requires a metaphysical and descriptive answer, so I defended a shift of the appropriateness question to: *in virtue of what is it appropriate for aesthetic content to affect aesthetic experience?* Putting this question in terms of content requires a stepping away from discussions of value and how different kinds of value can affect one another.

In chapter two, I gave a two-step argument for a metaphysical relationship between ethical content and aesthetic experience which is conditional on ethical content being aesthetically relevant and narrative being present. First, I established an understanding of narrative, borrowed from David Velleman. Narrative is comprised of (1) successive recounted events and (2) the ability to initiate and resolve emotional cadences. I argue that philosophical accounts of imagination can help explain attributing a narrative structure to static works of art, in line with Velleman's understanding of narrative. Then, I argued that there is an inherence relationship between ethical content and narrative, where the former inheres in the latter. This relation holds in virtue of the mutual dependence between ethical content and narrative. I then use Noel

Carroll's content approach to aesthetic experience to argue aesthetic experience supervenes on narrative content. This supervenient relationship captures the emergence of aesthetic experience while retaining the spirit of Carroll's discussion of aesthetic experience. Ultimately, I argue that because narrative is *a feature* of aesthetic experience and further because ethical content is *a feature* of narrative, then there is an entailing, metaphysical relationship between ethical content and aesthetic experience. Simply, when a narrative exists (even an imagined narrative) and relevant moral content is present, then a metaphysical relationship will exist between ethical content and aesthetic experience.

In chapter three, I addressed some objections to the account presented here and identify some upshots of my account. The first objection I consider, the transitivity objection, holds that transitivity does not hold across different metaphysical relations, and so I cannot claim a relationship between ethical content and aesthetic experience. I responded to this objection by highlighting a way in which inherence entails supervenience. Because of this, a change in ethical content will then reflect a change in aesthetic experience. Next, I considered an objection about the methodology of this project, since I do not discuss the appropriateness question in value terms. I respond to this objection by highlighting a way in which discussing the metaphysics of value would not clarify the canonical discussion about appropriateness.

Finally, I highlighted some upshots to this account. First, the emphasis of the literature is shifted from the *how* question to the *in virtue of what* question. Rephrasing the appropriateness question in this way allows for a new perspective when engaging with why a strong intuition that immoral content can affect the way we experience works of art. In this way, discussing value becomes a secondary issue, rather than the crux of whether it is appropriate to import moral critiques into aesthetic critiques. Asking the *in virtue of what* question also requires a different

kind of answer, which is more descriptive and requires less normative commitments. Next, I highlight the ways in which this project is largely compatible with the three major accounts presented here, from Carroll, Gaut, and Eaton. Then, I discussed how the account presented here gives us a better framework for understanding how ethical content can be depicted in mediums other than television and film, which seem to be the most obvious cases. With the addition of imagination literature, it seems more appropriate to understand there to be narratives present in static works of art.

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