

## ***The Moral and Cognitive Value of Art***

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper is about the notions of the artistic, aesthetic, cognitive and moral value of art and their (possible) interconnectedness. The main concern is to try to advocate the cognitivist claim about the artistic value of artworks' contribution to the advance of knowledge, as well as for the relevance of the moral dimension for artistic value. This is a discussion of the intersection of the debate about moral and aesthetic value. The central part of the paper is focused on a debate with Peter Lamarque. The problem of immoral artworks and their cognitive value is discussed at the end of this paper in order to show that they are counterexamples of the thesis of artistic relevance of the moral dimension.

### **KEYWORDS**

Artistic cognitivism, aesthetic autonomism, aesthetic moralism, cognitive immoralism, institutional theory

### ***1. Introduction***

This paper is about the cognitive and moral value of art. Precisely, this paper is about the value artworks have in virtue of being exemplars of art. This is a debated issue because reasons for valuing art seem to differ across different eras, cultures, and persons. Some people value art for its pleasure and leisure, some for the way it gives us an opportunity to gain insights about different situations and (fictional) characters, and some for the education it may afford. There are several objections to the idea of finding one unified fundamental reason for why we value art, but we don't think that these differences should force us to give up and conclude that an appreciation of art is too varied to say something about its value in general terms.

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To start, we can say that there is wide-spread agreement about what does not constitute the artistic value of artworks. For example, the value we are speaking about is not the amount of money that one can receive for a picture that one is selling. We call this the market value of art, i.e. the value that artworks have in virtue of their particular place in the market. It is not controversial to say that the market value of an artwork is not a characteristic that is relevant in establishing the artistic value of the artwork. We can try to explain this common stance in various ways. We can say, for example, that the market value depends, in great part, on contingencies and is apt to be variable. We can say that this same, or a similar value, can in general be realized by other means. For example, a person who needs money can obtain it by deciding to sell her car instead of a picture that she possesses. In this paper, we put the issue of the artistic value of artworks in terms of the proper focus a person has when she approaches an artwork as artwork. The value of artworks that we are speaking about is the value that a person cannot neglect if she wants to properly consider the artwork as artwork.<sup>1</sup> It is not regrettable if one neglects the market value of an artwork if one considers its artistic value. Neglecting some other features, however, represents a failure in approaching the artwork from the standpoint of its artistic value.

Despite such values from which we can uncontroversially distinguish artistic value, there are disputed issues. There are debates, for example, about whether the epistemological contribution of an artwork is a part of its value as artwork. James O. Young, for example, is one of the authors who most radically claims that considering how much an artwork contributes to the improvement of our knowledge is a part of evaluating it as an artwork (furthermore, he says that this is important to establish whether something is even an artwork at all) (Young, 2001). There is an intense debate about whether the moral dimension of an artwork influences its artistic value, and, again, we can put the question in terms of whether we artistically approach an artwork properly if we let its moral dimension influence our artistic judgment about it, and how.

## *2. Subject, theme, aboutness, seriousness*

Peter Lamarque is the principal author who we discuss in this paper. His

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<sup>1</sup> Here we follow (Lamarque and Olsen, 1994, 255-257 and Lamarque, 2010, 101-103)

specific interest is in the philosophy of literature, but we extend his theses to other art forms as well, and debate them in this broader context. In his considerations of what is proper in evaluating an artwork as artwork he says that “the design, form, and the structure of verbal artifact; the presentation of a subject with a reasonable degree of coherence and connectedness; and the development of a thematic interest that allows for deeper, more far-reaching reflection on, and beyond, the particularities of the subject” (Lamarque, 2009, 258) are all expectations that readers have when approaching works of art. The value of art resides on the quality of experience that artwork yields and, for Lamarque, it is based on “two broad dimensions: imaginativeness or creativity evident in design of the work, and the richness of its content at both subject and thematic levels” (Lamarque, 2009, 259). We will now dedicate a few words to explain the distinction between the subject and the theme of an artwork. Both, the subject and the theme related to the artwork. To explore a work’s subject is to detect what it is immediately about, to speak of its explicit preoccupation, to retell its content, specify its main characters, events, emotions.

On the other hand, the theme includes much more than interpretative statements on the subject. When we speak of the interpretation of the theme, we are speaking of identifying the subject matter or the artwork’s immediate content; and we are taking into account the whole perspective and vision the artwork is offering. Successful literature exposes its theme in an illuminating way and calls upon wider and more extensive interpretation. This differentiation between subject and theme is explicated by Lamarque with examples like Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, *Othello*. To that we add the example of the film: *The Lives of Others* (*Das Leben der Anderen*). The subject of the movie is a secret police agent’s preoccupation with the lives of a writer and his lover to whom he is conducting surveillance on. On the thematic level it is a movie about the control hidden powers exercise on the lives of people. “Posing a stark, difficult question — how does a good man act in circumstances that seem to rule out the very possibility of decent behavior? — it illuminates not only a shadowy period in recent German history, but also the moral no man’s land where base impulses and high principles converge. Mr. von Donnersmarck, born in West Germany in 1973 and making his feature film debut, demonstrates astonishing visual and narrative rigor. Even more remarkably, he is able to reach back into the totalitarian past and over the Berlin Wall into the grim, brutal absurdity of the late, unlamented German Democratic Republic, and lay bare the anxious, cruel

psychology of socialism as it once existed” (Scott, NYT). “You expect the movie to focus on the charismatic couple and their "subversive" activities (they drink, party with artistic friends of questionable political correctness, and have sex!), but "The Lives of Others" is really about the observer, the anonymous little gray man. He's supposed to maintain his distance, but the lives of the others he's monitoring begin to infiltrate his own consciousness” (Emerson) “If there is any justice, this year’s Academy Award for best foreign-language film will go to “The Lives of Others,” a movie about a world in which there is no justice” (Lane).<sup>2</sup>

Many different artworks may share a common subject, but on their thematic level they are different. Each artwork explores and demonstrates its own theme, through representing its concept and vision, preferably in an illuminating way, irrespective of whether it shares the subject with many other artworks. Lamarque’s example is represented by: Marlowe’s, Sophocles’s and Mann’s versions of Faust myth (Lamarque, 2009, 151). Literary critics tend to usually generalize works, and try to formulate thematic statements, which, in Lamarque’s sense are the unifying vision of the artwork. Also, some philosophers of art think that the issue of truth in the interpretation on a thematic level is a central concern when engaging with the artwork. But, we will explore Lamarque’s critique of cognitive value of artworks hereafter.

In order to show Lamarque’s stance more completely, it is important to remark on the element of seriousness in art. As he says”: “The point is that we can acknowledge the power and seriousness of literature, even its ‘cognitive’ nature, without supposing that its seriousness (value) lies in its ability to advance knowledge. [...] When a novelist (Kafka, say, or Beckett) presents a pessimistic or nihilistic view of the world we can take pleasure from the novel and value it as literature without endorsing the vision portrayed. The interest is in how powerfully, effectively, and originally the vision is developed. That is a literary interest, not any empirical, philosophical or sociological support for the vision that might or might not be forthcoming from outside” (Lamarque, 2010, 80). “Some philosophers of literature are uneasy with the underlying thought that literary works can only be good if they have an educative function. That need not be the way to understand the ‘usefulness’ of poetry. The mistake is to suppose that to be serious or reflective a work must in effect teach something. Yet there is no such implication.

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<sup>2</sup> These quotations are critic's reviews of the film *The Lives of Others*

A work is serious if it treats of a serious subject matter.<sup>3</sup> But it can do that without being true and without presenting a view that ought to be endorsed” (Lamarque, 2009, 258).

As we see, seriousness is constituted by various elements. Some of them are related to the way the content is presented (power, effectiveness and originality), others are related to the content as such: “A work is serious if it treats of a serious subject matter”. More precisely, a serious subject matter is something of perennial human interest, typically deep moral issues.

Lamarque’s thesis is that it is only relevant that the artwork is about such issues and that it develops this content with artistic values as those indicated above, but it is never artistically important that it, for example, advances our knowledge about what it treats, or contributes to improve our morally. On the contrary, we think that, endorsing the element of seriousness of artworks as a necessary element of their value, establishes the advance of knowledge or improvement of morality as values, as well.

### 3. *Aesthetic and artistic values*

The next section is dedicated to terminological clarity. In the current debates the distinction between “aesthetic” and “artistic” is not always clear. In some cases the distinction is not a problem. There are authors who say that the two completely overlap and thus define aesthetic value in narrow terms. Just as there are authors for whom the formal properties of the artwork are sufficient to establish the aesthetic and the artistic value of artworks.

“Artistic value” and “aesthetic value” are the equivalent of Berys Gaut, as well, but for opposed reasons, i.e., because he introduces several components in the aesthetic value. More precisely, Gaut speaks about the difference between wide and narrow aesthetic value. He claims that wide aesthetic value and artistic value are, actually, one and the same and they capture more than the formal (or beautiful) properties of works. Gaut claims that artistic theory, or wide aesthetic theory, should show not just that additional properties and values (such as cognitive and ethical) interact with aesthetic properties in a narrow sense, but that sometimes these qualities of art are aesthetic properties. (Gaut, 2007, 40.) Schellekens sees artistic value as the

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<sup>3</sup> Here the expression “subject matter” mustn’t be confused with the expression “subject” that we have defined above. “Subject matter” here refers most interestingly to what we indicated as the theme of the artwork.

value that art has in virtue of being a work of art, and as a value that can encompass different kinds of values, where the moral and aesthetic values are especially important for the intrinsic value of art. We see that in contrast to Gaut, Schellekens does not consider moral value as a possible part of the aesthetic value, even not if broad understood. The two concepts are distinguished, although they can both be part of the artistic value of an artwork. (Schellekens, 2007, 41)

Lamarque defines artistic value by making a difference between intrinsic and instrumental value. For artwork to be artistically valuable it has to be intrinsically valuable as a work of art, and it has to be response dependent (Lamarque, 2009, 233). In contrast to previously mentioned authors, Lamarque refuses to ascribe cognitive (and moral) values to the merit of intrinsic value. Also, he notices that there is a great difference between artistic and aesthetic value (in a narrow sense)<sup>4</sup>, since there is no explicit notion of what aesthetic is, and because of the examples of artworks that are not aesthetically valuable (in a sense of aesthetic usually grasped as beautiful). In addition, there are objects that are beautiful but are not pieces of art. Besides that, there are artworks that are anti-aesthetic or non-aesthetic, but if understood using a wider concept of aesthetic value<sup>5</sup> they can still be aesthetically valuable. Aesthetic value is sometimes conceived as analogous to perception, while artistic value is more similar to interpretation (Lamarque, 2009, 18). It seems that Lamarque does advocate that aesthetic value (in a wider conception) can be a critical value (artistic value) that an artwork can yield, as long as it is intrinsically valuable for the artwork as a work of art.

We intend to remain neutral in this paper in relation to the issue about whether cognitive and moral value are part of the broad aesthetic value (that is equivalent to artistic value), or are values of artworks additional to aesthetic value. The important thing for us is to have concepts distinguished from narrow aesthetic value. Dependently of the authors that we discuss in various parts of the paper we will use artistic value or aesthetic value as op-

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<sup>4</sup> Lamarque takes Gaut's differentiation of narrow and wide notions of aesthetic values, in *Philosophy of Literature*, 18.

<sup>5</sup> A wider conception of aesthetic value relates to cases of non-aesthetic and anti-aesthetic examples. Lamarque concludes that: "Whenever we talk about the way something is achieved (an effect, a response) we are potentially in a realm of aesthetic. As for the anti-aesthetic work, it is not entirely paradoxical to speak of a successful, even the aesthetically successful, use of ugly, repellent or shocking elements in bringing about some artistic end" (Lamarque 2009, 234).

posed to narrow aesthetic value.

### 3. *The importance of cognitive and moral value of artworks*

Now we go back to our discussion with Lamarque about whether cognitive value and moral values are a part of the aesthetic value of artworks. The debate about moral values, for Lamarque, starts not with asking whether moral thoughts and beliefs are present in works of art, because this is a fact that Lamarque finds obvious, but in questions concerning the relevance and status of these values. Namely, the aim of the debate is to discuss whether moral value is one of the reasons that contributes to the evaluation of literary works as works of art. In a similar way, Lamarque is ready to take for granted that art can contribute to the advance of knowledge, as well. For example, “Plenty of social history can be learned from the novel [*Felix Holt, the Radical*, by George Elliot], at whatever degree of reliability, but that kind of learning was never in dispute by the no-truth theorist”. (Lamarque, 2009, 106)

So, what is at dispute? “The crucial point for the cognitivist [...] is how important it is from a literary point of view to impart truth (or beliefs)” (Lamarque, 2009, 106). This is at stake in the debate. Lamarque does not deny that literary works can advance knowledge. He only denies this as an aspect of the literary importance of a work. Similarly, Lamarque’s thesis that moral values should not be included as a part of the intrinsic values of literary works is visible, as well: “To value a literary work for its own sake is not to value it for the truths it imparts or for the morality of its vision or for its ability to improve human lives. The great works of literature are not great because they make better or more moral or more knowledgeable readers but because they offer something strikingly unique, they show the very limits to which the medium of language can be stretched, and they create a ‘world’ or a vision often far beyond the powers of imagination of mere mortals” (Lamarque, 2010, 80).

On the contrary, we try to show that there are artworks which are artistically evaluated, among else, for their moral and epistemological elements, and argue that we cannot neglect these elements when we access these artworks as artworks. Precisely, we say that if, as Lamarque requires, we endorse thematic seriousness and depth as one of the values of art, then it follows that the advance of knowledge and moral improvement are artistic val-

ues, as well. As we remark, our thesis is conditional to the acceptance of seriousness in the sense of a serious engagement with issues of deep human interest. We do not deny here that art can be serious for other reasons, as well, as, for example, the employment of artistic techniques for amusement, or the simple wish to have experiences that we cannot have in everyday life. These can be, for example, foundations for the value of immoral art, and, therefore, lead to positions like immoralism, or even a denial of the possibility of establishing features with a stable valence in relation to the values of art. In the latter case, various, even opposed features, can contribute to the artistic value of the artwork, but they do this as contributory reasons, i.e. as reasons that are variable in their valence. For example, there may be cases where a negative moral value contributes positively to the artistic value of the artwork, while in other cases a moral flaw is the reason of the artistic flaw of the artwork, as well.<sup>6</sup> But our concern is with the position of Lamarque who, although he remarks on the seriousness of art, says that it doesn't matter at all for the artistic value of an artwork whether it advances knowledge or has a positive moral contribution. In our opinion, if the importance of seriousness is endorsed, then the advance of knowledge, or improvement of morality are required, as well.

To be sure, we do not say that moral and cognitive values are sufficient for having artistic value, even in the case that thematic seriousness is taken as crucial. That would really correspond to a reduction of the value of art to that of philosophy or sciences. This is a result that Lamarque firmly wants to avoid (Lamarque and Olsen, 1994, 6, 22; cfr. Currie, 1995, 911) and we share his position on this. Consequentially, we do not say, for example, that works like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* are great literary works. We agree with Lamarque and many others on the example of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that certainly has a relevant moral message but is nonetheless not valuable as a great artwork (Lamarque, 2009, 287). In our discussion we refer to artworks which are of high quality because of the different virtues they have, and among them moral or cognitive value.<sup>7</sup>

In a different case the problem is not to recognize the status of high value given to artworks that do not deserve it, but that of not recognizing

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<sup>6</sup> For typologies of theses on the value of art, see Carroll, (2000), Jacobson (2006), Schellekens, (2007, 64-88).

<sup>7</sup> But, as it will be clearer later, didactic works like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is not at the highest level if we consider cognitive values, as well.



the proper status of high value to those artworks that deserve it. Let's think about Sophocles's *Oediphus*. The tragedy considers the question of moral fate in a challenging way that can be taken as its theme. More precisely, we can take as the theme of the tragedy the influence of moral luck on moral virtue. Suppose that we do not agree with Sophocles' view on moral fate. Do we have, by this, to declare a diminished value of the tragedy? Or, think about Euripide's *Hecuba*, which theme may be that "nothing human is ever worthy of trust: there are no guarantees at all, short of revenge or death".(Lamarque, 2009, 253) The view is clearly too pessimistic. Does this have any influence on our appreciation of the work? We agree with what Lamarque says in a previous quotation about an analogous case, i.e. that "When a novelist (Kafka, say, or Beckett) presents a pessimistic or nihilistic view of the world we can take pleasure from the novel and value it as literature without endorsing the vision portrayed" (Lamarque, 2010, 80). But how is our acceptance of such a stance compatible with our claim that one of the values of artworks consists in the advance of knowledge?

We recognize the way the authors that we have mentioned are engaged with their themes as contributing to the high artistic value of their works irrespective of whether we are ready to accept the perspective of the themes or not. But in contrast to Lamarque, although we admit cases when, despite an artworks lack of cognitive value may be highly estimated in virtue of having an aesthetic value in the narrow sense,<sup>8</sup> we think that considerations about whether the works play a part in advancing knowledge also contributes to their artistic evaluation. If we suppose that Oediphus's vision on moral fate, or the visions promoted in Euripides's and Kafka's works are wrong, we can nevertheless say that there are further epistemological benefits besides from directly offering new truths, and that these benefits contribute to increase these works' artistic value. It could be, for example, that an artwork enlightens aspects of a vision that we do not endorse, of which we were not aware. Our refusal to endorse that vision was naïve and not well founded. At the same time, because of this, the vision we endorsed, although broadly true, was naïve and not well founded. So, the artwork, although not directly offering truths, advances our knowledge through challenges and, thus, through offering improvements to what we believed earlier. But this is not a particularity for artworks only. We highly evaluate mutually inconsistent scientific and philosophical theories, although they are opposed and cannot

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Young (2001, 108).

be true at the same time. Take for example, the works of Hume and Kant. They cannot at the same time present rightful positions about ethics or metaethics, and perhaps moral stances about suicide and other moral issues, but we value them because they enlighten the debate and offer unavoidable challenges for opposing positions.<sup>9</sup> When we say this we think about epistemological benefits like those remarked by John Stuart Mill in his *On Liberty*. As Mill says, a position may be relevant even if it is not true. First, it may be partly true, and, therefore, help to improve the opposed position that is partly true, as well. Second, it stimulates us to rethink about the position we endorse. This may be beneficial, even if the position we endorse is fully true, because this prevents that position from becoming dogmatic (Mill [1859], 1977, 228-259). In our opinion, great artworks, as well as great scientific and philosophical theories, have these merits even when they offer the wrong perspectives. In particular, it is important to remark upon the relation with the former of the two values that Mill indicates, because, as Young says, it is difficult that great artworks offer perspectives that are completely wrong. Young speaks of exemplars of great Christian art (like the *Divine Comedy*) and, similar to what we have done in relation to the artworks we mentioned above, he says that it would be absurd to declare them as unworthy if Christianity would be proved to be mistaken. Nevertheless, as he says, these works “can demonstrate the rightness of perspectives on mourning, redemption, forgiveness, charity and other matters” (Young, 2001, 109). A similar point is said in (Gaut, 2006, 123).

#### *4. Can there be a concept of depth deprived of a contribution to knowledge?*

Let's remember that the relevance of the contribution to the advance of knowledge for the artistic value of art is related to what Lamarque himself puts forward as one of the main aspects of his theory, i.e. that artworks (Lamarque speaks specifically about literary works) must be serious and deep in the sense of being engaged with issues of deep human concern. However, he thinks that this has nothing to do with the advance of knowledge: “What gives [to an artwork] depth is not so much that it implies a true proposition, but that it can be interpreted as about humanly interesting concerns [...] No doubt a different artistic treatment could present a theme of

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Gaut, (2006, 123).

equal interest albeit formulated in a proposition which is the precisely negation of this one. It is the content of the proposition, what it is about, not its truth as such, that confers interest” (Lamarque and Olsen, 1994, 329-330). On the contrary, we do not see how the engagement might be qualified as serious and deep if it does not contribute to advancing knowledge (or moral attitude, as we discuss later). We blame engagements in art that lack this virtue in the same way as we consider it to be sophistry when philosophy engages with deep and important issues without contributing to an advance of knowledge about them, and with the only merit of showing virtuosity in the elaboration of arguments. This is the reason why we qualify authors like Oscar Wilde or Gabriele D’Annunzio (think about his *The Child of Pleasure*) as being less valuable than Dante and Shakespeare even when they include deep issues in their works, and they show high virtuosity in literary skills. In a similar way, Young speaks of Wilde by remarking upon the example of *The Importance of Being Earnest*. As he says, “This play is certainly one of the most delightful comedies in the English language. Despite its enormous hedonic value, however, I do not think that it is a great work of art” (Young, 2001, 108).

Lamarque might partially share this view, but says that the reason for the reduced artistic value in the cases we indicated is not related to a defect in the advance of knowledge, but with a different failure in respect of the requirement of a valuable treatment of a deep issue. To be sure, he does not accept the equivalence of criticism for the absence of depth in philosophy (qualified as sophistry) with the absence of depth in art (Lamarque, 2006, 134). However, again, our position is that we do not know what would be a valuable treatment of a deep issue apart from a contribution to the advance of knowledge on that issue. In describing depth in the treatment of a theme, Lamarque, for example, indicates “originality, lack of cliché, attention to detail, and so forth, rather than truth” (Lamarque, 2006, 130), or coherence, complexity as opposed to simple-mindedness, and having a fruitful imaginative development. (Lamarque, 2006, 139) We, however, doubt that all of these values are separated from the goal of the advance of knowledge. Lack of originality is a flaw in the advance of knowledge because, trivially, repeating what is already known, or illustrating something in a way that is already known, cannot advance knowledge. We can say the same about a lack of cliché that is a specific case of lack of originality. Attention to details and complexity are valuable as a means to a nuanced and sophisticated knowledge. We can certainly imagine that all these virtues can be separated from the

advance of knowledge, but our opinion is that, if seriousness and depth of the theme are among central values, an artwork that shows attention to details and complexity for its own sake must be blamed as ‘ornamentalistic’, precisely as it happens with D’Annunzio’s works. In other places, Lamarque remarks on the proper attention to a literary work as directed to “its structure and tone, its use of dialogue as rhetorical device, its wit, its irony, or the consonance of ends and means” (Lamarque, 2006, 132). We do not disagree that these are aesthetic values in a narrow sense, as we do not deny this for some of the values in the previous lists. However, having values in the narrow sense is insufficient to account for one of the elements that Lamarque remarks in artistic evaluation, i.e. the seriousness and depth of the theme of the artwork. In our opinion, Lamarque faces the challenge of providing a concept of depth that is totally deprived of contribution to the advance of knowledge, and he does not respond satisfactorily to this challenge.

We are here at the point of central disagreement with Lamarque. As we have shown, he rejects the thesis that depth in arts can be judged in terms of the advance of knowledge, while we say that this is the proper way. What else can we say for the debate?

##### *5. Normative and empirical considerations*

One of the grounds of the debate is represented by the practice of art criticism as revealing what are the intentions of art (Lamarque, as always, refers specifically to literature). The positions, here, are divided. Rowe (1997, 324-327, 335-337) and Blackburn (2010, 85-88) object to Lamarque by trying to show examples that refuse his thesis, while Lamarque remarks that concerns about the truth of the vision of an artwork, or its relation to knowledge, are not at the focus of art criticism: “There is an absence of argument about whether or not a particular proposition or set of propositions implied in a literary work is true or false. Indeed, critical work is ended when it has been demonstrated how such a general proposition or set of propositions organizes the various features of a work into a meaningful pattern. [...] Debate about the truth or falsity of the propositions implied by a literary work is absent from literary criticism since it does not enter into the appreciation of the work as a literary work” (Lamarque and Olsen, 1994, 332, 334; see also: Lamarque, 2006, 134-135; Lamarque, 2009, 237; Lamarque, 2010, 101-103). We do not argue about the empirical fact – about whether as a matter of fact

dominant strands in art criticism are so detached from concerns of the artworks contribution to the advance of knowledge. Indeed, empirical fact is not Lamarque's central concern, although for him this issue is very important, because artistic practice and art, with the corresponding legitimate expectations and values related to them, are something this institutional practice shapes. The norms, therefore, depend on the practice as it is formed. However, we think that it is possible to approach the normative claim separately from empirical consideration. We express doubts about whether we can conceive art criticism separated from concerns about the advance of knowledge as something that we can appreciate.

We agree with Berys Gaut who says that it would be bizarre to say something like "This novel is a profound and insightful exploration of death without a trace of sentimentality, but this of course has nothing to do with its artistic merits" (Gaut, 2006, 122). The first reply that might be available to Lamarque consists in saying that the qualification of 'profound and insightful exploration' has nothing to do with the advance of knowledge. But, as we have already said, we disagree with Lamarque's qualification of the crucial terms.

Gaut tries to strengthen his position by a thought example. He starts with Lamarque's consideration that Dickens's novel *Our Mutual Friend* is appreciable not for the advance of knowledge that it offers, but for the way how it organizes the theme of the results of the false worship of money and organizes and makes sense of the particularities of the novel. Gaut's thought experiment consists in thinking about a novel, *Our Common Enemy*, that is equally successful in organizing its theme and making sense of its particularities, but that has as its theme that the worship of money is the greatest of human goods (Gaut, 2006, 125-126). Contrary to what Gaut suggests, it is not absurd to imagine such an example, because it is not difficult to think about examples of artworks that advance an immoral worldview, or an untrue worldview, or difficult to believe, and it is at least problematic to exclude them from the evaluation of great artistic merits.<sup>10</sup> But we would say the same about philosophy, and our hypothesis is that in such cases there are cognitive gains of the kinds we have described above when we mentioned

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<sup>10</sup> Here we disagree with Rowe, as well: "If, however, the proposition actually implied by a work is false or silly, then this will infect large tracts of the work: in all likelihood the concrete incidents will be imperfectly imagined, the drama forced, the motives implausible" (Rowe, 1997, 333).

J.S. Mill.

Lamarque makes a different move in responding to Gaut (Lamarque, 2006, 138-139). He opposes such a theoretical approach that is (a) based on a thought experiment that starts with a thematic statements, that (b) looks for what kind of work it might characterize, and that (c) looks for what value this work might have. Lamarque says that literary interpretations “always begin with a specific work and reaches a judgment of value, if at all, on a plurality of measures” (Lamarque, 2006, 138). The work postulated by Gaut appears to have many failings (not being engaging, not being serious, not being plausible etc.), but there is no reason to assume that falsehood of the theme is one of them (Lamarque, 2006, 139).

We agree with Lamarque that the proper way to discuss values in art is related to single works and with a plurality of measures.<sup>11</sup> But the challenge for Lamarque, then, is to find canonical artworks that do not contribute to the advance of knowledge at least in the ways indicated by Mill, or that are not properly morally engaged.

Gaut tries to support the cognitivist thesis by saying that we may judge that an artwork is of very high value, but would be of even higher value if it contributed better to the advance of knowledge. In relation to this, Gaut says that diverging in the artistic evaluation of artworks depending on world views is no fault: “It is simply a formalist dogma to insist that, despite their differing views of the world, two people must in principle always be able to agree on the exact artistic value of a work that expresses the views on which they differ” (Gaut, 2006, 124).

Although Lamarque is not a formalist, this thesis applies against one of his claims. The claim is that if the realization of the advance of knowledge were an artistic criterion, then we would not, for example, have the possibility to access the value of, for example, an artwork that treats the question of free will before we establish what the truth on this issue is (Lamarque, 2006, 138-139). But Lamarque is here mistaken. First, the epistemological merit, and at the same time the artistic value, may be assessed before resolving what the truth on this issue is. The same as in philosophy, reaching the truth is not the only epistemological merit, for example, offering a vision in an artwork may be enlightening and insightful without warranting truth. Second, as Gaut says, different people may assess the artwork differently, depending on their view on the issue. This is precisely because the truth of the

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<sup>11</sup> Here, by agreeing with Lamarque, we disagree with (Rowe, 1997, 337-338).

view of an artwork is a disputed issue. To be sure, we don't think that cognitive value is the only component of artistic value. We can assess an artwork independently of its cognitive value by relying on its narrow aesthetic values. We only say that cognitive value is an additional element of the assessment of the artistic value of artwork.

But, coming back to Gaut's argument, we note that an opponent of cognitivism may reply that here he admits an improper conflation of evaluations.<sup>12</sup> We leave this issue open here. But we indicate a consideration at the end of the paper that we find important for the resolution of this part of the debate, as well as of the debate in general, although we take this to be basically an *ad hominem* argument directed to Lamarque and consciously unable to be convincing for many opponents of cognitivism.

## 6. *Further challenges*

We indicate now two further challenges that Lamarque directs toward the cognitivist view. He might rely on visible practices in art that reveal the disinterestedness in relation to issues of advance of knowledge. So, for example, Lamarque says that "as with many proverbs [...] it seems not just difficult but curiously irrelevant to try to verify certain literary reflections. Literary sayings are just as likely as proverbs to contradict each other" (Lamarque, 2009, 234). In Lamarque's opinion, the fact that in different artworks there may be contradictory thematic statements neither diminishes their interest, nor their depth, and this is taken by Lamarque as evidence that it is not their truth that matters (Lamarque and Olsen, 1994, 330). Or, again, "A further worry about the emphasis on truth, aside from concerns about verifiability, is that these very general propositions are seldom defended or argued for in works of literature. This makes the literary context seem very different from the philosophic or scientific one, where evidence are paramount" (Lamarque, 2009, 234-235). While in philosophy or sciences, the author defends and argues her view, because her major intention is to influence the view endorsed by the reader, in literature "there is no demand that he should

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<sup>12</sup> As Lamarque says in the book he wrote with Olsen, we never have a total appreciation of an artwork, but always an appreciation that depends on the specific focus (literary, moral, cognitive, or another) with which we approach that work (Lamarque and Olsen, 1994, 393-397).

accept or reject the authorial perspective” (Lamarque and Olsen, 1994, 385).

We think that we already have the material needed to reply to the first of these observations: contradictions between artworks are not a problem for two possible reasons that were visible when we were outlining Mill’s thesis. To recap, the first is that although a perspective is wrong, the way it is treated may nevertheless be instructive for the reasons we have shown above. The second is that perspectives of great artworks, as happens with many philosophical theories, are seldom totally wrong or totally true. The wise consumer of artworks compares these perspectives and advances her knowledge in this way. The basic fact here is that when different artworks ground different visions, “this does not show that truth is irrelevant to literary evaluation; it merely shows how difficult is to establish what the truth is” (Rowe, 1997, 338).

The second objection corresponds to a matter of fact. We agree that the truths we can extrapolate from artworks “are seldom defended or argued for in works of literature”. But this does not prove that artworks are disinterested in relation to issues of knowledge, provided that they contribute to the advance of knowledge in a specific way that does not require defending or arguing particular statements. There are, for example, proposals that indicate that this is not required because the primary way artworks contribute to the advance of knowledge is by reshaping beliefs that we already have. These debates are related to epistemological discussions of high reputation and interest, as, for example, Davies (2010) and Carroll (1998) relate the cognitivist issue in art with a more general debate on thought experiments, and Carroll (1996) refers to the notion of understanding, central in epistemology, as well as in moral epistemology. We find the role of art particularly instructive in offering a distinctive contribution to knowledge by illustrative representation as opposed to semantic representation, with the final result of reshaping of beliefs. This is the contribution to the debate offered by James Young (2001, 104-107).

There appear to be authors ready to speak about arguments in literary works, such as Edward Harcourt, but we suspect that the difference between his position and those already shown is only verbal, because ‘argument’ for him means leading the reader to share a conviction. Harcourt explicitly declares that he is not speaking about arguments employed as in philosophy or sciences. It seems to us that he is speaking about what other authors call ‘reshaping of beliefs.’

#### *8. The advance of knowledge and artistic value*

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Before proceeding, some possible misunderstandings must be avoided. Lamarque could be ready to accept that the advance of knowledge can be obtained in the ways indicated by these authors. The point is how much this concerns his thesis that the advance of knowledge has nothing to do with the artistic value of artworks. As Lamarque puts it, the alternative is either to focus on the truth of the artwork's statements and evaluate them, but if the evaluator does this she renounces the artistic stance, or construes a criticism of how the artwork develops its theme. "This would be a step in the aesthetic appreciation of the work, but it would not involve attributing to the work any truth-claim" (Lamarque and Olsen, 1994, 338).

We don't see the need for such an alternative. The first condition for the advance of knowledge is to apprehend the artwork as such. It is through this that members of the audience have the experience to advance their knowledge. To be sure, such an experience is not sufficient, because the same art techniques can advance or corrupt knowledge. Further reflection is needed as well.

At this point Lamarque could say not in defence of his theses that this reflection is external to the experience of the artwork, and, therefore, it is exactly proved that the issue of the advance of knowledge is separated from the assessment of the artwork as artwork. But, we don't think that something like this is proved. There are other aspects of artistic merits that are assessed apart from the experience of the artwork. This is true, for example, for the assessment of the originality of the artwork. We assess the originality of an artwork only if we compare it with other artworks. In our view, the enjoyment of the artwork can be an elaborated and extended process. It implies, at least in some cases, the first experience of the artwork, further reflection upon it (that can imply even a reflection on elements external to the artwork) and an iterated experience of the artwork by enhanced members of the audience enhanced in their evaluative capacities.

By this, we have answered another general concern that Lamarque expresses against the contributions of knowledge we can have through artworks (Lamarque's argument is explicitly directed at Harcourt). As Lamarque says, such contributions may be double-edged: "Once we have departed from dispassionate reasoning (clearly, not the province of the novel) we can never be quite confident of the grounds of the beliefs we acquire from fiction" (Lamarque, 2009, 106). To add to what we have already said, dangers are present in dispassionate reasoning as well, and it suffices to con-

sider the conclusions of some philosophical arguments, even in the best philosophical tradition, in the field of ethics and political philosophy.

*7. The necessity of evaluating some artworks with regards to the advance of knowledge: three examples*

We now offer some examples in order to strengthen our thesis that the evaluation of artworks on the basis of their contribution to the advance of knowledge is a part of the engagement with artworks that they require as artworks. We now show cases of literary works that more explicitly take as their proper mission exactly this, to advance knowledge, and for these works, in the aspects in which they want to do this, it would be clearly a major failure to not be truthful or insightful. We offer three local examples, and one universally known example. The three local examples regard two theater pieces we have recently seen in Rijeka (Croatia). Two of them are a widely reworked *The Miser* by Moliere, and a widely reworked Euripides's *Bacchae*, both directed by the director Oliver Frljic, the third one is an authorial project by the director Borut Separovic called *My Heart Beats for Her*.

Frljic's *The Miser* and *Bacchae* are clear statements about political events in Croatia. Both are concerned with our former president Tudjman, and the former prime minister Sanader (whose voices and images appear in the pieces), as well as other politicians and events. In the first one, Sanader is identified with Moliere's miser, in the second one, together with the rest of the former political establishment, Tudjman and Sanader are interpreted as corresponding to the cruel Dionysus of the *Bacchae*, the god who renders people mad, inciting them to violence for satisfying his pride, for revenge and for will of power.

Frljic's *Bacchae* are an attempt to interpret our recent war (and many such wars) and the theme of *Bacchae* in juxtaposition. In this process Frljic is trying to say something about the real world, not only to find the theme of Euripides's *Bacchae*. The connection with reality is even more evident in virtue of the fact that the director puts a real person – the former prime minister – on the stage (his voice and his image).

The relation with the real world is even more evident in Separovic's piece, *My Heart Beats for Her*. There are three elements in this piece. One is the broadcast of the football match England-Croatia, won by the Croatian national team a few years ago. The other is represented by actresses playing

on the stage. The third element is represented by eleven women who come on the stage in order to speak about their real life stories concerning the process of transformation of the Croatian economic order from socialism to capitalism. The intention of the piece is to describe the dehumanized transformation we had from the socialist system to the market economy, as well as how football and nationalism work together as kinds of clouds that hide the social reality.

These were our local examples. As a universally known example, we would mention Orwell's *1984*. The novel has an obvious intention to speak about a real phenomenon: the totalitarian regime. In fact, its description does not with precision reproduce any real case of a totalitarian regime. There have been no such regimes that have had exactly the features as described by Orwell. But the novel advances our knowledge by employing in its description resources from literature. As three examples, we mention amplification, simplification and the remarking of details.<sup>13</sup> By these means the work does not show precise facts about particular regimes, but it is efficacious in offering a valid insight about what it is like to live in a totalitarian regime (although the description is amplified). We think that the main virtue of the novel is in this result.

By these examples we have shown that there are at least some literary works that put as one of their primary intended achievements that of the advance of knowledge. As the producers of the works themselves would certainly admit, it would be a failure of the works if they would depict reality in the wrong way. Even from the standpoint of the public, these artworks lose a great part of their appeal if it is shown that they depict reality in a wrong way, as it would be the case, e.g., if *1984* were only a work of antisocialist propaganda wrongly showing a society characterized by the sense of community and solidarity.

In the case of our local theater pieces critics were engaged in discussing whether reality is properly depicted in these pieces (this is particularly relevant, because one of the pieces of evidence for Lamarque's thesis is that critics are not usually engaged in discussions about whether literary works correspond to reality).

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<sup>13</sup> For these, and other techniques used by literature, see Young (2001, 80-88)

8. *Themes' contribution to advance of knowledge*

A possible reply by Lamarque might be that in our examples, we refer to the subject level of the artworks, while what matters is the thematic level. As a consequence, what really matters in 1984 is not whether totalitarian regimes at his time and possible authoritarian regimes in our time have the features remarked by Orwell, because this is only the subject of the novel. What really matters is the theme of the novel, i.e. that of the social and political forces that are a constant threat for our lives, in any time as a perennial feature of human life. This is a theme of perennial and deep human interest and it contributes, as such, to the high artistic value of 1984, independently of whether the particular regimes that inspired Orwell and that we have in mind when reading his novel are correctly depicted. In the same way, the themes in Shakespeare's tragedies contribute to their high artistic values, independently of whether, for example the events regarding Brutus, Anthony, Cleopatra, Henry V, etc. are depicted in correspondence with the historic truth. Here the analogy may be with pictures. What is really important in a picture is not whether the face is really similar to the face of the person portrayed, but, for example, the moral character that is illustrated (Lamarque, 2006, 130-131).

Our first response to this is that it is only the issue of truth that is transferred. If what really matters are themes, than what really matters is the themes' contribution to the advance of knowledge. For example, when speaking of 1984, we do not see what could be the interest of the novel if the concern of protecting individuals from totalitarian regimes would not be at least a possibility, even if not realized in the regimes to which Orwell's novel associates us. In this sense, the contribution of 1984 is equivalent to that of J.S. Mill in his *On Liberty*, when he speaks about the future of democracy deprived of the institutions of freedom: "When society is itself the tyrant – society collectively, over the separate individuals who compose it – its means of tyrannizing are not restricted to the acts which it may do by the hands of its political functionaries. Society [...] practices a social tyranny more formidable than many kinds of political oppression, since [...] it leaves fewer means of escape, penetrating much more deeply into the details of life, and enslaving the soul itself" (Mill, 1977, 219-220).

Or equivalent to that of Alexis de Tocqueville when he expresses similar concerns in his *Democracy in America*: "I want to imagine under what new features despotism could present itself to the world; I see an innumerable

crowd of similar and equal men who spin around restlessly, in order to gain small and vulgar pleasures with which they fill their souls. Each one of them, withdrawn apart, is like a stranger to the destiny of all the others; his children and his particular friends form for him the entire human species; as for the remainder of his fellow citizens, he is next to them, but he does not see them; he touches them without feeling them; he exists only in himself and for himself alone, and if he still has a family, you can say that at least he no longer has a country. Above those men arises an immense and tutelary power that alone takes charge of assuring their enjoyment and of looking after their fate” (Tocqueville [1835], 2010, 1248-1250).

Lamarque knows that cognitivists try to find the space for the artistic relevance of the advance of knowledge at the level of themes, but he denies that this is a good attempt. Thus, he says that an assessment of the truth of the theme is not relevant at all: “In the literary context what matters pre-eminently is whether a purported theme (as concept or proposition) helps give significance and coherence to the details of a work and thereby become a focus for reflecting on the work as a whole. A bare thematic statement on its own is of little intrinsic interest even from a literary point of view for what matters is not the summary itself but how the theme is elicited and supported through an imaginative reconstruction [...] of the work in detailed interpretation” (Lamarque, 2006, 137).

We agree with Lamarque that the bare thematic statement on its own is of little importance and that what matters is how the theme is elicited and supported. But we would say the same about conclusions of most philosophical theories, as well. The difference with Lamarque is that we think that the way how the theme is elicited and supported is important, amongst other things, in order to evaluate the artworks contribution to the advance of knowledge. Here, Lamarque is skeptical: “To dwell on the worldly truth of a thematic proposition can seem a remote and pedestrian preoccupation” (Lamarque, 2006, 137). The most important reason is that “such general propositions are rarely demonstrably true or false” (Lamarque, 2006, 137). We agree with this, the same as we would in relation to many philosophical theories, or conclusions from them. What counts in the case of philosophy, as in the case of art, is the way how these general propositions are supported. An artwork, for example, in virtue of its artistic merits can represent a convincing illustration of a general proposition and, therefore, can help to shed light on our beliefs, or reshape them, as, e.g., in various forms say the authors we mentioned earlier in relation to this issue (Carroll, Davies, Young).

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*9. Truth at the subject level*

To be sure, we do not think that the issue of truth at the subject level can be dismissed so easily. It would be strange if this were so, because “an apprehension of the subject is necessary for the apprehension of a literary work” (Lamarque and Olsen, 1994, 260). There are cases of artworks that are directed to specific situations, like most what frequently happens in political theatre that is intended to improve the consciousness of people in order to change a social or political situation. Let’s think of a play like Brecht’s *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*. The play clearly has a primary intention i.e. that of admonishing people about the nature of Hitler’s regime. We agree with Lamarque that in order to be qualified as an artwork among those really great, the artwork must include, amongst other things, a theme of universal and perennial human interest and not be too related to a specific context. Perhaps *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* is not even one of the greatest works among Brecht’s, but it nevertheless has the features of an artwork of permanent value because of the fact that through the specific subject it speaks of a theme of permanent human interest (the rise of wicked authoritarian politicians supported by corrupted centers of power). Nonetheless, we think that, although they are not so permanently valuable and although they cannot be masterpieces, artworks that are only directly relevant to a specific social and political situation are nevertheless valuable. Denying them any artistic value would support a tendency of depriving humanity of an important resource. We will return to this point later.

For the moment it is, nonetheless, important to remark another reason why the subject level matters. It is possible that sometimes if the subject level evidently contradicts truth, then this damages the theme of the work. Imagine, again, 1984 and that totalitarian orders were tendentiously and unrealistically depicted. Consequentially, it is hard to think that the subject could serve as an inspiration for the audience to be engaged with its theme. Such a fact, Lamarque might reply, is not a problem for his theory, because he would indicate that this is only a literary failure, and not an epistemological failure.

In fact, Lamarque says something analogous to cases that he analyzes. In such cases Lamarque says that there are literary works that must rely on reality, but the constraint is not based on the value of veracity as such, but

on genre conventions. Among the examples there are historical novels and satires like David Lodge's *Small World* (Lamarque, 2009, 230-231).

#### 10. *Genre conventions*

Contrary to what Lamarque argues, it seems to us that it is appropriate to conclude that the advance of knowledge is a primary goal and, therefore, not a side effect of the genre. As Lamarque says, satires are effective "precisely because of the balance they strike between exaggeration and recognized fact. If the exaggeration becomes too extreme and implausible – flouting a convention of satire – then the works lose their appeal" (Lamarque, 2009, 231). In our opinion, the exaggeration must not be too extreme primarily because of a constraint related to a cognitive and moral goal of satire: to describe the moral and personal features of some people, and to provoke an appropriate reaction in the audience. Lodge's intention was to represent the futility, vacuity and pretentiousness of (part) of the academic world. An extreme exaggeration would be unfair to this reality, for example, depicting people as stupid and ignorant, and this would be a failure for the purpose of the satire.

As regards historical novels, we can see two targets in them. One is related to the creation of national myths. These novels obviously want to influence beliefs, but we do not think that we may take them as advancements of knowledge. Because of their function, they cannot fulfill the advance of knowledge. But it seems to us that at least one of the proper values of historical novels is an enjoyment in learning about past through literary means (Cfr. Rowe, 1997, 339-341). A reader would be seriously disappointed if she comes to know that she was misinformed by a historical novel. The conclusion is that the genre convention that attributes trustworthiness to historical novels is related to the epistemic expectations of the consumers of literary works, which makes the advance of knowledge as one of the proper values of historical novels. Why, otherwise, there would be such a genre convention, or, we may say, such a genre?

But the genre conventions that protect truth in the case of satires and historical novels exist in other literary cases, as well. We say this about political theatre, for example. We cannot see how engagement with such artworks can be detached from the estimation of their relation with truth. We think the same about, for example, artworks that speak about relevant mor-

al issues, like in the case of the tragedies that we mentioned above.

### 11. *Moral value as a part of artwork's artistic value*

Our next problem is to try to see whether we can answer the problems related to the thesis that the moral value of an artwork influences its artistic value. This corresponds, for example, to the thesis that the fact that an artwork improves us morally (for example, by improving our moral understanding) is part of its artistic value, or to the thesis that immoral content decreases the artistic value of artworks. The stance can be affirmed from more radical to more moderate positions. There are mainly two possible doctrines in the discussion on whether aesthetic and moral values are, and in what way, interconnected, and at the same time, should we take moral value as a value relevant for the evaluation of art (for artistic value). These are autonomism and moralism that have radical or moderate versions.

So, the core of the debate turns on the question whether moral defects and/or moral values influence the broad aesthetic of the artwork and in what way. Autonomism holds that the moral character of a work is irrelevant to its value as a work of art, and that evaluation of art should be strictly focused on an artwork's narrow aesthetic properties. The most radical version of this doctrine is called radical autonomism/ radical aestheticism<sup>14</sup> that says that it is inappropriate to involve moral or any other properties, besides narrow aesthetic ones, in the evaluation of art. Advocates of autonomism do not deny existence of all sorts of different properties and values related to artworks, but they think that we should appreciate narrow aesthetic autonomy when evaluating art and restrain from including these other values into accounts of artistic value. Formalism, usually seen as a form of autonomism, says that in the evaluation of art, we should take only formal features of art into account. A moderate version of autonomism, also known as sophisticated aestheticism, states that an artwork's moral character may influence its intrinsic value - where such value is conceived primarily if not exclusively in aesthetic terms - but does not do so necessarily. The main idea is that an

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<sup>14</sup> We use the expressions autonomism and aestheticism interchangeably since autonomism stands for emphasizing the notion of autonomy of a narrow aesthetic value and consequently of artistic value, and aestheticism stands for underlining the importance of a narrow aesthetic value.



artwork's moral character influences its value indirectly if that moral character blemishes or promotes an artwork's aesthetically valuable properties.

Moralism in its radical version, often called ethicism (the position of Gaut to whom we have referred above), centers around the claim that the moral character of artwork is crucial to our appreciation and evaluation of that work. This doctrine says that an artwork's value is entirely determined by its moral character. Moral value, when it manifests ethically excellent attitudes, supports the aesthetic value of an artwork, and when it manifests morally repugnant attitudes counts as an aesthetic blemish.

A moderate formulation of this moralism states that the moral value of a work is sometimes relevant to its artistic value, and it is so to the extent it decreases or promotes the intelligibly and imaginative experience provided by the work. The moral value of artwork is relevant to its overall artistic value because sometimes moral defects can count as aesthetic defects, and moral merits can count as aesthetic ones, but this isn't necessarily so (Carroll, 1998, 419). The important feature of this doctrine is insisting on eliciting the right (emotional) response in an audience. If an artwork fails to achieve the right moral response, it will count as an aesthetic failure (Carroll, 1996, 233).

## 12. *Immoral artworks*

The problem for all positions that affirm the moral relevance for artistic value is represented by highly evaluated artworks that are nevertheless, beyond any doubt considered immoral. On the contrary, this may not be a problem for Lamarque, because of the fact that he says that although moral dimensions of artworks unquestionably exist, the moral value of a literary work has only a limited influence on the overall artistic value of the work. Precisely, as we have seen, the artwork must engage in depth with permanent issues of human concern, and defects in this are artistic failures. But, the moral vision of the artwork does not have constraints as, for example, of being true.

In our opinion, the problem of immoral artworks is frequently overestimated and for this reason we offer some distinctions. First, we have the simplest situation that is represented by works whose subject is immoral but moralise about it. Among such works there are, for example, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *Lolita*, and *Dangerous Liaisons*. Such works appear as im-

moral in their subject, but, to maintain Lamarque's distinction, moralise at the thematic level and, consequently, cannot properly be judged as immoral. We put in this category Hemingway's story *The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber*, the work discussed by Eileen John. She points out that this short story wouldn't be better if it didn't have moral flaw. Since it is a story of overcoming fear and humiliation as a test of a human worth, as John says, it "needs its wrong-headed moral framework to be the excellent story that it is" (John, 2006, 334).

Second, we have artworks with immoral dimensions without judgement. The artwork simply shows an immoral perspective. As an example we can use Agota Kristof's book, *Trilogy*. Perhaps the most morally problematic is the first book, called *The Notebook*. It is a story that describes the lives of nameless twins that grow up in a Hungarian village near the border, during the 2<sup>nd</sup> World war. They live with their evil grandmother, and they find ways to survive the war. On the one hand they can be extremely friendly and caring, for example for the girl next door, on the other hand they are two extremely awful boys who steal, deceive, betray and even murder whenever they think this is needed, and feel no remorse about this. However, what is extremely important is that through reading Kristof's work we gain an insight into another perspective, one that calls for us to reconsider our positions, opens up the question of morality to us and the legitimacy of some procedures, and raises questions such as does a crime need a motive, or can a crime pass unpunished and similar. Although the moral value pictured by Kristof is directly opposed to our ordinary moral values, there is a cognitive value present in her work in the way that it enables us to become better acquainted with a morally questionable perspective, so that we can confront it more effectively. Similar examples are offered by Eileen John. In discussing artworks that shows a different (a)moral world and considering what it would be like to live in one, she mentions, as examples of amorality, the movies *Trainspotting* and *The Talented Mr. Ripley*.

Third, we have works that are immoral where immorality is at the same time presented as beautiful, good and desirable. They hide the reality, which is judged as immoral according to values that are generally accepted. Here we can mention *Triumph of the Will* by Leni Reifenstahl. This is a controversial work that extols Hitler and the National Socialist Party. Due to its formal and narrow aesthetic characteristics it is considered to be one of the greatest works of documentary film, although its moral dimension is culpable. So, the first thing we can say is identical to what we said earlier, when

speaking about cognitive value. An artwork can lack cognitive or moral value, but nevertheless has aesthetic merits in the narrow sense. But in fact the moral and cognitive value of this film is important. Leni Reifenstahl tells us to watch a work that we consider morally defective as something beautiful. Nevertheless, we find the film important, amongst other things, for this reason, because it offers us the possibility to exercise our intuitions connected to moral defects and the wrong vision that the film offers, but also the possibility to have a better understanding of Nazism, as well. For example, the film helps many people to understand the value of community, and this is important in order to organize proper social politics that balance in a proper way the value of individuality and the value that the community has for many, in order to avoid extremist degenerations. The value of the film, therefore, can be found amongst other things in the point that it is a challenging case, which offers a new way of enhancing moral understanding of a phenomenon of great moral importance. Considering these things, we think that the similar (but of course not so disturbing) example is proposed by John's giving the story about her reading of *The Portrait of the Lady*. She mentions that, when she first read the book, she was disappointed by Isabel's choice, but after the second time she came to appreciate her decision given the circumstances of her world. John states that she offered these examples in order to show that artwork sometimes can be partly valued for its morally commendable character. In this last example, the value of such an artwork is that it made her rethink, especially in the second reading, Isabel Archer's life story, and even without having an emotional and moral response, the experience of reading did have a moral importance and was the cause of her strong reaction (John, 2006, 334-336).

### 13. *Cognitive and moral value relevance in institutional framework*

We conclude with further remarks that intend to show why Lamarque would have to embrace the thesis that the cognitive and moral dimensions of artworks are relevant for the artistic value of artworks. He supports the institutional account of literature. It is within the institution of art that we "investigate the role of authors and readers and the nature of literary works" (Lamarque, 2009, 61), and "the existence of literary works depends on a set of conventions concerning how they are created, appreciated, and evaluated;

in other words, on attitudes, expectations, and responses found in authors and readers” (Lamarque, 2009, 62). Included in this, there is an invitation to “readers to reflect, on thematic ideas that both bind together and transcend the immediate subject portrayed” (Lamarque, 2010, 79). Related to the thematic ideas, Lamarque remarks the expectation of “moral seriousness, in the sense of some broad human interest raised and developed. [...] Readers of literary works will have a conventional expectation that humanly interesting themes will be explored and developed through the subject presented” (Lamarque, 2009, 63).

But, if literary works can advance knowledge (and Lamarque does not deny this: “indeed it can be shown that fiction is an especially apt vehicle for certain kinds of learning” (Lamarque, 2006, 133); “It seems all too easy to find both factual and universal truths in works of literature (notably novels) and to discover instances where readers learn through novels” (Lamarque, 2010, 79) and some of them are not substitutable, as it happens in the case when experiences of the artworks provide insights (Lamarque and Olsen, 1994, 288), and if literary works are shaped in an institutional framework that establishes how they are appreciated and evaluated, as well as the proper expectations of readers, it becomes a strong argument. This has been put forward by James Young (Young, 2001, 1-22) in defending the claim that the advance of knowledge – and not only moral seriousness as indicated by Lamarque –, is one of the fundamental values of literary works (to be sure, contrary to Lamarque, Young speaks about art in general).

Young’s argument starts by (i) the interest we have in the production of the greatest number of artworks with the greatest possible value. Then, (ii) Young reminds us that the advance of knowledge is a great human value, and (iii) that artworks can advance knowledge in an important way, even in a distinctive way (in Young’s opinion, artworks give a specific contribution to the advance of knowledge as illustrative representations, in opposition to sciences and philosophy that give their contribution with semantic representations) (Young, 2001, 23-113). As a consequence, in the expectations we have about artworks in the institutional shaping of art it would be reasonable to put not only moral seriousness but, also to include the advance of knowledge, and not to leave it as a side effect.<sup>15</sup>

At this point, Lamarque might remark that the advance of knowledge is

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<sup>15</sup> For the value of having the institution of literature considered as art, see also (Feagin, 2010, 92)

not a distinctive virtue of art (he speaks only of literature, but as usual we extend the discussion). It is a virtue shared with sciences, philosophy, etc. From this, Lamarque concludes that the advance of knowledge cannot be a value of literature as literature. We do not see any reason for this conclusion, i.e. we do not see any reason not to assume that some shared virtues are at the same time values of literature as literature (or, in our discussion, of art as art). This is in the same way as contributing to the making of comfortable and safe objects is a value of architecture, although it is shared by civil engineering. But, there is a further and more important reason. Authors like James Young say that the contribution of art to the advance of knowledge is specific, it is different from how philosophy and science contribute to the advance of knowledge (although not deserving of a lesser reputation, as we have shown earlier) Consequently, its distinctive contribution to the advance of knowledge represents a distinctive value (Cf. Currie, 1995, 911).

Young's thesis may be a valuable starting point to answering Lamarque's objection that sometimes attempts to contribute to the advance of knowledge reduce the artistic value of artworks, like in the case of didactic works and the frequently mentioned *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Perhaps, this is so because in such cases the cognitive role is not explicated as well, i.e. these artworks try to contribute to the advance of knowledge by imitating philosophy's or science's way of representing, instead of making use of the peculiar artistic means.

To be sure, the last thesis that we offer is again conditional to Lamarque's endorsement of the institutionalist thesis. Eileen John would say that we might be more ambitious because she says that art needs to justify its value anyway, and that for this reason it must remark upon its potentialities to satisfy what is of value for human beings: "The idea is that there is an invitation built into the existence of art, inviting us to ask whether the work is worth having at all". (John, 2006, 340) This, as John says, does not put a mechanically moral value (we may add the value of the advance of knowledge) among artistic values. But art "seizes on whatever it can in order to make itself matter to us in this larger way. We happen to need to have moral matters explored and presented accurately, and we often take great satisfaction in that process as well" (John, 2006, 340). But Daniel Jacobson denies that this is how moral and epistemological values can become artistic values. There may be an artwork that satisfies important human needs without being of great artistic value (Jacobson, 2006, 349-350).

We do not enter in this wider debate, here. We limit ourselves to the

institutionalist perspective endorsed by Lamarque. He supposes that there is such a clear institutional framework. We are not without uncertainties that this is so. Anyway, if there is more than one institutional framework, we may rationally choose, as Young says, the one that includes the appreciation of values of art that in the best way embraces the values that we, as human beings, can receive from art. Or, if there is only one established tradition, there is no reason not to reform it in order to maximize the benefits that we can receive from art. We endorse the suggestion of Simon Blackburn (who, however, speaks against the institutional shaping of the proper approaches to artworks) that a person does not approach an artwork inappropriately if she opens her mind to aspects of a work (like those cognitive) but she “may feel short of reading something well as literature if [she is] blind to enough aspects of it” (Blackburn, 2010, 88). In accordance with this suggestion, we support openness in the institutional framework of arts for the artistic evaluation of everything that art can offer of value to humanity, and we do not see any reason to exclude anything from the appropriate artistic evaluation of artworks if it is based on artistic features like “the subject matter, the quality of writing, and the structure of the novel” (Feagin, 2010, 91).

After all, in the examples of institutional frameworks put forward by Lamarque the rule-governing of practices is not casual, but intended to optimize the functions of the practices. This is true, for example, for the administration of law (Lamarque and Olsen, 1994, 257), as well as chess, or cards (Lamarque, 2009, 268).

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